

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Towards Openness:  
A Reflection on Functional Behaviour Assessment  
in Schools**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
Curtin University**

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## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: Sonja Vanderaa

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## Abstract

This study suggests that a more pedagogically sensitive form of functional behaviour assessment (FBA) would take into account an unacknowledged necessity of facilitator openness. The nature of the inquiry is narrative, autobiographical, reflective, hermeneutical and phenomenological. My original contribution to the field lies in my attempted retrieval of FBA from the abstract manner in which it is traditionally represented. My intention is to ground FBA in lifeworld entanglements. In attempting this, I illuminate ethical complexities which are typically elided in the literature.

I question the notion that FBA method is ethically neutral. I suggest that FBA's status as an evidence-based practice provides no protection when it comes to asking if a particular encounter with FBA is ethical in its orientation to the other. Further, I propose that FBA's language, which comes from a positivist tradition, obscures both the agents who enact FBA and their finitude. My critique is that method is only one aspect of understanding FBA, yet it in much literature it is represented as the whole.

In particular, this study focuses on the importance of facilitator openness to the self, openness to the other, and to the situation. Using writing as a method of inquiry, it brings together aspects of behavioural science and human science in an effort to reach deeper understandings about FBA as situated in lifeworld experiences. In doing so, I believe it introduces new notions to the field of FBA. Questions of method are put aside and attention is given instead to engaging with the work of philosophers and others, in particular the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

I am especially interested in the intangible things which might slip between our fingers, despite our best efforts to secure them, or our confidence that we already had them securely in hand. Four FBA narratives are interpreted in the light of possible prejudices with the intention of developing a more hermeneutical stance.

I conclude by emphasising that openness is an act of resistance. I suggest that to restore FBA to a fuller sense of its ethical possibilities we must remain alert, in order to stay open. The first step is to acknowledge our historicity and unfinishedness.

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Finally, I wish to express heartfelt thanks to James Charlton for the constancy of his love at every step.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my maternal grandmother, Irmgard Seitz. Her PhD thesis, when almost complete, was lost in the bombing of Freiburg during World War II.

# Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Permissions	iv
Acknowledgments	vii
Dedication	viii
List of Figures	xii
Vignette 1	1
Vignette 2	2
Introduction	3
What is functional behaviour assessment?	7
The significance of this study	17
A response to Freire's questions	19
Chapter overview	21
Defining key terms	23
Limitations of this study	25
Chapter 1 Functional Behaviour Assessment as Tradition	26
Situating functional behaviour assessment within the context of this study	26
Functional behaviour assessment's underlying values	33
The epistemic grid	36

Chapter 2 The Meaning of Openness	43
Openness to the self	44
Openness to the situation	46
Openness to the other	48
Chapter 3 A Reluctant Finitude	51
Narrative One: “What I learnt from Zack”	51
Waking from an <i>epistemological dream</i>	59
Talking past each other	62
An optimistic assumption	67
Lucid in theory but scrambled in practice	70
Finite, vulnerable and unfinished	75
Chapter 4 Understanding as an Event	79
Narrative Two: “Skye Escapes”	80
Silent tensions	86
The platypus and prejudice	92
A conversational impasse	102
Shifting horizons	109
Chapter 5 Behavioural Science, Language and Agency	119
Narrative Three: “An obsession with method”	119
<i>Deficient modes of concern</i>	122
The problem of “experts”	125
Distinctions in language	131
Reframing functional behaviour assessment as <i>dynamic interplay</i>	140

<i>We forget ourselves and lose ourselves</i>	143
Chapter 6 Accidental Openness	153
Narrative Four: “Accidental openness”	154
The necessity of not knowing	163
<i>The conversation that we ourselves are</i>	166
<i>Like a flock of birds</i>	170
A moment of <i>sheer human togetherness</i>	175
Chapter 7 Openness as an Act of Resistance	183
Bibliography	195

## List of Figures

Figure 1	Sarah’s Function Hub	13
Figure 2	Three Aspects of Gathering Information for a Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA)	15
Figure 3	Assumptions about Academic Versus Behavioural Mistakes	31
Figure 3.1	Nine Prejudices from Narrative One – “What I Learnt From Zack”	77
Figure 4	Categories of the Communicative Functions of Behaviour	93
Figure 4.1	Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support: Three Tiers of Intervention	100
Figure 4.2	An Alternative Representaiton of the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support’s Three Tiers of Intervention	101
Figure 4.3	Eight Prejudices from Narrative Two – “Skye Escapes”	114
Figure 5	Habits of Language	145
Figure 5.1	Three Prejudices From Narrative Three – “An Obsession With Method”	151
Figure 6	Five Prejudices from Narrative Four – “Accidental Openness”	180

## Vignette 1

I gave my first positive behaviour support workshop in a community of farmers, tree-fellers and saw-millers. The road to the town was draped like a ribbon across the hills. The Tasmanian summer was nearly over and teachers eased their way from holidays toward the start of the school year. Anxious from the outset, I was over-dressed. A brown suit among shorts and t-shirts.

At lunch, from the balcony, we squinted at beach views, listened to the cries of terns and gulls. Then, just toward the end of the break, something happened. Tina, a woman I knew from Individual Education Plan workshops, waited to catch me. I knew her as a support teacher who worked across the region. Over 200km away in Hobart, I knew what her teaching meant to the local community. Curled in her hand was a piece of paper. As she talked, she rolled it, as if it still needed winding.

'Is it ok, that I've tried to do a functional behaviour assessment, when I didn't go to the workshop – I just got the notes from Steve?'

'That's great! How did it go?' I ask. And so the story unfolds. Max, a student from an outlying area, was about to be banned from the school bus for repeated outbursts of physical aggression. Times were tough for dairy farmers and Max's parents were unable to leave the farm each morning to drive him to school.

Tina smiled, 'He's back on the bus.'

## **Vignette 2**

It was a simple plan. I'd do an informal survey at the first district support meeting. Everyone would be there: social workers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, disability consultants and support teachers. I'd check how much the last four years of FBA professional learning, delivered by international and interstate experts, had changed our practice. I'd give an overview of my new behaviour consultant role, I'd cover the framework of positive behaviour support and my intended focus on functional behaviour assessment (FBA).

This happened as expected, until I asked staff to raise their hands if they had led an FBA in the previous year.

'Ever participated in an FBA? Any aspect of FBA? Informally applied an aspect of function-based intervention? Perhaps through an informal conversation?' The silence stretched into awkwardness.

## Introduction

This study explores the importance of facilitator openness in the context of functional behaviour assessment (FBA) in schools. It asks the question: In what ways might openness to the self, to the other and to the situation, contribute to more pedagogically sensitive practice? It makes use of hermeneutical reflections and phenomenological narratives, in an attempt to explore ways in which facilitator openness might contribute to understandings of FBA as a situated and relational act. In doing so, I focus on my own “lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36) with a view to improving my practice.

While there are many ways in which my understandings of FBA could be refined in terms of technical knowledge, my inquiry leads me in a different direction, towards the theme of openness. Accordingly, questions of method are put aside and attention is given to matters of human science rather than behavioural science. Inspired by Laurel Richardson’s notion of writing as a method of inquiry (2003) I also write to better understand what has puzzled and perplexed me.

I draw on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer to call into question aspects of FBA language and tradition inherited from the field of behavioural science. I suggest that to frame FBA solely in terms of *epistēmē* or scientific knowledge (Aristotle, 1980/2009, p. 270), is to mistake the script for the play. It is to omit not only the actors and director, but also the stage. While behavioural science can show us a powerful and important view, this study suggests a vision which complements the behavioural tradition.

To be brief, if behavioural science is considered as the script of a play, I suggest that we must situate it on a particular stage at a particular time, and interpret it collaboratively during a live performance. The person-centred values which underpin FBA (Bambara, 2005; O’Brien, 1989; Risely, 1996) depend upon *praxis*, or our capacity to bring these

values into being (Aristotle, 1980/2009, p. 269). As Gadamer suggests, our moral knowledge depends upon our capacity “to respond to the demands of the situation of the moment” (1975/1989, p. 319).

FBA can be described as “a process for gathering information which can be used to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of behavioural support” (O’Neill, Horner, Albin, Sprague, Storey & Newton, 1997, p. 3). It is an approach which is firmly situated in the epistemological territory of objectivism (Singer & Wang, 2009, p. 19). As such, it is a challenging task to write about FBA within the context of an interpretive study. This difficulty arises because I am steeped in the language of a paradigm that is attuned to the observable and measurable.

I would like to note from the outset that questions I raise about the behaviourist tradition, as I have experienced it, are not intended to create a dualism between natural science and human science. They represent different epistemological frames, with different purposes, which are oriented to answering different types of questions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2003, p. 43). From a pragmatic perspective, my work as a behaviour consultant depends upon the qualitative *and* quantitative. Much of the knowledge and many of the approaches I employ, originate in “positivist philosophy,” which as Sailor and Paul note, is the “foundational epistemology of behaviourism” (2004, p. 41).

To bring an additional metaphor to bear, I suggest that productive understandings of FBA might be likened to a fugue’s composition, which requires two interdependent lines of melody — subject and countersubject. Similarly, I propose that FBA in its fullest sense requires both expertise in the sense of *technē* (the craft of FBA) and a form of *praxis* (or action), which is imbued with *phronēsis*, or practical moral wisdom (Aristotle, 1980/2009, p. 269).

To assume that positive outcomes will follow from correct process is to ignore the unexpected exigencies of the lifeworld (St. Pierre, 2012, pp. 494, 498). A strong grounding in FBA *epistēmē* does not imply competence in the form of *praxis*. There are many additional points, from the perspective of practical moral wisdom, where things might go wrong. I am familiar with many of them, and my largest collection of errors is not to do with method.

I suggest that a conception of a pedagogically tactful FBA, hinges on enactment, on how theory is brought to life. It is the realm of the ethical. It is also a place of enormous challenge. While I accept an ongoing need to review and refine technical aspects of my FBA practice, my interest here lies not in *epistēmē* or *technē*, concerns of FBA literature for decades (Carr, Dunlap, Horner, Koegel, Turnbull, Sailor, Anderson, Albin, Koegel & Fox, 2002), but in openness, which lies more in the direction of *phronēsis*.

Recurrent references to a research-to-practice gap (Gable, Park, & Scott, 2014; Hawken & O'Neill, 2006; McIntosh, Filter, Bennett, Ryan, & Sugai, 2010) might suggest that FBA is a more fragile phenomenon than is frequently acknowledged. Theoretically and conceptually it may be stable, but in the lifeworld things are not so predictable. Further, when we hide our failed and fumbled efforts to act with “pedagogic tact” (van Manen, 1990, p. 169), we may ignore a multiplicity of lacunae into which others might fall.

I suggest that it is time to engage with FBA in new ways, to offer new readings of a much researched subject. For as Robert Sokolowski puts it, “psychologism, along with biologism, treats meaning and truth as a matter of empirical fact, not as a dimension that underlies and hence transcends the empirical, not as a dimension that belongs to the being of things” (2000, p. 114). Sokolowski’s comments have been echoed in my lived experience of FBA, repeatedly drawing me to “aspects of experience neglected by empiricism” (Moran, 2000, p. 13). My bias is with Jean-Paul Sartre when he states that “the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence” (1962/1938, p. 174).

Examinations of FBA from within the dominant discourse are ongoing (Blood & Neel, 2007; Dunlap, Kern-Dunlap, Clarke, & Robbins, 1991; Ervin, Radford, et al., 2001; Gable et al., 2014; Goh & Bambara, 2012; Scott, Anderson, Mancil, & Alter, 2009; Whitford, Liaupsin, Umbreit, & Ferro, 2013). My decision to step outside the established paradigm, may raise questions. For example, what is the point in doing this? The most obvious answer is that a different research paradigm will allow a different set of questions to be asked. Accordingly, my intention is not so much to engage with the plethora of FBA research, but to seek deeper understanding of my experiences of FBA.

FBA research has addressed many aspects of practice. It has explored the research-to-practice gap (Ervin, Radford, et al., 2001; Gable et al., 2014; Marchant, Heath, & Miramontes, 2013; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015), contextual fit (Albin, Lucyshyn,

Horner, & Flannery, 1996; Gable et al., 2014; Horner, Salentine, & Albin, 2003; Scott, 2007), support plan standards (Browning-Wright et al., 2007; Crone, Hawken, & Bergstrom, 2007; Medley, Little, & Akin-Little, 2008; Snell, 2005), pre-requisites such as school-wide positive behaviour support (Hawken & O'Neill, 2006; McIntosh et al., 2010; Medley et al., 2008; Sugai et al., 2000), application of FBA in applied settings (Anderson et al., 2008; Gable et al., 2014; Goh & Bambara, 2012; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015), and technical refinements to improve efficacy and efficiency (Cihak, Alberto, & Fredrick, 2007; Loman & Horner, 2014; Stahr, Cushing, Lane, & Fox, 2006). But just as an expertly constructed boat is no guarantee that it will not sink, FBA knowledge need not necessarily lead to the hoped for changes. My experience suggests that something more than technical knowledge is required.

I suggest that an interpretive perspective of FBA is often absent from behavioural literature, not because it is without value, but because it does not fit within the dominant epistemological frame. As Wayne Sailor and James Paul suggest, “for most of the last century, psychology and education have been dominated by positivistic philosophy and epistemology” (2004, p. 42).

My bias is with Sailor and Paul who see “hegemony in any form” as damaging, and advocate instead for an “epistemological pluralism” which is also “pragmatic” (2004, p.47). While recognising the irresolvable tensions between assumptions of different epistemological paradigms, Sailor and Paul see the potential for positive behaviour support — the framework within which FBA is situated — to provide “a shared conceptual space for contrasting sources of inquiry and methodologies” (ibid, p.45).

I acknowledge that no matter how hard I try to question the tradition that has been passed down to me, I am unable to put aspects of it aside. For Gadamer, this is a crucial point, which he emphasises in italics when he writes in *Truth and Method* (1975/1989) that “*understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event*” (p. 299). Whether or not there are localised traditions of school-based FBA which now embrace plural ways of knowing, understanding and being, I am unsure.

What is at potentially at stake here is not just an absence of conversation between individuals but, the absence of “a dialogue between different philosophical traditions” (Malpas, Arnsward, & Kertscher, 2002, p.xiii). More critically, it seems to me that the more we can attune FBA practices to the ethically complex pedagogical contexts of schools, the

more likely we are to be able to use the science of FBA to its full potential for helping those we set out to assist.

Conversely, in the absence of the values and underlying behavioural principles of FBA, we might see significant consequences in the form of a regression to traditional, punishment-oriented approaches. Without understanding the function of a student's behaviour, educators may revert to practices which are not only ineffective (Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005, p. 229) but may also be “counterproductive” (Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015, p. 83) and “make problems worse” (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 6). I will return to this point in Chapter One.

Inclusive, safe and effective learning environments depend upon educators having access to a continuum of effective behavioural interventions for students with a range of social learning needs. This includes, at the most intensive end of the continuum, students with challenging behaviours who need a function-based approach. I do not mean to suggest that FBA is the solution to all behavioural problems. It is only one way to improve quality of life — but it is a significant way (Loman & Horner, 2014, p. 18; Scott et al., 2009, p. 421).

I make an assumption, throughout this study, that FBA used with practical moral wisdom, has the potential to make the seemingly impossible possible. That is, for a student with a severe reputation to experience the satisfaction of social connectedness, belonging, and personally meaningful, sustained relationships. And the benefits are not only social. As Edward Carr notes, socially appropriate behaviour enables many things including full-time school attendance, access to the richness of a full academic program, the opportunity to develop knowledge, skills, understandings and dispositions essential to a future of social, emotional and material wellbeing, where personal choice is possible (2007, p. 5). I make the further assumption throughout this study, that FBA has the potential to improve a student's quality of life in the ways Carr describes.

At this point it is appropriate for me to explain the term FBA in detail.

## **What is functional behaviour assessment?**

The task of functional behaviour assessment is to make visible the contingent nature of human behaviour. It is to rescue us from the disempowering perception that behaviour is unpredictable, unpreventable and unchangeable. An assumption of functional behaviour

assessment is that problem behaviours are related to the context in which they appear, that behaviours are meaningful and therefore interpretable, and changeable. A premise of FBA is that problem behaviour arises when there is a mismatch between an individual's needs and his environment. As O'Neill et al., remind us, we often "talk and operate as if people 'have' behaviours" (1997, p. 5). On such a view, "it is logical to try to change people" (ibid). If, however, "we consider problem behaviours as occurring in contexts, it becomes logical to change the context" (ibid). Such a view is a guiding prejudice of FBA.

This does *not* mean that problem behaviours are viewed as acceptable. For example, acts of physical aggression, property damage and self-injury can be harmful and problematic for both the person who uses them, and for others. FBA makes an important distinction here. While the *form* of the behaviour — such as biting, bullying or fire-lighting — may be considered unacceptable, the *function* of the behaviour, its purpose, or the need it communicates, is not judged. In brief, FBA aims to understand a behaviour's purpose in relation to its context.

To illustrate, let us consider Tom, aged fourteen, at lunch time. Tom jumps onto Dick's back, and throws his arms around Dick's neck in a head-lock. When Tom approaches Dick front on, he tends to kick Dick's legs. Using a traditional approach to Tom's behaviour we would reprimand him and provide a standard consequence, such as five minutes sitting on a bench, aimed at stopping the behaviours. We would give no consideration to "the potential reasons for or the environmental influences of [the] problem behaviour" (Bambara & Kern, 2005, p. 12). If the focus of a traditional approach to problem behaviour is to stop the behaviour, in contrast, a function-based approach seeks to understand the behaviour in relation to a particular *context*, and to hear what it has to tell us.

Put simply, the purpose of functional behaviour assessment (FBA), is "to discover the reasons why a particular individual engages in severe problem behaviour" (Carr et al., 1997). From this interpretive frame, FBA invites us to ask in what ways a particular challenging behaviour serves the person who uses it? A function-based approach then, begins with a questioning. What might Tom's behaviour help him to get or avoid or communicate? In what ways might it help him to cope with the school environment? A second and important aspect of FBA is to apply information gathered during the

assessment “to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of behavioural support” (O’Neill et al., 1997).

For present purposes, let us summarise Tom’s problem behaviour in the phrase, a “rough interaction.” FBA would invite us to consider antecedents to Tom’s rough interaction with his peers (what was happening beforehand?). What were the consequences of his behaviour? (what did the peers and adults do and say afterwards?). By considering the contexts in which Tom’s behaviour occurred, and did not occur, interpretive possibilities would begin to emerge. We might observe Tom spending lunchtime in the library, playing with his Yu-gi-oh! cards, or if the library were shut, see him pacing the fence line, interacting with no-one. We might see how, after school, waiting in bus line, he kicks at a classmate’s bag. Tom kicks Dick’s bag, then at Dick’s legs. Suddenly, Dick’s attention is fully turned to Tom, talking to him gruffly, but talking nonetheless. Or we might see how, after ten minutes wandering around alone at lunchtime, Tom moves towards a group of his classmates as they talk in a huddle, surprising them by leaping onto Dick’s back. How a group of boys now moan at Tom in unison, as he tussles and wrestles before being shaken off.

In a function-based approach we listen to the message behind the behaviour. We ask where and when is Tom’s behaviour most likely, and least likely to occur? We might learn it is ninety per cent likely to happen during break times. Developing a function-based support plan we would consider the ways we might structure Tom’s break times to prevent his rough interaction with peers. This could include ensuring someone is on duty every day to supervise the library where Tom likes to spend time, that structured activities are run by senior students in the playground, or, that the duty teacher checks in each day at least once with Tom. Second, we would explicitly teach Tom’s peers to greet him as he approached to pre-empt the need for Tom to gain their attention physically. We would teach Tom how to initiate greetings, how to observe a group, approach and ask to join in. And third, we would ask how we could reinforce the new, replacement behaviours we were teaching Tom, so these new behaviours were more effective and efficient in meeting his need for social attention. This may involve teaching peers to limit their responses to Tom’s rough interaction and, most importantly, to respond positively to Tom’s greetings and requests to join in.

Thinking functionally, we come to understand Tom's rough interaction with peers as a means of seeking attention. While we do not accept the *form* of Tom's behaviour, we do accept its *function* – the need to engage with his peers, to feel a sense of belonging. FBA's goal is not to deny the needs problem behaviours express, but to identify and teach socially appropriate replacement behaviours. In this sense FBA not only seeks to prevent a problem behaviour's recurrence, but simultaneously aims to increase quality of life, not only for the focus person, but for those closely connected with the person's life (Carr, 2007, p. 5; Carr et al., 2002, p. 5). PBS, in its prioritisation of quality of life, subverts its positivist origins by valuing subjectivity over objectivity. Here it is the person's *own perception* of having a meaningful and satisfying life which matters.

In Tom's situation it is possible to imagine a more satisfying life when he feels a sense of belonging with his classmates. For Tom's family we can imagine they might find him happier at home and more eager to attend to school. Tom's peers may feel more comfortable around him knowing how to respond and to help him. And the school's duty teachers may have fewer issues during break times.

There are ethical implications of FBA which become particularly clear when we consider students with disabilities. In this example I will focus on six year old Sarah who has a severe physical disability and uses a wheel chair. Sarah's only form of communication is through eye-pointing. That is, when presented with a binary choice Sarah will look toward one item to indicate her preference. This could be a banana and a mandarin, one held up in the teacher aide's left hand and one in the right. Or in the case of a literacy assessment, a choice of two cards with pictures or letters, carefully positioned on a whiteboard.

Let us imagine that staff are eager to include Sarah in the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) testing. It is an important assessment for early literacy and numeracy skills for all students across the country. But we hear from Sarah's teacher and teacher aide that Sarah is 'being uncooperative'. Cajoling, rule reminders, warnings of consequences, stern voices have been to no avail. They decide to ask for assistance.

Sarah's teachers remain passionate about maintaining high expectations for her, both academically and behaviourally. Puzzled by Sarah's recently uncooperative behaviour we ask Sarah's speech and language pathologist for advice. As she suggests, we film our next session of the PIPS testing and invite Sarah's father to meet with the school team. We

want to reflect on the film together, to find clues to Sarah's behaviour, which staff had begun to call "non-compliant." To avoid such a label's value judgement we decide to use the language of the observable. What do we see and hear Sarah do? We agree to call the behaviour 'wriggling, grizzling and looking away'.

Our conversation leads us to four possible functions for Sarah's behaviour. First, the speech therapist points at the film and says, "Let's watch this, *really* carefully. You ask Sarah which picture goes with the letter 'B'. Now watch her eyes. Her eye pointing is *really* quick." We had missed it. That split second response as Sarah lifted her head, raised her eyes and looked up to the right.

Sarah's teacher aide, suggests a second possibility. "When I take a break and someone else works with Sarah, especially if they're new to her, she seems to grizzle more. Do you reckon she's worried the next person won't understand her eye-pointing?" The team agrees this is a possibility.

Next, Sarah's teacher asks, "Is it possible she's got exhausted lifting her head? Maybe when we missed her eye-pointing and asked her to tell us again she didn't have the stamina?" The team agrees this is also likely. Finally, Sarah's father says, "Or it could've been the grass seed that got stuck in her sock." As each interpretive possibility brings forth new ways for us to respond, I record it in the "function hub," a simple tool I developed to help teams draw a connection between what a behaviour might be communicating, that is its function, and how we might respond effectively (See Figure 1).

Of course there could have been other reasons for Sarah's wriggling, grizzling and looking away, but we had made a start. The school team's ethical commitment to Sarah was clear. They would listen to what her behaviour was telling them and act. In practice, this meant responding to each of the four interpretive possibilities. First, we would follow the speech therapist's advice to use a mirror to help us see Sarah's eye movements better, and we would sit at Sarah's height. Here, the function-based strategy was to teach the adults how to better understand Sarah's communication.

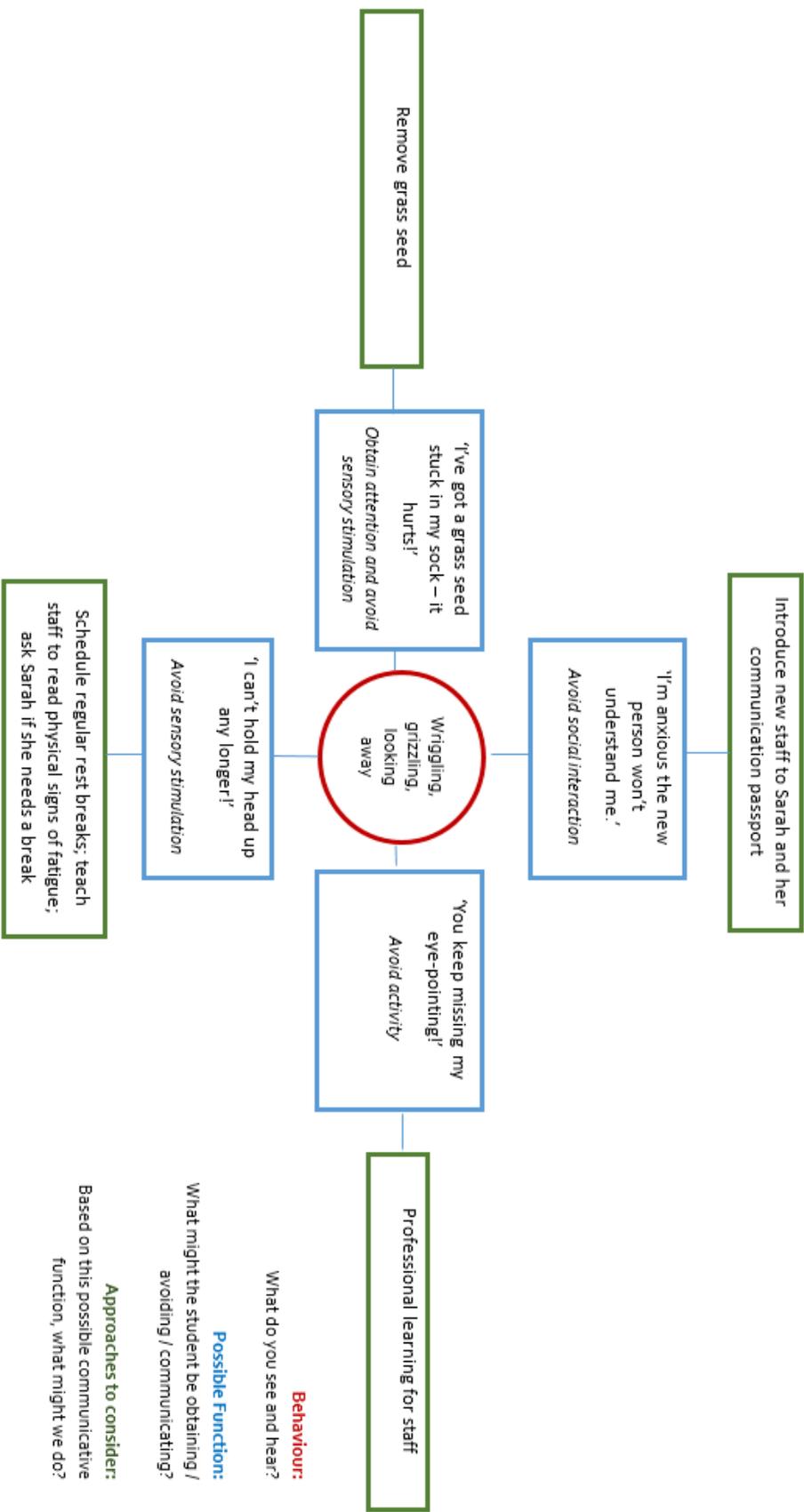
Second, we would introduce new staff to Sarah, explaining to her that they had been taught how she "talked with her eyes." We would have enough practise sessions together with two adults until the new person was ready to work alone with Sarah. We would check Sarah had a "Communication Passport," always attached to her wheelchair.

We also needed to apologise to Sarah. Using a function-based approach to interpret her behaviour we came to see that we had exhausted her by repeating questions she had already answered. Sarah was no longer able to lift the heaviness of her head. What might a function-based approach look like in this instance? We would provide regular rest breaks. We would seek advice from Sarah's family on the early warning signs of physical fatigue. We would find a way Sarah could tell us when she needed a rest and we would check with her at regular intervals. If staff felt Sarah asked for too many breaks and this was becoming a form of task avoidance, we would check this hypothesis by offering a structured choice, a fifteen minute break to rest, or fifteen minutes of a highly preferred activity, such as playing in the home corner with two friends. The fourth and simplest thing to do was to check Sarah's physical comfort. For example, we would check her socks for grass seeds if we went on other outings.

Figure 1. Sarah's Function Hub

Student: Sarah Date: 10/2/10

Team Members: xxxxx (parent), xxxxx (teacher), xxxxx (teacher aide), xxxxx (speech & language pathologist), xxxxx (PBS Consultant)



In this instance, the ethical implications of FBA are stark. If we focus only on the *form* of Sarah's behaviour we might label it as non-compliant and our negative prejudice would disable ethical action. In contrast, if we bring with us the positive prejudices of FBA, most notably the view that behaviour is purposeful, and we seek to understand a behaviour's function, we enable ethical action. We come to understand Sarah's behaviour as adaptive, as using the best means at her disposal to meet her needs. FBA is not the only way of understanding behaviour, nor is it the only path to ethical action. Nevertheless, this single approach is the focus of this study.

O'Neill et al. in defining FBA list five essential outcomes: a clear problem behaviour description; identification of where, when and which activities predict the occurrence and non-occurrence of the problem behaviour; identification of the maintaining consequences or function of the behaviour; development of at least one hypothesis that describes the contexts in which the behaviour occurs, what predicts and maintains it; and, direct observation data that confirms each hypothesis (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 3).

In addition, there are important distinctions to make between the terms *functional analysis* and *functional behaviour assessment*. Educators often use these terms interchangeably which can lead to confusion of meanings. As shown in the Figure 2, functional analysis is only one of three approaches used to gather information during a comprehensive functional behaviour assessment.

Figure 2. Three Aspects of Gathering Information for a Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA)

1. Interview

The first way to increase understanding of the function of a student's problem behaviour is to listen to the student and to those who know the student best. Common approaches include rating scales, checklists, questionnaires and structured conversations. Person-centred interviews focus on listening to student voice and understanding the whole person (not just their problem behaviour). When used effectively, FBA interviews gather up multiple perspectives and insights into a coherent body of collective wisdom.

“A major goal of any interview procedure is to identify which of the hundreds of events in an environment seem to be linked to the specific problem behaviour of a specific person” (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 5).

2. Observe

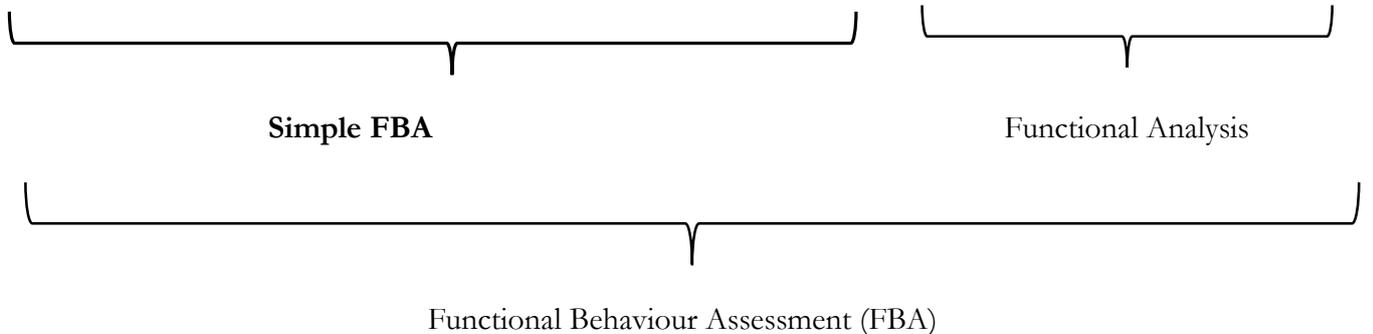
The second way FBA information is gathered is through repeated observations. The observer looks for patterns which help to understand the meaning of a problem behaviour from the perspective of the person who uses it. Questions which guide FBA observers typically include: when is the problem behaviour most likely and least likely to occur? Where? When? During which routines and activities? With whom? What was happening before the problem behaviour? What appears to reinforce the problem behaviour?

“Direct observations are usually done by teachers, direct support staff, and/or family members who already work or live with the person. The observations must be done in a manner that does not interfere with normal daily events or require extensive training” (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 5).

3. Experiment

Functional analysis is the third means of gathering information during FBA. One variable at a time is manipulated to observe its impact on the problem behaviour. Results of each behavioural experiment are graphed to provide data on the circumstances under which the behaviour occurs and does not occur. Functional analysis is an approach which aims to increase our certainty about the function a specific problem behaviour serves. As Carr et al., (1997, p. 32) state, functional analysis is a way to “verify” a behaviour's purpose.

“Functional analysis is the most precise, rigorous, and controlled method of conducting a functional assessment. Functional analysis is the only approach that allows unambiguous demonstration of a functional relationship between environmental events and problem behaviours” (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 6).



Two further terms, often used synonymously with simple FBA are “indirect assessment” and “descriptive FBA” (Whitford et al., 2013, p. 150). Although descriptive approaches may or may not involve direct observation (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 274) simple FBA, as defined in Figure 2 requires at least some student observations. To reiterate, the focus of this study is on *simple* FBA (Crone & Horner, 2003, p. 8). That is, on school based teams’ use of the first two strategies, interview and observation. For the purposes of shorthand, any reference to FBA within this study should be interpreted as simple FBA.

Aware of the tradition of functional analysis, I now set it aside. I do this because functional analysis is often considered prohibitive in school settings due to its demands on time, the difficulties and costs of accessing this expertise (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 6). In addition, for some teachers the thought of engaging in analytical approaches, which involve purposefully structuring the environment — even if briefly — to increase the problem behaviour’s occurrence, is difficult to countenance. Behaviour analysts, however, might argue that the school environment already provokes the problem behaviour. What other explanation could there be for its recurrence? If the behaviour is occurring again and again — to the point where it has been identified as a problem — something in the environment must be maintaining it.

While I am inclined to agree with this position, I am also conscious of the rarity of functional analysis expertise in schools, and the time required. I accept that some situations are so complex or serious that functional analysis is required and is perhaps the only definitive way of ensuring an adequate understanding of the problem behaviour and its relationship to the context. But the problem remains, that “the process requires [such] research-like skills” that it is “seldom wise for a functional analysis to be conducted without the direct involvement of a person trained in conducting behaviour-analytic research” (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 6). Functional analysis is therefore a process removed from the realm of most educators. It is a specialised field of technical expertise, typically frequented by the behavioural psychologist. It is for this reason that I join with O’Neill et al., as they state: ‘Our emphasis, however, will be on interview and direct observation methods because we believe these are the most applicable in typical homes, schools, and communities’ (1997, p. 6). Moreover, recent findings by Ailsa Goh and Linda Bambara

(2012), suggest that in the context of schools, “descriptive or indirect assessments may be as effective as more rigorous experimental manipulations” (p.281).

What simple FBA and functional analysis have in common is an intention “to identify the antecedents and consequences that occasion and maintain” problem behaviour (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 6). In so doing they both focus on smoothing the fit between the context and a person’s needs. This view is consistent with my assumptions about other areas of learning, where I believe that an educator’s role is to explicitly teach and structure the social and academic environment in ways which foster all learners’ growth.

### **The significance of this study**

I now wish to elaborate on the ways in which this study makes an original contribution. First, it examines FBA through a hermeneutical lens, by which I mean that I attempt to “see what is questionable” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 85) in the FBA tradition which has been handed down to me. As Donald Schön cautions, aspects of our practice may become so embedded in the routine and repetition of what we do, that we may unknowingly pass by opportunities to re-think and refine our actions (Schön, 1983, p. 61). Accordingly, my writing becomes a “*moral site*” (Richardson, 1990, p. 138), in which I reinscribe my work with an ethical sense of self, through questioning my behaviour and mode of being in relation to the other.

Second, my approach is phenomenological and makes use of narrative. It is phenomenological in the sense that I turn my attention back to the thing itself (Heidegger, 1953/1996), to the phenomenon of FBA, to illuminate particularities of unique, lived experiences. I use narratives as a form of phenomenological heuristic (van Manen, 2014, p. 376), in an attempt to be attentive to FBA, “to let things speak for themselves” (van Manen, 1990, p.180), to disclose puzzlements or *aporias*.

The nature of such writing presents a twofold challenge. First, it is difficult to convey the *aporetic* nature of an experience, while writing clearly enough for a reader to understand the situation described. Second, writing with the emotional intensity of the time means that sentences are clipped back to convey language and speech in a manner which is pre-reflective. The purpose of such an approach is for FBA to become “an open place, a method of discovery” (Richardson, 2003, p. 452) in which it is possible to “claim the creative space of *praxis*” (Latta & Kim, 2010, p. 145) and to explore what

phenomenologist and educator Max van Manen calls “possibilities for being in the world in certain ways” (1990, p.179).

Third, the writing which unfolds throughout this study emerges through using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2003). That is, I do not set out with a particular end in mind, or seek results to lay out after the research. Instead, I engage in what Richardson describes as “a dynamic creative process” (2003, p. 451). My intention is to “learn something I didn’t know before I wrote it” (ibid, p. 517). Perhaps there is a synergy between writing as a method of inquiry and my hermeneutical intention “to engage in *creative* interpretations which, in themselves, hold the potential for the generation of knowledge” (Sumara, 1996, p.124).

Fourth, although this study is autobiographical in nature, it may contain elements of what Richardson calls a “collective story” (1990, p.25). It has potential to give “voice to those who are silenced or marginalised in the cultural narrative” (1990, p.25, 26), thereby decreasing a sense of facilitator isolation. I am also conscious that I cannot claim to represent anyone’s voice but my own, and even this continually evolves.

Each FBA experience I describe is not intended to be interpreted as a “standalone” episode, but rather as a temporally defined opening to an ongoing conversation where meanings are continually modified over time (Wang & Geale, 2014, p. 196). Writing as a method of inquiry is not just a stepping back to reflect at a single point in time. It is a continual movement. Writing becomes a way to re-member, to re-interpret and to discover (Denzin, 2009, p. 95). At times there are moments of illumination, but more often of scorching realisation, when the thin skin of my intention is blistered by the heat of tradition, when the inadequacies and vulnerabilities I project onto others, are found to be my own.

The final area of originality is in bringing FBA into conversation with aspects of Gadamer’s philosophy. Gadamer is the central focus for two reasons. First, he addresses the theme of openness (1975/1989, p. 271). Second, he writes that he has “endeavoured to mediate between philosophy and the sciences” (1994, p. 556). His interest is in “transcending the restricted horizon of scientific theory and its methodology,” and in acknowledging that “science can fulfil its social function only when it acknowledges its own limits and the conditions placed on its freedom to manoeuvre” (ibid, p.556). Might

it also be said that FBA can fulfil its social and pedagogical functions only to the extent that behavioural science acknowledges its limits?

## **A response to Freire's questions**

Paolo Freire provocatively asks the following questions, “for what and for whom do I study? And against what and against whom?” (1998, p. 73). I responded to Freire’s questions with two contrasting vignettes as a preface to this study. Their purpose was to provide an interpretive context for the discussion which followed. As illustrated in the vignettes, my interest lies in how FBA can survive and sometimes thrive in unlikely places.

My early experiences of FBA looked good on paper. In practice they rarely moved beyond the assistant principal’s filing cabinet. My observations suggested that prior to a Tasmanian state-wide pilot program of schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS), and the introduction of national mental health initiatives such as KidsMatter (Slee et al., 2009) and MindMatters (2010), few schools had an articulated values base, a shared language or an explicitly taught curriculum focused on social and emotional learning (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015, p. 5). This was further complicated by a couple of schools whose initial contact with FBA had prejudiced them against it.

For example, a principal once asked me to run a full day workshop on FBA and, if possible, not mention the term FBA. The complex way in which it had originally been introduced by a visiting expert, led staff to associate FBA with the impossible — a thirty page assessment. She described her staff as having been overwhelmed by their earlier experience. What were the meanings these educators projected before them? FBA is lengthy, exhausting and unrealistic for schools. FBA is the territory of experts. This was a difficult starting point for planning a day’s professional learning, and a moment for reflection.

I saw I had to take responsibility, to ask if my actions were either opening up or closing down staff interest and engagement with FBA. My actions could shape educator prejudices about FBA, which in turn could influence the number of students potentially able to benefit from a function-based approach. Again, the need for what van Manen calls “pedagogic tact” (van Manen, 1990, p.169) came to mind. In other words, I needed a disposition of openness not only to a student’s experiences, but also to staff experiences.

Since my learning occurs in the social context of school communities it brings with it ethical responsibilities both to those I work with and to the tradition of FBA itself. While I am shaped by tradition, I am conscious that my actions as well as my inactions may contribute, incrementally, to a community's perceptions of FBA. As Gadamer put it, "tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves" (1975/1989, p. 293).

To return to Freire's question, it is my attraction to FBA's potentially transformative power (Emerson, 2001, pp. 100-101; Whitford et al., 2013, p. 148) which drives my commitment to developing a more "action sensitive pedagogy" (van Manen, 1990). I write for those I work with, the students, their families and school staff, in an effort to deepen my understandings, to increase my awareness and openness. I write in an attempt to explore what has been going on in my FBA work, or rather, what has been going wrong. While the nuggets of epiphanies may elude me, I hope through writing to fossick for insights, to increase awareness of how I might act with greater "pedagogic tact" (van Manen, 1990).

This brings us to an important point: FBA's capacity to thrive in schools depends not only on knowledge, school values and systems in place to support and sustain FBA, but on the comportment of those who introduce it. But if staff experience nothing that liberates them from disabling forestructures, which lead to ineffective actions, it is not for me to blame them, but to question how I might better understand and act to assist them. This study is in part, my struggle to do this.

I wonder if FBA were to flourish in our schools, how many students might be saved from experiences of suspension, part time enrolment, and exclusion? For educators, what changes might we see in stress-related sick leave, workers compensation claims, staff satisfaction and wellbeing (Ntinis, 2008, pp. 11-12)? How much safer might schools be, both physically and emotionally for both students and staff? How different might life be for students and families? I think of the students who are given a wide berth by their peers, who dread the loneliness of lunchtime, who are banned from the bus, from their local sports team and leavers' dinners, who pretend they never wanted an invitation to their classmate's party anyway.

Accordingly, I question school systems which perpetuate social and academic exclusion through punitive rather than educative responses to students with challenging behaviours. I question systemic inconsistencies wherein students' academic learning is supported proactively, yet their social learning, reactively. Is there a misunderstanding that social learning is simpler than academic learning? Observation of the comparative departmental structures, support systems and funding arrangements — between the academic curriculum and social curriculum — would give the impression that this is so. Although I am unable to address systemic issues, I can reflect on how I might, even in a small way, deepen my understandings, thereby enhancing my capacity to act.

In van Manen's words, I aspire to increase my "pedagogic thoughtfulness" (1990, p. 143). I hope to act from a position of greater understanding, to be more informed and more sensitive to what each unique situation calls for. This study forms part of an ongoing attempt to move toward more "thoughtful action: action full of thought and thought full of action" (van Manen, 1990, p. 159).

Van Manen's emphasis is on pedagogical theory as a "theory of the unique, of the particular case" (1990, p.150). And a pedagogical attitude to FBA might suggest that no tool or approach contains within it, a generalizable method to guarantee its efficacy. For FBA is a practice which is inescapably embedded in the contextual particularities and ambiguities which form the collective and individual evolving tradition of each school community. To borrow some terms from Freire, it is my experience in school communities which repeatedly alerts me to my "unfinishedness" and re-awakens my "epistemological curiosity" (1998, p. 55).

## **Chapter overview**

In Chapter One, my intention is to situate myself and FBA within a broader interpretive context. The chapter's purpose is to acknowledge the specific temporal, philosophical, educational and personal contexts from which the four narratives of this study emerge. In particular, attention is given to the values which underpin FBA. The chapter concludes by engaging with a selection of FBA research, and by suggesting there may be merit in exploring FBA from a new perspective.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the notion of openness, as a frequently overlooked, yet essential ontological aspect of FBA. I reflect on the meaning of openness and its relevance

to my practice as an FBA facilitator, drawing in particular on the work of Gadamer. Dutch philosopher Ilja Maso's three-fold focus on openness to the self, to the other and to the situation, becomes a structuring motif for this chapter and much of the writing which follows.

Broadly speaking, in Chapters Three to Six, I shift the focus to reflect on my lived experiences of FBA. Each chapter begins with a narrative from which I select a small number of themes for reflection. Each narrative is a fictionalised account of real events and real people. In order to protect the identity of those involved, each story combines only a number of elements from any given situation. These are re-configured into new narratives, combining aspects of different people, across different settings, in different times. Alterations may also include age and gender. In this regard, the only literal truth to the narratives is that they all represent aspects of my experience. More importantly, I hope they convey an experiential truth, a sense of the daily, situated, complicated, human aspects of team-based FBA in schools.

Each narrative chapter concludes with a summary of prejudices which emerged through the narrative within that chapter. Accompanying the prejudices is a list of questions intended to nudge myself — and to invite other FBA facilitators — into a more hermeneutical stance. That is, to move beyond such forestructures of meaning as the prejudices might connote, into more pedagogically sensitive ways of thinking and being.

The people in each account present a challenge to my understanding. They are subjects who contributed to a moment in which my FBA understandings, carefully stitched together over many years, were unpicked in an instant. Many of these aporetic moments were uncomfortable. What I thought I knew — even the values I held — were brought into question.

More specifically, in Chapter Three, I try illustrate a lived experience of my unfinishedness and a moment when I was overwhelmed by tradition's power. In many ways the narrative, "What I Learnt From Zack," calls my understandings of self in relation to FBA into question.

This chapter also returns to the theme of prejudice and introduces Gadamer's concept of finitude.

In Chapter Four, I try to write my way into an FBA experience which was both painful and puzzling. I explore prejudice, the temporality and party-dependent nature of understanding and ask how an FBA which began so positively could end in misunderstanding?

In Chapter Five, I explore the notion of FBA as “process” and consider how our language might shape our ways of being. Had my own understandings of FBA become operationalised and procedural, rather than dialogical and relational? In the final section of this chapter I consider the ways in which much FBA literature screens out the subjects who enact it, and the possible ways in which this absence might influence our practice.

Chapter Six explores an example of FBA facilitation where I was perhaps most able to embody something like a dialogical approach. It discusses the important role of uncertainty in FBA, the power of conversation, and considers Hannah Arendt’s notions of action and natality. I also consider Gadamer’s conception of solidarity in relation to FBA.

In the final chapter, “Openness as an act of resistance,” I draw together key themes, before considering possible future directions. While my focus is on the implications of what I am coming to understand, for my own work, Chapter Seven is also written in the hope that there might be aspects that resonate with the experiences and understandings of others.

## **Defining key terms**

It seems appropriate to clarify terms at this point. First, I have chosen to employ Gadamer’s definition of understanding which “*is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of a tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated*” (1975/1989, p.291).

Second, I draw on Gadamer’s notion of “lifeworld,” which he in turn took up from the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (Beyer, 2015). I understand lifeworld to mean the natural, directly experienced, pre-theoretical and communal world which we live in as “historical creatures” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 239).

Second, I will use the language of “we” and “us” to reflect the collaborative, team-based nature of FBA in schools. When I use “I” and “we” it is with the recognition that

“one’s own experiences are the possible experiences of others and that the experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself” (van Manen, 1984, p. 52). I intend “FBA team” and “team member” to be inclusive of parents, carers, principals, teachers, teacher aides, inter-agency, support staff, and any school community member involved. I assume “parent” and “family” to be inclusive of all carers. By “support staff” I mean speech and language pathologists, social workers, school psychologists and disability consultants. The term “educators” is used to encompass teachers, teacher aides, specialist staff, support staff, school and departmental leaders.

Third, I follow Gadamer’s distinction between two types of experience. The German *Erfahrung* conveys an ongoing integrative experience, and for this reason is always used by Gadamer in the singular. In contrast, *Erlebnis* which Gadamer uses for the plural (experiences), refers to events or adventures which may be “had” (1975/1989, pp. 84-86). It is the singular experience, *Erfahrung*, which involves finding out or learning the hard way which is the focus of this study.

Fourth, in addition to its usual meaning, I use the term “intend” in its phenomenological sense, to connote “the conscious relationship we have to an object,” not the practical intentions, but the “mental or cognitive” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 8).

Finally, I will not refer to prejudice in its contemporary meaning of a blinkered outlook, a negative forestructure which distorts interpretation. Gadamer observes that a pejorative meaning of the term arose during the Enlightenment. Indeed, he notes that “the prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself” (1975/1989, p.273). In keeping with this view, I will follow Gadamer’s use of prejudice to connote a pre-judgment which either enables or disables an interpretive act. Whether positive or negative, prejudice remains an inescapable forestructure which precedes all judgements. Despite a sense of autonomy of thought and action, Gadamer writes that my prejudices, far more than my judgements “constitute the historical reality” of my being (1975/1989, p. 278).

Definitions of positive behaviour support and schoolwide positive behaviour support are addressed in Chapter One.

## **Limitations of this study**

I am conscious that all writing is shaped by the particularities of history, context and intention. The finitude of such a view implies that aspects of FBA will have slipped below the surface. I acknowledge from the outset that I am trapped in the net of language, which defines the parameters of my conceptual and interpretive horizons. I am also conscious that it is impossible to separate the observed from the observer (Bohm, 2004, pp. 79-82). My understandings of FBA are influenced by and continue to be influenced by my socio-cultural conditioning, they are inevitably formed and re-formed by tradition.

Thinking with Gadamer, unless self-awareness is grounded in awareness of the power of tradition, it risks being nothing other than “a distorting mirror” and a “flickering in the closed circuits of historical life” (1975/1989, pp. 211, 278). But as Gadamer puts it, “to be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible” (1975/1989, p. 354).

Due to its autobiographical nature, this study represents only one behaviour consultant’s perspective. Inevitably the scope is limited as the narratives and reflections are temporally and contextually situated. Aspects of experience are highlighted while others are obscured. As a historical being, my thinking can only manifest aspects of my current horizon. As van Manen suggests, such themes “are constellations that make up the universe we live through. By the patterns and light of these themes we navigate and explore such universes” (1990, p. 90).

Finally, the purpose of this study is not to solve a problem so much as to be descriptive and hermeneutically aware. Instead of focusing on what to do, it turns to questions of meaning, asking how we can make sense of what happened in the context of a particular FBA.

## Chapter 1

### **Functional Behaviour Assessment as Tradition**

In this chapter I hope to provide an interpretive context for the narrative explorations which follow in Chapters Three to Six. My intention is to question my own silent inheritance as a behavioural consultant working in the context of schools. I try to situate myself within the traditions of positive behaviour support (PBS) and functional behaviour assessment (FBA).

I consider the centrality of person-centred values and the traditions from which PBS and FBA emerge. In addition, I reflect on key assumptions which underpin FBA, and challenges in enacting FBA in schools. I also begin to question the positivist use of language in much FBA literature. Further, I consider the possibility that FBA's frequent representation, solely in terms of method, is unhelpful.

#### **Situating functional behaviour assessment within the context of this study**

My understandings have been shaped by two main influences, namely, a behavioural tradition and a pedagogical tradition. While I would like to think that the pedagogical and behavioural — in the sense of positive behaviour support — have much in common, their co-existence is not always easy. Sometimes apparently contradictory values and approaches appear to co-exist in schools, in which the radical nature of PBS is not fully understood. Such inconsistency is also possible for individuals, as I illustrate in Chapter Three.

Analysis of the tradition of FBA and its varied applications is beyond the scope of this study. What I wish to do instead is to highlight particular aspects of my FBA inheritance which come to mind as I interpret lifeworld experiences. I do this acknowledging van Manen's observation that "the problem of understanding involves interpretive dialogue which includes taking up the tradition in which one finds oneself" (1990, p. 179).

My interpretations of FBA experiences in schools are both enabled and circumscribed by the light of a tradition I now explore. For Gadamer, no perspective, no matter how rigorous frees us from tradition. I am conscious that I cannot claim or capture the traditions of positive behaviour support and functional behaviour assessment. Rather, their tradition has a claim on me. My interpretations are "conditioned by historical circumstances" and the "power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate" me (Gadamer, 1975/1989). I am conscious that "hermeneutical experience is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is *language* — i.e. it expresses itself like a Thou" (ibid, p. 352).

When perceived as a "Thou," Gadamer suggests that tradition invites us into dialogue (ibid). In other words, tradition is not an object which can be contained but rather, a "Thou" which addresses us. In Chapter One, then, I hope to take up aspects of FBA tradition as I seek deeper understanding. I acknowledge prejudices — the silent, cultural inheritance of the field of PBS and FBA — which inevitably and unconsciously influence my understandings and actions.

The origins and traditions of FBA and PBS are inextricably intertwined (Singer & Wang, 2009, p. 27). And in the context of schools using a whole school approach to positive behaviour support — otherwise known as schoolwide positive behaviour support — FBA is nested within a broader range of behavioural interventions (Scott et al., 2009, p. 421). FBA, for each school discussed in this study, is only one part of a continuum of approaches to supports. In short, schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) has been defined as a continuum of supports, comprised of three tiers: universal interventions which are for *all* students, all staff and relevant to all school settings; secondary interventions which provide an additional layer of support needed for *some* groups and classrooms; and, tertiary intervention which provides intensive, individual support for a *few* students (Sugai & Horner, 2002). It is also important to note that three common

threads weave their way through each tier of SWPBS intervention: data to support decision-making, use of evidence-based practice to support student behaviour, and systems to support staff behaviour.

FBA, a key aspect of tertiary intervention, is considered necessary for only a small percentage of the population — typically one to five per cent (Sailor, Doolittle, Bradleu, & Danielson, 2009, p. 739). To recapitulate, FBA has been described as “a process of understanding the physiological and environmental factors that contribute to a person’s problem behaviours. The whole purpose of a functional behaviour assessment is to gain information that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of behavioural interventions” (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 2).

Three positive prejudices or assumptions form the foundation for FBA. These assumptions are described by Crone and Horner as “(1) human behaviour is functional, (2) human behaviour is predictable, and (3) human behaviour is changeable” (2003, p. 11). These powerful understandings are the ballast which keep FBA afloat. In difficult times, these three assumptions became resources for me to draw upon. They provided forestructures to guide my observation, reflection and dialogue; they supported the making of meaning. Inherent to each assumption lies a question to set us upon a pathway of inquiry which leads toward possible actions.

For example, I once taught Andrei, a nine year old, who had severe autism. His squealing was distressing, even painful, for everyone around him. Rather than beginning with a focus on stopping his behaviour my orientation was instead to understand it. Guided by the values of PBS and FBA my starting point was a search for meaning. In what ways might squealing meet Andrei’s needs? How do we respond when he squeals? Who was there when he squealed? Where were we when he squealed? When did he squeal? Is the squealing always directed at adults? When is Andrei least likely to squeal? What happens if an adult who enters the room, greets Andrei first? What happens if I stop asking him to leave the swing and I walk away?

After many conversations with Andrei’s parents and the staff who knew Andrei best, the above questions led to three possible interpretations of Andrei’s behaviour. That is, squealing was considered to have three communicative functions. First it was a way for him to say, “I’m excited, I love being at the swimming pool!” Second, squealing was an effective means by which Andrei could send adults away so they did not interrupt his time

on the swing outside our classroom. It was his way to say, “Be quiet, go away, I want to be on my own.” And if a visitor entered our classroom, squealing was also a way for Andrei to say, “Hello, look at me, talk to me!” Understanding the function or purpose of Andrei’s behaviour brought with it new ways of responding. For instance, we could ask all staff to greet Andrei the moment they entered our classroom. If we had accurately interpreted the motivation of his squealing, as being to gain adult attention, we might expect a change in his behaviour, no longer needed squeal to communicate his need for social interaction.

This simple example of a function-based intervention raises another important assumption which underpins FBA. Although FBA is about decreasing problem behaviours, it is also about developing support plans which describe “what *we* will do differently. It is the change in our behaviour that will result in improved behaviour of the focus person” (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 65).

FBA’s emphasis on the importance of adults creating supportive environments for students is echoed in the Association for Positive Behaviour Support’s definition of PBS as “a set of research-based strategies used to increase quality of life and decrease problem behaviour by teaching new skills and making changes in a person’s environment” (Association for Positive Behaviour Support, 2013). The Association for Positive Behaviour Support describes PBS as an approach, not a program, which is founded on “valued outcomes” (i.e. valued by the people being supported); it incorporates “behavioural and biomedical science,” “validated procedures and, systems change to enhance quality of life and reduce problem behaviours” (ibid).

In addition to applied behaviour analysis in particular, the origin of PBS lies both in the movement toward inclusion and in person-centred values (Carr et al., 2002, p. 5). The latter two elements share a common context — disability. In this sense there is unity. But there is also division here, an epistemological disparity. Put simplistically, the inclusion movement and person-centred values originated from a commitment to human dignity, the importance of subjective experience and an individual’s quality of life. These three elements — person-centred values, inclusion and applied behaviour analysis — form the tradition of PBS. In contrast, applied behaviour analysis emerged from a tradition focused on the objective, measurable, repeatable and observable.

If the primary purpose of early behaviourist experiments was to control or stop behaviour, this was only a secondary goal in PBS. Built on a foundation of person-centred values, the primary goal of PBS is to increase quality of life (Singer & Wang, 2009, p. 28). The way in which FBA does this is to help people to meet their needs in more socially appropriate ways, using proactive, educative and functional approaches. In doing so, problem behaviour decreases, as it becomes “irrelevant, inefficient and ineffective” (O’Neill et al., 1997, p. 8). PBS also represented an ethical turn in my own professional life. Today there is still an ongoing dialogue, a continual unfolding of experience and the challenge of translating my learnings into practice in the educational communities I belong to.

The origins of functional behaviour assessment (FBA) can be found in the 1950s in B.F. Skinner’s *Science and Human Behaviour* (1953). The behaviourist legacy is still evident today in the pervasive use of language such as treatment, variable, reinforcer and stimulus. By the late 1960s the *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis* was founded and publishing “studies describing clinical applications of behaviour analytic concepts and procedures” (Ervin, Ehrhardt, & Poling, 2001, p. 175). Researchers conducted studies in clinical settings manipulating variables to demonstrate experimental control. The principles of operant conditioning evolved over the next half century.

Space does not permit an exploration of the various aspects of PBS applied at a whole school level. And there is a plethora of material on this theme already. What is important here, is to note the values shift that the previously mentioned definition of PBS requires, for many school cultures. PBS differs from traditional approaches to behaviour from the outset, in its goal of increasing quality of life (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009, p. 3). In contrast to traditional approaches which focus on stopping problem behaviours, PBS emphasises teaching a student a socially appropriate replacement behaviour. Where traditional approaches relied on punishment to create behavioural change, PBS uses positive means to create change. PBS locates the problem within the environment, *not* within the individual. As O’Neill et al., state

if we consider problem behaviours as occurring in people, it is logical to try to change the people. If we consider problem behaviours as occurring in contexts, it becomes logical to change the context. Behaviour change occurs by changing environments, not trying to change people. Functional

assessment is a process for understanding the context (antecedents and consequences) associated with problem behaviours. (1997, p. 5)

There are many overt differences between traditional approaches to challenging behaviour and that of PBS and FBA. What is less visible is the extent to which traditional assumptions about behaviour still influence much of our thinking. I recall, for example, my discomfort when first discovering the table below in Louise Porter’s book *Student Behaviour: Theory and Practice for Teachers* (2000). I was uncomfortable because it revealed inconsistencies between my views on academic learning and behavioural learning. I was confronted by the power of my prejudices which operated without any conscious awareness that they were at play.

Figure 3. Assumptions About Academic Versus Behavioural Mistakes

Common assumptions about academic errors	Common assumptions about behavioural mistakes
Students are trying to make the correct response	Students are trying to be disruptive – that is, to make an <i>incorrect</i> response
Errors are accidental	Errors are deliberate
Errors are inevitable	Students are refusing to cooperate
Learning requires exploration	Students should not explore the limits; they should obey them
Students who are having difficulties need additional or modified teaching	Students who are having difficulties should be punished
Students who achieve good work deserve some recognition	Students should behave appropriately without needing recognition (Brophy, 1981)

Note. Adapted from Jones & Jones (1998, p. 276) in *Student Behaviour: Theory and Practice for Teachers* (Porter, 2000, p. 298), St Leonards: Allen & Unwin. © 2000 Allen & Unwin. Reprinted with permission. This table is not subject to open access and further use by third parties requires Allen & Unwin’s permission.

I could intellectually analyse the above disjunct between common assumptions of social learning errors and academic learning errors. I could think about it rationally. But this was not enough. My challenge was to embody a new way of understanding and to

find a new way of *being* in relation to students with challenging behaviours. As Gadamer put it, understanding has an “ontological structure” (1975/1989, p. 293).

The shift from reactive, punitive orientated approaches, focused on short term behavioural change to proactive, respectful and educative responses is not an easy change to make, for a person, school or education system. And I will not address those complexities here. Rather, I wish to set the scene for four narratives which follow. Schools which implement a whole school approach to PBS, otherwise known as schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS), map out a social curriculum for all students, which involves participation of all staff, and all students across all settings. The educational vision for schools implementing SWPBS is to “maximise the academic achievement and social success of all learners” (Sugai & Horner, 2009, p. 307). Teachers apply the same principles of differentiation that are applied to academic learning, to social learning. In other words, students’ learning needs are assessed, planned for and additional opportunities for practice and support, in highly structured environments are provided. When universal interventions (for all students) and secondary interventions (for some students) are implemented effectively, FBA is considered necessary for only a few students — approximately only one to five per cent (Sailor, Doolittle, et al., 2009, p. 739).

Perhaps the tradition of PBS presents another challenge. If the culture of teaching literacy and numeracy has traditionally been visible, publically discussed and measured, I would like to suggest that the educational culture in regard to behaviour has traditionally been hidden. A maths teacher whose class is known to be working on Pythagoras, is likely to welcome ideas on how to teach the theorem in meaningful and memorable ways. A colleague may share an idea where students are invited to cut out paper templates, manipulate materials to see how the square on the hypotenuse really is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Students are thereby invited to experience the theorem for themselves. If I shared this way to teach Pythagoras with another teacher I would probably not need to approach the conversation with great sensitivity. Teachers share resources, ideas and conversations about academic curriculum frequently.

Conversation about behaviour, however, is different. For many of us it is still off limits, a matter of individual style, something which occurs behind a closed classroom door. In my first year of teaching I recall my own anxiety at a behavioural consultant’s visit to my classroom to observe a student. I began to reflect on how well intentioned and technically

helpful information can so easily be experienced as confronting, further perpetuating a culture of silence. In order to address such issues and to begin their work in a respectful and sensitive way, schools involved in SWPBS start their focus in areas where staff share responsibility for student behaviour (e.g. hallways, playground, locker areas and bus zones). I mention this because SWPBS is the context of the schools described in this study. Each fictional school I describe has begun the cultural shift from punishing to teaching, from reactive to proactive approaches, involving their whole community in a gradual move towards perceiving students' behaviour problems as social learning needs.

### **Functional behaviour assessment's underlying values**

For me, the shift toward the values of PBS was incremental. The origin of my interest in PBS and FBA was discomfort. In my early years as a support teacher, I was uncomfortable with an expectation that I would implement what are known in the literature as “aversive procedures” (Dunlap & Fox, 2009, p. 51). Behavioural approaches that are aversive are easily identified if we consider the etymology of aversive from the Latin *aversus*, meaning to turn away, and the meaning of avert, which connotes more of a physical avoidance. Dunlap and Fox note that

aversive strategies became popular in many settings serving individuals with severe disabilities; however, they were met with a crescendo of protests from advocates who noted that such procedures were inconsistent with standards of human rights and with the growing movements of deinstitutionalization and community inclusion. (2009, p. 51)

PBS emerged as an ethical alternative to behaviour management strategies being used with individuals with severe disabilities in the mid-1980s (Dunlap & Fox, 2009, p. 51). Yet even with the closure of institutions and movement towards inclusion of people with disabilities into their local communities, the legacy of punitive practices in some settings was difficult to change. As Bambara notes, two standards of behavioural practice remained. One that was “acceptable for ‘us,’ and another for ‘them’ ” (Bambara & Kern, 2005, p. 6). The person-centred values of PBS, together with the principles of self-determination, challenged such inequities. The principles of self-determination ask us to listen to student voice, to take action in ways which increase students' capacity for choice and control in their lives. As Bambara puts it, “who better than the person with disabilities to determine what a good life should be?” (ibid, p.7).

PBS represented an ethical turn in the history of behavioural science, motivated by what Singer and Wang describe as a “moral revulsion at aversive treatments developed and promoted by prominent behaviour analysts” (2009, p. 18). In the schools of my early career, aversive approaches in a general sense, were not used. An occasional exception to this was the time out room. A child could be exited from class and taken to a “time out room.” If the child wore boots, they would be removed, to avoid injury and damage to property. At this time and in this place, our toolkit was limited. But things were about to change.

One day in autumn, two behavioural psychologists visited Tasmania. They had both worked in institutions for people with disabilities, which later became special schools. It was from them that I first heard of Anne Donnellan and Gary LaVigna, whose very book titles were epiphanies: *Alternatives to punishment: Solving behaviour problems with non-aversive strategies* (1986), and *Progress without punishment: Effective approaches for learners with behaviour problems* (Donnellan, LaVigna, Negri-Schoultz, & Fassbender, 1988). Here were researchers pioneering highly effective, alternative ways of responding to people with challenging behaviours. And they were achieving what schools wanted — a reduction in problem behaviour.

But they were doing far more than that. They were showing that the very tools, the behavioural science we used to change behaviour through punishment, could also change behaviour through respectful and positive approaches. Donnellan and LaVigna were successfully demonstrating that the locus of control could be shifted from external, to internal, thereby creating more durable change. Why was this a revelation for me? I was educated in a school where it was not uncommon for a child to have her ear twisted, mouth washed out with soap or to receive the cane or the “cuts.” Phrases such as “tough love,” “you’ve got to be cruel to be kind” and “spare the rod and spoil the child” echoed the biases of a tradition oriented to punishment as *the* instrument of behavioural change.

The visiting psychologists also introduced me to John O’Brien’s writings on quality of life (O’Brien, 1989). While O’Brien’s work had emerged from a disability context, his work was equally relevant to every student with challenging behaviour who had experienced exclusionary practices. In particular, O’Brien described “five valued experiences” associated with quality of life for *all* of us: making choices, growing in relationships, contributing, sharing ordinary places, and the dignity of valued roles (ibid,

p.23). In order to enable such a positive vision for individuals, he suggested five corresponding “accomplishments” or “guiding principles” for organisations: promoting choice, community participation, supporting contribution, community presence, and encouraging valued social roles (ibid, p.23).

Person-centred values represented a framework from which I could make decisions with confidence that my actions would do no harm. And more than that, they would be respectful. In the context of schools, Bambara translates a person-centred approach, as one which emphasises

participating in meaningful and enjoyable activities in school and community settings; the feeling of belonging or being an accepted member of a group; having good relationships with peers, family members, and friends; having the opportunity to make choices and direct one’s life; and having the skills and abilities to pursue dreams and engage in activities that are personally meaningful or important. (Bambara & Kern, 2005, p. 6)

Person-centred values are at the heart of PBS and FBA.

What I found most liberating, in the field of PBS, was the notion of crisis management within a non-aversive framework. No longer was it my job to *control* – which was impossible anyway – but to *understand* behaviour, to structure the environment, to guide, to teach, to reassure and acknowledge. These were things I knew I could do. And as my horizon expanded, a whole new world of behavioural supports opened up.

I read whatever I came upon, from early applications of behavioural science which had little to do with person-centred values, to Herb Lovett’s book, *Learning to Listen: Positive Approaches to People with Difficult Behaviour* (1996). Lovett described inhumane practices used in the name of science to control behaviours of people with disabilities (ibid, pp. 157-159). He describes a “hierarchy of aversives” or behaviour consequences, used in a Massachusetts institution as late as the mid nineteen-eighties. The hierarchy begins with “1. Ignore” and moves through to step “4. Water squirt to the face and back of the neck,” and “7. Vinegar, vanilla extract, lemon juice, jalapeno pepper spray, or other unspecified taste aversives applied to lip or tongue.” By level twenty-one: “Finger pinch applied to buttocks, inner arm, inner thigh, bottom of feet, the palms or abdomen” (Lovett, 1996, pp. 157-158).

The hierarchy finishes at level twenty-six.

In the context of institutions using such aversive behavioural practices, it is easy to understand the emergence of PBS's primary goal — increasing quality of life. But if applied behaviour analysis gave behaviour science its nadir in such inhumane methods, it has also has given us its zenith, in the profound and positive life changes, when its principles are applied within a framework person-centred values (Bambara, 2005, p. 4; LaVigna & Willis, 1997b).

If we accept Lovett's above account as accurate, behavioural science was seemingly unaccountable to society, as late as the nineteen-eighties. Behavioural scientists operated — sometimes literally — behind the locked doors of institutions (Dunlap et al., 2009, p. 6; Lovett, 1996, p. 179). By the late nineteen-seventies the concept of social validity or the “measure of how well a social program is embraced by those who are targeted to benefit from it” was emerging (Marchant et al., 2013, p. 223). Montrose M. Wolf's article “Social Validity: The Case for Subjective Measurement or How Applied Behaviour Analysis is Finding its Heart” (1978) was a turning point.

## **The epistemic grid**

The *Handbook of Positive Behaviour Support* (Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009) provides two and half pages on “problems with traditional FBA in school settings” (pp. 429-431), under two subheadings: “complicated and time-consuming methods of FBA” and “lack of trained personnel” (Scott et al., 2009, pp. 429-431). While these are important points, I would suggest that there are additional and more subtle challenges to consider. Similarly, I accept Dunlap and Kinkaid's view that “the time, effort, and expertise required to conduct functional assessments will be a significant factor in the manner with which the process is used to develop interventions” (2001, p. 372). Research which “focuses on the integrity, validity, and efficiency of functional assessment methods in typical contexts” (Dunlap & Kincaid, 2001, p. 372) is important, but is it all we need to consider?

Might an issue still remain, as Gadamer puts it, of what happens to us “over and above our wanting and doing” (1975/1989, pp. xxv, xxvi)? As suggested in this study's four narratives and the quotes below, there may be additional complexities to consider.

Perhaps the biggest issue on the tertiary level is the clear research-to-practice gap in the area of function-based individualised support strategies. (Hawken & O'Neill, 2006, p. 51)

Future research should investigate whether the lack of individualization is due to missing information resulting from inadequate and incomplete FBAs or an inability of school teams to take information from the FBA and transfer it into an effective plan. (Blood & Neel, 2007, p. 77)

Developing strategies that will reduce the disconnect between FBA research and practice should be a major priority. (Gable et al., 2014, p. 126)

The research-to-practice gap has been a persistent feature of FBA literature (Anderson & Scott, 2009; Blood & Neel, 2007; Hawken & O'Neill, 2006; L. Kern & Manz, 2004; Marchant et al., 2013; McIntosh et al., 2010). Might this suggest that we are trapped within a single epistemology, stuck with the same questions and often, the same answers? How is it that the system within which I work can produce such varied uptake of FBA, as indicated in the vignettes at the start of this study?

Could it be that pivotal barriers to FBA, not being measurable, slip through the coarse net of behavioural science? Quantitative research is clearly essential, but is it enough? Is it possible that the dominance of empiricism in PBS tradition limits the possibilities of our understandings? For instance, in addition to “empirical investigations,” the *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions* masthead (2014) outlines a broader range of acceptable article types. These include: “discussions, literature reviews, and conceptual papers,” “programs, practices and innovations,” and “forum” for “brief articles” of a more subjective nature. Note the maximum of eight pages for a forum article compared to up to thirty pages for an article on programs and practices. Through limiting the space for articles of a more subjective nature, is it possible that we are fostering a tradition which risks becoming univocal?

Again, I do not wish to set up a dualism here, but rather, to highlight a potential problem. If we accept the dominant discourse, as I interpret it, it suggests that method is the sole answer to the question of “how can we increase quality of life through FBA?” As novelist James Baldwin put it, the purpose of art is “to lay bare the questions which have been obscured by the answers” (1963, p. 17). Using writing as a method of inquiry, and

in the context of FBA, I interpret Baldwin's comment as an invitation to keep questioning my assumptions, experiences and understandings.

Gadamer's view that "tradition is language" (1975/1989, p. 352) resonates. How many teachers will read an article which contains reference to the following: omnibus multivariate and univariate ANOVA results (Riley-Tillman, T.J., Chafouleas, Boice-Mallach, & Briesch, 2011), or PND and PZD metrics, chi-square analysis, Pearson's  $r$  correlation, and Cronbach's alpha measures of internal consistency? Terms like mands, iatrogenic, DRO, DRL, discriminative stimulus, and independent variable are unlikely to attract a school-based readership. Even language such as "treatment utility" and "treatment validity" is foreign to an educational context. As I interpret it, PBS emerged through paradigm dialogue, yet today such language could lead to a paradigm monologue.

Who would read an article in a foreign language, scattered with unfamiliar acronyms or sets of statistics, which may or may not be our preferred way of making meaning? Our preparedness to listen to a conversation is dependent on our capacity to understand, our fluency, and the degree to which what is being said engages us. Whether intentional or not, a barrier in language between behavioural researchers — typically psychologists — and educators, may diminish FBA's traction in schools. It can perpetuate division, between those who have the knowledge, language, skills and understandings needed to assist those who do not.

Would teachers ask different research questions? Might a corollary of this be the need for different methodologies? Would their inquiries lead beyond the bounds of a behaviourist paradigm and bring with them a new, shared language? Might we see more alignment between the context in which a research question arises, the professional group who pose it, explore, implement and review their findings?

Perhaps, there exists not so much a research-to-practice gap as a little acknowledged distinction between two cultures, two traditions, two languages. Like surprised host parents, finding a fledgling cuckoo in their nest, educators do their best to meet the needs of the new arrival — FBA. But it is often exhausting. And either consciously or unconsciously teachers may experience a power imbalance. Or as Ntinis writes, the problem can be even more pronounced, in situations where FBA is a systemic, legal requirement (*ibid*, p.10).

In order to address such difficulties, some researchers have turned to focusing their efforts on simplifying FBA and function-based support, to the point where schools are likely to use such practices, while still “preserving” its “fidelity” (Scott et al., 2009, p. 438). In other words, the focus remains on method. In contrast, I would suggest that there is no need for FBA to be tied into an epistemological strait-jacket. FBA is structured both epistemologically and ontologically. It is about both knowing and being.

My thinking here has been guided by what van Manen describes as the “half-life” where we may find

theorizing that [has been] ... severed from the moral life, the ordinary pedagogic practices, of which these forms of theorizing too are ultimately a part. And so, there seems to exist much theory in education that lacks education. Educational theorists (of various cloth) may have become unresponsive to their pedagogic responsibility to their readers and to the children with respect to whom their theories are constructed in the first place’ (van Manen, 1990, p.138)

Bernstein, in his chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, notes that Gadamer and Habermas took their critique of positivism one step further. Not only did the positivists constrict what could be counted as knowledge, they also dismissed the validity of other forms of understanding. Bernstein describes the irony that the “the positivists, who prided themselves on being empirical and open-minded, were violently imposing their epistemic grid” (2002, p. 268). And for Gadamer and Habermas, this was neither accidental nor innocent, but a “manifestation of deeper forces at work in modern societies where instrumental or technological rationality was infiltrating and distorting the forms of everyday life” (ibid). Returning again to Freire’s question, “against what do I write?” I write against the epistemic grid, the dominant tradition of FBA — or, to use Charles Taylor’s term — the “reigning methodology” (Taylor, 2002, p. 81). While behavioural science represents a valuable lens for interpretation, it remains only *one* way to perceive things.

While my reflection on FBA and the importance of a facilitator disposition of openness may be a new contribution to the field of FBA, authors such as Richard Albin, Joseph Lucyshyn, Robert Horner and K. Brigid Flannery, as early as 1996, were thinking beyond the constraints of the positivist tradition of behavioural science. In their article

“Contextual Fit for Behavioural Support Plans: A Model of ‘Goodness of Fit,’” they make the following observation: “long-term success of a [function-based] support plan may be as dependent on the involvement of relevant stakeholders and the use of a collaborative process as it is on methodology” (1996, p. 149). Such views resonate with Gadamer’s comment that “reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms — i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates” (1975/1989, p. 277). Perhaps this is why van Manen refers to the “ineffability of pedagogy” (1990, p. 142).

The problem, then, is not that FBA is grounded in a particular tradition or epistemology. Rather, that we lack of awareness of tradition’s claim on us, our historicity and our inevitable biases. As Gadamer suggests, like “all human existence, even the freest” we are “limited and qualified in various ways” (ibid, p. 277). Were we to accept Gadamer’s proposition we would also recognise that “the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity” (ibid, p. 277). It is through recognition of the limits of the epistemic tradition of FBA, and my experience of behavioural science’s inability to completely answer the question of what is going awry in my FBA practice, that I seek understandings from outside a behaviourist tradition.

My concern is not that the behavioural sciences have failed to acknowledge the lifeworld — this is not its epistemological frame — but that there are so few other voices represented in FBA literature. Is the research written largely by one group, from one epistemological view point, read by one group of readers? The domination of behaviourist language might suggest the answer to this question is yes. I wonder to what extent teachers are able to recognise and reconcile their experiences with those represented in FBA literature? Are we on the same page, in a literal sense, when it comes to developing function-based support plans?

By using an interpretive frame — a less familiar methodology to FBA research — I am able to ask a different set of questions. A move away from the positivist roots of FBA is not to devalue the science of behaviour. I believe such knowledge is critical if there is to be a possibility of improving quality of life, not only for students, but for families and school communities. Understanding, however, is a different matter. Gadamer is helpful here. His magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1975/1989), is an extended exploration of the nature of understanding. His thesis is that method does not necessarily lead to truth. As

Gadamer stresses in the foreword to the second edition, his interest is not in downplaying the importance of scientific method, but is “instead concerned with the ‘scientific’ integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding” (1975/1989, p. xxv).

An example of such commitment, in the case of FBA, could be the aforementioned underpinning assumptions of FBA: behaviour is purposeful, predictable and changeable (Crone & Horner, 2003, p. 11). Gadamer’s interest is in finding “a way between or beyond objectivism and relativism, scientism and irrationalism” (Dostal, 2002, p. 7). Gadamer states that his “real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (1975/1989, p. xxvi). And it is precisely this curiosity of Gadamer’s which draws me to his thinking.

It often seems that there is a well-defined border around the territory of FBA. And although it could be argued that while one remains in one’s own land there is no need to learn a new language, learning to live within a new language could bring new meanings, new understandings. Sometimes it is necessary to step outside one language and into another, to explore different meanings. When the English language holds no parallel for the German word *Erhfahrung* (experience, in the sense of an evolving, integrative experience) for instance, it would seem reasonable to use the German. Similarly, when the goal is to explore understandings which emerge from the FBA lifeworld, it would seem appropriate to engage the language of the human science.

Martin Heidegger writes that a “hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved” (1962, p. 44). Without doing so he suggests that we will not be able to “stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits” (ibid). And so I began to wonder, what lies beyond the observable? Are the tangible factors which behaviourists attend to, enough to guide our practice? What if the behaviourist’s lack of concern with intangible factors “like thoughts, emotions and beliefs” (Arthur-Kelly, Lyons, Butterfield, & Gordon, 2007, pp. 31-32), provides a helpful and practical reduction of reality, but ignores other realities which may guide our actions? Is it possible that by combining external (behaviourist) and internal (interpretive, experiential) approaches, we might glimpse a new and shared horizon of possibilities?

While there are significant overlaps between clinical understandings of FBA and school-based understandings, the languages and traditions they draw from are necessarily different. They have arisen from different contexts, epistemologies and even ontologies. Before moving on I wish to acknowledge the depth of FBA within behavioural science, and its heritage which stretches back at least thirty-five years (Umbreit & Ferro, 2015). I suggest that even educators who embrace FBA may have limited awareness of the values, language, understandings and practices which underpin its tradition.

In this chapter I have briefly outlined the heritage of PBS and FBA, acknowledged FBA within a broader context of PBS, and situated myself in relation to FBA. Having acknowledged the field of behavioural science, I wish to move on. My interest now is to approach FBA through a different epistemological doorway, and to see where it leads. In particular, what might be gained from orienting to FBA with a focus on openness? But first, I need to describe what I mean by openness.

## Chapter 2

### The Meaning of Openness

For Gadamer, openness is about acceptance of a “radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing” (1975/1989, p. 356). This implies an awareness of our human finitude, the historicity and contextuality which govern our existence. We move within a horizon which is already situated within a context, within a tradition. Following Gadamer, then, I acknowledge that openness is not without limits; it is inescapably circumscribed by our “limitedness” (ibid, p.356).

To avoid the sense of closure which might accompany a formal definition, Gadamer defines openness by way of illustration, through conceptually related terms such as experience, conversation, insight, understanding, fusion of horizons and dialogue. Through multiple explications of the term in *Truth and Method* (1975/1989) readers are left with enough substance to shape their understandings of what is meant. Openness to Gadamer is about our “orientation toward new experience” (1975/1989, p. 350). An open person is one who is “open *to*” something, is “radically undogmatic,” and is “well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them” (ibid). Openness is a perpetual invitation to keep questioning.

Openness is not a passive state. It requires something of us: that we stay permeable to the new, to infinite expansion. We speak of everyday forms of physical openness in the language of opening up, unblocked, opening onto, open spaces, or that which we can pass through. To make something open, in these physical instances, requires that we remove, uncover, or draw something aside. Can we also inscribe such meanings to metaphorical forms of openness, such as being open-hearted, open-minded? Openness in its human form though, is perhaps less of a single event, more of an iterative struggle towards awareness, receptivity and vulnerability.

At the time of writing this study it is clear that researchers have, to some degree, explored the notion of openness to the situation in regard to FBA. What has been more difficult to locate is FBA research which addresses openness to the other — in the form of educators — and, in particular, openness to the self. It is possible this theme is original to this study.

Ilja Maso's notion of "trifurcate openness," that is, openness to the research situation, openness to the research, and openness to oneself (1995, pp. 15-17), has also significantly guided my thinking. Having reversed their order and slightly adapted Maso's terms to openness to the self, openness to the other and openness to the situation, I briefly define these terms, drawing heavily on Gadamer's writings. In Chapter Three onwards, I explore through narrative and theoretical reflection, the complex ways in which forms of openness and closure manifest in a selection of my lived experiences of FBA.

### **Openness to the self**

Following Gadamer, any openness to self or self-understanding will be limited. It is something which is "always on the way; it is on a path whose completion is a clear impossibility" (2007g, p. 239). Our horizon is never static. It is never possible to be fully enclosed and removed from the lifeworld's impetus. To reiterate, *Erlebnis*, the cumulative life experiences (which Gadamer always refers to in the plural) are a natural corollary of temporal life, the gaining of *Erfahrung* (experience in the singular) is not inevitable. What is required for *Erfahrung*, is a disposition of openness. And this does not happen by chance.

A disposition of openness to the self implies acceptance of incompleteness, of what Paulo Freire refers to as a "permanent movement of search" (1998, p. 57). Accepting our 'unfinishedness' means knowing we can always 'move beyond', propelled by "our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (1998, pp. 54, 55). But in practice, what does this mean? In the realm of FBA in schools this may translate as maintaining a stance of questioning. How open am I to attune to my inner and outer experience, to embrace what is difficult, to be addressed by what is here to experience? How open am I to change? How mindful am I of what is occurring for me physically and emotionally? To what extent am I aware of what Maso refers to as "all the preceding, accompanying and resulting thoughts, feelings, [and] inspirations" (Maso, Atkinson, Delamont, & Verhoeven, 1995, p. 17)? How might this awareness prepare me to be with the other, to be present?

Gadamer's description of "self-understanding" has particular relevance to FBA as something which always occurs through "understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other" (1975/1989, p.83). Are there echoes of person-centred values here, in Gadamer's reference to the "unity and integrity of the other"? And if every hermeneutical reflection, precisely because it is an interpretive act, involves a degree of self-understanding (2007c, p. 64), might openness to the self, be an additional, unacknowledged foundation of FBA?

Conversation, for Gadamer, is central to the notion of openness in that we "we live in conversation" (2007f, p. 371). It is the means by which we enter into understandings with the other. In addition, conversation is a way we come to understand *ourselves*. As Gadamer puts it, we need conversation "because our own concepts threaten to become rigid" (ibid). If we wish to understand the other, we must first understand ourselves. Openness to the self, precedes openness to the other in that "when we seek to understand the other person, we have the hermeneutical experience that we must break down resistance in ourselves if we wish to hear the other as other" (ibid). In this sense, openness to the self is also relational. It is inextricably linked to both openness to the other and the situation. We open ourselves in relation to something or someone.

Adri Smaling makes a helpful distinction between a receiving mode of openness (e.g. open-mindedness), and a sending mode of openness (e.g. open-heartedness), in his chapter "Open-mindedness, open-heartedness and dialogical openness: the dialectics of openings and closures" (1995, p. 28). Smaling suggests it is the balance between the sending and receiving modes of openness that create a sense of "communicative symmetry or reciprocity" (ibid, p.28). I would add that when families and educators feel distressed, angry or unheard, what may also be required of us is an asymmetrical communication style, where we consciously position ourselves in a receiving mode, making space for the other.

There are clear connections here with openness to the other and openness to the situation. For even if our openness to the self is supple enough to adjust our manner of being in an appropriately ethical manner, we also need to read the situation before us, to see what is there to be seen.

## Openness to the situation

From a hermeneutical perspective openness to the situation presupposes a subject who is open to what is present. There is an implied subjectivity. And although it may sound like a single, unilateral focus, a looking outward, it is not that simple. As Maso's writings on trifurcate openness describe, there is a need for "researchers to be aware of themselves in relation to the research situation" as well as the "way the research situation will react to them and vice versa" (1995, p. 17). Here, the emphasis is bi-lateral. I may be open to the possibility that my interaction with a particular context may shape it, but to what extent am I open to the possibility that the context may shape me?

In the context of FBA, then, being open to the situation is about a stance of receptivity, of attunement to contextual factors such as school climate, leadership styles and the systems in place to support shared actions. It is about asking what is the collective experience of this school community? What contextual factors are at play which may affect staff capacity or motivation to engage with FBA? Openness to the situation means resisting the urge to claim I know this school or these staff. It is about maintaining a stance of questioning, of "not knowing" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p.356). In this sense, enabling prejudices of openness to the self, such as awareness of human finitude and limitedness, could be said to precede openness to the situation.

The context in which each FBA occurs is fraught with competing demands, particularly for senior staff time. An FBA is one piece of each day's infinite "to do" list. Every team meeting puts additional demands on staff and draws school leaders away from what many see as their key role — curricular leadership (which for some does not include the social curriculum). And for an FBA facilitator the interruptions which form the reality of teachers' lifeworld can feel like obstructions. I sometimes long for a meeting schedule where everyone turns up every time, on time, where teachers have the resources, energy and optimism to model to the rest of their staff how FBA is done. I want them to bring values and prejudices which align with PBS, collegial relationships which enable trust and allow conversation. I want us to surface our assumptions, to move from conversation to a fusion of horizons.

But the lifeworld is not ideal. A sense of what might not be possible often emerges. The parameters within which our work must be done, bring with them innumerable opportunities for closure: closure to the self, to the other and to the situation. For this reason, Maso alerts us

to the importance of “awareness of the way in which this situation reveals and conceals itself to the behaviour and appearance of the researcher, and the way it invites and discourages him or her” (Maso, 1995, p. 15).

How then, might a facilitator, recognising such contextual factors, both acknowledge the vicissitudes of a particular school’s situation, attune to its needs and maintain a sense of clarity, leadership and hope? Openness to the situation may also, of course, include the possibility that FBA may be neither appropriate nor required. Just as a sailor would not plot a course ignoring weather conditions, so too FBA requires contextual sensitivity.

A disposition of openness to the situation is crucial for FBA. This is acknowledged by applied behaviour analysts. For example, in their *Behaviour Assessment Guide*, Thomas Willis, Gary LaVigna and Anne Donnellan include sections on “mediator analysis” which assesses the “characteristics of those who have the primary responsibility for managing the person’s behaviour and/or providing care and training” (1993, p. 48). Understanding that each FBA is situated within a social context they discuss the role of staff “motivation cooperation, technical skills, level of staffing resources, parenting or teaching philosophy, philosophy of behaviour management” (ibid, p.48). Acknowledging the importance of context, Willis et al. recommend that such situational variables be explored from the moment of referral (1993, p. 2).

In their “Reasons for Referral and Assessment Issues Form” they include a section called “Treatment Priority” which asks the person completing the form to acknowledge “stresses in the environment,” such as single-parent families, number of siblings, multiple family members with disabilities and stresses associated with for example, “work obligations” (Willis et al., 1993, p. 3). Such examples of openness to the situation may fit within functional behaviour analysis, but as acknowledged by the authors, it is a “time consuming process” (ibid, p. iii) which is often prohibitive for schools due to lack of access to staff expertise. Where might such openness to the situation sit in relation to simple, team-based functional behaviour assessment?

Without conceptually simplifying the importance of situational factors, the authors of *Prevent Teach Reinforce: the School-Based Model of Individualised Positive Behaviour Support* (Dunlap et al., 2010) provide inspiration. In particular, their school surveys encourage inquiry into the relational context of FBA (ibid, pp.17-21). For instance, the “Classroom Team Survey” and “Work Style Survey (Teacher and Paraeducator)” and the “Self-Evaluation” form, explore such questions as: What strengths does the team have? What challenges do the team face? To what degree does

the teacher like to supervise the paraeducator? To what degree does the paraeducator like to be supervised? By making the first of the five steps in FBA the “Classroom Team Survey,” the authors certainly acknowledge the importance of context (ibid).

Another text which both acknowledges and addresses contextual factors is *Individualized Supports for Students With Problem Behaviours: Designing Positive Behaviour Plans* (Bambara & Kern, 2005). The index lists many terms with an overt connection to openness to the situation, such as “contextual fit,” “ecocultural factors,” “environmental influences,” and “quality of life.” The book’s index also contains a long list of entries relating to “collaborative team” (p.393) and “families” (ibid, pp. 391-398). In the chapter on teaming, openness and supportiveness are identified as a key features of positive collaborative practice. The authors define openness as “the capacity of teams to raise critical (and often delicate) issues and deal with them objectively, without making any team members feel defensive, unintelligent, or inferior” (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Koger, 2005, p. 77). While I am unsure we can ever free ourselves from bias or prejudice, I warm to the meanings conveyed by such a definition. It suggests openness in the sense of empathy for the other, fairness and respect. But how are we to remove our biases from the situation if we have not yet identified them? Or for that matter, from the self who holds them? Might there also be space here for valuing subjectivity?

In the above mentioned texts it is difficult to assess the degree to which openness to the self might be considered constitutive of openness to the situation. If openness to the self is implied, perhaps it is obscured by the language of behavioural science. And if my interpretation is a fair one, and an element of self-understanding is either neglected or accidentally obscured, then I suggest this is problematic. Has the language of behavioural science become stipulative and boxed in meanings’ possibilities? If so, Gadamer might suggest that we have overlooked an important realisation, that “insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p.350).

## **Openness to the other**

Relating to others with openness is about a sense of reciprocity, the difficulty of which Gadamer acknowledges as a “constant struggle for mutual recognition” (1975/1989, p.353). He also notes the tendency to perceive the other person “as a tool that can be absolutely known and used” (ibid). Gadamer warns that the claim to “know the other person in advance functions to keep

the other person's claim at a distance" (ibid). If I think I already know, I no longer need to listen, and thereby close over the space required for the other to be present. I may, for instance, never pause long enough when talking for the other to speak. I may interrupt and cut short, preventing entry into a conversation. But I think Gadamer means even more than this. His reference to claiming to know the other person "in advance" is more redolent of a forestructure. In this sense, openness to the other is also about what occurs prior to entering an interaction. My degree of openness is influenced by meanings which I project onto the situation, which are structured by what Heidegger calls "fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception" (1953/1996, p. 142).

What Gadamer emphasises is the need "to experience the Thou truly as a Thou — i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us" (1975/1989, p. 355). Such openness to listen is considered essential to the development of what Gadamer calls a "genuine human bond" (ibid, p.355). For when we open ourselves to the other we attune ourselves to what is. And this act of attunement creates space for difference. It recognises that the other brings to FBA a personal set of assumptions and forestructures of meaning. Without openness to the other there is no possibility of what Gadamer calls "genuine conversation," that which "transforms the viewpoint of both" (ibid, p.96).

Openness to the other need not imply that we accept the view the other holds, but it does mean to make ourselves open to what might speak to us, to make ourselves vulnerable to experience, in the sense of *Erfahrung*, to new understandings. This also involves empathy — even when faced with starkly different values and attitudes — it requires seeing educators as an end in themselves, not as a means to improving student quality of life. It involves being open to the human messiness of what we each bring to an FBA: our emotions, where we are on the continuum from exhausted to energised, our values and beliefs about human behaviour, all the assumptions and forestructures which shape our making of meaning.

Openness to the other encourages us to discard the mantle of expert, and as Freire puts it, stop talking *to* and start talking *with* (1998, p. 103). I need to listen in the sense of Heidegger's "hearkening" which he suggests "has the mode of being of a hearing that understands," it is a way of "listening to each other, in which being-with is developed" (1953/1996, p. 153). The notion of hearkening is also taken up by Smaling, where he identifies an aspect of open-mindedness as our capacity for "hearing with attention and respect" (1995, p. 24).

Perhaps this sense of openness is a precursor to a later focus of Gadamer's writings — solidarity. Openness underpins solidarity which comes from the Latin for solid, *sollus*, meaning whole. Its antithesis is domination, where we feel stood over, devalued, unseen, unheard.

Is openness to the other in its fullest form a kind of solidarity? Whatever the case, a sense of solidarity is that which brings a sense of commonality, of standing together. As noted by Gadamer scholar and translator, Richard Palmer in his introduction to Gadamer's essay "Greek philosophy and modern thinking" (2007e, p. 267), Gadamer sees in solidarity both a social and ethical dimension. Through openness to the other we always seek "a common ground for conversation, for dialogue, for negotiation" (2007d, p. 108). This brings us to an important question which is explored in the next four chapters' narratives: to what extent may team-based FBA be possible without openness?

## Chapter 3

### A Reluctant Finitude

If in Chapters One and Two I explored how I would like to be in the world, this chapter's narrative concerns "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, pp. xxv, xxvi). At the time of writing the narrative, "What I Learnt From Zack," I still felt a sense of shame. Even now I blanch to think of how many problems it highlights. From the outset I wish to acknowledge my absence of openness to the self, to the other and to the situation. The reader might well find other weaknesses, but for the purposes of this chapter I shall limit myself to a small selection of entangled prejudices.

This chapter's purpose is to uncover thematic aspects of a particular lived experience in regard to FBA. I explore moments of *aporia* which I might otherwise have preferred to evade. In this narrative I also hope to re-create my experience as a behavioural consultant being with teachers, and to imagine the experience of teachers being with a consultant.

#### **Narrative One: "What I learnt from Zack"**

'Help, Sonja!' It's a shrill voice on the phone. I'm surprised to hear that it's Elaine, a self-sufficient principal from one of our large, rural, K-10 schools. Her voice drops an octave. 'We need your help with a new student. I told District Office that it wasn't a good time of year for transition, that we weren't prepared, we needed more time. But, we got him anyway' she laughs, pauses. 'You've probably heard of him. He came from

interstate, went to a private school up north, was expelled, then came to us. We're his second school this year.'

'I'm aware of his background,' I say, 'but I haven't met him.' I've overheard conversations about Zack for weeks.

'You really need to meet him, and the staff, to see if we're on the right track.' She talks quickly. 'Everyone will be here this afternoon.'

And so, that afternoon I meet the support teacher, the school psychologist, and the principal, Elaine, helping a teacher who hops into the meeting room holding an ice-pack to her shin.

'What a day!' Elaine says. 'The police have just taken Zack! But since you're here and we've got the team together... I haven't had a chance to document anything. Do you mind taking notes?' She reminds the teacher to elevate her leg. 'District Office needs to understand what's happened today.' She pauses.

'You know the students I've worked with,' the injured teacher says, 'when I say this is different, that we've tried everything with Zack, do you understand?' Elaine exhales, removes her glasses, and rubs her eyes, clearing the way to describe the day's events. I focus on listening, acknowledging, writing neatly enough for someone to type up my notes. But I struggle.

How could this be? Zack's been at school for twelve weeks. No observations have been documented, no part of a functional behaviour assessment started. I know the school psychologist and support teacher. They understand FBA. The school is in its third year of schoolwide positive behaviour support, the leadership team meets monthly, and they have a schoolwide data system for recording behavioural incidents. Elaine and I've attended the same FBA professional learning. We've heard internationally renowned speakers on FBA.

I listen, but stop writing. The conversation has taken me by surprise. This is not what I expected to hear. Not in this school. These are thoughtful, reflective practitioners. Have I assumed too much? The schoolwide interventions, from what I've seen, are in place and consistent with PBS values. Inclusive practice for students with disabilities is a

strength of this school. So where has the belief that PBS is about changing environments, not individuals gone? Where's the attention to data, to systems, to evidence-based practices? Has the values base slipped now we are talking about a student who does not have a developmental disability?

Perhaps Elaine is right. Perhaps this is different. Maybe Zack's situation is beyond us? But why are there no incident reports, observations or the simplest Antecedent-Behaviour-Consequence analyses? They have data on other students in the school. They can print graphs, provide all the information we need — the who, what, where, when and how often of problem behaviours. How is it there's no data for Zack? Why didn't they ask for help earlier? Before making any hasty judgements I need to better understand how this situation has come to be.

'This isn't going to be simple.' I say. 'If it was, you would've figured it out by now.' They nod. I suggest an FBA. The support teacher who's remained silent until now, returns a swift volley, 'It's beyond FBA!'

They say they feel the safety of students and staff can no longer be guaranteed. They say it might not be the best place for Zack, at present. He's very strong. There are smaller, fragile students in the school. Quite vulnerable. Parents are complaining, students are afraid to attend. Elaine suggests school *per se* might not be the best place to meet Zack's needs. I sense Elaine's phone call this morning has come too late. Too late to begin an FBA before Zack is excluded again.

I continue. 'When behaviour impacts so significantly on the safety of others, and puts the student's educational placement at risk —'

'— well it's certainly done that' says Elaine.

I attempt to continue, 'A functional behaviour assessment is... .' But the timing is wrong. This is not what they want to hear. Today they have reached their conclusion — Zack should not be here. Their observations have confirmed that there are no setting events, no triggers for Zack. Just his need for control and a wish to harm others, like the grade one girl, walking quietly through the courtyard, who Zack lifted by her throat, up against the wall.

This is not the time for talk. The mood has sunk. To remain buoyant feels false. A sense of hope might indicate an inability to comprehend the situation's severity. Could

Zack's needs be outside behavioural support principles, beyond the relevance of FBA? It's an uncomfortable thought, a disempowering thought. For years I've been convinced of the transformative potential of person-centred planning and FBA. Perhaps, not having met Zack, I have the liberty of seeing different possibilities, a different horizon? But my certainties are slipping.

Elaine concludes her story. Zack has been physically aggressive to everyone within reach. A cycle of calm followed by escalation and physical aggression has continued all day. She'd phoned Zack's grandmother who was unable to leave work. When it was considered too great a safety risk, Elaine called the police.

'I know he has to go to school somewhere, but we just can't keep doing this. You *know* this can't continue.' Elaine assures me she'll pass Zack's information to 'whoever is going to work with him next.'

The 'next steps' were uncertain. No data; no context. Not even a hint about possible setting events, antecedents, maintaining consequences. What is known about strengths and interests? That Zack likes playing basketball and being outside. When he visits the library he looks for pictures of guns.

The following week I am surprised on the way to the tearoom — Zack stands beside his grandmother, at the front counter of my office, a solid, pale-faced nine year old, with shadowy eyes. Poised to move he scans the office, flinches as my manager extends his arm to guide Zack into the room. Zack's grandmother has come straight from her new job. She slides back in the chair, a right angle triangle, arms folded, jaw jutting.

Days later I find myself wondering what educational alternatives exist for Zack, so late in the year. Unable to return to Elaine's school, what are the options? An off-site alternative education program? Just for the short term? Until another school placement can be negotiated? What consistency has Zack had? A new state, new house, new school — two new schools — and soon there'll be three. Where's the stability, the structured environment? Sense of belonging? He starts to connect with the school Chaplain through basketball, then, he has to leave.

My manager pieces together an interim program for Zack. But we also struggle. Zack's alternative program has moved location twice to prevent complaints from nearby teachers. Securing people to work with Zack is difficult. I interview staff who listen closely, then phone the next day to decline. 'Not quite what I'm looking for.' My manager intervenes, takes over Zack's case management. An awful term 'case' management.

It was a week later and it didn't sound good — two new staff working with Zack in a new school, away from other students. Too much change. But I wasn't the support coordinator. And the planning had been done. At least Maree, an experienced support teacher, would get to know Zack and assist with transition.

After two days there are complaints from staff with offices near Zack's work area. Maree is distressed at the continual carping, sometimes within Zack's hearing.

'He's not coming in here is he? ... You know the water filter's actually for staff. You probably aren't aware, but we actually pay for it.'

The stories — Zack helping himself to water, threatening to throw a glass at someone, throwing a telephone, sweeping files off a desk. Our senior school psychologist has been contacted. The phone throwing incident triggered a previous traumatic experience for a nearby teacher. And she was still shaking hours later. The Union rep has reported a 'work place safety issue', recommended that staff decline to work with or near Zack until a risk assessment has been done. But I have little empathy. I'm angry at our own staff responses. Frustrated we again have to find a new place for Zack's program. For him, this means more change, disruption, rejection.

Our only priority, for now, is for safety — Zack's, his peers and staff. Zack didn't punch his fist through a window, he didn't run onto the highway, lie down in front of a truck or wander the streets today. Zack, who runs away for days at a time, whose file is thick with history, the details of which we try not to remember... .

Two days later the phone rings. My colleague Belinda answers. 'He's in a meeting and has asked not to be disturbed. But Sonja's here.' She holds her hand over

the mouthpiece, swivels on her chair 'It's Maree — there's a problem with Zack,' she says. Maree was with Zack, just for the first few hours to help him settle.

'Does she want us to come?' I ask. And suddenly we are reaching for car keys, walking past office staff, calling behind us there's been a problem with Zack. Belinda follows the crisis plan, phones the police.

We arrive to a locked external door. Maree is inside. She glides down the corridor, an ice-skater on polished floor. She's surprised to find the door locked, goes in search of a key. We wait. I listen for shouts, smashing glass. No, no sounds.

Belinda returns with the key. We enter the room. It's hot and hollow, its only windows, up near the ceiling, are all shut. I haven't met the two new staff who were employed to work with Zack. But this is no time for introductions. Rachel, the teacher, is on hands and knees, picking up scattered pens. Zack comes from behind to jab a biro at her back, forcefully. Andy the teacher aide, lifts him away. But Zack comes back, swinging his arms to grab at something, anything, to fight. He kicks, aims for Andy's legs, pelts the cushion Andy holds as a shield.

Belinda is looking for somewhere safe to put down her bracelets, car keys, mobile phone. She leaves the room briefly, re-enters and joins the tussle, trying to protect Andy, but becomes another target for Zack to hit. Having only spent time with Zack on a couple of occasions I've no idea what calms him.

I don't ask Zack what he wants. Which I should. Instead I peel a banana. I want to look calm, to distract him with his endless drive to eat. This much, I remember. I offer it to Zack who I know loves them. He swings past, still wrestling with Andy, trying to hit Rachel. He is not hearing, but he sees everything, scans continually. I should be stopping this. I need to make this safe.

Maree is not sure what happened. She went to get a basketball and when she got back Zack was hitting and kicking out at the cushion, as if training for boxing, Andy just managing to keep him at arm's length. I'm relieved he's blocking, not trying to hold Zack.

Andy says calming things. 'It's ok, calm down, I'm not going to hurt you.' There's enough talk. I remain silent. Keep back.

I feel helpless. How can I look useful? Be useful? Resolve this situation? I move in to shield Andy's legs with another cushion. Just as I approach, Zack scruffs me by the shirt collar, looks intently, breathing out through his teeth. He can see my fear. I close my eyes, in anticipation. But he doesn't strike. I keep trying to position the cushion to shield Andy's legs from a barrage of kicks which begin as Belinda approaches. Thud. Zack's foot has connected with my shin. I hear it, but can't feel it. I am so much in my mind that I'm no longer in my body. I am thinking — there are four adults here. We could easily restrain Zack, hold him until the Police arrive. Just pin him down. I move away. Belinda speaks my thoughts,

'We need to restrain him.'

'No!' before I know what I've said, the words are out. 'We won't restrain. Not with everything that's happened to him. We're not re-traumatising him.'

Maree approaches to assist, is lunged at, moves away. I suggest Rachel take a break. There are three adults in the room. Are they awaiting my direction? My thoughts are racing. I'm an unwilling sky-diver in free fall. I was emailed a copy of the crisis plan. But what was it? And what options are there now? To ring my manager — who is unavailable — or wait for the police?

'Too many people,' Maree says as she exits the room.

Slowly, I am waking to the situation, seeing what needs to be seen. I am absorbing the meanings before me — as anyone approaches Zack, his behaviour escalates. And it doesn't matter who it is.

Zack shouts, 'I want —,' he breathes, 'to go —,' breathes, 'outside!'

And finally, I've heard him — the message behind his behaviour. It has taken Zack's words for me to understand what his behaviour has been shouting at us. I exhale. This is the cue I've needed. I'm no longer in free-fall.

'Unlock the door,' I say. 'He needs to go outside.'

Belinda is not convinced, nor are the others.

'What if he runs away?'

'Or goes onto the road?'

'Our only priority is safety. And this isn't safe for Zack, or us,' I say, 'He's said what he wants and we need to listen.' Zack is already running to the door. 'He needs to know that adults can listen and respond. If he leaves the grounds we notify the Police.'

My thoughts clear. Active listening. Provide what's asked for. If you can't deliver, do active listening. My senses are returning. What was I thinking? Why didn't I think of letting him out immediately? Where did that thought of restraint come from? I haven't thought like that in years. And it's completely foreign to my values. Why this thought-freeze? Was it the adult audience? That I wasn't the support coordinator? Didn't write the crisis plan? Didn't feel comfortable with the plan? I am disorientated. It's the shock of my response.

Zack is outside. And he isn't heading for the road. He walks toward a distant tree, sits down. If we give him space he's going to stay. I stand at the corner of the building, partially hidden to observe from a distance. I ask the others to stay away, except Maree, who finds her own tree to sit under, at a distance.

It's 5.30pm when my manager slumps down in the chair beside my desk. His deflation is visible. He looks at the floor, at the walls of my windowless office as he speaks. 'I think I've failed with Zack. If three adults with him aren't enough to hold things, I don't know what more we can do?'

But we haven't even started. 'There are some positives from today,' I suggest. 'Zack didn't harm himself, there was no real injury to any staff, he didn't trash the room, break a window, or run away.' I pause. 'I can see it working if we stick with Maree and one other person. No-one else. She's the only person he trusts. And we really need a stable place, away from offices. We had no information when we started. But we've learnt a lot from today.'

I talk of the need to find a space with multiple exits to reduce the sense of confinement, a place with windows, a view and fresh air. I suggest we start documenting setting events and triggers, like feeling enclosed (not to mention being locked in), too many adults, physical proximity. And a list of early signs of stress, with possible strategies. We need to use the information to write a crisis plan which calms, prevents

re-traumatisation and ensures consistency. We could start the process with some person-centred planning.

'There's another trigger,' I add, thinking back to a numeracy assessment I did weeks ago. 'Rachael asked Zack to subtract nine from thirty-one, which he couldn't do, even with blocks.' I pause. 'I think we need to start an FBA. Then we'll understand how to respond, we'll know what'll calm or trigger things.'

My manager isn't convinced. 'He's just so complex,' he says. I can see that we have different perspectives, different degrees of hope. And I wonder if I am starting to lose perspective. Am I so immersed in theoretical understandings of behaviour that I am losing a sense of reality? He continues, 'You understand that nothing will ever rectify what's happened to Zack? And you understand that this will never go away?' His comment is more statement than question. I'm simultaneously disappointed by his response, deflated, fired up. Just because I think FBA will help, doesn't mean I think it'll fix Zack's history.

I try to explain my thoughts, 'Obviously nothing will ever... .' I try again. 'What's happened to Zack will mean life-long... .' I'm losing heart. Our assumptions are so different, our understandings so far apart. Nothing I can say will span this gap.

### **Waking from an *epistemological dream***

"What I Learnt From Zack" presents innumerable inadequacies, not the least of which is a lack of openness to self, the other and the situation. My proposed method for writing this chapter was challenged from the start. My intention was to use two pages of quotes, from Freire, Gadamer, Heidegger, Smaling and Maso, re-written in the form of questions, as a stimulus for reflection and theoretical discussion. But I soon discovered that the only honest response to each question, could be a resounding "No." I showed limited awareness of my unfinishedness. At no point did I demonstrate epistemological curiosity. I did not listen in the sense of hearkening. Which brings me to the question of why? How could I spend years speaking publically, with conviction, about person-centred values, only to lose my way? How is it that values which I had previously considered so robust were in practice so vulnerable?

A short answer to this question might be that without openness to self, there is no foundation for openness to the other, or to the situation. A closed sense of self brings with it incoherence. That is, my thoughts and actions lacked alignment with my values. What I consciously held to be so, what I believed to be both ethical and efficacious, was sunk in an instant, weighted down by situational stresses. There was an absence of “self-transparency” in what Gadamer refers to as a “sense of full presence of ourselves to ourselves” (2007g, p. 239). I do not mean to imply that a complete coherence is possible. For Gadamer, self-understanding is “always on the way ... on a path whose completion is a clear impossibility” (ibid). Reflecting on this chapter’s narrative I am acutely aware that what my mind may perceive as “conscious representations” may be nothing more than what Gadamer describes as “masks, mere pretexts, under which our vital energy or our social interests pursue their own goals in an unconscious way” (ibid).

The struggle for coherence between what I understand, what I value and how I act, is unceasing. It is an encounter of “relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment” (Gadamer, 2007g, p.240). As my lifeworld experience reveals, no amount of behavioural science can rescue us from this tension. But Gadamer goes further, suggesting that our perceptions of the apparent grandeur of progress, may present us with unanticipated problems in the lifeworld:

Might it not be just a prejudice of modern times that the notion of progress that is in fact constitutive for the spirit of scientific research can and should be transferrable to the whole of human living and human culture? One has to ask whether progress, as it is at home in the special field of scientific research, is at all consonant with the conditions of human existence in general. Is the notion of an ever-mounting and self-perfecting enlightenment ultimately questionable? (ibid, p.240)

Perhaps the origin of my shock at what occurred in the narrative lies in such a prejudice. Having immersed myself in the progress of behavioural science, to some extent I tended to see the challenges at Zack’s school as already solved. I see now that it was delusory, but I believed at the time, that by the light of behavioural science I could find my way anywhere. A more hermeneutically orientated person, who accepts the complexities inherent in all interpretive acts, may have been less shocked by my incoherence, less surprised at the fragile web between knowing and doing. Ethical intentions, knowledge, skills and a strong sense of self-efficacy were no safeguard. Conscious of Gadamer’s comment that we need to “repudiate the illusion of completely illuminating the darkness of our motivations and tendencies” (ibid, p.239), I accept that a full understanding of what went wrong will be unattainable. But acceptance of my finitude

does not imply a ceasing to search. After all, as Gadamer says, “understanding is an adventure” (2007g, p. 244).

Entranced by an ideal notion of the boundless capacities of behavioural science, I felt invincible. I had heard international leaders in the fields of PBS and FBA at conferences, I had read their papers, their books. I had seen for myself, in a teacher’s glistening-eyed smile, the transformative power of FBA. But at Zack’s school, my ideals had hardened into ideology. I had lost sight of understanding as a situated, embodied event where there is always an element of self-understanding. As Jean Grondin remarks, “we are always implied in our understanding” (2002, p. 45). Had I been conscious of an implied self I may have been more alert to potential problems. Instead, I felt protected by science. Buoyed up by a research tradition with scant use of personal pronouns, I had a false sense of safety from myself — from my own bumbblings.

I was asleep in what Brice Wachterhauser refers to as an “epistemological dream” and from which Gadamer suggests “we awaken as soon as possible” (Wachterhauser, 2002, p. 58). Even if we accept that FBA in an abstract, theoretical sense is limitless, in “What I Learnt From Zack” we can see that in the lifeworld FBA is grounded, sometimes even, run aground.

In the absence of openness I foreclosed the possibilities of FBA. Somewhere along the way I had mislaid my epistemological curiosity. Too comfortable with my interpretations, I was unaware of what Gadamer refers to as our “arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought” (1975/1989, p.269). Gadamer, acknowledges Heidegger’s thinking here, in suggesting that we break the spell of such ingrained patterns of thought, by repeatedly returning our focus to “the things themselves” (ibid). And if being “guided by the things themselves” is obviously not a matter of a single, “conscientious’ decision, but is the first, last, and constant task” (ibid, p. 269), I need to accept that there is no epistemological wand which can rescue me from my finitude, historicity and vulnerability.

If each FBA context manifests itself in a unique way in the lifeworld, reliance on method as the sole means of understanding would seem unwise. Fuller understandings of FBA invite us towards a liminal zone, in which a constantly moving horizon reveals that things “can always be presented in more ways than we already know” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 28). For Gadamer, understanding is possible, only when we allow something to address us (1975/1989, p. 298). And before something can address us, we must first suspend our prejudices. In practice, “this has the logical structure of a question” (ibid).

But Zack's narrative is the antithesis to suspended prejudice. It is a story characterised by lack of openness to self, the other and the situation. And like submerged icebergs our negative prejudices can shipwreck our intentions. I say *negative* prejudice because prejudice "does not necessarily mean a false judgement, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 273). As Gadamer suggests, it is our prejudices which "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world" (2007, p. 82). And the fact that they "can go entirely unnoticed" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 271) makes the possibility of understanding even more complex.

In some instances in Zack's narrative, the issue is that we hold opposing prejudices and what FBA calls for is a unified approach, of shared values, assumptions, understandings and actions. As David Bohm states in *On Dialogue*, if we work together and live together, we need to share understandings, share a sense of meaning. But this can only work "if we have a *culture* — which implies that we share meaning" (Bohm, 2004, p. 22). But what happens more frequently in society, Bohm suggests, is that "different assumptions that people have are tacitly affecting the whole meaning of what we are doing" (ibid).

### **Talking past each other**

I entered Zack's school with a sense of knowing, holding tight to my view of what was required. Without listening to what staff had to say I felt I already held the answers. There was no dialogue, no space for the other. I believed I had the theoretical knowledge to help Zack and the school. But as Aristotle alerts us in *Nicomachean Ethics*, "practical wisdom cannot be scientific knowledge" because "that which can be done is capable of being done otherwise" (1980/2009, p. 106). For Aristotle, there is no single solution to a problem we encounter if we address it with *phronēsis*. If we follow Aristotle's thinking, then it becomes difficult to reduce the way we intend FBA to a process. Instead, we are encouraged to turn our attention to the 'thing itself'. In the case of FBA I suggest this includes each social context's myriad specificities and vicissitudes. But as seen in Zack's narrative I was unable to do this.

The moment I heard the teacher's comment 'It's beyond FBA!' I felt rebuffed. Frustrated by what I saw as *their* resistance, *their* lack of openness. I was unable to respond with empathy. I had forgotten that years ago the shoe had been on the other foot. A boy called Luke, with a history of abuse related trauma, had in the ten minutes since arriving at school that morning, struck a peer in the head with a cricket bat. Luke was in my anger management group. As the

special education teacher I was invited to attend a meeting with the principal and class teacher, to get some advice from a couple of visiting behavioural consultants. I remember the principal's laughter at their suggestion of cue cards with a smiley face and a frowning face. 'We're way beyond that!' she said. An interesting choice of language — beyond. I shall return to this shortly.

In both instances there was what Freire refers to as “talking *to*,” and not “talking *with*” (Freire, 1998, p. 103). But at Zack's school, it was more than this. I lacked awareness of an important difference which Heidegger describes as the distinction between negative and positive modes of concern. In the first, we “*leap in* for the other” (1953/1996, p. 115) and dominate, leaving no room for the other. Heidegger contrasts this with a second mode of concern which he characterises as an “authentic” form of care. Here, it is not that we *leap in* and displace the other, rather, we *leap ahead* to clear a path for the other, thereby returning the other to his concern and making him “transparent to himself *in* his care and *free* for it” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 115).

Sensing my certitude the teachers and I were immediately at odds. I had leapt in. I conveyed not only my lack of care for them as people but also an absence of understanding what they perceived as the complexities of the situation. Without self-understanding, without mindfulness of my orientation, I was stuck in what Heidegger refers to as the “deficient modes of concern” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 114). In Zack's story I moved through each of these modes: “Being for-, against-, and without-one-another, passing-one-another-by, not mattering-to-one-another” (ibid). Although I find Heidegger's language helpful for my purpose, I would like to acknowledge Gadamer's criticism that Heidegger's preoccupation was with being, not with the other. Further, I do not wish to conflate Heidegger and Gadamer's thinking, but to borrow some of Heidegger's words which, perhaps in character, have more in common with Gadamer's openness to the other. Indeed in a rare moment of criticism of Heidegger, Gadamer went so far as to say that “Heidegger's inability to acknowledge the other was a point of weakness in him” (2006, p. 22).

In subtle and not so subtle ways my sense of closure to staff echoes through the next two narratives. Through writing this study I have come to understand that openness to the other requires me to bring epistemological and ontological tensions into conscious awareness, to observe my thoughts, feelings and physical responses. I need to respond from a place of mindfulness, of moment to moment awareness, to orient myself to each situation with a sense of openness. It is easy to say this, but why was it so difficult to do?

So entrenched was my stance of advocacy for the student that it took me years into writing this study, to consider that openness to the other included openness to staff. My perception had been that it was a teacher's job to do what needed to be done. But Gadamer has cautioned us not to "see another person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used" (1975/1989, p. 353). I am embarrassed to think of my absence of openness to staff, that my empathy for Zack overrode my care for staff. Did it occur a result of a dualism between staff and student, a form of either or advocacy? I see now how I was unable to "break down resistance" in myself to "hear the other as other" (Gadamer, 2007f, p. 371). And in Zack's story, openness to the other required the capacity to be open simultaneously to Zack *and* his teachers. It meant acknowledging the tension between staff needs and Zack's needs, and perhaps, their irreconcilability. Until the teachers experienced me as being present, attuned, and listening with "attention and respect" (Smaling, 1995, p. 24) — in Heidegger's words "hearkening" (1953/1996, p. 153) — little could change.

Surely staff felt a lack of care, and that which Smaling calls an absence of "communicative symmetry" (1995, p. 28). There was no reciprocity. I wanted to instruct, and them to follow, like a cartoon I once saw on a noticeboard: "A team is a group of people doing what I say!" I entered the school "for" the student. My frustration with staff who declined to engage in what I thought was an appropriate course of action led to a feeling, to some degree, of being "against." And we continued our own pre-planned communicative trajectories "without-one-another," "passing-one-another-by" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 114).

We were at cross purposes, neither of us "with" each other. We were "blocked off from mutual insight" and "stuck within the compass of our own opinions" (Gadamer, 2007i, p. 97). But as Gadamer put it, "understanding does not occur when we try to intercept what someone wants to say to us by claiming we already know it" (2007a, p. 130). As a consequence of our lack of openness, we failed to understand each other, and with it the full possibilities of the situation. Our interactions were imbued with tension that Gadamer believed characteristic of modernity. There was no "aspect held in common"; we spoke not with each other, but "past each other" (Gadamer, 2007i, p.96). We both entered the situation with a preordained sense of what needed to be said and done. From the school's perspective, the goal was to have Zack leave the school; for me, the aim was to lead them in a team based FBA, starting immediately. In dismissing each other, did we dismiss Zack, losing an opportunity for change? There is an irony here that has taken me years to notice. At times my advocacy for students, particularly

their right to be at school, can be counterproductive. The moment staff felt that I ignored their needs, I lost the opportunity to assist Zack.

Novelist Rebecca West suggests that “there is no such thing as conversation. It is an illusion. There are intersecting monologues, that’s all” (in Dessaix, 2007). While I do not subscribe to such a view as the totality of conversational possibility, I did sense such a constricted attempt at conversation during my meeting at Zack’s school. When I visited to observe, I found that Zack had been suspended and would not be returning. During the conversation which followed I found it difficult to speak a complete a sentence without being cut off. It was as if the very mention of FBA was another stressor for staff.

In Gadamer’s terms “to question is to lay open, to place in the open” and a skilful questioner is one who can “prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion” (1975/1989, p. 361). I wonder now how Gadamer might have responded in a similar situation. Certainly he would have used questions and avoided statements. But is it always possible to enter into dialogue? What if our prejudices and forestructures of meaning are so different that possibilities are already foreclosed? Gadamer acknowledges that for dialogue to occur partners must not talk at “cross purposes” or try to “argue the other person down” (1975/1989, p. 361). For a true conversation to occur we must “ensure that the other person is with us” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 360). But what if they are not with us?

As I learnt from Zack’s teachers, when my knowing was characterised by domination and self-assurance rather than openness and care, I denied what Gadamer has called the “the foreignness of the other mind” (2007a, p.128). Doing so was a form of closure, a shutting down of FBA’s possibilities, a barrier to understanding and hope. What was required was a not a sense of knowing, but of questioning, of mindfully making space for the other. And for Gadamer, this means accepting that what the other will say will be both foreign to us and transcend us (ibid, p. 128).

Had I learnt through years of collegial observation that a consultant’s role was to enter schools and, on the first visit, spring into action? I can see now the urgency of Zack’s situation, to keep in connected to school, reduced my openness to the educators. Ironically, this absence of awareness and openness prevented the very outcomes I set out to achieve. In the context of Zack’s school my drive for change meant that I ignored the need for relationship, for dialogue, to surface assumptions, to create a place which felt safe enough to say what was thought, a place

of mutual respect and, non-judgement. In this light, Gadamer's advice not to approach the text or the object of our interpretation directly seems wise. Instead, he suggests that *before* we leap in we explicitly examine "the legitimacy — i.e., the origin and validity — of the fore-meanings dwelling within" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 270).

I wonder how differently things might have played out, had I observed the signs of my own anxiety rising, such as shallow breathing, and planning what I would say next, rather than listening to the other? What if I had attuned to the educators' emotional states and oriented myself to the situation with attentiveness? But how may I maintain a disposition of openness when under pressure, when my anxieties increase and self-awareness decreases?

Daniel Siegel, in *The Mindful Therapist*, describes openness as being about "cultivating receptive states within ourselves that rest beneath the surface layers of judgment and expectation. To reach and maintain a state of openness requires that we monitor our internal reactivity" (Siegel, 2010, p. 1). On this view, in Zack's narrative, openness to the self would have involved ongoing monitoring of my responses. When I heard teacher comments I found confronting, the question was not am I receptive to her view, but rather, am I receptive as I hear her, to my own internal state? Do I allow time to pause, to gather myself up before speaking? Do I notice what is happening to my breathing, my posture? Am I starting to judge, control or blame?

I am embarrassed to acknowledge how I projected onto Zack's teachers, judging their views as less inclusive than my own. I heard what staff said but was deaf to its communicative intent. With hindsight, I interpret what I sensed as their closure to Zack as an expression of anxiety and overwhelming exhaustion — a consequence of a system which struggles to provide timely and adequate behavioural support for its educators and students. I knew this staff. And I knew the magnitude of their care and inclusivity. They did the best they could at the time, in a particular situation, within their repertoire of expertise.

Interpreted functionally, the teacher's comment that Zack's behaviour was "beyond" FBA, presents numerous interpretative possibilities, such as, "My training never prepared me for this!", "I'm worried about the other students," "This isn't my responsibility — this requires an expert," "I've tried, but I just can't do this anymore," "I need to balance the needs of all students in my care," "I have to protect my students and staff," "This isn't working for us and it isn't working for Zack."

I wonder to what extent my lack of openness to the other, to Zack's teachers' concerns in regard to FBA is, to some extent, mirrored the tradition as reflected in FBA literature? In the research it seems that teacher perspectives are often unheard. As Marchant et al. observe, "in the current climate of evidence-based intervention, we often lose sight that it is not solely the proposed intervention that leads to desired change, it is the buy-in of stakeholders ... that ensures success" (2013, p. 221).

In Zack's narrative our understandings were shaped by the meanings we projected before us. Did the educators enter the meeting with an assumption that I would recommend Zack change schools? Having tried everything in their repertoire, did they wonder how there could be anything else that could help? Did they think Zack's behaviours could ever be made safe? Perhaps they thought once a student had such challenging behaviour it was time for a psychiatric diagnosis, medication, or an off-site educational program?

I was surprised, disappointed, even a little incensed at the educators' fixed views that Zack must leave their school. They had lost their way, I thought. Their values had drifted. But I was unaware of my own values' slippage. Values drift was not a problem *they* had, it was a problem *we* had. There was a misalignment between our deeply held beliefs and our actions — but for quite different reasons.

### **An optimistic assumption**

A prejudice I brought to Zack's school is that there is always the possibility for teaching and learning. FBA is one way of doing this. But it is not simple. For instance, there may be a disabling prejudice, a lack of hope, a sense that the student's family history makes any change impossible. Zack's situation was sadly familiar in this regard. I have worked with teachers who have said, at our *first* meeting, that a student "won't be coming back into my class." Could it get worse than this? Yes. I once met with a teacher whose opening comment was that a student "should have been drowned at birth." This comment caused me a visceral response. But the point is, that the moment I interact with another person, our prejudices are engaged. And where there is a significant mismatch in prejudices, the challenge is to maintain a sense of awareness and to respond with pedagogical tact. Or as Gadamer says, "all that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text" (1975/1989, p. 271). And if I could not maintain openness to Zack's teachers, how could I assist them to remain open to Zack?

Before visiting Zack's school or listening to staff I had already reached the conclusion that, with help, they had the capacity to support him. From the school's perspective it was too late for FBA. They had used everything in their repertoire including clearly defined behavioural expectations, explicit teaching of social skills, rewards and predictable consequences. They had an alternative program with one teacher, just for Zack, in an area especially set up for him. What more could possibly be done? And how could anyone understand how hard this struggle had been for their staff, students and parents? As a school leader, the consequences of not acting now, of not removing Zack from the school were clear: lost learning time for students, parent complaints, falling enrolments and teachers on stress leave.

On this occasion, for this staff, what precluded them from maintaining a state of openness to Zack? I had seen the ease with which they interacted with students with disabilities. Why was this different? Perhaps there are a number of interpretive possibilities. First, we could assume that at some point, staff endeavoured to understand Zack's behaviour. Yet, by the time they asked for help, their pedagogical openness had been overcome by exhaustion. The empirical preoccupation of FBA literature, often elides this critical challenge. No matter how effective FBA is, the corrosive power of physical and mental exhaustion can overwhelm. We all, at times, feel swamped by life's vicissitudes. There are situations where, for our own survival, or to protect others, we need to bail out or at least take a break. This has significant implications for early intervention. It also draws attention to the need for greater openness to the other. My encounter with Zack made me wonder how crucial a culture of teacher self-care is in the capacity to engage in FBA.

While a lack of adequate, early support may have left staff feeling isolated, vulnerable and fearful, it may also be true that there was a time, when even if anxious, they were buoyed up by a sense of possibility for Zack. That was the time for conversation. Now, staff were exhausted, disheartened and overwhelmed. Having tried every strategy in their collective repertoire, what more could I possibly suggest? How could I know how to help when we had entered what Heidegger refers to as the "privative modes of not hearing" and "turning away" (1953/1996, p. 153). I was deaf to what staff communicated, both verbally and non-verbally. Without listening, how could I understand the situation? And if my advice was not based on situational understanding, what was it based on?

A second possibility is that staff who had attended FBA professional learning had been left with a sense of what FBA was, but inadequate understanding of how use it. This might fit with the alarming research of Bruce Joyce and Beverley Showers, which claims that for learning to be transferred to new contexts the training must contain, four vital elements: theoretical knowledge, demonstration, practice and peer coaching (1995, p. 112). Their research is alarming because professional learning which embraces only the first two elements is considered to lead to *no* application. When the first three elements are involved, their findings indicate application of learning in only *five* per cent of situations (ibid).

From Joyce and Showers' perspective, for professional learning to be effective and result in a *ninety-five* per cent rate of transfer, all four elements of effective training to be involved — theoretical knowledge, demonstration, practice and peer coaching. And such an approach, in my experience, has not been provided for schools. The pedagogy of most FBA professional learning tended to focus on sitting, watching and listening. The knowledge was with the presenter and we were the novices. We sat, we read, we listened, and occasionally asked questions. Activities focused on hypothetical case studies; they drew little emotional investment. Practice and peer coaching were certainly never provided at a systemic level.

Never having tried FBA in simpler circumstances, is it possible that staff felt that to start their learning with an FBA for Zack would be difficult, if not impossible? If the etymology of tradition lies in the Latin *traditio* meaning that which we inherit or pass down, could it be said that the absence of the transmission of positive experiences hindered action? And here I mean experience in the sense of *Erlebnis*, the experiences we 'have' and which we gather as part of our professional expertise. What I inherited, in contrast to the staff, was a tradition where FBA was perceived as enabling and inspiring.

One story in particular, has sustained my practice with enabling prejudices and an expansive sense of hope. It is a story of a man's self-injurious behaviour, told by Gary LaVigna and Thomas Willis. When upset the man "would tug on his own lip to the point where he had separated it from his face on a number of occasions, requiring surgical replacement" (1997b, p. 11). Based on a comprehensive FBA, they developed a sophisticated, "multi-element" support plan which included eight-teen "proactive strategies" (ibid). And the result? "What happened over time was that years later, he still has his lip. Further, because of the proactive plan, he no longer engages in any level of injurious behaviour" (ibid).

The power of tradition, and the mediation of the present by the past (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 291), is echoed in the findings of research which suggests that teachers prefer to rely on “direct or vicarious experience in the selection of interventions” (Murik, Shaddock, Spinks, Zilber, & Curry, 2005, p. 32). This brings us to a further possible option for staff reluctance to engage with FBA. Did teachers perceive Zack’s history to lie beyond their combined previous experience? And at that moment, did he become other, requiring some foreign treatment, a specialised solution, which would come from beyond the school?

Previously, staff may have been more open to Zack and to FBA. Is this temporal aspect of openness to engage with FBA, acknowledged in the literature? Or might our historicity lie outside the epistemological frame of behavioural science? Yet as subjects in the lifeworld we are bound by time. We are necessarily finite in our knowledge, experience and situatedness. I suggest there is a crucial distinction, between an FBA which we conceive of as theoretically possible and an FBA we might, in practice, be able to embody. If FBA is to have efficacy in the lifeworld, perhaps what is needed, as Gadamer puts it, is a “sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now” (1975/1989, p. xxxiv). And this requires acknowledging what he refers to as the “tension” between what man “claims to achieve and the reality in which he finds himself” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. xxxiv).

### **Lucid in theory but scrambled in practice**

In “What I Learnt From Zack” I saw how a rift can so easily develop between what I appear to know and that which I am able to enact. And although it would be easier to avoid such reflections, I follow Gadamer’s view that “the hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension or by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out” (1975/1989, p. 305). That is, my intention is to better understand both the phenomenon of FBA in the lifeworld, and myself in relation to FBA. In this section then, I will reflect on the two situations described in the narrative separately — first the school meeting and second, the attempt to assist Zack and staff.

It is clear that FBA requires a disposition of curiosity, wondering, hypothesising. Less clear is why, at times, we can anticipate behavioural meaning, thereby entering a process of intra-subjective and intersubjective dialogue, and at other times we remain closed to such possibilities. And perhaps this is also true for some staff. There are those who open themselves to the

possibilities of FBA and to a search for meaning in a student's behaviour. And there are those who remain closed. 'Have you read her file!' 'If he's anything like his brother... .' 'He's a lost cause.' As Gadamer puts it "we cannot understand without wanting to understand, that is, without wanting to let something be said" (2007a, p. 129).

But let us return to the language the teacher used in declining to engage in FBA. She said Zack's behaviour was beyond its reaches. The etymology of "beyond" shows its origins in Old English, meaning "from the farther side" (Hoad, 2003, p. 40). And we seemed to be on opposite banks of a fast flowing river, neither of willing to cross. The teacher's choice of language is interesting when considering Gadamer's view, that what is said to us is "always more than the declared and comprehended meaning" (2007a, p.128).

What was revealed by this teacher's comment? An intention to close down a particular line of conversation? Gadamer suggests that "we cannot understand without wanting to understand, that is without wanting to let something be said" (2007a, p.129). I do not wish to imply that the teacher was alone here. I was equally implicated in not wanting to hear what she was saying. The teacher's words clearly conveyed "I don't want to hear any more about that," her timing intercepting my speech flow. Meaning was communicated both through content and form, through the language used and its temporal placement in the communicative flow, its timing intended to block.

Zack's teachers brought with them a prejudice that his situation was beyond FBA. Never having encountered a student with such challenging behaviour, who responded to so little, they lost hope. And in the context of their hopelessness I also began to question my optimism that change for Zack might be possible. The context of despair shifted my interpretation of what was possible. But why did my sense of hope not evaporate completely?

Perhaps Freire provides some guidance. He suggests that

it is fundamental for us to know that without certain qualities or virtues, such as a generous loving heart, respect for others ... perseverance in the struggle, a refusal of determinism, a spirit of hope, and openness to justice, progressive pedagogical practice is not possible. (1998, p. 108)

But I knew these teachers. Their lack of engagement with FBA was certainly *not* characterised by lack of care. For Freire, hope is more than a matter of disposition. He proposes that a hopeful state is about both virtues *and* knowledge. He writes that "the more methodologically rigorous

I become in my questionings and in my teaching practice, the more joyful and hopeful I become as well” (Freire, 1998, p.125). In summary, I suggest that inadequate experience of FBA *technē*, contributed to these educators, on this occasion, declining to engage with FBA.

I interpret Freire’s questioning as inviting us to enter dialogue, both within and between ourselves. It suggests that an interpretive, questioning orientation to the lifeworld becomes both a means of navigation and a way of being. Openness is inevitably of the self in relation to something or someone — or in the case of FBA, both. And a person who could embody such openness, for Gadamer, shows how experienced she is by being “radically undogmatic” (1975/1989, p. 350).

I also brought many prejudices to Zack’s school. I assumed that the school, being involved in schoolwide positive behaviour support, would have a values base of inclusion with regard to all students with challenging behaviours. They would have a sense of hope and a belief in the possibility and power of all learning, including social and emotional learning. The school data base would contain data on Zack which would guide support plan decisions. Just as the whole school environment was structured for success, Zack’s individual learning environment would be differentiated to meet his needs. I could continue, but what strikes me now are the seemingly endless assumptions I made about Zack’s school context. And at precisely the moment I thought I knew the situation, I began to stumble. If I knew, why would I need to listen?

How could Zack’s school, which had strong SWPBS universal interventions in place, be so overwhelmed and without hope? They had mapped out their four schoolwide expectations in a matrix, they reminded staff about using a ratio of at least six positives to every corrective interaction, they had grade group assemblies to teach the social skills, identified in their data as areas of need. They understood and enacted, at a schoolwide level, the PBS shift in emphasis from punishing to teaching. They had structured lunchtime activities, used playground behavioural data to adjust their duty areas and supervision roster.

Why then was there no data for Zack? While I accept that a more detailed, personalised form of data collection may have been more suitable, the absence of any data was a concern. Was it an early warning sign of school distress, of feeling of being overwhelmed? Perhaps it was a sign that staff were either too busy reacting to record data for Zack, or felt that existing systems were inadequate. Perhaps staff thought that if their typical repertoire of behavioural interventions was ineffective with Zack, their standard data collection system could not be effective either.

Would it have made a difference, had behaviour data been recorded, if records were kept of antecedents and consequences? I suggest that even a small improvement, during overwhelming times, can make a significant difference. Just as a small, well positioned lever can move a large wheel, a single environmental adjustment can create change. For example, if behaviour data indicates a student's relocation to any room in the school except the principal's office, leads to further escalation and frequently to self-injury, staff can reduce incident severity by relocating the student to the principal's office. Clearly this is not a long term solution, but if the priority is student safety, it is helpful for now. Sometimes such a small step — in this case meeting a goal to keep things safe — can increase staff confidence. Buoyed up by this small degree of predictability, staff might begin to observe more closely, they might examine their data with a forestructure which says, this behaviour meets a need for the person who uses it; there *are* circumstances under which it is more likely and less likely to occur. And each small discovery might gently nudge them in the direction of hope.

Would data have resolved everything? No. The complexity of Zack's history meant that safety, and emotional-regulation, would need to be a priority for months and possibly years. Why then, did I think FBA was relevant to Zack at this point? Because functional thinking could have helped understand what kept Zack within his "window of tolerance" (Siegel, 2010, p. 50), and what pushed him outside it. If Zack's physical aggression was understood as a means to express his lack of safety, data could have shone light on what triggered his fight, flight or freeze response. Even when a behaviour's motivation is extremely difficult to see, FBA holds that behaviour is meaningful. Simple data about setting events and triggers, even if tentative could have been refined over time and given staff a glimmer of possible patterns.

The logic of the hermeneutical circle (we can only understand the whole in terms of its parts, and the parts in terms of the whole) applies here. Problem behaviour is understood as purposeful, only when interpreted in context. The context may include aspects of the present environment, the student's history, or more likely, the interplay between the two. And before we can perceive a behaviour's function, we must first perceive its parts, the setting events, triggers and maintaining consequences. Without each tiny interpretive clue we may risk obscuring our understanding of the whole.

But even before we can begin this search for meaning, we must accept an underlying assumption and positive prejudice of FBA, that all behaviour is meaningful for the person who

uses it. Such a view allows us to ask, from the perspective of the person using the behaviour, what is he getting, avoiding, or communicating? The exploration of data is one way of seeking answers to such questions. But this presupposes a stance of questioning, a seeking of meaning.

In the situation of Zack's escalated behaviour, I was like a swimmer, unknowingly pulled off course, too busy to stop, look up and check if I was still heading in the right direction. And if I stop hiding behind metaphors, I have to admit that although I would lead others in learning about de-escalation, had years of experience in this field, it was typically in one to one situations with a student who was either relocated from his classroom, or already attending an alternative education program. That is, there was no adult audience. I felt free from peer judgment in such situations. No-one was watching my performance. Context affected meaning. That is, in Zack's situation, I hardly knew him. In the absence of a reactive strategies plan to guide what we said and did, we were carried on a wave of adrenaline. My sense of having behavioural expertise led me to feel the need to lead — to make things safe, now! But I was disoriented. I was unconscious of the regression of my thoughts to long ago patterns of control and restraint.

But why was I so taken by surprise? Were my values and understandings so easily over-ruled by the stress of context? If such misalignment of values is possible within individuals, could this also account to some extent, for the difficulties schools experience as they move from whole school to individual interventions? And might this account for part of the much reported research-to-practice gap (Crimmins & Farrell, 2006, p. 31; Gable et al., 2014, p. 126; Scott et al., 2009, p. 429) ? Where are we without this values alignment within and between ourselves?

There was no awareness, no chance to pause, reflect and get my ethical bearings. My sense of knowing dominated my sense of being. Disoriented, I lost sight of the context, which is the place of moral application. I regressed to values inherited from a tradition I believed I had transcended. But why did this happen? Did I inherit more than an objectivist, positivist view of behavioural science and FBA? Was there also implicit, a Kantian vision of being a rational, autonomous subject, able to act on principles of "the moral law within me" (Immanuel Kant, 1788/1976, p. 166)? Did I bring to Zack's situation, an unconditioned sense of self? Did I fall into the trap of what Gadamer calls an "a priori value system," which can only make sense if we are subjects who are "infinite" (2007m, p. 284)?

In his essay "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics," Gadamer acknowledges such mistakes in understanding as he critiques what he describes as Immanuel Kant's "formalism"

(2007m, p.284). Gadamer finds greater affinity with Aristotle's thinking which focuses on the "conditionedness of our moral being, on the dependence of the individual decision on the practical and social determinants of the time, and less on the unconditionality that pertains to the ethical phenomenon" (2007m, p. 284). To what extent might such a view explain the incoherence between my consciously held values, knowledge and actions? And what, in the end did I learn from Zack? The most painful thing I learnt was that my values are not a destination.

### **Finite, vulnerable and unfinished**

This chapter has included reflections, insights and harsh realisations. "What I Learnt From Zack" was a moment when the thin skin of my intention was blistered by the heat of tradition, when the inadequacies and vulnerabilities I projected onto others, were also found to be my own. Unconscious of the past's claim on me, I denied the fragility of my present. Did such naïvety originate in over-reliance on method? Did my blinkered focus on behaviour science omit the lifeworld and deny "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, pp, xxv, xxvi)?

I can see now the myriad ways I embodied a lack of openness. Not only at the time of Zack's narrative, but later, as I wrote and reflected. My attempts at concealment were evident in early drafts through my choice of personal pronouns. I was eager to claim insights with a confident "I" and to distance myself from oversights with a "we" or a "they." Resistance to slipping into moments of concealment did not come easily. Openness to self and the development of self-understanding is uncomfortable, iterative and irresolvable.

Awareness of a movement, backwards and forwards, sometimes through what feels like the same doorway of understanding, brings with it something I never imagined. If I accept the finite nature of all knowledge, the partiality of my understandings, and my inescapable conditionedness, might I also create space for the other? Perhaps acceptance of my own finitude precedes awareness of the conditionedness of others. If so, could I now accept that there are times and situations when FBA may not appropriate? When *not* to use FBA is rarely, if ever, discussed in the literature. What is addressed instead are whole school requirements to support FBA (Crone & Horner, 2003, pp. 16-21). That is, schools involved in SWPBS are said to engage most efficiently and effectively in FBA, once their data in surveys such as the *School Evaluation Tool* (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2001), has reached an implementation average of

eighty per cent. While I agree that schools with lower SET scores often struggle with FBA, I do not believe that data provides a full explanation for potential difficulties encountered.

When we engage in FBA in the lifeworld, we always already find ourselves located somewhere, in time, in space, epistemologically, socially and relationally. FBA is not only about what we know, but also about what we do, and the manner in which we do it. If we accept this, might an understanding of FBA, adequate to the lifeworld, recognise both epistemology and ontology? As touched on in Zack's narrative, the way we comport ourselves, our manner of being — with the other, or not, as the case may be—also has the potential to derail FBA. And if this is so, why do such possibilities so rarely appear in FBA literature? Does their immeasurability make them less important to our understanding of FBA efficacy? As we have seen in Zack's narrative, for each situation we enter, we project before us meanings. We are accompanied by the “hermeneutical conditionedness of our being” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 83). Our prejudices may guide us but they can also sometimes mislead.

In the figure below is a selection of prejudices which emerged through my lived experience, as described in the narrative. My purpose in summarising my prejudices is to invite others, FBA facilitators in particular, to reflect on their own prejudices. It is also an attempt to help myself and others, to move beyond such forestructures of meaning into ways of thinking and being which might improve our practice. For this reason, in the figure's second column I have tried to nudge each prejudice into a question, in order to practise a more hermeneutical stance.

Earlier in this chapter I speculated about staff prejudices yet I have purposefully limited my focus, in the table below, to my own. My intention is to stay focussed on my lived experience. And I have found no neat way to align each prejudice with a handful of questions. The overlaps are numerous. In the jungle of the lifeworld, the questions are entangled.

Gadamer reminds us that “understanding begins” at the moment “when something addresses us,” and this can only occur through the “fundamental suspension of our own prejudices. But all suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a *question*” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 298). Finding language which is appropriate to the kind of questioning Gadamer refers to is a challenge. There can be no closed questions here. What Gadamer invites us to do is to question in ways that “open up possibilities and keep them open” (1975/1989, p. 298).

To re-iterate, my prejudices in Figure 3.1 below sounded reasonable to me at first. A closer examination of the grounds of each prejudice, though, produced a cascade of questions. And in this chapter’s narrative I explored some of the effects of these prejudices. For Gadamer, though, our misadventures need not be a problem. Indeed he suggests that the “experienced” person “is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them” (1975/1989, p. 350), because of the way she orients herself to new situations with openness. From Gadamer’s perspective, the gaining of experience “inevitably involves many disappointments of one’s expectations” (ibid). Moreover, he suggests that “every experience, worthy of the name, thwarts an expectation” (ibid, p. 350). As described in the Introduction, I use prejudice in a non-pejorative manner to convey forestructures of understanding which precede all judgements.

Figure 3.1 *Nine Prejudices from Narrative One – “What I Learnt From Zack”*

My Prejudices	Possible Questions
Correct FBA method and implementation leads to successful FBA.	<p>How might I bring to the FBA team, a sense of being which is present for the other?</p> <p>How might I monitor my own thoughts, feelings, actions and responses to the other?</p>
Staff who know and understand FBA can do an FBA.	<p>How might I share my own assumptions about the purposefulness of behaviour and my sense of hope for behavioural change through FBA?</p> <p>How might I help others to identify the internal and external resources that have sustained them in their care for the student so far?</p>
Staff who have attended multiple FBA seminars understand the power of behavioural science and bring with them a sense of hope for each student.	<p>In what ways might school communities share stories of hope about behavioural change?</p> <p>How might I respond when I first start to notice a tension between myself and other?</p> <p>In what ways might schools and educational systems, support earlier use of simple FBA, prior to staff exhaustion and lack of hope?</p>
Problem behaviour is purposeful for the person who uses it.	<p>How might the level of staff energy and commitment to FBA be assessed, prior to beginning an FBA?</p> <p>In what ways might staff be invited to reflect upon the views they inherited about discipline and what leads to behavioural change?</p>
Students with the most challenging behaviour are represented in whole school behavioural data.	<p>How might staff be invited to explore their assumptions about challenging behaviour, both individually, and as a team?</p> <p>How might staff be invited to explore potential differences in their assumptions about academic and social learning errors?</p> <p>How might staff be invited to explore potential differences in their values between inclusion of students with disabilities and those with challenging behaviours?</p>

<p>A student's needs have priority over a teacher's needs.</p>	<p>How might staff be invited to make connections between their own behaviour toward all students and their school values?</p>
<p>A school culture which is inclusive of students with disabilities, will also be inclusive for students with challenging behaviour.</p>	<p>How might staff be invited to explore the complexities and tensions between their duty of care to all students and to a student whose challenging behaviour is unsafe?</p>
<p>Whole school values will be enacted at an individual student level.</p>	<p>In what ways might professional self-care be embedded into FBA team and whole school routines?</p>
<p>Our consciously held values are embodied and enacted.</p>	<p>How might an FBA team be invited to identify possible impediments to completing an FBA, implementing, monitoring and adjusting their function-based support plan?</p>
	<p>In what ways might the FBA team be encouraged to plan for the barriers they anticipate?</p>
	<p>In what ways might school leaders support FBA practice and acknowledge the FBA team's insights into supports required?</p>
	<p>In what ways might an FBA facilitator help staff to anticipate and navigate common challenges?</p>
	<p>Under what circumstances and in what ways might staff be invited to explore alternatives to FBA?</p>
	<p>Under what circumstances and in what ways might I consider referring on an FBA request to someone else?</p>

In this chapter I have explored aspects of an uncomfortable experience which brought both my self-knowledge and my understandings of FBA into question. I became aware of the power of tradition, the limits of technical knowledge, and the challenge of coherence between my values and actions in the lifeworld. I have reflected on tensions which arise when our prejudices are misaligned, and questioned my conception of method as the “whole” of FBA, and not *one* its parts. I came to wonder, if we cannot escape tradition’s power and our finitude’s tendency to capsize our intentions and actions, why does so much FBA research conceal this? More importantly, will I have the courage to let go of a view of FBA method, as a vessel which can carry me anywhere, anytime, through any weather? Will I open myself to uncomfortable possibilities, including acceptance that there is nothing that can shield me from my unfinishedness?

## Chapter 4

### Understanding as an Event

If I carried a sense of shame for events described in Chapter Three, the FBA in this chapter left a residue of awkwardness and loss. If the narrative appears unclear, it echoes a sense of confusion which characterised my experience, and perhaps also the experience of others. Ironically, at the time of this FBA I felt a strong sense of clarity and of knowing. But over time I have felt increasingly uncertain. This chapter is an attempt to write my way out of puzzlement. I ask why I was unable to help Skye, her family and school community.

How is it that even now, years later, I prefer not to see staff involved with Skye's FBA? Like a social *faux pas*, this FBA brought a sense of distance between us. From my perspective at least, a sense of awkwardness lingers. I can see how I projected my flaws onto others and clung to method with rigidity. At one point I wanted to delete this narrative due to its inadequacies. I also considered presenting it as an "imaginary" in order to distance myself from something I preferred not to be associated with. But, having set out with an intention of increasing my hermeneutical understanding, I decided to include it. As van Manen notes, Heidegger's notion of hermeneutical understanding was about "the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being in the world in certain ways" (1990, p. 179). And my interest lies in "possibilities of being" in relation to FBA.

How did my work at Skye's school start off feeling like a dance and end up feeling like a battle? How could staff appear to understand the motivation for Skye's behaviour one moment and not understand it the next? What was I missing? If my conceptions of how people came to understand FBA as a process were problematic, in what ways did my perceptions limit the

efficacy of my actions? Was I present to the possibilities of openness to the self, the other and the situation? And how was it that what remained unsaid between us came to have such a weighty presence?

### **Narrative Two: "Skye Escapes"**

'Yep, look at that!' says Skye's teacher, having found a pattern in the behaviour data. Skye's mother Anna, teacher Diane, school psychologist Lisa, support teacher Margot, teacher aide Chris, and principal Lucy, are smiling at last. We have something to grasp. Ideas are flowing. Finally, we have positive news for Skye's mother. The mystery of Skye's physical aggression and running from class is – for now – resolved. Looking at the data we can see the times and activities during which Skye is most likely and least likely to hit and kick others and then run away to hide. The data shows a number of triggers, but seventy-five per cent of occurrences come down to one thing: fear of making a mistake. Skye's anxiety is so paralysing she's unable to colour in a picture, without first being shown a completed example. How else could she be sure to get the right colour in the right spot?

I place Skye's file carefully on my left, between Anna and myself, write notes that she can see. I try not to write while she speaks. I unfold our A3 data sheet recorded in a simple tally. Skye's mother scans the data as we talk. We can see in the data the function of Skye's behaviour, as she escapes behind a locked toilet door or onto a roof or under a table-cloth.

Safety means somewhere quiet, away from people and out of reach of demands. I wonder if adults who follow Skye, concerned for her safety, unknowingly prompt her to climb the trees on the edge of the playground, higher and higher. I'll raise this at the staff meeting, not now. Stay with the patterns the team has found in the data. Stick with the positive momentum. Skye's teacher has another thought, 'Do you think that a tent in the corner of the library could be used as a "safe spot"?' The team agrees it's a good idea.

'You've all contributed to the draft reactive strategies plan,' I say, passing around copies of the one page summary. It describes each phase of the escalation cycle for

Skye, from calm to crisis and back to calm. Each stage describes behaviour signals (what we will see Skye do and hear her say), what helps and what to avoid.

'Your names are here so people can see it was written by those who know Skye best, and who collected the data. Thank you Diane and Chris for the data!' So far so good. Everyone has contributed – parent, class teacher, teacher aide, principal, school psychologist and support teacher. Importantly, Skye's voice is also represented through the *Listen to Me!* student interview (USARC/PACE, 1996) in which Lisa scribed Skye's comments. We can see who Skye has identified as key people in her life, Skye's perspective on what makes a good and a bad day at school, important things she feels staff should know about her and things they can do to help her. Skye's fragile self-concept is visible in the section which asks her to reflect on her strengths. Skye's response? 'Skipping and — handstands and — summersaults on the trampoline', about which Anna comments, 'She can't do any of those things.'

'The reactive strategies plan can be shared with relief teachers,' I continue, 'and specialist staff and everyone on staff so they know how to respond on playground duty. But the plan's particularly useful for us in sharing our observations and insights with each other, and to ensure that our responses are consistent.'

Anna nods, noting her words describing the physical early warning signs of stress listed in the first box of Skye's plan.

'We need a copy of this for Dad,' she says.

Having finished the main part of our meeting it's time for Skye's FBA team's group reflection on how they think things have gone. A couple of quick questions before staff go on bus duty or return to class for the end of day routines. Anna needs to collect her son from the kinder before meeting Skye and says she'll be back in a minute.

'Skye's much happier at home,' says Anna, as she stands up to leave. For a moment, my eyes meet hers. 'Thanks for all your help,' she says. Anna leaves and we have seven minutes left for our reflection time.

'What are the things that've been most helpful from looking at your data?' I ask. There's a long pause. My question is poorly worded. Don't jump in, give them time to think.

'Everything's been helpful,' the teacher says. She stops to think. 'Yeah, and understanding how many incidents involve work frustration.'

'And how many involved *no other students!*' Lisa adds.

I leave the school with a sense of hope: the team's thinking has shifted. They have moved from a belief that there is 'no trigger' towards finding, for themselves, a pattern in the data which makes sense of Skye's behaviour. We have a sense of momentum. We have begun a task which we wish to complete.

By the end of the term we had planned that at the start of the new school year Skye would return to school to find she had the same teacher, and mostly the same students in her class as last year. Then there was the long summer holiday. What was going to be different? Two things — a new teacher aide with a different approach, and, although the class routines were the same, there would be different, slightly more complex activities. Skye would run from class, hide in unsafe places. Staff, eager to maintain their duty of care, would hold her by the arm to 'guide' her back inside.

No longer able to escape, Skye would develop new behaviours — like defiance and physical aggression. Scratching, kicking and hitting out. Indeed, this was what I was to find out had happened. Skye was reacting mainly towards staff and sometimes peers. She was beginning to be socially isolated. She would canter up to a group of classmates playing basketball, hoping to join in. Seeing Skye come, the child holding the ball would drop it, and skedaddle. In class after recess, sitting on the mat ready to listen to the class novel, classmates would avoid Skye, whisper to a friend, and shuffle away.

I had known the FBA team's progress last year was only the beginning. Ahead of us was the real work. We'd written the reactive strategies plan but had run out of time before the holidays to implement it. Our understandings of the function of Skye's behaviour were becoming clearer. The reactive strategies plan (a description of

observable early warning signs of stress with accompanying strategies, and the signs of Skye being very stressed, with strategies to guide staff responses, and a list of triggers). At the bottom of the page were some dot points of staff interpretations of possible messages behind Skye's behaviour, written in the first person: I'm scared I won't be able to do this, I don't like new things, I can't do this like the others can, I don't understand what to do.

Our data had informed the reactive strategies plan, which described helpful ways to respond to Skye's behaviour and decrease incident *severity*. The data also guided our proactive support plan (which focused on prevention and ways to decrease increase *frequency*). The proactive support plan, detailed environmental adjustments and what we needed to teach Skye, and others (both students and staff). It included how we would respond to her escape behaviours in ways which didn't accidentally reinforce it or escalate her running away and hiding. But most importantly, we'd agreed on how we'd help Skye to meet her needs in a more effective and efficient manner. In particular, how she could more easily escape from tasks and people, by asking for a break and moving to an agreed upon 'safe spot' where we wouldn't disturb her.

I returned to Skye's school after six week's long service leave to find three new staff and a significant shift in school culture. A couple of staff who hadn't been involved in Skye's team were having surprising sway undermining the confidence of Skye's FBA team. And staff stress had increased as Skye's behaviours became more severe. Skye's teachers were unsure how to respond to her new behaviours – throwing glue-pots, sticky-tape dispensers, hitting out at staff who tried to hold her arm, knocking over anything in her way to the door, kicking adults in the shins if they came too close.

Unsure how to respond to Skye's behaviour, staff were slipping back into traditional, more controlling strategies, escalating her unsafe behaviour. I sensed that the more worn down and exhausted they were, the further staff responses would stray from our support plans. On paper Skye's support plans looked good. In practice there was no sign we had ever begun to implement a function-based support plan.

Two of the new staff members, concerned about safety and stress levels of students and staff, contacted the Education Union. A risk assessment was recommended. Where was the concern for Skye? What about her wellbeing, her capacity to access a learning

environment in which she felt safe enough to learn? What about the risks associated with not following evidence-based practices? Like a function-based plan. What about quality of life for Skye, her family, peers or school staff? We hadn't succeeded in making her problem behaviour irrelevant, inefficient and ineffective. In fact, Skye's unsafe behaviours were intensifying.

Was the plan not working, or not being implemented? What would they conclude about the FBA process? About my competence? About all the data they had collected? Months ago I attended a staff meeting to ensure that everyone understood the plan. Ensure? Is it ever possible? I thought the FBA team had collected the data and, having understood it once would understand it now. But with new staff, new ideas and a different approach, it was if our data had become irrelevant, the function-based support plan put aside.

Weeks later Lisa, the school psychologist phones me. I can hear the strain in her voice. 'Everyone just agreed with the Andrew, the new principal, even the new Teacher Aide,' she says. 'I was the only one saying that we needed to go back to the plan.'

'Do they understand that we collected months of data and Skye's parents and the whole team agreed with the hypothesis?' I say.

'They said they've decided to treat her like the rest of the class.'

'And how's that going?' I ask, trying not to react.

'That's the problem. They reckon it's going a lot better. That she's getting the same consequences as everyone else. And she's not spending so much time in the library for cooling down anymore.'

'Do they understand the data? Have they seen our person-centred planning? The *Listen to Me!* interview with Skye?'

'I asked Andrew and he just said, *Seen that, Yep, seen that.*' I could just hear his flat tone.

I ring Andrew, the new principal, to arrange a meeting. I need a first-hand update from the school.

'Yeah' he says, 'we've changed things around a bit. What they were doing wasn't working, so we've started to put in place some consequences for Skye. And I reckon the staff will tell you it's made a difference already.' Andrew says they've started to use consequences? What happened to the schoolwide approach to consequences? The steps are clearly displayed in the school's handbook and described in their Behaviour Policy. Do they think that positive behaviour support is about no consequences? Surely not. That Skye's individual, function-based support plan is completely separate to schoolwide procedures?

Before I meet Andrew I mentally prepare. I need to expect that he'll have different assumptions. Zero tolerance? Get tough? Don't quote research at him. Not at the first meeting. Try to understand where he's coming from. Skye's data was so clear. Skye's FBA team identified the patterns and agreed on them. But staff are now happier with the new approach. Perhaps they never implemented the function-based plan. I was away at a crucial time and wasn't there to help guide and monitor implementation of the plans. I left the team to enact Skye's plans. And so, the new staff have found a new solution. A more familiar one. That makes sense.

I'm anxious we've lost a precious opportunity. Last year Skye negotiated a 'safe spot' with her teacher. I knew that at the start of this year, staff had tried it but said, 'It didn't really work.' But I wonder if she is safe there, from adult interaction? Is Skye choosing when she's ready to re-enter class? Is she safe from sensory triggers of noise, touch and environments teeming with movement? Did anyone read the article on non-contingent reinforcement I gave them?

There was a new plan in place. Andrew had introduced a counting down from five as a warning, before 'leading' Skye to his office.

'Skye, you know what happens if I get to one,' says Andrew. 'You need to come inside with me now please. Five, four, thr- ee.' But Skye shows no sign of moving. Andrew stretches each syllable, trying to give as much time as possible for Skye to comply, 'Two-oo, ... .'

Assume nothing. Listen carefully. Offer support to re-activate the data collection system, so the new staff can monitor the progress of their current plan. Help them to find the patterns in Skye's behaviour, and interpret things for themselves. I must work to the team's strengths, find out more about their understandings of behaviour, have a discussion on external compared to internal locus of control.

I need to identify my own assumptions. Develop a shared language, shared understandings. Learn from this. Next time, make reference to the schoolwide acknowledgment and consequence systems in the function-based support plan. Re-teach the plan at the start of each term, observe more, monitor for implementation fidelity, monitor staff stress. The alternative? To do what we've just done, that is, to throw away months of work and progress. We have also lost our most powerful strategy to decrease Skye's anxiety: the 'safe spot'. What next? The long journey of re-building Skye's trust so that she can learn that when she's in her 'safe spot', that she really is safe.

### **Silent tensions**

Before the school holidays and staff changes, I felt the culture at Skye's school to be unified and cohesive. All staff had participated in a sequence of professional learning on PBS. They were implementing a whole school approach to behaviour support, tracking their progress with behaviour data and anecdotal feedback from their school community. But when I returned to Skye's school after six weeks' long service leave things had changed. To start with there were three new staff, all of whom were on Skye's FBA team, and none of whom had had experience with PBS or FBA.

As Bohm notes in *On Dialogue* (2004), when a group comes together they may represent a number of subcultures with a variety of opinions and assumptions. Eager to maintain the positive momentum Skye's FBA team had begun, I found myself doing what Bohm describes as "*unconsciously* defending" my opinions (Bohm, 2004, p. 13). Soon this became a conscious awareness of a "will to win," a "struggle of opinions" (ibid, p.13). I was convinced that if staff implemented the function-based support plan again, they could help Skye.

Preoccupied with what I perceived as the problems of others' negative prejudices, had I overlooked my own? What obfuscation was at play when I focused on whether or not staff were

open, whether *their* forestructures hindered or aided understanding? What emerged through writing the narrative above was that “the fore-meanings that determine my own understanding can go entirely unnoticed” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 271). Again, I created an unnecessary dichotomy between listening to what Skye’s behaviour communicated and the needs of staff.

I feel an awkward resonance reading Heidegger’s description that at times, “under the mask of the for-one-another, the against-one-another is at play” (1953/1996, p. 163). Did I convey a sense that my thoughts mattered more than theirs? That I knew what to do and they did not? That my knowledge was more valuable than theirs? When staff followed my suggestions I was able to maintain a sense of care for them, with ease. Yet when staff expressed opinions and assumptions, which differed from mine, I slipped back into a different mode of being. I found it difficult to maintain openness to the other when we held different assumptions about social and academic learning.

For Gadamer, openness to the other and what he refers to as “hermeneutical experience” are related (1975/1989, p. 355). They both involve a “readiness for experience,” an openness to encounter something new. Hermeneutical experience shows itself when we anticipate that the other has “something to say” to us (ibid). And our openness to the other, in Gadamer’s terms, is particularly challenging because it “involves recognising that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so” (ibid).

But this was not what happened in Skye’s narrative. Differences between our prejudices created a silent presence between us. Was behaviour random or purposeful? Was Skye naughty, defiant, controlling everyone and calling the shots, or, using her behaviour to cope in the most effective way she had in her repertoire? Even Skye’s behaviour data, collected by staff, with what seemed obvious patterns, appeared irrelevant to the new staff. As Taylor suggests, “our conceptual grids” can be so different that even when we “stand before the same external objects,” what we perceive is “enframed by the other in a systematically different way” (Taylor, 2002, p. 290). It is as if “all reasoning stops at the borders of conceptual schemes, which pose insurmountable limits to our understanding” (ibid).

Only the school psychologist from the original FBA team remained committed to her previous interpretations of Skye’s behaviour data and to the implementation of the function-based support plan. But what happened for the other staff, who changed their views? They had collected the data and been part of its analysis. They were involved in the support plan

development, admittedly in a limited manner, and had seen a decrease in the frequency and severity of Skye's behaviour. How could their understandings which evolved over time, so easily dissolve? Did I falsely assume that all staff were working from a foundation of shared values and common understandings? Was it the delay in all staff hearing from the team about their data and how it guided the function-based support plan's development?

I wonder if Goh and Bambara (2012) might also have something interesting to add here. Their meta-analysis of FBA studies in school settings found that "although positive maintenance outcomes were found, few studies (20%) assessed maintenance, with only four studies reporting maintenance beyond two months past intervention" (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 279). This striking piece of data indicates that only *four* of the sixteen studies which assessed the degree to which improvement in student behaviour was sustained, showed positive results.

This leads me to two questions. First, why are so few researchers interested in long term outcomes of FBA? Is this an oversight in the research or a concealment? If we are serious about improving students' lives through the use of FBA and other PBS approaches, why do we so rarely check how sustained our efforts are in achieving that goal? Second, how many others have had an apparently positive start to an FBA dissolve over time, as the social context and school culture evolves? Kathleen Strickland-Cohen and Robert Horner (2015) provide a welcome exception, acknowledging such lifeworld challenges.

I wonder now, if I fostered an environment safe enough to surface the unsaid? Or was I so immersed in my own "categories, attachments, projects, sense of self" that I was "unable to detach from them and cross over to imagine sympathetically another's situation or meaning" (Beatty, 1999, p. 289)? Did I assume we shared an understanding of the purposefulness of behaviour? Is it possible that the very questions which the behaviour data sought to answer, were meaningless to those who did the observations?

If Gadamer is correct, that "to understand a question means to ask it" (1975/1989, p. 368), what implications might this have? How might we interpret his comment that "to understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question" (ibid)? Skye's behaviour observation data were answers to questions, but who had been doing the asking?

The FBA team also began to divide between those who believed that appropriate student behaviour was a result of a strong *external* locus of control. In other words, a view which says that authority figures are required to control student behaviour. On the other side was a view

that positive behaviour was about each child developing their own *internal* locus of control. On this view, educators would explicitly teach for social and emotional learning, just as they do for other areas of the curriculum. In practice, this means students are taught to “effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (“Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Schools,” n.d., para. 1).

It seems ironic that in my passion to advocate for the importance of social and emotional learning for Skye, I lost my own capacity to embody the very attributes I was hoping Skye might develop. Had I been more mindful my own sense of discomfort and agitation, might I have noticed an absence of conversation, a lack of reciprocity? To what extent did I impose the interpretations and views of the original FBA team, about Skye’s behaviour, on the new staff? In the rush to improve things for Skye, and to bring my work at her school to a close. I lacked awareness of the new team’s perspectives. Having been open to the other — at least to some extent — with the first FBA team, I was eager to move on.

Our meetings were characterized by the kind of talk that Bohm calls “‘discussion,’ which has the same root as ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion’ meaning to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view, and where everybody is presenting a different one” (2004, p. 6). Bohm likens this type of talk to a “ping-pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself” (Bohm, 2004, p. 7).

Paul Ricoeur is also helpful here when he suggests that “it is part of life that there are conflicts” and “the challenge is to bring conflicts to the level of discourse and not let them degenerate into violence; to accept that [others will] ... tell history in their own words as we tell our history in our words” (Ricoeur & Cosgrave, 1999, p. 12). Ricoeur challenges the notion that we “think we have failed” if we do not reach consensus (ibid). He follows this line of thought further, by stating that “to assume and live conflicts is a kind of practical wisdom” (ibid). In other words, to allow the other to be truly other, to make space for the difference between our views, means acknowledging a degree of friction between our perspectives. Paradoxically then, to avoid conflict may be construed as a way of dominating the other, or, of retreating from

engagement in discourse with other entirely. When we deny differences between our perspectives, we resist dialogue.

My point is that Ricoeur's view stands in contrast to a prejudice of the tradition of applied behaviour analysis (ABA). As George Singer and Mian Wang put it, PBS inherited an assumption from ABA, "that direct observation of the visible features of behaviour is sufficient to create a shared understanding in a community of researchers and practitioners to organise meaningful action to change behaviour" (2009, p. 19). Reading this, I was glad to know I was not alone in my assumption. But my lifeworld experience shows me that such an assumption is problematic.

Singer and Wang note a further assumption which underpins FBA, which is again inherited from the tradition of ABA, that all behaviour is "ultimately caused and maintained by the environment rather than intra-psychological variables" (2009, p. 19). Already, such an assumption presents difficulties for teachers who attribute a student's behaviour to a diagnosis ("she got autism"), family traits ("you should meet his Dad!") or personality ("he's a rotten egg, that one"). ABA's ethical strength, in this sense, was that it liberated us from blaming individuals or perceiving their problem behaviours as inherent to the individual. Instead, the tradition of ABA, based on operant learning, says to us "there is always a reason for a person's behaviour." We are invited to look further to inquire what is happening. And this often involves looking at the social environment, which often contains ourselves. So here again, we bump into the need for openness to the self and its interconnectedness with openness to the other.

If we accept the above assumption, that problem behaviours indicate a mismatch between a person's needs and their environment, that there is "a functional relationship between behaviours and their antecedents and consequences," ABA tells us that it therefore follows that "it is possible to predict and control many behaviours of concern" (Singer & Wang, 2009, p. 19). Such a prejudice is essential to make meaning from FBA methods. To what extent Skye's new FBA team shared these foundational assumptions, I am unsure. The fragmenting of the team, though, is unsurprising when we consider that the three new staff had not had access to the same opportunities for professional learning and dialogue.

Initially, I enjoyed visiting Skye's school. But what began feeling like a dance, soon felt like a battle. Reflecting over time, writing the narrative and thinking about my writing about it, I can see how my thoughts became constricted. I began to go into a protective mode, defending my

position. I noticed changes in my language, my shifting values, from the person-centred origins of PBS, to a more adversarial stance. And language, even of our thinking about FBA, is important. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* state, “metaphors partially structure our everyday concepts and ... this structure is reflected in our literal language” (1980/2003, p.46). I began to reflect on some of the more militaristic and adversarial language associated with behaviour and FBA.

In schools we sometimes hear echoes of militaristic and adversarial metaphors. For example, one educator might advise another to “pick your battles carefully,” or to “stick to your guns.” The tradition of FBA brings with it the language of “target” behaviour, that is, the operationally defined problem behaviour which is our focus. We talk about behaviour “strategies,” another military term, from “stratagem,” meaning an “artifice to surprise an enemy” (*Concise Oxford dictionary of English etymology*, 1996/2003, p. 465). Such an adversarial orientation in the tradition of FBA language echoed through my thinking during Skye’s FBA.

It was with a creeping sense of unease that I began to notice the language which structured my thinking. Even with the first FBA team, when things were going well and there was a positive momentum, I was thinking about how our data would “win over” the educators who were uncertain. I felt that once they understood the data they had somehow “made it over the finish line.” My thinking was in a language of competition and battle, not a language of partnership and pedagogy.

I was also thinking of FBA as argument, which can be conceived of as war: winning, losing, taking sides, taking positions, fighting and retreating. Why is this relevant? “Because we act according to the way we conceive things” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 5). If my actions with Skye’s second FBA team conveyed that I was trying to prove something to staff, even if well intentioned, it was a relationship of dominance. It was founded on the importance of *my* understanding, edging out the other, limiting reciprocity and leaving little space for educators’ understandings.

Working with Skye’s FBA team I learnt that method provides no protection from the incoherence Bohm describes. Indeed my passion for FBA method, perhaps to some extent, manifested itself as dogmatism, thereby increasing incoherence. Although I understand the veracity of Bohm’s comments that “conviction and persuasion are not called for in dialogue” (ibid, p.31), I still struggle to embody this. The urgency of many behavioural situations drives

my eagerness to act. When a staff member disagrees with something which I believe is ethical, educationally sound, supported by the family and student, consistent with the school's values, has a strong evidence-base, and I have experienced as transformative, I want to convince and persuade. At Skye's school, if I were unable to complete an FBA I would feel I had failed in my duty of care for Skye and for those around her. I might also feel incompetent.

But is something new starting to emerge here? Has my identity as a helper begun to intrude? Is there a protruding "I," determined to do what I think is right? Perhaps there is a parallel, even an echo, between my way of being with staff, and the way in which they could be present for Skye. Perhaps we had both slipped into dogmatism. As Bohm observes, the etymology of "the word 'convince' means to win, and the word 'persuade' is similar. It's based on the same root as are 'suave' and 'sweet'" (2004, p. 31).

When I consider the shift in my emotional state, from a calm satisfaction at the beginning of this FBA, to an agitated, irritated sadness, it would seem clear that I was trying to "win." When I returned to Skye's school after being on leave, what I thought was in place, had crumbled. Reflecting on Bohm's comments above, I can see now, with a deep sense of regret, how the team split into two camps (another militaristic metaphor), each group equally passionate and well-intentioned, but constrained by prejudice.

## **The platypus and prejudice**

One of the ways our situatedness and conditionedness manifests itself is through prejudice. And if we accept that prejudice is an aspect of our finitude, we will not be surprised that prejudice is repeatedly illustrated through human history. A renowned example comes from difficulties classifying the platypus. Early nineteenth century naturalists collecting Australian specimens, viewed the platypus with their own distinctive anticipatory structures of meaning. They looked at the platypus but were unable to truly see it. That is, they regarded the platypus as a hoax.

How could a single creature simultaneously have the fur of a mole, a duck's bill, webbed feet, lay eggs and suckle its young? Constricted by the prejudice of taxonomy, they struggled to fit the object of their observation into a pre-determined epistemological grid. So heated were the discussions that the divergence in views was said to have "pitted nation against nation, naturalist against naturalist, and professional against amateur" (Hall, 1999, p. 211). I suggest, that the history of the platypus is an illustration of what Gadamer describes as "biases of our openness

to the world” (2007l, p.82). In some regards it is a story which parallels staff efforts to make meaning from Skye’s behaviour. What was apparent to the first FBA team, and later just the school psychologist and myself, was simply not visible to the second team. But how can we make sense of such different perspectives when people are observing the same creature, or, in Skye’s case, the same person and same data?

For Gadamer, “a kind of anticipation of meaning guides the effort to understand from the very beginning” (2007a, p.129). There is a remarkable similarity here with FBA. Both understanding itself and FBA involve a seeking of meaning. FBA is a search brought into being through questions, such as what motivates a person’s problem behaviour? In what circumstances will that behaviour be most likely to occur, least likely to occur? What might the person gain or avoid? What needs are being met? What messages communicated?

The behaviourally literate teacher brings with her a key understanding from behavioural science that all behaviour is purposeful. People do things that work for them in some way. At times it may be difficult to discern exactly what this purpose is (or purposes are), but there is an assumption, that if a behaviour happens again and again, it is for a reason. It is meeting the student’s needs in some way. Thinking functionally is a good start, but it is not enough. We still need a language with which we can shape our fore-projections in useful ways.

Without an appropriate forestructure of meaning there can be no understanding. What guides the experienced teacher is a conceptual framework, like a menu of possibilities, which guide observation and interpretation. An example of interpretive possibilities for problem behaviours, is given below in Figure 4 (Dunlap, Harrower, & Fox, 2005, p. 30).

*Figure 4 Categories of the Communicative Functions of Behaviour*

Function	Communicative message
Obtain attention/social interaction	“Pay attention to me.” “I need help.” “Can I play with you?”
Obtain materials/activities	“I want to use the computer.” “I want the book.” “I want to listen to music.”

Obtain sensory stimulation	“This movement feels good.” “This movement makes me feel calm.”
Escape/avoid sensory stimulation	“This noise is too loud.” “This classroom is too hot.”
Escape/avoid attention/social interaction	“I don’t want to talk to you.” “I don’t want you to look at me.”
Escape/avoid materials/activities	“I don’t want to do this work.” “I don’t want to be in the classroom.” “I don’t like this; I need a break.”

Reprinted from Bambara, L. M., & Kern, L. (Eds.). (2005), *Individualized Supports for Students with Problem Behaviors: Designing Positive Behavior Plans*. New York: The Guilford Press, with permission of The Guilford Press and authors Harrower and Fox. © 2005 The Guildford Press

The possible motivations for problem behaviour listed above, both individually and in combination, represent forestructures of FBA. When we observe a student’s behaviour through the lens of FBA, the functional categories structure our questioning. For instance, what happens as a result of Skye’s problem behaviour? What might she obtain or escape? Does the behaviour decrease or increase attention from adults? Does it prolong access to a highly preferred activity, or mean escape from a difficult task?

For Gadamer, “a person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text” (1975/1989, p. 269). Most importantly, it is the validity of our fore-projections which allow movement towards understanding. As Gadamer puts it, “working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed ‘by the thing’ themselves, is the constant task of understanding. But understanding realizes its full potential only when the fore-meanings that it begins with are not arbitrary” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 270). And it is precisely these fore-projections of meaning, which provide entry into the hermeneutical circle.

Without vocabulary for “the thing itself” — in this instance functions of behaviour — staff are often guided by prejudices which lead nowhere. For example, when we attribute a student’s problem behaviour to that which is beyond our pedagogical reach — a diagnostic category, a complex family history, or aspects of a student’s temperament — it can bring our educative responses to a full stop. While these might be more obvious examples, staffroom conversation

about student behaviour which is not characterised by the enabling prejudices of FBA, in particular that behaviour is purposeful, unnecessarily limits our capacity for efficacious action.

For example, to the statement “She’s just being aggressive,” we would begin by defining “aggressive” in observable terms. We might then respond by asking: When was the student aggressive? When not? Who with? What was happening before? What did adults and peers do and say after the aggressive behaviour? Information gained through such questions can help us to structure the environment and reduce the likelihood of the behaviour’s recurrence. We can teach replacement skills once we understand what a student’s behaviour obtains, escapes or communicates. We can also ensure that the new skills are reinforced more than the inappropriate behaviour.

I suggest that we need a language and forestructures which enable understanding and action. If we enter the hermeneutical circle, as members of Skye’s new FBA team did, with a view that behaviour is unpredictable, unpreventable and unchangeable, the history of the platypus might tell us that this is precisely what we will see. Forestructures which enable meaningful interpretation of behaviour and enable efficacious, educational responses, begin with an understanding that behaviour is functional (Cho Blair & Fox, 2011; Gable et al., 2014, p. 117; Gage, Lewis, & Stichter, 2012). Behaviour is meaningful. Even more recent research into non-linear FBA (Crates & Spicer, 2012), which I do not have space to explore here, holds to this key prejudice. The tradition of FBA brings with it language and fore-meanings which help us to make sense of what we observe. The language of function holds within it prejudices which scaffold our emerging understandings.

But when staff look through a very different frame, when our starting point is what Gadamer calls the “arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings” (1975/1989, p. 270), problems emerge. And perhaps this is what happened for Skye’s FBA team. Did their fore-projections of meaning disable understanding? Did the new members of the team project before them possible meanings for Skye’s behaviour, which they found irreconcilable with the data? I wonder what opportunities I gave the new staff to understand the prejudices I brought to FBA and my interpretations of Skye’s behaviour.

At times in this study I have highlighted my over-reliance on method and my assumption that method is enough. I also wish to acknowledge that there are aspects of FBA *technē* which are precisely designed to keep us questioning, returning us to the thing itself, that is, checking

the student's behaviour against emerging patterns in data, and the hypotheses we project before us. For example, we do not begin by asking a teacher "Do you think Skye leaves the class to get adult attention?" Instead, FBA resources provide numerous interview tools for the student and those who know the student best, to enter a mode of inquiry and dialogue (Crone & Horner, 2003, pp. 131, 153; Lee Kern, Dunlap, Clarke, & Childs, 1994; O'Neill et al., 1997). Gradually, each question carves away some meanings while others take shape. Such tools guide conversation and propel our inquiry. They turn our attention to contextual particularities.

*Skye's hypotheses*

When Skye is given an unfamiliar or non-preferred task she exits the classroom to escape the task.

When Skye makes a mistake with her work she exits the learning area to escape the activity.

When Skye receives a corrective comment from a peer or adult she leaves the situation to hide, to escape their attention.

When Skye attempts to exit the classroom and a peer or adult is in her way she engages in physical aggression to escape the situation.

I wonder now, how I expected the new staff, without access to the tools which coaxed our thinking along and invited us into dialogue with each other, to share in the meanings we had made. What language, what supports, what dialogue was there to assist their understandings about Skye? How could I have expected their interpretations to replicate ours when our experiences were so different? Understanding the functions of problem behaviour is not simple. As research suggests, we often we need a number of hypotheses to make full sense of a behaviour's meaning (Gable et al., 2014, p. 124). And each hypothesis is the culmination of an inquiry, guided by a prejudice that behaviour is functional.

FBA is an enquiry, predicated on our capacity to anticipate meaning. We enter our search for understanding with an openness to the unknown, but our forestructures hold that our quest is purposeful. A teacher who believes there are no patterns, no triggers, no meaning — that it is simply "misbehaviour" — is unlikely to move beyond the realm of the ineffective (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 271). And as "Skye's Escape" illustrates, for some FBA team members, no amount of data could alter their interpretations.

Australian philosopher Jeffery Malpas, cites Eldridge (1996, p. 154), who proposes that the "crucial move of Kant's philosophy is to explore the possibility that 'objects must conform to our knowledge', in opposition to earlier modes of thought which assume that 'knowledge must conform to objects' " (Malpas, 2002, p. 202). At Skye's school I confess that my thinking was

in line with those “earlier modes of thought” (ibid). I struggled to understand that, as Malpas puts it, “the self is an active maker of the world, rather than a passive recipient of either rational inputs or empirical data” (ibid). Just as the early naturalists’ prejudices obscured their vision of the platypus, even as it swam before their very eyes, for Skye’s FBA team, her behaviour data eluded their comprehension. We have a tendency to see what we believe. And this was also true for myself.

I believed that staff at Skye’s school understood PBS and FBA. New staff would be absorbed into the whole school culture of proactive, educative and functional approaches to behaviour. I observed nothing at the school to suggest otherwise, until it was too late. Just as the teachers at Skye’s school struggled to see what I believed to be evident, I was unable to register — what must have been obvious to others — indicators that not only the new staff, but even some members of the first FBA team were no longer making the same meanings from Skye’s behaviour.

While Skye’s initial FBA team participated in schoolwide positive behaviour support professional learning, for new staff the tradition of PBS was foreign. The interpretive horizons within which they sought meaning, were understandably different. We each brought with us our own “bias of openness to the world” (Gadamer, 2007, p.82). Difficulties resulting from frequent teacher transfers and changes in school leadership were compounded by variable levels of systemic support for professional learning on PBS and FBA. The interpretive horizons of each staff member in Skye’s FBA team differed not only according to their personal perspectives, but also due to the degree of participation in whole staff dialogue about PBS and FBA, through a period of whole school cultural change.

With this in mind it is interesting to consider Scott et al.’s study of thirty-one school-based FBAs. They compared the quality of support plans developed by schools’ FBA teams and those by national FBA experts (Scott, McIntyre, et al., 2005, p. 211). They concluded that school teams were more likely, regardless of the determined function of the behaviour, to revert to traditional, exclusionary and punitive approaches (ibid, p.205). The negative emphasis of plans developed by educators, compared to those of the experts was considered to be related to “the adequacy, fidelity, or content of training” (ibid, p.211). The authors acknowledge that a six hour course in FBA was inadequate. But their reflections go further. Having noted that their results “lead to serious questioning as to whether information of function made any difference at all in terms

of the strategies that were selected” (Scott et.al, 2005, p.212), they move into an area more familiar to Gadamer. They acknowledge the role of tradition:

It seems quite possible that learning history and preconceived notions of what a behaviour plan should constitute effectively trump introductory training in the use of function-based interventions. Recent research has indicated that although school-based teams can develop collaborative plans, those tend toward a reapplication of familiar strategies that were in place prior to referral (Scott, Liaupsin, Nelson, & McIntyre, 2005; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998).

Gadamer would perhaps be unsurprised by such findings, and remind us that “it is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition” (1975/1989, p.272). Is it the very denial of our situatedness and prejudice which sweeps us off course?

In Part Two of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer reminds us that prior to the Enlightenment, prejudice was not conceived of in the negative way it is today (1975/1989, p. 273). He turns from the Latin (*praejudicium*) and French (*préjudice*), to the German legal usage of prejudice (*Vorurteil*), which conveys a sense of “a provisional legal verdict before the final verdict is reached” (1975/1989, p. 273). Such a pre-judgement may be either negative *or* positive. Gadamer draws a distinction between “true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones, by which we misunderstand” (ibid, p. 298), and this becomes a significant challenge in FBA.

Unless there are planned, systemic opportunities for dialogue in regard to PBS values and the underpinning assumptions of FBA, it is difficult to expect teachers to assume the positive prejudices necessary to FBA. And in the absence of positive prejudice we are not only likely to misunderstand FBA, but we may also misunderstand each other.

Each fore-projection of meaning with which we enter the hermeneutical circle, creates further complexities for our attempts to make meaning. As Georgia Warnke notes, for Gadamer, our most significant hermeneutical task is to understand “the narratives in which we find ourselves” (Warnke, 2002, p. 80), and this involves resistance to the notion of an unconditioned self. It invites acceptance of a finite self, which acknowledges that the forestructures of meaning we bring to each FBA are not “our own autonomous creations, however, but are rather bequeathed to us aspart of the narratives themseleves” (ibid). I suggest that the example of the platypus, and the narrative “Skye’s Escape,” illustrate the power of tradition in interpretation, which Warnke

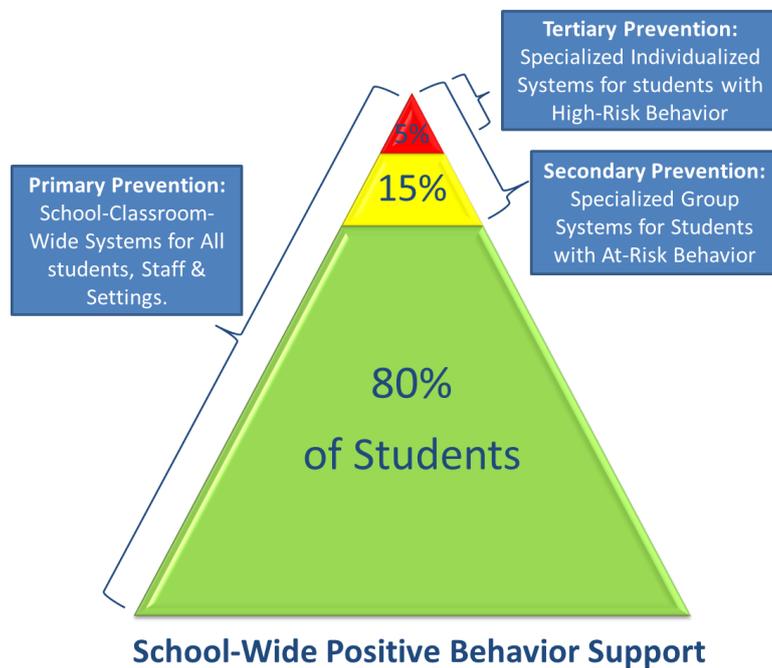
describes. Further, I suggest that the possibility of an impartial, objective view, is perhaps the greatest work of fiction of behavioural science.

If I believe that I hold the objective view of Skye's behaviour, because I am empowered by knowledge of behavioural science, it is easy to see how my need to listen to what others might say, falls away. I wonder how different things would have been, had I read David Bohm's essay *On Dialogue* prior to visiting Skye's school. Would I have been jolted, as I am now, by the veracity of Peter Senge's quote of Humberto Maturana in the introduction: "When one human being tells another human being what is 'real', what they are actually doing is making a demand for obedience. They are asserting that they have a privileged view of reality" (Bohm, 2004, p. xi)? I can see now that without acceptance of finitude, and prejudice, dialogue is unlikely. Which one of us would want to join a team which makes a "demand for obedience"? If I presented myself to the second FBA team, as too busy to engage in dialogue again, did I also believe I had a "privileged view of reality" (ibid)? From where did I expect coherent thought and cohesive actions to grow?

During Skye's FBA, I had a sense that each team member, although looking at the same parts, was piecing them together into a very different whole. But I now believe that although we might have been looking at the same parts we certainly did not see them in the same way. Our interpretations fundamentally differed. Not only were the constellations of meaning we made different, but the very stars that they were composed of were from foreign galaxies. If the epistemological debate about the platypus divided nations, Skye's FBA certainly strained staff cohesion.

It became clear that the behaviour data, which I thought was shouting certain conclusions, could not, after all, speak for itself. As Warnke notes, the temporal, situated, relational contexts in which we found ourselves "thrown," were already imbued with their own "specific vocabularies [and] plots," (2002, p.80). Warnke also observes that for Gadamer, "the importance of the image of a hermeneutic circle lies in its characterization of our 'historicity'" (ibid). That is, our entry into and movement within the the hermeneutical circle, is conditioned and propelled by our historicity. The interpretive possibilities open to us are inevitably circumscribed by our historicity.

Figure 4.1 Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support: Three Tiers Of Intervention



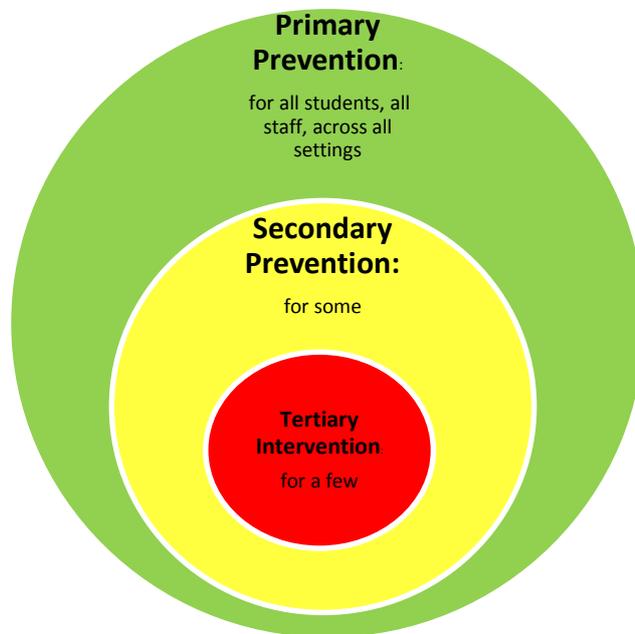
Note. Figure from Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project, University of Delaware (2015).

Gadamer describes the “hermeneutical rule” as a reminder “that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole” (1975/1989, p. 291). In the case of FBA, I interpret this to mean conceiving of FBA, recommended in the literature for approximately one to five per cent of students, to be situated within the larger whole of schoolwide interventions for all students. FBA is only one part of a continuum of schoolwide PBS values, systems to support staff behaviour, data collection procedures to guide decision making, and evidence-based practices to support student behaviours. Hence, there is a brace on the left-hand side of the triangle in Figure 4.1.

Why do we so often, in practice, find it difficult to hold each of these tiers of intervention together in a coherent whole? In response to this difficulty colleagues have sometimes suggested an alternative representation, in which the SWPBS becomes a nest of concentric circles. The intention in doing this is to convey an image of FBA as surrounded and supported by a whole school approach. It is an attempt to shift our understanding from FBA as something which sits

on top of, to something which is embedded within a whole school culture. But changing a diagram is a simple step towards attempting to resolve a complex, multifaceted problem.

*Figure 4.2 An Alternative Representaiton of the Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support's Three Tiers of Intervention*



In Skye’s school, with the first FBA team, there was a cohesive understanding of each tier of PBS. That is, there was coherence between whole school interventions and individual student interventions. School values were visible and enacted. Schoolwide positive behaviour support data and practices were visible and shared in staff meetings. By the time of the second FBA team, Skye had a new class teacher, the school had a new principal and, another new member of senior staff. The whole culture was on the move.

How could the new staff make sense of FBA — one part of the PBS continuum — without having a sense of the whole? Without re-tracing the original team’s steps and rebuilding understandings of the continuum of PBS, were they left with a fragment without a context and without meaning?

As Malpas suggests, understanding the meaning of a text is not simply about “coming to understand what each word or sentence in the text means independently of the whole. Indeed, one may be able to read the whole of the text and yet still not understand anything of what the text ‘means’” (Malpas, 2002, p. 202). And there is a reason that PBS professional learning begins

with whole school approaches and does not rush into FBA. There is a sequence to learning which helps us to keep in mind the whole, even when we are focused on a single part. The part and whole not only complement each other, but also co-inhere. As Malpas puts it, “the understanding of each word or sentence is dependent on our understanding of the larger structure of which they are a part and within which they ‘show up’ in a particular way” (ibid).

Similarly, the tip of the SWPBS triangle is dependent on the values, practices, data-based decision making, and systems to support staff behaviour, at each of the two preceding tiers. In other words, what we do for the one to five per cent of students needing FBA, is only meaningful in a context of a whole school approach. The way in which PBS values and practices are embodied by all staff, for all students, in all settings, provides a vital context for the few students needing FBA. Put differently, there is a throughline of common prejudices, shared between each tier of the SWPBS triangle. But the acknowledgment of the existence of prejudice, a foreign term to behavioural silence, remains largely unspoken.

On Gadamer’s view, “if we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices” (1975/1989, p.278). What I notice now are the hazards, relationally and in terms of FBA, when I was unaware of prejudice. I assumed there was an objective view of what was occurring for Skye. I believed the key to valid interpretation was method. Equipped with FBA method, I was eager to share it with others. But this was no longer possible. Something had changed. From the passion of the first FBA team, who appeared eager to share Skye’s progress with her mother, we had entered into a mode of irritable sadness. I was annoyed that the team had not followed the plan, and they were frustrated and overwhelmed by Skye’s continuing problem behaviour. If we held anything in common was it a sense of grief, that our shared hopes for Skye, which started so well, had reached such an impasse?

### **A conversational impasse**

But, strange to say, all these arrangements, these efforts and plans, which were no whit inferior to others made in similar circumstances, never touched the root of the matter. Like the hands of a clock disconnected from the mechanism behind the dial, they swung about in an arbitrary, aimless fashion without engaging the cogwheels. (Tolstoy, 1869/1957, p. 1190)

With Skye's second FBA team, I felt a sense of what Gadamer describes as "irreconcilable otherness" (2007f, p.119). Tensions between staff views were obvious, yet I was unable to do more than open myself to conscious awareness of these feelings of discomfort. And what was called for was something more — what Gadamer calls "hermeneutic virtue" (ibid), which invites us to realise

that it is essential first of all to *understand* the other person if we are ever to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together — if we do not do this, then we will never be able to accomplish the essential tasks of humanity, whether on a small scale or large. (2007d, p. 119)

Gadamer's comments are of particular interest when we consider that a behaviour support plan is about adult behavioural change. It is about adjusting the environment, teaching replacement behaviours, responding in ways which reinforce the student's newly learnt behaviour more than her inappropriate behaviour. Implementing a function-based support plan is also about consistent staff responses to the student. And such alignment of action is predicated on an FBA team's cohesiveness in thought. In a sense, "Skye's Escape" illustrates Bohm's comment that unless we "share meaning, i.e., significance, purpose and value," things are likely to become "incoherent" (2004, p. 22).

This is not to say that all voices must sing the same note. What is called for is unity through harmony, a strong sense of the home key, where many voices sing with a unified "ethical purposiveness" (Pugh, 2015). In Chapter Six I explore such ethical possibilities with a remarkable FBA team. The point I wish to make here, is that FBA requires something of us which goes far beyond method. FBA invites us to enter a space which Sharon Todd aptly describes as the "uncertainty and unpredictability of the pedagogical encounter" (Todd, 2001, p. 436). But how was such a "pedagogical encounter" possible when my prejudices were so different to those of other educators at the school? Returning to Bohm's view on the importance of "coherent thought," what conditions might be necessary for coherent thinking in regard to FBA?

At the opening of the second chapter of *Building Positive Behaviour Support Systems in Schools: Functional Behavioural Assessment*, Crone and Horner, list three assumptions which underpin FBA: Behaviour is predictable, preventable and changeable (2003, pp. 11-13). I addressed these

assumptions from the outset, with Skye's first FBA team, at a staff meeting. I wonder now if this was this a way to develop shared understandings, or an attempt to get everyone onto the "same page" — my page? We were certainly a long way from Bohm's suggestion of developing shared meanings, actively participating, altogether, to suspend our assumptions and enter a dialogue, where "everything can move between us," where "each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it" (ibid, pp. 30-31).

It occurs to me only now, that while all teaching staff had been involved in the staff meeting about key assumptions of FBA, and where FBA fitted within the continuum of SWPBS, Skye's teacher aides had not been present. Although they were essential to the implementation of Skye's support plan, the meeting times, being after school, prevented their participation. While I believe it is a teacher's responsibility to lead and guide pedagogical interactions, this need not imply that a teacher aide's voice is unheard. Instead, what is called for, is "a capacity for relationality not premised on control or coercion" (Todd, 2001, p. 435). The ethicality of such a stance would acknowledge our shared finitude and that we are both "learning to become" (ibid).

What might this mean in practice and where might we start if we come from such different perspectives? Bohm suggests that

if people are to cooperate (i.e., literally to 'work together') they have to be able to create something in common, something that takes shape in their mutual discussions and actions, rather than something that is conveyed from one person who acts as an authority to the others, who act as passive instruments of this authority. (Bohm, 2004, p. 3)

In Skye's FBA I needed to create a safe place for what remained unsaid. Whether or not I agreed with what was said was not important. Rather, as a partner in conversation, my task was to identify my interlocutor's "standpoint and horizon" so that "his ideas become intelligible without necessarily having to agree with him" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 302). And at Skye's school this required dropping an illusory mantle of authority, to listen. For a behavioural consultant the pressure to complete assessment after assessment can feel unrelenting. Does the pace at which the system demands we work, prevent our capacity to slow down enough to embody what Freire describes as "the presence of listening" (Freire, 1998, p. 104)? Perhaps this is particularly so at a time when FBA has become obligatory in the USA, since the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act of the late nineties (IDEA 1997). Interestingly, Goh and Bambara note that “reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 continued to emphasize the use of FBA and IPBS [individualized positive behaviour support] practices for students with challenging behaviour” (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 272). Although it is not yet a legal requirement in Tasmanian schools to conduct an FBA, it seems to me, an increasingly frequent expectation. Indeed, I was once instructed to do an FBA, even when the school principal preferred this not to occur.

But I do not wish to diminish the complexities faced by senior educational leaders. The interpretive horizons within which leaders make decisions about whether or not an FBA should be done, are very different to my own. For instance, if a risk assessment has indicated a significant concern for the emotional and/or physical safety of a student to herself, her peers or staff, FBA may be considered a response which aligns with a duty of care. If a student’s behaviour brings the school into disrepute, an educational system would be considered responsible for acting quickly to prevent parent complaints, falling student numbers and decreasing community confidence. Or what if students fear a classmate’s behaviour so much that they are too frightened to attend school? Under such circumstances would we still consider an imperative to undertake FBA an act of systemic coercion?

A frequent complication has also been a tension between a system which provides an additional layer of resources for students with challenging behaviours and the impossibility of sustaining such support longer term. If FBA represents one way to develop an efficacious support plan, decrease duration, severity and frequency of a student’s problem behaviours, would it be ethical for a school *not* to use FBA? Todd’s writings on pedagogical violence remind us that even when we act according to our obligations we risk harming the other (2001, p.439). As seen in the narratives of this study, use of FBA does not absolve us, in any way, from the intricacies of ethical interactions with each other.

I wonder to what extent our educational systems and school cultures heed what Freire warns can become “an authoritarian attitude which presupposes that the listener’s time is also the speaker’s time” (Freire, 1998, p. 104). Might behavioural consultant and educators’ heavy workloads multiply ethical difficulties as we rush past each other? Or is this side-stepping the issue? If we claim that school cultures lack time for dialogue, to what extent might we infer that

the system's *ethos* has become one of imposition and coercion? And might it also be possible that the ache of our frequent failings is too painful to voice?

In the context of Skye's FBA, Freire's writing about listening, in *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (1997), is confronting. What I perceived as an urgent need for the "simple transmission of information" was perhaps more accurately a call to hear what Freire describes as "the question, the doubt, the creativity of the person who is listening" (1998, p. 104). Whether or not I listened with attentiveness to staff involved in the first FBA team, it would seem that I spoke *to* and not *with* the new team (ibid, p.105).

I can see now the hazards of a system which establishes people as authorities, unless such expertise is coupled without what Freire calls an "inner security," which is "grounded on the knowledge, which experience itself confirms, that I am unfinished" (1998, p. 120). Freire does not diminish the importance of knowledge. On the contrary, for Freire it is our sense of unfinishedness which shows us our "ignorance" and launches our curiosity into the realm of what we "may still come to know" (ibid). And there is a paradox to Freire's thinking when he states

it is in openness to the world that I construct the inner security that is indispensable for that openness. It is impossible to live this openness to the world without inner security, just as it is impossible to have that security without taking the risk of being open. (Freire, 1998, p. 120)

Were I to find myself at such a communicative impasse again, how might I respond? Would I be more open to my finitude, to pause, to listen, in silence, to paraphrase, checking I had accurately understood the other's meaning? Would I make explicit my prejudices with my conversational partners? Would I be able to bring an intentional ethical openness to the other, which would "accept and respect what is different" between us (Freire, 1998, p. 108)? As Ulrich Arnsward puts it, in his interpretation of Gadamer, our understanding of the other is made possible "via the unveiling of our implicit understanding, which conceals the view of the other" (2002, p. 39).

Further, "by understanding the other we learn to allow for his or her difference and at the same time allow ourselves to be questioned" (ibid). When we truly listen, we put our humility to the test by risking our sense of knowing, of identity even, in order to embody openness to the other. Although I may not change my view as a result of the conversation, my openness to

fresh perspectives may further clarify my position, slightly refine it or shift my orientation entirely.

Our openness and preparedness to engage with what is other, shapes the perpetually shifting nature of our horizons. Just as moving through a landscape, our horizon slowly changes to encompass new sights, so too moving through the landscape of FBA, our horizons continually unfold before us. The motivation to go further, to see a little more, continues again and again. But for this interpretive movement, Gadamer reminds us that “both partners must have the good will to try to understand one another” (2007k, p. 172). And opening ourselves to the authentic kind of understanding which Gadamer writes of inevitably involves an encounter with the uncomfortable. As Taylor suggests, “real understanding always involves an identity cost” and the path is “frequently painful” (2002, p. 295).

Eventually, I ceased labelling the views of Skye’s second FBA team as being in “error” or at “fault” (Taylor, 2002, p. 296). I began to write my way toward the tensions rather than away from them, in an attempt to allow myself to be “interpellated by the other,” the result of which Taylor suggests is always to bring “our own self-understanding into question” (ibid). What shocks me is how many years’ distance it took to do this. Is a possible explanation the degree to which we emotionally invest ourselves, as educators, in the area of behaviour? Which other area of learning can put the emotional and physical safety of a student and others — including ourselves — at risk? Perhaps for this reason, our capacity for openness to self, other and situation becomes so crucial if we are to respond with “pedagogic tact” (van Manen, 1990, p. 154).

For Todd, such an ethical orientation toward others can never be claimed in a general sense, but is embodied in the “specificity of relationship” with each “pedagogical encounter” (2001, p.436). But the need for awareness of pedagogical ontology is not typically fostered by educational systems which are focused on outcomes, rankings and driven by short-term political cycles. And as part of an educational system under pressure, I wonder if I had unconsciously become a follower of what Freire refers to as “a type of methodology that aims at silencing constructive diversity, constructive criticism, and, ultimately, freedom” (1998, p. 104).

In addition to what we try to do in schools, to help, there is also a question of the manner in which we comport ourselves. In a sense the ethical purpose of our activity is twofold. It encompasses both what we do and how we do it. And while the former is assumed in FBA,

perhaps the latter is elided in much FBA literature. Yet, FBA method becomes irrelevant unless we are invited, repeatedly, to enter the space of the other. FBA depends upon a communicative reciprocity, and at Skye's school, I was not asked back. Was it because I was unable to accept that we had become stuck in a conversational *cul de sac*? Was I unable to turn around and lead us out via another route? Or was there something even preceding this? Was I stuck in an "epistemological dream" (Wachterhauser, 2002, p. 58), unable to accept that perhaps, method was not the way out?

If method was no means by which to navigate the situation, what was? Perhaps one mode of "ethical purposiveness" (Pugh, 2015) is what Freire describes as "the discipline of silence, which needs to be developed with serious intent by subjects who speak and listen" and is "a *sine qua non* of dialogical communication" (1998, p. 105). The situation was difficult because I sensed around me a culture of interrupting, talking over, and sometimes the rigid silence of opposition. I too, am part of this culture. And what challenges me, reading Freire, is the realisation of how far I had drifted from the person I hoped to be. In one witty sentence Freire nudges those of us, particularly in the helping professions, into a moment of stark self-realisation, when he writes that "no matter how important the issue," our "opinion probably will not be the one truth long and anxiously awaited by the multitudes" (1998, p. 105).

While Freire acknowledges that a person who has something "worth saying" has "a right and the duty to say it" (1998, p. 105), he reminds us that we are not the only people who need to be heard. He emphasises that until we have genuinely listened to what the other has to say to us, whatever we say, "no matter how correct and convincing will not fall on receptive ears" (ibid).

Re-reading the narrative, I see how I began to distance myself through my language as I increasingly struggled with the situation. I avoided referring to staff by name and began to speak of them as their role "Skye's teacher," "the principal," "the teacher aide." I also began to resort to well-worn phrases, rather than open myself to the situation and the other. Such changes in language may be subtle yet vital signs which remind me in future, to pause and listen.

If I re-project myself into Skye's school, imagining how I might respond today, I am still puzzled. Would I be more open to accepting the seemingly irresolvable nature of our interaction? Would the differences between our prejudices be resolvable? I am not sure. Perhaps it was an *aporia*, an experience which could not be approached directly and instead, must be navigated around. But to navigate something, we must be able to see what is before us. To begin

with, this means acknowledging the conflict, not avoiding it. What I hope I would bring to the situation today, is a sense of presence, of listening “which goes beyond hearing” (Freire, 1998, p. 107).

At Skye’s school this would have meant listening to all staff working with Skye, not just the teachers. It would have meant making time and space for every voice. Making space for diverse perspectives in conversation has particular relevance to understanding. And this is especially so if we accept that the ground of understanding is “to be found in the complex, dialogical interplay between speakers, and between speakers and their world, that always takes place in relation to language and tradition, and yet is never held captive by them” (Malpas, 2002, p. 212). In the absence of such “dialogical interplay,” at Skye’s school, I believe I damaged — at least at some level — what were previously positive relationships.

### **Shifting horizons**

The narrative “Skye’s Escape” is an attempt to re-present my most difficult experience of FBA. Like a strong wave it lifted me out of my comfort zone and dumped me, dishevelled, on a foreign shore. I had gone to Skye’s school at the invitation of the first principal who established and led their schoolwide positive behaviour support and FBA teams. Under her leadership I conducted whole school professional learning and was asked to give feedback on school policies and practices. Skye’s teacher, as well as her mother, her principal, her teacher aide and her school psychologist actively participated in each step of the FBA and provided regular feedback on Skye’s progress. As indicated in the narrative, both Skye’s mother and teacher made comments, which at least at particular moments in time, sounded appreciative. Moreover, I took the teacher’s comment, ‘*Everything’s* been helpful’, and the teacher aide’s remark of how many incidents ‘involved no other students,’ to reveal their engagement and some degree of increased understanding.

I found staff to be open to learning about the full continuum of positive behaviour support, from whole school approaches to practices which focused on individual students, such as FBA. More specifically, I experienced the FBA team as eager to apply their learnings. They tracked Skye’s target behaviour of exiting the classroom, for weeks. I collated the data — something I would now invite the team to do — and we discussed the summary together. I could hear, through their conversation, how staff were interpreting patterns in Skye’s data, finding the words for the meanings they uncovered.

Then came the staff transfers, including a new principal. As the school's social context changed, so did its cultural and relational dynamics. What I had previously experienced as openings in regard to FBA were suddenly closed. I was frustrated to learn that Skye had been suspended and no longer had access to her calming space outside the classroom. In addition, an application for part-time attendance, on the grounds of her problem behaviour, was already underway without any consultation with the school psychologist. I was surprised to find a reversion to traditional, reactive and exclusionary approaches.

I was angry with a system which had provided professional learning in regard to PBS and FBA for only a limited time for a limited group of people. There was to be no long-term, proactive, systemic approach. The new principal and new staff had not had access to the opportunities of the original FBA team. What else were they to do but select what they considered the most appropriate behavioural responses within their collective repertoire?

There seemed to me something very wrong that staff could be left so ill equipped to understand Skye's behaviour and to support her. What might Todd have attributed to this wrongness? Might there be some degree of unconscious ontological violence, in Todd's terms, in systems which, through inaction, allow such situations for their students and staff?

Our data held the known setting events and triggers for Skye's anxiety, but the second team did not use this information. Skye's behaviour escalated — not in frequency, but in intensity. That is, there were fewer incidents, but those that occurred were more difficult for Skye and those around her. I was dismayed that the FBA team was disbanded. I felt Skye had been categorised. Unable to let go of my hope for her I could feel my breath become shallow and my cheeks flush. What had been possible was no longer possible. The moment had passed. Possible openings closed.

Oblivious to my finitude, did I make a claim to an abstract, unconditioned form of knowing? Was it a form of knowledge as power, of what Todd calls "ontological violence," which can sometimes characterise our "pedagogical interactions" (2001, p.435), where we use teaching as a tool to change the other? After six years of feeling disturbed by what happened — and sensing my visceral response — I have had to reluctantly accept that to coerce anyone into FBA is a form of harm. But such a view does not diminish my sense of ethical conflictedness. Perhaps in the future, I might need to withdraw from a situation to prevent myself using knowledge as power and engaging in ontological violence. Yet if I do walk away, accepting an educator's

current closure to FBA, it will not be because I hold a relativist's view that all approaches are equally reasonable in regard to behaviour. Rather, that each of us has moments of openness and closedness.

If we accept that understanding is an “event,” there is always hope. If FBA does not happen now, then perhaps later. My job is to read every word, silence, posture and gesture educators bring to an interaction, asking myself, is this an opening or a closing? As Elizabeth Buchanan writes in response to the work of John Paul Lederach, “to know the moment is your work,” and it can be a matter of “waiting until the moment arrives,” “you just have to be patient and gentle. I call it my tadpole technique!” (2015). In other words, an ethical approach to FBA means attuning to the distinct, temporal particularities of each FBA's context, which cannot be known in advance.

It seems that understanding a *concept* such as FBA, as an individual person, is a very different matter to reaching an understanding about FBA with others. The first being primarily abstract has bracketed out human meanings, while the second is conceptual and situated and relational. FBA is a type of “pedagogical encounter” between facilitator and FBA team, and like other aspects of education it is, as Todd suggests, “a site of *implied*, rather than *applied* ethics” (2001, p. 437). In the context of FBA, in Todd's view this “means thinking about ethics *through* education” (ibid), or thinking about ethics *through* FBA. During “Skye's Escape” I came to see how the pre-determined understandings which the staff and I both brought to the situation in our different ways, lacked a suppleness that might have been required to apprehend what Aristotle refers to as “the ultimate particular” (1980/2009, p. 109). The new staff had categorized Skye as needing to be “brought into line,” and I was wedded to an ideal of action — implementing the support plan — which I was determined to follow through. At this time, we both lacked practical wisdom.

How did the situation reach such an impasse? How could staff understandings — and the support plan we had all agreed to — seemingly evaporate? Had a monocular focus on method blinded me to the evolving social landscape at Skye's school? Perhaps I expected staff meaning-making to follow a pre-set trajectory. What happened instead was that a community of educators continued an interpretive movement of which the school psychologist and I were both unaware. In our absence staff understandings did not stand still. In this respect, Jay Garfield might suggest that it was because all human beings are “both bearers of meaning and creative participants in

the set of meaning-bearing and meaning-determining practices that constitute the cultures and traditions in the context of which they live their lives” (Garfield, 2002, pp. 106-107). In other words, it is because we are socially situated, because we live and work within perpetually evolving communities that our interpretive horizons are always on the move. If the lifeworld is in a state of perpetual flux how could our interpretive horizons be static?

As illustrated in “Skye’s Escape,” understanding is unable to abstract itself from time. The evolution of our understanding is anything but linear and progressive. It seems more akin to finding and losing our way. Our understandings evolve but they can also dissolve. Understanding is conditioned by finitude and what Heidegger refers to as our “thrownness,” and our manner of “being-in-the-world,” which always involves our “*being delivered over*” (1953/1996, p. 127). Gadamer interprets this thrownness as the “unilluminable obscurity of our facticity” (1997, p. 328). For Gadamer, our facticity, our conditionedness, not only “sustains” our ontological possibilities but also “sets limits” (ibid).

Lacking awareness of my finitude, and over-confident with what I “knew” from Skye’s data, I was unable to see that understanding is “not so much an act of consciousness as a challenge that one comes up against,” and even more importantly, what Gadamer refers to as “a happening” (1997, p. 328). The temporal nature of understanding had eluded me. What I have since come to recognise is that understanding is more like an art installation than a permanent exhibition. As the school’s social context changed over time, so did staff understandings.

But the everyday language in regard to understanding, within which I am embedded, has an absence of temporal qualifiers. With no reference to time, a degree of permanence if not arrival, is perhaps suggested. For instance, we *come* to understand, we *reach* an understanding. But if my experience at Skye’s school is any indication, it would seem that understanding is not a destination. Our language may also suggest that the notion of understanding brings with it a sense of possession. For example, we might say, she has a good *grasp* of English, I *have* an understanding of what a sentence means, he *gets* it, he *acquired* his understandings over many years.

In Gadamer’s words, “*understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated*” (1975/1989, p. 291). Perhaps if I had conceived of understanding as being “constantly mediated” I might have avoided a pedagogical stumble. But at the time of “Skye’s Escape” my

view of understanding tended to be both solitary and static. In regard to my misconception that understanding is the activity of an individual person, Gadamer's careful linguistic distinction in the terms he uses for understanding are of interest. For example, Joel Weimsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, in the "Translator's Preface" to the second, revised edition of *Truth and Method*, note Gadamer's contrasting of the German *Verstehen* (understanding) and *Verständigung* ("coming to an understanding with someone" or "coming to an agreement with someone"), and *Einverständnis* ("understanding, agreement, consent"). This is contrasted with the less nuanced English notion of understanding ("a person understands something") (1975/1989, p. xvi).

I suggest that Gadamer's distinctions are significant. His choice of language ("coming"), suggests our understandings are always on their way, always in a state of becoming. Perhaps our English definition of understanding also puts us at something of a disadvantage. At Skye's school I was preoccupied with *my* understanding of the relationship of the "physiological and environmental factors that contribute to a person's problem behaviours" (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 2). I decreased the likelihood of reaching a shared understanding, of "coming to an agreement" with the others, because I felt I was already in possession of what I needed. Desperate to help Skye in what seemed an increasingly difficult situation, my actions at the time were most likely imbued with what Gadamer refers to as a sense of "advance lordship over all meaningfulness" (Gadamer, 2007f, p.363).

For Gadamer, our historicity implies that our understandings perpetually evolve within our interpretive horizons, which in turn are situated within tradition. Our understandings remain irresolvably unfinished. And if I accept that, as Taylor suggests, "Gadamer does not believe that the kind of knowledge that yields complete intellectual control over the object is attainable, even in principle, in human affairs" (Taylor, 2002, p. 281), I must also relinquish such a view in regard to FBA. My intellectual, procedural, methodological ways of knowing are both important *and* inadequate.

No matter how brilliant a facilitator's insights, observations and hypotheses, they are of limited value, if they mean little to those on an FBA team. A conception of understanding, for Gadamer, perhaps for this reason, "pushes toward a three-way relation: one person comes to an understanding with another about something they both understand. When two people

‘understand each other’ (*sich verstehen*), they always do with respect to something” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. xvi).

Again, to conclude this chapter, a selection of prejudices is explored below in Figure 4.3. While the content is intended to be considered in addition to prejudices listed in the previous chapters, it is hoped that it adds a layer of specificity to reflections which continue to emerge from this chapter’s narrative. One prejudice which has been raised in this chapter will be addressed in Chapter Six instead — the assumption that FBA is an inherently ethical act.

Figure 4.3 Eight Prejudices from Narrative Two – “*Skye Escapes*”

My Prejudices	Possible Questions
Once we understand something, we grasp it, we have it to keep.	<p>If I accept that my own understandings are on the move, why would I expect the understandings of others’ to be static?</p> <p>In what ways might a facilitator model a stance of questioning and reflecting, showing a continual movement of her own understandings?</p>
The act of coming to understand something is personal and individual.	<p>What might I need to attend to in communicating with others if I am to notice whether their understandings are heading them away from or toward FBA?</p> <p>In what ways might an absence of dialogue alter the trajectory of an FBA?</p>
Educators involved in positive behaviour support understand that FBA is only <i>one part</i> of a continuum of supports.	<p>What might I notice in myself and in the responses of others which could indicate I have slipped into a mode of trying to convince or persuade the other?</p> <p>If I need to withdraw from an FBA in order to avoid ontological violence, how might I open a conversation about this with the principal, team, or Regional Office?</p> <p>How might an FBA team be invited to reflect upon our social situatedness and its influence on the meanings we make?</p>
An FBA facilitator’s role is to guide and lead data collection.	<p>In what ways might I help an FBA team to build clarity about their values, intentions and goals, while respectfully acknowledging differing perspectives?</p> <p>In what ways might ‘pedagogical tact’ be evident in my responses, when a conflict emerges?</p>
Educators understand that behavioural change takes time.	<p>How might school induction processes or systemic professional learning cater for the needs of new staff, who arrive at a school already underway with PBS?</p> <p>In what ways might I invite an FBA team to generate their own questions about the student’s behaviour?</p>
Educators involved in PBS understand that social learning is more complex than academic learning.	<p>What might staff need to be familiar with before they can translate their questions into appropriate methods for data collection?</p> <p>What steps might a facilitator take to help all team members to feel comfortable participating in the data collection and collation process?</p>
Educators select practices according to their values, student needs and the currently available evidence-base.	<p>How might each team member be encouraged to enter a conversation which explores possible interpretations of their data?</p> <p>In what ways might team members be invited to reflect on the complexities, for all of us, in learning new behaviours?</p>

<p>Staff understand behaviour data when they are involved in collecting and analysing it.</p> <p>Data is powerful in changing people's perceptions and actions.</p> <p>When data is available, educators use it to make informed decisions.</p> <p>When an FBA team agrees on a plan, the team sets out to implement the plan.</p> <p>Responsibility to enact a function-based support plan rests with the educators who have day to day contact with the student.</p>	<p>In what ways might I invite staff to reflect with me, on our own stress responses and the way these shape our actions when outside our window of tolerance? What changes do we notice in ourselves and our own behaviour when we are within our window of tolerance?</p> <p>How might I help staff to reflect on the power of tradition in our emotional responses to problem behaviours?</p> <p>In what ways might staff be invited to support each other when they are outside of their window of tolerance and about to react to a student's behaviour?</p> <p>What steps might school leaders take to build a culture which is committed to both academic learning <i>and</i> social and emotional learning for all students and staff in their care?</p> <p>In what ways might I model a decision-making framework which is guided by legal, ethical and empirical considerations?</p> <p>How might I invite staff to develop their own framework by which to make decisions?</p> <p>How might I help staff build fluency in developing support plans which include ways to <i>prevent</i> the problem behaviour from occurring, ways to <i>teach</i> appropriate replacement behaviour(s) which meets the same need as the problem behaviour, and ways to <i>reinforce</i> the new behaviour?</p> <p>In what ways might I encourage an FBA team to respectfully explore differences in views about appropriate actions?</p> <p>In what ways might I help a team to reflect on the rationale for their decisions?</p> <p>How might my pedagogical tact influence an FBA team's capacity to independently enact their support plan?</p> <p>How might I gauge the degree of support a school requires to implement its support plan?</p> <p>How might I help foster a community of inquiry where FBA team members trust each other enough to openly and respectfully disagree with each other's views?</p> <p>How might I invite a team to share the barriers to implementing their plan, so these learnings can be harnessed for the benefit of others?</p> <p>In what ways might educational systems help schools to maintain a focus on whole school approaches, so they have a firm foundation for FBA?</p>
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Taylor, in his chapter "Understanding the Other" (2002, pp. 280-281) provides some further explanations about why staff understandings shifted so significantly in regard to Skye. He suggests three key features of understanding, none of which fit with "our classical model of knowing an object" (2002, pp. 280-281). Taylor's first point is that understandings are bilateral. A bilateral view of understanding encompasses a notion of reciprocity, where I may need to "give some ground in my objectives" (2002, p. 281). Such a view of understanding also suggests it is important to relinquish a sense of control, "or else I am engaging in a sham designed to manipulate my partner while pretending to negotiate" (ibid). Was this what I was doing at Skye's school?

For Taylor, the intention of understandings which are bilateral is to move towards a place where we not only talk but also listen, and are “able in some way to function together with the partner” (ibid). This would also seem a prerequisite for any functioning FBA team. But what is challenging in Taylor’s definition of bilateral understanding, is that it calls for an openness to the other which “may require that I redefine what I am aiming at” (ibid). Such a notion of understanding brings with it an ethical intentionality.

For a limited time, with the first FBA team, the type of understanding which guided my action at Skye’s school, held a sense of reciprocity. As time passed, and new staff arrived, I reverted to a unilateral approach. Interestingly, my regression to what was a more familiar way of being — and the tradition I was raised in — paralleled the educators’ reversion to more punitive approaches. At the very time which I thought they had lost their ethical bearings, I was equally ethically disoriented.

Taylor’s second defining feature is that understandings are party-dependent (Taylor, 2002, p. 281). That is, our conversational partners actively affect the meanings we make and our interpretive horizons. Context affects meaning. As Taylor puts it “we come to understandings with certain definitive interlocutors. These will not necessarily serve when we come to deal with others” (ibid, p.281). While I could understand how new staff held different understandings, I particularly struggled to apprehend how the same class teacher’s views could change so significantly.

What took me by surprise at Skye’s school, was the realisation that “even our present partners may not remain the same. Their life situation or goals may change and the understanding may be put into question” (ibid). Taylor would perhaps challenge our need for behaviour support plans in which we define the actions each staff member agrees to. Indeed he suggests that we use such “binding agreements and contracts ... precisely because we see that what constitutes perfect and unconstrained mutual understanding at one time may no longer hold good later” (Taylor, 2002, p. 280).

The third aspect Taylor describes is that understanding “involves revising goals” (ibid). And this is unsurprising if we consider the preceding two points. If I am open to the other and listen mindfully to what is said, it is possible, even likely, that my perspective will change. Had I been present at the time the second FBA team’s understandings began to evolve, and entered into conversation with them, it is unlikely I could have maintained a prejudice that understanding is

solitary or static. Through entering a dialogue with the team, I imagine that at least some of my prejudices would have been “brought into play by being put at risk” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 299).

But perhaps at this time, in this situation, I had more in common with those naturalists who could not see the platypus for what it was. My prejudices about what was important in the situation were so strong that I was unable to take in what was visible before me. To borrow some words from Gadamer, I needed to realise that, like understanding, FBA is not “a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge” (1975/1989, p. 309). On the contrary, “being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. *Understanding proves to be an event*” (ibid). The behavioural tradition passed down to the new group of staff was clearly quite different to that which the first FBA team had inherited. In other words, the enabling prejudices or forestructures of meaning essential to the interpretive act of FBA were simply not present with the second team.

I wonder in what ways Taylor’s three key features of understanding might enhance my future practice of FBA? Might they help to restore aspects which have become lost in a tradition, weighted toward one way of knowing, one way of making meaning? Were we able to embody such nuanced interpretations of our understandings, as bilateral, party-dependent and involving revising our goals, what difference might it have made for Skye? Would I have gained a “more comprehensive account” of understanding, that “would tell more about human beings and their possibilities,” and would allow “more human beings to understand each other and to come to undistorted understandings” (Taylor, 2002, p. 289)? Would I have been more open to the situation, aware of the extent to which we are both “thoroughly entangled” (Malpas, 2002, p. 199) and alive within our interpretive horizons which are always on the move? What if I had perceived understanding as temporal, conditioned and situated, and had waited and recognised the unique, ethical nature of what was called for in each moment?

In this chapter I have reflected on FBA’s ethical demands and relational complexities in the lifeworld. I have considered the power of prejudice in regard to FBA and also the challenges which arose in a team in with varied prejudices. My notion of understanding has been restructured to acknowledge temporality and also to incorporate the other. Next, I develop a

theme already introduced. It concerns the relationship between language, understanding and action within the context of a particular FBA.

## Chapter 5

### Behavioural Science, Language and Agency

In this chapter I draw connections between the language with which we think about FBA and the manner in which we embody our understandings. I consider some linguistic distinctions between the traditions of behavioural science and education, and question the notion of behavioural consultant as “expert.” In addition, I propose an alternative to conceiving of FBA as “process” in an effort to retrieve agency from behavioural technology, and to restore it to human subjects.

In the narrative below, “An Obsession With Method,” there may be glimpses of openness to self, to the other and to the situation. Perhaps the most confronting aspect of the narrative is how conditioned I had become, how unquestioning. For instance, why was it that even when overwhelmed by a heavy workload, I was reluctant to trust the efficacy of assistance from others? If I consciously wished for team-based FBA, where tasks were distributed, why did I find it so difficult to share the work? In what ways might I have perpetuated a tradition which is characterised by division between consultants and educators?

#### **Narrative Three: “An obsession with method”**

Exhausted. Frustrated. Weighed down. Student files pile up, layer upon layer on my desk. The things I said I’d do, but haven’t yet done ... . The previous meeting’s momentum now lost. And here, another request for another FBA. An opportunity to try something different? A necessity to do something different.

It's a full room. And this is only the pre-meeting meeting. Three rose buds on short stems fill a tiny vase on the principal's desk. Top-heavy, one has toppled out. Today the purpose is two-fold, first, to surface my assumptions about the FBA process and ensure that the group's beliefs about behaviour are aligned. Second, to clarify processes with the principal, senior staff, consultants and school psychologist. Today it's all about our behaviour, how we'll work together. In particular, it's about highlighting one assumption critical for the FBA process. I pass around the handout I've created, titled 'Helpful Assumptions.'

Having heard that people think you're saying something more profound if you speak slowly, I try this. I look at each staff member, occasionally pausing.

'Unless we believe that all behaviour is purposeful — that there's a reason for the student's behaviour — we are in effect asking staff to set out in search of something that they don't believe exists.' They nod. I will try this approach again.

'That's really important,' the principal says.

We move on. Introductions, any new items for the agenda, handouts about definitions of challenging behaviour, a one page overview of the FBA process. I remind myself to explain each step, state the relevance of each handout, what it's about and why we're using it. Don't assume it's obvious. I pass around my draft FBA action plan.

'The purpose of this is to give everyone a sense of where we're going during the FBA process.' What was different about this? It was the inclusion of what I'd naïvely avoided in the past — clarification about assumptions, roles and responsibilities. I was not about to make the same mistake twice — the assumption that good communication would be enough.

Now for the second part. The ground rules. What if it seems condescending? Clarifying roles and responsibilities might look like I don't trust them to have this in place already. But I have to try doing something different, and better. Surely I've learnt from my earlier experiences that I can't afford to launch out with a new FBA team, only to find the principal has to leave meetings early to do bus duty, that the teacher is about to go on leave for three months. And I have to avoid giving the impression that they can abdicate responsibility and leave it all to me. I don't want another email saying, 'I look forward to *you* [my italics] using the data to find a solution that will make everyone's life more enriched.' You? *Who* will be using the data? But I was also pleased that the email reflected

an understanding of person-centred planning and the purpose of positive behaviour support — increasing quality of life. We work through the roles and responsibilities, point by point.

'The case manager?' I ask, thinking let's start with something simple. There is a pause. The silence continues. Jo, the support teacher, looks to the school psychologist. The psychologist looks to the consultant.

'Well, Jo, that'd be you wouldn't it?' the principal says.

'Ah, yes, um ... I can do that.'

If Jo is only just agreeing to take this role, who has been coordinating things so far? I don't like talking about a person as a 'case,' must start using 'support coordinator' instead.

Now comes the responsibilities part.

'The reason the roles and responsibilities section looks obsessive is that I've been struggling to keep up with things. I know I'm not getting back to schools quickly enough emailing the meeting notes and actions. I'm aware I need to address this. So, here's my attempt to improve things.' They seem ok with this.

'But even more importantly, the people who gather the data need to be the ones to find the patterns. If they understand the patterns they can then develop a support plan. I used to get excited taking away the data and finding the patterns. But how does that help? I could develop a brilliant,' I smile, 'function-based support plan which no-one likes the look of, and doesn't fit your context.' The principal nods a little more vigorously than I expect.

I continue, 'I'll be a guide to the FBA process, but it's your understandings that we'll use to develop the support plan. The ideas will be yours, using your knowledge of your school.' Is Jo, the support teacher looking disappointed? Had she wanted to hand the responsibility over to me?

We're deciding who'll be responsible for different aspects of the FBA process, using the new action plan. Hopefully it'll help to distribute the inquiry process and, the workload. Then it comes to the next item on the plan — analysing old school data.

'The records review?'

The support teacher, Jo, whose role it is to oversee the keeping of such records speaks.

'I could have a go at that.'

I balk at the offer. What if she misses key information? Has Jo ever done this before? Would she know how to record it? How ridiculous. This is precisely what I want to happen — school teams working more independently.

'It doesn't matter which way you record things,' I say, thinking that it does. I explain that 'I usually tally the target behaviour according to days of the week, build lists of antecedents and consequences. Then you can see, for example, that seventy-five percent of the times the target behaviour happened on a Monday, or that the student had a relief teacher, or had maths, or whatever. And when you look at the maintaining consequences, at least fifty per cent of the time the student was relocated to the assistant principal's office.'

'It'd be good to work with someone,' Jo responds.

I've put her off. I can see it. She's anxious she mightn't do it the way I want. But she might find an even better way. And then we'd have another method. She might even design a good template for recording the information. I've devalued her contribution, increased a model of dependence, reinforced an 'expert' model. I've devalued teacher expertise.

'It'd be great to have both the teacher *and* psychologist insights...' I say.

Tonight I must email Jo, thank her for the offer, and invite her to share her findings at the next meeting. Yes, I need to show that I value her contribution, in front of the whole team.

### ***Deficient modes of concern***

The FBA described in the narrative above shifted my attention from the doing of FBA to the importance of being. That is, I could no longer perceive correct method as something inherently ethical or even neutral. For me, method had become a means of obscuring my vision of the ethical implications of what Ricoeur refers to as the “ontological density” (1981, p. 131) of the lifeworld. Only through writing the narrative and reflecting on the writings of others have I reached a sense of perspective. To borrow David Parker's words, I have been able to recover a sense of being, as “a self in moral space” (2007, p. 105).

Parker orients himself to the ethical, not by diminishing the doing of “right action” but suggests that what we do is “is only part of the broader ethical domain” (ibid, p.2). To the question of “What is it right to do?” he suggests we must add the more encompassing question of “What is it good to be?” (ibid). In the context of FBA I interpret this second question to stretch my self-understandings. Not only might I assess the value of an FBA in terms of its efficacy (results, outcomes, increased quality of life, improvements in student behaviour measurable by data), but also according to how it is experienced by those who enact it. On Parker’s view then, the good of an FBA must take in both an ethics of doing and an ethics of being. This is radical thinking when we consider that a tradition which has typically been preoccupied with outcomes, graphs and the language of scientific experiment. Parker is suggesting that we attend to both the ends and the means of our actions.

What emerged from this chapter’s narrative was a sense that FBA involves a “pedagogical encounter” (Todd, 2001). Perhaps FBA at its most ethical is like a dance of reciprocity, where each party flows with the movement of the other. Each person is in-step together. But what happened in “An Obsession With Method” was different. I invited a partner onto the dance floor, then before she had the chance to dance, manoeuvred her to sit back down. Why? I had spotted what appeared to be a more competent partner. Yet again, in this narrative, I struggled to juggle the different forms of openness to the other. What also emerged was the importance of openness to the self as a predicate of openness to the other.

For Heidegger, our daily modes of “everyday Being-with-one-another” move “between the two extremes of positive solicitude — that which leaps in and dominates and that which leaps forth and liberates [*vorspringenden-befreunden*]” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 159). The delicate balancing act of doing enough to support and not so much that I take over, is a challenge the magnitude of which I believe has not been adequately explored. And it is not even as simple as weighing up whether to do more or less, so much as a question of how to be. How can I be with others in ways that will lead to their inviting me to share what is essentially *their* inquiry? This precarious situation sometimes disintegrates completely when FBA is imposed.

To enact our work as educators requires a social context. Our being as educators is necessarily bound up in our being toward the many forms of other that we encounter. And if Heidegger is correct, in the main, we interact in the “deficient modes of concern” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 114). That is our “everyday and average being-with-one-another” is characterised by “Being for-, against-, or without-one-another, passing-one-another-by, not-mattering-to-one-another” (ibid). My suggestion that the support teacher leave the data review to the school psychologist might be

interpreted as a moment of “passing-one-another-by” (ibid). At that moment my mode of concern was one which “dominated” and “displaced” the other (ibid). In a sense my narrative is a reminder about what can happen when a facilitator is too determined to use “correct” method.

Two ironies came to my attention. First, my overt ethical intention of helping the student and staff through FBA, at the moment of displacing the support teacher, became a moment of pedagogical violence. That is, FBA gave me no formula by which to ethically navigate the specificities of the situation. FBA may show us *what* to do but its epistemological frame constrains it from guiding us with a wisdom of *how*. And if the ethical aspects of a situation are only brought to light through the *particular*, is there is any epistemology upon which we can rely? As Todd reminds us, it is difficult “to make ethics programmatic” (2001, p. 436). Drawing on Levinas, she defines ethics as being rooted in “non-violent relationship to the other, in the particular relation the Self has to another person” (ibid).

The second irony lies in a lack of coherence between my reactions to two circumstances described in the narrative. On the one hand I felt that the teacher’s email suggested that the FBA was work that I would do, not the staff. And this irritated me. I sensed that staff longed for a recipe and perhaps also, for a cook. On the other hand, when the support teacher offered her support, I hesitated, reluctant to trust her potential agency. At the same time that I wanted educators to see themselves as leading characters in a narrative of their students’ behavioural transformation, I found myself editing them out. What I was missing was a sense of openness to the other which trusted educators’ potential efficacy to create the changes they hoped for. What was required was a form of “authentic care,” a type of solicitude which “helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free* for it” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 115).

But being aware of Heidegger’s positive and negative forms of solicitude has not made my work easier. What it has given me is a language with which to hold my thoughts, to anticipate how my emotional responses may affect what I do and say, and to increase self-understanding. I cannot claim to be fluent in “leaping forth” as there are times when I still twitch with an urge to “leap in” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p.115). What has changed? I am conscious of the need for constant self-monitoring and ongoing alertness. In practice, perhaps this means a continual internal dialogue, a capacity to keep questioning, to anticipate habits of thought and action and to respond more mindfully.

I will not re-imagine my way back into the narrative to provide alternative endings to illustrate more ethical ways of being. Rather, following the pattern of Chapters Three and Four, I attempt

to weave such ethical imaginings into the questions in Figure 5. In summary, the tradition of behaviour consultant passed down to me, was lop-sided in its distribution of agency. An FBA facilitator's role was to review records, observe, interview, collate data, summarise findings, negotiate a support plan, monitor the plan's implementation, graph and interpret behavioural data, recommend adjustments and deliver professional learning where needed. Re-reading the previous sentence I cannot help but notice the string of verbs, and who is doing the doing. While I do not wish to deny the existence of expertise and knowledge in the field of behavioural science, I have come to question what I understand to be an inherent imbalance in such a model.

To what extent do educators feel affirmed in *their* knowledge and understandings of the student? Do they believe that they have received adequate professional learning to follow through with the support plan? Will they feel more confident and competent to do the next FBA? How often might we unintentionally decrease rather than increase educators' feelings of agency, by "leaping in" (ibid) and displacing the other?

### **The problem of "experts"**

I now wish to broaden the questions above to ask which elements of FBA tradition might increase our vulnerability to moments of pedagogical violence. Rather than consider examples from the narrative "An Obsession With Method" and FBA literature separately, I will briefly bring the two together into a single discussion. In particular, I seek to understand forms of dominance which may be evident in behavioural consultant practice. I do not mean to imply that these might be conscious acts of excluding or diminishing the other. Rather, I suggest that our passion to help, our knowledge of what is possible and our sense of hope for a student, makes us more susceptible to using educators as a means to an end. Lack of openness to the other takes many forms. And I want to be better at recognising its disguises.

One of the potential problems can be summed up in the questions, who conducts the FBA? And, who implements the function-based support plan? The difficulties underlying such questions are highlighted in a review of one hundred functional assessment articles, published between 1980 and 1999, where Ervin, Radford, et al. note the following three points. First, "a general concern with the ability and/or willingness of school personnel to conduct F[B]A" (2001, p. 194). Second, the majority of FBAs were conducted in segregated settings such as special schools (ibid, p. 198). Their third observation was that in roughly half the functional analyses, the "experimenter," *without assistance from others*, was the person to conduct the assessment (ibid, p. 201).

The study does not make clear the reasons for lack of staff involvement in FBA. But in such findings I hear echoes of my own experiences. As described in “An Obsession With Method,” I brought a similar prejudice to the school about the solo nature of a behavioural consultant’s work. When I received the teacher’s email, it appeared that my prejudice was shared. But this was a misinterpretation which arose from a misunderstanding. I mistook the teacher’s eagerness for my assistance, as not wanting to take responsibility. I now believe the teacher feared being left alone to learn a new approach. The meta-analysis mentioned above would suggest that such an interpretation might be possible, if not likely. The authors note that having completed their assessment, behavioural consultants typically had little role in applying function-based support plans. Unsurprisingly, they found that “school personnel were the individuals most often involved in the implementation of interventions, and they typically did so without reported assistance” (Ervin, Radford, et al., 2001, p. 203).

The research quoted above suggests a style of FBA which brings a limited need to negotiate with the other. Even the term “experimenter” — rather than psychologist, consultant or facilitator — reflects an honouring of the methodological above the pedagogical. Admittedly, this was in the context of functional analysis. But it is interesting to note that the words experiment, empiric and expert all share the same Greek root, *peirao*. Using the term “experimenter” to describe the person who conducts an FBA, I suggest, conveys an inappropriate distancing, an interaction between objects not subjects. If FBA has developed a tradition where consultants are the “experimenters,” have they also become the arbiters of who enters the shared space of inquiry? Are we anxious that a novice will ruin our results? Or is methodological pride, perhaps, a more honourable symptom of what Siegel refers to as the eagerness of helping professionals to “be able to predict outcomes and to help others” (2010, p. 56)?

In addition, Siegel notes how “we strive to be certain about the skills we’ve acquired, the facts we’ve learned, the approach we’ve been taught, the strategy we’ve come to believe in” (ibid). In this chapter’s narrative I had faith in an FBA method I had inherited, and was anxious to see it used. Perhaps if I had inquired into the support teacher’s method I would have been relieved, even eager to see something new. But I did not ask. I had experienced the efficacy of the FBA method I inherited. It was familiar and I felt competent and confident using it. I also understood, from conversations with the principal that staff were feeling burnt out and claims for sick leave were increasing. There was a lot to lose.

Again, Siegel provides an apt *riposte* to my thoughts when he observes that “controlling outcomes of knowledge in certain ways is counter to what the clinical encounter entails” (ibid). In

the case of FBA, when we try to control an outcome, are we actually controlling the other? Might openness to the other also bring with it an implied openness to new methods and alternative approaches? Might openness to the other, especially multiple others, require that we cease managing and controlling and start listening and participating? Perhaps opening to the other, in Smaling's words, invites us to negotiate a balanced communication where our "sending" and "receiving" modes form a kind of "communicative symmetry" (1995, p. 28).

Nancy Weiss, in the forward to Larry Douglass's book *Respectful Relationships and Effective Teaching: Understanding Challenging Behaviours of Persons with Disabilities* (2005), writes of the power imbalance when we try to change the behaviour of others. She joins Douglass in challenging us to consider the subtle and not so subtle ways that our behaviour communicates the message that "I'm in charge and you're not" (2005, p. xiii). While Weiss and Douglass advocate here for people with disabilities, we could apply the same line of thinking to the power imbalance of consultants and educators, or educators and parents. The challenge then, is to let our actions, as well as our words, communicate the messages of "I understand you; I value and enjoy you; I care about you; I hear what you are conveying through your actions" (Nancy R Weiss in Douglass, 2005, p. xiii). The challenge is to remain open to the other.

In this light, van Manen's notion of pedagogical tact is even more vital. How many overwhelmed teachers are likely to invest in a solution which even the literature describes as "specialized, effortful, and complicated" (Ingram et al., 2005, p. 234)? Our forestructures of understanding are critical. In a sense there is a circularity here. Forestructures shape understanding and, understanding shapes our forestructures. As Gadamer puts it, "working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed 'by the things' themselves, is the constant task of understanding" (1975/1989, p. 270). In practice, this means that the way I speak about FBA in schools, the way it is introduced and people's earliest experiences of it, are paramount. Accordingly, I write to increase my awareness, the degree of mindfulness with which I approach others in relation to FBA.

A second problem is a tradition which holds that an external observer of a student's behaviour will bring a greater objectivity. For example, when talking about the *Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff*, otherwise known as the *FACTS* (March et al., 2000), a psychologist from another agency once said to me, "Don't you think there's real value in having an external observer? We often find they come up with completely different conclusions to the teacher." I reflected. This may well be so. But is it not also a fiction that an outsider brings no pre-judgements? Such a view holds that a person new to a situation, being emotionally detached and bringing "fresh eyes"

to a situation is more likely to perceive events accurately. From this perspective consultants or external observers are privileged in at least two ways. First, by being “outside” the situation, their observations are at risk of being automatically deemed to be more pertinent than an educator’s, regardless of their veracity. Second, if we hold that an objective view of a student’s behaviour exists, and this view is attainable through correct method, then some may grasp it and others might miss it entirely.

While an external observer may have a silent, internal dialogue, a school-based FBA team, knowing they will need to implement a function-based support plan together, also know they need to participate in dialogue to develop a satisfactory plan. After all, how sustainable is the implementation of a plan which depends on a behaviour consultant’s presence to implement it? I am conscious that, as Gadamer says, tradition “is always part of us” (1975/1989, p. 283), and perhaps an external observer brings, in the behaviourist tradition, a “prestige of authority” (ibid, p. 280).

I wonder, if a psychologist, not an educator, observes a student, who does the thinking? Whose understanding is required to write observations, to reflect on the behaviour’s meaning? In the case of antecedent, behaviour, consequence analysis, the observer lifts and moves her pen from column to column, physically embodying an understanding of (A) antecedent, leading to (B) behaviour, being reinforced by (C) consequence.

Does an expert observer necessarily lead to better outcomes than a team who know the student from hours, weeks, even years of observations? The team can record problem behaviours as they occur, or, retrospectively, reflecting on observations. While a case can be put for the role of both local knowledge and external, expert observation, one thing has become clear to me. It is best for the person who collects the data to use the data. In other areas of the curriculum this is standard practice. A support teacher will release a class teacher so he can do a numeracy assessment with a student who is struggling. It is no longer considered helpful for a numeracy specialist to do the assessment and hand back the results to the class teacher to develop a program. The pedagogy of assessment is now more subtle. Educational theorists such as Lorna Earl and Steven Katz have advocated for a more a pedagogically attuned view of assessment (2006).

Closely focused observation of a student during assessment increases an educator’s awareness of how to guide and support learning. It can be a moment to develop a more attuned pedagogical relationship with the student. If such an approach to assessment is now considered appropriate in curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy, why not in social learning? As I explore in Chapter

Six, the very act of data collection and collation can alter educators' understandings. The act of assessing can be one of learning for both educator and student.

A further potential difficulty with experts arises if we accept the common prejudice that emotion is the undoing of the rational. Such a view is evident in research where only the dark side of the subjective is described in teachers' "impulse," "anger" and "retribution" (Morin & Battalio, 2004, p. 252). In schools we might hear the prejudice against the subjective in comments such as "He's too close to the situation," or "She needs to distance herself." While these statements might well be appropriate to a *particular* situation, to generalise the position into a form of propositional knowledge, concluding that partiality, involvement and empathy are *always* problematic, seems unwise. Where does such a view leave a passionate and caring educator, in a hierarchy of knowing?

As an alternative to such a view, let us take the example of my experience one lunchtime with a student called David. I was a new teacher to the special school and had the benefit of working with teacher aides who were experienced, compassionate and wise. Dee was particularly familiar with David, as she worked both in our class each day and also sometimes at a local respite service, where David occasionally spent weekends. This particular lunchtime David began to hit his forehead against the table. David had severe autism and at this time, no verbal or symbolic means of expressive communication. As a newcomer to the school my understanding of what led to David's sudden distress was limited. The most I could do was to quickly insert my cradled hands between the table and his head while I called for a cushion.

What shed light on the situation was Dee's intimate understanding of David's preferences and routines. Dee knew David was used to a daily hot roast lunch packed by his mother. Noticing that respite had given him a lovely, but cold packed lunch, she quickly heated a tin of spaghetti. David stopped, calmed and ate. In David's moment of distress, no amount of my theoretical knowledge could help me to assist him. Being new to David I struggled to make meaning from the clues before me. I was instantly and desperately questioning what might calm him, but the newness to the situation meant I lacked the necessary background to interpret his behaviour. What Dee's actions illustrate is that at times, closeness to the situation and to the person we are trying to assist, is precisely what is required. Further, were we to reject the possibility of an absolute, objective knowledge, it would seem that sometimes what we have, even with finite knowledge, is enough.

If the anecdote above shows the potential value of subjectivity, I also suggest that a tradition of objectivism, has perhaps made me more vulnerable to moments of pedagogical violence. To relinquish a view of objectivity is not at all to give up the rigour of science, but rather to

acknowledge that there are “epistemic situations where we know that enough is enough even though we also know that we do not have, epistemically speaking, everything we might imagine” (Wachterhauser, 2002, p.71). I do not wish to devalue the enormous contribution of behavioural science. On the contrary, it is my passion for learning and working in this field which propels my inquiry. What I want is to reconfigure my orientation to FBA. Together with Lakoff and Johnson, I hold that

one can believe that objectivist models can have a function — even an important function — in the human sciences without adopting the objectivist premise that there is an objectivist model that completely and accurately fits the world as it really is. (1980/2003, p. 219)

As described earlier, our prejudices may be either positive or negative, but they are an inescapable aspect of human finitude and situated life. While some would argue that a subjective view is of limited value, in contrast, Malpas interprets Gadamer’s view of finitude, “that is, our prior involvement and partiality, not as a barrier to understanding, but rather as its enabling condition” (2009, p. 7). For Gadamer, all acts of understanding are circumscribed, because “understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event” (1975/1989, p. 299). Acceptance of our “historically effected consciousness” (1975/1989, p. 336) need not be problematic. As Wachterhauser put it, “a standpoint is precisely a point from which we *see* and not a point from which we are necessarily blinded” (2002, p.73). And I would suggest that by acknowledging that we each have a standpoint, we can temper any potential for *epistemic* pride and even bring a humility to our knowing. This is not to say that all views will be assessed as equally valid, but that by recognising our finitude we will stay open and curious in our ongoing search for understanding.

A further challenge for FBA facilitators working in schools is that of paradigm mismatch. FBA literature began with establishing methodological credibility, reliability and validity in clinical settings. Rather than continue down this same path, one of the new directions it has taken is application to more typical contexts, such as homes, community and school settings (Carr et al., 2002, p. 13). But having moved FBA from clinical settings into educational contexts, is it possible that we have detached it from its tradition and language? Have schools been left with a method without a philosophy, a technique without a history? And to what extent might the language of FBA perpetuate an apparent division between consultants and educators?

## Distinctions in language

The briefest survey of FBA literature reveals the language of behaviour science in terms such as stimulus, response and hypothesis. Graphs summarise data. Emphasis is on effectiveness, efficiency and methodological rigour (Scott et al., 2004). While such concepts may not be foreign, for some educators aspects of the language and interpretive framework of FBA may be unfamiliar. Indeed, Crone and Horner suggest that “a function-based approach to individual behaviour support will be a new approach to behaviour management for most schools and most behaviour teams” (2003, p.96). Perhaps this is particularly so in the context of this study, where it has been rare for undergraduate teachers to receive more than an occasional guest lecture on the topic of supporting individuals with challenging behaviour.

The situation is further complicated when we consider that the same language may convey different meanings within the contexts of behavioural science and education. For instance, to an educator the term “consequence” may be synonymous with a disciplinary action or punishment. This is evident when teachers talk about responding to problem behaviours with “natural consequences” and “logical consequences.” Whereas to someone immersed in behavioural science, “consequence” means the result of a behaviour, which could *either* be experienced by the person who engages in that behaviour, as negative *or* positive (Alberto & Troutman, 2003, p. 19). For example, the consequence of a student who pokes pencils up his nose to impersonate a walrus, may be peer laughter, complaints and groans. Here, used in the behavioural sense, the consequence — peer attention — may be experienced by the student as positive.

I do not mean to imply that educational and behavioural traditions share no language or concepts in common. As Elizabeth St. Pierre suggests, a positivist tradition dominates many domains of research (2012, p. 484). Rather, I wish to observe differences between pedagogical and behavioural traditions, as reflected in their use of language. For example, I once started writing a list of behavioural terms I came across when reading FBA research. It was a long list and finding an article written by educators was difficult. Terms like non-aversive, non-contingent, positive and negative reinforcement, acronyms like FACTS, PBQ, PTR and MAS became vocabulary I was unaware I was even using.

How then might teachers feel when reading terms such as “PND and PZD metrics” and “treatment efficacy” (Shrogen & Faggella-Luby, 2004, p. 229)? Methodological rigour is vital in FBA research and I do not mean to imply otherwise. What I wish to highlight is a frequent misalignment between systemic expectations that educators engage with FBA (Goh & Bambara,

2012, p. 272), and the provision of a literature which supports their understandings. Where in the FBA literature are the voices of educators who spend their days leading and implementing function-based support plans? Are we still in the process of building an educational tradition of FBA, with a language and literature written by and for educators? Might we be able to develop a shared conceptual space, with a common language which we can all speak and understand?

The need for educators to understand the values and principles of a function-based approach, if not of a full FBA, seems essential in today's schools for reasons both pragmatic and ethical. Not only is it considered a key approach for approximately one to five per cent of a school's students with significant social learning needs, its efficacy is grounded in "a half century of experimental research" (Gable, Park & Scott, 2014, p.111). This view is reinforced by Goh and Bambara's meta-analysis of eighty-three studies of school-based FBA, which indicates the power of function-based interventions to "effectively reduce problem behaviour of students and increase their use of appropriate skills" (2012, p. 279). If the practice of FBA is recognised as holding such potential to change students' lives, do we not — as educational systems and individuals — have an ethical obligation to enact it?

In the United States, the answer to this question has clearly been 'Yes!' Schools have been legally required since the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) to use FBA when students are at risk of a change in school placement due to problem behaviour (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 272). In Australian educational jurisdictions, at the time of writing this study, the use of FBA remains a matter of choice.

In addition to distinctions in language between the traditions of educators and behavioural specialists, is a further difference in the attribution of agency. For instance, comments made at the end of FBA articles, often under the heading "limitations," are nearly always to do with research design or method. Is it possible though, that our being human, our finitude, might also contribute to the limitations of what we are able to do? Through writing this study I am repeatedly drawn to question the ways in which my own choice of language and disposition might affect others' experiences of FBA. In short, after "An Obsession With Method," I began to reflect more deeply on my own mode of being with the other.

If tradition includes language and language affects how we conceptualise things, I could no longer assume that behavioural language was a tool I could simply pick up and put down as a matter of choice. One example of the power of language is the way in which the term behaviour has, over time, been diminished. From its fifteenth century meaning, "to hold oneself in a certain

respect” (Hoad, 2003, p. 37), its connotations have evolved, no doubt influenced by B.F. Skinner’s *Science and Human Behaviour* (1953).

Today, in the context of FBA and also within common usage, “behaviour” has come to mean “an observable pattern of actions, a response to a stimulus,” and people are considered “objects” of observation (Brown, 1993, p. 207). In this chapter’s narrative I sense that I slipped into a mode of being where I perceived the FBA team, including the support teacher, to be objects. Yet again, the power of tradition startled me. My conscious intention was to invite, encourage and affirm the team’s work. Yet something quite different occurred. What interests me now is to consider elements in the tradition of FBA which may have, at least to some degree, influenced my response.

One possibility is that I inherited a tradition of an “expert” who leads the assessment. It seems to me that the term expert appears with surprising regularity in FBA literature (Carr et al., 2002, p. 127; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015, p. 91). Even with a strong emphasis on the importance of teaming in FBA, could it be possible that the way in which the tradition understands the role of experts, has influenced my openness to the other? A data-base search using ProQuest, at the time of writing this study, using the search terms “functional behavior assessment” and “expert” yields 48, 638 results compared with a search for “functional behavior assessment” and “team,” with 47, 817 results. The difference is more marked when using Google Scholar, where the figures are over a million results for FBA and expert, and only 742, 000 for FBA and team. It is perhaps unwise to interpret such results as anything more than a snapshot in time. Such data does suggest though, a tradition permeated by the notion of expert.

I suggest that a question which largely remains unasked by the research, is how have participants experienced FBA? To some extent this may reflect the fact that there are not too many participants to ask. And this is problematic when we consider that a support plan — even if written by one person — in a school context, is best implemented by a team.

In a review of one hundred and eleven studies focusing on critical features of positive behaviour support, including functional behaviour assessment, Martha Snell, Mary Voorhees and Li-Yuan Chen state that

ten of the 111 studies reported involvement of either special or general educators with parents in assessment; only one study reported all three (Dunlap & Fox, 1999). Six of the 111 studies reported involvement of either special or general educators with parents in PBS planning or implementation; only one study reported all three (Dunlap & Fox, 1999). Other critical team members such as the person with the disability, peers,

paraprofessionals, and related service providers were included infrequently. (2005, p. 145)

And who is likely to spend the most time with the young person who is at the centre of the FBA? I would suggest parents, peers and educators. Precisely those who Snell et al., describe as often omitted. It is not surprising, then, to learn that “reports of teaming were also infrequent” (Snell et al., 2005, p. 146). Whether this accurately reflects a paucity of collaborative practice, or that existing examples are not reported in the literature is unclear. Yet, it might lead us to ask if FBA tradition passes down to us a practice which risks obscuring the other. And if, for Gadamer, “understanding is accommodation of the Other” (Lawn, 2006, p. 70), inheriting a tradition with an often absent other raises some concerns.

How many function-based support plans have been written by one person and yet must be implemented by many? In the lifeworld, FBA requires a collective effort, melding each team member’s observations and insights into shared understandings and shared actions. The importance of collaborative practice in FBA is well established in the literature (Crone & Horner, 2003, p. 96; Goh & Bambara, 2012, p. 80). Further to the rationale discussed elsewhere for teaming, I wish to acknowledge the importance of what Bohm refers to as “coherent” and “collective thought,” the strength of which he likens to the powerful light of a laser (2004, p. 16). I wonder if this sense of a team’s collective wisdom — which perhaps echoes Gadamer’s notion of understanding as agreement (Grondin, 2002, p.39) — will one day be more visible in FBA tradition.

The idea of “collective thought” requires participation of multiple others which is difficult in a tradition which has reportedly excluded participants’ voices (Marchant et al., 2013, p. 228). Marchant et al., make a strong case for the claim that “despite repeated recommendations to evaluate social validity, researchers continue to overlook this important source of data and fail to report information regarding social validity” (ibid). Put simply, their findings indicate that the voice of those who experience FBA — students, parents and educators — frequently remains unheard.

This brings us to the challenge of contextual fit which has been described as “the fit between the behaviour support plan and the values, skills, resources, and routines of the people who will carry out the plan” (Crone & Horner, 2003, p. 60). Issues of contextual fit have arisen with frustrating regularity in school settings where there has, at times, been a distinct lack of purchase with FBA practices (Gable, Park & Scott, 2014, p.113). For example Scott et al., in one study, observe that

no evidence was collected or presented to indicate that the plans that were developed by the teams ever were, or, in fact, could be implemented...just because the teams developed a collaborative intervention with antecedent and instructional components and put it in writing does not necessarily mean that the plan would be carried out with any integrity or consistency. The possibility exists that selection of positive and proactive strategies were simply part of the planning process and were abandoned in favour of more negative and punitive procedures during implementation. (2005, p. 211)

One explanation for this could be that a language which tends to remove reference to the other, provides little support to engage with and to understand the other's values, hopes and needs. For example, in "An Obsession With Method," my starting point was my agenda. I was more focused on moving through each step of the FBA, than attuning to the situation and to those in it. While I attributed agency to method, I directed my attention primarily to procedure. At that time, I lacked awareness of the additional need to attune myself to the situation and to the other.

To some extent it could be said that Willis, LaVigna and Donnellan (1993) address contextual fit through advocating the use of "mediator analysis" (pp. 48-53). They describe the purpose of mediator analysis as a way to

assess the characteristics of those who have the primary responsibility for managing the person's behaviour and/or providing care and training. The Mediator Analysis attempts to identify the characteristics of these persons that might enhance or detract from the successful treatment of the referral problems. (Willis et al., 1993, p. 48)

Similarly, Horner, Salentine and Albin devised an interview for *Self-Assessment of Contextual Fit in Schools* (2003, p. 1). As with mediator analysis, one might ask who sets the parameters for the conversation? To what extent is the interview a closed discourse, and in what ways might it allow a conversation to unfold, to be guided to some extent by the other? Might the introduction indicate a separation between behavioural consultant and the enactors of the plan, where it states for participants that the interview

asks you to rate (a) your knowledge of the elements of the plan, (b) your perception of the extent to which the elements of the behaviour support plan are consistent with your personal values, and skills, and (c) the school's ability to support implementation of the plan. (Horner et al., 2003, p. 1)

Might one need to ask such questions if those who are interviewed participated in the plan's development?

A growing number of texts and resources (Bambara & Knoster, 2009; Dunlap et al., 2010; Gardon, 2009; Hieneman et al., 1999; March et al., 2000) make significant contributions to an FBA tradition which is accessible to educators. Influenced by such a shift in the tradition, as I interpret it, I am coming to understand FBA as a phenomenon which can be overshadowed by an individual expert, but is brought to light by a community of expertise. Returning to the context of this chapter's narrative, I wonder in what ways the expert-centric tradition I inherited, shaped my capacity to act with respect, and to draw out the strengths and resources of others?

In a tradition where agency is attributed predominantly to method, it is perhaps necessary to be an expert. The etymology of "expert" though, from the Latin *expertus*, means someone who, being experienced, brings particular skills *and understandings*. I interpret this, to mean that expertise includes a capacity for "insight into the situational, factual, and therefore ontological aspect of what might otherwise be construed as ... [the] epistemological concept" (Coltman, 1998, p. 22) of FBA.

Although much literature seems to have a monocular vision of FBA as a form of *epistēmē* or scientific knowledge, Jean Grondin reminds us that for Aristotle, an experienced person would also embody "practical understanding (*phronēsis*, often rendered by prudence, following the Latin translation)" (2002, p. 38). Were we to understand a phenomenon in terms of its *phronētic* potential, could it then invite a moral attentiveness in the one who is trying to act with discernment and wisdom? Interpreted in this way, might FBA become a place of complementarity, between doing and being?

As Rod Coltman interprets Gadamer's notion of *phronēsis*,

it is both immediate and situationally dependent, application and cognition remain undifferentiated. That is to say that *knowing* (at least in the sense of practical knowledge, but ultimately for Gadamer, all knowing) does not precede and is not something other than either *doing* or *being*. (1998, p. 22)

Here we encounter the importance of self-knowledge, a kind of "seeing" what is called for in a specific situation, in relation to the ethical implications of a socially complex context. "Seeing what is immediately to be done" writes Gadamer, "is not a mere seeing but nous" (1975/1989, p. 319). I understand this to mean that when we are blind to the ethical possibilities of what is before us, we not only misunderstand the situation, but also misunderstand ourselves in relation to that social context.

Again, we return to Gadamer's view that "application is an element of understanding itself" (1975/1989, p. xxix). After all, what good is a theoretical ethical purpose of working to increase the quality of life for the focus person of an FBA, and those closest to him, without the capacity to embody this ethical purpose in action? What matters in our school communities "is to be able to do the good in human affairs" (Grondin, 2002 p. 39). And a helpful starting point, and companion to our behavioural knowledge, might be a humility which allows for the otherness of others. Indeed, this study explores my increasing awareness of the power imbalance and disempowerment inherent in traditional conceptions of behavioural expert. I mean traditional, here, in the sense of the tradition I have lived and worked in as a support teacher and behavioural consultant.

In "An Obsession With Method," the extent to which my own behaviour perpetuated a hierarchical interaction caught me by surprise. It seems ironic that while consciously wanting staff to take responsibility, I was simultaneously acting in ways which prevented them from doing so. I am reminded of the undertow of prejudice, which according to Gadamer, we can never be fully aware of. Gadamer reminds us that "history does not belong to us; we belong to it" (1975/1989, p. 278). For, "long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (ibid).

My suggestion to the support teacher that the records review be done together with the psychologist, rather than alone, was a moment where I lacked trust. But it was also a moment where my prejudice was false, in that it hindered my understanding. Having heard that staff were unclear who, if anyone was coordinating support for the student, I interpreted this as a sign of the team's reluctance to take responsibility. My prejudice was quickly brought into question though, when the support teacher volunteered to assist with part of the assessment. It soon became clear that I needed to revise my fore-projections of meaning for the whole FBA team, whose commitment to the student and their school community was evident in their interactions with each other and their ongoing reflective practice.

What were the origins of my prejudice? Perhaps they lay in my previous work patterns. In an effort to reduce pressure on educators I had frequently reviewed a student's records and compiled lists of antecedents and consequences for the specific problem behaviours. I liked the feeling of exploring, discovering, bringing back evidence that there *was* a context and purpose for a student's behaviour. Like a botanist visiting the colonies, I enjoyed collecting, classifying and labelling. What was unsettling, was the pride I felt in displaying these discoveries. Did I feel more justified, more competent as a behavioural consultant if I had completed a task between visits?

I also wonder to what extent my sense of urgency to improve a student's quality of life, might have decreased my pedagogical tact? Is there something to learn from Michel de Montaigne's quote from Cicero, that "the authority of those who teach is very often a hindrance to those who wish to learn" (1958, p. 55)? How often have I positioned myself as the expert, and unconsciously devalued staff observation and experience? Have educators also had difficulty following through with something unfamiliar, because they had not been adequately involved from the outset? Perhaps this is a broader problem, if we consider that

few studies have evaluated the long-term effectiveness of interventions and support plans derived from FBAs ... (66%) of Functional Assessment based intervention studies evaluated maintenance of intervention gains between one and five months. Only 5% of the studies assessed follow-up at 13-24 months, while no studies reported follow-up for longer than 2 years.

A single follow-up assessment does not capture possible fluctuations in behaviour across time, nor does it offer information about ongoing implementation challenges.  
(L. Kern, Gallagher, Starosta, Hickman, & George, 2006, p. 67)

On Gadamer's view, dialogue is what enables understanding. Dialogue is about a conversation with a community of inquirers, or, to borrow a phrase from Jacques Rancière, it is about "reason between equals" (1991, p.45). The moment that I convey a sense of expert and novice, or even an inequality between the knowledge and understandings we each bring to the situation, my action contradicts my intention. It is my job to know more about FBA than a general educator, but it is also my responsibility to show, through my actions and interactions, that we *each* bring particular resources and strengths. FBA requires interdependence. It asks us not only to recognise each human's inherent potential, but to actively become agents for each other.

In practice this means adjusting the facilitator's stance to a distance which allows space for dialogue, while staying close enough to scaffold the team's building of meaning. It is a dance like motion, stepping forward and back, sensing the moment, when to turn, when to lead, when to follow, and apologising when treading on toes. And, like a physical dance, at its best, it can bring a sense of unity and exhilaration.

What changes might we see in the tradition of FBA, were we to replace the words "expert" and "facilitator," with "consultant"? Facilitate comes from the French *faciliter*, meaning to "make easy" or "easier" (Brown, 1993, p. 903), and from the Latin *facilis*, which gives us the word "facile." In contrast, "consultant" may convey more of a sense of "gathering the Senate," as in the Latin

*consulere senatum* (Harper, 2014), where there is a seeking of a collective wisdom. I suggest that such a notion carries an implied sense of other and invites a plurality of perspectives. Accordingly, I will use the word consultant as synonymous with FBA facilitator.

If I consider my role as consultant rather than expert, might I be more open to the experiences, understandings and perspectives of others? Interpreted in this way, might FBA become a democratic approach, honouring a plurality perspectives? A behavioural consultant's role might become one of drawing each perspective out, bringing it into dialogue with other views. After all, a consultant visits the school for only a short time. Staff understandings may be limited to what they have learnt about the student during school hours. Both rely on parents' intimate understandings of their child. And who could be more expert on the student than the student herself?

As an FBA leader I am inspired by an unconventional and democratic move of artistic director and leader of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Richard Tognetti, to have “the violins and violas stand as though each one is a soloist among soloists” (Merson, 2012). Similarly, I believe it could be a behaviour consultant's role to ensure that the student, parents, educators, inter-agency staff — all team members, “stand” and are considered “soloist[s] among soloists” (ibid). Each person in the team brings countless observations, experiences and insights. Each voice contributes to the whole. Each interpretation of events adds to the larger interpretive act of FBA. The collegiality of such an approach promises not only respectful relationships which are the foundation for any ensemble, but might also help to sustain the group through the inevitable stresses associated with supporting people with challenging behaviours.

In this chapter's narrative, I thought the behavioural specialist's role was to make sure we followed correct procedure. I was the conductor of an orchestra where musicians followed my lead. The selection of music and its interpretation were mine. And they were to play. Within this expert-centric tradition, was a democratic approach too radical? Why was I so unable to enact my ethical intention, and immediately and graciously accept an offer of assistance?

Interestingly, the effect of Tognetti's changes to the orchestra were described as having musical as well as human value, for “standing not only frees more sound from the instruments, it also makes it easier for musicians to communicate with each other” (ibid). Observers noted that “musicians exchange glances and smile as they play, each moving autonomously yet in sync, like the many limbs of some vast, musically attuned cephalopod” (Merson, 2012). In Chapter Six I explore the closest I have come to such a parallel experience in FBA. It is an FBA still talked about

by its team members, seven years later. It is a story of hope which changed the trajectory of a young man's life. But before moving on I wish to explore two final aspects of FBA tradition, and the potential harm we can do when we neither notice nor question our language.

### **Reframing functional behaviour assessment as *dynamic interplay***

Throughout the literature FBA is frequently described as a process. At the time of writing this study, a search for “functional behavior assessment” and “team” using Google Scholar, yields 727,000 results, and “functional behavior assessment” and “openness” leads to no relevant results. In contrast, a search for “functional behavior assessment” and “process” yields over *two million*. This is not surprising when we consider FBA's origins in applied behaviour analysis, as discussed in Chapter One, which brings with it the language of procedure and experimental design.

I accept that it can be helpful to conceive of FBA as process. If I consider it a procedure, it can guide me with prompts of what to do next, thereby bringing a degree of clarity and calm. Might it also, at times though, make us too comfortable? My intention in exploring the language of process, is not to deny its value, but to ask if it is the *only* way we wish to characterise FBA. In response to this question I offer a complementary interpretive possibility. I do this in the hope that a shift in my thinking might lead to more pedagogically sensitive ways of acting and being.

Reflecting on this chapter's narrative in particular, I increasingly felt uncomfortable with the language of process which dominated my thinking. I came to ask what connections there might be, between the language of process and the manner in which I enact my understandings of FBA. Is it possible that the language which structures our thought is influential on more than our thinking? For example, Lakoff and Johnson suggest that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (1980/2003, p. 3). This chapter's narrative, “An Obsession With Method,” highlighted my sense that in FBA there was not only a process to follow but also a correct way of doing things. Unaware of the power of the metaphor of FBA as process, did I enact a vision of FBA as something mechanistic, a “succession of actions ... performed in a definitive manner” (1993, p. 2364)? Were my thoughts structured by a perception of FBA as sequential and linear, as per a “procession”?

In some ways FBA *is* procedural. To be meaningful, particular steps in FBA need to occur before others. For instance, if we generated a hypothesis and summary statement for a student's behaviour *prior* to reviewing records and data, interviewing and observing, we would no longer be doing FBA. Instead, we would have bi-passed the inquiry and moved straight to an explanation for a student's behaviour. FBA is about the to and fro of thinking, conversing, questioning and

exploring of possible meanings. My point is not to discount the ways in which FBA is like a procedure, but to ask whether its dominant representation as process is adequate to the broad, ethical origins of PBS and FBA? Even reduced to a pragmatic level, is the representation of FBA as process enough to ensure its efficacy?

My lifeworld experiences continue to show me that difficulties with FBA efficacy may include, and range far beyond, problems of method. And for this reason I resist characterising FBA solely as process. But there is perhaps a more pressing reason to rethink the language with which we discuss FBA. If FBA has become part of a repertoire of assessments which schools use — and are expected to use — how might the meanings we associate with “process” align with our understandings about pedagogy? How is it that we might enact our potential for unfolding our understandings of FBA with pedagogical tact? Whether or not we can ever answer this question, in a conclusive sense, is not the point. From a hermeneutical perspective, the intention is to keep revising and enacting each temporal, incremental understanding which arises through our ongoing seeking.

For van Manen, pedagogy has an “ineffable” quality about it (1990, p. 142). Pedagogy is neither “process nor content, but rather something which constantly and powerfully operates between” (1990, p.146). If we embrace van Manen’s definition and Lakoff and Johnson’s emphasis on the power of metaphor on our thinking and doing, it would seem wise to be careful in our choice of language. Thus, I wonder if characterising FBA as “process” falls short of our pedagogical intentions. If over-used, or used in isolation, might it convey a sense of something too predictable in a lifeworld characterised by the unexpected and relational complexity? As van Manen writes,

learning to understand the essence of pedagogy as it manifests itself in particular life circumstances contributes to a more hermeneutic type of competence: a pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. And it is characteristic of pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact that it always operates in unpredictable and contingent situations of everyday living with children. (1990, p.143)

A further problem with referring to FBA only as “process” is described by English philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, who cautions against a tendency to “seize upon a minor concept and promote it to do major work” (1992, p. 327). This is precisely what I believe has happened with the over-emphasis in behavioural literature on process, which risks confining our attention to method.

When we consider, again, the three million references to “FBA process,” there is a potential problem of concealment. My point is that the literature perpetuates a view which constricts possible interpretations of FBA. I do not deny that in the absence of a process there is no FBA. In addition, though, might it also be said that in the absence of openness to the self, to the other and to the situation, we diminish FBA’s potential? In the lifeworld, I experience FBA as part natural science *and* part human science, as both sequential *and* entangled, as procedural *and* unfolding. Could it be that sensitivity to this interplay is a significant key to FBA’s potential?

While I accept that “there is always and everywhere concealment,” Gadamer also suggests that there is “always also the deconstructive explication of concealments” (2007f, p. 365). Although we cannot simultaneously hold before us all facets of FBA at once, to deny FBA’s manifold aspects, seems unwise. Before acquiescing to the dominant representation of FBA as process, we must ask, in what ways such a representation assists action in our school communities. And what kind of action do we value? How does the term “process” address the contextual, temporal and relational aspects of the lifeworld? Are we satisfied that we have found a language adequate to the ethical intentions of our actions?

Another reason to be cautious of conceptualising FBA primarily as process is that of agency. If I believe that correct implementation of FBA, as an “evidence-based practice” — a term which has been increasingly critiqued (Biesta, 2006; Hansen, 2007) — results in positive outcomes, how might I account for a lack of change in a student’s behaviour? Two possibilities come to mind. The first is described in a range of PBS and FBA research, as an issue with “implementation fidelity” (Algozzine et al., 2014, p. 4; Allday, Nelson, & Russel, 2011, p. 142; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015, p. 89). The causal thinking, which Gert Biesta (2007) attributes to educational research on evidence-based practice is important here. The logic of implementation fidelity proposes that if we want the positive outcomes associated with a particular practice in the research, we must implement the approach correctly. Conversely, it suggests that when a recommended method is not followed with fidelity, the positive changes that we seek, will be limited.

Implementation fidelity has become a science of measuring and accounting for the positive and negative trajectories between interventions and their outcomes (Algozzine et al., 2014; McIntosh, Lucyshyn, Strickland-Cohen, & Horner, 2015, p. 9). And here we find ourselves in a language of empirical science, where historicity and finitude do not feature. As Gadamer suggests,

what is established by statistics seems to be a language of facts, but which questions these facts answer and which facts would begin to speak if other questions were asked

are hermeneutical questions. Only a hermeneutical inquiry would legitimate the meaning of these facts and thus the consequences that follow from them. (2007l, p. 84)

I accept that implementation fidelity is a key aspect of FBA's transformative capacity (Umbreit & Ferro, 2015). What I question is a view which claims that implementation fidelity alone, "predicts the extent to which interventions are successful" and therefore "plays a *singularly* [emphasis added] important role in behaviour support" (McIntosh et al., 2015, p. 8). Drawing on FBA as instantiated through the four narratives of this study, I wonder how such a position risks attributing agency solely to method. And in this chapter's narrative I have seen how privileging method above being with the other, affected my actions.

In the previous chapter's narrative, "Skye's Escape," I had a process which I believed had been helpful in previous schools, and I thought it likely to work again. In a sense I had an instrumentalist view of the educators, where they became a means to my end of assisting a student. Although I would have felt ethically uncomfortable referring to educators who chose not to participate in FBA or PBS as "resistant teachers" (Morin and Battalio (2004, p. 251), I know that while in the situation of "Skye's Escape," I was frustrated that the new staff had disengaged. If my thoughts at that time, and also in "An Obsession With Method" had a monocular focus on method, where was the place for questioning my own manner of being and interacting with the other? How did I come to lose awareness of FBA's intersubjective, embodied nature?

Looking back, it seems to me that I had little sense of what Smaling calls our "own paradigmatical inclinations" (2000, p. 51). Even now I am still in a liminal zone, trying to bring to awareness, through narrative inquiry, self-reflection and engagement with texts, a sense in which the tradition of FBA represents particular "ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological convictions and implicit presuppositions" (ibid, p.52). I interpret this to mean that the language with which I think about FBA matters. Even beneath my conscious thought, FBA's tradition brings with it prejudices which shape what I do and the manner in which I do it. That is, my being and my doing are enmeshed, by my conditionedness. For such reasons, our preparedness to engage with what Smaling calls "paradigm-dialogues" might foreground enhanced ethical possibilities.

### ***We forget ourselves and lose ourselves***

I am steeped in the language of FBA tradition. Every article and book I have read on behaviour, with only one exception (Douglass, 2005), every conference and workshop I have attended, has been situated within behavioural science's epistemological frame. As noted in the Introduction,

from such a paradigm comes positivist language. For example, articles about FBA are usually written in the third person. Reference is made to “the authors,” sometimes to the second person plural. For instance, “until *we* [emphasis added] have the information necessary to determine which methods should be implemented under specific circumstances, FBA will remain an unwieldy and unsupported practice in general education settings” (Scott et al., 2004, p. 198).

What we are less likely to find is an author who acknowledges her subjectivity in the form of an “I.” Readings of FBA literature might suggest that any use of the first person singular is rare. How then, without the presence of a subject who understands herself, in relation to others and in regard to FBA, is it possible to build a culture of reflective practice? If we bring a positivist’s view that correct method results in positive outcomes, while simultaneously avoiding acknowledgement of the conditioned, finite nature of our subjectivity, where might this leave our attempts to refine our *praxis*?

If we lack both a common language with which to explore the immeasurable aspects of our practice, and a literature to hold such experiences, where might such meanings belong? Where is the place for discussions which recognise our finitude, which value openness to the self, to the other and to the situation, in relation to FBA? Reflecting on Gadamer’s view that tradition is language (1975/1989, p.352), I began to wonder if the frequent absence of personal pronouns in much FBA literature might have muffled a culture of reflective practice.

During the narrative “An Obsession With Method,” my outcome-oriented conceptualisation of FBA paralleled the bias of its tradition. Thinking of the ends of my actions, I lost sight of temporal and relational aspects of an embodied understanding, where FBA becomes a dynamic interplay between ways of knowing and being, in which openness to self, precedes openness to the other. Like the research I was reading, my efforts towards a degree of hermeneutical awareness were often impeded by habitual use of a language which objectifies and abstracts. For example, it took me four years into writing this study, to consider that openness was something which applied to me, not just to educators! To borrow a phrase from the poet William Blake, my “mind-forg’d manacles” (Raine, 1970, p. 64) locked me into a narrowed way of thinking.

In an effort to become more aware of my linguistic tendencies and the prejudices they contained, I began a notebook of hermeneutical fumbblings. What I discovered was a style of writing from an un-situated, non-temporal, disembodied perspective. And I can see now how such thoughts shaped my professional mode of being. While the selection of sentence stems below might appear to be identical twins, their characters could hardly be more distinct.

Figure 5 Habits of Language

First draft of sentence stem	Reflective question	Second draft of sentence stem
The conclusion ...	Whose conclusion?	The authors' conclusion ...
The explanation for this ...	Is there only one explanation or might there be many?	One explanation for this ...
I lacked awareness of ...	Have I always lacked such awareness?	At that time, I lacked awareness ...
FBA, therefore, invites us to ask in what ways a particular challenging behaviour serves the person who uses it.	Why does this follow?	From this interpretive frame, FBA invites us to ask in what ways a particular challenging behaviour serves the person who uses it.
Which member(s) of the FBA team might take a long term leadership role in monitoring ... and ensuring that key information to support the student is disseminated?		Which member(s) of the FBA team might take a long term leadership role in monitoring ... and checking if key information to support the student has been disseminated?

I found various words, seemingly innocuous, which, upon a second reading lacked awareness of FBA's vulnerability. Instead of representing FBA as a phenomenon in which subjects act to create change, I had unconsciously echoed a prejudice of the tradition I had inherited, where, in the main, agency is attributed to the application of evidence-based practice. If behavioural science has, according to Taylor, created difficulties because it has "bracketed out human meanings" (2002, p. 285), he states that prior to the Enlightenment "scientific languages, largely influenced by Plato and Aristotle, were saturated with purpose and value terms" (ibid). The legacy of the Enlightenment's achievement of developing "a language for nature that was purged of human meanings" (2002, p. 284) is still visible in today's texts. Van Manen reaches similar conclusions as he describes a contemporary educational tradition which is often "overly rationalistic, scientific, corporatist, managerial, and narrowly results based" (2000, p. 315). What we need, he suggests, is to ask "what it would mean if teachers were treated as moral agents with a practical professional language" (ibid).

I do not mean to create a dualism between behavioural and human science. As I experience it and understand it, FBA is dependent, more or less, upon a paradigmatical tension. It involves the capacity to hold, simultaneously, what Singer and Wang (2009) call "a commitment to rigorous

empiricism” (p.43), together with an openness to the self, to the other and to the situation. If we are unable to recognise our individual and collective finitude, and the unavoidable yet unacknowledged complexities inherent to FBA, might we also lose sight of ontological possibilities for hope and change?

How can we think about ourselves in relation to FBA when our language, so often, brackets us out through an omission of personal pronouns? Where might a language of openness to self and other reside, if it has no place in FBA literature? If we value the notion of pedagogical sensitivity in FBA, surely this asks more of us than simple acknowledgement of the other. As Gadamer writes,

in human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou — i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. (1975/1989, p. 355)

Recognition of our shared subjectivity is the foundation for our capacity to develop hermeneutic virtue. The presence of an “I” and a “we” who are defined by what Gadamer calls our “human finitude,” and the contingent nature of our situatedness, is precisely what calls for pedagogical tact. Moreover, this is something which only makes sense in embodiment, when the other is able to apprehend our care, not just through what we do, but the pedagogical sensitivity with which we do it. FBA can invite us into a space of openness, where we can mindfully notice our states of being as an encounter with the other unfolds. If FBA is embodied, like many forms of inquiry, it asks far more of us than cognitive engagement (Smits, Towers, Panayotidis, & Lund, 2008, p. 45). Might FBA then become intersubjective in nature, literally bringing us face to face with “embodied qualities” such as “listening, speaking, seeing and feeling” (ibid)? Each social encounter in some way engages us, provokes us, and brings our subjectivity, immediately into play.

While the *technē* of FBA may be comparatively static, we can never know what may be called for in a particular encounter. From this perspective, the language of FBA — with its absence of personal pronouns — could be understood in Heidegger’s words, as having formed a “hardened tradition which must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved” (1962, p. 44). Heidegger goes on to say that this is not intended in a negative sense, but rather to “stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits” (ibid). Likewise, it is because I am inspired by the transformative capacity of FBA that I want to better understand what its application requires of me ontologically.

I would like to think a more robust view of FBA would bring multiple perspectives and multiple ways of understanding. In the context of FBA, I interpret Gadamer's notion of "hermeneutical consciousness" (1975/1989, p. 355) to mean not just that we cease being "captivated by dogma" and develop a "readiness for experience" (ibid), but that we need to step out of the shadows to claim our experiences as our own. To contemplate, wonder and puzzle over something implies subjectivity — a someone who experiences. To write about subjective experience requires the use of an "I." After writing "An Obsession With Method" I longed for a tradition of FBA, with what van Manen (2000) describes as "a professionally acknowledged moral language" (p. 315), which would help us to reconfigure our understandings of FBA as an essentially "pedagogical interaction" (ibid).

What concerned me writing this narrative's reflection was the seemingly instantaneous, pre-reflective nature of my response to the support teacher's offer to assist. I thought it important that the person who surveyed the student's data saw it through an interpretive frame where behaviour was understood in terms of the context in which it occurs. For some reason I had also assumed that she would not want to increase her already heavy workload, by assisting with the records review. Did I generalise others' responses and project them onto a particular human being?

In that moment when I found it difficult to allow the other to be other, and to make space for the other's potential agency, I not only dropped my ethical compass, but also the awareness that I was lost. Although I promptly recovered my bearings, the ontological harm had been done. The moment had passed. I wonder now if my denial of subjectivity brought an ethical distancing. Had I developed an Enlightenment-style of thinking which bracketed myself and others out? Had I absorbed a view that with science on my side, I could not go wrong? Yehuda Amichai, in his often quoted poem, would have something to say about that!

### **The Place Where We Are Right**

by Yehuda Amichai

From the place where we are right  
flowers will never grow  
in the Spring.

The place where we are right  
is hard and trampled  
like a yard.

But doubts and loves  
dig up the world  
like a mole, a plough.  
And a whisper will be heard in the place  
where the ruined  
house once stood.

(Amichai, 1996)

If we accept, from a hermeneutical perspective, that phenomena are “simultaneously quantitative and qualitative” (Ercikan & Roth, 2006, p. 16), a purely clinical and positivist perspective is impossible. This is not to say that behaviourist methodology has no place, but that this perspective must be seen as just that, one perspective, which brings with it the baggage of a particular paradigm, and leaves behind it, the baggage of other paradigms. To some extent two articles have already begun this conversation. First, Bambara’s, “Are you a behaviourist or a bonder? Smashing artificial dichotomies and entering into a dialogue of shared knowledge and multiple perspectives” (2002), and second, Sailor and Paul’s “Framing positive behaviour support in the ongoing discourse concerning the politics of knowledge” (2004). In addition, Carr (2007) and Dunlap et al. (2010), have helped to shape a contemporary tradition of FBA which looks beyond the epistemic grid of behaviourism.

But why is it that much FBA literature seems to side-step these broader perspectives? If every FBA involves both quantitative and qualitative aspects, why is research so often limited to a study of the graph-able? I suggest that if FBA language has become stipulative to the point of discouraging personal pronouns, it risks denying the hermeneutical horizons within which our understandings take place. And if we fail to recognise differences among our horizons, having failed to recognise each other, we may forget what is required of us in an ethical orientation to the other.

If FBA lacks traction with many teachers, perhaps this is partially due to a separation of FBA into component parts, its being presented as if the theoretical piece were the whole? When we listen to a single voice in a Bach fugue, no matter how beautiful the subject, its interaction with the counter-subject is necessary to create the whole. The musical dialogue between the voices is what inspires. Likewise, I suggest that FBA is more helpfully conceived in terms of both objective and subjective epistemologies.

Proponents of functional behaviour *analysis*, on the other hand, might suggest that integrity of method leads to quality data, which leads to quality outcomes. But what I would like to suggest is that method and data are no more than loose beads, and, until strung on a thread of situational and social understandings, are destined to roll about aimlessly. Or, as Sokolowski suggests,

so long as science is merely objective, it is lost in positivity. We have truth about things, but we have no truth about our possession of these things. We forget ourselves and lose ourselves even as we are fascinated by the things we know. The scientific truths are left floating and unpossessed. They seem nobody's truth. (2000, p. 52)

An interesting example of this is a lack of alignment between PBS's stated goal of increasing quality of life, and the focus of much PBS literature. Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, et al. (1999) citing Carr et al. (1999), note that meaningful "lifestyle results were measured in less than *three per cent* [emphasis added] of PBS studies" (p.16). While they note that "attention to the reduction of problem behaviour is understandable," they also state that schools must be more attentive in assessing the extent to which outcomes have positively affected students, families and schools (ibid).

Why would researchers not check that their efforts improved students' lives? Perhaps the tradition of behavioural science — focused on stopping problem behaviours — suppressed a tradition of pedagogy. Or is this another manifestation of a tradition which struggles to recognise the presence of its subjects? Again, I return to *Truth and Method* where Gadamer, reflecting on Heidegger, states that "it is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition" (1975/1989, p. 272). Alternatively, a more generous interpretation might suggest that without resorting to data, educators can notice improvement in a student's quality of life. But I am not so sure, given the hectic nature of most classrooms, the multiple demands for teachers' time, energy and attention and the complex web of student wellbeing.

I wonder what capacity for change there would be, if we no longer hid from our finitude, but stepped onto the field and passed the baton of each "thwarted expectation" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 54) and its accompanying insights, from one person to the next? What if FBA literature encompassed both *technē* (the abstract and technical) and *praxis* (the particular, the doing)?

Ricoeur, writing about the "hermeneutical function of distancing," describes a guiding antinomy of Gadamer's work. Namely, the "untenable alternative" where we must "either adopt the methodological attitude and lose the ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt

the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the natural sciences” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 131). I find Ricoeur’s rejection of this dualism helpful. In the lifeworld, without knowledge of what to do and pedagogical tact to do it, it seems we diminish the capacity to stay true to FBA’s underlying values.

A hermeneutical orientation to FBA would be one which, on Miguel de Bestegui’s view, would be “more akin to a dialogue between persons, or a game between players, through which both parties evolve and are transformed. Understanding is this movement to and fro between text (or situation) and interpreter, between an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’” (de Beistegui, 2005, p. 194). Or in this case, a dialogue between epistemologies through which both may be transformed. Such a position is not a criticism of either frame, but a recognition, as Ricoeur states, that hermeneutics provides “an explication of the ontological ground upon which these sciences can be constructed” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 55). In Figure 5.1 below, I add three additional prejudices to those listed in previous chapters and explore each prejudice through an un-sequenced series of questions, in an attempt to increase my openness to an interaction between epistemological and ontological aspects of FBA.

Figure 5.1. Three Prejudices From Narrative Three – “An Obsession With Method”

My Prejudices	Possible Questions
<p>FBA, using correct method, is an ethical activity.</p> <p>A facilitator’s role is to ensure the most effective and efficacious use of FBA.</p> <p>The most knowledgeable and technically competent person available should conduct each step of the FBA.</p>	<p>In addition to knowledge of FBA, what skills, dispositions and understandings might a facilitator need to bring an ethical orientation to FBA?</p> <p>In what ways might FBA be considered a pedagogical encounter with the other?</p> <p>In what ways might I model an approach to FBA which combines a capacity to reflect on both my doing and my being?</p> <p>What types of ontological violence might an FBA facilitator need to be aware of, and skilful in preventing, navigating and repairing?</p> <p>In what ways might FBA invite a facilitator to reflect on her own being and becoming?</p> <p>How much longer do I anticipate being involved in this school and FBA team?</p> <p>What language might I use to make FBA accessible to all members of the team?</p> <p>In what ways might I ascertain and affirm the FBA team’s existing strengths and resources?</p> <p>In what ways might I increase the agency of others? In particular, what steps might I take to foster an increased sense of agency in the key adults in the student’s life?</p> <p>How might I invite the FBA team to identify their professional learning needs?</p> <p>Which of these identified needs might be appropriate to weave into team meetings or individual conversations throughout the FBA?</p> <p>Which steps in this FBA might provide opportunities for professional learning which the team could use for the benefit of other students they work with?</p> <p>Which member(s) of the FBA team might take a long term leadership role in monitoring and recording the student’s progress over time, celebrating successes, revising the plan as needed, and checking if key information to support the student has been disseminated?</p> <p>What might I need to anticipate and be aware of so I do not dominate or displace the other?</p> <p>What might I need to be aware of in myself so I do not foster dependence?</p> <p>In what ways might I create a shared space for the FBA team to conduct their inquiry?</p> <p>How might FBA be refigured in metaphor, to capture aspects of hermeneutic virtue and pedagogical tact?</p> <p>In what ways can a tradition of a behavioural ‘expert’, divide or unite us?</p> <p>What might I need to remain mindful of if each FBA team member is to always feel valued as an active participant in a dynamic, collective, interpretive act?</p> <p>How might a facilitator’s pedagogical tact influence an FBA team’s capacity to independently enact their support plan?</p>

If the intention of school-based FBA research not only concerns outcomes, but the improvement of quality of life, why not extend FBA research in directions which embrace the

situated, specificities of the lifeworld? In what ways might we contribute to a tradition which moves away from FBA's "reigning methodology" (Taylor, 2002, p. 81), which perpetuates an ongoing polarity between the natural sciences and human sciences, between epistemological and ontological orientations? I wonder how this avoidance of epistemological tension — an untenable choice between two equally necessary perspectives — will continue to play out? What forms of ontological violence might be decreased, between behaviour consultants and educators, educators and families? And what might a more hermeneutically and pedagogically nuanced approach reveal about ourselves?

## Chapter 6

### Accidental Openness

In this chapter I explore the positive possibilities of FBA. I emphasise Gadamer's notions of conversation and solidarity, and Arendt's understanding of natality and action. I also consider connections between openness to self and the importance of not knowing. Writing about what occurred in this chapter's narrative, I am acutely conscious that "no interpretation is ever complete, no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge" (van Manen, 2002, p. 7). Were this story told through another voice, it would speak from a different place and bring with it a different horizon.

This FBA marked a turning point in my practice. It represented an epiphany which released me from the grip of methodological certainty, and opened my ears to the sounds of dialogue. I caught a glimpse of how Gadamer came to see conversation as his "starting point," and that through conversation, "in question and answer, the alterity of the true [*die Alterität des Wahren*] is brought to recognition" (2007h, p. 384).

I wish I could say that the manner in which this FBA unfolded was due to a purposeful intention. It was not. What occurred was accidental and the results unexpected. If Gadamer is correct, that "every experience worthy of the name, thwarts an expectation," (1975/1989, p. 350), then this was certainly an experience.

## Narrative Four: “Accidental openness”

What if I couldn't help? What if, each meeting, the sense of hope receded like an ebbing tide? What if the research was right, that behaviour problems — for students over a certain age — should be treated like a 'chronic illness'? I was nervous of a high school FBA. And Adam's reputation. But somehow, this was the FBA that had a momentum all of its own. This was an experience that shifted my awareness, practice, and sense of hope.

I would develop a simple, one page FBA action plan. It would be our team's map, describing actions, the who, what, when and with whom. Its fourteen points would guide our actions from person-centred planning and records review, to indirect and direct observation. Down the right-hand margin, small boxes, stacked on top of each other, would soon indicate completion with a tick. It would be an orderly, systematic movement toward completion.

Wind-blown and weary from a week on the road, I find a pencil — not a pen — at the bottom of my bag. The room is hollow with light. The team sit silently, lanyards of keys around their necks. Expectant. My heart thumps its way around chest, throat, stomach. Trudy, the support teacher who'd sent me the Request for Assistance form begins the introductions: Jeanette - assistant principal; Paul - school psychologist and mentor to Adam; Nicki - grade co-ordinator and English teacher.

'Before you start' Jeanette says leaning forward, 'we're *really* concerned about Adam.' She pauses. 'If we don't do something now, the future's not looking good. He's already had three ten day suspensions, and we're not even half way through the year!'

I give a brief introduction to FBA, its underlying and necessary assumptions for the process to work, why we'll start with person-centred planning, why we'll need to collect data.

'We'll be identifying behaviours to *increase*, such as particular social skills, and of course, behaviours to *decrease*, like physical aggression.' I pass around copies of the FBA action plan.

'This is a guide to where we'll be going. It's a way to share out the jobs so we can get things moving quickly.' I feel guilty. I don't have time — with my state-wide role — to do

the necessary observations. Will I be able to do any? Not in the next three weeks. Are they overwhelmed? How will I fit in time to guide them through this process? If we can just get the three forms filled in: Profile of Student Strengths and Needs, Questions to Consider, Target Behaviour. If I can keep them on track. Polite but assertive. Stop the talk and refocus the team on the next step.

'If you had to pick just one target behaviour, a problem behaviour which we'll collect data on, what's important right now? What is it that has the most impact on Adam, peers, staff?'

Nicki clicks her biro, 'Definitely the physical stuff.'

'And racist abuse,' Trudy says.

'Yeah, violence and swearing.'

'He seems to lose control *completely*. And after, it's as if nothing's happened.'

'And he's very hard to calm, it's -' Jeanette squints, '- it's as if he can see no reason.'

'You know he goes hunting on weekends with his uncle?' Paul asks.

'No, I wasn't aware of that.' I make a note.

Jeanette's pace is deliberate, measured, 'Staff have been very concerned about death threats Adam's made. We know we can't search his bag.'

'Does he threaten peers or staff?' I ask.

'Both. He regularly threatens peers, and there's a long standing death threat to a previous staff member who's recently transferred to another school,' Jeanette says. 'He also gets used by other kids as a 'hit man'. It's his way of connecting with other kids. He does their dirty work for them.'

'And he doesn't always get the right person,' Paul grimaces. 'He used to wear glasses, and we're not sure how well he can see.'

'He's also said himself, that he likes torturing animals,' Trudy says.

I nod. 'Does he have any friends?'

Jeanette shakes her head. 'He's been socially isolated since primary school. The last two years he's spent his whole time one-to-one with an adult and had different break times to the other children. He hasn't had much practice at social stuff.'

'No wonder he found it hard when he got here!' Trudy says looking to the ceiling. 'He's been out there every lunchtime since day one at high school.'

'Last year he used my office as a safe spot,' Jeannette says, 'and he still uses it. But it can be a problem if I'm already with another student.' The others nod.

'Like the time he had to wait in here. He was pacing up and down, looking at the African boy on the World Vision poster, and saying "F-off!"'

Jeanette nods. 'Acceptance of difference can be a problem. Racial differences, but not disability. He picked Darren to sit with on the bus.'

'Ahhh,' Trudy stops twirling her pen. Pauses. 'I didn't get a chance to tell you before — he's just been banned from the bus.'

They are talking on and on. Is this the first opportunity they've had to think about Adam, to talk together about him?

'Now that I stop and think about it,' says Paul, 'he doesn't trust anyone.' There is a moment of silence. They pause to observe this freshly unearthed artefact.

'I've noticed that too,' Jeanette nods, 'and he's continually testing to see if people like him.'

Their conversation sifts material; at times they pause, curious, puzzled, sometimes satisfied. Each observation, like a shard, is examined and re-examined from different perspectives. Each new piece rotated to see how, and if, it might fit with the whole.

Fifteen minutes left. What if the meeting ends and they're all left wondering 'how did that help?' I've said nothing. Just asked a couple of clarifying questions. They've talked, reflected, recalled incidents, clarified things among themselves. They're revealing *their own understandings*. What have I done? Written down what they said. The forms I brought to structure and guide our conversation, to ensure we get the necessary information, will leave as they arrived — blank. I don't have time for this. *They* don't have time for this. We have to move faster. Or we'll just be starting our data collection as the end of the year unravels. Today we could've been more efficient, more effective. But it is their FBA, not mine. It's important they sense this. They'll be the ones doing the work. Let them set the pace.

It's nearly time to conclude the meeting. How to pull together whatever there is to be pulled together? A quick salvage job, perhaps. At least define the target behaviour.

I interrupt the conversation. 'In the last ten minutes, can we go back to the question we began with?'

'Sorry, we got a bit off track didn't we?' Jeanette smiles at Paul as he pushes back, off the table, rocking on his chair.

We revisit the concept of target behaviour: the need for clarity of definition, for observable, measurable behaviour. This will be our baseline; the problem behaviour we want to *decrease*. Then there'll be behaviours we want to teach or *increase*, aimed at increasing quality of life. The spin-off of these behaviours is that they'll improve things, not just for Adam, but for everyone around him. It's important that these are shared goals.

'Safety and friends, I reckon,' says Paul.

Trudy looks up from her notes, moves her head slowly down and up, as if scratching her nose on an imaginary post in front of her.

'Building positive relationships is definitely a priority. And decreasing physical aggression.' Jeanette scans her colleagues for consensus.

Paul nods. 'I think we'd all agree with that.'

Now to refine the target behaviour definition so it's observable and measurable 'so we're all observing the same thing.' Otherwise it will 'skew the data' making it difficult if not impossible to 'find the patterns about what predicts and maintains the behaviour.' They nod, but I'm rushing and am not sure I've been clear.

What's in place now? It's their first year of schoolwide positive behaviour support. They're focusing on whole-school, proactive intervention. Systems are in place for regular support team meetings between key school staff, community mentors and itinerant support staff. Jeanette is the support coordinator; communication systems between family and school are in place.

They have an enthusiastic leadership team of principal, teacher, teacher aide, parent and community representatives. They meet monthly. The school collects paper-based incident reports for behaviours which occur in class and in other areas of the school. These include information such as: date, time, teacher(s) involved, student(s) involved, location, description of incident, immediate and longer term actions taken, along with an optional brief comment. The relocation form encourages the respective teacher to follow and reconnect with the student; it also provides a place for student reflection.

Adam's typical response? Honesty about what he did, appropriate responses to 'what things could you have done instead?' And always the same answer to:

'When you did that, what did you want?'

'Nothing.'

'Where to from here?'

'Nowhere' (In a variety of misspellings).

The incident report forms describe what happened, but don't provide the necessary information. We have a third of an A-B-C: we have the behaviour, but are missing antecedents and consequences. What was happening before the problem behaviour? How did adults and peers respond when Adam did x? What happened as a result of the behaviour? We need this information. Now.

By the next meeting we were a team of three: Jeanette, Paul and Trudy. But Nicki would 'still be actively involved,' Jeanette would 'fill her in.' I hand out the two page action plan. I'm anxious; it's a lot of work to share around such a small team.

'I can do number three, the summary of incidents this year,' Trudy suggests.

'I'll see what assessments are on file, and old support plans,' Paul offers.

'His literacy's very low.'

'The Early Warning Signs of Stress document,' Jeanette says with emphasis, 'all staff need to know what the triggers and the strategies are.'

The tasks are divided. No talk of not enough time? This surprises me. Jeanette in particular, has taken on a huge number of actions to complete before our next meeting. I should do the interviews together with staff, at least until they're familiar with the tools. Can they delay things for three weeks while I'm away? No. What if Jeanette misses a crucial piece of information? Run through it with her beforehand, pre-teach.

'I'm conscious of how busy your role is —' I say.

'—No, this is important,' says Jeanette, closing her diary.

Have I really left with my initials next to only five actions? Two of which can be delegated to office staff, so call it three. It feels — uncomfortable. My jobs: 1. type up the Profile of Student Strengths and Needs; 2. type up the Target Behaviours; 3. select the most appropriate student interview and email to Jeanette for her to use with Adam; 4.

work with Trudy to design a template for tallying the target behaviour onto a weekly timetable; 5. type up the retrospective A-B-C analyses from recent incidents which they told as stories during today's meeting. The options are limited: either offer no assistance, or limited assistance. I hope they can follow through. Only Trudy's attended a FBA workshop. It should be fine for Paul — a psychologist. Jeanette knows Adam's family, and Nicki sees a lot of him each week. Jeanette has 'handpicked' the FBA team. They all like Adam. And they're desperate for change.

Next time we meet I leave them with blank A-B-C forms and a completed example. I explain how critical the C (consequences), or what happened after the behaviour, column is. So often this is misinterpreted. I've edited the form to say 'what did adults and peers do and say?' and 'what happened next?'

A reminder: only the two target behaviours will be tallied on the weekly timetable. Observations of other problem behaviours, even if interesting, will skew our data. Target behaviour one will be summarised under the heading 'verbal threats to staff and peers.' It'll be tallied on the timetable using simple event recording. Each instance of target behaviour two, 'physical aggression,' will also be tallied on the timetable, but a corresponding A-B-C analysis will also be completed. Why? Because this is our first priority and it's easier to track one behaviour at a time.

'Who will do the observations and how many do we need?' Jeanette asks.

'As long as it takes to find the patterns of what predicts and maintains the behaviour', I reply. 'Sometimes it can be really quick — in which case we check that everyone agrees with the hypothesis we come up with - sometimes it can take months.' And, I reflect, it depends on your observation skills. I'll need to do at least some of them.

'I could do a couple of observations — in two weeks' time — I'm also conscious that observing in a high school is very different to a primary, where there are often different adults in and out of the room. It's important that both Adam and teachers are comfortable with the person doing the observing.'

'Everyone's used to seeing me around the school,' Trudy says.

Again, I'm surprised by a shared sense of purpose, of commitment.

Trudy's observations are meticulous. Two weeks' timetables with target behaviour tallies and accompanying A-B-C analyses are complete. And correctly filled in. Jeanette has

done the 'Interview Guide for Functional Assessment' with Adam's mother. In the margin, beside question ten ('Are there situations in which the behaviours never or rarely occur? What are the situations?'), she's written in large block letters 'Attention.' She's listed a series of examples which illustrate the point.

What did Trudy's records review reveal? Not much. Diagnoses had been pursued by the previous school, unsuccessfully. Two FBAs had apparently been done; copies of them 'would have to be on someone's file.' A phone call is made. Something about 'ran out of time,' about 'exploring interagency support'. And so, a thirteen year old boy attends school part-time. He receives daily assistance which is variously described as being 'supported,' 'monitored' or 'followed'.

Jeanette hands around the 'Problem Behaviour Questionnaire,' used to interview Nicki, the grade coordinator. Two pages, stapled together. It hasn't been scored yet. I pull the pages apart, separating the questions from the scoring page. I explain the scoring, ask Trudy to read out the ratings and Jeanette to circle the respective number on the scoring profile. I want her to see this picture take shape as each item is called out. I want her to discover the patterns. I look on, supporting until she's got the gist of it. We're only at question six and Paul, sitting beside Jeanette, has found something. He leans over:

'Well it's definitely attention!'

'That fits with my interview with mum too,' says Jeanette. 'Look at this.' She slides the sheet over to show Trudy.

We note three things in analysing possible functions for Adam's behaviour. First, his need for adult attention. Second, the impact of setting events, and third, that escape from peers seems more of a factor than previously considered.

It's two months until the summer holiday and many weeks since I've been in contact with Adam's team. It's getting late in the year to write, implement, monitor and refine a support plan. Even if implemented with fidelity it'll take time for Adam, staff and peers, to learn new ways of interacting. I'm feeling guilty. They started well and I've not given them enough support.

It's an optimistic meeting. Things haven't changed at home, but at school it's going 'really well'. I'm pleased. Hesitant. How can this be? We haven't even started to develop the support plan. All we've done is identify patterns in the data.

They've found the functions of Adam's behaviour, and gathered this momentum of understanding into action. Their shared sense of purpose and commitment is clear. Are they already enacting an unwritten, function-based support plan? It's hard enough to get staff to implement a plan *after* it's written it, but to implement a plan *before* it's written?

Jeannette would like to know, would I come to a staff meeting to share what we've been doing? 'It's always helpful for it to come from someone else. We could review the target behaviour and get their input into the early warning signs of stress.'

I hesitate. It's too soon. Too exposed, with the whole staff. We've got a hypothesis but we haven't even written a function-based support plan.

But, we do it. I give an overview of the FBA process, target behaviour definition and data gathered. We each contribute briefly to discussion. I thank all staff who assisted with the intensive three week observations and the thorough incident records which were filled in all year. I scan the room, keep eye contact and, prepare for an interjection of 'but ...,' the 'I don't know if you're aware ....' I wait for the stories of continuing trouble.

I continue. 'In term one, your data showed that verbal threats to students or staff — to shoot or kill people — were happening on a daily basis. As a result, staff and students were sometimes frightened of Adam, and he was considered to be socially isolated.' Some nods and whispers. 'The second behaviour we tracked, punching and hitting peers and staff, was reported as happening every four to six weeks. And, apart from injuries, the results were pretty much the same: difficulty in making and sustaining friendships, peer and staff fear, and increased social isolation.' I invite staff to help us update this baseline. I make it clear that we're only getting started.

'Regarding the two target behaviours,' I swallow, 'we'd like to know what you've observed, either in your classes, in corridors, or the playground.'

Silence. *Surely...*

Adam's FBA team members flick glances across the room.

Jeanette prompts, 'Tony, what about in Wood?'

'Nothing lately,' he hesitates, 'that I'm aware of...'

'Science?'

'No, things have been ok lately.'

'Cooking?'

'Nothing,' the cooking teacher shakes her head. 'He's actually choosing to sit at a table with others now. Before he'd pick up a desk of his own and move it away from everyone, over the other side of my demonstration bench.'

'That's great to hear, Sylvia,' says Jeanette.

'Lunchtimes are much better too, now he's got a guitar and Jim's old amp. I wouldn't say he's got *friends*, but he's talking to other kids.'

'And they're hanging around the music room too,' Nicki adds.

'We had a big positive at the dog home last week too,' says Paul. 'Instead of just wanting to walk the big, tough-looking dogs, Adam climbed into the puppy pen. He was actually really good with them,' says Paul.

The principal gives me the signal to wind things up. I try to sum up, clarifying things.

'So, six months ago, Adam was threatening to kill people on a daily basis. Are we saying that now, no-one is aware of any serious threats?'

'There've been a couple of *very* inappropriate comments, but other students weren't frightened by them.'

'That's different then, isn't it?' Jeanette is quick to clarify.

'Yeah, well it is, that's what I'm saying, it *was* different.'

'Ok, so there've been a few comments —, I must stop repeating myself. Accept what they're saying.

'— but nothing where students or staff felt frightened or threatened? Is that right?' A few nods. 'And the physical aggression to staff and peers?' I scan the room. Nothing. *Really?* Paul and Nicki give each other the 'thumbs up.' Jeanette smiles. Trudy whispers to someone beside her. The principal acknowledges the team's efforts and achievements. He's keen to move on.

I pack up my papers, nod goodbye, quietly exit. I step out onto the sun-blazed car park. Together, the team has discovered each fragment's meaning. They have pieced together each shard to find the shape of something new.

## The necessity of not knowing

How is it that this FBA for Adam, an eighth grade student with a reputation for challenging behaviour, evolved so differently than the others? Indeed at the end of that school year he gave Jeanette, the assistant principal, a card saying “thank you for everything you’ve done for me.” Years later, I heard that on leaving school, Adam found a job as a carer. But how was it that Adam’s FBA came to be so transformative?

Hannah Arendt might provide a caution here, against thinking we can ever untangle the complexities of what contributed to a change in Adam’s life trajectory. I concur with Arendt’s view that

in any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject ... we never can point unequivocally to him as the author of its eventual outcome. (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 185)

Arendt explains this view by suggesting that when we act, we insert ourselves into what are, already pre-given situations. At Adam’s school, the pre-given took the form of a whole school approach to positive behaviour support, exceptional school leaders, Jeanette’s “hand-picked” FBA team, respectful relationships between Adam’s mother and key staff, positive relations between Adam and a number of his teachers, and Adam’s mother’s steadfast love. Here was an FBA team whose constellation of personal and professional strengths, created some kind of alchemy. I return to this theme at the end of this chapter.

There was also something different in my approach to Adam’s FBA, which created space for something new. On this occasion, I had run out of time to prepare an agenda and I entered the meeting in a different mode of being. I did not try to steer the conversation. What occurred could perhaps be likened to Rancière’s description from the third lesson of *The Ignorant School Master*, “Reason Among Equals,” where he writes about a form of “reason” which is founded on equality (1991, p.72). Such equality, he suggests, is not enforced or accidental, “but an equality in act, verified at each step by those marchers who, in their constant attention to themselves and in their endless revolving around the truth, find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others” (ibid). With no sequence of agenda items, allocated times or speakers to lead particular parts of the discussion, the conversation took shape through the gentle yet firm leadership of Jeanette, with only an occasional nudge from me. My position of not knowing prompted me to

elicit information and insights from others, to evoke curiosity, to paraphrase, synthesise, clarify and question.

Another difference between this FBA and those in the previous chapters was my decision not to observe Adam. Although unorthodox, I chose this path for a number of reasons. First, in a high school it is difficult for a visitor to observe a student without attracting attention. And I was not prepared to risk the possibility of adding to Adam's social stigma and sense of shame. Second, by not observing Adam, staff needed to be more involved and to rely on their own judgments.

A further reason not to observe Adam was to reduce issues of contextual fit. When a school-based team has not only collected the data, analysed it, described the patterns, developed hypotheses and actively contributed to the support plan, there is less need to check that "the plan is compatible with PBS team members' values and skills" (Snell et al., 2005, p. 142). Adam's plan fitted the team's values and sense of the do-able precisely because it grew from their own conversations. I saw my role as supporting the team to draw connections between their interpretations of the purposes of Adam's behaviour, and ways in which these understandings could inform their planning.

I would like to add an important caveat here. I believe there are times when it can be critical to have an expert observer, times when the complexity of a situation requires a more experienced eye. An obvious example is when a student's behaviour is so unsafe — either physically or emotionally — to herself or others, that a duty of care to everyone involved would ask us to employ someone with commensurate experience. A less obvious instance also comes to mind. For example, when a school leader with over twenty years' experience teaching students with multiple and severe disabilities, asks for assistance to identify a child's preferences, this might suggest a desire for dialogue, where additional perspectives might be added. A consultant's role might begin with a deep attentiveness and attunement to the student and her social and physical surroundings. Reframed as questions, each wondering might be offered for the family and educators to consider. The expertise required then, from a hermeneutical perspective, becomes a capacity to compose questions which contain within them a prompt, which helps a team to set off in their inquiries in helpful directions.

Perhaps in FBA one of the helpful traces is an assumption of the purposefulness of a student's behaviour, minus any hint of what that might be. At Adam's school, coming from a place of not knowing I found it easier to maintain what Gadamer describes as the "essence of the question," that is "to open up possibilities and keep them open" (1975/1989, p. 298). The importance of the

question in maintaining openness to interpretive possibilities is not new to FBA. LaVigna and Willis caution us against asking “conclusionary questions” (LaVigna & Willis, 1997a, p. 7), that is, those which might direct our interlocutor to a particular conclusion. For example, “Do you think he does it for attention?” or “Is it always worse on rainy days when students spend lunchtime inside?”

If, together with Gadamer, we consider that the “secret of the question contains the miracle of thinking” (2007h, p. 392), it is no surprise that the role of facilitator as questioner is uncomfortable, if not difficult. If we follow Gadamer’s thinking, we need to attune ourselves with great care, to what might be helpful for our partner. We need to find the words which “reach out to the other person,” which help our interlocutor to “find the trace [the direction-giving-clue]” required to make our question “fruitful” (ibid). As Heidegger put it, “every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought” (1962, p. 3).

As reflected in the narrative, I found such an approach uncomfortable. What it showed me, though, was the power of not knowing. It was perhaps a parallel experience to what English poet John Keats calls “negative capability.” That is, as Keats wrote to his brothers, “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (in Drabble, 1985, p. 689). Where for Keats negative capability was a “conception of the receptivity necessary to the process of poetic creativity” (ibid), in the context of Adam’s school, I suggest negative capability was a receptivity necessary for pedagogical creativity.

Although for some FBA facilitators such a stance of openness as negative capability implies may come with ease, I cannot claim that for myself. As seen in the preceding chapters’ narratives, my openness varies. As an embodied being my capacity for openness is both temporal and contingent upon myriad intra- and inter-personal circumstances. As Murdoch remarks, “our inward being *happens* moment-to-moment” (1992, p. 328). From this perspective, perhaps FBA is not only a matter of epistemology but also of ontology.

I would like to think that I can choose to be open, at any given moment. Yet in this chapter’s narrative I certainly did not sense my initial movement towards openness as a conscious decision. Perhaps there are parallels here with Murdoch’s view that “moral acts do not usually, and cannot essentially, rest on isolated pure arbitrarily ‘willed’ decisions. We can change what we are, but not quickly or easily, there is such depth and density to what needs to be changed” (Murdoch, 1992, p. 325). It would be far wiser, writes Murdoch, for the notion of “will” to “be kept under restraint,” for “if it becomes too powerful and abstract and simple it tends to swallow and segregate our ideas

of morality, obliterate their omnipresent detail, and facilitate a treatment of “morality” as a small special subject” (ibid).

My uncertainty in the situation, my lack of knowledge about Adam, lifted my thinking and speaking into the unanticipatable present. Unable to reach for pre-pared information, even my manner of speaking was brought into question. I was unable to use words as a tool, a means to an end, which Gadamer critiques as being “always already a technology-based distortion in which words and word-combinations are imagined to be held in readiness in a kind of stock-pile and are simply applied to something that one encounters” (2007e, p.272). What I found instead, was a need for invention, for improvisation, a fumbling search for the right words at the right moments. Together with the team, in our shared uncertainty it became easier to have what Gadamer refers to as a “genuine conversation,” opening ourselves to each other, “holding fast to the common subject matter as the ground on which one stands together with one’s partner” (2007b, p. 33). And our common ground was Adam.

### ***The conversation that we ourselves are***

There is a contextual aspect of Adam’s FBA which I must acknowledge, as it created space in a hectic school schedule for our conversations. The school leaders repeatedly gave Adam’s team time to meet for a proactive purpose. In my experience this has been unusual. Some might claim that our focus was reactive, given Adam’s history of problem behaviour, but the context of our initial meeting was not during a suspension, period of exclusion, or immediately following an incident. I felt refreshed to find a school leader who released staff regularly, not for the purpose of conducting a risk assessment but for person-centred planning, simple FBA, for Adam’s team to talk together and think together.

My wish to rush things, perhaps even to control the conversation so I could elicit the responses that would answer my key questions, had been part of my previous “efficiency.” It was not until this FBA, partly as a result of exhaustion, partly the fortuitous lack of an agenda, that things took a different course. My schedule for the next few months meant I was unable to visit the school as often as I thought necessary. There was no option but for staff to actively participate in this FBA, if they were to help Adam. So, having heard during a cognitive coaching workshop (Garmston & Wellman, 2009) that the person who is doing most of the talking is likely to be doing most of the thinking, I listened to our conversation unfold with fascination. I tried to mindfully monitor my internal responses, how and when I spoke. I felt the momentum of each individual’s interpretation gather and build into collective understandings. I came to wonder if conversation in the sense of

dialogue was vital to an embodied understanding of FBA in the lifeworld. I wonder now how adequately the importance of conversation is represented and valued in FBA tradition?

To reiterate, by conversation I do not mean an everyday mode of talking with one another, which is frequently characterised by the stating of opinions. For Gadamer there is a clear distinction between the structure of opinions and the meanings he attributes to conversation. While he considers opinions to be conclusionary in nature, and a form of speaking which “suppresses questions” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 359), conversation becomes synonymous with dialogue. In a ‘successful conversation’ writes Gadamer, both parties “come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community” (ibid, p.371).

When we are in conversation, we purposefully leave our metaphorical agendas behind. We no longer seek to persuade or convince. Instead, we open ourselves, together with our interlocutors, to the potential for what Bohm refers to as a “*stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us’, and from which ‘may emerge some new understanding” (Bohm, 2004, p. 7). What was new, in the context of Adam’s FBA, were insights into his need for social connectedness and belonging. The team interpreted Adam’s current physical aggression within the context of his past, a social history which had given him little opportunity to practise interacting with his peers.

As our understandings about Adam moved, so too did aspects of my self-understanding. Indeed, both Gadamer (1975/1989) and Bohm (2004) hold that through dialogue we may change more than our understanding of “something.” A true conversation may also change ourselves. For this reason dialogue can be slow and difficult and uncomfortable. “To reach an understanding in a dialogue” writes Gadamer, “is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (ibid p. 371).

To transform our understandings and ourselves though, requires us to become “absorbed into the conversation” leaving notions of self-identity behind, to open ourselves “for questioning by the other” (Arnsward, 2002, p. 39). As Bohm puts it, dialogue is not about trying “to make common certain ideas or items of information,” that is, to bring someone over to our view, but rather to create “something in common,” something new and shared between us (Bohm, 2004, p.3). Dialogue, Bohm suggests, begins when each person chooses for a moment to suspend his opinions and to listen to the other. When this occurs it becomes possible for us altogether to “see what all of our opinions mean,” to enter the conversation on an equal footing, “sharing a common content, even if we don’t agree entirely” (Bohm, 2004, p. 30).

I wish to be cautious here, in claiming that Adam's FBA team engaged in dialogue, in the sense that Bohm describes. I am not sure that the challenge for team members, to listen without judging ever arose — at least not in the difficult sense that the previous narratives might have involved. At Adam's school Jeanette's knowledge of her staff and her self-described "hand-picked" team, meant there was already a sense of shared values, trust and mutual respect. Staff shared key prejudices essential to FBA. In this small group I felt a pre-existing sense of unity. Evident, yet unspoken among the staff, were common views on equity, social inclusion, and problem behaviour as a form of communication.

Adam's FBA team embodied for me, Gadamer's notion that the iterative movement of conversation, which occurs with tradition and within it, gradually shifts the horizons of our understandings (Lawn, 2006, p. 3). As Chris Lawn aptly put it, "we cannot find an Archimedean point outside culture and language in our pursuit of truth, as our prejudices, the conditions of understanding, are part of what we seek to make comprehensible" (ibid). Even though our historicity circumscribes our understandings, a hermeneutical conception of conversation might suggest that we launch ourselves into the unknown, propelled by the movement of language, into an unanticipatable encounter with the other, and the meanings brought into play by the other. When we reach an understanding together, and there is a "*fusion of horizons*," we do so according to Gadamer, only because of the "*achievement of language*" (1975/1989, p.370). I wonder then, how we might weave a net of language between ourselves, which can catch and hold our understandings?

If we accept that understanding is an event which takes place in dialogue, then the manner in which we listen and speak with each other during FBA becomes central to its interpretive act. The type of openness required of us, Gadamer suggests, is to the "meaning of the other person or text" (1975/1989, p. 271). Is it enough then, for a behaviour consultant to enter a silent kind of dialogue, if only in thought? On the one hand, Gadamer acknowledges that to reach an understanding with someone, and to reach an understanding about a text, are alike to the extent that "both are concerned with a subject matter that is placed before them" (1975/1989, p. 370). On the other hand, he emphasises that understanding is not a solitary activity.

Even if we feel provoked by an encounter with an image or text which calls forth a response, what we intend is still an inanimate object. In contrast, a human conversational partner, by virtue of being an independent human being, brings us into a space of unanticipatability. Thus, the nature of our understandings may vary according to the "what" or "who" we engage with. As Taylor puts it, our understandings are "party-dependent" and "will differ both with the object and the subject of knowledge" (2002, p. 294). For example, as other staff came to hear of Adam's behavioural

transformation they wanted to know which assessment tools we had used, how many meetings we had, and other such details. Although we shared what we could, were our actions transferrable to new situations, or was what occurred an example of understanding as an event? How would it ever be possible to convey the seemingly invisible aspects of Adam's FBA, such as openness, intersubjective trust and shared positive prejudices? In previous chapters I have spoken of openness to the other, and I would now like to take this one step further.

I sensed that Adam's FBA team never saw him as "other." It seemed an unspoken understanding that he belonged to their school, no matter what he had done. He contained within him, something common to all of us — human dignity. With a strong grounding in PBS staff had come to interpret Adam's problem behaviours as social learning needs, which were their duty to address. Did the team ever question Adam's potential to learn safer ways of interacting and being? Did they always maintain hope? A cynical interpretation might suggest that staff had faith in Adam's future because they had not inherited a full history from his primary school. Although this is a possible explanation, I believe it is inadequate.

What I experienced at Adam's school was a culture where thinking together and acting together — in curriculum teams, grade groups and leadership teams — fostered communities of being and of action. There were weekly if not daily, structured opportunities for staff to practise what Günther Figal describes as "dialogical comportment" (2002, p. 106). Senior staff questioned their own practice, openly sharing their learnings from interactions with parents or students which they wished they could rewind. School leaders built an environment in which educators felt able to question, take purposeful risks, and explore innovative practices for the benefit of their students. Although it would be naïve to think that all staff participated in this culture, it appeared that individually and communally, there was a core group of educators trying to exemplify a dialogical way of being.

I came to understand both FBA and conversation as layered with ontological meanings. Bound up in these meanings was a recognition of our shared finitude and a need for humility. As Figal puts it, "Gadamer's understanding of conversation has a particular accent" (2002, p. 106) and upon closer reading, we come to see that "we do not 'lead' a conversation, but 'are' a conversation" (ibid). Whenever we "entrust ourselves to what we are investigating" we are in effect, Gadamer suggests, entrusting ourselves to language (ibid). For Gadamer, "we are endeavouring to approach the mystery of language from the conversation that we ourselves are" (1975/1989, p. 370).

### ***Like a flock of birds***

When read in the context of the three other narratives, “Accidental Openness” points to an obvious irony. This FBA where I had the least grip on sequential procedure, technically the poorest data, and had not had time to write up the support plan, led to the most positive changes. The increases in quality of life for Adam, his family and school community, reached beyond what I had imagined possible. What was even more remarkable was that Adam’s social inclusion and capacity to make choices in his life, continued for years afterwards. Even now, years later, if I see Jeanette, she will often give me an update on Adam. If he sees her in the street he likes to stop to say what he has been doing. Adam has friends and a job he enjoys. If on paper this was the weakest FBA of the four described in this study, in human terms it is the one that echoes most happily through our lives.

Adam’s FBA was an experience which reconfigured my understandings. While remaining committed to the most current evidence-based practices — understanding them within a hermeneutical horizon which would always be on the move, new practices emerging as others would fall away — matters methodological came to hold a different place in my attention. As Robert Dostal put it, “Gadamer would have us give up the notion that truth is to be understood primarily as the function of rigorous method” (2002, p. 2).

If I once saw scientific knowledge of FBA as the figure, and openness to self, to the other, and to the situation as the ground, Adam’s FBA led to a figure-ground reversal. I came to see expertise not only in terms of craft or *technē*, but also as a form of practical moral wisdom or *phronēsis*. No longer a subject in search of an object, to which I could apply my knowledge, I became a subject in search of self-knowledge. No longer a purely “*outward looking*” expert-oriented consultant, I discovered a need to develop what Shaun Gallagher describes as “a practical knowledge about oneself *from the inside out*, and from within the particular situation in which one exists” (2007, p. 215).

In contrast, much school-based FBA research asks the question, how can we balance a necessary rigour with adequate accessibility (Scott et al., 2009, p. 438)? While this question is clearly vital to our capacity to apply FBA in schools, Gadamer’s thinking takes us in a different direction. It is not that Gadamer dismisses method. What he wants instead, is to “bring into consciousness ... something that does not so much confine or limit modern science as precede it and make it possible” (1975/1989, p. xxvi). Thinking with Gadamer, I wonder if we have lost sight of the foundation on which FBA rests, as a practice which is emplaced, embodied, ethical and temporal.

How frequently, for example, does the literature refer to notions such as contextuality, temporality, trust, dialogue, active listening, or mindful speaking?

I emerged from Adam's school with a sense of how much practical know-how about FBA lay beyond the reach of *epistēmē*. Were leaders in the field to not only publish the conclusions of their work, but to show themselves in living, relational, action, how much might we learn? To borrow an image from Margaret Latta and James Field, I long for a literature where researchers reveal to us, not only their practice in the form of a "finished picture" but themselves as artists, in the very act of "producing the picture" (2005, p. 652).

I set out on this FBA, pleased with my newly developed action plan. Its fourteen points were steps inspired by ideas in *Individualized Supports for Students with Problem Behaviours: Designing Positive Behavior Plans* (Bambara & Kern, 2005). Together with a highly structured agenda I attempted to operationalise FBA, to step us through each part of the assessment in a systematic movement towards completion. Staff would therefore be more aware of what FBA would involve, at the first meeting tasks would be shared and time frames decided. Perhaps to some degree, I had internalised the agenda and then, in its absence, needed to trust both my own capacity and the team's, to differentiate FBA to the specificities of the context.

Perhaps the absence of an agenda opened my manner of being with the other, to include a more collective action where we needed to rely upon each other. Did I write my action plan, not so much to support others as to reassure myself, at a time of when my workload felt overwhelming? In my work with students, I take it for granted that predictability and structure decreases anxiety. If my pre-formulated action plan was an attempt to guarantee safe passage, Don Kinkaid and Tim Knoster provide a wise reminder that there is no such escape from life's challenges.

It is important for the team to remember that no matter how well it may "engineer" support for a student, there are issues within the student's family, society, and school that may impede or completely derail their best efforts at a given point in time. (2005, pp. 320-322)

At Adam's school I felt uncomfortable letting go of a notion of FBA as predictable, procedural and predetermined. Conversation for Adam's FBA covered the ground it needed to, but I could not predict its path. Forgetting the agenda, I was ushered into a state of openness to self, to the situation, and to the other. Prior to this moment I saw FBA as an act of *poiēsis*, which Arendt describes as a form of "productive arts," a kind of "making" or "fabrication" (1971, p. 312). No

doubt I felt more comfortable conceiving of FBA this way because of its “greater reliability” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 195). Of course this was a misconception. What emerged instead was an experience of *praxis*, or what Arendt calls “action,” imbued with a “boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome” (ibid, p.196).

For Arendt, action is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” and as such, “corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men and not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (1958/1998, p.7). In addition to action, Arendt proposes two other categories of the *vita activa*, labour (focused on survival and consumption), and work (literal and metaphorical fabrication), the latter two being beyond the scope of this study.

Mary McCarthy notes in the “Editor’s Postface” to *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt’s distinction between the *vita contemplativa* of a solitary subject living a life of contemplation, and that of the *vita activa*, where a subject’s life is one of participating in community and of appearance in the *polis* (1971, p.414). The relevance of Arendt’s understanding of the *polis* to FBA becomes clearer when we consider specific aspects of what emerged during the conversation at Adam’s school. The *polis* for Arendt, was not a place, but rather a “space” which “arises out of acting and speaking together” and “lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (1958/1998, p.198).

The unanticipated nature of FBA becomes clearer when we understand it as a socially situated activity. When I visited Adam’s school, on Arendt’s view, I was inserting myself into a pre-existing relational “web,” characterised by the plurality of the other agents already present. That is, our “action and speech are surrounded by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p.182). Such an interpretation provides possible explanations for difficulties described earlier in this study. Yet at Adam’s school it highlights the vital presence and plurality of the other.

It was not simply a matter of me entering the school, but each of us stepping out from our “private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one’s self through ... a willingness to act and speak” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 186). While Adam’s mother felt more comfortable talking only to Jeanette than attending our meetings, her voice came through clearly in the person-centred planning tools, such as Questions to Consider (Hieneman et al., 1999), O’Neill et al.’s Functional Assessment Interview (1997), our proactive and reactive support plans.

Each team member risked sharing an insight. We opened ourselves to each other and to questioning our interpretations of Adam's behaviours. "Meaning is not static — it is flowing" suggests Bohm, and when it is "being shared, then it is flowing among us; it holds the group together. Then everybody is sensitive to all the nuances going around, not merely to what is happening in his own mind" (Bohm, 2004, p. 46). The conversation's ebb and flow was so different to that of the FBAs I have described earlier. Our speech was slower. We paused more. There was even a moment, during the staff meeting, when I felt what Sartre once described as "a moment of ecstatic silence" (1962/1938, p. 124). Working in such a school was a privilege. The principal made Adam's social learning needs a whole school priority, he created time for team dialogue and invited the FBA team to share their work at the staff meeting. In doing so, all staff were recognised as contributing in their small but important ways to Adam's transformation.

For Arendt, the changes in Adam's behaviour may not have been so surprising. Unlike research which suggests that behaviour problems for students over a certain age should be treated like a "chronic illness" (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995, p. 6), Arendt's notion of natality holds onto a possibility for change. "The new always happens," she writes, "against the over-whelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle" (1958/1998, p.178). What happened during Adam's FBA, illustrated for me Arendt's notion of "natality," which she writes is inherent to all humans by virtue of their being born, each birth bringing the promise of something unique into the world.

At its best, FBA becomes an expression of natality. FBA can enable a person like Adam, through a collective action — in which he is also an agent — to emerge from a history of problem behaviour, and be recognised for his positive uniqueness. Natality for Arendt is something which cannot be held back, or expected to conform to 'whatever may have happened before', but is characterised by a "startling unexpectedness" which "is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins" (ibid, p. 177).

Adam's FBA gave me an insight into Gadamer's reference to conversation, as "the medium in which alone language is alive" (2007f, p. 371). I could hear our thoughts working themselves through, as we tentatively coaxed each insight out of ourselves and each other. I came to see how Gadamer could say "I take conversation as my starting point" (2007h, p. 384). There was an intangible balance to Adam's team's conversation, between a sense of unity and coherence, yet at the same time, a recognition of a plurality of perspectives. Gadamer writes that it is here, in conversation, that "*différance* is realised" (ibid). The term *différance*, coming from the French *différer*,

he notes, carries a two-fold meaning, of “distinguishing between things” as well as “deferring until later” (Gadamer, 2007f, p.360). A conversation, then, if characterised by *différance*, will recognise distinctions between each person’s perspective. Such a conversation might also never *fully* resolve questions of meaning. Instead we might find ourselves and our understandings unsettled by the iterative movement of our interpretive horizons. We might also find moments where we are opened up, not by choice, but because we experience what Gadamer calls “an arising,” in which the distance between what we understood and are now coming to understand, “yawns before [us] ... like a chasm” (ibid).

If there was a moment which opened up between myself and my understanding of FBA, it was the untapped power of dialogue in schools. What if other FBA teams could speak and listen and engage in conversation? Adam’s team came together, united in a common purpose and found a way to “talk together coherently and think together” (Bohm, 2004, p. 46). What seemed even more radical was that they were able to act together. Like musicians who could not only read music but also read each other, this team was able to improvise. As soon as they had completed some person-centred planning using the *Facilitator’s Guide on Positive Behavioural Support* (Hieneman et al., 1999), collected and analysed their indirect and direct observation data, they acted. Their understandings were embodied. FBA became a creative activity and the support plan a matter of documenting what had already been done.

Simon Rattle, provides an image of conducting an orchestra which perhaps parallels my sense of FBA at Adam’s school.

When it flies, you know it flies. There’s a feeling that everybody is in it together, and that it’s moving almost of its own accord. It can change direction like a flock of birds.

There can be a feeling of weightlessness, which is addictive. (Rattle, 2015)

In Adam’s FBA our thoughts took flight through dialogue. Dialogue, in turn was enabled through shared prejudices about the purposefulness of behaviour, through individual and collective attunement to Adam’s needs. It was as if our pedagogical tact in regard to Adam was predicated on a kind of attunement to each other. Adam represented a shared commitment between us, which Arendt describes as an “*inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (1958/1998, p. 182). And this brings us to the notion of solidarity which was a particular focus of Gadamer’s later writings.

## **A moment of *sheer human togetherness***

The ease with which this FBA flowed and its apparent influence on Adam's life, differed from the experiences I have described in the other three narratives. If, in the previous chapters, I focused mainly on what went awry, in the context of Adam's FBA, I now consider what went well. From relationships which were attuned both to the self and to the other, arose a conversational vitality. With Adam's team I sensed the importance of apprehending the "conditions the other requires to say what he means" (Beatty, 1999, p. 284). Admittedly, this was a select group of staff. Positive relationships pre-existed the FBA team. Yet this need not diminish the importance of the insight that trust is central to conversation. In the often exhausting and stressful contexts of FBA, in the absence of trust, divisions within the team can fracture the entire enterprise.

I suggest it was because Adam's team felt a sense of emotional safety with each other that they were more open to venture into the unfamiliar territory of FBA. Perhaps a mode of "being-with" (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 153), enabled each person to emerge as "a uniquely distinct 'who,'" revealed retrospectively "through action and speech" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 186). In contrast, in Chapter Four, I addressed Bohm's characterisation of discussion, as being a percussive, batting of ideas between interlocutors, in an attempt to gain ground. The distinction Bohm draws between discussion and dialogue — or what Gadamer often refers to as conversation — is an important feature of this chapter's narrative. In dialogue, Bohm suggests,

nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it. In a dialogue there is no attempt to gain points, or to make a particular view prevail... [It is] something more of a common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other, but with each other. (Bohm, 2004, p.7)

Bohm's description captures the feeling of the mode in which Adam's team spoke. Somehow, the team, was able to bring into being what Arendt refers to as a "space of appearance," which "ultimately resides on speech and action" within the "public realm" (1958/1998, p. 200). Arendt also notes that a "space of appearance" does not automatically arise when people gather together to talk and act, "it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (ibid p.199).

Neither Arendt nor Gadamer shy away from the fragile and sometimes unexpected nature of our interactions with others. As seen in the first two narratives, we can experience moments of what Gadamer refers to as "irreconcilable otherness" (2007d, p.119). Yet even a temporal relational dislocation cannot negate the possibility, at other times, for the human potential for

action. And it was this more positive possibility of being with the other that I experienced with Adam's team. There was a sense of "trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 208), or as Gadamer might have put it, of solidarity.

Gadamer describes solidarity as "a form of experiencing the world and social reality" (2007e, p. 271), as a mode of being together which can never be operationalised or activated through "objectivist plans" (ibid). Solidarity, according to Gadamer, defies our attempts to organise it through systems, procedures and customs, because it already exists, and is what "*carries* them and makes them possible" (ibid). From this perspective, the unity I felt between members in Adam's team, became that which carried the FBA. And in turn, a second layer of solidarity which arose from the whole school staff, carried both Adam and the FBA team.

I hear resonances between Gadamer's notion of solidarity and Arendt's *praxis* or action. For Arendt a "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them — that is, in sheer human togetherness" (1958/1998, p. 180). The starting point for such togetherness, from Gadamer's perspective, is openness to the other. If I translate his comment below in the context of FBA, the implications are significant, but the arc of Gadamer's meaning is even broader. He invites us to "acquire hermeneutic virtue" and to

realise that it is essential first of all to *understand* the other person if we are ever to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together — if we do not do this, then we will never be able to accomplish the essential tasks of humanity, whether on a small scale or large. (Gadamer, 2007d, p.119)

Put simply, what I learned from Adam's FBA was that a team's capacity to enter into dialogue or conversation with each other, alters the possibilities for everything which follows. Dialogue is a first step toward solidarity. Our capacity to think together and act together, in turn enables collective action. Thus, for Gadamer, language enables our capacity to develop a "shared interpretation of the world" and has profound implications precisely because it "makes moral and social solidarity possible" (2007i, p. 96). Accordingly, I suggest that at Adam's school the shared language of PBS was crucial to every aspect of what occurred. Staff spoke using words to "disclose realities" and "to establish relations and create new realities" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 200). Perhaps this was also characteristic of the conversation between Jeanette and Adam's mother. I sensed a trust between family and school, a shared humility of two parties seeking to better understand Adam, and united in hope.

For Arendt it is power that “keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence” (ibid). And the ‘public realm’ is the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all’ (ibid, p.208). Without the *polis*, then, there can be no action. While the other two categories of the *vita activa* (work and labour) are essential to human life, for Arendt, action is of particular importance because it is in action that we are able to disclose our identity. I would like to take this one step further. In the context of this FBA, I suggest action’s disclosive capacity had an even greater power. Action not only revealed aspects of my own identity, but enabled the disclosure of the unique possibilities of another human being.

What surprised me with Adam’s FBA was the magnitude of positive human possibilities. It was as if the team had entered what Arendt calls the “space of appearances,” and acted with a unity which generated an uncommon “power” (1958/1998, pp. 244-245). Arendt is clear that she does not use “power” in the sense of a will to power. Instead, she traces the origins and meanings of “power” in Greek (*dynamis*), Latin (*potentia*) and German (*möglich*), and follows these older meanings which suggest potentiality and possibility (ibid, p.200). Thus, power comes to mean that which is variable, vulnerable and boundless. As such it has both negative and positive possibilities.

A vision of power in regard to FBA might suggest that its variability arises from the plurality of individuals involved, and “the revelatory character of action and speech, in which one discloses one’s self without ever either knowing himself or being able to calculate beforehand whom he reveals” (ibid, p.192). For instance, when we open ourselves to each other and to what each moment calls for ethically, we can no longer enter a conversation with a stockpile of pre-planned responses. Instead, we are invited to unfold ourselves throughout the conversational encounter. Gadamer might add, that our facticity, or the multiplicity of ways in which we are conditioned, at any moment, further adds to power’s variability.

As illustrated in “Skye Escapes,” power’s vulnerability stems not only from its variability, but because it disappears when the people who gathered together to act together disperse (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 244). Not only can the positive changes created through power disappear before our eyes, action cannot guarantee the presence of power. As seen in the preceding three narratives, action can take flight in ways we are unable to anticipate and might deeply regret. Paradoxically it is this same characteristic of natality, and of unpredictability, which also carries within it a power, where “the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation” (ibid, p.190).

Conceiving of FBA in the lifeworld then, might become a matter of recognising its unformed, indeterminate nature, of seeing it as an embodied, creative act, in which we are but one participant, one agent among many. Such openness to the other, and to the potential power of plurality, has long been recognised through approaches to person-centred planning, wrap-around and teaming (Bambara & Kern, 2005; Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2011; O'Brien, 1989; Risely, 1996; Scott et al., 2009). Each of these aspects of PBS tradition, holds the potential for solidarity, action and power. Still, it seems to me, that such aspects of PBS practice remain in the shadows of much research which is preoccupied with representing FBA as an evidence-based practice, which, if implemented with fidelity, leads to outcomes such as those reported in the research. If we understand fidelity solely in terms of method, might we risk reducing FBA to technology, characterised by a pre-determined causality, a push and pull of method?

During Adam's FBA I became aware of the challenge which Gadamer describes as that of "concretising the universal, by applying it to the given situation" (2007, p. 288), which brings us to the notion of *phronēsis* or practical wisdom. For Aristotle, "practical wisdom is not scientific knowledge" but is about virtue which reveals itself through action, practice, "the ultimate particular" and the "variable" (1980/2009, pp.107, 109, 110). In *The Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle writes that "it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, or practically wise without moral virtue" (1980/2009, p. 117). Gadamer however, came to a slightly different view saying that he had "found a better basis for *phronēsis*" which he developed not so much "in terms of a virtue, but rather in terms of dialogue" (2006, p. 22).

I came to wonder, through Adam's FBA, the extent to which dialogue might be enabled by a sense of solidarity, and if, in the absence of solidarity there is even the possibility of *phronēsis*. Without openness to the self, to the other and to the situation, how can we decide what is wise to do? As Lauren Swayne Barthold (2010) puts it, "Gadamer's construal of *phronēsis* requires solidarity, where solidarity reflects a willingness to listen to the other, to come together with the other to work on a shared problem, to engage in a common quest" (p. 63).

The solidarity I sensed at Adam's school was rare. At the time I attributed it partly to the small size of the school, although I have since found a similar culture in schools in which leaders recognise and acknowledge their own finitude, and model for staff a reflectiveness both *in* action and *on* action (Schön, 1983). I believe that Adam's team embodied FBA in a particularly *phronetic* manner. For example, it would have been easy to interpret Adam's singing of death metal songs and threats of violence as a way to frighten and keep others away. Yet this group of educators, together with Adam's mother, saw in their data how often his verbal and physical aggression led

to instant peer or sibling reactions and adult intervention. Together with their understandings about Adam as whole person, which had emerged through person-centred planning, Adam's behavioural data led staff to consider his behaviour as maintained by peer and adult attention.

Rather than perceiving his behaviour as manipulative, threatening attempts to seek attention — which should be ignored — they interpreted it as the yearnings of a socially isolated young man to connect. Adam's way to initiate social interactions was clearly inappropriate and damaging for others as well as himself, and this needed to change. Having recognised how his behaviours met his unmet needs, staff had found an important clue. Their starting point was to provide Adam with non-contingent access to peer and adult attention. That is, educators structured the environment so Adam could receive the attention he needed before a problem behaviour could occur. One example was the principal's donation of an amplifier for Adam and his peers to play guitar during lunchtimes. Staff reminders to greet all students, was another. Every morning, a key adult was given time to check-in with Adam. These apparently simple staff actions were of course not the full support plan, but they represented the beginning of something new.

Just as there are skilful musicians with an ear for improvising, so too there are teams who are able to improvise FBA. From knowledge of their instrument, musical theory, a finely attuned ear and responsiveness in the moment to their fellow musicians, arises the potential for creative explorations. As Gadamer suggests, “where there is a *technē*, we must learn it” so we are “able to find the right means” (1975/1989, p. 318) required in each situation. It is also true that no amount of *technē* will ever “obviate the need for moral knowledge” (ibid). This moral knowledge implies “deliberating with oneself” (ibid) which again returns us to the theme of openness to the self. What Adam's team showed through their embodied understanding and interpreting of his behaviour, was a harmony between their technical knowledge of what to do, and a situated, moral sense of the manner in which to do it.

The figure below, again, presents a selection of prejudices and questions which arose during my experiences at Adam's school, through writing both the narrative and reflections. My intention is not for Figure 6 to represent any complete set of ideas. Its purpose is to help me continue to question and to remain open to what I encounter.

Figure 6. Five Prejudices from Narrative Four – “Accidental Openness”

My Prejudices	Possible Questions
<p>Changing staff perceptions about adolescents with severe reputations is extremely difficult if not impossible.</p> <p>The structure of high schools makes FBA more difficult than it is in primary schools.</p> <p>When a student’s behavioural problem threatens the safety of others it is best to use the quickest, evidenced-based practices.</p> <p>The FBA facilitator should observe the student, even if briefly.</p> <p>A dialogical approach to FBA takes longer than an instructive approach.</p> <p>Educators implement a function-based support plan once it has been written.</p>	<p>In what ways might leaders of educational systems actively build a sense of hope among educators, that all students are capable of social learning or behavioural change, irrespective of their age?</p> <p>In what ways might school leaders help their staff to maintain hope for change in a student’s behaviour?</p> <p>In what ways might FBA team members be invited to share and explore the positive glimpses they have caught of the unique aspects of the student’s being?</p> <p>How might a facilitator contribute to an educational culture which embraces a notion that with individualised assessments and supports, all students are capable of improvement in social learning?</p> <p>What assumptions underpin a view that FBA lends itself more to primary schools than high schools? What alternative perspectives might there be?</p> <p>What advantages might there be, for the student and the FBA team, in high schools where a number of different educators work with the student?</p> <p>In what ways might consultants attend to the urgency of a situation, without compromising the need to listen to others and for team dialogue?</p> <p>Is accurate implementation of an evidence-based practice enough to create a positive change in staff and student behaviour? What else might be necessary to enact FBA with pedagogical tact?</p> <p>What other aspects of FBA practice, which lie beyond the empirical, might we value? In what ways might staff be invited to consider these aspects?</p> <p>If a student needs to be observed, how might it be done in a manner which protects dignity, prevents increased social stigma and shame?</p> <p>In what ways might it be beneficial for me <i>not</i> to observe the student?</p> <p>How might it be better for the student, not to be observed?</p> <p>In what ways might it help peers for me not to observe the student?</p> <p>How might it assist educators if I did not to observe them interacting with the student?</p> <p>How might a sense of trust be built between all members of the FBA team?</p> <p>In what ways is FBA dependent upon people’s capacity to suspend their opinions and to move into dialogue?</p> <p>In the absence of dialogue or genuine conversation, what changes might we anticipate in the team’s understandings and ways of relating to the student? How might this affect the student?</p> <p>What might we gain by conceiving of FBA as dependent upon shared language and enabled by conversation?</p> <p>What steps might educational leaders, at a systems level, take to develop a shared behavioural language, within and between school communities?</p> <p>What steps might an educational leader take to build solidarity among members of the FBA team, and more broadly, with members of their school community?</p>

	How might understanding notions such as <i>technē</i> , <i>phronēsis</i> , <i>praxis</i> , solidarity and action inform my evolving practice of FBA?
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Adam’s FBA was a turning point in my practice, in which I came to question the necessity of always observing the student. Today, I consider the reasons to observe, or not, for each individual, rather than applying a general rule. What has been most noticeable, are the changes in my own way of being, when I do not observe, and a shift in staff responses. Perhaps they sense a greater degree of trust in their professionalism and a tacit sense of respect, of “reason among equals” (Rancière, 1991, p.72). The challenge, of course, is to sustain a quality of openness, questioning and radical non-dogmatism, even when I do direct observations.

The solidarity of Adam’s team was also revelatory. There was no research-to-practice gap here, but an illustration of Gadamer’s comment that “application is an element of understanding itself” (1975/1989, p. xxix). Staff seemed equipped with the power of “collective thought” which Bohm writes is always “more powerful than the individual thought” (2004, p. 15). In a school culture with a common language, developed through positive behaviour support professional learning for all staff, Adam’s team could situate FBA within a values base and enabling forestructures of meaning. FBA was one part of a whole school approach to social and emotional learning.

At Adam’s school I came to see how we insert ourselves into a pre-existing web of relationships and understandings, to join with others to bring something new into being. In FBA this newness takes the form of fresh interpretations of the meanings behind a student’s behaviour, and a renewal of the student’s possibilities for being. The starting point for such renewal is conversation. For as Gadamer puts it,

in speaking with each other, in the communicative sedimentation [in language] of our world experience which encompasses everything that we are able to exchange with each other, there comes forward a form of knowing that presents the missing other half of the truth, a truth that stands alongside the great monologue of the modern sciences and their growing collection of [unexploited] experiential potential. (2007e, p. 273)

If there is something that shines out from Adam’s FBA, it is the power of that “missing other half of the truth” (ibid). Although I only caught a glimpse, at Adam’s school, of Gadamerian solidarity and conversation, of Arendtian action and power, what I experienced has been enough for me to carry seeds of these understandings to other schools. In the feedback from parents, staff

and support staff, I can sense a shift in my horizon, towards attempting — if not always enacting — aspects of FBA which at the start of this study were foreign to my thinking and being.

But I do not wish to claim that I now possess particular insights. The degree of my openness and the specificities of each school's situation will continue to vary. What I learnt from "Accidental Openness" and from each of the narratives will continue to challenge me. As van Manen suggests,

pedagogy is not something that can be 'had', 'possessed', in the way that we can say that a person 'has' or 'possesses' a set of specific skills or performative competencies. Rather, pedagogy is something specific that a parent or teacher continuously must redeem, retrieve, regain, recapture in the sense of recalling. (1990, p.149)

A pedagogy of FBA then, is something which invites an iterative openness, a questioning of what is called for in each particular situation.

## Chapter 7

### Openness as an Act of Resistance

In the preceding chapters I have shown the ease with which openness, in the context of FBA, can elude us. I have illustrated and highlighted ethical complexities which I believe are latent in experiences of FBA, yet typically remain unacknowledged in its literature. I have used phenomenological narratives of lived experiences, theoretical discussion and hermeneutical reflection, in an effort to reinscribe new meanings and to explore new ways of being in relation to the other, in the context of FBA. What is common to each of the lifeworld narratives is a sense of *aporia* which caused me to pause, to reflect on what occurred within me and around me. Perhaps there is a synergy here between resistance and openness. As Howard Caygill observes, the etymology of resistance, comes from the Latin *stare*, “to *come* to a stand or to *cause* to stand,” and the Greek *stasis*, which translates as a standing still (2013, p. 9).

Writing this study has been a form of *stasis*, an opportunity to explore aporetic experiences, with a view to increasing my openness to self, the other, and the situation. Moments of *stasis* have disclosed a moral imperative to stand up against things, or for things I had lost sight of. If I remain closed to what is other, unaware of myself in relation to otherness, I can maintain a static identity, secure in a world where I avoid the uncomfortable. Openness on the other hand, can bring into question, through disclosing what is other, not only what I think I know, but who I think I am (Warnke, 2002, p.93). An “attitude of permanent openness,” as Freire writes, is one focused on being “open to differences,” to “approaching and being approached, to questioning and being questioned, to agreeing and disagreeing” (Freire, 1998, p. 119).

Openness is not a peaceful state but a matter of constant vigilance against slipping into moments of closure. For Freire, openness is a call to “keep awake and alert,” to “sharpen my perception,” to develop “methodological mistrust,” to prevent me “from becoming absolutely

certain of being right. To safeguard myself against the pitfalls of ideology” (Freire, 1998, p. 119). Openness, like understanding, is not something I possess. It depends upon many things — among others, my prejudices, the time, the situation and my interlocutors. I may be able to bring a state of openness, listening to an educator in the sense of “hearkening” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 153) one day, but not the next. Such variability might suggest that openness is not a quality inherent to an individual, but is relational. That is, for every statement of openness I might ask the question, open in relation to what, or open in relation to whom?

If I then conceive of openness as an act of resistance, I can ask a further question. What form might such resistance take? Specifically, what might openness to the self, to the other and to the situation mean for my own comportment in regard to FBA? In asking such questions I make the assumption that openness is not a passive state but an active one, which at times might involve friction. Is there ever, then, such a thing as accidental openness? My response would be a qualified “yes.” Sometimes we bring a mindful consciousness of openness to a conversation or situation. At other times, as illustrated in Chapter Six, openness can surprise us, like a moment of serendipity. To catch a moment of openness as it emerges, though, suggests receptivity, a “someone” who is ready to receive what is there to be open to. In addition, we might ask if there was something in the context’s *ethos*, in the pre-existing web of human relationships, which already held within it a seed of openness.

Perhaps there are moments when school cultures, the unique qualities of our conversational partners, and the synergy between team members’ capacities to enact FBA, create a whole which is larger than the sum of its parts. For example, when I entered Adam’s school, where relational trust appeared foundational to the school’s *ethos*, it was possible to feel that openness was already present. In addition, might openness in this and other situations, also arise through mindful awareness and effort, and like Arendt’s conception of action, be simultaneously powerful yet also vulnerable to dissipation?

Between remembering events, writing each narrative, and reflecting on what occurred, I have become conscious of shifts in my awareness, movements in my interpretive horizons. As stated in the Introduction, my purpose is to notice ways in which I might improve my pedagogical tact, and to describe experiences which hold the potential to resonate with the experiences of others. This study is also an attempt to reveal ways in which I am coming to understand my FBA experience, in the sense of *Erfahrung*, an ongoing, integrative experience. To return to Latta and James’ image (2005, p. 652), what I have offered is not a finished picture, but a situated subject in the act of producing a picture.

With my unfinishedness in mind, I now wish to re-present a selection of insights from each chapter, in the form of resistances. I do so understanding that each resistance is a counter-resistance. That is, my practice of FBA is situated within the tradition of PBS which itself arose as an act of moral resistance against a dominant tradition where power was misused in approaches to people with disabilities. Following the person-centred values of PBS, the purpose of each resistance offered below is to simultaneously return me to the ethical intentions of PBS, as well as to resist aspects of the FBA tradition I have inherited. In a sense, my purpose is threefold: to “think for, against, and beyond” (Firth, 2014, p. 5) the tradition of FBA.

First, I hope to resist reducing FBA to the sole domain of behavioural science and objectivist ways of knowing. I hope to act in ways which acknowledge FBA’s structure is simultaneously epistemological *and* ontological. What interests me is the ways in which an epistemological stance might enhance or inhibit the development of greater pedagogical sensitivity. As illustrated in the narratives, a monocular preoccupation with FBA process, at times, diminished my alertness to the ontological complexities inherent in a situated and relational act. Was this bias towards methodological rigour at the expense of pedagogical sensitivity a personal characteristic, or a manifestation of my “historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 336), as a temporally, culturally and contextually situated being? Might it also be possible, as suggested in Chapter One, that the tradition of FBA research sometimes privileges and perpetuates a hierarchy in our ways of being and knowing?

To withstand a tendency, whatever its provenance, to separate the epistemological from the ontological, will be an ongoing challenge. Even eminent researchers such as Bambara have described the pressure to identify with only one of the “camps” from which PBS originated. That is, there is a professional divide between those who align themselves with “applied behaviour analysis (with the behaviourists) and the inclusion/person-centred planning-centred movement (the bonders)” (Bambara, 2002, p. 17). In her article “Are you a behaviourist or a bonder? Smashing artificial dichotomies and entering into a dialogue of shared knowledge and multiple perspectives” (ibid), Bambara described her fear of becoming “roadkill to the traffic on both sides” of such a cultural divide.

What I draw from Bambara is a reminder that the origins of PBS are both qualitative, guided by person-centred values, and quantitative, influenced by behaviourist principles and methods (ibid, p. 17). My challenge is to bring a conscious openness to each FBA, which can so easily be submerged by the less personally demanding requirements of methodological rigour. As Gadamer

proposes, it is possible to resist a dualism between the epistemological and ontological. And when we do, we may benefit from a “modern ideal of method,” without losing the “condition of solidarity” which he considers “the basis for any form of social life” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 311).

If there is an epistemological boundary between a behavioural science perspective of FBA and a hermeneutical one, it might be expressed as the contrast between the observable, repeatable and measurable on the one hand, and the temporal, contingent and intangible on the other. If one leads towards technical knowledge, the other may reveal *aporetic* experiences. But do we have to take sides? Sokolowski is also helpful here, when he likens the way we perceive a cube, to conscious experience, one side at a time. Knowing we can only see one side, from a particular viewpoint, we simultaneously “cointend” the absent sides of the cube.

Sokolowski suggests that our perceptions are composed of both “filled and empty intentions,” or, put simply, our conscious experience is able to hold, simultaneously, the present and absent (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 17). From this perspective, the way we perceive “is also a mixture, parts of it intend what is present, and other parts intend what is absent, the ‘other sides’ of the cube” (ibid). I suggest this phenomenological model of perception presents a possibility for transcending the epistemic grid which can constrict understandings of FBA. Such a model of perception makes possible a way to intend FBA as more than one part, more than one epistemology. It allows us to recognise that the phenomenon of FBA in the lifeworld requires a necessary tension between both natural science and human science. No single representation will suffice.

Second, I hope to resist my previous naïvety about FBA’s reliability as an “evidence-based” practice. The variability of my experiences, even when using the same method, have alerted me to less tangible aspects of FBA which defy generalisation. Put simply, my experience suggests that method is unable to “secure a particular outcome” (Biesta, 2006, p. 20). FBA, like any aspect of educational practice, cannot be reduced to what Biesta refers to, in the broader context of education, as “a logic of causes and effects,” for it “is a process of meaning and interpretation, not of physical push and pull” (ibid). The nature of coming to an understanding about the purpose of a student’s behaviour is not reducible to a model of cause and effect. Such a view could falsely suggest that FBA is a process we apply to objects, not subjects. As Norman Malcolm suggests, “perhaps the best way to sum up behaviourism’s shortcoming as a philosophy is to say that it regards man *solely* as an *object*” (1964, p. 154).

Arendt's notions of natality and action, as discussed in Chapter Five, have prompted me to anticipate the unexpected and to resist characterising FBA solely in terms of process. The plurality of perspectives and strengths each person brings to an FBA team, together with the temporal and situational distinctions of each school's context, ensure the only certainty is that each FBA will be, like the people who enact it, unique.

I have come to wonder if the term "evidence-based" sometimes feels to educators like an announcement designed to silence dissent. How alert have I been to the risks of ontological harm which can accompany a style of conclusionary, knowing, correctness? Have I taken heed of the temporality of understanding, or remained oblivious to history's evolution of thinking (Kuhn, 2012, p. 1)? If this is a risk, even to a small degree, how might I convey my willingness to listen, my preparedness to be questioned?

In addition, as Biesta notes, invoking a notion of practice informed by evidence, raises two further questions which often slip from sight, "evidence of what?" and "evidence for what?" (Biesta, 2006, p. 19). These are questions which address the epistemological limits of a particular form of knowing. Ways of knowing which have potential to shut down dialogue, invite us to inquire into what St. Pierre calls the "values that justify its limits" (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 485). To be clear, I do not mean to devalue evidence-based practice — I rely upon it. What I want instead is to understand its place in my work in schools, and how I might use evidence-based practices while remaining "radically undogmatic" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 350) and acting with pedagogical tact.

In addition to understanding FBA as an evidence-based practice, I have proposed the notion of FBA as dynamic interplay. In addition to the sequential, process oriented approach, a dynamic view might encompass situational specificities, the temporal nature of understanding and a continual state of flux, characteristic of the lifeworld. The term interplay could bring with it a sense of reciprocity, a need for the other, even perhaps, for a disposition of openness.

In Section II of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant summarises key aspects of his thought in three, now famous, questions, "What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?" (1787b, p. 397). The relevance of Kant's questions, is that even when we accept the finite nature of our knowing, the positivist tradition of FBA (Saylor & Paul, 2004, p. 42) clearly makes a significant contribution to Kant's first question. Yet positivism provides little help with the latter two. As Kant puts it, "What ought I to do?" is a question which is "purely practical" (ibid, p.397). It requires embodiment, a subject or doer. It is also about our ethical orientation in the lifeworld. As discussed

in Chapter Five, the language of behavioural science, which conceals subjectivity through the absence of personal pronouns, makes little space for an ethical ‘I’.

Kant writes that his third question, “if I act as I ought to do, what may I then hope? — is at once practical and theoretical” (1787b, p.397). And in the context of FBA, such a view honours the necessity of both knowledge and practical application. That is, Kant’s question addresses not only the tradition of behavioural science, but then invites us to re-imagine a fuller, ethical potential of FBA, which can only be realised when embodied.

While it may be assumed that the person-centred values which underpin PBS and FBA are a constant call to an ethical orientation, might it also be said that situated, subjective voices are heard less in a tradition which is predominantly attuned to empirical research? If this is so, might we unconsciously build a tradition, limited in the main, to a single epistemological frame? Perhaps for such reasons, in the conclusion to *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant suggests that philosophy “must always remain the guardian” over science (1787a).

Behavioural science has addressed the questions of what is possible but is not able, given the bounds of its epistemological frame, to address an equally vital question — what enables us to enact such possibilities? This is the realm of socially situated, embodied action, of disposition, of lifeworld complexities. Understandings about the lawfulness of human behaviour (Dunlap et al., 2005, p. 28) being general principles, are unable to speak to a specific situation’s moral complexities. FBA, understood as an event, requires something more of us than knowledge.

Within FBA lies an interplay, between that which might be possible (abstract potentiality) and that which might be enacted (contingent, intra- and inter-personal, situated potentiality). FBA, if understood as the transformation of knowledge into embodied understanding, requires something of us. It invites us into a space of “tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depthful understanding,” or what van Manen refers to as “pedagogic competence” (van Manen, 1990, p. 159).

In Chapter Five I explored the potential harm which can arise from using knowledge as a form of violence. I suggested that when FBA is interpreted within a positivist tradition, as an evidence-based approach, it can lead some of us into a misguided sense of certitude. Accordingly, I hope to resist the assumption that FBA is a value-neutral method which protects me from ethical fumbblings. To maintain a sense of “self in moral space” (Parker, 2007, p. 105), requires me to actively seek out voices from other traditions which speak to the way in which FBA and philosophy “are completely entangled” (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 500).

Third, I hope to resist an assumption that FBA method will keep things afloat, that correct procedure is somehow ethically neutral or perhaps even good. Using writing as a method of inquiry I came to see how each narrative brought *aporetic* encounters, moments when my ethical intentions were sunk by a lack of awareness and openness. What was required was a consciousness of Aristotle's injunction that we not only attend to the "nature" of our actions, "but how we ought to do them" (1980/1989, p. 24). In the lifeworld then, it seems naïve to continue to think that behavioural science can ever be sequestered from the human sciences. For instance, how can I do justice to the science of FBA if I lack pedagogical tact in what is essentially a relational activity? As explored in Chapter Six, FBA depends upon far more than *epistēmē* and *technē*.

Through writing this study I have come to see the significance of Gadamer's comment that "science can fulfil its social functions only when it acknowledges its own limits and the conditions placed on its freedom to manoeuvre. Philosophy must make this clear to an age credulous about science to the point of superstition" (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 556). Unless I inquire into the epistemological limits of behavioural science, I might continue to mistake one part of FBA — method — for the whole. Until I can cointend *epistēmē*, theoretical knowledge, together with *phronēsis*, practical moral knowledge (ibid, p.312), how can I avoid contributing to what seems a perpetual research-to-practice gap (Blood & Neel, 2007, p. 75; Loman & Horner, 2014, p. 18; Scott et al., 2009, p. 429)? Moreover, if the epistemological frame of FBA involves the general rather than the particular, how will I recognise its ethical requirements of me?

There is no formula or generalisable principle which can be applied to questions of ethics, because as Warnke suggests,

not only must ethical knowledge deal with a constantly changing set of circumstances and not only is its application determined by a history that is, in the course of its becoming, unceasing in its demands on us. In addition, we make and remake our ethical knowledge and ourselves in these changing circumstances, in the actions we take to apply the ethical knowledge we already possess. (2002, p.85)

An example of the need Warnke writes of, to continually revise what I knew of FBA and my understandings of self in relation to the other, was described in Chapters Three and Four. Specifically, I saw the potential for "ontological violence" (Todd, 2001, p.431), when FBA is imposed upon educators, either by a behaviour consultant, or through systemic requirement.

We have seen how FBA being grounded in the lifeworld, and enacted by situated, finite beings can evolve in many ways. In the four narratives, understandings and relationships were at times

woven together. They could also be fraught or completely unravel. In its abstract, conceptual form it seems that FBA might be comparatively simple. In its situated form, however, my experiences would suggest it is socially complex and sometimes downright difficult. Thus I have tried to write against a culture in which lifeworld complexities are buried or avoided, where we turn away from what is painful or that which simply transcends FBA's epistemological limits.

Accepting that understanding is situated and temporal, I have come to resist the notion that FBA is always possible, even in circumstances when it might be considered necessary for a student's wellbeing. I follow Gadamer's view that "when there is no common ground linking two parties together no conversation can succeed" (2007c, p.68). Nevertheless, I hold onto the hope that if I am able to maintain a stance of openness, and to interact with pedagogical sensitivity, there may be a time when FBA is welcomed.

Through the narratives of this study I have sought to explore a selection of complexities in balancing the sometimes conflicting ethical demands between student and staff needs. In a tradition largely devoid of personal pronouns, such issues typically remain unvoiced. Published research is understandably "skewed toward positive results" (Goh & Bambara, 2012, p.281), further confirming a view, that FBA is possible in almost any situation. There is no conception of our thrownness or finitude. As Australian novelist J. M. Coetzee's character Elizabeth Costello says, "We understand by immersing ourselves and our intelligence in complexity. There is something self-stultified in the way in which scientific behaviourism recoils from the complexity of life" (2003, p.108).

To be fair, behaviourism's elision of the lifeworld's unpredictable vicissitudes has not been characteristic of all FBA researchers. There are welcome exceptions to this pattern (Bambara, 2002; Carr, 2007; Dunlap et al., 2010; Dunlap et al., 2006; Knoster & Kincaid, 2005; Paul, French, & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Sailor & Paul, 2004; Strickland-Cohen & Horner, 2015). My point is not create a dualism, rather that I wish for still more emphasis on FBA as a socially situated, ethically complex activity.

What I suggest is still missing, even in the above mentioned researchers' work, is an acknowledgment of grief as our best efforts fall short. Perhaps the avoidance of personal pronouns is a way of avoiding our pain and responsibility, or, as Arendt puts it, "seeking shelter from action's calamities" (1958/1998, p.220). I suggest that the stories we tell ourselves and each other of FBA are important. Unless we insert ourselves as subjects into the language of FBA, how can we

acknowledge either the vitality or calamity of our actions, which “arise from the human condition of plurality, which is the *sine qua non* for that space of appearance which is the public realm” (ibid)?

Fourth, I hope to withstand what I perceive as a growing systemic tendency to use educators as instruments for political purposes. Unlike technical knowledge, which “serves particular ends,” “moral knowledge,” as Gadamer proposes it, “embraces both means and end” (1975/1989, pp. 318-319). In practice this invites me to relate as empathically to educators as I do to students and families. It means I need to speak *with*, not *to* the educators with whom I work, meeting them as equals in dialogue. I seek to resist a closed sense of self and instead to follow Freire’s lead, as he asks “whether or not our politico-pedagogical option is democratic and progressive and whether or not we are coherent in regard to it” (1998, p.108).

Through using writing as a method of inquiry I have been shocked at my own incoherence, and been made increasingly aware that there is no pre-planned ethicality I can bring to a situation. To approach the other with a plan already in mind, is at times, a form of turning away from a situation’s specificities, a way of not letting the other speak.

To the extent that I closed myself off from otherness, I diminished my ethical orientation to the situation. Closure to the other is not only inconsistent with one of our stated purposes of PBS — increasing quality of life — it also removes our capacity to revise ourselves and our understandings. As Murdoch alerts us, “there is an important difference between learning about virtue and practising it, and the former can indeed be a delusive substitute which effectively prevents the latter” (1992, p.9). Might it then be possible that an understanding of FBA as a situated relational activity, enacted by finite beings is predicated upon a mode of ethical being, prior to a mode of knowing?

Through this study I have come to see, with Gadamer, that “consideration of the means is itself a moral consideration and it is this that concretizes the moral rightness of the end” (1975/1989, p. 319). Thus, I hope to resist the urge to act before I have adequately listened to what a particular situation calls for. The challenge is to make time for true conversation, in a system dominated by a language of efficiency and outcomes.

The contrast in situations described in this study, where FBA team members were able to engage in conversation, and those where they were not, was pronounced. Unless we allow time for mindful reflection, how can we expect to bring the necessary forms of openness which allow us to comprehend the pedagogical density of the situation before us? To avoid Heidegger’s deficient modes of being, “being for-, against-, and without-one-another, passing-one-another-by,

not mattering-to-one-another” (1953/1996, p. 114), requires time for teams to meet together, to build a sense of trust and solidarity. For if Aristotle is correct, that “error in deliberation may be either about the universal or about the particular” (1980/2009, p.110), we need time to attend to each situation’s specificities. My challenge here is to maintain a simultaneous, three-fold awareness of openness to self, to other and to the situation, continually returning to the person-centred values of PBS, but this time applying them to the educators.

Fifth, I hope to be more aware of everyday forms of closure such as rigidity, ideology, knowingness and a finished sense of self. If, as Gadamer puts it, understanding *is* application (1975/1989, p. xxix), then the doing and being of FBA requires awareness of and resistance to such forms of closure. Ricoeur’s description of understanding’s primary importance as its impact on the “power to be” (1981, p.56), provides further explanation for the frailty of our endeavours. Method’s impact on objects may be predictable and determined, but with uniquely conditioned subjects who are capable of changing themselves and each other, able to question each other and be questioned themselves, both positive and negative possibilities multiply.

Openness is an act of resistance against self-closure, against understanding as a form of arrival or possession. Being open in the context of FBA implies a sense of self that is aware of our unfinishedness. If I understand openness as temporal, situated and relational, I need to enter each relational space with mindful awareness, monitoring my feelings, thoughts and responses. I need to foreground my biases and the meanings I project before me into a situation and, onto others. Openness means exchanging knowledge as a form of closure for a risk-taking tentativeness, through a “constant movement of search” (Freire, 1998, p. 69). Stanley Kunitz, in the final stanza of his poem “The Layers,” expresses such thoughts poetically when he writes,

no doubt the next chapter  
in my book of transformations  
is already written.  
I am not done with my changes.  
(Kunitz, 1978)

What then, do I understand about my current FBA practice? That it will continually evolve, that it alters slightly for each context, and that I am ethically implied from the moment I project before me the first anticipatory structures of meaning. The horizons of my understandings will continue to transcend what I thought I knew both in terms of moral knowledge and technical knowledge,

as I join others in dialogue and action. But “becoming better” as Murdoch puts it, involves more than a capacity to articulate how I might comport myself in regard to FBA. It is a matter “involving an exercise and refinement of moral vocabulary and sensibility” (1992, p.324). A sense of self in moral space requires the “doing of the thing itself” (Figal, 2002), that is, participating in FBA in a way which resists “idolatry of scientific method and the anonymous authority of the sciences” (Gadamer, 1975/1989, p. 316). To conceive of FBA as an ethical site involves a resolve to take individual responsibility for what I do and the manner in which I do it.

An ethical stance toward FBA would, I suggest, bring what Ricoeur describes, in his essay “Memory and Forgetting,” as “a duty to tell” (1999, p. 10). In practice, Ricoeur describes this as being “a means of fighting against the erosion of traces,” avoiding the “general tendency of history to celebrate the victors” (ibid). Perhaps by embracing our finitude, in the context FBA, we may be able to ease some of our grief for those we were unable to help, and who we were unable to be. When we resist the notion that “all that is left behind is lost” (ibid), when we feel it a “duty to remember” (ibid), we open ourselves to reflecting on alternative ways of acting and being. For FBA does not exist as an abstract notion, floating free of time and place and human protagonists. It is more sprawling than concise, more complex than any method or narrative can represent.

How can FBA fulfil its embodied, ethical potential in the lifeworld, without subjects being aware of their finitude? How can we create the solidarity necessary for action without first seeking each other out through dialogue?

If I seek a new tradition for FBA, it is one which restores to the terms “behaviour” and “assessment” aspects of their medieval meanings, which might embrace more ethical notions of FBA, which I consider more true to the person-centred values at its heart. For in medieval times, “behaviour” did not simply denote an observable action, but “a manner of bearing oneself,” it was about “treatment shown to or towards others,” it meant to “hold oneself in a certain respect” (Brown, 1993). Similarly, the ethical nuances of “assessment” seem to have been covered over. Today we might consider an assessment a test or evaluation, but its Latin origins suggest the more companionable *assidere*, to “sit by,” from which we get “assiduous,” which conveys more of a sense of attentiveness and care (ibid).

Although this study has made only a small and tentative contribution to a vast field, its originality lies in its attempt to re-present FBA in a less abstract manner than it is traditionally shown, and to ground FBA in the situated messiness of lifeworld experiences. It has employed narratives told from a facilitator’s perspective, reflection on the importance of openness, and

applications of Gadamerian thought. I have drawn these threads together at the end of each chapter in a selection of prejudices and questions which may act as further prompts for dialogue.

I have come to understand openness to the other and to the situation, as predicated on openness to the self. I have found FBA to be enlivened by the power of solidarity. My conception of FBA has grown from one of neat certitude to something more entangled. I have written my way into a view of FBA which reflects ethical and moral complexities of the lifeworld, where my values and conscious intentions were not as secure as I thought, where my understandings may be released, but never in a final sense, resolved. What I have tried to express through each narrative is the multiplicity of ways in which, as a finite being, I fall short of my ethical intentions. Yet even if corrections to some pitfalls elude me, I believe I can always take steps — limited though they may be — towards opening myself to new ways of knowing and being. I have come to see FBA as a moral site, which requires both *epistēmē* and *phronēsis*. And the challenge to act with practical, moral wisdom, will continue to unfold before me.

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