The Journey to Creative Wisdom: Reflections on Teaching the Theory U Model

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ABSTRACT

This paper builds on a previous workshop paper presented at the Centre for Learning and Teaching Conference in 2015, which explored the value of the nondual perspective i.e. the perspective of non-separation, for higher education. This paper explores, from the author’s background as a teacher of the Theory U change model, the nondual dimensions of the experiential process for tapping into the unfolding and learning of creative wisdom. The paper engages with the question, ‘If the U process works, why does it work?’ This approach allows the author to draw on the insights of nonduality (and simultaneously his own experiential journey) to account for terms like ‘source’ and ‘presencing’ in the terminology of the U model. By this it will show that rather than being vague, mystical expressions, these terms can be presented through the irrefutable logic of scientific inquiry. One of the gaps in the presentation of the Theory U model is the absence of a clarifying rationale for a statement such as ‘leading from the emerging future’. The purpose of this exploration is to remove these grey conceptual areas, which often hinders full engagement by participants because of a resistance to what is often perceived as unscientific statements with no basis in actuality. Coming as it does from a practitioner perspective, the paper is also a template for engaging in an action learning process where participants connect to the source of creative wisdom. The paper also specifically shares the author’s use of magic performance to actually and metaphorically engage in illusion; to consciously draw learners into an experience where belief systems, arising from both present sensory experience and prior conditioning, are animated to the extent that ordinary consciousness in its self-deceptive mode is exposed, and which sets the scene for a mindful journey into the U process. This felt deconstruction, arising out of this specific use of illusion, then allows for a deeper ontological inquiry, which seems to provide the necessary conditions for creative wisdom to emerge. This wisdom is not only the apperception of what is true, that is, we are inseparable from the system (the Whole,Source), but there is also the unfolding wisdom to discern what we can and cannot change within specific contexts of needed action.
KEYWORDS
Theory U, Wisdom, Action Learning, Creativity

TEACHING THEORY U
What occurs in the magical world is actually seeing our resistance and conditioning. We see things and say: ‘this can’t be’. But, if the mind doesn’t say ‘this can’t be’, then it is so. That is the magical world. So in each of these gatherings, like yesterday, there is human potential. A potential that can make dramatic shifts. World peace is then a fact. But, we resist it, because we say: ‘this can’t, because…. this happens, and that happens, and I happens.’ So, for world peace I have to stop happening. The mind will resist that. That is the magical world, a world that waits… Steven Harrison (2003)

Preamble

When I started lecturing in Leadership at a major South African university in 2007, I was – in a sense, and unconsciously so – embarking on a journey of discovery that is reflected in the phases of the U process of the Theory U model of social change by Otto Scharmer (2007a&b). I formally encountered the details of the model through Scharmer’s DVD (2007a), which speaks to a movement of creative discovery and action that begins with: suspending one’s mental models (belief systems and worldviews); seeing the situation under investigation as holistically as possible, especially the disconfirming data that are habitually rejected by our mental models; sensing the situation beyond mere intellectual engagement by using other faculties of knowing like non-conceptual awareness and intuition; and moving into presencing, which is the timeless moment of the now where the act of letting go of the old ways of knowing finds its resolution in the creative expression of the unknown, the Source, giving rise to the new.

What has just been described is the downward movement of the U journey, which is then followed by the upward movement that embodies creative expression and realisation.

On multiple levels of engagement and interpretation, this creative journey of the U is the template for the pedagogic conceptualisations that emerged in my facilitations. These are: the teaching methods for unpacking the deep learning concepts of Theory U; the appropriate framing thereof within the perspective of nonduality, which is the philosophical view that nothing in life exists in separation and that consciousness is our primary reality; the reskilling of oneself as a magic performer within a teaching context; and the journey of self-inquiry and awakening through being receptive to the wisdom of the whole.
This paper, then, is an unfolding of a story, within which are many other stories. The challenge of holding these stories together, creatively and coherently, is executed through giving authentic expression to the story of unfolding wisdom. Here the word story is not being used loosely, but its discussion is for later, at an appropriate point in the story.

Lastly, perhaps the best way to tell the story is through the seemingly linear phases of the U process, but the reader is alerted to the possibility that the non-linear, as in magic and all creative performance, will often rear its head. This cannot be helped, but every effort will be exerted to keep the story within the bounds of the comprehensible.

A Brief Reflection on Wisdom and Nonduality

Before I begin the narrative, it would be apposite to reflect on how I’m using the concept ‘wisdom’ in this paper. My dictionary defines wisdom as the ‘enlightened understanding of what is true or right’. As it stands, I have no qualms with this definition, even though I am using the particular lens of nonduality to point to the ground of wisdom, because the following narrative is about uncovering, conceptually and experientially, this field of what is true.

What is being explored here is not the wisdom of being intellectually or practically smart, which is often the focus of neuropsychological (Goldberg, 2005) and other research (Surowiecki, 2005), very often with the aim to enhance functionalist outcomes and performance within individuals and groups in organisations. This has its place, and indeed there are thousands of books and hundreds of training programmes attempting the project of making people work smarter and more creatively, going back many decades and every so often finding new life through new takes on behaviour or apparently new psychological or spiritual insights, like the emotional intelligence movement in the workplace or variations thereof (Goleman, 1998; Pillay, 2001).

Even nonduality has found its way into the workplace (Davidson, 1998), and in a sense, the Theory U model, which frames this journey of unfolding wisdom, can also be viewed purely for its utilitarian aspect, that is, improving organisational performance, even though it also carries the potential for uncovering a deeper wisdom. Indeed, Scharmer is alert to this when he mentions cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch’s distinction between ‘conventional analytical knowledge and “primary knowing,” or wisdom awareness’ (in Scharmer, 2007 p.167). And this echoes Krishnamurti’s emphasis that ‘wisdom is not knowledge’ (1991 p.211), and that ‘truth is the unknown; it must be discovered from moment to moment’ (1991 p.352). This is the experiential aspect of attaining wisdom in the nondual tradition, where the locus of investigation is discerning awareness and not belief.

However, the nondual perspective, conceptually, is also about non-separation, and the dawning of wisdom occurs when it is seen ‘that there is no individual “I” separate from this totality’ (Davidson, 1998 p.54).
Charles M. Johnston, in pointing out the pitfalls of binary thinking that comes from the assumption of being separate, calls for what he terms ‘necessary wisdom’, because ‘our times challenge us to a whole new kind of maturity. On that the future depends.’ (1991 pp. 232-233).

Magic and Mental Models

I realised that with the students in my postgraduate classes, many of whom come from cultural backgrounds in which magical illusions are perceived to be real, I could use magic on multiple levels of experience. First, to initiate a genuine sense of wonder about the exploration that we were embarking upon (Neale, 2013). Second, as a metaphor for the surprising magical discoveries that we would make (Burger and Neale, 2009) in our experiential learning of co-sensing, co-presencing and co-creating (Scharmer, 2007a); that is, discoveries that seemingly appear out of nowhere. Third, to unpack the brain’s propensity for illusion (Macknik, Martinez-Conde & Blakeslee, 2011), and thereby show why suspending one’s mental models is the critical starting point of the excursion into the wisdom of the source. Abram’s (1997) evocative account of interfacing anthropology, shamanism and sleight-of-hand that I read in late 2013 echoed much of my own explorations of using illusion in the teaching of Theory U. Central to this kinship of engaging in alternative narratives is the act of changing perception, and changing perception runs through this story as a leitmotif in the generation of wisdom.

The story of my subsequent deep foray into the art of magical performance is a subject on its own. But as a twin-journey of knowledge and skill acquisition on the one hand, and synchronistic self-discovery on the other, there are elements of the story that are worth telling, because they throw into relief a movement of creative action that is mirrored by the U process.

I suppose it’s because I come from a drama background, as both a lecturer and writer and, initially, as a very superficial dabbler in magic tricks, that I suspended my ‘voice of judgement’ (Scharmer, 2007a) that said I should not use magic performance with adult learners in postgraduate classes. In fact, my first attempt at presenting Theory U was to a group of parliamentarians in the South African Parliament in Cape Town, in mid-August 2007. Here, I performed a few simple magic effects, only to find that seasoned political activists from the anti-apartheid struggle, now parliamentarians, were not only amazed, but in some cases, disturbed, and even mildly fearful. It was in that moment that I used the experience to unpack the actuality of the concept mental model. I discovered that the term mental model, popularised by Senge (1990) in his seminal management text The Fifth Discipline, that students said they understood, was in fact just an intellectual understanding; there was no visceral recognition of how it colours perception. More significantly, it was seen, as it has been argued across a range of theories about language and perception, that in the moment, the mental model is the perception.
Magic had, synchronistically, provided a pedagogic device for unpacking in a direct and immediate way, the actual feel of a mental model for the student. Students, through their reactions to the magic, could experience in the moment a belief system at work, and by revealing how one of the illusions was created, they could observe how the illusion was co-created by both the skill of the performer and by their mental models and the brain’s tendency for illusion-making (Macknik, et al., 2011).

At this point of the story, synchronicity seemed to be everywhere, and Jaworski’s (1996) classic story of this phenomenon, in his quest for the roots of leadership wisdom, was not only a telling reminder of what I had read in his work, and was now seeing being played out in my own life, but Jaworski himself was entwined in the Theory U story as one of the group of four who gave rise to the book Presence (Senge, et al., 2004) that laid the platform for Scharmer’s Theory U. There were layers of synchronicity in the way things unfolded.

The mental model episode with the parliamentarians led me to quickly see the need for developing my magic skills and extending my repertoire. I knew that Cape Town housed the world’s only College of Magic with perhaps the only magic shop in South Africa. Set in an old colonial mansion in a suburb adjacent to the city centre, the College, in its refurbished 18th century building was a real counterpart of the fictitious Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from the Harry Potter books. Here I learnt that the extraordinary American mentalist, Marc Salem, was performing in my hometown of Durban. I had seen Salem before in 2004, but now I wanted to see him again in order to review whether I could in some way emulate some of his skills to use in my classes. Also, my own mental model was that I was too old for advanced sleight-of-hand effects, and that mentalism would be easier to master.

While Salem was inspiring, I realised that to develop one’s skills to the level that he was performing at required instruction from a live mentor rather than from books. Within the field of possibility arose another synchronistic occurrence, with its own barely hidden irony.

I was assigned to teach a module on coaching and mentoring for middle managers from a major international motor manufacturer based in Durban, South Africa. In that group was a young manager with an engineering background, who was also a performing magician. He had an amazing talent for close-up magic and we quickly became good friends; within a few weeks our roles had reversed and he was my mentor, pointing me to good resources on the internet besides showing me a few advanced skills.

While much happened subsequently in my own serendipitous way of advancing myself as a magician and mentalist, in terms of the Theory U story, a significant event took place in the late afternoon one day after teaching on the coaching and mentoring module, and this was indirectly as a result of my meeting with the young magician. Excited to show my daughter and her cousins a new card effect, I started laughing uproariously when something went wrong with the execution of the trick… and then I disappeared. When I tell this story, most listeners immediately jump to the conclusion that the physical
organism disappeared (another mental model?), but what disappeared for two or three minutes was the total sense of self, the psychological entity that is known as 'me'. I have written about this in an academic article (Pillay, 2008), but it was a pivotal event for many reasons.

The first reason is that this event advanced my experiential understanding of nonduality, which, very simply, is the perspective of non-separation. In that brief moment it was clearly seen that the self is a construct, the container of all the mental models that we carry. However, it constructs an apparently real identity that becomes the locus of suffering in most human beings. While there is an uninvestigated belief in the absolute reality of the self, the Source of creativity postulated by Theory U will always be blocked. I could now, with an inner certainty, teach about the dynamics of this, having fully experienced my own illusory nature and yet still see its place within relative phenomenality.

Second, it opened up a way to use Theory U to teach nonduality that was accessible not only in everyday leadership and management educational contexts, but also across a range of disciplines and ontological inquiries and practices, and at the same time to use the deep experiential insights of nondual perception to make grounded and rational concepts like sensing, presencing, source, leading from the future, etc. I also acknowledge that in doing so, I may be going beyond Scharmer’s own experiential definitions of these concepts. However, I saw, and still see, that Theory U was not an inviolate philosophy and that, by its very lack of clarifying definition in key areas, allowed one the flexibility to add to the body of knowledge, not through idle speculation, but through the very creativity that arises out of source and presencing.

A book chapter and academic articles grew from the insights of the ‘disappearance’, like position papers on the journey, but more importantly, to conclude this section on magic and mental models, I devised a performance piece on illusion and the brain called Brain Scam, which was performed by my young magician friend and which premiered at a conference in the United Kingdom in 2009. The DVD of the performance was accepted into the library of the prestigious London Magic Circle in 2011.

The story thus far has all the elements of the U process. I found a way to effectively create a learning space for the concept of mental models by following my intuition about the use of magic. This intuition thrust me into a deep insight into the subject of performance magic from all angles, including experimenting with its use as a pedagogic device; a performative act that carries with it the origins of ritual and theatre, that is, to transform perception. And I was literally co-creating with the field of emergence (Scharmer, 2007b).

As if by magic, academic articles and videos on magic and perception started appearing on the internet from September 2007 onward (at about the time of my ‘disappearance’ event, although I only became aware of these in early 2009), with the first book by Macknik, et al., Sleights of Mind, appearing in 2011.

**Further Down the U: Descent into the Nondual**
Earlier I alluded to the fact that keeping completely to a linear narrative, however much desirable, is not really possible. Except for the mind’s reconstruction, events are really non-linear with causal properties that are difficult to define. And as I write this I am cognisant of not only explaining a particular narrative approach, but also preparing the reader for the later exploration of the essentially non-linear qualities of the phases of the U process known as sensing and presencing. In essence, this is the essential feature that I’ve observed in working with Theory U; that wisdom arises out of unknowing, and that coming to unknowing only appears to be a series of steps taken. It is, by its very nature, a timeless moment of discovery. How this could actually be, is the subject of this section.

But we have to go back to 2006, and recount events, like the excursion into magic, that were crucial to how I engaged with Theory U as both a facilitator and a practitioner. This narrative is not really separate from that in the section above, but to conceptualise it in this way makes the task of holding the non-linear with a linear, tool-like language easier.

In 2006 I encountered Peter Dziuban’s book Consciousness is All (2006a), and it corresponded with my superficial mental model of nonduality; that there is only consciousness or awareness, and this speaks to a view of the ultimate oneness of life. However, there were two inquiries that seized me: What if consciousness is the product of the brain, as proposed by materialistic science? Then material separation and not non-separation is the fact. I sensed that this could have negative implications for the claims of sensing and presencing in Theory U. This first inquiry had its resolution in the second; conceptually at first, and not without much intellectual struggle that took place over six years, and then experientially, in mid-2014. The second inquiry, for me, holds the key to explaining why the U process works.

The second inquiry was sparked by an email comment made by Dziuban:

We assume that the picture of human experience as presented by the human senses is some kind of reality. Or, if it’s not reality, it is assumed to be equally present with reality … (Dziuban, 2006b p.103).

When I pressed for further detail that there is no objective reality, Dziuban directed me to his deconstruction of the way we experience an apple (2006a). This deconstruction of perception, which I will replicate later in my own words, first came to prominence in the modern West through the philosopher Bishop Berkeley. But it has been part of Eastern philosophy for more than a thousand years, if not longer. Nevertheless, even in those traditions, students of nonduality were only exposed to it after much intellectual and spiritual preparation (Goode, 2012). And what is the deconstruction? It is essentially the direct examination of experience as given by the senses, showing that all we can ever know is a sensory production. While this now accords with the findings of the neurosciences, there is still the assumption in the latter that what is sensed as reality has a ‘real’ counterpart ‘out there’, even though it cannot be sensed or proven. However, if one really follows the deconstructive steps, one comes to the mind-boggling conclusion (and it still is, for the mind) that the observer is not separate from the observed; ‘the observer is the observed’ (Krishnamurti, 2000 p.78). Therefore, the reality of the brain,
like any object, is also a sensory experience and all collapses into what is, which we could call consciousness or awareness or presence, and this is not a thing.

I had encountered this view in the teachings of Krishnamurti (1991), but somehow its import found no real resonance until now. But for six years the intellectual recognition that there is in actuality no separation because there is no objective reality, kept slipping away, and the inquiry was revived by Greg Goode’s The Direct Path (2012). My intellectual understanding now seemed more grounded and I decided that if I was to teach this within the context of Theory U, I needed to assess whether I had the communication skills to do so. To this end I presented the deconstruction at a teaching and learning conference in 2012 and failed miserably to communicate it.

It must be emphasised that throughout this time I had been giving workshops and presentations on Theory U, albeit mainly introductory ones. While I avoided engaging with the question of proving non-separation¹, it was never really an issue with the audience, because Scharmer himself does not address this. That is why it was a conceptual grey area for me to begin with, and one that I felt was necessary to address because our students want some form of evidence for why things work as they do, rather than engaging with seemingly vague, poetic concepts that can be described as being ‘mystical’ by some management theorists (Stacy, 2007 p. 92). In fact, Stacy’s remark was one of the niggling spurs at the onset of my teaching that fuelled my need for resolution.

But the magic was also working. That is, even while having my initial doubts about proving non-separation and a non-materialistic position, the work of deconstructing mental models through illusions created by performance magic, and then processes like the cognitive inquiry of Byron Katie known as ‘The Work’ (Pillay, 2001), combined to give us all in the workshops, time and again, a glimpse of presence that inevitably gave rise to creative action (Pillay, 2014), often in very surprising ways.

**Deconstructing Non-Separation**

At the heart of nonduality is the assertion that separation is an illusion. But like any philosophy, nonduality can, and often does, degenerate into a belief system, where I believe in non-separation but experience myself as separate. It would appear that beyond intellectual comprehension, no matter how sound and clear, there has to be an accompanying ontological awakening to the actual fact that ‘I am the World’, to paraphrase Krishnamurti (1991). No process, from my own experience, can give you this awakening, but you can receive glimpses. With my on-going experiences of the U process, I realised that there was in fact no need to take a purist nondual stance in respect of the fundamental phase of Theory U, which is presencing. Simply going through the

¹ If I did try to prove non-separation, the analysis simply went back to my initial assumption, which is prevalent in many students of nonduality and awareness teachings, and that is that one’s essential nature is awareness, in which all things appear. As a concept in nonduality, this is not totally incorrect, but it still admits a real world made up of separate objects, which exists within the container of non-material awareness. This latter assumption, I was to find, is false. There is only Presence, and the apparent world is an appearance that is not separate from Consciousness.
phases with authentic intention seems to be enough, especially in group dialogic contexts, for something creative and magical to emerge. So, the drive for non-conceptual certainty was part of my own journey, yet nevertheless I felt, and still feel, that to be able to articulate with precision why separation is a fallacy can help bring down a paradigm that is no longer working, one which Eisenstein calls the ‘Story of Separation’ (2013 p.6). Within the range of cultural institutions, I feel that it is the academy, primarily, that fuels the myths of separation through uninvestigated discourses. Theory U has made a small appearance, but can be quickly rejected if the theory does not pass scrutiny. Through needing to teach the model in as precise a way as possible, I had arrived at the actual place of unknowing, which is the source of wisdom.

The following section is adapted from an unpublished paper presented at the CLT conference last year (Pillay, 2015).

We assert that there is separation based on what is sensed. This feeling is further compounded by the sense of a self that seems to be doing the seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. The common, cultural depiction of this is the homunculus residing somewhere in the head. While we may be more sophisticated in our thinking about these things, the fact is that the average person feels like an entity residing in the body that is separate from the world. There are a number of dichotomies at play here, all of which, when examined closely, give rise to Scharmer’s ‘voice of fear’ (2007a&b). This is not an illusion to dismiss, and the many philosophies and psychologies that have made it their project to transcend the separate sense of self have largely failed. But that is another focus of inquiry.

However, I’m restating my earlier comment that an intellectual deconstruction has a valid place in our critical discourses, not just for interrogating Theory U.

This intellectual deconstruction of the operation of the senses goes like this: Let’s take any object that you are now sensing. For instance, an open bottle of orange marmalade. I know that it has a certain shape and colour because of the sense of sight. I also know that it has a certain density and texture because of the sense of touch. If I pick it up and smell the contents, it has a certain, distinct smell associated with an orange; if I taste it, it has a certain, unique taste. If I tap the glass bottle, I hear a sound. Collectively, the senses provide evidence of a self-existing object that resides outside of this defined physical organism that I call ‘me’.

However, all that I know of an object, any object, is my sensing of it. That is, there is no bottle of orange marmalade – in sensing, in perception – that exists independently of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. The sensing and the thing sensed are one seamless experience; the observer is not separate from the observed (Krishnamurti, 2000). I am not insensitive to the objection that the way I’ve presented this deconstruction makes it appear as anything but difficult. It is difficult to comprehend; it took me about six years to finally ‘get it’ and even that was only at the intellectual level. The deep apperception came two years later. Yet, I still maintain that it’s an inquiry that we cannot run away from anymore if we want wisdom to flower in our relationships, communities
and work. With teaching Theory U I felt that I was no longer sharing an authentic voice by simply defaulting to the systems thinking perspective.

Yes, systems thinking allows us to see that everything is inter-connected; this is an invaluable truth in a world scarred by fragmentation. But the healing of that fragmentation has to go one level higher than systems thinking; and that is to show that everything is seamlessly one, and that I can comprehend this with my intellect, and for some, actually experience the fact of it through the radical transformation of perception. And because non-separation is the actuality, and not separation, we have always felt this in our hearts (Eisenstein, 2013). This echoes Theory U’s call for an ‘Open Mind, Open Heart and Open Will’ (Scharmer, 2007a&b), where the latter is the will of the whole rather than the apparent part.

The reader might want to engage with Greg Goode’s *The Direct Path* (2012), or Peter Dziuban’s, *Simply Notice* (2013), which were written for the modern mind, without the embellishments of exotic cultural influences.

**Mindfulness and Theory U**

In my paper on mindfulness and practitioner research (Pillay, 2011), I argue for deepening practitioner research through going beyond the accepted self-study paradigm – of critically interrogating oneself to improve professional competence – and becoming mindful; that is, engaging in non-conceptual awareness. The thesis was situated within the domain of nonduality, with specific reference to the dis-ease that chronic separation engenders; generated as it is by the thinking self, in contrast to the sense of wholeness that mindful presence elicits.

The paper continues with an analysis of Theory U as being an exemplar for a form of mindful action learning that articulates various kinds of knowing that culminate in non-conceptual being or presence, which is the ground of the generative field of creative potential.

The purpose here of summarising this paper is to show that as a reflective practitioner, deeply engaged as a teacher in improving my communication of the perceived nondual dimensions of the U process, I was unconsciously leaving a trail of my own seeing phase through my writings about Theory U, which charted the ever-widening and deepening discoveries. This current paper marks the confidence to engage in the deconstruction of perception presented here. But this communicative competence, as in the U journey, pales into insignificance against the act of presencing. And what is it that is sensed in the present? That there is no self and no other; there is just *what is*.

**Presence and the Timeless**

I empathise with those who struggle with the apparently vague phrase *what is*. The question what is *what is*? is natural for the uninitiated student, as the term can be infuriatingly vague, as they can be for concepts like *presencing* or *future resonance*
(Scharmer, 2007b p.402). But more than the apparent vagueness of these concepts that occur within the lexicon of Theory U, is the oftentimes unsettling doubt that we are dealing with unscientific theory that gestures towards New Age sensibilities rather than sound, precise and empirically grounded theories.

This awareness of the difficulties that students had in entertaining such notions as ‘leading from the future as it emerges’ (Scharmer, 2007b), led me to introduce an exploration of time from a nondual perspective, which postulates that there is only the now. In our actual experience we cannot find time; even the label ‘now’ is misleading because it implies a subtle moment of time, but as a concession to language, we use linguistic pointers to signify what just is. Yet, at the same we can all attest to apparently experiencing time. But again, through closer examination we find that time is really a construct of thought; that no matter how incredulous it appears to the mind, what we experience as time is actually a movement happening in the timeless now. If this is profoundly apperceived, then leading from the future as it emerges makes absolute sense, in that the future is now, and we can sense this through being fully present with all our senses mindfully alert and not distracted by the chatter of thought. This notion is echoed by Scharmer’s words: ‘The currency that counts at the bottom of the U is not ideas, words, or insights.’ (2007b, p.402)

When I first realised the need for deconstructing the notion of time in presenting the deeper, nondual, dimensions of Theory U, I was taken aback when a student jumped up angrily at me and demanded that I stop talking nonsense and demonstrate to her that time, as given in my lecture, did not exist. I was at first nonplussed as to what to do, but the student was seething with anger, no doubt made worse by earlier performances of magic. In a flash, I saw a possible way to empirically verify my claim. I asked the student to count out ten seconds with me. When we got to five I changed from calling out numbers, and instead used the word ‘now’. Now, now, now, now …, all the while bringing my right hand down vertically to visually reinforce the sense that time, if it does exit, does so vertically and not horizontally.

The curious side effect for all of us present was the meditative quality that this simple exercise brought about. As we counted out the seconds, with the shift to the word ‘now’, we all sensed this timeless moment, in which all time appears and disappears. It was a magical change of perception; we touched the place where wisdom resides.

Conclusion

This account of teaching aspects of Theory U through the lens of nonduality is unavoidably self-reflective, but is within the tradition of practitioner research and autoethnography. When attempting to capture the moments of encountering the source of wisdom, language often fails because the source is the stillness within, which we call Presence, Being. Hence this form of literary narrative, the story, had to be used, but mindful of the necessary connections that have to be made with analytical thought and the more formal parameters of the conference’s purpose.
By no means is this account inclusive; and one relies on the spaces between the things said – the presence between the words – to give the full resonance of the actual, which is always right here.

In practical terms, this learning best happens in dialogic contexts. A model like Theory U is simply a tool for framing the excursion into the unknown terrain of wisdom. As a practitioner I have found that keeping the journey simple has always been the best way forward. The word is not the thing, and this maxim is often forgotten by the academic consumed by theories and concept-making in a world of knowledge production, where this knowledge often exits in an artificial bubble of intellectual prowess, which has no resonance with the actual. But, embedded within the U model is the challenge to ascend into creative realisation and action after descending into presencing.

My journey as teacher and practitioner was such a journey, and is best summed up by Eisenstein’s words:

Where does the wisdom to act in entirely new ways come from? It comes from nowhere, from the void; it comes from inaction. When we see it, we realize it was right in front of us all along. It is never far away; yet at the same time it is in a different universe—a different Story of the World. (2013 p. 118)

REFERENCES


