Lifelong learning : theological education and supervision

Ward, F
WARNING

This material has been provided to you pursuant to section 49 of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) for the purposes of research or study. The contents of the material may be subject to copyright protection under the Act.

Further dealings by you with this material may be a copyright infringement. To determine whether such a communication would be an infringement, it is necessary to have regard to the criteria set out in Part 3, Division 3 of the Act.

WARNING

This reading is NOT complete.

Copyright restrictions limit the amount included in this file.

To complete the reading the book may be accessed through the Moore Theological College Library.
Lifelong Learning
Theological Education and Supervision
Frances Ward

scm press
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii
Preface xi

Introduction 1
1 Learning to Read the Signs of the Times: Ministry in a Changing World 51
2 What Kind of Learning? Developments within Theological Education 65
3 Learning to Play: The Interplay of Theology 87
4 Learning to Listen: The Practice of Supervision 105
5 Learning to Write: The Living Human Document 129
6 Learning to Learn: Resistances Good and Bad 153
7 Learning to Cope with the Downside 173
Conclusion 182

Bibliography 185
Index of Names and Subjects 189
INTRODUCTION

You find the term 'lifelong learning' all over the place in today's culture, and not just on the notice boards in institutions of further and higher education, in literature on continuing professional education or in books on study skills. Tap the words on an internet search engine and you will gain access to over four million sites. The UK government Department for Education and Skills site will tell you that 'it's never too soon or too late' for learning. The EarlyChildhood site will inform you that lifelong learning starts here. There are courses galore to enhance your skills, to empower the learning community, to 'learndirect', to learn as a family, to learn through transitions, to learn into old age. Lifelong learning, it seems, is everyone's business. The rhetoric has permeated all aspects of life – and church ministry and theological education have not escaped.

The prevalence of lifelong learning indicates a shift of emphasis that has occurred over the last few decades from an understanding of education as something done to you when young, to a sense that education is the responsibility of anyone who takes seriously the need to continue to learn and grow through life, professionally and personally. It is a shift that has happened since John Hull wrote *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* in 1985. There he argued that one of the main problems that faced adult Christians was the traditional understanding of the church as a teaching office that handed on knowledge from teacher to learner. Learning was a passive activity; it was something received. With that view of
education, adult learning becomes a contradiction between a return to a childlike state, and the received wisdom that adulthood puts an end to childish ways. To become a learner, as an adult, writes Hull, can be ‘to abandon one’s adulthood’ (1985, p. 208).

Since he wrote in the mid 1980s, learning has become something that adults take responsibility for. You can pick and choose courses that suit your particular needs. Lifelong learning can enable you to gain different skills so that you are able to respond more effectively to a changing work market, or simply enhance your leisure hours. ‘Lifelong learning’ is so widespread you could be forgiven for thinking that lifelong was the only way of learning, and it is important to sustain a range of educational methods, and recognize that for some purposes and at some times of life, different ways of learning are needed.

So who is this book on lifelong learning, supervision and theological education for? It is aimed primarily at those who are training for church ministry in all its many forms, and those responsible for that training, but the book is also for anyone who is interested in reflecting upon their practice. The book offers ways of sustaining the learning and reflection for those who minister, throughout their professional lives. I have used the term ‘reflective practitioner’ so that the book is inclusive of all who seek to develop through their ministries, whether ordained or lay. By drawing together the current literature on supervision and theological education, I explore what supervision can offer as an educational means to sustain adult learning. Supervision is understood here as what happens when a practitioner takes space and time out in an environment that facilitates ongoing processes of reflection on practice. It is facilitated by the ‘supervisor’, who may work individually with the reflective practitioner, or in a group. In a theological context, supervision can include reflection upon the resources of the living traditions of faith. I suggest that the goal of lifelong learning is the acquiring of practical wisdom in the sense that Aristotle and others after him have used the term ‘phronesis’ (see Graham, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2001). The emphasis upon knowing in action by reflection upon practice runs through this book as the key goal of lifelong learning.

Hull believes that for this change from teaching to learning to happen, it helps if we use different metaphors and analogies of God: ‘as long as the central idea in education was that of teaching, the place of God in a theology of education was clear enough, since he was conceived of as the supreme, all knowing and authoritative teacher’ (1985, p. 212). Instead of ‘God the teacher’, Hull proposes carefully that we understand God’s nature as one which learns. He writes, ‘If we can speak of the adulthood of God, we may say that he is continually renewed through learning, and so is both the ancient of days and the eternal child’ (1985, p. 224). In making this proposal, Hull wants to emphasize that the need to learn does not necessarily imply a lack of any sort. It is not something that adults should be ashamed of doing. If God can be understood as a learning God, then we can understand our own learning in the different context of faith in God who is intimately interested and involved in creation, renewed continually by the encounter with the world in an ongoing expansion of life. This book, about lifelong learning, is rooted here. If we can talk of a living God, we can also talk of a learning God, full of loving attention towards the world.

It can be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. Depending on how God is understood, that fear can be triggered by different things. If God is seen as a strict teacher who cajoles and instructs, who tells us off when we get it wrong, then we will be fearful like some caricature of a Victorian child, vulnerable to a dominant God who is ready to use the ruler when we err. Or it can be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God because God challenges us to learn despite our inclinations not to change, our need to be right, our lack of confidence and our defensiveness. To commit oneself to a process of lifelong learning is to be open to learning throughout life, and from life; from its challenges, failures and possibilities, which will be different at different stages of our
Lifelong Learning lives. To learn means to encounter new experience and other perspectives and this can change us. To learn in the hands of the living God will challenge our sense of identity: It will take us, with a God who is 'both the ancient of days and the eternal child', into a lifelong seeking after understanding that brings us to the limit of our comprehension. As Nicholas Lash says, 'the search for understanding, is for all people and at all times, an endless search: whoever you are, and however wise and learned you may be there is always infinitely more that you might try to understand' (2004, p. 8). A lifelong learner is someone who knows there is much more to understand.

This book on lifelong learning is for people who see themselves as engaged upon a journey that is God-given, a journey that seeks God, transcendent and incarnate in the world, a journey of service and ministry. If God is a living God, that journey is a path of life. To be on a path of life is to be willing to be transformed and changed in ways that take us to the core of our identity, where all we hold most dear and most terrifying is found. Learning is to seek after God on a lifelong journey. It is to hope to create ourselves in God's image, as we grow in understanding and in the desire to make a better world. Just as God is both the ancient of days and the eternal child, this journey will not necessarily be a linear one. It may circle around particular areas, familiar or unfamiliar territory, at different times of our lives. If it is a journey of lifelong learning, though, it will be marked by openness to where God leads, a willingness to be changed, a desire to risk former certainties in order to practise faithful discipleship.

An Overview of the Book

Imagine looking down on one of those safety nets provided for high-wire artists at a circus. The net itself is there, primarily, to hold anyone that falls by accident, those who slip or lose their balance. But it gives confidence merely by its presence to those who are competent: it enables risks to be taken high above. And sometimes, imagine, the net is somewhere to dive just for the fun of it; a glorious trampoline where one can bounce and bounce and then lie still and contemplate the wire high above, for a time quiet and swaying gently, with the opportunity to think about new movements, new combinations, different techniques, working relationships. Falling into the hands of the living God is a bit like that, I imagine. It is to fall into hands that hold you, yes, but which also inspire and challenge. The best supervision offers something similar. A holding place of safety, a space that reflective practitioners can rely upon when things go pear-shaped, or when they want to bounce ideas around, or when they need a reassuring sense of confidence. Supervision is a bit like a safety net that offers the security that is necessary for challenging learning to happen.

That safety net requires anchor ropes to suspend it. If supervision is the subject matter of the book, then it can be approached in a number of different ways. I offer seven anchor ropes that give us different ways into the central subject matter — and depending on your approach, you might find it better to read, not from beginning to end, but from a particular chapter that captures your attention.

Anchor Rope One: Learning to Read the Signs of the Times

The literature on supervision has primarily come from a psychotherapeutic background (see Hawkins and Shohet, 2002; Foskett and Lyall, 1990 and the further reading at the end of the book) and as such has offered useful insights to theologians and reflective practitioners. I want, however, to locate the work of supervision more centrally within a learning church and the ministry it offers in today's world. The first anchor rope explores the shape of ministry in contemporary times and the growing impact of globalization upon society. What is it to minister in such a world, and how can supervision support that ministry? The first anchor rope, Chapter 1, locates supervision within the ministry of a church that seeks to serve a changing world.
Anchor Rope Two: What Kind of Learning?

The second anchor rope charts the changes that continue to occur in theological education. It starts with a brief overview of educational theory, noting the influence of writers such as Polanyi, Freire, Kolb and Schön. I then take the developments within the Church of England as a case study, examining the reports from the mid-1980s to the present day as indicative of the way theological education has responded to developments in understanding of how adults learn and integrate their knowledge with practice.

Anchor Rope Three: Learning to Play: The Interplay of Theology

The third anchor rope extends the metaphor of the 'space' that supervision can provide to enable adults to learn. As we explore the space of supervision— that net below us that offers security and confidence to experiment with new practice—I use the work of D.W. Winnicott, his creative approach to playing and reality and his idea of a facilitating environment where learning happens. The space is also seen as the place of encounter, infused by the presence of God, where self and other can engage. We look at the work of John V. Taylor on the go-between God, and others who use Trinitarian theology to provide ways of understanding learning that occurs within encounters with difference, both within ministry and within supervision.

Anchor Rope Four: Learning to Listen: The Practice of Supervision

A fourth anchor rope takes us into the practice of supervision itself and the skilled ability to listen to other people reflecting on their ministry. For listening to happen at any depth, the supervision sessions need to be established clearly in terms of a contract, the working relationship and the context of the organization. Chapter 4 shows how to write verbatim accounts which capture effectively the dialogues of ministry, in order to bring material for reflection on practice. The chapter introduces the 'clinical rhombus', a simple diagram that enables the relationships and dynamics of supervision to be mapped. The phenomenon of the parallel process is explored here. Two verbatim accounts, provided by Sarah and Robert, are worked as examples.

Anchor Rope Five: Learning to Write: The Living Human Document

I draw upon dialogical theory, with its beginnings in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, to understand further how external and internal dialogues, conversations and other forms of non-verbal communication can be used within supervision. This chapter shows how writing a learning journal can be a form of self-supervision. A journal can provide the tools to consider conversations that occur in ministry and analyse how what is said is often dependent on relations of power between people.

Anchor Rope Six: Learning to Learn: Resistance Good and Bad

Chapter 6 draws us into a consideration of how resistance to learning comes about as powerful emotions of anxiety or fear can inhibit engagement with new material. Resistance to learning usually arises because the learning is hard and there is a desire to avoid it. I give examples of different games that both the reflective practitioner and the supervisor can play to resist learning. This chapter also continues the exploration of how power permeates ministry and supervision. If the supervision that is provided fails to take account of the genuine differences of perspective that the supervised person brings, then it will run into difficulties as the person being supervised will start to resist the learning opportunities that are offered.
Anchor Rope Seven: Learning to Cope with the Downside

Ministry in today's world can be a struggle. This chapter recognizes the need to deal honestly with disappointment and a sense of failure so that, within a learning situation, the reflective practitioner can gain resources to cope with the regret and guilt that can result from mistakes that are made, and the disheartenment and lack of motivation that can result from managing decline within churches.

It may seem that the practice of supervision is addressed directly and properly for the first time in Chapter 4, and if you want to cut to the chase then you can always start to read there. However, there is good reason for the initial chapters: I find it difficult to think about supervision in ministry without thinking about ministry itself in the context of church and world, hence Chapter 1.

Throughout the book I argue that supervision can sustain lifelong learning and that, therefore, it is primarily an educational process rather than a therapeutic one, and so educational theory needs some exploration as well, particularly the emergence of the notion of reflective practice within theological education.

So we now have a net (Figure 1) that has seven anchor ropes:

1. Learning to Read the Signs of the Times: Ministry in a Changing World
2. What Kind of Learning? Developments within Theological Education
3. Learning to Play: the Interaction of Theology
4. Learning to Listen: the Practice of Supervision
5. Learning to Write a Living Human Document
6. Learning to Learn: Resistances Good and Bad
7. Learning to Cope with the Downside

As it hangs, the net, as seven anchor ropes, would hardly catch anyone, or offer any sort of hammock upon which to swing and reflect. We need some strands that link the anchor ropes. These have been provided by six ministers who were kind enough to write a journal over three days, chronicling their life and ministry. Geoff, Jean, Lynn, James, Ben and Roger wrote for me a full, warts-and-all record that included what they did in their time off, how they felt and what they thought. I wanted a good cross-section of different ministries in the Britain of today. Lynn is a Church of Scotland minister working on a deprived estate in Major Scottish city. Jean is a rural advisor in the south of England, with responsibility for a number of Anglican parishes. Geoff ministers in a 'new town', built in the 1950s in a northern city. Ben is a Church Army officer who oversees the development of a fresh expression of church in inner city Manchester called Sanctus. James is an Anglican
curate working in a suburban context in a northern town and Roger is a Methodist superintendent of a circuit in the North West. In asking these particular people, I wanted a range of examples of church life, from rural to inner city, to estate, to new emerging shape of church. Perhaps, on reflection, what is missing is the experience of affluent church-going, though it is there implicitly, for example behind Jean’s obvious concern with her engagement with rural issues, and the wealth that lies behind Ben’s story of Sanctus. The experience that each records does, however, raise issues concerning the joys and difficulties of ministry in today’s world, and provides the book with cameos of practice upon which to reflect.

Alongside these six strands, three student ministers, Jackie, Sarah and Robert, have also presented us with material from their practice of ministry. We see how Jackie’s portfolio works as a way of guided learning and Robert and Sarah have provided verbatim accounts of conversations they had,

Figure 2: The Seven Anchor Ropes with connecting strands which represent the experience of ministry.

written because the encounters left them with questions that they would bring to supervision.

Drawing was never my strong point! It looks more like a spider’s web than a safety net. But then, perhaps as a web it can suggest other ways of thinking about ministry, theological education and supervision. Miller-McLemore has written about ‘the living human web’ of pastoral practice (1996, p. 9), how we are caught up in many different dynamics which include social forces, personal and political concerns, the whole fabric of institutional life, permeated by power, that make us who we are. Perhaps the ‘messiness’ of ministry in today’s church is better represented by a spider’s web, displaying the intricacies and complexities of its delights and disappointments.

Ministry and Supervision in Complex Contexts

In the eyes of many, it is strange to be committed to the ministry of the church in today’s world. More often than not, you become part of church and organizational structures that can be bizarre and even frustrating in the way they work. You find yourself working in communities of faith which are complex organisms with hopes and tensions, visions and fears. Ministry is set in the context of day-to-day routines, but it can be unpredictable in the wide range of activities involved. Gone are the days of the lone minister upon whom all depended for the pastoral work and leadership within a pastorate or parish.

Now, more often than not, ministry is corporate, agreed with colleagues both lay and ordained, as a community of faith decides upon its visions and priorities for ministry and mission. It can be difficult, though, to assess the effectiveness of ministry. It can be difficult, too, to cope when things get out of control, or when it becomes a business of managing decline. Through a lifelong ministry you can be challenged personally and professionally by an ever-changing church and world that can raise hard issues and confusing questions.

The relationship between the church and the world can seem
Lifelong Learning

a strange one. Is the church there to point the way back to basics, to core values that sustain the fabric of society, promoting the family, honesty in a greedy world, the sanctity of life? Is it there to show the way forward to a more inclusive society where all can discover that they are children of God, find a place and fear no discrimination? What is a church or congregation there to do and be, in a world that seems indifferent; where the foundations of traditional faith are contested and shaken; where many increasingly turn away from institutional and traditional forms of religion towards the appeals of New Age spirituality in the search for well-being and relaxation?

How can churches continue to thrive when what Madeleine Bunting (2004) calls ‘willing slaves’ have no time or energy to offer voluntary organizations like churches, as they did in the past? It can be strange to follow the way, the truth and the life in a society where ‘Generation X’ and their offspring have little or no residual knowledge about the life, death and ministry of Christ (Lynch, 2002); where competing fundamentalisms seem to be in the ascendancy and the world is an increasingly dangerous place as Christianity, Judaism and Islam fail to live together in peace in many parts of the world.

This book does not attempt to provide any answers to the complexity of church life and ministry in a globalized world. It does seek to explore what ministry is about - the experience of discipleship in the midst of that complexity. It takes seriously the commitment that many people make, and offers some ways in which their lifelong journey can be supported and enhanced by the practice of supervision. It is a book concerned with practical wisdom and adult learning; how adults learn effectively, as they reflect critically upon their practice, and find ways to change and enhance who they are and what they do.

How to Use this Book

You can approach this book through a number of entry points, as outlined above. It may be that to start with the six accounts of ministry are a good way to engage - with the reality of their stories. Or perhaps you like to reflect theologically before the rest, in which case Chapter 3 is for you. Wherever you start, though, read this section first which offers some explanation of how to use the book and the key points to grasp.

Turning Life into Text

The six accounts of three days of ministry introduce one of the main ideas of the book. I explore here how personal writing can be used as a means of turning life into text, how ‘living human documents’ can provide useful material for reflection upon practice. These texts can be professional or personal portfolios, as Jackie shows; or learning journals; verbatim (word-for-word) reports of an encounter in ministry; or a piece of creative writing. Such writing can subsequently be reflected upon either alone in a form of self-supervision, or one-to-one with a supervisor, or within a group. To recognize the importance of texts in this way is to draw on the growing understanding of the place of reflective writing in education and the practice of professional life and continuing ministerial education (see Moon, 2004; Bolton, 2003).

Documents that turn life into text in order to reflect upon practice are an imaginative way of taking forward the Clinical Pastoral Education movement that originated in the United States in the 1920s and 30s with the work of Anton Boisen and Richard Cabot. Cabot pleaded in 1925 'for a Clinical Year in the Course of Theological Study', and in the same year Boisen, recovering from a breakdown, returned to his work as a chaplain at Worcester State Hospital, Massachusetts, and invited some theological students to work with him in the hospital during the summer vacation. He exhorted the theological students to study not only books, but the ‘living human documents’ (that is, themselves) in pastoral encounters. Allison Stokes writes how ‘for him it was an opportunity. How he dealt with this opportunity has affected the course of American religious history’ (Stokes, 1985, p. 39). Although
Cabot and Boisen eventually fell out, from their initial collaboration Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) was born, and in 1967 the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education was founded. CPE courses can be found throughout the world, particularly in the States, but also in Australia, South Africa and Germany as a mandatory element in theological education to improve the quality of reflective practice by regular supervision (see the website: www.acpe.edu). There is now a recently formed UK Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (UKACPE), which draws together those working and training in chaplaincy and theological education (for further details, contact Linda.doyle@slam.nhs.uk). Students work under the guidance of a qualified supervisor and bring case material from their ministerial practice to supervision in order to reflect within a safe and challenging space, either within a group setting or individually. The case material is usually presented in the form of verbatim reports, and as such are understood as ‘living human documents’. This expression captures both the verbatim record of the conversation that has occurred in ministry, and also the practitioner who is presenting the material. As the account is read and performed, for instance, in role play, the words present the person. This means that the person can feel that his or her very self is on the line: their life is being examined, in supervision, like a text.

The expression ‘living human document’ has been taken up by many practitioners and practical theologians. Charles Gerkin, for example, emphasizes the narrative and interpretative elements of the pastoral and learning situation. An encounter between a counsellor and client becomes a coming together of the different complex stories of each to create new interpretations and possibilities for the future. He writes:

When Anton Boisen first suggested that pastors should include in their preparation ‘the study of living human documents,’ he proposed an analogy the implications of which have never been fully developed. Boisen is generally considered the founder of clinical pastoral education in America and thereby one of the progenitors of the twentieth-century pastoral counseling movement. His concern, however, was only secondarily with pastoral counseling as such. More basic was Boisen’s concern that the objectifications of theological language not lose touch in the minds of pastors with the concrete data of human experience. His fear was that the language of theology was being learned by seminarians and pastors without that connection being made. Only the careful and systematic study of the lives of persons struggling with the issues of the spiritual life in the concreteness of their relationships could, in Boisen’s view, restore that connection. For Boisen this meant the study of ‘living human documents’. (1984, p. 37)

Gerkin highlights Boisen’s own concern that theological reflection be integrated with the skills and practice of pastoral counselling. He draws upon the hermeneutical theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur to explore further the way in which the complexities of language and interpretation are present in what he describes as a three-way conversation between ‘the Christian tradition, biblical and theological’, ‘myself and the dilemmas of my life’ and ‘my counseling practice and its problems’. From a rich interplay between the contributions of each of these points of a triangle (1984, p. 60) an integration of practice and reflection can occur. In ways that Gerkin does not develop, I consider the ways in which learning occurs, on the basis of such ‘living human documents’, within supervision.


I have used the word ‘supervision’ in this book, but only because it is difficult to find another that describes what we are investigating. At this stage it is perhaps easier to say what it is not. It is different to consultancy, where an expert will, most often at the invitation of a group or individual, come into a situation as an outsider, listen, and offer appropriate guidance. Nor is this book about spiritual direction or guidance, the one-to-
one relationship that seeks to understand faith by reflection on prayer and life. Nor is supervision about counselling or therapy, where someone comes for help and healing by talking through difficult situations, thoughts and feelings.

Supervision is about reflection on practice in order to learn to be a more effective practitioner, to be a 'true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad', as Aristotle defined phronesis (quoted in Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 56). Supervision will often happen when the reflective practitioner is in a training role, but not necessarily: they may be seeking to reflect throughout their learning life under the guidance of someone who can offer a sense of distance from the material under consideration. In training situations, some element of direction and evaluation is necessary; part of the discipline of being trained is accepting that others have the responsibility of oversight of the training and ministry (in this sense of oversight, 'supervision' is the right word). In a training situation appraisal and assessment will be an inevitable part. Appraisal is much more effective, though, when it is integral to learning: when the learner, in collaboration with those responsible for the training process, takes responsibility for the aims and outcomes of his or her own learning. And, of course, anyone in a training or supervisory role is also learning. This book explores methods of supervised reflection that are useful during periods of training, but I recommend that such reflection on practice becomes a habit, a lifelong process that supports continued learning throughout ministry and life.

Identity: Formed in Stone, or Dynamic in Dialogue?

Often theological educators use the word 'formation' to describe the processes of adult learning and preparation for ministry. I do not use the word here, because it suggests to me an end to the process of learning, a formed product as the result, a minister trained and shaped for evermore in some clerical paradigm that values a heroic individualism as a model of ministry. The way the notion of ministerial identity is understood in this book stays with the root of the word 'formation', however. I suggest throughout the book that lifelong learning is about being transformative and 'performative' (Graham, 1996; Atherton, 2003). 'Performative', as Elaine Graham uses the word, means attentive to the ways in which the practices of life and ministry not only reveal faith, but also embody and create faith. So as ministry works at being transformative within the complex local networks of a globalized world, faith communities, Graham argues, perform their faith and, as they do so, they embody the realm of God, a realm of justice and love, peace and hope. Instead of a formed identity as the end result of a training process, lifelong learning is about transforming and performing the living traditions of ministry in today's church and society. It is about embodying the rich inheritance of tradition, scripture, reflective reason and a critical seeking-to-understand the ways of God. In a world of immediacy, of image, of instant communication, the church and its ministry can remind the world of living traditions of hope which are based on a sense of rootedness in life-giving texts and history.

I suggest that to minister is to refuse to understand oneself as ever 'formed', but always open to growth, to the encounter with new ways of doing things and to interpret the given practices and traditions of faith in new ways. It is to see oneself in creative dialogue with others in the world, in dialogue with living traditions of interpreting biblical texts and theological resources from the past, and in dialogue with the present experience of faith in changing cultures. This suggests a sense of identity that is dialogical, willing to share oneself with others and to be open to the (sometimes radical) otherness, or 'alterity', of different viewpoints.

Throughout this book, identity is understood as dialogical and dynamic. Dialogue can be seen to happen in any number of ways and places. First, dialogue is fundamental to all aspects of ministry, whether in face to face encounters, in meetings, by email, in outreach or through networking with different
individuals or groups. How and what is said, and what is not said, is significant to the way in which ministry is carried forward. And then as material is brought from the practice of ministry to supervision, dialogue is crucial to the reflection in that secondary situation. If a particular text that is the ‘living human document’ is brought for consideration, it will contain within it the many different perspectives and voices of the primary situation. The dialogues which occur within supervision can throw light upon the ways in which the minister is engaged in different situations and contexts and in negotiation with others, and can offer the opportunity to experiment with alternative practice.

Then there will be internal dialogues (‘Did I really say that?’ ‘What should I have said then?’), or a constant conversation with someone else that continues in your head after you have left them. To attend to the many ways in which dialogue occurs is to value how it shapes us, how our sense of identity is continuously formed and reformed in encounter and language. To explore a sense of dialogical self is to develop skills and the ability to be reflective and self-reflexive, self-aware and open to learning and reflection upon practice.

To see oneself as dialogical is to attend to one’s own voice in different situations. It is to attend to questions of position and power which, I shall argue, permeate all relationships and which needs to be owned and addressed. Michel Foucault’s work, especially on the nature of power, has inspired followers to analyse discourse and think further about how language and dialogue involves us in different and complex situations of negotiating power, dominance and authority; the ways in which institutional life can shape and discipline the lives of individuals (see his Discipline and Punish, 1975/1991); what it means to the understanding of identity to be in relations of power and difference (see Bernauer and Carrette, 2004).

Exploring further that understanding of identity as always in relations of power and difference, I find in the doctrine of the Trinity (Chapter 3) a model of interrelationship and dialogue that provides a pattern of mutuality, of love and respect of difference that can offer rich theological insights into the nature of dialogue.

One of the ways in which dialogue happens is between you, the reader, with your experience of ministry and theological education, and the text of this book. You can make use of the book, and work with the method of reflection upon practice that is used here by writing your own ‘living human document’ as a learning journal as you read. If you do decide to read the book like this, the activities I have provided will give you the opportunity to pause for thought and to bring what you have read into dialogue with your own experience and thinking. Educationally, this technique is often used in distance learning materials, and can be a helpful way of making the material under consideration your own. This is an option, however. It may be that you prefer to read the book without the interruptions of such ‘activities’. If so, simply ignore them.

Activity one
Do you keep a learning journal or a portfolio already? If so, write a side of a sheet of paper describing how you use it – what sort of things you include, how you reflect upon what you have written, how you seek to learn from your experience.

Do you write for someone else – in reality, or in your head? If so, who? And what value do their comments have?

Activity two
George Kelly wrote of Personal Construct Theory in the 1950s (Kelly, 1955). He argued that we construe meaning in our lives and develop constructs that serve as interpretative frameworks (see Chapter 6 below). One of the ways to discover more about your own construct is to write, describing yourself in the third person, as if to a stranger, and explaining the main motivations and passions of your life and ministry.