

# Grounding practice research in the Philosophy of the Implicit: methods, experiments and innovations

---

Greg Walkerden PhD  
Macquarie University, Sydney

Deliberative Transformation: Embodied Phenomenology and Process  
Thinking

September 28 - October 1, 2023  
The International Focusing Institute, DePaul University,  
University of Iceland, Universität Koblenz, Kansai University

# Goals for this talk



- Convey the **importance** of disciplined practice research
  - both formal (research communities) and informal (communities of practice) - for our practice traditions
- Taking examples from my own research as instances, convey some sense of the **breadth** of opportunities for social change
  - Shifting professional practice towards sustained felt sensing
  - Expanding the range of the focusing tradition
  - Deepening understanding of non-human beings
- Convey the **potential** of the Philosophy of the Implicit to make a large contribution, from the perspectives of both practitioners and scholars

# Approaching listening to this talk as a reflective practice experiment

---

Some opportunities (after Donald Schön 1987)

- **Exploratory practice:** **As you are listening, notice your own process and be curious and learn**, e.g. noticing ...
  - power and authority: listening tactically, differentially, mutually?, ...
  - emotional undergrounds: listening anxiously, combatively, curiously?, ...
- **Move testing:** **Trying out promising variations** to how you usually listen when they occur to you (e.g. perhaps privileging your process more)
- **Hypothesis testing:** e.g. both the following will deepen your understanding
  - 'tasting' variations I describe experientially as I am describing them - feeling your way into what they would involve (from Feldenkrais)
  - letting listening be a sustained felt sensing process: letting my words land in your focusing space, ... (from *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*)

# Professional development [preparing students for a major assignment - an example slide]

## Checking questions

re your knowledge and skills as a practice researcher, to ask as you move forward

---

1. Do you know enough about one or more of the practices that are the focus of this course 'to try them out for real' in some setting in your life (that is outside this course)?
  - systems analysis
  - stakeholder analysis
  - management system analysis and design
  - creative thinking
  - Principled Negotiation
  - reflective practice
2. Are you sufficiently familiar with Donald Schon's kinds of reflective practice experiment to use them in your daily life?
  - exploratory practice,
  - move testing, and/or
  - hypothesis testing(remember the boundaries between these are not hard and fast: they may merge and blend in your practice)

3. Do you know how to check with your 'feel' for how your practice is going (Gendlin, Walkerden) to learn from it?

how skilled are you at 'listening to yourself'?

... is slowing down and letting an idea emerge slowly something you are familiar with?

... is being curious when something you've written or said no longer seems to fit a stance that comes effortlessly and easily?

... is checking back and forth ... in a relaxed, gentle fashion ... between your feel for what is needed and your ideas or plans familiar territory?, ... letting your ideas adjust to fit what you feel is needed (and vice versa when that feels appropriate)

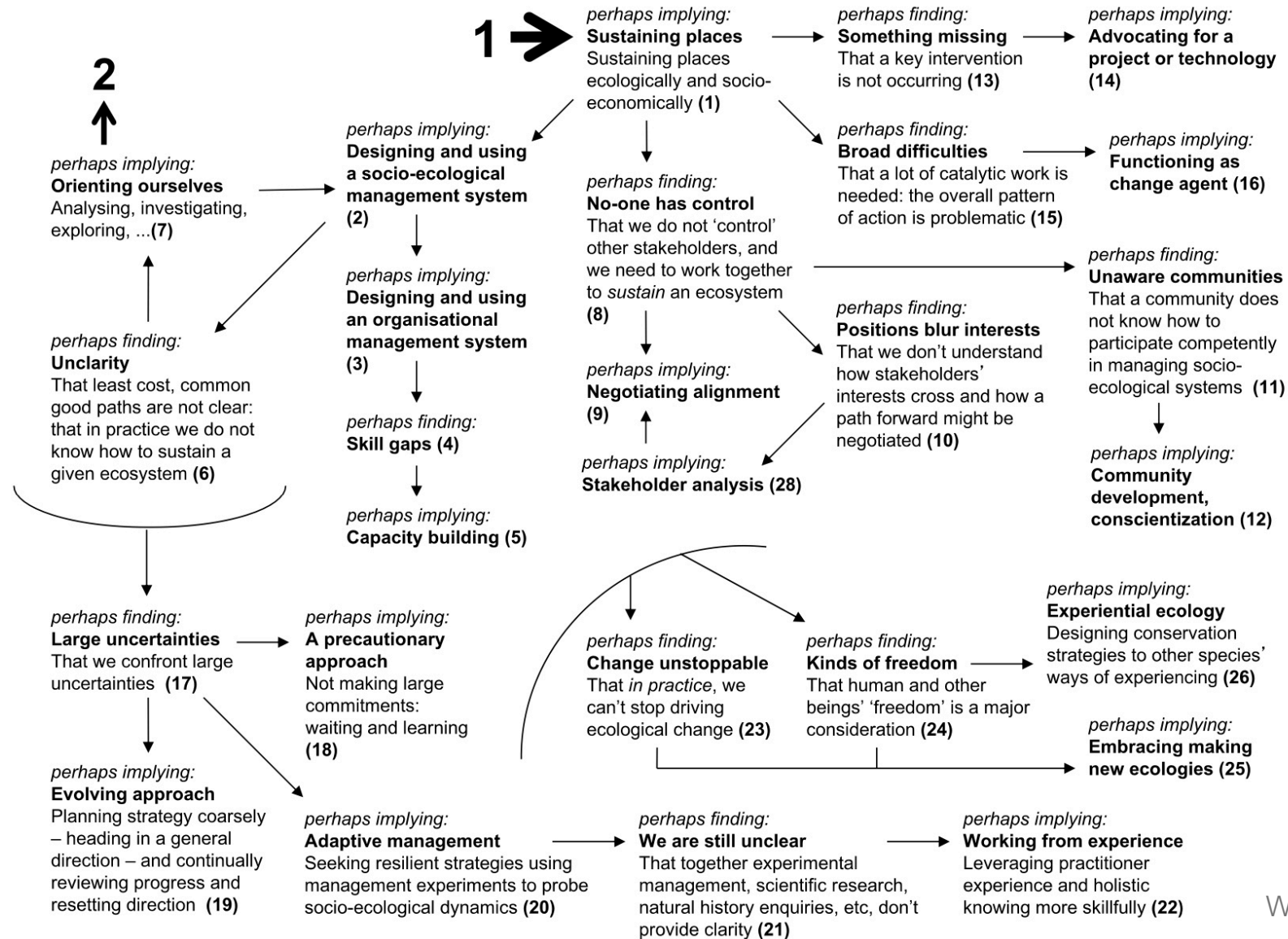
# Professional development:

## Teaching felt sense centred reflective professional practice

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Curiosities              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Felt sensing is underpins astute professional practice, but how do you teach it? Many approaches are indirect (e.g. Schon 1987); how can it be done directly, explicitly, outside the helping professions?</li></ul>   |
| Approaches               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experimenting with alternative teaching methods to help students develop felt sensing skills (over more than a decade)</li><li>• Explicitly using students' assignments as data</li></ul>  |
| Insights                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A focus on skills that help professionals be effective internal entrepreneurs</li><li>• Felt sense centred reflective practice experiments project as 50% of assessment</li><li>• Homework exercises that help students ground their systems analysis and negotiation practices in felt sensing</li><li>• Building links from existing practice skills to more sustained, more holistic, more creative felt sensing</li><li>• Particularly strong for "soft skills" that are usually considered hard to develop through formal teaching, yet are highly valued by employers</li><li>• Embedding within reflective practice: a natural fit, but also a very good way of legitimising this work</li></ul> <p>(Walkerden 2005, 2014, 2024b)</p> |
| This work as an instance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The teaching approaches employed can be used with <i>any</i> kind of professional practice</li><li>• Links amongst 'platform skills' that practitioners rely on need to be built</li></ul>   |

# Explicating know-how:

## An ecosystem management practice sensibility model



# Explicating know-how:

## Modelling the sensibilities that underpin practicing

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Curiosities              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A savouring process plays a core role in decision making, but what is its logic?, how do you describe it? Gendlin's work - centering on felt understanding, appreciating evening, etc. - provides concepts for thinking into this carefully.</li></ul>   |
| Approaches               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explicating my own professional practice - which is an expression of communities of practice and practice traditions</li><li>• Crossing multiple practitioners' understandings</li></ul>   |
| Insights                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The very poor fit of metaphors like 'repertoires of procedures' and 'flow charts' to skilful practice</li><li>• The utility of a non-standard logic for describing knowing how</li><li>• The helpfulness of decentering away from authorial authority to individual practitioners' situated felt sensing - "<i>perhaps</i> finding", "<i>perhaps</i> implying"<br/><small>(Walkerden 2009, 2010, 2019)</small></li></ul> |
| This work as an instance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The approach to researching and representing knowing how can be <i>widely</i> applied</li><li>• These methods can work both in practice tradition research and development (my focus) <i>and</i> in descriptive, explanatory work like Bourdieu's (1990a, 1990b) re <i>habitus</i></li></ul>   |

# Taking practice moves as instances:

Feeling the contraction as lovingness (main steps from practice instructions)

---

## 1. **Feeling the contraction**

Letting a felt sense of a contracting, straining, unease, difficulty, form ...

## 2. **Feeling the contraction as lovingness**

Noticing how this contracting is trying, somehow, to be helpful, ...

## 3. **Allowing fulsome lovingness to come ...**

Feeling what fulsome lovingness in this place would be ... what uncontracted loving that embodies all you understand about your situation here would be, ...

## 4. **Allowing a sense of wonder to come ...**

Allowing a sense of wonder to come ... that every wrinkle, contraction, misery (as felt in our bodies) is a wrinkle of lovingness, a movement of loving and caring, even if, even though, quite misguided ...



# Taking practice moves as instances:

## Segueing from contracting to relaxing

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Curiosities              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Simply being curious, and appreciating processes that are helpful</li></ul>  |
| Approaches               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exploratory practice followed by move testing, in Schön's (1987) terms</li></ul>   |
| Insights                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Noticing passages of living can be taken as instances, templates</li><li>• Finding that by refining iteratively formal practices can be developed</li><li>• A marked shift from Gendlin's approach to 'the critic'</li><li>• 'Contracting' as a useful concept for explicating the pulsing of horizons of awareness and concern (linked to "breaking back")</li><li>• The delight points towards 'Larger Space' processes</li><li>• Diverse practitioners have found this practice helpful; some have found it profoundly so<br/>(being explored in workshops)</li></ul> |
| This work as an instance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Any</i> focusing session process can be looked at like this</li><li>• <i>Any</i> passage of <i>any</i> kind of practicing can be approached this way - I have used this in research methods and environmental management, as well as felt sense centred reflective practice, for instance</li></ul>   |

# Crossing practice traditions:

Agendaless focusing (an excerpt from the start of practice instructions)

---

The core of the movement in this experiment is a shift from focal awareness (Focusing) to non-focal awareness (mindfulness). Being quietly present, vs doing something.

One way of experiencing the movement we are playing with is

noticing how awareness, in Focusing, is kind of funnelled: directed towards somesuch, or, oriented in a particular direction (towards somesuch kind of possibility); ... what comes is a kind of coming-to-be-engaged-with; ... 'space' takes on a particular shape, as a place for drawing close and kindness ...

and

allowing the funnel edges to come right back, to open out wide, so we are no longer present with a focused awareness, allowing the whole of what is to be ... a field ...;

'space' is kind of shapeless, destination-less ...

letting what comes come ..., be ..., drop away ..., agendalessly;  
experiencing a kind of pulsing into presence and dissolving into absence or nothingness or...;

Letting funnelled, focused, ... become ... open, quietly present ..., effortlessly, because all one is doing is relaxing, resting.

# Crossing practice traditions:

## Crossing focusing and mindfulness

### Curiosities

- If we take our felt sense of a way of moving in *one* practice tradition, and let it find expression as a way of moving in *another* practice tradition, what new way of moving do we find?

### Approaches

- This takes a 'thinking from the implicit' move that Gendlin (1989) describes as part of his formative development, and transposes it from theory development to practice innovation

### Insights

- Bringing together the conversational (focusing) and observational (mindfulness) emphases of the practices
- The crossing brings out the agenda-edness of usual focusing practice
- Letting a focusing space version of the Buddhist 'getting used to is' take shape
- Appreciating that the mapping practice terminology to experiential processes needs to be explored explicitly (being explored in workshops)

### This work as an instance

- *Any* practice tradition can be crossed with *any* other in this way
- Working with relatively closely related practice traditions creates opportunities for building process models of enlarging areas, fields, of practice

# Exploring the logical implications of Pol schemas: Investigating holding and letting within focusing practice

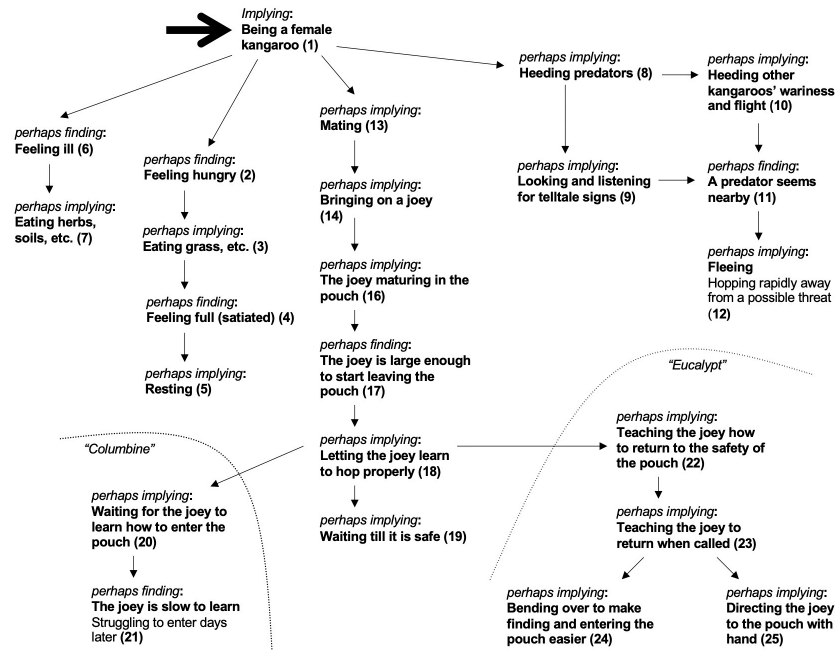
---

- A new space that is **experienced as different from usual Focusing** space:
  - ‘the quality of spaciousness has completely changed’,
  - ‘there's time and then there's some other space that's not time’,
  - ‘a different space opens up that's much bigger than me’,
  - ‘the Focusing space [...] it's quite individual, its mine [...] the spaciousness when I moved into ... [...] I was no longer an individual ...’
  - it is ‘vast’ in relation to what is *usually* experienced in *Focusing* practice
- **A different ontology**: not ‘focuser with felt senses’, rather, a ‘Vastness-Oneness’
- **Arrived at via “doubling”**: holding and letting within focusing practice

# Exploring the logical implications of Pol schemas: Extending the focusing practice tradition to Vastness-Oneness

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Curiosities              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appreciating how “doubling” describes how new fundamental kinds of space develop (e.g. how symbolising emerges from iterating bits of behaviour and felt sensing emerges from iterating in pattern use (Gendlin 2018)), what happens if we embrace <i>holding what is iterating in focusing process, and let?</i></li></ul>   |
| Approaches               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experimenting with out alternative practice instructions, for focusing, that take up these logical implications of <i>A Process Model</i> (see Walkerden 2021)</li></ul>  |
| Insights                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A pathway into experiencing, being, a kind of Vastness-Oneness ... into being with such as focuser, <i>and</i> resting in and as such ... through sitting with iteratings in focusing process, like the joy in insights coming, and the underlying, pulsing, coming of experiencing</li><li>• Formalisation of a marked expansion of both the focusing practice tradition and <i>A Process Model's</i> ‘kinds of space’ schema</li><li>• Marked resonances with mystical traditions (e.g. Christian and Buddhist)</li><li>• Potential for making traditions of spiritual practice freshly intelligible to secularly oriented people <small>(Walkerden 2021, 2024a; being explored in workshops)</small></li></ul> |
| This work as an instance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parallel work exploring how repetition - iterating - functions in familiar spiritual practices, e.g. "just sitting", counting breaths</li><li>• Working experimentally with other Pol concepts, e.g. (aPM) "the FLIP", "breaking back", (ECM) "relevance" (cf. sensibility model work), "circumlocution", ...</li></ul>   |

# Understanding non-human beings: Kangaroo know-how from the perspective of implying



Walkerden 2023

Walkerden 2023

- Revealing breadth, crossings - the whole sensibility model, panels (a) and (b) - that standard research protocols systematically obscure
- Bringing individual differences in practices into focus - panels (c) and (d) - that standard research protocols also systematically obscure

# Understanding non-human beings:

## Kangaroo know-how from the perspective of implying

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Curiosities              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How might we use Philosophy of the Implicit concepts (esp. Gendlin 2018) to illuminate the lives of non-human beings? E.g. helping with understanding animals' experiencing?</li></ul>   |
| Approaches               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Piloting a method</li></ul>  |
| Insights                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Standard mammalogy research practices exclude sensitivity to implying by design:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complexly crossing practicing is excluded from observation by design</li><li>• Legitimate findings must be averaging behaviour across categories of animals</li><li>• Natural history as a better window on individual organisms' forms of life than standard ecological research</li></ul></li><li>• A hermeneutic alternative: wholes to parts to wholes ...; first cut, second cut, ...<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A first hermeneutic movement: embracing a natural history approach</li><li>• A second hermeneutic movement: improving interpretations</li><li>• A third movement: reflecting on the powers &amp; limitations of Pol concepts ...</li></ul></li><li>• Modelling kangaroos' sensibilities<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• revealing breadth, crossings</li><li>• revealing individual differences in practices</li></ul></li><li>• Basic processes that Pol needs to handle better, e.g. what 'abiotic' - non-living - processes are; what reproduction is (one process becoming many, two becoming one); how not carrying forward can arise (Walkerden 2023)</li></ul> |
| This work as an instance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using this in long term behavioural research, where individual animals are studied ...</li><li>• Taking up more Pol concepts, <i>and</i> adding to them; currently we have <i>only</i> basic concepts ...</li><li>• Exploring the forms of life of many other kinds of organism ...</li></ul>  |

## Practice research thresholds: Placing the experiential processes Gendlin focused on in a context

---

- **The experiential process Gendlin focused on is felt sensing, and particularly deliberate, sustained, holistic felt sensing.**
- Its important to appreciate, and to explore, what kinds of important experiential processes fall outside this focus. Major opportunities for research and development lie here.
- Some of these edges:
  - a focus on doing, not relaxing, in the way that the focusing / mindfulness contrast brings out
  - a focus on relatively ordinary modes of experiencing presence and place, as the contrasts between focusing as usual and experiences of profound vastness and oneness brings out
  - work on conversation that deals with only highly attenuated, asymmetric forms of conversation, with a focus on carrying *one* participant's process forward - leaving profoundly mutual, collaborative conversation unexplored



## Practice research thresholds: Three legs unevenly developed - philosophy, psychology, practices

---

- Gendlin and/or his colleagues have explored
  - **philosophical aspects** of sustained felt sensing quite systematically (Philosophy of the Implicit texts),
  - **empirical evidence** for its importance quite systematically (the Experiencing Scale work in psychology),
- We have *not* explored the field of possible practices systematically - **except close to the three modes of practice Gendlin pioneered**, Focusing, Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy, and 'Thinking at the Edge'.
- **The field of practice research and development cries out for disciplined effort.**

## Practice research thresholds: The relatively weak integration of practice innovation and related research

---

- Innovation within practice traditions often relies on **auteurs**, innovators whose students follow the originator's insights quite or very closely, e.g. Moshe Feldenkrais (awareness through movement), Christopher Alexander (pattern languages), Tarthang Tulku (Time, space and knowledge)
- Some patches of integration linking practice traditions exist (e.g. creative thinking research, reflective practice research)
- But a *general* research program looking at the underpinnings of practice - **platform skills** that are in play together, interpenetrating and mutually defining each other - e.g. conversation, negotiation, analysis, creative thinking, reflecting - *is missing*

## Practice research thresholds: The Philosophy of the Implicit can provide key supports for disciplined practice research

---

"No-one would argue that **practice development research** is not a legitimate activity, and yet it is **owned wholly neither by practice nor research environments** since it sits slightly outside the parameters of each." (Clarke and Procter 1999)

- Central concepts like **living as occurring into implying carrying forward**, and human living as living in **nested, crossing spaces, organised by doubling**, offers foundational concepts for a disciplined, integrated understanding of practicing

Through the clarity it provides for thinking in an organised way  
about our own living and experiencing,

the transformative potential of practice research  
grounded in the Philosophy of the Implicit  
is profound

---

It is obviously not a panacea - what *actually* matters is how we live - but it can demonstrably make transformative contributions to each of:

- how professional practice is understood, approached, taught: giving felt sensing a central place
- how practice research is approached generally: adding disciplining frameworks and new methods of innovation
- how spirituality is understood: providing new forms of legitimacy, and new approaches to innovation
- how we understand non-human beings: creating platforms for more compassionate sharing of landscapes and waters

# References & other resources

---

- Bourdieu, P. 1990a. *The Logic of Practice*. California, Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990b. The scholastic point of view. *Cultural Anthropology* 5(4):380-391.
- Clarke, C. and S. Procter (1999). Practice development: ambiguity in research and practice. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 30(4):975-982
- Gendlin, E. T. 1989. Phenomenology as non-logical steps. In: *Analecta Husserliana: Vol. 26. American phenomenology: Origins and developments*: pp.404-410. E. F. Kaelin and C. O. Schrag (eds). Dordrecht, Kluwer.
- Gendlin, E. T. 1997. *Experiencing and the creation of meaning: a philosophical and psychological approach to the subjective*. Northwestern University Press.
- Gendlin, E. T. 2018. *A Process Model*. Northwestern University Press.
- Schön, D. 1987. *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Toulmin, S. 1977. *Human Understanding: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Walkerden G. 2004a. 'Thinking at the edge in environmental management and ecological theory', *The Folio*, 19(1), pp102-110.
- Walkerden G. 2004b. 'How I read the structure of the [A Process Model](#) text', *The Folio*, 19(1), pp124-130.
- Walkerden G. 2005. 'Felt knowing: a foundation for local government practice', pp170-187 in G. Keen, V.A. Brown, and R. Dyball (eds), *Social learning in environmental management*, Earthscan, London.
- Walkerden G. 2006. 'Adaptive management planning projects as conflict resolution processes', *Ecology and Society*, 11 (1): 48. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol11/iss1/art48/>
- Walkerden G. 2009. 'Researching and developing practice traditions using reflective practice experiments', *Quality and Quantity*, 43:249-263.
- Walkerden, G. 2010. 'Adaptiveness and openness in ecosystem management', in V.A. Brown, J.A. Harris and J.E. Russell (eds), *Tackling wicked problems: using the transdisciplinary imagination*. London, Earthscan.
- Walkerden, G. 2014. 'Developing platform skills for the workplace: Weaving reflective practice experiments into everyday life'. In Moore, K (Ed). *Work Integrated Learning: Building Capacity – Proceedings of the 2014 ACEN National Conference*, (pp.89-93). Tweed Heads, 1st- 3rd October, 2014.
- Walkerden G. 2019. 'Sustaining places: sensibility models as decision support tools for messy problems'. *Sustainability* 11(6):1-37.
- Walkerden, G. 2021. 'Focusing, vastness and union: Elaborating the Focusing practice tradition and the Philosophy of the Implicit to describe an additional kind of space', In N. Kypriotakis, J. Moore (eds.), *Senses of Focusing vol. 2*, pp.127-147. Eurasia Publications, Athens.
- Walkerden, G. 2023. 'Kangaroo know-how: Animal practices from the perspective of implying'. In: Eric R. Severson and Kevin C. Krycka (eds), 2023. *The Psychology and Philosophy of Eugene Gendlin: Making sense of contemporary experience*, pp.145-180. Routledge, London.
- Walkerden, G. forthcoming 2024a. 'The Contribution of Felt Sensing and Focusing to Contemplative Research'. In: Kerri Clough, Bernadette Flanagan (eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality & Contemplative Studies*. Routledge, Milton Park.
- Walkerden, G. forthcoming 2024b. 'Learning to catalyse change: reflective practice experiments'. In: Donata Schoeller, Sigrður Þorgeirsdóttir, Greg Walkerden (eds), *Engaging the embodied ground of thinking in research, learning and teaching*. Routledge, Milton Park.

Contact me at [greg.walkerden@mq.edu.au](mailto:greg.walkerden@mq.edu.au) if you would like examples of some of the professional practice teaching resources I have developed, if you would like to know about reflective practice experiments workshops I will be running, if I can contribute to PhD supervision, or you want to discuss practice research projects.

Questions  
Comments  
Reflections

---

Grounding practice research in the Philosophy of the Implicit:  
methods, experiments and innovations