

Finding my facilitator self

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Another year on (2017) and critical creativity is taking hold of my life! What I mean is that it has influenced how I plan, think and process thoughts so that I maximise creativity and opportunities to get in touch with my whole self. This is happening both in and out of work now and I feel that I have embodied critical creativity as part of who and how I am. Titchen and Horsfall (2012) describes dancing metaphorically between the body, cognition, creative imagination and expression as a way of developing our practice and at the same time maximising possibilities for human flourishing. I have always loved drawing, doodling and generally daydreaming and through my critical creative companionship with Angie I have learned to harness this love of creativity to help me capture my learning and understanding in a more productive way using many different mediums. One of the most powerful means to stimulate my deep reflection and understanding is through engagement with nature. Indeed Aristotle once said that “art takes nature as its model” and for me the landscape in nature has proved to be a very useful in generating deep knowledge, experience and connections when working with my co-researchers as a group as part of my PhD.

Although I am just about to begin analysing my research data I would like to share a couple of insights I have experienced when using critical creativity as my research method. Firstly my research is focused on how I, as a facilitator, can enable conditions for human flourishing to take place within a group of nurses when developing practice. My research study is underpinned by Aristotle’s philosophy of virtue ethics and I am using critical creativity as my methodology to implement a theoretical framework. Thus, I am combining Titchen and McCormack’s (2010) framework for human flourishing with virtue ethics to enable human flourishing in practice development.



Critical creativity seemed to be a natural fit for this study and my co-researcher colleagues engaged with curiosity and some reservations initially as was to be expected. Although unfamiliar with creative expression, the group embraced creative ways of engaging together and exploring ideas and very quickly overcame the idea that one needs to be a skilled artist to be creative. We had sixteen meetings, two of which took place in nature. One was a creative reflective walk in a woods and the second was a creative reflective walk on a small beach.

The day that we walked in the woods it was lashing rain and I didn’t expect any of the group to turn up. I sat in my car in the car park and waited thinking that I would give them about a half an hour over the agreed time to arrive, fully expecting to have to abandon the session. Sure enough at the agreed time, people began to arrive with wellies, umbrellas and raincoats ready for the walk. I was

amazed and delighted in equal measures that so many had turned up. I explained the process again, which was that we would walk in silent reflection focusing on what we agreed in our last meeting; i.e., what human flourishing means to us as individuals within this group, how we might know when we are flourishing and how we might make that happen. This is a process I have used with Angie when we engaged in our critical, creative companionship walks in the Cotswolds and the Burren, described in earlier blogs. We shared our reflections at an agreed time and then agreed to create a mandala to capture our learning. We created a beautiful mandala (below) of items we picked up in nature and this was to represent our feelings at the end of the exercise.



The overall word we used to describe the meaning of our mandala were ‘connectedness’ and that we are connected together as a group at a deep level with one of our co-researchers claiming that this mandala “*..completes part of us*”. This prompted me to think about what Titchen et al (2011) said about facilitation work that focuses on more than just facilitating methods, but goes beyond to live the actual *being* rather than just *doing*. It is in the ‘being’ that I believe flourishing takes place for us and in this walk we almost became part of the landscape in the woods. Difficult to describe in words, but many of us on that walk felt a oneness, or perhaps described better by one co-researchers when sharing her feelings about the walk and what meaning it had for her: “*Respect, yes, there is great respect in the use of this park. We are respecting our space here today. You can feel respect and feel respected.*”

Authentic engagement as a facilitator

As a group of co-researchers we used many different methods to explore our own values about what is important to us as individuals, what we value about our work, how both our community and palliative care services are distinct and how they can become more entwined in values and beliefs about a palliative care community nursing service. I have attempted to enable conditions for human flourishing to take place during this work through my facilitation methods. However what became very clear to me as our meetings progressed was the amount of engagement that I had to commit. In order to enable whole self engagement, that is body, heart and soul within the group I had to engage in this myself. That meant that there was no room for non-authentic ways of being for me as a facilitator. I didn’t necessarily contribute to decisions about palliative care because this group were very knowledgeable and experienced in this work, but I felt I had to contribute a large part of myself.

I thought that I had been doing this already in my facilitation but I needed to do more if I was to enable human flourishing to take place. I am beginning to think that this may be a challenge for us facilitators because letting go and immersing in a group can be very difficult because of time restrictions and the size of the group as well as the personality of the facilitator. I don't believe it can be achieved by 'doing methods' as Titchen et al assert it has to be lived. I suggest that it must be lived in equal measure by the facilitator requiring personal reflection and exploration with the group. This is where critical creativity provides the means for 'living' human flourishing as it were, to take place. Because our whole selves include getting in touch with our own recent and ancient wisdom, sometimes hidden from us, it requires deep engagement with our inner selves through creative reflective methods that can unlock this for us. I had to be in this place with the group and I think that this is what I mean by authenticity as a facilitator. Karl Rogers (1995) in his work on person-centred psychology refers to us using human functioning below the level of consciousness and to a conscious awareness of organism and the external world. This may link to what is referred to as "a different sort of knowing" which links into our "different ways of understanding" (Senge et al (2005 pp84-85). That deeper level of understanding is more aptly described in Senge et al work on exploring deeper and profound changes in people, organisations and society; the deeper levels of knowing come from the heart and by using this we then don't apply the same solutions to new experiences or issues.



I started to focus differently on myself as a member of this research group and started to also understand the facilitator role I was playing. I didn't need to know everything about facilitation but I did need to be open to learning about myself in order to be authentic and flourish as well. I had to be open to learning new things about what I know and exploring my inner wisdom along with the group. McCormack and Titchen (2006, 2014) in their work on critical creativity and human flourishing also identified the importance of engaging with our different intelligences and our whole selves including mind, body heart and soul. It was in fact this work that inspired me to look at human flourishing and critical creativity when undertaking my PhD. My co-researchers and I may have formed solutions to creating more cohesion between both nursing services in half the time but by just using what is described in Scharmer (2009: pp167) as "conventional analytical knowledge" and not our "primary knowing" based on our wisdom awareness.

I have linked my blog to some theory that I feel captures what has taken place for us as researchers. Although this isn't new - there is evidence elsewhere that shows that deep and perhaps extraordinary personal development can take place with a certain level of surrendering to something that can free our minds of conventional knowing. Thus freed, our primary knowing enriches us and how we work..



When my co-researchers (above) and I worked together on looking for our deeper wisdom, we used nature to guide us once again when we visited a beach. By now I wanted to fully engage in this process and found it easier to just let the afternoon unfold over the couple of hours we spent together. Our mandala (below) of our reflective learning is a culmination of us using our minds, bodies, hearts and souls to find meaning in the landscape. We found that our common themes were connectedness, friendship and support and I believe these themes are evident in the body language in the picture of the group above. There is no going back for me as a facilitator. The changes I have experienced in myself and how I think about practice development and facilitation has I believe changed forever. That does not mean that I don't slip every now and then, but through praxis and my commitment to, and growing knowledge of, critical creativity I can identify when this happens and change my focus and in turn facilitation to something much more productive and satisfying.



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