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## Dancing with stones: critical creativity as methodology for human flourishing

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Heavy feet of stone  
Seeking transformation  
Dancing rocks and flows

Critical creativity is a paradigmatic synthesis linking critical social science with creative and ancient traditions. Our haiku summarises the essence of this three part paper. *Heavy feet of stone* describes the rationale for our creation of critical creativity. *Seeking transformation* sets out the background and methodology for our inductive, methodological development. *Dancing rocks and flows* unfolds a new methodological framework for action-oriented, transformational practice development and research that is concerned with human flourishing for those who engage in such work, as well as those for whom the work is intended. Through interplay of story, metaphor, poetry and critical dialogue, we present our methodological development approach for critical creativity and the evolving methodological framework. Within the framework, we focus on conditions and principles that enable our worldview of critical creativity to be used in action research and practice development.

**Keywords:** practice development; professional artistry; praxis; embodiment; creative arts; ancient wisdom

### Introduction

In resonance with others working in mainstream education, business, organisational development and qualitative research (for example, Heron and Reason 1997; Lincoln and Denzin 2000; Senge et al. 2005), we enrich our person-centred, transformational practice development and research, in health/social care and education, by promoting human flourishing for all involved. Often within in-conducive, ‘hard-nosed’ technical/biomedical contexts and cultures, we are exploring a path towards enabling human flourishing through the body, creative imagination, nature, beauty and the sacred, as well as through the critical mind. This path has ‘danced’ and ‘spiralled’ towards our creation of a new paradigmatic synthesis or worldview that we call critical creativity (McCormack and Titchen 2006). This synthesis adds to the critical paradigm for the development and improvement of professional practice and its investigation (see Box 1).

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**Box 1**

*Critical creativity* is a paradigmatic synthesis in which the assumptions of the critical paradigm are blended and balanced with, and attuned to, creative and ancient traditions, for the purpose of human flourishing. *Human flourishing* focuses on maximising individuals' achievement of their potential for growth and development as they change the circumstances and relations of their lives. People are helped to flourish (i.e. grow, develop, thrive) during the change experience in addition to an intended outcome of well-being for the beneficiaries of the work. Flourishing is supported through contemporary facilitation strategies, connecting with beauty and nature and blending with ancient, indigenous and spiritual traditions (cf. Senge et al. 2005) and active learning (Dewing 2008).

Critical creativity blends being critical with being creative (see Box 2).

**Box 2**

By *being critical* we mean engaging in cognitive critique by de-constructing a context, situation, crisis, contradiction or dilemma, politically, socially, historically, culturally, then re-constructing it to develop new understanding for the purposes of transformation of practice and generation of ever evolving knowledge (see Habermas 1974; Fay 1987). Whilst this kind of reflective re-construction is a creative process, *being creative, in the context of critical creativity*, also means using creative imagination and expression to: de-construct the context, and so forth; grasp the meaning of the whole; access embodied, tacit knowing (the root of verbal knowing); create and/or release energy for practice development and research; and blend/interplay embodied and imaginative knowing and meaning into cognitive critique (see Senge et al. 2005; Higgs et al. 2007; Marshall and Reason 2008). The key idea is that when we blend *being critical and creative* in our work as practice developers and/or researchers, we increase potential for our own and others' flourishing that is visible to others.

In this paper, we present an account of our methodology for creating a methodological framework for working within a critical creativity worldview. We also share the essence of the new framework itself, focusing on the facilitation of conditions that enable people to flourish as they work through the challenges of individual, team, workplace, culture and organisational change and, simultaneously, create knowledge about that change. We conclude that our development of the methodological framework is an exemplar of critical creativity in action in which cognitive reflection and critique interplay with expression through creative imagination and arts. Thereby, this interplay not only imbues subsequent use of the framework by facilitators of practice development and action research, but is also the kind of reflection/reflexivity that the facilitator is trying to enable in others. We 'dance' how this interplay results in a reflective process distinct from that usually described in the action research literature. We also 'dance', using brief examples, to link this reflection/reflexivity process with the kinds of transformation and knowledge creation undertaken within critical creativity. Finally, we acknowledge the connections and differences between our critical creativity methodology and creativity and arts-informed research in health and education.



### Heavy feet of stone: the current paradox

We have accepted, for some years, the fundamental assumptions of the critical paradigm or worldview for our emancipatory practice development and action research within health and social care. The purpose of this work is the development of person-centred, evidence-based care. Over time, whilst this purpose is still incorporated, our ultimate purpose has shifted to the promotion of human flourishing as end and means. Whilst this agenda might always have been the case for those engaging in emancipatory practice development and research, seldom has it been so self-consciously named and facilitated (Horsfall and Titchen 2009). To emphasise this inclusive growth, we now refer to transformational (rather than emancipatory) practice development and research in the context of the definitions presented in Box 3.

#### Box 3

*Practice development* is a continuous process of developing person-centred cultures. It is enabled by facilitators who authentically engage with individuals and teams to blend personal qualities and creative imagination with practice skills and practice wisdom. The learning that occurs brings about transformations of individual and team practices. This is sustained by embedding both processes and outcomes in corporate strategy (Manley, McCormack, and Wilson 2008, 9).

*Transformational practice development* is more a way of living, being, doing, inquiring and becoming in professional work (i.e. a practice ontology and epistemology) rather than a time-limited project or programme. It is not a set of tools (although it makes use of them); rather, it is through the use of self and one's knowing and being, in relationship with others, that brings about transformation.

*Transformational research* is qualitative research that promotes transformation as both end and means of research. In addition to knowledge creation, there is a concern with transformation of self and, if they so wish, with facilitated transformation of co-researchers, participants and other stakeholders, in addition to, for example, the transformation of practices, contexts and cultures. Transformational research can lead to human flourishing, in creative, spiritual and ethical senses, of both recipients of the research and those undertaking it (adapted from Titchen and Armstrong 2007, 151).

Now we are explicitly challenging the adequacy of the critical paradigm, and critical social science in particular, for underpinning the new ways we are working to promote human flourishing as end and means. For our detailed phenomenological critique of critical social science and Brian Fay's (1987) critical theories<sup>1</sup>, see McCormack and Titchen (2006).

Another challenge is that whilst the influence of critical social science in health-care development and research has risen over the past two decades, paradoxically, given that critical social science is all about transformation, *heavy feet of stone* practice development and research methodologies are emerging increasingly in contemporary interprofessional healthcare literature. Technical, formulaic, outcome-oriented designs (due perhaps to government demands to meet specified targets and increasing valuing of technical care over and above person-centred care) seem to be becoming fixed, turned into stone. As if these designs cannot be transformed.



### Seeking transformation: methodological development of critical creativity

Over the past decade, we have begun to address the inadequacy of critical social science and to challenge *heavy feet of stone* interpretations of it. We have done this by combining the assumptions of the critical worldview with our experiences of using creative imagination and expression and ancient wisdom in our work. Whilst others in health and social care and education are working in this way, we have set out in McCormack and Titchen (2006) and Titchen and McCormack (2008), for what appears to be the first time, the philosophical, theoretical and methodological assumptions for a worldview (critical creativity) underpinning such work. We have also explicated the implications of these assumptions for practice developers/researchers in terms of their practice epistemology (their knowledge and ways of knowing) and ontology (their ways of being). These publications include the development and refinement of a theoretical framework that provides the theoretical background for our methodological development and the resultant methodological framework.<sup>1</sup> We propose that use of the methodological framework supports practice developers and researchers in putting Fay's theories into action or, any other theories that people draw on in their transformational work.

The methodological framework uses our expanding view of the body<sup>1</sup>, with the core of praxis (intentional action or mindful doing with the moral intent, in this case, of human flourishing). Praxis is enabled by professional artistry. According to Titchen, Higgs, and Horsfall (2007) professional artistry is the use, within professional practice, of diverse artistic processes, such as, blending, synchronising, attuning, balancing and interplaying, to engage with or *dance* a number of dimensions, for example, different types of knowledge, ways of knowing, intelligences, discourses and creative imagination. We use this idea in the context of transformational practice developers/researchers enabling their praxis, as shown in the following opening of our story:

Grey evening light. We arrive at the Giant's Causeway. A retreat to refine our emerging methodological framework. Following our expanded view of the body, we agree to experience the Causeway through our senses.

**Brendan:** Silence. Here now. Deliberate entering and grounding in the space and place. I feel anxious that Angie will be disappointed and will not feel ownership and responsibility for the space and creating the space for our further exploration and embodiment of critical creativity. I feel responsible for meanings and shared meanings as this is a very special place for me with particular meanings. We sit together in silence, watching the sea crash on tessellated stones. I decide to let go and see what happens.

**Angie:** I sit alone in silence. Attuning myself. In the evening light the stones look like reptile-snake skin. I feel the shedding of my skin, as a transformation, to go into the new with Brendan. I become conscious that I am framing my current experience in this awe-inspiring, mythical landscape. Then, marveling and sharing Brendan's sense of a special place, I no longer feel alone. I am connecting, existentially, with Brendan through the space we are creating together, without words; by being fully there with all my body senses.

After a while, still sitting on the stones, we begin to talk.

**Brendan:** I sensed you processing and your being there authentically with me and in the space. Your framing was very enabling and respectful of my special place.

We then create shared meanings, a collective landscape. Sensitivity, quietness, stillness of, and in, a landscape bring about our human flourishing. The significance of paying



attention to space, place and the bodily senses (as described also by McIntosh 2010) is emerging as central to critical creativity as methodology. Knowing that we do not have the right to transform anyone else, we are awakening to the notion that creating the conditions for human flourishing is paramount. As yet, we are still vague about exactly what the conditions are.

The development of critical creativity as methodology began under the auspices of the International Practice Development Collaborative (IPDC), in collaboration with Maeve McGinley. Thereby, we created the first version of the metaphorical principles for human flourishing (McCormack and Titchen 2006). We (Brendan and Angie) then synthesised this work with our findings from previous inter-professional collaborative inquiries<sup>2</sup> by undertaking a secondary data analysis of the earlier findings. Enriching this synthesis are insights and understandings from Angie's introspective inquiry of herself as a qualitative researcher (Titchen and Horsfall 2007), from her work on professional artistry (for example, Titchen, Higgs, and Horsfall 2007) and from Brendan's work on creativity in evaluation studies (Simons and McCormack 2007).

### *Inquiry methods*

To illustrate our inquiry methods in action before naming them, we continue our story of explication of the conditions for human flourishing. The story is told through the reflective notes and images we created at the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland (see Figure 1), interplaying with later scholarly discourse. The poems were constructed primarily by laying out our spontaneous reflective notes in a poetic format. A few were written sitting on the stones.



Figure 1. The Giant's Causeway as place and space.



The next morning, we arrive in early light. In silence. Momentarily, feeling self-conscious, even though there are very few people around, we feel the need of a safety net. We choose an enfolded space on the stones. We know we need to create a supportive space (physically, emotionally and spiritually), to free our bodies' wisdom for reflexivity (critical consciousness). We move intuitively into a QiGong exercise (part of T'ai Chi practice within the Taoist tradition which involves the breath, movement and visualisation of energy). Through grounding and centring ourselves, we deeply connect with this beautiful landscape and create the space we need within it. After a while, we begin to talk and agree that we will explore critical creativity through awareness, movement and stillness of the body through authentic movement (Pallaro 1999). The aim is to access our unconscious and deep embodied knowing of critical creativity that is difficult to express in words. By now, other visitors are coming over the brow of the hill in the distance towards the Causeway. We know we need to work quickly. We take turns to witness each other, for two minutes each, in our own dance, moving with eyes closed and following the lead of the body (rather than the mind). We watch each other with soft, uncritical eyes. A mystic veil creates magic and mystery ... and protection.

After moving, we express our experience and learning by painting together. We were dancing on individual rocks and tiny pools in crevices. A natural canvas, ready to hand. In silence, we paint<sup>3</sup> on wet, tessellated stones ... The painting transforms itself, by our brush strokes and by itself. Blue paint flows into a crack in the rock and becomes a blue river. We begin to express contemplatively and poetically the wisdom of the body, without knowing logically where this dialogue is going. By following the lead of the body in our authentic movement and painting, we know that our bodily sense of the situation implies the new, the something more that will unfold at the edge of our thinking (cf. Gendlin 1993).

Critical creativity  
Work not bound by rules rather  
By flow and continuity  
  
Context sensitive  
Need to find nooks and crannies  
To create safety  
(crack in the rock and the blue river)  
  
Spirals fight for space  
Melding images blending  
Fire energy comes through  
  
Fire clears murkiness  
Exposes authenticity  
The sword cutting through

We are working intentionally, but we are not task-oriented. We are not sitting down to do a task. Even though we feel at times that we should be getting down to doing the work!

Tussle of *Tradition*<sup>4</sup> and more than one skin  
We still have task skins to slough

This part of the story shows the pivotal connection between working critically and creatively with nature, the body and creative imagination and expression. In particular, connecting with the natural environment in our work places and spaces is increasingly experienced as fostering enrichment, flourishing and effectiveness (see Senge et al. 2005; Marshall and Reason 2008). The extraordinary ease and energy that come about when working in beauty are portrayed.

Overall, multiple methods for gathering, reflecting upon, analysing and synthesising data (sometimes simultaneously as shown in the story) were used in the studies contributing to this methodological framework, for example:



- Using creative arts media (e.g., visual and word imagery, paint, clay modelling, poetry, authentic movement, drama, story-telling).
- Walking and being in nature and framing reflection and reflexivity in the world around, whether physical, metaphorical or metaphysical.
- Gathering artefacts to create an artistic expression (e.g. landscape art and mandalas).
- Dancing – physically, metaphorically and metaphysically (see Titchen and Armstrong 2007; Simons and McCormack 2007).
- Engaging in cognitive critique and scholarly inquiry.
- Re-iterative and creative writing.
- Interplaying all the above with critical dialogue to engage in methodological knowledge creation through cognitive and artistic critique.

Such inquiry methods and phenomenological critique (below) are modelled by the facilitator of practice development/action research who is using the framework to enable others to develop the skills for interplaying *being critical* and *creative* through reflection, reflexivity and artistic and cognitive critique.

As the framework emerged, we refined each aspect of the framework through phenomenological critiques of our experience and theory in action. In addition, influenced by the ideas of van Manen (1997) and our own experiences of critical-creative writing, further re-iterative syntheses took place during the development of successive frameworks; for example, through the writing of the first draft of this chapter and email and telephone critical dialogues. Phenomenological critiques of the developing framework have been undertaken by others, including people without expertise in research or phenomenological critique. This critique was facilitated through experiential workshops using critical-creative processes, both within the IPDC and at international practice development and research conferences, retreats, workshops and seminars. Currently we are testing the framework in a major international, randomised controlled trial in which three types of facilitation intervention are being tested to help an organisation to get clinical guidelines into practice. In one intervention the facilitation approach sits within critical creativity. Facilitators internal to the organisation are being helped to become practitioner-researchers who work collaboratively, inclusively and participatively with stakeholders to implement, evaluate and diffuse the guidelines.

In summary, new methodological knowledge presented below is a synthesis or interplay of personal (experiential, presentational), practical (professional craft) and propositional knowledges through the encounter of mindful (reflective/reflexive) and creative engagement. The evolving synthesis is symbolised in this article by juxtaposing and weaving our presentation of story, visual imagery and poetry with scholarly writing.

### **Dancing rocks and flows: a new methodological framework**

Our key assumption, underpinning the new methodological framework shown in Figure 2, is that we assume a critically creative approach to praxis or informed, reflexive action. This approach is enabled by professional artistry that provides the synergy and positive/enabling power to blend the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of critical creativity and convert them into creative reflexive action or praxis that promotes human flourishing. Two values of *creating energy for creative practice* and *informed creativity* (Coats et al. 2004) thus shape the framework.



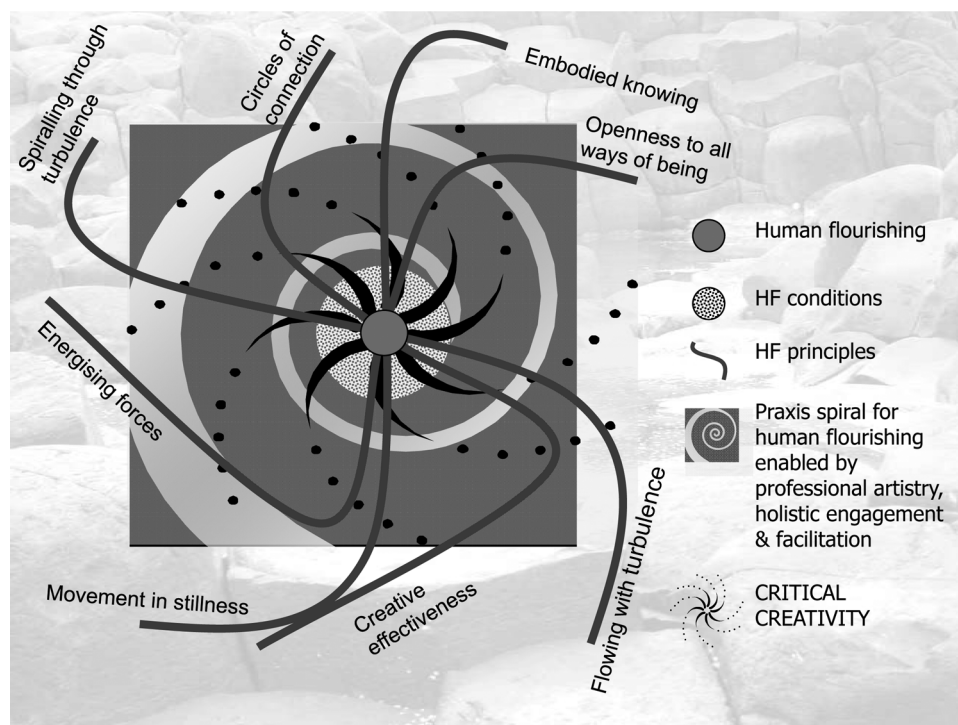


Figure 2. Methodological framework for facilitating human flourishing.

The framework is presented in the form of a mandala (an archetypal symbolic representation showing the essentials of the parts, their relationships and how they link to the whole). Due to space restrictions, we focus on the principles and conditions for human flourishing. The mandala is placed against a natural background (the stones on the Giant's Causeway) because being attuned to the natural world and its energy and beauty is central to critical creativity.

### *Human flourishing*

At the heart of the mandala, linking the parts and the whole, is a circle symbolising human flourishing. It is seen as the desired outcome and means of practice development and research, and it can be witnessed by others. Human flourishing is experienced when people achieve beneficial, positive growth that pushes their boundaries in a range of directions; for example, emotional, social, artistic, metaphysical directions. In our IPDC inquiry, human flourishing has been experienced in diverse ways, such as: well-being; deep fulfilment; connection with nature and/or beauty; radiance; being uplifted energetically and/or spiritually; sublime, transcendent moments; being authentic (our real selves without ego); and being transformed. Human flourishing occurs when we move from a point of inner knowing to taking right action effortlessly, swiftly and with 'a natural flow' (see Senge et al. 2005, 88–92). This kind of experience is dazzling! We also see it happening in our practice development work when using critically creative processes. For example, in a programme that focused on the development of person-centred practices with older people in residential care settings in Ireland, it was



observed that when the practitioners recognised their inner strengths and inner knowing about 'being a person' they were able to instil a greater sense of 'hope' into their practice. This resulted in the creation of more hopeful practice settings in which older people and the staff who worked with them were able to flourish through previously unknown connections and new relationships (McCormack et al. 2010).

Another example is observing how one of our PhD students has transformed herself from a deep despair about how, as a novice facilitator of action research (as she recognises now), she was continuously challenged by the prevailing workplace culture of ineffectiveness when her intent was to enable collaboration, inclusion and participation of the leader and nursing team to transform the culture into one of effectiveness. Recognising this personal crisis for this student, we supported her letting go of her feeling of failure through creative expression, symbolism and ritual in addition to helping her to de-construct what had happened and re-construct the direction of her research. This letting go enabled her to move towards self-enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation (Fay 1987), thus freeing herself from emotional and existential blocks inside her that had been paralysing her progress in her research. Now, after a lot of hard work and perseverance, she has found her way and is radiant in her flourishing as a person, professional and PhD student.

### *Metaphorical principles for human flourishing*

Streaming out from the centre of the mandala, the elaborated principles are presented using the metaphors through which they first emerged (McCormack and Titchen 2006) (see also Figure 3). The principles are based on the assumption that transformational practice developers and researchers are facilitators of experiential learning or critical companions (Titchen 2004) accompanying others on journeys of transformation. The principles guide facilitators as they create the conditions for human flourishing and nurture transformation. Whilst these principles are inter-dependent, in that each contains something of all the other principles, each one draws out a particular aspect. They are mostly concerned with ontology (being) and with the blending of ontology with epistemology (knowing) when creating the conditions.

### *Spiralling through turbulence*

By spiralling through turbulence or *Crisis*<sup>1</sup>, we make progress through it and grow from it, rather than being buffeted and blocked by it. Thus facilitators help others to see and experience any kind of turbulence as an opportunity for growth and transformation, just as we recognised with our PhD student above. Facilitators enable people to dance a praxis spiral that arises from their shared beliefs and values; for example, about their shared vision and common purpose for change or improvement or the kind of workplace culture they wish to co-create.

### *Circles of connection*

Our Giant's Causeway story, above and below, is imbued with circles of connection – ecological, symbolic and physical-metaphysical, for example. Being aware of, and working intentionally with, such circles can be very satisfying, as our PhD students discover when research supervision takes place in nature where we encourage working with the natural landscape to symbolise, for example, the philosophical landscapes of



Metaphor	
<i>Spiralling through turbulence</i>	<b>Authentic facilitation</b> that is consistent with the shared values and beliefs of co-participants and that results in human flourishing.
<i>Circles of connection</i>	<b>Co-construction of a shared reality</b> and spiralling awareness and understanding that has no beginning and no end.
<i>Creative effectiveness</i>	Through <b>blending, improvisation, synchronicity, attunement and balance</b>
<i>Movement in the stillness</i>	The <b>stillness of reflection</b> , contemplation and emptying the mind creates a movement that enables future meaningful, ethical action and understanding to occur
<i>Embodied knowing</i>	Connection with the development/research environment through an <b>internalisation</b> of its culture(s) or the culture is enacted and seen through a person's body/being in the world.
<i>Energising forces</i>	Transformation occurs through <b>moments of 'crisis'</b> that trigger a need for change. Creative expression at moments of crisis generates energy from a new ability to express feelings, experiences, spirituality, ethical concerns, embodied and tacit ways of knowing
<i>Openness to all ways of being</i>	Practice developers and leaders need to be open to and appreciative of <b>different world views</b>
<i>Flowing with turbulence</i>	Working with turbulence requires the use of <b>emotional and spiritual intelligences</b>

Figure 3. Principles for creating the conditions for human flourishing.  
Source: Adapted from McCormack and Titchen (2006).

their research and what this means for them as they collaborate with practitioners as co-researchers. Re-visiting the lake, forest or sea-shore, they see connections of the seasons or the weather, for instance, with their own work that, through critical-creative dialogue with self and others, lead to deep, embodied insights and understanding.

### *Creative effectiveness*

Blending being critical and creative enables us to improvise in deep, but rapid and seemingly effortless ways. As we experienced on the Giant's Causeway, it does not feel like work. We are effective with maximum focus and aligning of energy, synchronised with minimum of effort, just as the athlete's body works in perfect attunement between effort, relaxation and balance. For example, practitioners and teams often experience rapid shifts of perspective, when we invite them to explore their current and desired workplace cultures through the creation of collages, installations or sculptures. They not only experience this expression as fun and energising, it also enables them to move from a feeling of hopelessness in terms of overcoming the outer obstacles to achieving the desired culture to a feeling that it might be possible.

### *Movement in stillness*

The paradox of this principle is difficult to put into words, but it is the crux of creativity. It is about letting go of or suspending the old, for instance, old patterns,



assumptions, ways of seeing, thoughts and images, in order to allow the new to emerge. Peter Senge et al. (2005) call this phenomenon: *letting go – letting come*. We still our minds through contemplative or meditative practices. If we observe our thoughts and then let them float away, allow stillness and nothing happening and stay with it, it is likely that movement will occur (H. Simons, personal communication).

### *Embodied knowing*

Working consciously with the body, we can uncover pre-reflective, embodied or intuitive knowing, for example, as shown above in our inductive discoveries about critical creativity at the Giant's Causeway or the internalisation of undesirable work cultures. When we help practitioners and leaders to develop their facilitation skills, we encourage them to listen to, and act upon, the wisdom of their own bodies and to blend that knowing with cognitive, metacognitive and reflexive knowing. Moreover, we intentionally embody cognitive knowing in order to, for example, model critical creativity for others and the critical theories that inform our practice or desirable workplace cultures. Through modelling and pointing out when we see it in others, we enable the embodiment of theory as people transform themselves, their teams and cultures.

### *Energising forces*

At times of crisis and turbulence, the work of a facilitator is largely about working with energy, releasing, drawing out, re-directing, creating or transforming energy flows. With creative expressions of crisis, for example, positive energy for change is released through catharsis or emerges from a new ability to express the previously inexpressible. This principle (along with others here) connects with Marshall and Reason's (2008, 79) notion of 'dancing in beauty rather than fighting ugliness'. This principle imbues the examples above.

### *Openness to all ways of being*

As critical creativity is a synthesis of worldviews, those involved in transformational practice development and research need to be open to diverse worldviews because, when we are, new opportunities for growth and ways of engaging in praxis emerge. Informed creativity comes into play as the developer/researcher helps others to experience the fundamental tenets and assumptions of other worldviews, first in their bodies and practices, and then helps them to understand these tenets and assumptions with the mind, through cognitive, metacognitive and reflexive critique. For example, another of our PhD students is working with nursing leaders in an action research study to help them become more person-centred in their leadership. In trying to engage them as co-researchers in a creative hermeneutic analysis of their data, they needed help to overcome a socialised resistance to doing research and, in particular, to creative expression and critical-creative dialogue. When they did engage, they were able to draw out insights to some degree, but he found that they needed help to develop their metacognitive capacity in order to understand the assumptions and practice of hermeneutic analysis.



*Flowing with turbulence*

Working with turbulence stretches us and is likely to challenge us emotionally, creatively and spiritually as we push out at the edges of the known and search for meaning. Emotional intelligence gives practice developers and researchers awareness of, or attunement to, their own and others' feelings, facilitating social adeptness, empathy, compassion, motivation, caring and appropriate responses to pain or pleasure. Developing and refining our emotional intelligence is extremely important in research that requires collaboration, inclusion and participation of others. Spiritual intelligence (Zohar and Marshall 2000) enables practice developers and researchers to address and solve problems of meaning and value and place their actions, lives and pathways in wider, richer meaning-giving contexts. It gives them their moral sense and allows them to discriminate, to aspire, to dream and to uplift themselves. It is perhaps our spiritual and aesthetic intelligences that are most significant in enabling us to flourish.

*The conditions for human flourishing*

Developers and researchers cannot go out and just do something to transform people, contexts or cultures and bring about human flourishing. There is no cause and effect or short linear relationship between action and outcome. Nor can they expect that, by undertaking intentional facilitation strategies based on the above principles, transformation will automatically occur. Rather, they have to create multiple and inter-related conditions to enable people to transform themselves and that around them, in a sustained process of becoming, and thus create and fulfil their own potential for flourishing. Conditions mean the things that have to be fulfilled in order for human flourishing to come about.

The conditions for human flourishing we are concerned with in the methodological framework (Figure 2) arose from our being, knowing, doing and becoming at the Giant's Causeway. They were clarified for us metaphorically and spiritually (metaphysically) through our use of our multiple intelligences; for example, our spiritual intelligence (above) and *artistic intelligence* (see Cowan 2002). *Artistic intelligence* is the capacity to create, to perform and to appreciate artistic expression and form. Working synergistically with *embodied intelligence* (below), artistic intelligence facilitates the sensing of the unconscious and brings it to consciousness through artistic expression. Artistic intelligence also helps people, often in an instant, to judge whether some new thing is expressed in exactly the right way, the way we knew that it was right that our painting was transformed by the continuous flow of sea water (below). Artistic intelligence shows whether the expression is enough, satisfying, fulfilling, whether there is balance, beauty, synchronicity, interplay and form, for example.

The conditions are as follows:

- *Stillness in a landscape* or being still, open and empty in the practice development/research place and space.
- *Becoming the rock* or embodying critical creativity.
- *Nurturing, flowing, connecting* or the ontology of the transformational practice developer/researcher.

We describe them here as they emerged during our methodological development on the stones.



### Stillness in a Landscape

Through our QiGong, in the quiet morning light, our bodies connect with stillness in the landscape (see Figure 4). We suspend habitual ways of seeing, letting go and opening up to sense and observe what is happening from within ourselves, rather from the outside (cf. Senge et al. 2005). From this sacred space and through our authentic movement, we flow into Gabrielle Roth's (1990) circular five rhythms of life:

- Flowing: embracing fear and courage/stillness/birthing/connecting with the body
- Staccato: expression/forgiveness/heart/fire
- Chaos: sadness & release/writing/surrender/power of knowing through the body
- Lyrical: joy & gratitude/air/soul/creative action/the power of seeing
- Stillness: stillness/compassion/connection/mystery/healing/meditation/spirit.

Later, we dialogue about what these rhythms meant to us as we danced on the stones and what the implications are for practice developers and researchers who work from *The body to Reflexivity*<sup>1</sup>. On the stones, from a point of physical and ontological *stillness* we *flowed* into an embrace of the fear of working with the body in a public space. Relating this to the workplace, transformational practice developers and researchers need to be still in the development and research setting, in order to embrace the fear of working in radically different ways to technical, biomedical cultures and of stepping into new and unknown ways of knowing, being, doing and becoming. Being still in healthcare settings is not easy to do as it is rarely an attribute of healthcare culture (even though being still or being present with patients in their fear and suffering is not considered strange). And whilst simple in itself, it requires a sensitive, skilled facilitator to create this condition to enable this essential starting point for energy flow. *Staccato* was the letting go, the thrusting out of the negative energies, thoughts and feelings that could have got in the way of our work that day. This letting go is essential to a facilitator's authentic (ego-less) engagement in transformational work.

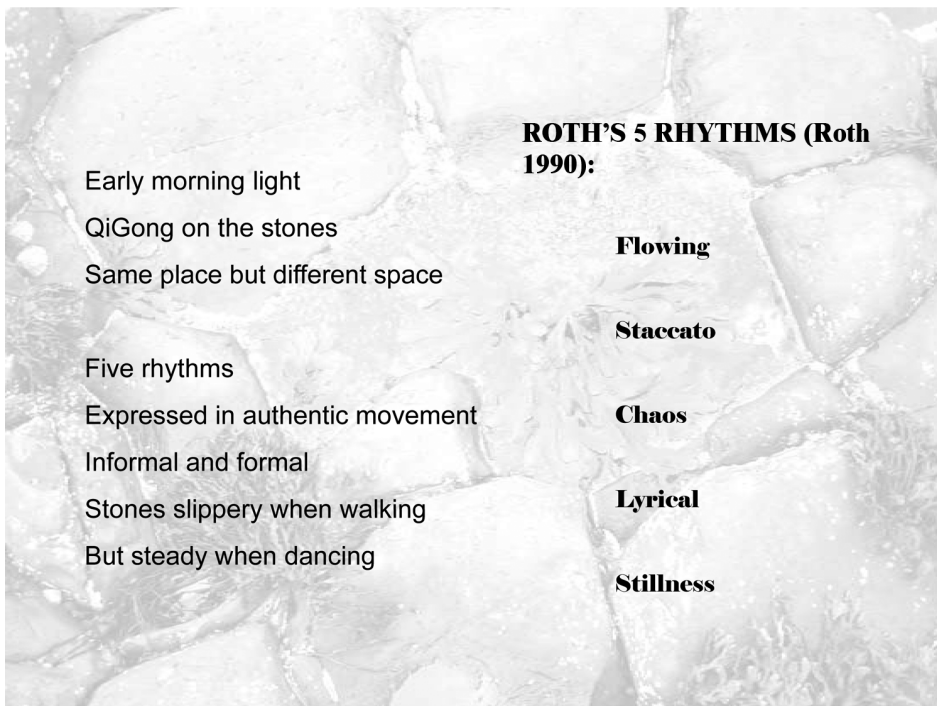


Figure 4. Stillness in a landscape.



The rhythm of *Chaos*, so often perceived negatively in our healthcare cultures, was necessary to help us to put words to our feelings and using these words to shape our dance on the stones. For practice developers and researchers, creating reflective spaces for this work is essential. *Lyrical* – our free movement and taking in the early morning air gave us clarity of feeling, exhilaration and joy so that, no longer holding ourselves back, our creative juices were released. Back to *Stillness* as each of our dances ended, releasing feelings, emptying, meditating. And without effort, experiencing openness and compassion flooding in like the sea.

Being still in the practice development/research setting is essential after reflective engagement and embodying emotions and releasing feelings. Finding ways of creating meditative spaces and ways of connecting that feel acceptable for stakeholders, as well as facilitators, is the challenge for such work. The challenge centres around the reality that, firstly, many people are unfamiliar with being still, physically and ontologically, in any aspect of their lives, let alone in the workplace and, secondly, most work environments are far away from the natural world. It is true that within our transformational development and research we try to work in beautiful places in nature and other settings when we can, by organising workshops, days away from the healthcare organisation or university and retreats. In beauty, we create spaces for our work. However, most of our work is done in urban environments. Concrete and sometimes shabby and unbeautiful workplaces can be transformed into different physical spaces with different energies. For example, use of creative visualisation or placing a small bunch of wild flowers, autumn leaves, pieces of wood or a candle as a focal point in the centre of the room creates a meditative, symbolic or ritual space (for further ideas, see Coats 2001; Titchen and Horsfall 2007). Contact with nature is often experienced as uplifting. We find that being with another authentically in such spaces opens up opportunity for personal revelation and growth, and that human flourishing happens when meanings are given to such spaces. Usually, there are places, such as gardens, somewhere in or near workplaces where people can be invited to walk or sit contemplatively in silence and open up their body senses and minds for the new. And, failing that kind of space, we can invite colleagues to create reflective spaces in twos or threes, by opening up the five body senses, as they walk together to a meeting or coming back to the workplace after lunch. Intentionally walking together in silence can open up the space for a brief but significant critical-creative dialogue.

### *Becoming the rock*

In her dance, Angie feels the boundaries between herself and the stones begin to fall away. She is flowing molten lava bursting out into the world and becoming pillars rooted in sea pools. For a brief moment, she becomes the dancing rock in a metaphysical connection (see Figure 5).

Allowing her body to lead her movement, rather than her mind, this experience strengthened our belief that authentic facilitation of the conditions for human flourishing requires us to embody critical creativity – to become a dance in the improvisation between artistic, bodily and cognitive critique. Creating these conditions also means embodiment of the theories that guide us, in our case, Fay's critical theories.

At the Causeway, critical creativity became real, as a methodological framework, through our bodies' engagement with reflective dance and movement. However, it is



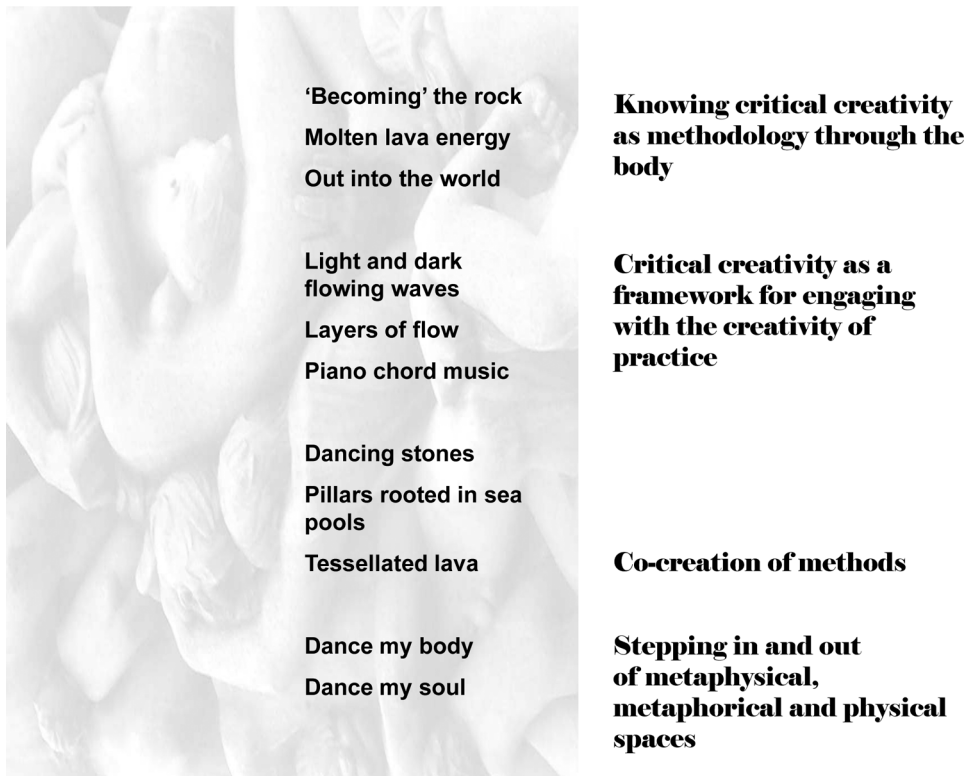


Figure 5. Becoming the Rock.

not enough for practice developers and researchers to engage just in reflection, there is also a need to transform that reflection into methodological principles for action; in other words, a need for operationalising critical creativity as methodology.

Our co-creation of the methods of critical creativity, over many years, has led us to a shared understanding of how we undertake such work through ecological connection. Others have argued similarly. For example, Senge et al. (2005) have discovered, in similar ways to our own, the power of retreating into nature, meditation and connecting with the deep wisdom of ancient traditions. In parallel, Paul McIntosh (2008) argues that the work environment landscape can be used to frame deep reflection and understanding of our own internal and practice landscapes. McIntosh and others say that this work creates a movement between different kinds of spaces – some spaces that are physical (such as the Giant's Causeway) and others that are framed by the meanings that each of us gives to particular spaces – personal meanings framed, for example, by beliefs, values, feelings, energies, emotions.

#### *Nurturing, flowing, connecting*

On the Causeway, we came to know the flow of energy and spirals of connection between aspects of the framework through the energy of our intentional dancing with stones. Thus our hidden, ontological knowing was accessed and expressed through *embodied intelligence*; that is, our capacity and quickness to gain understanding of pre-cognitive knowledge of ourselves and others.



We finish our painting on the stones and watch it continuously transform through the constant flow of sea water rivulets. Mentally recording its imaginative form, symbolism, colour, texture and dynamism. It will be washed away by the tide and, somehow, that feels right. We are ready to let it go. People are beginning to climb over the stones near to us now. Our mystic veil has kept us safe just long enough! We agree to walk on the cliff top overlooking the Causeway to engage in an artistic and cognitive critique of insights that have emerged in dancing with stones.

Arriving breathless at the top, the aerial view of the whole Causeway looks just like the sea being sucked into a cauldron, just like the rivulet of blue paint! Micro/macro connections uplift us! It is beginning to rain, so umbrella up, we walk. We take turns to write as the other speaks/critiques (see, for example, Figure 6). We are very excited about the new understandings that are emerging about praxis within critical creativity.

The third condition, *nurturing, flowing, connecting*, links with *becoming the rock* (embodiment) because it is concerned with the ontology of the transformational developer and researcher. This condition, therefore, puts emphasis on being – on who we are and how we are – rather than on praxis (intentional acting/doing). And that way of being enables a modelling of critical creativity in the flesh. It exists alongside praxis, but whilst it is felt, it is often unnoticed, left in the shadows and therefore, perhaps, undeveloped. By this we mean that our ways of being in the world of practice development and research may be less overt and visible than our praxis, even to ourselves, so we may not put as much energy and attention into developing our being as our doing. For this reason, we offer facilitators of practice development and research the opportunity to do authentic movement, allowing the body to lead. Each time, this

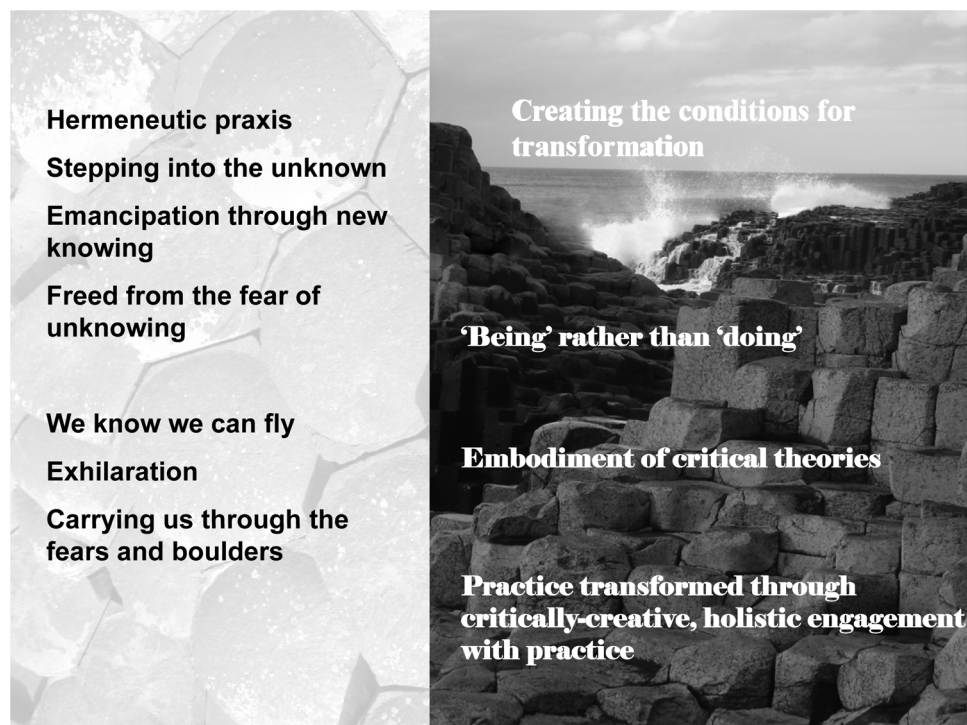


Figure 6. Nurturing, flowing, connecting.



experience seems to bring up ontological sights for them for further reflection about what it means to be and become a facilitator.

This condition is also concerned with nurturing and making overt the flow and circle of connection between hermeneutic and emancipatory praxis so that facilitators, collaborators and participants understand how to act intentionally with moral intent in a critical creativity worldview. (The need for nurturing of self as well as others often comes up through authentic movement.) Acting intentionally requires being able to systematically unravel the distinct types of praxis. The terms 'emancipatory' and 'hermeneutic' refer to the intent and philosophical roots of the two kinds of praxis; that is, emancipation from obstacles and understanding/transformation, respectively. The philosophical concern of hermeneutic praxis (located in the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics) is ontological. The creation of knowledge in this tradition is about uncovering the meaning of being. This meaning is often held in the body, practices, imagination and in the unspoken shared meanings between people who are immersed in the same context or setting, rather than being known with the mind. The philosophical concern of emancipatory praxis (located in the critical tradition) can be ontological, as above, but also epistemological (i.e. a concern with knowledge created by accessing what people know in their heads). Emancipatory praxis is about seeking to overcome the external and internal barriers to achieving, in our case, human flourishing, through the delivery and receipt of person-centred, evidence-based care. Hermeneutic praxis, on the other hand, is concerned with reflexivity and informing it through the transformation of embodied understanding, imaginative understanding and shared, but unarticulated meanings, into cognitive understanding. This understanding by the mind can then be shared, developed and used intentionally by participants for the transformation of self, teams, organisations and communities.

One of the key insights to emerge at the Giant's Causeway was that emancipatory and hermeneutic praxis are *blended* in the praxis spiral (Figure 2) in order to overcome obstacles (boulders) and bring about transformation.

### *Praxis spiral dance*

Hermeneutic praxis energises  
Emancipatory praxis and letting go of boulders and baggage  
This flow enables us to journey  
To new understandings and refreshed, informed hermeneutic praxis  
Which then again frees us for further letting go!!

Cold, but warm in our hearts with a deepened understanding that our way of sensing and being creates actions that are liberating for others, we realise that it is nearly lunch time.  
So we make our way back to the hotel for warmth and sustenance.

### *Praxis spiral and professional artistry*

We use archetypal spiral imagery to form the foundation of our mandala (Figure 2) and to symbolise praxis and the reflexive journey from wherever we are now towards human flourishing as we develop and improve the care and education we offer to others. This double spiral (two tones of grey in parallel) represents hermeneutic and emancipatory praxis. Not only do the emancipatory and hermeneutic traditions use the spiral as imagery,<sup>5</sup> the spiral also keeps emerging as a significant symbol of the practice ontology and epistemology of transformational practice developers and



researchers (see McCormack and Titchen 2006). Facilitators engage in praxis to enable the creation of the conditions for human flourishing. This engagement requires professional artistry. As stated earlier, professional artistry appears to consist of at least seven dimensions that are danced by a variety of processes (Titchen et al. 2007). Examples of dimensions that imbue our story and descriptions of the conditions and principles are as follows:

- Artistic qualities (e.g. discernment, appreciation, discrimination).
- Praxis skills (using different kinds of knowledge/evidence and engaging in different ways of knowing, i.e. pre-cognitive, cognitive, metacognitive and reflexive).
- Multiple intelligences.
- Creative imagination.
- Multiple discourses (values imbued in language and meaning).

The processes of professional artistry are attunement, interplay (improvisation), synchronicity, melding, blending, synthesis and balance. They dance within each of the dimensions, for example, enabling the blending of different ways of knowing to inform unique action for particular people, at a particular time. The processes also dance across the dimensions; for instance, we have shown how multiple intelligences enable this blending and balancing. We have also illustrated the interplay and synchronicity between praxis skills and creative imagination.

We have placed praxis centrally because it is through this spiral that we tap our paradigmatic foundation, critical creativity, shown in Figure 2, as the dynamic energy of a Catherine Wheel. This spiral then connects with the conditions and principles at the centre of the figure when we engage in methodological praxis. Thus critical creativity symbolically flows throughout our framework.

### **Reflection, reflexivity and arts-informed research**

Merely articulating and understanding the nature of praxis enabled by professional artistry is not enough, however. To enable expertise to grow and flourish, we need to create the right conditions in our workplaces and organisations. This means developing cultures, systems, strategies for work-based learning and facilitation skills to nurture it. An example is the transformation of a culture (in which challenging the *status quo* is oppressed by hierarchy, power relationships and a focus on technical reasoning and outcomes) into learning cultures (where reflection is seen as a necessary ethical and philosophical endeavour for enabling practitioners to constantly question and evaluate themselves and their practices). In our story of methodological development, we have revealed some of the reflection, reflexivity and inquiry processes that practice developers, stakeholders and action researchers within a critical creativity worldview might use, not only to challenge the *status quo* and transform cultures, systems, and so on, but also to develop their own professional artistry and to facilitate others in their development of praxis expertise. Whilst there are many more, the inquiry methods above (which are also used by art-informed researchers, but which are imbued here by the above principles and enabled by creating the conditions for their use) enable an intense focus on using reflective, reflexive and inquiry processes. Not only does the framework provide a space for this intensity, it offers the opportunity for critical companions (Titchen 2004) perhaps to go deeper and more widely



than those processes that are more often described in health/social care and mainstream educational literature. A necessarily very brief and limited analysis of this literature follows to show how this might occur.

The key influences on our understanding of reflection are located in the interpretive and critical paradigms. In the former, Donald Schon (1983) has perhaps been the major influence in developing learning in and from practice. His work, which in turn arose from John Dewey's (1933) pragmatism, has opened up the significance of paying attention to different ways of knowing, different types of knowledge and the gap between the theories/values we espouse and those we put into practice, as we make professional judgements. In education in general and educational action research in healthcare and mainstream education, reflection, in the form of dialogues with self and others to raise the unconscious to consciousness and challenge our assumptions and values, has been promoted for many years by key influences like the Editors and Editorial Panel of this journal. Many action researchers and practice developers extend reflection stemming from Dewey's pragmatism into the critical paradigm by putting emphasis on transformational learning leading, for example, to perspective transformation (Mezirow 1981) or enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation (Fay 1987). Freeing ourselves from inner and outer obstacles, we are able to implement and evaluate change that is driven by an explicit moral and democratic intent, shared values and a common purpose.

To help people to acquire reflective skills, many practical models of reflection have built on these influences (see Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1985), often combining them with other theoretical influences such as psycho-therapeutics or analysis; for example, Johns' (2000) guided, structured reflection model in nursing. Whilst we use such reflective models within critical creativity to facilitate cognitive, metacognitive and reflexive knowing and exploration of how we can put this knowing into action, we find the models are insufficient because they tend to ignore pre-cognitive knowing and do not make explicit the other remaining dimensions of professional artistry above. Moreover, they are less likely to enable the processes of professional artistry as the processes dance the dimensions of self. This is why we, along with others – for example, the Creative Methods Network (see McIntosh and Sobiechowska 2009), Horsfall et al. (2007) and Scharmer (2009) – take a much more holistic view of reflection and reflexivity that involves both sides of the brain, the body, heart and spirit and our connection with nature and so a much wider range of reflective methods is necessary.

Our use of holistic reflection and reflexivity that goes beyond cognition departs perhaps from the work of such others and some arts-informed researchers; for example, McNiff (1998). Arts-informed researchers tend to use creative arts expression and imagination (e.g. drama, dance, paintings, poetry) to gather, analyse and interpret data and to present their research findings. In contrast, we also focus on working in nature, listening to the wisdom of the body and ancient, archetypal knowing (although we are aware that a few others do also). We find working intentionally with the body, as in the Giant's Causeway story, reveals something of the knowing at the fringes of our consciousness. This type of knowing is rarely revealed through cognitive models of reflection.

On another note, like some others, we are concerned with creative arts with a small 'a' – that is, the expression of learners', participants' and co-researchers' embodied knowing – unlike others who use art with a capital 'A' – for example, to develop analytic and interpretive principles or to produce a work of Art as the research product (for example, Fish 1998; McNiff 1998). In addition, and perhaps here we offer



something distinctive, our notion of professional artistry enabling praxis is set within an explicit methodological framework informed by a particular set of philosophical and theoretical assumptions (see Box 4) and an adaptation of Brian Fay's critical theories to include creativity (see McCormack and Titchen 2006; Titchen and McCormack 2008).

**Box 4**

*Philosophical assumptions*

There is a creative connection and blending of assumptions, if assumptions across different development and research paradigms are combined within a project.

The use of creative expression to create synergy between cognitive and artistic approaches to critique.

Transformational development and research is person centred.

The three philosophical assumptions above are blended with spiritual intelligence.

*Theoretical assumptions*

Conscious to unconscious blending of assumptions

Connecting worldviews

Human flourishing is an intentional means as well as the ultimate end

Human becoming

However, we know that we are not alone in attempting to improve the rigour and trustworthiness of arts-informed or Arts-informed research and we acknowledge

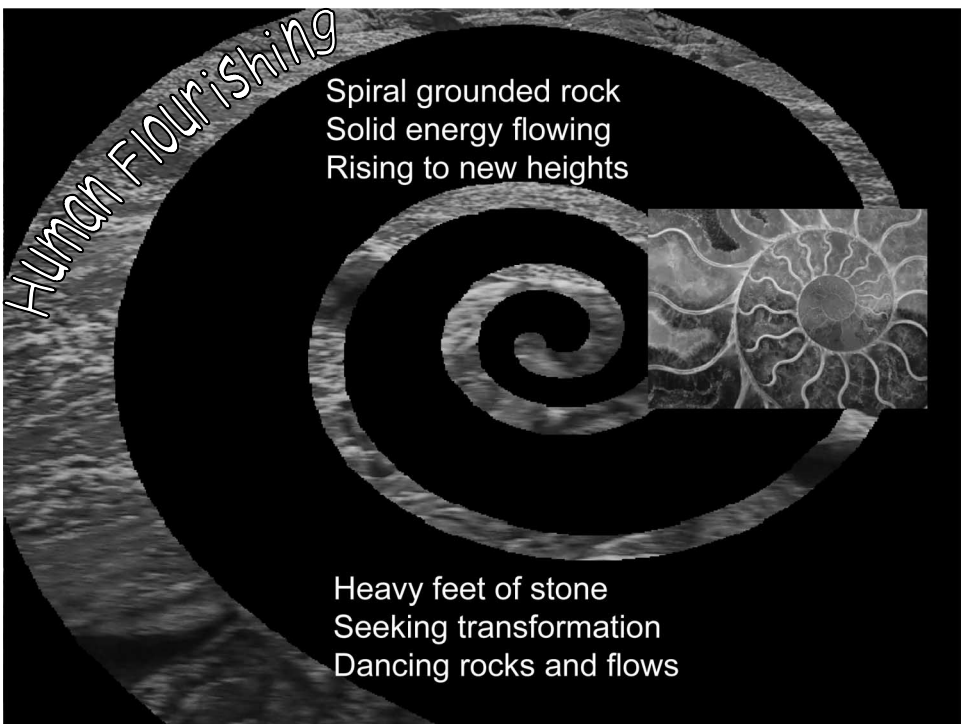


Figure 7. Summary.



and welcome the careful and painstaking work that other educators, practice developers and action researchers in health and social care and education (for example, Todres 2007; Elliott 2008; Elliott, Grant, and Morrison 2010) are undertaking to locate their creative arts methods in explicit philosophical, theoretical and methodological frameworks.

### Rising to new heights: conclusion for now

In this paper, we have responded to the inadequacy, in our view, of critical social science as methodology for transformational practice development and research located in a critical creativity worldview. Flowing from the centrality of human flourishing and an expanded view of Fay's (1987) critical theory of the *Body*, we have presented a new methodological framework for transformational practice development, research and learning and their facilitation that overtly promotes human flourishing for all concerned in the endeavour, as well as those for whom the work is carried out (see Figure 7). This framework guides praxis in both the action and the research and blends use of creative imagination and expression, body and ancient wisdom with criticality. Whilst discussing the key roles of praxis, enabled by professional artistry, and human flourishing in the framework, we have focused on the new elaboration of eight facilitation principles for transforming practice through critically creative, holistic engagement with practice. We have also paid special attention to three newly described and pre-requisite conditions for promoting human flourishing: *stillness in a landscape*, *becoming the rock* and *nurturing, flowing, connecting*. Our development of this framework has been illustrated through the interplay of story, metaphor, poetry, word and visual imagery with cognitive, metacognitive and reflexive critique. This methodological development is an exemplar of critical creativity in action within a critical companionship.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

1. In the theoretical framework for critical creativity (Titchen and McCormack 2008), we substantially elaborate Fay's sub-Theory 10 with reference to his Theory 4 (*Transformative action* – identifies those 'crisis elements' that need to be changed and a plan of action for doing so). We re-name the sub-theory, *Creativity*. In addition, we propose and articulate the new central relationship of Fay's theories of *The body* (Theory 5 – understanding of how we inherit roles and how these limit our freedom) and *Reflexivity* (Theory 8 – explains the past, accounts for the present and plans for liberation whilst paying attention to context and limits). We have broadened Fay's ontological notion of *The body* beyond embodied knowing of roles that limit us. We include the wisdom of the body and the body's capacity to attune to a situation and pick up significance, before *Reflexivity*, through critical consciousness, has seen this significance (cf. Gendlin 1993). Trusting this wisdom, without having a rationale, paying attention to it and going with it are central to transformational development and research. This is a positive, expanding view of the body, whereas Fay's view is more negative with its focus on how the body often holds us back. Our emphasis is that our bodies have the potential to set us free from inner and outer obstacles to transformation! This pre-requisite relationship of *The body* with *Reflexivity* and their subsequent interplay enable



- us to deal, for example, with *False consciousness* (Theory 1 – shows how our understandings are false, how these came about and potential alternatives) and *Crisis* (Theory 2 – spells out what a ‘crisis’ is and why it exists) and move towards *Transformative action*.
2. These inquiries were: critical and creative becoming in professional practice in health, education and the creative arts (Higgs and Titchen 2001); creativity and the use of creative imagination and expression in practice development, education and research in health and social care (Seizing the Fire 2002); and Nuffield Trust-sponsored inquiry into use of creative arts and humanities in health and healthcare practice, practice development, education and research (Coats et al. 2004).
  3. We use children’s poster paint, which is formed of natural substances and is harmless to the environment.
  4. *Tradition* (Fay’s Theory 6 – identifies which parts of a particular tradition are changeable/not changeable).
  5. For example, the recurring spirals of planning, action, observation, reflection, in relation to emancipatory praxis, and the spiral of reflexivity and increasing understanding, in relation to hermeneutic praxis.

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