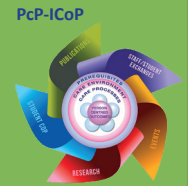


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FEATURE ARTICLE

Creating healthful cultures through Critical Creativity

Working with the body senses, reflection, connection with Nature,
ancient wisdom & creative imagination

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Abstract

During Covid lockdown in 2021, I was invited to offer a masterclass to masters students at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh:

'In the leadership module we have a masterclass, groupwork, study time and a plenary that ties together. We even have a book club!!! The aim is to be generic, not nursing/health focused. The learners make space to consider application in their own areas/specialisms.

'We were wondering if you would like to/could do a masterclass within the strand of healthfulness. We really value your storytelling and know you are really passionate about healthfulness from an ecological perspective. We would love it if you could draw on your experiences of politics, environment... The more creative the better.

'We would want learners to consider their role in creating healthful cultures and ways that they might go about it.'

How could I resist, given my decades-long passion for transformational practice development and inquiry within a critical creativity landscape in health and social care? In my retirement, I have continued to work successfully in this way in a variety of contexts, including political activism. I responded:

'I would love to show how healthful cultures can be created, with stories from my person-centred community engagement work in creating a neighbourhood plan [for 21st century local housing development] and campaigning for positive personal and community political responses to the climate and ecological emergency. Stories that show up something of how conditions can be created to enable the ecology of human flourishing to be embodied in action. Also, how I am seeing the stirrings of transformative change in local politics that have previously been very traditional in the way they work with people.'

This article is based on that webinar, because students not only enjoyed it, but we heard that some were also able to transfer the learning to their different professional contexts. Therefore, for this paper, I repurposed and elaborated the material for a wider audience.

Health and social care services are increasingly offered in new ways in the community and I imagine more health and social care professionals will be setting up innovative ways of working. I hope, therefore, that sharing my experience of creating cultures where everyone flourishes by doing things differently, as well as critically and creatively with the whole self, will be helpful. I will share four stories of how I do that in a variety of contexts and show you, through images and metaphors, how I have gone about that, first in health and social care but primarily for now in political and campaigning contexts. Through the stories, I will show you what it takes as a person to create healthful cultures. Woven through the article is an introduction to critical creativity and its three mandalas. They are there for you to look at with soft eyes/letting the words wash over you – without digging into meaning at this point. My hope is that you begin to get a sense of where the mandalas fit into the stories and, if you so choose, into your own stories and practice. The parts of the mandalas are italicised in the text as they are mentioned.

Invitation

You may wish to create your own inquiry question before you engage with the article, but if not, I suggest you just notice what you notice as you read and especially when you look at the images. You might want to jot down what you notice, however ordinary or bizarre, as it might reveal hidden messages on reflection! I offer a few reflective questions throughout, and there are some references and resources for further exploration of critical creativity at the end of the article.



If you are interested in creating an inquiry question about creating the conditions for healthful cultures in your own workplace, you might like to use my Ancient Tree creative visualisation. If you have any crayons or coloured pens and paper immediately to hand, that would be great. Or you might prefer to create your own journey from where your workplace culture is now to where you would like it to be.

However you choose to do it, I recommend you close your eyes to visualise your journey. When you open them, take up your crayons or pens and paper and draw and write down whatever you noticed, however strange or seemingly irrelevant! Then ponder awhile on the inquiry question you want to work with.

Ancient Tree creative visualisation

Make yourself comfortable, then gently close your eyes.

Listen to sounds outside the room for a few moments, then inside the room and then inside your body. Listen to your breath, feel your ribs rise and fall. Feel the relaxation of your body as you breathe out.

Now imagine you are walking down a grassy slope to an ancient tree by a lake. Feeling and connecting with the earth, moving in any way that feels right to you.

You arrive and become still with the tree, experiencing it with all your five senses.

Then, you hear and feel the beat of the wings of a huge bird. The bird lands and invites you to fly to two landscapes, the first is the culture you work in today and the second is the flourishing healthful culture you would like to create with others. You climb on the bird's back and rise up, feeling the rippling of its wings.

High in the sky, as you approach your culture, the bird reminds you to go spontaneously with what your imagination offers you. Not to judge or reason – but to go with it, however bizzare it might be.

From high up, what kind of landscape do you see, feel, imagine? What do you notice about it? What shapes, forms, colours, light, dark, textures, energies?

You land, climb off and begin to move around. What do you hear, taste, smell, see, feel? Who or what do you meet, what is going on?

Time passes. Then climbing back onto the bird's back, you fly off into the unknown of a healthful culture landscape. This time you know what to do when you get there. The bird has helped you to become confident as you sense the whole landscape from above. Gently landed, you are still.

You open your ears, eyes, nose, taste, touch to colours, shapes, textures, and start to move.

After a while, the bird suggests returning to the ancient tree to reflect. And so back to the lake, landing under the tree, you wave goodbye to the bird.

You hear beating wings and feel a rush of air as you turn your attention to your own breath, the sounds in the room and the sounds outside. Now gently open your eyes!

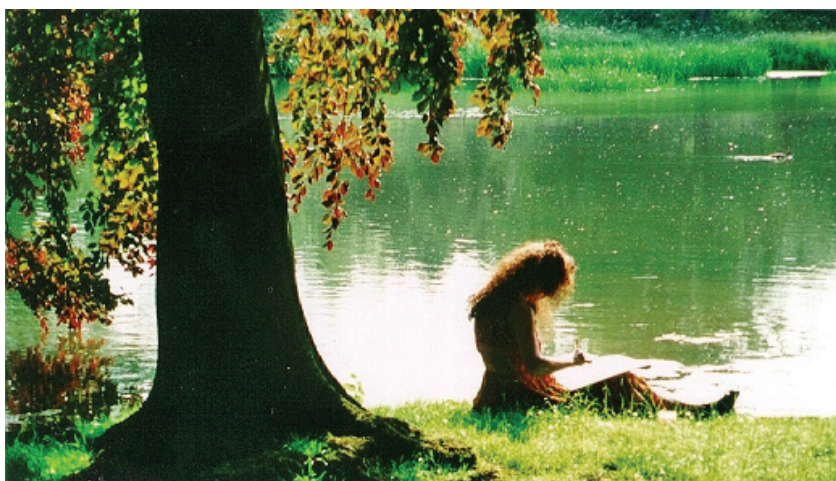
Take a few minutes to capture your insights, journey in words, images, shapes, without thinking and analysing! THEN write down YOUR INQUIRY QUESTION!

Story 1: Critical creativity

Critical creativity – paradigm/landscape of action-oriented, transformative practice development and research into which we bring the whole of ourselves. The bedrock of this landscape imbues three critical creativity mandalas.

This story begins in 1995, when I first experienced intentionally growing as a person through my body, creative imagination and expression alongside reflection. This happened on a personal growth alternative holiday in Skyros, Greece, which I took to help myself heal from a great sadness in my life. There I met some amazing women and we decided to form a Wild Women group back home in England.

The work we did together over five years prepared me for the path I subsequently walked with Brendan McCormack and others in international communities towards creating and embodying a critical creativity worldview.



This is a picture of me in 1998, shortly after I had finished my doctorate about patient-centred nursing and the facilitation of its development. It was taken by Joy Higgs, from the University of Sydney, near my home, and shows me painting our first book together. Joy was the first person outside my Wild Women group with whom I had shared what I wanted to

do next. I wanted to explore how we could bring the body, reflection and creative arts into health and social care practice development and research. And she believed in me, giving me the courage to begin my journey. The next picture is critical creativity in the making over the following years, up to 2010.

I suggest you look at it first, feel it, and then ask yourself, 'What do these images evoke in me? What do I see, feel, imagine?' Maybe jot that down. Do the images connect in anyway with your visualisation of a healthful culture?



For me, the background of trees in this picture symbolises the first chance I had, a few months after painting at the lake with Joy, to try out my ideas at a Royal College of Nursing practice development school (before the International Practice Development Collaborative had been formed). In the grounds of an Oxford College, I ran a workshop of authentic movement followed by creative expression of insights that emerged through the movement.

'In this process an individual can pose a question or an issue for exploration through awareness, movement and stillness of the body (Pallaro, 1999). The aim is to access the unconscious and deep embodied knowing that is difficult to express in words. The individual works in a supportive space (physically, emotionally and spiritually), [indoors or in Nature] witnessed by another who watches the mover with soft, uncritical eyes. After moving, in silence, both express artistically what they have experienced and learned through accessing and watching the wisdom of the body and the heart, using paint, crayons, creative writing' (Titchen and Horsfall, 2011, p185).

It was an enormous success and by 2001, I had led a collaborative team bringing together the Collaborative Action Research Network, the Foundation of Nursing Studies and the Royal College of Nursing to design the first practice development 'Enhancing Practice' conference, with democracy, collaboration, creativity and transformation at its heart.

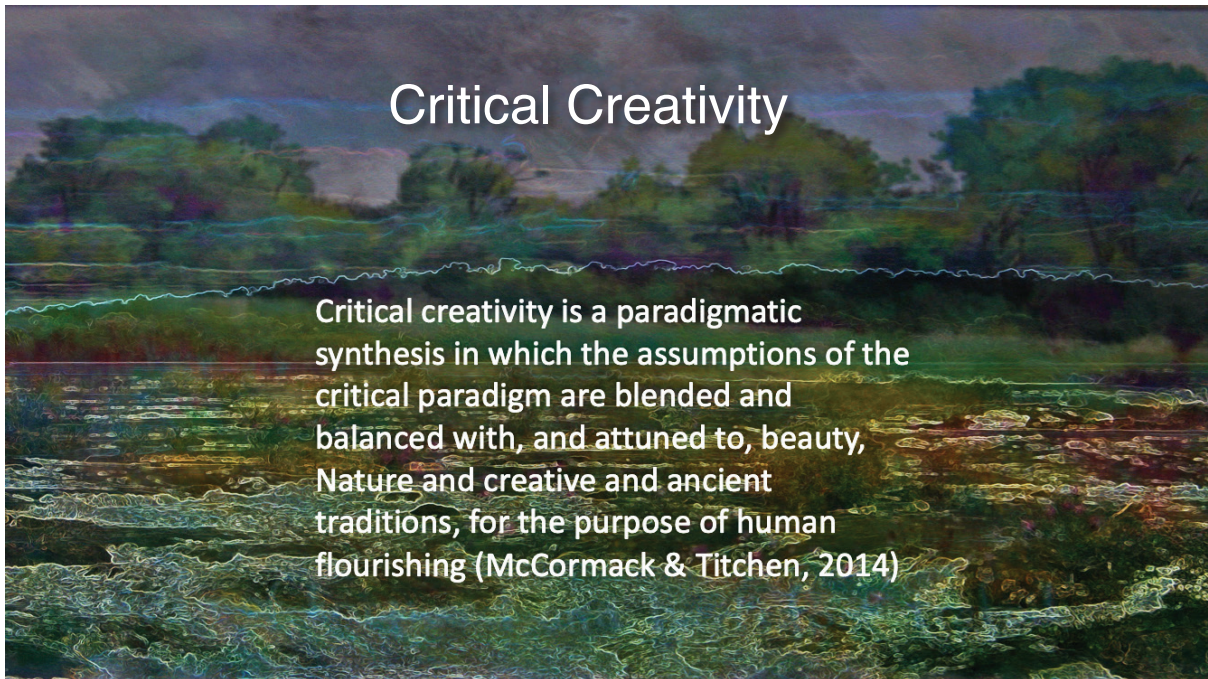


This picture is an avenue of ancient, pollarded ash trees lining the path to the Bridewell or Lady Well in the Cotswolds. The Bridewell has ancient pre-Christian and pre-Roman origins. I sometimes walk here in silence on my own and with others in our critical-creative inquiries that are often associated with creating healthful cultures. I must have walked hundreds of miles around my home with others inquiring into things such as facilitating human flourishing while bringing about transformational change. Also, with critical-creative companions in our workplaces, gardens, city streets, parks, by rivers, on hills ...! (See Resources at the end of this article.)

I find connecting to ancient and indigenous wisdom much easier in Nature than indoors. I am particularly influenced by aspects of the ancient wisdom from the traditions of Taoism (see, for example, Hill, 1997), Buddhism (see Osho, 1995), Native Americans (see Arrien, 1993), Australian Aboriginals (see Morgan, 1994) and most powerfully, from the Celtic tradition (see O'Donohue, 1997) in relation to authenticity of self, balance, being in the body and being at one with Nature as precursors of creativity. I have found creativity alongside criticality to be the wellspring of human flourishing in my personal and professional lives. In fact, I don't really separate those two lives!

During the pandemic and in this time of climate and ecological emergency, more and more people are reconnecting with Nature and realising how important it is in enabling human and planetary health and wellbeing.

What are your thoughts on spending intentional or reflective time or just being in the 'here and now' in the gardens or grounds of your workplace? Alone or with others? (see Titchen and Kinsella, 2019)



Critical creativity is a paradigm, or landscape if you like, for action-oriented practice development and research. It is particularly relevant to creating healthful cultures in your workplace because it places person-centredness and human flourishing right at its heart.

‘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 (ie grow, develop, thrive) during the change experience in addition to an intended outcome of wellbeing 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)’

(Titchen and McCormack, 2010, p 532).

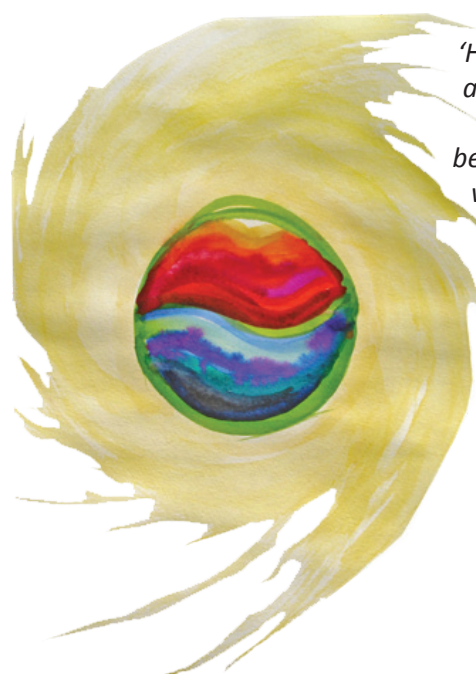


Figure 1: Dancing the mandalas of Critical Creativity (Titchen and McCormack, chapter 2, pp 15-28).
Access the ebook [here](#).



The three theoretical, methodological and human flourishing frameworks of critical creativity are shown in Figure 1 and are returned to separately in Figures 2-4. We call these frameworks, 'mandalas' (a mandala is an ancient symbol that shows the whole and its parts and the relationships between them). Just look with soft eyes/let the words wash over you! Imagine the mandalas whirling at different speeds, creating new combinations and juxtapositions with each other. Feel the movement, energy, light, colour!

Human flourishing lies at the heart of the mandalas.



'Human flourishing occurs when we bound and frame naturally co-existing energies, when we embrace the known and yet to be known, when we embody contrasts and when we achieve stillness and harmony. When we flourish we give and receive loving kindness'
(McCormack and Titchen, 2014, p 19)



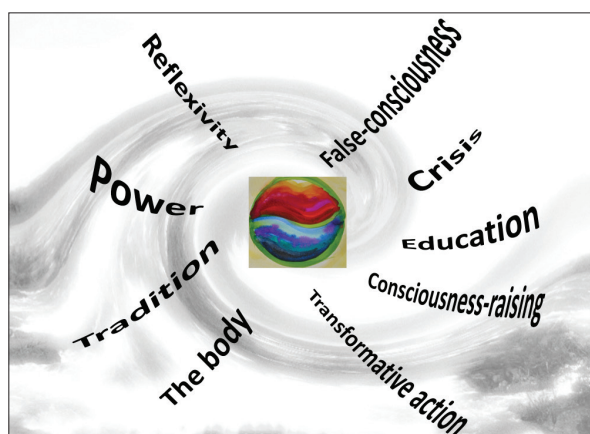
Creating a healthful culture for local people to empower themselves politically

The story of Eynsham Futures shows how local people took on *Power* and *Tradition* in developing a neighbourhood plan to protect their village and surrounding countryside against the threat of massive development, loss of exceptional biodiversity and our global climate and ecological emergency.

Back in 2015, there were rumblings of major housing and business park development around Eynsham, the large village I live in. Residents were alarmed, but felt helpless to do anything about it. As is common around the world, people often feel their local and national governments do not listen and do not act in the best interests of the citizens, country and planet. Fortunately, an Eynsham resident talked with me about the possibility of asking our parish council (the bottom tier of local government nearest to the people) if it would develop a neighbourhood plan, so our community could have some say in ensuring any development would be the best it could be. I said I would support her and suggested some of the village groups might be interested in helping too. So, after conversations with a number of them, she asked to speak at the next parish council meeting. This was granted, but she was told she had to set out the case at the beginning of the meeting and when it was discussed on the agenda, neither she nor any other residents in attendance would be allowed to speak or ask questions.

Figure 2: Critical creativity theoretical mandala (McCormack and Titchen, 2006)

(For free download, [click here](#))



I had never been to a parish meeting before that day, but this prior knowledge of our not being allowed to join in the discussion fitted with my observations of the way the room was set up and the meeting was conducted. I could see a dynamic/pattern of the theories within the critical creativity theoretical mandala (Figure 2). These theories underpin Brian Fay's basic scheme of critical social science (1987). Brendan and I have modified this scheme slightly (in conversation with Brian and with his approval) as the theoretical mandala for critical creativity.

- *Power* Hierarchical structure, autocratic/authoritarian chairman, controlling
- *Tradition* Bureaucratic, formal, rule-bound, technical culture
- *The Body* Entitlement to, and embodiment of, control/closed and invested in the role of power and tradition rather than, as I hoped, invested in helping councillors develop the role of enabling and nurturing relationships between themselves and between the council and community

Both *Power* and *Tradition* were enshrined in the bodies and language of the chairman and some of the councillors – and in the use of the term ‘chairman’, instead of the gender-neutral term ‘chair’. An authoritarian culture and hierarchical structure could be felt and observed in: councillors’ deference to, and lack of challenge of, the chairman’s decisions; a closing down of creative thinking; and an avoidance of risk taking. We had a sense of being shut out, dismissed and made to feel our viewpoint was unrealistic. There was no evidence of any version of the CIP principles of practice development – that is, authentic collaboration, inclusion and participation of all stakeholders involved (Manley et al., 2013).

At the first meeting, a decision was quickly reached, to the effect of: ‘We don’t need a neighbourhood plan because a local plan is being developed by the district council (the next level of local government which at the time was equally authoritarian and bureaucratic) and anyway we don’t have time.’ It seemed to me that several of Brian Fay’s theories were being played out here.

- *False consciousness* We knew our countryside and biodiversity was at stake in an increasingly alarming climate and ecological emergency, and that development on the proposed scale would impact greatly on our thriving community and those in other villages who are reliant on Eynsham for basic services. It would put a huge burden on those services and our roads if the necessary infrastructure was not put in place before any homes were built
- *Crisis* We could not be confident that the district council would ensure that development at Eynsham would be the best it could be – that is, zero carbon build and buildings, and retaining wildlife corridors and habitats that enable biodiversity to flourish – in part because national building regulations are not stringent enough

Afterwards, residents discussed the outcome of the meeting. We decided to attend the next meeting to put forward the case even more cogently.

- *Consciousness raising* At that meeting, we raised the need for involving the community right from the outset in shaping the plan, in a break from the tradition of the parish council preparing a plan and then putting it out to public consultation

Grudgingly, the chairman said words to the effect of: ‘Okay, but we don’t have the time to do it, so you will have to do the work on the basis that the council holds the legal responsibility and will make the final decisions. If you are happy with that, go ahead.’ So, we did!

- *Education* There was no evidence among the councillors of *Reflexivity* (self-knowing and awareness of one’s own impact on others). The council seemed more used to the *Tradition* of telling people, rather than creating safe spaces and facilitating CIP through person-centred facilitation to enable *Transformative action*.

We could see there would be a need to help the councillors learn how to create a healthful or flourishing culture for a neighbourhood plan to be genuinely developed, and therefore owned, by the community.

Is any of this resonating with my experience in my workplace? And if so, how?

Anyway, we proposed the residents would form a steering group, for which permission was given. We decided to call it Eynsham Futures. At our first group meeting, I was surprised that three councillors turned up at the dark and dingy council room (just 'to keep an eye on us', they informed us) and pleased to see eight members of the community join us too. We then elected our chair and set about developing person-centred structures and ways of working. Drawing on my practice development work in health and social care, I offered the CIP principles as a way of working with stakeholders and residents right from the very beginning in creating a shared vision and common purpose for the neighbourhood plan. I was asked to lead on this and a team of volunteers from the steering group (alongside the two most go-ahead of the three councillors) agreed that we would hold our meetings around my dining table rather than in the depressing council venue. Bringing treats to share at our informal meetings quickly became the norm.

This first community-engagement event was going to be very important so people in the steering group were keen to learn how to facilitate conversations with residents, how to draw people out, how not to put words into people's mouths, how to encourage them to express ideas in the different ways, including through imagery, story and creative arts materials. I encouraged the group to think about how we could create a lively, communicative space that connected with our village, countryside and with Nature. I sought to help by role modeling and articulating my embodied knowing about my facilitation role and what I was doing as I facilitated our preparation meetings. Inviting people to use picture cards to express and draw out their hopes, fears and aspirations for Eynsham was one of a variety of ways of helping our community develop a shared vision and common purpose for the neighbourhood plan (cf Dewing et al., 2014, pp 55-57). Valuing each person's contribution and working creatively together engendered huge enthusiasm and commitment in the group.



The Big Launch weekend in the village hall arrived. I greeted everyone at the door and explained that the room was laid out café style, with conversation tables for different key topics like housing, health, biodiversity and education. There would be someone from the steering group sitting at each table to listen to what people had to say and include them in any conversation that was going on informally around the table. Alternatively, they could make a collage, do a drawing or write down their hopes, fears and aspirations for Eynsham on sticky notes. With hundreds of people of all ages attending, there were well over 1,000 notes. People spent time reading these and added related comments.

Participating in such an event was a new experience for a lot of those who came but, as a friend of mine said, people just went along with it and enjoyed it. 'The way you introduced it was just right – you didn't make a big deal of it. It was seamless and there was no pressure.' I also noted that many people stayed on to talk about the event with tea and cake. They seemed in no hurry to get home!

As I said goodbye to people at the door, I asked how it had been for them. I particularly remember an older woman who had been part of Eynsham life for many years saying she had really enjoyed it and that, for the first time at such an event, she had felt able to have her say. When I asked why that was, she replied: 'Because I am too shy to say what I think, but I was able to write it on the sticky note.'

At the end of Sunday afternoon, exhausted but energised, pairs of steering group members took home bags of sticky notes, flipchart pages and pictures relating to the conversation areas they had been facilitating. They were to undertake a thematic analysis and provide an audit trail to set out how each theme was generated and the evidence for it. As I had already facilitated our own values-clarification activity at the first community engagement group meeting, we were able to help those for whom this type of exercise was new. Everyone did an amazing job; most just got it straight away while a couple needed some hands-on help. After I had put the findings altogether and had everyone's agreement that the analyses were sound, I posted them on our local community website for residents to check.

The launch was a huge learning for the councillors and the steering group in terms of creating a conducive place and spaces, using CIP principles. For the first time, I felt that the whole group was making headway in creating a healthful culture in which there was potential for human flourishing. This culture enabled collaborative design and facilitation of community-engagement events over the next three years. For example, stalls at the day centre, primary school and community day (main picture below) and at the village carnival (inset), as well as [group discussions](#), all fed into the neighbourhood plan. Each event was tailored, not only to widen opportunity for residents to have their say, but also to show them how we had used what they or their fellow residents had contributed at earlier events.

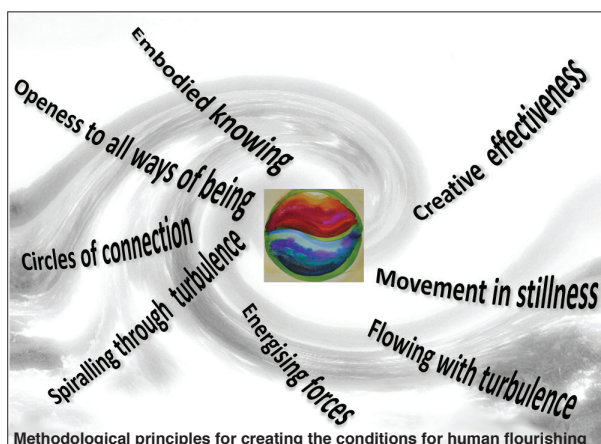


After each event, the steering group considered the findings and changes. Additions to the plan were agreed by consensus and then its next iteration was shared with the community. Residents valued this approach. So, growing the plan was an iterative process resonant with the *Circles of connection* principle for creating the conditions for human flourishing (Figure 3). To get a sense of the breadth and rigour of this work, have a quick scroll through pages 7-11 of the [community engagement report](#) I produced for the submission of the final neighbourhood plan.

The effect of these ways of working on the culture of the parish council and steering group was that all three councillors who attended our first meeting to 'keep an eye on us' became active in the community engagement. One also took on the challenging role of putting the plan together and linking it to all the technical and legal stuff. While the chairman still hovered around the edges, he attended all our meetings in an observation role by sitting in one of the observer seats for residents (many of whom came to the early meetings). Nevertheless, there was no doubt we were an effective, supportive, and challenging team of residents and councillors during the engagement process. The chairman did become active in our meetings at the point when we invited the district and county councils for talks (although, in our view, these talks did not take us anywhere). But despite his detached approach during engagement and in the aftermath, the councillors stuck with us to the end. So, I conclude, without taking away any of the significance of our achievement, that a healthful culture was partially created. But, this changed for the better (more of which later).

In summary, residents and councillors in the steering group learned new people skills and inquiry skills, and the community felt heard and communicated openly and freely with us. This set the scene for Story 3, 'An EPIC tale', which I tell below.

Figure 3: Critical creativity methodological mandala (Titchen and McCormack, 2010)



Throughout the life of the steering and community engagement groups, my intention was to role model working in a healthful culture and to point out gently what was going well/not well and why. Occasionally, when asked or when it felt right, I used everyday language to share my *Embodied knowing* (Figure 3) about what I was doing. This is tacit knowing that becomes embedded in our practices and body as we develop expertise, and which most people find difficult or impossible to talk about – either because it seems so ordinary to them or they are not conscious of it. This sharing was done with a

light touch and differently from the way I do it when working in my negotiated roles such as doctoral supervision or as a critical-creative companion with colleagues.

Nevertheless, I could see in varying ways the theoretical mandala (Figure 2) playing out in the steering group, especially when there were moments of external *Crisis*, as well as internal disagreements and fall-outs. With a few exceptions, though, the group learned to overcome these crises through *Transformative action*. They seemed to pick up unconsciously on my role modeling and cues. Moreover, when they did this, I could see glimmers of evidence of the principles to create the conditions for human flourishing in the methodological mandala (Figure 3). I saw, for example, group members *Spiralling through turbulence*, rather than being totally buffeted and losing their way. This was most apparent towards the end of our work when the neighbourhood plan was almost ready to submit to the district council. The chairman sat at the table of our steering group meeting to push us to include support for the 3,200 homes set out in the district's local plan. We refused because we knew from our extensive community engagement that residents had only been prepared to accept up to 650 homes and this

had already been upped to 750 in our plan. In the iteration we were presented with at this meeting, 750 had been changed to 3,200. However, we *Flowed with turbulence* by presenting and winning a case for including no figures at all and pointing out that if the 3,200 figure was inserted, the plan would fail to be supported by residents in the legal referendum before it could be submitted to the government inspector. This strategy avoided mass resignations from the steering group, including mine, and resulted in almost 100% support in the referendum.

Is any of this resonating with my experience in my workplace? And if so, how?

Evidence that a healthful culture between the Parish Council and the community has been created and is making a difference

Between 2018 and today, the parish council has increasingly shown that it values the neighbourhood plan because councillors have quoted our policies extensively in all their responses to public consultations, not only about the development of 3,200 homes on our village fringe, but also about the A40 road improvements. The latter include dualing, multiple roundabouts and crossings next to back gardens on the immediate edge of our village. Recently they have strongly objected to a developer's garden village outline planning application, relying heavily on the neighbourhood plan. Moreover, the council's recent decision to update the plan shows it continues to value it. Since the chairman retired this year, a new parish council and chair are liaising and working actively with community campaigning groups. This summer, the new chair invited representatives of these groups to a meeting to establish points of commonality so we could work effectively together with another set of developers on a second large site of 1,000 homes at Eynsham. At the time of writing, we have established that we are broadly on the same page and have submitted a preliminary joint response to the developers. These actions indicate that local people have been effective in changing the traditional power relationship between themselves and the parish council. There is early evidence that a healthful culture is emerging between us. This evidence also shows that genuine transformation of culture is slow; at this first level of local government, it has taken six years. Eynsham Futures made no impact at all on the district council (second level), although community campaigning groups in the past couple of years have. The next story shows how.

Story 3: An EPIC tale – from parish to district council



CREDIT: HYWEL EDWARDS

An EPIC tale of residents moving into action to wake up and work with local government and developers as equals.

Eynsham Futures Steering Group disbanded itself in 2018 after its work was done. It is important to note that the neighbourhood plan was not finally approved by the district council and government inspector until early 2020. A few months after we disbanded, an older campaigning group, the Eynsham Planning Improvement Campaign (EPIC), was revived by a small group of residents. Some 40 years ago, EPIC had seen off repeated development proposals for West Eynsham housing and perimeter road building. The campaign was revived to pick up the new and more serious challenges facing our community and the obvious stalling by the district council of our neighbourhood plan. Here is the EPIC rallying cry:

*EPIC is an independent and non-political initiative of local citizens who have come together to voice our concern about recent development plans for Eynsham. We aim to challenge the assumptions on which these plans were made and campaign to ensure that any development is appropriate and answers **local** needs.*

Stand up for your village!

*EPIC is open to anyone who lives or works in Eynsham, or has other ties to the village, and wants to protect it from **over**-development. (Visit the [EPIC website](#)).*

When I joined EPIC, I found the small working group had done a grand job of public outreach and getting the campaign structure set up, with a small strategic working group, a website and mailing list of 450+ supporters. I started demonstrating with EPIC outside West Oxfordshire District Council offices about the pending West Oxfordshire Local Plan, which included the 3,200 homes at Eynsham. EPIC supporters attended hearings and presented papers to the government inspector. We were tolerated, but as key stakeholders who would be most affected by the local plan, we were not making any impact on the views of the council nor those of the inspector.

CREDIT: GARDEN VILLAGE SITE PAINTING BY EYNSHAM RESIDENT ERIC WHITE, WITH KIND PERMISSION



Not long after that, two members of the strategic working group resigned, so I offered my home for our meetings and found myself sitting at my dining table with a bottle of wine, picture cards and a keen group of people, of all ages, who wanted to organise a demonstration on the A40 – horrendously busy even without the proposed 3,200 new homes. Using picture cards got us off to a good start because they helped us to express our feelings, connect with Nature, see things differently, *Embrace the known and yet to be known* (Figure 4), reveal new understanding and be courageous.

At regular planning meetings, we established that we would all take leadership of something, and I offered to facilitate the meetings to get us going, after which we could take turns. But I still had to keep reminding group members I was not the leader! Was this *Tradition* (Figure 2) creeping in? I kept stressing that each person's skills and attributes were valued and we were equally responsible for making plans and shared decisions. We successfully became a co-leadership team, taking responsibility for overall strategic and tricky decisions together, but trusting each other to make operational decisions about the aspects for which we were each responsible (for example, liaising with parents of children at primary school, social media and comms, writing and editing, making banners). Those decisions were taken with residents directly involved. It was a joy to work together in this way and to flourish as an intergenerational group.

In preparation for our demonstration on the A40, my neighbour, a local carpenter, made and put up the billboards on the A40. With [Andy](#) – recently elected to our district council – I made this video, [Three Billboards at Eynsham](#), with more than a nod to a film I had recently seen!

Then on a sunny Sunday morning, following a carefully prepared plan and risk assessment, we closed the A40 for five minutes for Morris dancing, a football match, a game of tennis and symbolic tree-planting in the middle of the road. Hundreds of residents turned out and then marched with banners to our village square for a short rally!

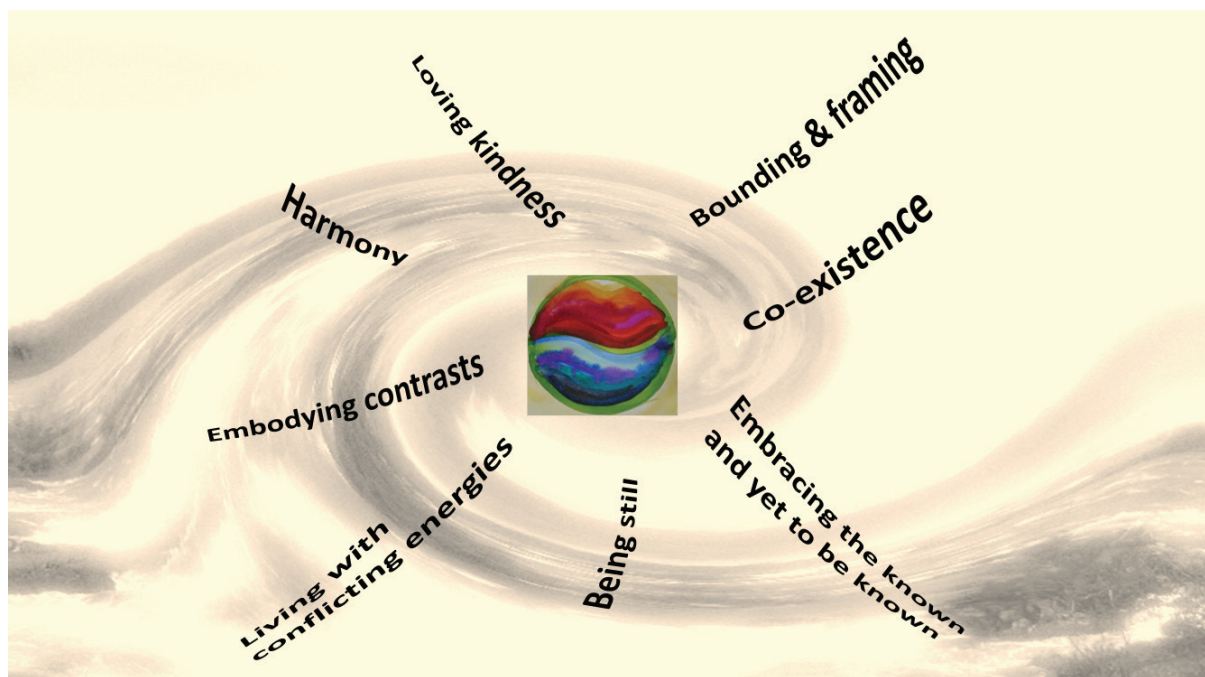
CREDITS: EYNSHAM RESIDENTS ANIA READY (TOP RIGHT, CENTRE AND BOTTOM LEFT PHOTOS) AND HYWEL EDWARDS (MIDDLE BOTTOM PHOTO)



In addition, being in Nature (walking, playing, picnicking) not only brought people together to progress commitment to contributing to upcoming public consultations, it also strengthened community wellbeing and support at this stressful time. People mourned the potential loss of extraordinary countryside around Eynsham, some of whom had previously been unaware of it and/or had no idea all these green fields were to be covered by housing. *Loving kindness* and *Living with conflicting energies* (Figure 4) played a key role here.



Figure 4: Human flourishing mandala (McCormack and Titchen, 2014)





'Could do better... district councillors critical of local plan after document given seal of approval'

The scene was now set for the next phase of activism, when we intentionally created person-centred, rather than role-centred, spaces and relationships with councillors and the garden village developer. In some cases, spaces emerged spontaneously at the public engagement events that the district council and developer organised together and separately. These included site visits to other garden villages/eco developments and attending workshops, engaging representatives from the community and other key stakeholders. We seized these opportunities to get to know the strategic directors, officers, landscape architects, consultants and administrators of both the district council and the developer. We observed them in relationship with each other and with us. By being person-centred, we modeled the acts of getting to know each other as people and listening to what each other had to say about our core values and how we lived them.

The most powerful of these opportunities was a walk on the garden village greenfield site organised by the developer. It was a gift to us. EPIC, the local campaigning group [GreenTEA](#) and other community representatives were able to share their local knowledge of the site with district councillors, officers and the developer and their consultants - covering aspects such as its medieval history and the high quality of its soil due to zero contamination through long-term organic management. Then the farmer on this land showed and told them about the rare flora, fauna, biodiversity and habitats and the abundance of wild and plant life that these conditions had nurtured. Moreover, by *Being still* (Figure 4) in our showing and telling, we enabled these people (many of whom had never set foot on the site before) to be present, immersed and to feel it. They were clearly astonished, even gobsmacked: 'I never realized it was so beautiful.' We used this opportunity to help them *Bound and frame* (Figure 4) the foreground or microlandscape – ancient trees, wide hedgerows alive with wildlife, rare arable wildflowers and wetlands – in order to grasp the background or macrolandscape – our planetary climate and ecological emergency. At the time, we thought this might encourage the developer to start being more sensitive to the site, in the context of the global emergency. This hope was strengthened a few weeks later by their expression of a desire to protect more land than they had originally envisaged.



Being still & bounding & framing

CREDIT: BACKGROUND PAINTING, GARDEN VILLAGE SITE BY EYNSHAM
RESIDENT ERIC WHITE, WITH KIND PERMISSION

As well as the metaphorical and literal walk, another powerful strategy we used with GreenTEA was to call and chair joint meetings with other community groups and parish councils in Eynsham and surrounding villages and with the district council and the garden village developer. The plan was to hold these meetings before the developer's public site visit, workshop and exhibition. We wanted to get in first to challenge aspects of the emerging development plans, as well as support positive aspects. We set the agenda (a first!) and prepared key areas and questions for discussion. Running through was our concern that neither the district council (unlike the parish council) nor the developer was moving towards a development fit for the 21st century; a development that would address the climate and ecological emergency.

We wanted to create a supportive space for delivering this high challenge, so we discussed the processes we would use to enable honest, fair, friendly and respectful contributions. Our chair for the meeting ensured this happened using her innate sense of humour and kindness. We also offered a home-prepared, beautifully presented lunch with produce from our gardens and allotments (which the development team particularly enjoyed as a welcome change from take-away sandwiches). I am certain we created, for those two meetings, something approaching a flourishing, healthful culture which created the space and conditions for us to *Live with conflicting energies* (Figure 4) and to flourish a bit! Nevertheless, points of contention around biodiversity and zero-carbon energy production, build and buildings remained unchanged at the end of the day.

However, a month later, we were delighted with the following announcement from our district council:

'In recognition of the urgency and importance of local action in response to a global concern, on 26th June 2019, West Oxfordshire District Council declared its [Motion](#) to address the climate and ecological emergency.' (WODC, 2021, p14).

At last! Our district council had committed to take action (helped, we surmised, by the efforts of one of its officers with whom we had been working closely for some time). Moreover, it soon appointed a team of new staff to work with West Oxfordshire communities to create a climate strategy and action plan. As it turned out, the community engagement approach of the new team had many parallels with our own, including creating a shared vision. It was heartwarming to see collaboration, inclusion and participation becoming more authentic outside health and social care! It seemed we might have begun to change the system from the bottom – but at that point, we could not be sure.

Is there evidence that healthful cultures between the community and the district council and between the community and developer have been created and are making a difference?

Yes, partially. In 2018, before we held the joint meeting, the district council consulted the public on its views for the garden village development to prepare a 'preferred options' paper for the garden village area action plan (AAP) – a plan with legal teeth. When the public consultation on the draft AAP ran some months later, we submitted a detailed response as well as co-ordinating a community response with this key message.

'The AAP is an integrated and forward-looking document containing most if not all of the responders' desired aims, objectives, principles and policies. Moreover, much of the commentary and core objectives reflect the views expressed by EPIC, GreenTEA and others in the community... However laudable the general approach, there must be strong enforcement. The generalities must be translated into measurable criteria that can be tested and, thereby, enforced. The District Council must have the will and capability to ensure compliance with the AAP. The landowners and developers will resist many of the provisions affecting their profit – inter alia, the amount and cost of non-market housing and carbon-neutral buildings (homes, institutional and commercial buildings).'

The AAP was published and opened up for public consultation in 2020. We were astonished to see it included a great deal of what we had submitted in our response in 2018 and was promoting much of what we had been fighting for! Again, we co-ordinated a community response and received more than 200 signatures, which we submitted to the district council. Recently, the government-appointed inspector has conducted an examination of the plan and we await his decision.

And what about the impact of the community in bringing about change through our work with the developer?

Our embodiment of a healthful culture in which the ultimate outcome is human flourishing (Figure 4) in our dealings with the developer appeared to have had some influence. First, after the developer's two-day workshop, which we attended, they seemed to be committed to protecting spaces with special biodiversity and by maintaining a wildlife corridor around the site. Second, possibly based on their experience of working with us, they intend to work more actively with communities in the future. They published this intent on their website.

Sadly, in 2021, when the developer's outline planning application for the garden village was presented to the district council, the intention to keep a continuous green space and wildlife corridor around the site seemed to have been compromised. We think releasing highly biodiverse land for building is due to the UK government's private commercial development model and the lack of a land value tax, where developer and landowner profit are the fixed points and the developer argues that everything else that exceeds the statutory minimum (for example, 25% biodiversity net gain and net zero building and energy) should be subject to 'viability' or up for grabs! This shows the need for communities to step up action to national level and demand that new building and development regulations should be enacted if we are to meet our climate change targets. The positive side is that the parish council objected to the outline application as well and the district council is resisting through its AAP, but time will tell...

So now to my final and shortest story – one that gives me hope and inspiration that citizens are already taking effective climate and ecological action at local and national levels when they are supported by healthful cultures.

Story 4: Loving kindness & transformative action is in the air



Extinction Rebellion

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a non-violent, peaceful protest group, in the tradition of the Suffragettes, the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr Martin Luther King and the Anti-Apartheid Movement led by Nelson Mandela. I joined two years ago after attending a meeting in Oxford where two inspiring young women talked about XR. They told us how it worked as a genuinely democratic organisation and how local affinity groups organised their own community-based actions, as well as contributing to, and sharing with, a network of regional, national and worldwide strategic decisions and actions – a genuinely flattened hierarchy that reminded me of my work with nurses in the John Radcliffe in Oxford some 30 years ago (Binnie and Titchen, 1999). I immediately joined XR Swallows, the West Oxfordshire affinity group, and met an intergenerational group of women and men who were passionate about taking *Transformative action* (Figure 2) in the context of our current climate and ecological emergency.

The most beautiful things about these new friends are their *Loving kindness* (Figure 4), their care and support of each other, creativity, positivity and hopefulness that we could turn this emergency round if people in our communities understood the nature of the emergency, why it had happened and what they could do about it. These people of all ages were on the same page as person-centred, transformational practice developers. I felt I had come home, especially since creativity and Nature are so important to them. This reinforced my hope that some of the principles of person-centred work that we have been developing and practising for decades in healthcare are happening elsewhere too!

Soon after I joined, the Covid-19 pandemic struck and we were all initially locked down, so I suggested a socially distanced Trees of Hope action in our villages. In Eynsham we chose the trees in our square, shown in the photo above. Feedback on our village streets suggested this action nourished community spirit and encouraged people to think about how it is possible for governments, communities and individuals to change quickly and how they might contribute to a better future. Amazingly, a video of the leaves received more than 600 views in a single day on Twitter from around the country.



CREDIT: CENTRE PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN SILK

XR is often painted in the media as violent and as preaching doom and gloom, but this is far from the truth. Our actions are often witty, creative and colourful, and they convey positive messages as shown on our banner, above left, on a London march before lockdown. And on St. Valentine's Day, 2021, we pinned cards and poems on our Member of Parliament's constituency office door asking for his support for the [Climate and Ecological Emergency \(CEE\) Bill](#).

The need for a healthful culture of support hit home when those of us who were not in Covid vulnerable groups contributed to the September 2020 XR rebellion in Parliament Square, London. I decided to support the action at home and so I offered to join our Arrestee Welfare team.

The rebellion centred around the presentation of the CEE Bill as a Private Members Bill drafted by cross-party MPs and XR. It took the shape of publicised creative actions. For example, a mass die-in outside the Houses of Parliament in London, organised by a group of healthcare workers when the Bill was having its First Reading in Parliament. Other actions included a disco in front of Buckingham Palace, a newspaper blockade and the reappearance of the pink boat that featured so heavily at the 2019 rebellion. Some senior members of the medical profession have expressed support for civil disobedience to achieve greater action on climate change. Moreover, the editors of *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* came out in support. Does this indicate healthful cultures emerging?

Our Swallows took part in all these actions and told those of us on the Arrestee Welfare team that it gave them confidence to know we were there for them 24/7 if they were arrested.

Has my workplace or the *International Practice Development Journal* considered coming out in support of the CEE Bill, or, declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency as University College London Hospital has done recently with a commitment to reach net zero carbon dioxide emissions in the next 10 years?

CREDITS: MAIN PHOTO BY ANGELA WILSON, WITH KIND
PERMISSION; CENTRE PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN SILK



On the last day, I had to swing into action. A replica of the pink boat was smuggled into Parliament Square under a tarpaulin. When it was removed by the police, three of our Swallows were standing right in front of it; they took this picture and posted it on our social media channel. I picked it up seconds later. I immediately enlarged it and thought I identified one of our Swallows as a ‘barnacle’ on the boat! I immediately let the three on the ground know this and they checked and confirmed it was her. A few minutes later, after her peaceful arrest, they photographed her waving at them from a police car as it drove away! So, she knew that we knew and would immediately kick in the support that she had indicated to the team she would need.

So, what is the impact of such actions?

As I write, the Bill is still in its Second Reading in the House of Lords, so we will see.

Finale

Meanwhile, in the lead up to the 2021 UN Climate Change Summit (COP26), *Circles of connection, Loving kindness, Harmony and Co-existence* are in the air at Eynsham. As I write, I am ready to help plan Eynsham’s [Great Big Green Week](#), with volunteers from our community. This is part of a massive national event to showcase and celebrate commitment to creating a better, greener future, and to demonstrate to our leaders that we care about our planet. We are inviting to individuals, families, friends and community groups to reveal our community’s great green endeavours. Offers, including from our Swallows, are pouring in! Perhaps this Great Big Green Week will in some way become a measure of success in creating healthful activist cultures in communities across our nation – perhaps even in the context of UK citizens contributing to local, regional, national and international *Transformative action* (Figure 2) at COP 26. The first small steps in bringing about global culture change that is healthful to our planet and all life on it. Let’s hope so!

Reflective questions



- What have I noticed, felt, imagined as I read this paper?
- If I let the words of the critical creativity mandalas wash over me without digging for meaning, what happened?
- What am I taking away about myself and how I might help to create a healthful culture in my workplace/community?
- If I chose one, what is my experience of having an inquiry question?

Postscript

A friend involved in some of the community-based actions in this article and a former principle of Ruskin College, Oxford, expressed interest in reading and commenting on this paper. This is what he said:

'It is UTTERLY AND WONDROUSLY DIFFERENT [sic] from any take on "politics", national, local or community, or even on agitations/demonstrations I have taken part in over the years. Thank you. I have so much to learn both about the theoretical, practical base from which your work stems and about what effect/affect it has had, could have, and will have on the formidable class, race and gender-based interests and power bases which so many of us have tried to oppose and shift out of power over the years... I only hope, as I know that you do, that it makes a substantial difference to what happens in Eynsham, Oxfordshire – and to the planet! - in the short and long terms.'

In relation to Story 2, Eynsham Parish Council has invited residents to come to have their say on what the council should be doing – or not doing now. It has designed a ['drop-in, informal community event'](#) to make the experience of engaging with the council easy and, if we're lucky, enjoyable'.

In relation to Story 4, COP26 in Glasgow is entering its second day as I write, and now we know that people around the world appear to be encouraging world leaders at the conference to make substantial agreements, for example, to halt and reverse global deforestation. While cautiously welcoming their commitments, we the people need to ensure that genuine Action is taken. XR Swallows, therefore, will join a march and rally in Oxford for the [Global Day of Action for Climate Justice](#) wearing giant eyeballs to let our leaders know the world has its Eyes on them!

I refer in the Finale to Eynsham's [Great Big Green Week](#). It was a resounding success and a number of residents are now taking action on climate change, for example, setting up a community car-sharing scheme. Also, just in today is a message from Joan Stonham (webmaster, Eynsham Online):

'I'm delighted to report that statistics for Eynsham Online hit an all-time (2014-21) record of 22,301 page views and 6,070 users in September – driven almost entirely by GBGW, of course. Renewed congratulations on an inspirational programme :-)'

Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks to the many wonderful people in my stories who have made such significant contributions to bringing about change from the bottom! Thanks also to Ania Ready, Hywel Edwards, Angela Wilson, Christian Silk and Neil Bailey for permission to use their photos, and to Eric White for permission to use his paintings.

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Resources

Titchen, A. and McCormack, B. (2020) *Dancing the Mandalas of Critical Creativity in Nursing and Healthcare: A Collection of New Work, Published Papers, Book Chapters, Creative Media and Blog Entries with Weaving Commentary*. Edinburgh: Queen Margaret University Centre for Person-centred Practice Research. This is a resource offering core articles for critical creativity. They are free to download. The final section, 'Widening', offers stories of learning and working with critical creativity. Available at: cpcpr.org/critical-creativity.



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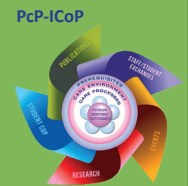
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Angie Titchen (DPhil Oxon, MSc, MCSP), Independent Research and Practice Development Consultant.

A commentary by Clare Cable follows on the next page.

International Practice Development Journal

Online journal of FoNS in association with the IPDC and PcP-ICoP (ISSN 2046-9292)



COMMENTARY

Creating healthful cultures through Critical Creativity

Clare Cable

This article is presented as a set of heartfelt and beautiful stories that illustrate how the skills of a practice developer can be powerfully combined with the passion of an environmental activist. It provides a strong narrative through the four stories of how critical creativity can be brought to all aspects of our lives, particularly at this time of climate emergency to support a commitment to planetary health.

The writing and publication of this paper are timely, coinciding with the COP26 conference in Glasgow. It gives readers an opportunity to consider their own actions in response to the climate emergency and how it connects with their professional identity and practice.

I like the fact that this is an unusual article and draws from work outside of health yet asks the reader to translate the learning to their own setting. Throughout the article the reader is offered gentle invitations to engage in reflection through the creation of an inquiry question, but also through a series of reflective questions. Too often we make assumptions about someone's learning and feel the need to translate across settings for the reader. I really appreciate the way this article leaves it open to the reader to be curious about what resonates.

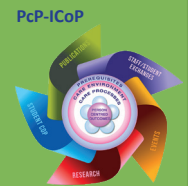
It is an inspiring paper, thank you.

Clare Cable (FRSA, MSc, RSCN, BN, RGN), Chief Executive and Nurse Director, Queen's Nursing Institute, Scotland; Honorary Professor, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Scotland.

A response to this commentary by the author follows on the next page.

International Practice Development Journal

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RESPONSE TO COMMENTARY

Creating healthful cultures through Critical Creativity

Angie Titchen

This is such a lovely and inspiring review. I was slightly nervous when submitting my article, because it is different, but I was so certain of the importance of the message that I did! The message is two-fold: (1) practice development is relevant to different and often unreceptive contexts; and (2) doing it within the worldview of Critical Creativity (with human flourishing and loving kindness at its heart), is potentially profound, effective and long lasting. This wonderful review inspired me to add the postscript at the end of the article to show what has happened since it was submitted three months ago.

Angie Titchen (DPhil Oxon, MSc, MCSP), Independent Research and Practice Development Consultant.