



## IDEAS AND INFLUENCES

### Writing with flow: publish and flourish through whole-self writing

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Submitted for publication: 18th April 2013

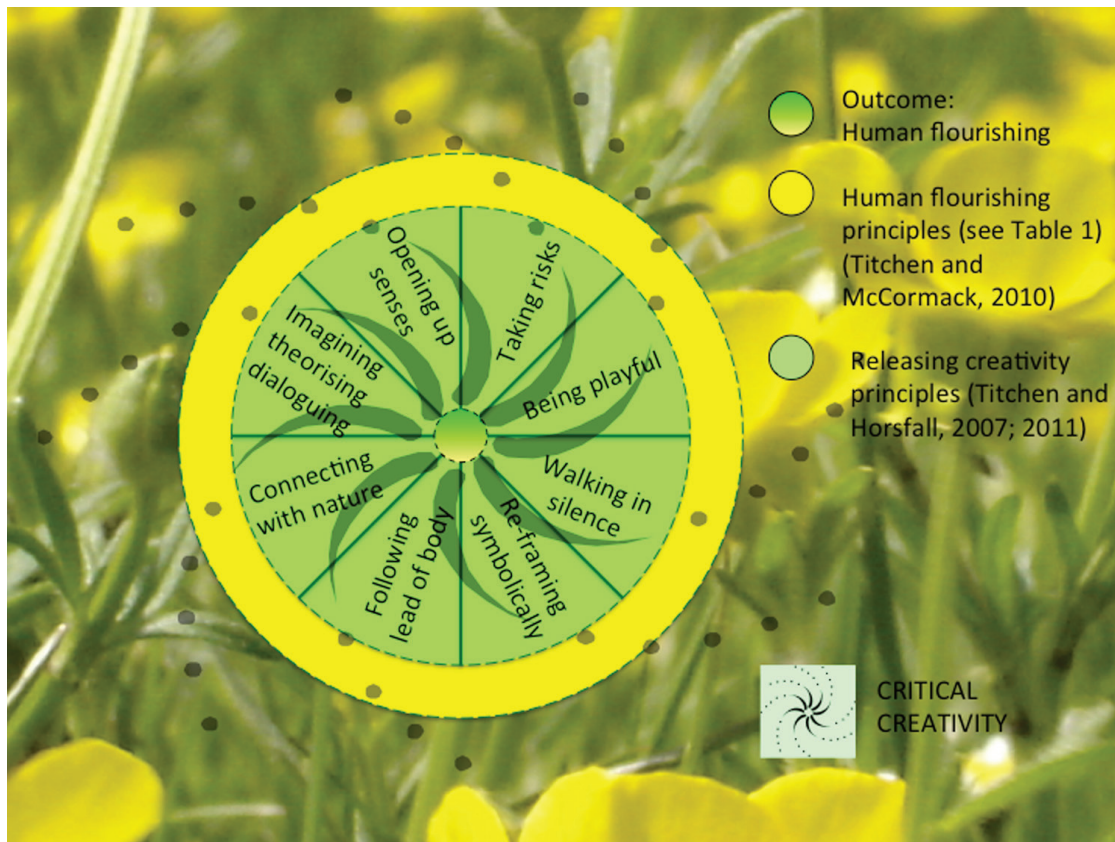
Accepted for publication: 22nd April 2013

**Keywords:** Writing, reflection, criticality, creativity, human flourishing

*Yesterday was supposed to be a preparation day for writing this short piece, but by the time I had done all my emails and finished some outstanding work (procrastination!), it was late and I felt angry and frustrated with myself. So, I put on my coat and went out for a short walk (yes, in work-time!). In my pocket I had a small notebook and pencil. The question I posed myself for the walk was how could I get across succinctly some action principles for releasing creativity, transforming ourselves and coming to deeper understanding through writing? As I walked, I intentionally let this question go and opened up my senses. Breathing deeply, I smelled the moist fragrance of late afternoon air. I saw the growing darkness of the sky and the chilling breeze brushed my face. My frustration left me as I refocused my attention on my body. I wrote some short phrases in my notebook about what I was noticing. It seemed that the dark chill symbolised how I was feeling. How could I achieve all of this richness in such a short paper?*

*As I turned the corner, I felt a physical jolt of delight. The sun was breaking through black clouds with shafts of golden light! This symbol shocked me into realising that the bigger message I also had to get across was the theoretical context of the principles for action and I had to do that simply. As always, I found the walk helped to speed up my preparation for writing. This morning, I awoke thinking vaguely about boxes with columns to show the relationships between the theoretical and practical principles, but over breakfast quickly realised that boxes would be too rigid and would not show the dynamism of getting into flow through whole-self writing. Later, after Pilates and a swim, and reading an email from two Australian colleagues, Mary Mulcahy and Cat Schofield who use mandalas in their practice development work, I thought, 'Of course, that is how to do it.' So here you have it (Figure 1), with the action principles for releasing creativity in green and the theoretical principles in yellow. The yellow-green circle at the centre represents human flourishing for the writer and for the intended audience as the outcome. The dotted lines show the dynamic flow between both sets of principles. The 'Catherine wheel' symbolises the blending and melding of criticality and creativity.*

**Figure 1: Writing with flow: a mandala (an ancient symbol that shows the parts and the whole of something – in this case writing with flow)**



Do you, like me, often find it a struggle to prepare yourself and get going in the writing of a practice development or evaluation report or a paper for publication? It has always comforted me to know that even the most experienced and respected writers, including well-known novelists, find this difficult. The *IPDJ* team know this too and they have invited me to offer you some principles for action on how we can engage our whole selves in our writing. This paper is complementary to the online *IPDJ* guidelines on how to deepen your preparatory reflections through the use of various models. I want to show you some ideas from transformational practice development. While this kind of practice development is located in a new worldview called critical creativity (McCormack and Titchen, 2006; Titchen and McCormack, 2010), you can use the principles for action irrespective of the worldview in which you work and thus benefit from using your whole self in your writing.

Over the past few years, a number of us have been experimenting with engaging our whole selves in all aspects of practice development. Using both sides of the brain to dance metaphorically between the body, cognition, critical consciousness and creative imagination and expression, we have come to an understanding of transformational practice development and research with human flourishing for all as the outcome. This approach integrates emancipatory practice development and research with ancient and creative traditions and awareness that are intimately connected with the natural world. And more to the point here, it helps us to write creatively and effectively! Let's look now at the meaning of the theoretical principles for enabling human flourishing (Titchen and McCormack, 2010; McCormack et al., 2013) for such writing. See if you can relate these metaphorical principles to my experience of preparing this article and to your own experiences in the past.

**Table 1: Theoretical (metaphorical) principles for enabling human flourishing**

Principle	
<p><b>Spiralling through turbulence</b></p> 	<p><b>Writing often sets up an inner turbulence, perhaps caused by our insecurity, vulnerability or fear of exposure or rejection.</b> We therefore need to find a way to spiral through our writing journey in a way that is authentic and consistent with the values and beliefs of practice development and that will enable us to flourish. Finding a critical-creative companion you can trust to support and challenge you on your reiterative, but ever-changing, journey can be vital.</p>
<p><b>Circles of connection</b></p>	<p><b>Sustained dialogue with yourself and others enables a spiralling awareness as you look for circles of connection</b> between ideas, insights, intuitions and different forms of knowledge, wisdom and intelligence. There is no beginning and no end to these connections.</p>
<p><b>Creative effectiveness</b></p>	<p><b>This occurs through blending, improvisation, synchronicity, attunement and balance.</b> Blending and melding different forms of knowledge/evidence is central to creating balance and flow in our writing. No one form takes precedence over another; rather the importance and significance of the knowledge/evidence is determined by the purpose of the article and the contexts for which it is intended. We need to be attuned to the type of knowledges needed by our audience and, simultaneously, to improvise processes suited to the intended outcome for our readers.</p>
<p><b>Movement in stillness</b></p>	<p><b>The stillness of reflection, contemplation and emptying the mind creates a movement that enables future meaningful, ethical action and understanding to occur.</b> This is one of the most powerful principles for writers when they come face to face with new, but unwelcome insights about themselves. Also, when they feel 'stuck' and despite repeated efforts, the writing doesn't flow or feel authentic. In such situations, we need to create distance from turbulence by using our body senses and imagination to come to new understandings through reflection.</p>
<p><b>Embodied knowing</b></p>	<p><b>Ancient and creative traditions recognise that connecting ourselves with the natural world and our environment enables an internal, bodily knowing that transcends cognitive and rational processes of analysis.</b> Essentially, this means we can know something through our bodies before we come to know it in our brains. These connections are held through the body and can be accessed and articulated through imagery, symbolism, movement, artistry, metaphor, poetry and prose, thereby releasing our untapped internal knowledge and resources, creativity, and capacity to think, reflect and act differently. This articulation is obviously important for writers who want to access their own embodied knowing, bring it to their own critical consciousness and then to articulate it to others.</p>
<p><b>Energising forces</b></p>	<p><b>Transformation occurs through moments of 'crisis' 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, and embodied and tacit ways of knowing.</b> As writers, we need to create the conditions for ourselves to tap into our creative expression. When this happens, it is exhilarating, dazzling and it energises us.</p>
<p><b>Openness to all ways of being</b></p>	<p><b>Writers need to be open to and appreciative of different worldviews.</b> To speak to others who may not share our worldview (that is, the knowledge, ways of knowing, beliefs and values that shape our ways of engaging with others), we try not to patronise or preach to our audience, but recognise that their ways of being are different and respect that difference.</p>
<p><b>Flowing with turbulence</b></p>	<p><b>Working with turbulence requires the use of emotional and spiritual intelligences.</b> Working with turbulence is often scary and painful because we are working well beyond our comfort zones. As writers, putting ourselves on the line, we may feel exposed, inadequate and vulnerable. These feelings get in the way of flow and being present. To write with flow, we need to be able to stay connected with our authentic selves and be truly present with the whole of ourselves. We can do this by transforming negative emotions. This is where our emotional and spiritual intelligences come in. As we refine them, we are more able to be present wherever and whatever we are doing.</p>

## **The principles for releasing creativity in writing**

These principles for enabling flow and releasing creativity in writing are building on work I began with my friends and colleagues, Emma Coats (Coats et al., 2006) and Debbie Horsfall (Titchen and Horsfall, 2007).

### **1. Taking risks and being playful**

Many of us have been educated and socialised into conventional ways of reporting practice development and research initiatives and writing articles for publication. Moreover, we may have received the impression, perhaps in our childhood education or beyond, that we are no good at expressing ourselves creatively through dance, singing, drawing or painting, for example. So, living the above principles for human flourishing in whole-self writing is likely to involve taking a risk to push aside those memories, the 'I can't ...' belief and the fear of being seen as childish or feeling embarrassed. I must recognise that every human being on earth, including me, is an artist within and that my artistic merits are not going to be judged aesthetically by others because I will present them as a means to access my deep embodied knowing and to get my message across. We have to leap into the unknown, perhaps with our critical-creative companion beside us, and be in the moment as the playful child we once were and so sadly lost. Being playful, rather than trying too hard, releases creativity in our writing.

### **2. Connecting with nature, walking in silence**



The power of walking in silence, in nature, either alone or with others, is almost universally found to be enriching in some way. I have rarely walked and dialogued with myself and others in city parks, hospital or university grounds, by the sea or in the country, without there being a welling up of joy, insight and transformation in my/our knowing, being, doing or becoming. Walks can take place in buildings and on busy streets, but it is less easy to become fully present and contemplative. If you are walking with a companion, then stay attuned to each other but do not speak until you both feel ready to do so.

As shown in my opening account, these walks are intentional and an initial question or issue might be posed and then let go.

### **3. Opening up the senses**

Letting go, while walking in silence, can be helped by opening up the body senses; by paying attention, first to our breath and then to what we can see, hear, smell, taste and feel (touch). This is a form of emptying the 'monkey' mind (with its endless chatter) through awareness and getting oneself into the 'here-now'. When we feel aware and present, we intentionally begin to notice what we notice, whether it is a bodily thing, a feeling (emotion) or something in the environment. At this point, we don't dwell on thoughts or ideas or reflect on why we might be noticing something. We just accept the noticing, even if it seems really bizarre, meaningless and unrelated to our writing (the likelihood is that it is closely related and, like me in my account, we haven't previously been conscious of it). We might pick up an object to which we are attracted, draw or use words to record these things. Thus freed up, we continue to walk in contemplative silence.

#### **4. Symbolic reframing**

We may begin to see connections between what we are experiencing right now with something in the natural or built environment. This is a symbolic reframing of our experience and can be used either in reflective dialogue with yourself or with your critical-creative companion (at a time that feels right, you indicate to each other when to break the silence). You might find that sharing your reframing uncovers a collective consciousness between you (and others, if you take the reflective dialogue further).



Sometimes, you might choose to express whatever is emerging by creating a piece of art with whatever is to hand or something you have collected. Or you might want to sketch or paint something. So it is good to have pastels, coloured pencils or a small paint box (if you want to) and a camera in your pocket, as well as a notebook. These expressions might become your inspiration for writing and give you energy (you might pin them up by your computer or put objects on your desk, perhaps). Sometimes such expression marks the healing of some hurt that may have

taken place in connection with our writing or what we are writing about. You might also use your expressions as part of your article or to create a figure (as I have done in this paper with my mandala). You might choose to frame your paper using a metaphor or a visual image, for example.

#### **5. Revealing embodied, embedded, intuitive, archetypal knowing through active imagination and following the wisdom and lead of the body (see Pallaro, 1999; Arrien, 1993)**

This principle is embedded in the principles above. Ancient people around the world have known about the wisdom of the body and so they paid attention to it and acted on it in their daily lives. There is something about body movement and stillness, if we are intentional, that helps us to reveal this knowing: repetitive movement like running, dancing or drumming; engaging in simple physical tasks like washing up, ironing or gardening; being still, by sitting quietly in the park or by a lake; meditating or staring into the fire. It is no surprise to me that many great writers, like Tolstoy, scientists like Charles Darwin, philosophers like Kant and poets like Rumi built walking, simple tasks like carpentry or being still into their working day. Sleep and dreams also reveal such knowing, so many people have notebooks by their beds to capture waking insights and dreams for further reflection and contemplation and possibly action.

Another approach that practice developers use to help them in their writing is authentic movement. In this quote below, I am talking about how I became more critically conscious of the essence of doing transformational practice development research. The supportive space to which I refer is a physical and symbolic space where the mover feels supported physically, emotionally and spiritually.

In this process [authentic movement] 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), 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, etc. In this way, for example, I [Angie] built up, over time, a collection of paintings and haikus (a form of Zen poetry that gets at the essence of experience) to interpret my paintings (Titchen and Horsfall, 2011, pp 185-6).

We can also engage our active imagination through guided visual imagery, creative visualisation, writing and reading poetry. A companion can help you with this.

## **6. Creative expressions are equally important to critical commentary and are included in the publication**

In whole-person writing, we want our readers to engage with our work using both sides of the brain, so we are likely to use creative expressions, such as those mentioned or shown above, that is, metaphor,



paintings, drawings, poetry, photos and story. As you engage in critical commentary you might refer to your artworks or photos. Or they might speak for themselves. In addition, you might invite readers to take part in a creative visualisation and guide them through it. You might also consider using different forms. For example, Jan Dewing, Kim Manley and I wrote a chapter, as a novellete (Titchen et al., 2013) in a new practice development book. Others have structured chapters as drama, dialogue or poem (see Higgs et al., 2007; 2011).

If at first you are shy of exposing your own artworks, that is fine; you can take photos of landscapes or objects, for example, that help get across your ideas.

## **7. Imagining, theorising, dialoguing**

The last principle, for now, is the need to explore our emerging knowing and theorising through further engagement of the active imagination, using theory and literature and having conversations with others. When you meet with your companion and colleagues you might bring along your creations to stimulate the imagination and enrich the conversation. You might also invite people to co-create an artistic response to your writing in addition to a cognitive one – in other words, engage in an artistic and cognitive critique.



### **How to go from here?**

In this paper, I have tried to live and show you how two sets of principles – theoretical (metaphorical) principles for human flourishing, and principles for action for releasing creativity – work together when you are preparing for, and doing, your writing. If you want to try out some of these ideas for the first time or build on your previous experiences of writing creatively and effectively, you could go forward in different ways. You might choose to:

- Use only the principles for action
- Use the principles for action first and leave consideration of the theoretical principles for later
- When you have tried out some of the principles in your writing, revisit the theoretical principles and establish whether you have experienced them in any way
- Dance between the two sets of principles straight away, finding out how each set informs the other and works for you

Whichever choice you make, you are likely to find it helpful to reflect and record your experience of working with the principles and what you are learning. Dipping into the references and resources might also be helpful.

## References

***I have added a short note beneath each reference and resource.***

- Arrien, A. (1993) *The Four-Fold Way*. San Francisco: Harper. *This book is a beautiful expression of Native American ancient wisdom.*
- Coats, E., Dewing, J. and Titchen, A. (2006) *Opening Doors On Creativity: Resources To Awaken Creative Working. A Learning Resource*. London: Royal College of Nursing. *This resource, which can be accessed at [www.rcn.org](http://www.rcn.org), was prepared to help practice developers to access their creativity generally, but the activities are relevant in the context of becoming a more creative and effective writer. It is an example of using creative approaches in the presentation of a publication.*
- Higgs J., Titchen A., Horsfall D. and Armstrong H. (2007) *Being Critical and Creative in Qualitative Research*. Sydney: Hampden Press. *Although this book is about critical and creative research, including action-oriented research and transformational practice development research, the way it is written, as well as a lot of the content, could be useful to practice developers who want to be more creative as well critical in their practice. Sadly, it is out of print now, but you should be able to get it through your library.*
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## Resources

- Dewing, J., McCormack, B. and Titchen, A. (in press) *Practice Development Workbook for Health and Social Care Teams*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. *This workbook is full of resources for using creative approaches in all aspects of practice development, including creative visualisation. The workbook itself shows how the authors used a range of creative media in the publication itself.*
- Jackson, C. and Webster, A. (2011) Swimming against the tide - developing a flourishing partnership for organisational transformation. *International Practice Development Journal*. Vol. 1. No. 2. Article 7. pp 1-11. Retrieved from: [www.fons.org/library/journal.aspx](http://www.fons.org/library/journal.aspx) (Last accessed 18th April 2013). *This article is an exemplar of a critical reflection on practice development using metaphor and visual imagery.*
- McIntosh, P. (2008) Poetics and space: developing a reflective landscape through imagery and human geography. *Reflective Practice*. Vol. 9. No. 1. pp 69-78. *McIntosh argues that the work environment can be used to frame deep reflection and understanding of our own internal and practice landscapes.*

Sanders, K., Odell, J. and Webster, J. (2013) Learning to be a practice developer. Chp 2 in McCormack, B., Manley, K. and Titchen, A. (Eds.) (2013) *Practice Development in Nursing and Healthcare*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. pp 18-44. *This chapter is an exemplar of using metaphor, walks in nature, poetry, landscape art and imagining, theorising, dialoguing to prepare for, and do, writing in practice development.*

Titchen, A., Dewing, J. and Manley, K. (2013) Getting going with facilitation skills in practice development. Chp 6 in McCormack, B., Manley, K. and Titchen, A. (Eds.) *Practice Development in Nursing and Healthcare*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. pp 109-129. *This chapter is written in the form of a novelle to get inside the heads and feelings of the characters facilitating and learning about practice development. It was great fun to write!*

### **Acknowledgments**

The image of the spiraling water on page 3 is reproduced with the kind permission of Brendan McCormack. The image of the wheel on page 5 is reproduced with kind permission of Brian McGowan.

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