



RESPONSE TO COMMENTARY

Human flourishing through body, creative imagination and reflection

Angie Titchen, Brendan McCormack, Val Wilson and Annette Solman

Thank you for this commentary on our work and for modeling what we hope many readers will do as they read it, that is, interrogate it, notice what it evokes in them and how it makes them feel. We resonate particularly with the points you make about helping practitioners to use theoretical and methodological ideas in their practice development. It is one of the challenges we frequently meet in our everyday work as facilitators of practice development projects, programmes and schools and as healthcare and university leaders and action-oriented researchers. There are so many great points you make in this commentary and we would like to respond to them all, but this theory/practice challenge is the one we want to focus on here. We also want to convey a fragrance of how we help practitioners who work in busy settings to enhance their practice development work by embodying or internalising the theoretical and methodological frameworks of critical creativity in who they are as a person and professional.

You have picked up quite rightly on the 'left field' stance the four of us tend to adopt. Working outside mainstream thinking and developing ideas and language that people are not familiar with is very challenging, as we expect you have experienced as well! We remember the early days of helping practitioners to become reflective practitioners and clinical supervisors. Many complained then about the terminology we used (even though most of us know that whenever we move into a new field of practice there is new language to learn). Today, ideas and terms about reflective practice and clinical supervision have moved more into the mainstream and people sit more comfortably with them. But that took a long time. However, we are finding that we can speed up engagement with the new ideas and language of critical creativity in several ways.

Firstly, we have found that the notion of human flourishing as the end and means of transformational practice, practice development, education and research really grabs people and makes them want to learn more about this new approach. For this reason, we are working with others in many fields of practice to deepen our understanding of human flourishing. Secondly, when facilitators create the conditions for flourishing and use critical-creative methods, everyone involved in the work can actually experience the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the frameworks without even knowing what these underpinnings are. So, for example, the philosophical underpinning of being person-centred and the theoretical underpinning of *Human becoming* as the development of mind, heart, body and spirit is understood without knowing why. This understanding means that everyone can participate in a congruent way to the shared vision of the project or programme. Some parallels might help to clarify what we mean. For instance, patients are able to recognise, and flourish through, the expertise of a particular nurse or healthcare professional, but they do not know why. Or we may experience the beauty of mathematical proportions such as the Golden Section in architecture (think of the Greek Parthenon) and in Art even though we don't know the mathematics that create it (Grayling, 2011). Nevertheless, to be a

skilled facilitator of transformational practice development and research who helps others to know without the 'maths', we do have to know it!

What this means for our challenge is that only reading texts about the 'maths', such as the paper we are dialoguing about here, is unlikely to be sufficient to help practice developers come to know and understand in these ways. This seems to be because this knowing and understanding has to be enabled through having direct experiences of it through the body, creative imagination and/or reflection. And then people might find the reading helpful. Thus we provide direct experiences by building critical creativity into our everyday work and relationships with people, in meetings, walking to meetings, over lunch, doing supervision, encouraging the use of 15 minute reflections with a buddy, chance encounters in the corridor and practice development schools and workshops with ongoing organisational and strategic support. By embodying critical creativity as well as talking and writing about our practical know-how or craft knowledge of working with creative methods (e.g. Dewing and Titchen, 2007; Titchen and Horsfall, in press; Dewing et al., in press) and pointing out to others when we see critical creativity in their own practice, we help others to become facilitators of the conditions for human flourishing in the workplace.

Such facilitation is so much more than just using critical-creative methods. We have learned (particularly from our facilitation work within the International Practice Development Collaborative practice development schools which possibly thousands of participants have attended since 1991) that without further support back in the workplace, people tend to stay working at the level of method. Thus, our strategy is to support those with whom we work to go beyond method to living the theoretical and methodological frameworks as professional and person. This means *being* and *using* the theory and methodology rather than *applying* them. The latter term, *applying*, denotes traditional thinking on the relationship between theory and practice, whilst we support Michael Eraut's (1994) research findings that practitioners *use* theory that blends with and becomes embedded in their practice. This is the point where articles such as this one are useful. They show people that being a facilitator of practice development and research in this worldview often requires in-depth personal and professional development work to be able to use the methods in ways that deeply influence and transform in times of turbulent change. We know from our own experience that there is no way round this, but we also know that those who invest in themselves usually flourish beyond their wildest dreams! This investment can be greatly enhanced if undertaken with others, for example, within critical companionships, supervision, active learning groups, communities of practice and communicative spaces (conversations for change).

And yes, further work is needed to help people be living exemplars of the theory and methodology. This is why we are working on a book with others that will include practical exemplars. So critical creativity is still a work in progress and probably always will be which is why the practice development outcome we describe in this paper is just a stepping stone on our ever-evolving journey.

References

- Dewing J. and Titchen, A. (2007) *Workplace Resources for Practice Development*. London: Royal College of Nursing.
- Dewing, J., McCormack, B. and Titchen, A. (in press) *Resources for Developing Person-centred Cultures in Care Homes*. London: Department of Health.
- Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Grayling, A.C. (2011) Why beauty matters. *National Trust Magazine*. Summer. p.15.
- Titchen, A. and Horsfall, D. (in press) Embodying creative imagination and expression in qualitative research. Chp 18 in Higgs, J. Titchen, A. Horsfall D. and Bridges D. (Eds) (in press) *Creating Spaces for Qualitative Researching ... Living Research*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.