

Interlude – Part B to Part C

In Part B I described the first stage of my connection with Silver Street in a dual role as a volunteer and a researcher; this resulted in a period of intense first person inquiry into my relating to this new community.

By the conclusion of this first stage I had explored the interaction between my own developing aesthetic in practice and that of the individuals and groups with whom I was engaging. I had also opened up an inquiry into the intrinsic and expressive aesthetics in practice. The analysis of episodes from Silver Street-1 and elsewhere showed how the expressive aesthetic of arts-based processes are always enacted within an intrinsic aesthetic context. This calls for a greater sense of contingency between the two, on the part of myself as facilitator.

My choice of a phenomenological framework was increasingly confirmed as I looked at the personal meanings that greater openness to this participation elicited. I found myself living more in the moment of experiencing both intrinsic and expressive aesthetics. Once experience is expressed in aesthetic statements, performance or artefacts, it has the power to influence and change others through their imaginal participation in stories, observations and reflections.

Now in Part C I will describe and analyse my first experience of a sustained action research inquiry; this was with a group of Silver Street front-line staff and it focused on the issue of making the service provided for people with learning disabilities more flexibly tailored to their individual needs. As my account will show, I found myself learning ‘on-line’ about the tension between hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy which Heron and Reason see as the enabling balance within and between people in such inquiries.

Play was evident in the subtle interactional unfolding of sessions as we attended to what it felt like to be acting together and experiencing the dramatic shaping and dénouement of events. I became more attuned to the movements of thoughts and feelings in the aesthetic of the group, and to the group’s capacity to work in its own play modes of Agon, Alea, Mimesis and Ilynx.

Also within this playful environment we created dialogue that enhanced the reflexive processing of shared experience. I came to see this as a poetic process; it was evident in our

working more consciously with narrative, imagery and metaphor, that people were able to re-tell their stories and evocatively engage with the stories of others.

In analysing the journal accounts of this period, I began to see more clearly how play and poetics are intertwined processes. Understanding this led to my closer attunement to the aesthetic improvisations of dialogue and drama in group interactions and encouraged me to use expressive activities which render themselves more open to aesthetic knowing.

I have structured my account of this stage in my work in the following way.

Chapter 9, Action research in Silver Street-2

This first chapter introduces the *Different Days* cooperative inquiry and analyses the first two days, both for what they said about action research as an approach, as well as the opening tendency to playfulness and poetry that we experienced. An early question from a participant, “What do you want us to do?” intimated a tension they were experiencing around my wish to work with the group in a more participative way.

I describe the way expressive activities engaged the group and began to open up a greater sense of voice and cohesion.

Chapter 10, Play in practice

Having already analysed practice accounts from a play perspective earlier in the thesis, I now take the opportunity to focus on the theoretical framework for play as an aesthetic process. Drawing on the work of Huizinga, (1938) and Caillois, (1958), I explore the relevance to an analysis of Silver Street-2, of four ‘dispositions’ – Agon, Alea, Mimesis and Ilynx,. In particular I make sense of a moment when a participant posed the question, “Where is all this getting us?”

Chapter 11, Poetics in practice

Here I define how I am using the term *poetics in practice*. It encompasses all those processes of shaping imagination in groups, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols.

Referencing Linstead, (2000) and others I explore the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double and apply it to an account of a conversation I had with *Tony*, who attends the Centre. The concept of metaphor in relation to practice is explored by reference to Lakoff and Johnson, (1980).

I conclude this chapter by presenting and analysing an item of my expressive writing as a form of poetic inquiry into practice. It is based on the Tony journal item referred to above.

Chapter 12, Silver Street-2, Where has all this got us?

This final short chapter returns to Silver Street-2 and shows some of the main directions in which this cooperative inquiry did 'get us'. This account provides me with an opportunity to reflect on the use of model making as an expressive process. In this case it enabled the group to articulate their vision of a future service that would be more community-based and responsive to individual needs.