

Appendix C

Examples of sense making writing

I include these excerpts from my writing here to demonstrate

- o Sense-making writing-as-reflection
- o The use of dream and allegorical material in the sense-making process
- o The interplay between issues identified through dreams and in therapy sessions and reflection on my professional practice – the indivisibility of such material
- o The interplay of the personal (wanting to be 'nice') and the political (wanting influence, wanting my work to be liberatory). How one's emotional, biographical material can be channelled to provide thoughtful and self-aware 'fuel' for a mindful and crafty facilitation practice
- o Me surfacing issues around feelings of frustration and co-option and my struggle for agency, and how the writing enables me to understand some of what lies at the root of my feelings in order that I might be more choiceful about my responses and actions.

From 'Sussex Pond Pudding'

3rd June 2003.

It started with a dream (of slapping someone), which I recorded in my journal and took to my therapy session. I then wrote about the whole experience, linking it to my practice and writing on participative research.

I wrote of the dream:

I dreamt of the department store, a very artificial place. The woman living on a stand it seemed [I am trying to persuade her of something, I give up and give in to my frustration and slap her].

The suddenness of the slap, the relief [I felt at doing it], the regret I felt at the loss of relationship/ communication with her – all the persuasion in the world would not convince her now; despite the way she acts as if it never happened. (I remember my mother unforgiving, incidents not forgotten)...

And during my subsequent therapy session with SM:

The image of Sussex Pond Pudding³²⁰ springs to mind. Cutting into the pudding turns the apparently solid and dry into a pond - tears. The feeling I woke up finding so familiar at the core of it [the dream].

SM reminds me about the sharpness of the lemon, something sharp and sour trapped/hiding inside something sweet. Suggests I maybe saying I've decided to stop pretending to be (only) nice with him.

I am happy with this idea, but there is also the pain of insecurity, coming apart.

I think about work: I remember the ache of inauthenticity, frustration and shame working for GHA and being unable to influence sufficiently.

Ashamed of myself, speechlessly angry – Feeling I can't give-in to anger I can't be sure of controlling.

I was hating the game playing, the pragmatism, the settling for small rewards. Loathing the culture of obsequiousness...

And I go on to reflect more generally:

It brings up so much about working in the world, working with values and authenticity. It reminds me of John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall writing in Handbook of Action Research about the qualities of participative research – that it must be liberatory. I had been thinking about the sort of research I want to do, and the ways my colleagues use research currently; talking of Rapid Appraisal in situations when the final stage of bringing participants and agencies together gets left out, [thereby] not ensuring that participants receive information and the skills to act on the information, hearing the defence that this is about moving reactionary partners slowly to change without frightening them. Is it enough?

I am feeling I don't know how to be in the world that requires me to conform and be constantly pragmatic. The frustration feels like self destruction. Do I mean self destruction? Like doing something that will cause me to implode.

In the timely way such things happen I came across the following today: A quote from an interview with Tom Paulin in the Observer (20.1.03).

"I'm sure there must be a term in classical rhetoric for the act of losing your temper because it's the only appropriate response" he (Paulin) insists. "In the sort of Puritan tradition I'm coming from, there is the notion of 'sacred vehemence', which is akin to Yeats's 'passionate intensity'. It maintains that if you don't get angry, you've copped out, and if you do get angry, you've copped out." He ponders this moral impasse. "Funny, that eh? And very, very English".³²¹

I then linked my reflections with some earlier writing:

I note that in my notes from a CARPP meeting in July 2002 I wrote:

*'A possible sub title for my thesis is **learning to be nice, whilst still being nasty!**'* Akin to Morwenna Griffiths' (and Shakespeare's) image of 'a good deed in a naughty world', where the good deed is working for social change.

³²⁰ Sussex Pond Pudding – an old English pudding in which a whole lemon is baked inside a pudding crust. When it is served the crust is cut open and the juice of the lemon runs out of the centre – forming a pond on the serving dish.

³²¹ I wrote to my LGA consultant team colleagues at this time to say that I was interested in the possible reframing of 'passionate professionals' [the way some LGA staff describe themselves and their relationship to environmental protection] as carrying/embodying passionate intensity or sacred vehemence.

On 9th February 2003 I wrote to a colleague, discussing our New Architecture project:

The idea of 'a good deed in a naughty world' comes from a paper by Morwenna Griffiths called 'Authentic action research: A good deed in a naughty world?' in which she talks of working for social change (the good deed) in a naughty world. It's predominantly a piece on self and change and the use of narrative.

She argues that authenticity and a connected self are possible for constructed, non-unitary selves, working with ideas about playfulness and earnest purpose.

I think what really appeals to me, in the context we were discussing, is how one holds onto the intent of the good deed, in the face of the naughty world, in a way which enables one to continue to reflect/ask the question 'what does it mean here, now, with these co-participants?' (Personal communication: email to Mike Pedler, 9.2.03).

Another example of writing-as-reflection on the same topic of agency and frustration:

From 'Toads, catflaps and the sea'

19th September 2003

Again this writing started from a dream, in fact several dreams which I recorded, also an incident of hearing a toad croaking in my kitchen, and a subsequent discussion about these in a therapy session. I then wrote about it in my journal. Much later (March 2004) I spent some time in a CARPP tutorial group meeting writing into my original journal entry, and again in May 2004 I added reflections³²².

In 2003 I wrote:

Going to my session today knowing I wanted to speak of my dream on Wednesday night. The dream of being nice when I wanted to be nasty.

I speak of my dream: that someone is vulnerable, in need of some sort of care or support and that I am fighting to get that support for them. How I feel hazy about the person but passionate about the 'cause'.

I am going from one person to another who has the ability to help, persuading, cajoling, reasoning. Eventually entering a building and going down into a large subterranean room which is poorly lit. [Thinking about it now the room seems to be filled with a billiard table, really huge, so that we are moving about in just the few feet between its long edge and the wall and the rest of the table disappears into the gloom its so large]. There I am making a supreme effort to persuade a woman, with the image in the dream of also moving her from the left hand side of the room to the right (where I am). I wake consumed with rage and poisoned with smiling.

I am **outraged**. I shouldn't have to do this.

As I tell the story I weep, particularly as I start to tell it. This is not the emotion of the dream. It is the emotion of the telling, experiencing how it feels to share the feelings, the images, the inner world. I come apart, gently. Writing this now [in 2003] I experience the desire to rest my head on the shoulder of my listener. So here I am – caught between a painful desire to push against the resistances, and the alternative of withdrawal under the floor, [like the toad under my kitchen floor] coming and going silently and invisibly, making some things happen but not openly challenging the status

³²² For a fuller description of this writing process see 'Associative knowing' section in methodology chapter.

quo, rather undermining it. If I let out what I really feel/think what will become of it all and me?

I had no mother to facilitate my sharing, telling how I felt, my inner world. The mother who might have made the connection could not do so, and I withdrew under the floor, keeping it to myself and at times keeping it from myself.

I'm not now so much confused by this stuff (it's familiar), but I have been confused by the feelings which belong to sharing this stuff.

I am afraid what will happen to it...

Being heard is so important.

There is fear in being heard (I say 'it doesn't matter' when asked to repeat myself – suddenly unsure of being heard, of exposing myself).

The toad is a shape shifter; it shifted to be safe, can it shift back to be in-company?

Later (March 2003) I reflected on this:

So many dreams of being nice when I want to be nasty – I'm thinking also of a recent dream of slapping the face of the woman in a department store. The frustrations of being unable to influence, or the holding-in of my outrage/passion whilst trying to influence others.

How to use my (limited) power choicefully, skilfully and without being overly pragmatic, losing myself into the other, the mainstream that I am trying to influence. (Which is why Meretta's³²³ story rang true for me – took me back to GHA and trying to charm, persuade, make the Health Authority 'do' participation in a joined-up integrated way, rather than a tokenistic, stick-on way).

Do I need to explore strategies for self care more? If so I hear such a contrast between what I did at GHA (push harder) and what I'm doing with LGA (push, relax, push, find somewhere else to push it to). The balance between my Pig and Deer selves.

Who am I advocating for in all this? [I am advocating for someone in the dream but cannot remember who, they are indistinct].

Is it just myself? My own anger at not being heard? Wanting to hear my own story told in my own words?

I don't believe so: it feels like a values thing. A passion about voices being able to be heard.

In the dream I lose a sense of the person I'm advocating for – but not of my passionate advocacy. Reading my account of the dream I re-experience the frustration of going from one to another to advocate the need.

I pursue the woman to the underground room – here I give it my all – and awake '*consumed with rage and poisoned with smiling*'.

'I shouldn't have to do this' – what does it mean? There are some values that everyone should enact? That the righteousness of the cause should be sufficient argument? – Where's the dialogue in that?

In this dream there is no dialogue, only me pleading the case. Reminds me of the LGA work – my case (for making changes) being described as '*wholesome but unacceptable*' to the Board! Thinking of the consultant team stories Sally and I were remembering (See *Inquiring about my practice, Appendix H and the LGA Practice account*): how my advocacy of collaborative writing would have been viewed as 'wholesome' too by my colleagues – but was too alien to their usual practices to be readily acceptable. How I engaged them in a process, took on facilitating a day, tried to

³²³ M is a member of my tutorial group.

enthuse them, used design to ensnare them, and so eventually captured some writing from a shared starting point.

How more recently I tried leaving aside terms like 'collaborative', responded to the shrinking-away from the idea of shared writing and instead advocated a day in which we would discuss the key messages to run through our reports and agree the evidence to support them. How this has resulted in a set of papers which we all feel comfortable about, where the project no longer feels confusing even though laid-out in its entirety. The LGA work where we [the consultant team] are committed to the messages, and insulted by the description 'wholesome'. No, rather we are appalled by the loss for the agency of its own messages blocked by cautious and self interested managers.

Even writing this I feel in myself a rising frustration (met just last week over the DTI man and the Governance Conference). Me wanting to learn better how to challenge the dominant discourse³²⁴, not to collude with privileging it. But not knowing how to enable Steve from the DTI to appreciate the wealth of knowing that was available to him from the participants. Feeling that a continued struggle to meet him where he was would just confirm him in his position, which he has to want to change. (Oh dear, the old *how many social workers does it take to change a light bulb?*³²⁵ joke).

And later still:

Reflection 15.3.04.

The facilitator hat enables me to cope/live with my rage – because it has no place in the circle *in this form*. Instead it makes me work harder. In this way it is affected by and affects my sense of self, and certainly my sense of my own voice.

³²⁴ The power of the DTI representative in contrast to the timebank participants: The way the steering group members for the Governance project privileged his views over the other voices in the room.

³²⁵ Answer: One, but the light bulb really has to want to change.