

Chapter 6

Conclusions

This chapter draws together key elements of my thesis. I review the territory which the thesis has covered as a document, I then discuss the interlinkages between theories of power I have explored and my developing practice, giving practice examples to illustrate. I end by revisiting and drawing together the key concepts which makeup my approach to facilitation, noting how this model differs from other models of practice and who would find this facilitation model of use.

I start by reflecting on the process of ending this period of writing.

Preamble

How tempting it has been to try to make this whole thesis 'bullet proof', to make it meet everyone's expectations/demands of it. But I can't do that, it would end up not as one book but as a set of books, and I don't wish to publish a 'library' at this point. I'm particularly conscious of this in relation to my examiners and their areas of expertise; which theories and writers one draws upon. But I have been choiceful and can justify where I have discriminated between thinkers and theories, and have had to do so as this is not a thesis with a single focus but one which ranges across disciplines.

For myself at this stage of stopping writing, all I know is what I'd like to be in here which isn't here (due to lack of space). And part of this learning journey has been for me to learn what 'good enough' is, and that that can be positive and not simply a critical reflection upon the writing. The fact that I may feel it not good enough, because I can't find 'good enough' comfortable, is the way it's going to be.

And I mourn for some pieces of writing and reflection which are not in here, but there are other things that one can do with them. This thesis is a jumping off point, rather than a container for all that I wish to say and have heard by the world.

Learning journey

The description 'a learning journey' is in some ways misleading as it suggests that this is something with a discrete beginning middle and end. It's not. And necessarily that means that at whatever point I end this thesis, I will only be reflecting to you where I and my practice are *at that moment*.

This process of critical self reflection has enabled my own emancipation. In learning to observe and listen better to myself I have become aware of my increasingly connected knowing (WWK), and my interconnectedness, both with the world in general and those I am working with in particular. I have

learnt to better observe and question my own processes, to better distinguish these from a group's processes and that of the wider system (e.g. systemic mirroring).

The territory that this thesis has covered

Key themes in this thesis are the territory I am working in, my personal journey and the nature of facilitation. So what do I think I am offering here?

The story of what it's been like to work in these ways during the 1990s and 2000s – with the backcloth of the changing relationships between the state and communities, the marginalisation and disaffection of some groups, and the consequent pressures on people.

*How I and my practice have developed and changed over that period – from Tigers of wrath to Pig and deer. From the self-effacing (denying) neutral facilitator, to the communion of grounded pig and watchful deer. This includes coming to terms with the *witchy* aspects of facilitation, which contribute to offering a fluid facilitation (see quote from Brydon Miller later in this chapter), the 'throwing soot or flour over the unseen to make it apparent, drawing pictures in the air with the material created by the group' (supervision session, April 1998).*

I have included stories of my practice (practice accounts) as examples of what a developing mindful and crafty facilitation practice begins to look like.

An extended exploration of what it takes to sustain this practice – the noticing practices, and the moving-about constant questioning of one's own position (and that of others), which constitute sense-making in real time and reflection.

The writing-as-sense-making and reflection. Utilising the 'extra' dimension available from dreams, imaginal writing and reflection in therapy.

The debt owed to feminist approaches to research – including consciousness raising (conscientisation), the valuing of everyday experience and different ways of knowing, a valuing of 'otherness' and a commitment to inclusion, participation and voice, and to including my feelings as part of the field. And an awareness of the ways we contribute to dominance ourselves.

The facilitation practices necessary to sustain craftiness –

Critical reflexivity, self-awareness, working with power awarely and skilfully; inclusive practice, supportive work with powerholders as well as the powerless, and processes which create empowering space, which work with the multiple dimensions of power, and generate new mutual understandings (Making Sense Meetings, large group processes like FS).

I write of the micro-processes of facilitation – Chambers identifies the insecurities one can have as facilitator, but he doesn't *go there*. I talk about, and show the in-the-moment 'stuff' that is going on (inside and out), what it is to have whiskers and to use them.

The contribution of ideas such as WWK and TR and theories of power – how they have helped me to understand myself, how they contribute to my ability to understand and support others.

An understanding of constructed reality – which seeks to understand the interconnection between the personal, the political, the inter-personal and the transpersonal³⁰².

³⁰² As I explore in Chapter 5 *Inquiring about my practice*.

The interlinkages between theories of power I have explored and my developing practice

Here I articulate the interlinkages between the theories of power I have explored and my developing practice, illustrated with examples from my *Practice Accounts*.

My own theories of power grew from a Marxist-influenced model, where power was a fixed sum resource with absolute winners and losers. Over time and experience this simple (simplistic?) model proved inadequate in supporting an understanding of the multiplicity of ways in which power was expressed and experienced in the contexts in which I worked, for a simple class-based analysis ignores the complex dynamics of power in which we are all caught-up and playing our part.

I have found elements of a range of theories of power helpful in coming to my own understanding of power. It feels like a series of transparencies laid-over each other, so that there is no one theory which 'does-it' for me, but rather a composite of the economics-based model of Marx and Gramsci, with the insights of the 4 dimensions of power identified by Lukes and Hardy and Clegg, drawing from Foucault and all set against a sense of our profound interconnectedness and the potential of the power from within (Starhawk, Macy).

What this means for my practice is that I have needed to cultivate an alertness for and subtle awareness of the multiple manifestations of power, and to develop strategies to work with them. This has meant examining my role as facilitator, and developing approaches which support the co-generation of sense-making across the system. In order to do this I have had to extend my role as co-inquirer, as learner/ educator, and supporter to *all* stakeholders in a situation. The social processes and tools I use in my practice have reflected this expansion of the role of facilitator.

If the structuralist interpretations (Marx, Weber, Gramsci), which argue for confrontational approaches, are over simplified then so are those of the pluralists (e.g. Dahl) who argue for groups to compete for resources without, I believe, a proper appreciation of the barriers to success, the cost of competition or the price of failure. And as Taylor wrote

transformative and post-modern interpretations imply more subtle understandings of the ... process and the windows of opportunity that can be found within it (2003:93).

My practice has evolved to work into these windows of opportunity.

I have outlined my model of facilitation practice (below), describing the four elements underpinning the facilitator roles of co-inquirer, learner/educator and supporter. Here I will refer to this model and

specifically I give some further explanation of my use of the term 'crafty' in respect of my facilitation of groups of unequal power. My use of colour in the text refers to Fig. 6.

The term 'craftiness' has a deliberate edginess to it – it could be seen as duplicitous or two-faced in some situations, it has a shape-shifting aspect to it. I argue that a **'nimble' moving about dynamic** is necessary to keep an alert awareness of power, one's own positioning and that of those facilitated. I have to hold an awareness of the multiple expressions of power, its diversity.

This approach could be seen to be simply pragmatic – but it is more than that because it is *critically informed and committed to specific values*. By which I mean it is underpinned by my **values** of justice, inclusion and participation and informed by critical theory and feminism (**critical awareness**). And it is *compassionate* and responsive to the theories of power-with and power-from-within (Starhawk, Macy) which recognise our (radical) interconnectedness.

Foucault points out that both the powerful and the powerless are trapped inside the dynamic of power, and Hardy and Clegg talk of us being caught in the web of power. Practice has taught me that I need to work across a whole system for best outcomes and this means co-inquiring and supporting those with power and position, as well as those who are oppressed. Operating with craft means I can sit by the side of the powerful, I can coach them to be strong enough to explore not-knowing.

Because of my discipline of **critical self awareness**, policed by my **noticing practices**, I can *shape-shift*, move around, be crafty because I know where my foundations are (**my drivers and values**, as well as my biography).

Work with the participants to understand expressions of power

I offer here three examples of the ways I have developed my practice and the interlinkages with theories of power. They are in chronological order.

Example:

In the **Stroud CPC project**, the first of my practice accounts, I am struggling with a desire simply to advocate with and on behalf of the group I was facilitating against the power holders and the oppressions experienced by residents. At this time the embryonic facilitator in me was struggling to find a different way of operating and was trying to hold a position of neutrality. One of the things I found most challenging at this time was working with my own position of privilege, I wanted to disown it, and in denying my position power as facilitator I limited my usefulness to the groups I was facilitating. I

was, if anything contributing to dominance, despite my best intentions (Lather).

By using meeting designs and empowering tools that were themselves good I succeeded in creating some of the conditions for communicative space, but I did not work to support the powerholders in that situation and so did not enhance their ability to engage with the process or the debate. I did however appreciate the importance of capacity building and conscientisation in the resident groups and worked to enable this (Freire). I was limited by my unsophisticated understanding of power (zero-sum), and by a facilitation practice that was pretty basic and overly dependent on social process designs. I was not very crafty in my practice.

Example:

When I worked with the **Diabetic User Group CI group** we explored both structural and dialogical power as it related to their position as people with diabetes accessing the health care system and relating to professionals, friends, family and others (by which I mean their positioning as 'non-experts' on their condition, and as 'damaged' people).

In this way they were able to learn from each other about self-management of their condition (the original aim of the group for its sponsors), and also to become more astute and choiceful about services and better equipped to advocate for their wants and needs, and eventually those of others as they took-on the role of representatives on service planning and review groups. In this way the work in the CI group included conscientisation (Freire), learning about structural and dialogical power (Hardy and Clegg) and becoming aware of dominant gazes (Foucault).

Through the sense-making in the Reference group for the DUG project, the sponsors of the inquiry also learnt how power expressed itself in the system they managed and learnt to value the reflections and advocacy of the group, even if they were not always able to respond directly to them.

As a facilitator I worked with transformative power (Wartenburg, Giddens), developing social learning strategies across the system (Healey). See *DUG Practice Account* for details.

Example:

In the work with older people in Tewksbury, the original request from the Health Improvement Partnership (the sponsors) was to investigate the needs of older people in the area, as a basis for service planning. My first role as facilitator was to work with the sponsors to reframe this as an inquiry into older people's needs. They also agreed to us using a methodology which recruited older people as the research team. In my role as supporter and co-inquirer I helped sponsors to understand and connect with the people at the centre of their concern (older people), and to understand that the latter had wants and not just needs, exposing the gaze which determined the way older people are viewed in our society. As the project

developed we explored how this enhanced understanding related to their role and statutory responsibilities as service planning and providing organisations, those with authority but also those restricted by regulations and rationing.

This process meant that they too needed to develop a 'trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason' (Freire), and meant that we were all (sponsors, older participants and the researchers) embarking on a process of co-intentional education.

The older people we recruited to the research team would, as individuals, have been unable to voice to us (as researchers) having *wants*, they too were stuck within the frame/gaze of having only *needs*, and that was how they expected to be approached. A process of consciousness-raising in the group (by which the group came to understand the underlying causes of discrimination) enabled them to feel stronger in confronting their oppression, resisting enculturation (Maslow).

We worked with them as part of the research team, and then with the extended group of older people whom they subsequently interviewed, to inquire into and understand how the structures of local service-providers worked (Power/knowledge - Foucault). Perhaps more importantly we supported them to reflect on how they thought about themselves, and how this self image was affected by wider societal views of the worth of older people. The group went on to consider how the ways they thought about themselves in relation to groups with authority had been influenced by a subtle hegemony which identifies older people as of no value e.g. because they are 'economically inactive people' in a society in which economic productivity is seen as of greater importance than other, social contributions. We deconstructed this with the group.

The subsequent Making Sense Meeting created communicative space for the sponsors, research participants and other stakeholders to make sense of the data together. In order for this to happen as facilitator I worked with the research group and the sponsors to create the conditions for good listening and communication, and at the event provided a strong holding facilitation.

Working in these ways required me to have trust that the older people had both resources and solutions to offer from their lived experience, not just needs.

Again I worked with transformative power in this project (Giddens, Wartenburg).

See *Tewkesbury Older People's Services Practice Account* for details.

The key concepts which make up my approach to facilitation

Reg Revans asked two very basic questions about what it means to be a good man (sic) and what it is to do good deeds. So what good is this thesis in the world? I believe it is helping to explain, and empirically demonstrate, a model of mindful and crafty facilitation practice for positive social effect, and which focuses on the appropriate use of self in facilitation practice.

When I stop to think of a metaphor for my model of facilitation practice then it is a phrase from the writing I did for my colleagues in the LGA project that comes to mind. I was trying to answer a question about where my passion for the work came from and the phrase that came to mind was '**teeth and claws and dancing**', meaning that work of value for me needed to engage me in several ways, and that these were not divisible³⁰³.

By which I mean a facilitator working in this way will need to work with:

- o Teeth – political awareness
- o Claws – out-rage at injustice
- o Dancing – passionate commitment to change.

This is facilitation that has a political (and self) awareness, that comes from a sense of out-rage about injustice, and has a real passion for making change. In order to practice in this way one needs the self-awareness and associated disciplines I have advocated and demonstrated throughout the thesis.

The model of facilitation described here shares much with the 5 part description of action research (Reason and Bradbury, figs 1 and 2 in thesis):

- o It is for positive social effect
- o It is rooted in practice
- o It has cycles of action and reflection
- o it supports participation, and
- o it's form is emergent, not formulaic.

³⁰³ And writing this now I can see clearly in my mind my ferret Nell, dancing across the floor, standing on her hind legs with her forepaws outstretched, her head twisting and her mouth open showing fearsome teeth. A strange mixture of pleasure and ferocity.

Figure 6 shows the key concepts that make up this model, which I have described as 'mindful and crafty' facilitation:

- At the core of this practice lie the facilitator's own values and drivers (teeth and claws and dancing). This is combined with
- o an acute political awareness
 - o strong critical self awareness
 - o a 'nimble' moving about dynamic or quality
 - o a set of noticing practices,
- and this critically informed facilitator works with a range of congruent social processes and tools, undertaking the roles of co-inquirer, learner/educator and supporter to clients and participants.

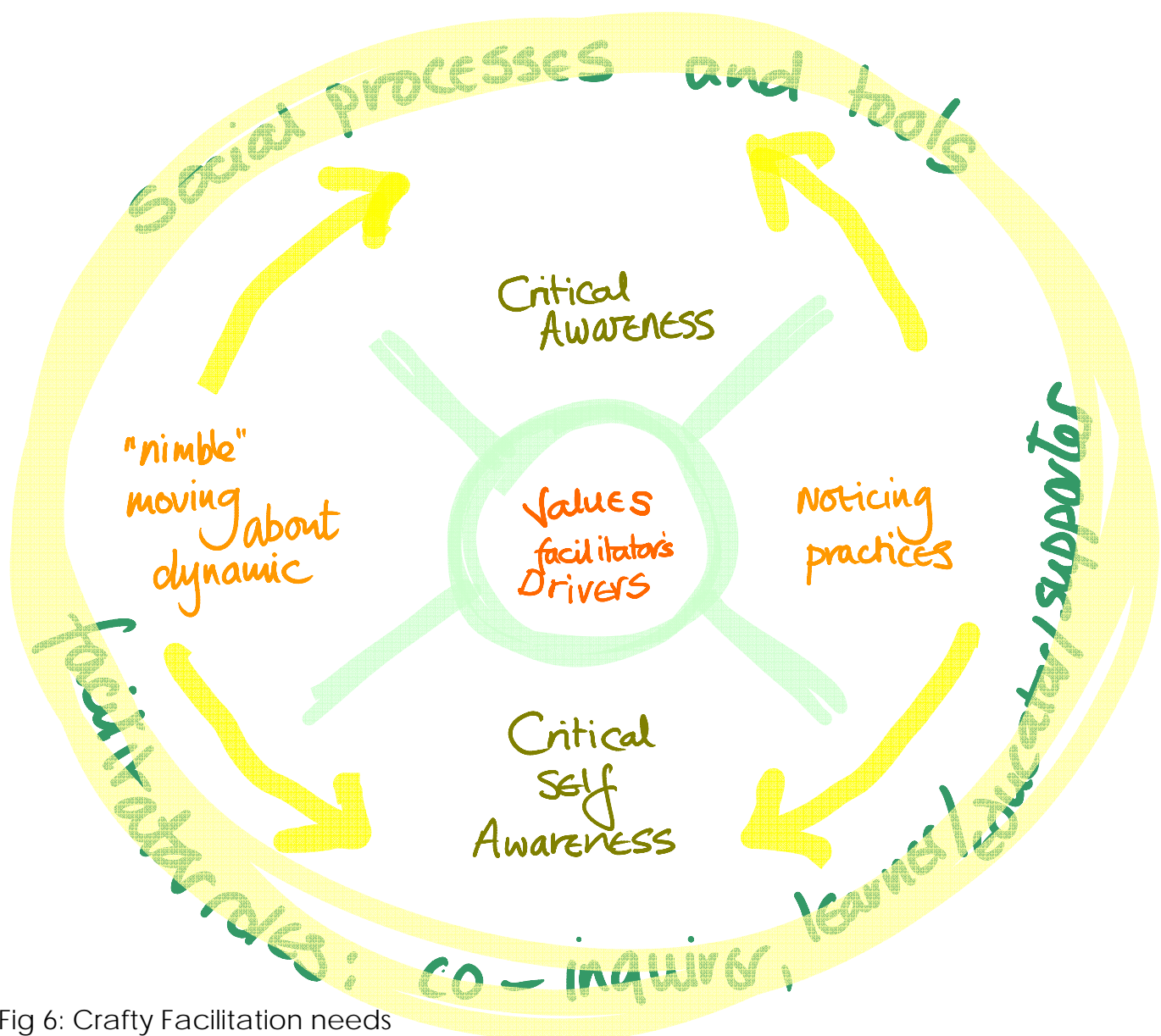


Fig 6: Crafty Facilitation needs to integrate these elements



Fig 7: Detailed
Crafty Facilitation needs to integrate these elements

Fig 7 adds detail to this picture of what crafty facilitation needs to integrate:

Values and Drivers

Figure 7 puts facilitator *values* and *drivers* at the heart of this model of practice. This is not a value-neutral model for value-neutral facilitators. However I believe that the model works equally well as a discipline for those working with both social and environmental justice issues as part of their arena of practice.

Critical awareness

As a facilitator I believe you need an acute **critical awareness** in order to understand the *situated nature of clients, participants and your self*. This provides the foundation for a politically informed practice and will necessarily be *enhanced by appropriate theory* (for me this has come through *feminism and critical theory*). This critical awareness is essential because *all actors are situated* and operating within *power systems*, as I explore in detail elsewhere, and identity, knowledge and experience are *socially constructed*.

Facilitation from awareness is a systemic approach which *engages across the system; at individual, group and wider context levels*.

But awareness alone is not enough; this model requires the facilitator to *act* on this understanding of the world, to facilitate for inclusion.

This is the predominantly 'outer work' of my practice, and requires the development of appropriate skills and disciplines.

Critical self awareness

The 'inner work' consists of a **strong critical self awareness**, informed by *self reflexive practice*, and involves using *one's personal biography*.

In this model the facilitator is a *co-inquirer*, at their best working from *connected knowing* – a valuing and integrating of their own multiple ways of knowing and those of others (Belenky at al).

The facilitator is required to stay *aware of their own power* and therefore their potential to contribute to oppressions.

Noticing practices

The **noticing practices** keep watch over this; *cultivating a special attention in the emerging present* through in-the-moment *micro practices of inner noticing and self study* (for me my '*noticing pocket*' and developing *whiskers*) and *outer noticing* to stay aware of the dynamics in the participant group and the context.

Also required are reflective practices for sense-making including use of *writing as reflection* and of peer supervision. This is the 'watchful work' of my practice.

'Nimble' moving about dynamic

The '**nimble' moving about dynamic** or quality ensures that I keep *questioning my positioning* and that of others, that I have an *understanding of constructed reality*, and that I *access the personal and the transpersonal, the imaginal and the metaphorical* in order to better sense-make. And it ensures that the *sense-making is co-generated* wherever possible. This is the 'connecting work' of my practice.

Facilitator roles

I believe that when the qualities of practice and disciplines identified in each quadrant are *integrated* and working together dynamically, then this can be termed a mindful and crafty facilitation practice. For the model of practice I have developed it is necessary for the facilitator to aim to embody the multiple roles of co-inquirer, learner, educator and supporter.

Social processes and tools

Social processes and tools are so often the core of teaching about facilitation. In this model of practice I recognise the importance of processes and tools which are *congruent* with the values embedded in the model and appropriate to the client and group, however I do not believe that facilitation should be tool or process led.

Crafty facilitation

I explain elsewhere in this chapter (*The interlinkages between theories of power I have explored and my developing practice*) the edginess and ambivalent nature of craftiness.

Essentially crafty facilitation is in service of creating the conditions for communicative space, and about developing a set of disciplines and practices which enable me as facilitator to use myself in an appropriate manner, holding the group in-mind, and so holding and expanding the space in which new knowledge can form.

The processes described in the *Practice Accounts* including co-operative inquiry, large group processes, Making Sense Meetings and the Children's Commission do this. Facilitating something that is

simultaneously knowledge based in action and action based in knowledge, resulting in conscientisation... Whatever the process, the final stage is one of shared reflection and consolidation of learning that has taken place, and a re-examination of the political, social, and economic conditions facing the community. The appropriate role of the researcher

is fluid and, to quote my friend, the late poet Joel Oppenheimer, 'you just have to be there when it happens' (Brydon-Miller, 2001:79-80³⁰⁴).

Where do my imaginal creatures sit on the diagram?

Another way of thinking about these quadrants in Figures 6 and 7 is through the way they are inhabited by the key metaphorical creatures that have appeared in this thesis as personifying my learning journey moments.

I have placed accessing the imaginal, the metaphorical, dreams and reflection in therapy – all ways of making sense of the world and oneself – in the quadrant called '*Nimble*' *moving about dynamic* in Figures 6 and 7. I have however come to see that each section of the diagram, each aspect of my evolved facilitation practice, has a lens personified by my learning journey moments creatures.

Critical awareness – is very connected to my Tigers of wrath moment, which was about being individually/personally politicised, (as well as being distressed and not knowing what to do with it). In my Tigers moment, my facilitation practice was earthed in an anger about injustice. You would have seen me struggling to exclude my anger from my work with clients and in groups I facilitated. This would have been at the cost of withholding other aspects of myself which could have been accessible in-service to the group had I by then developed a discipline of self-awareness and noticing practices. As it was I was operating largely from this quadrant.

For example, I might judge myself harshly if changes I had hoped for could not be achieved, paying less attention to the features of the situation which severely limited their chances of being available to that group of people at that time.

'Nimble', moving about dynamic – is the Unicorn that never settles; it is constantly questioning, weighing up this or that, hunting for meaning, looking for the other side of something that's said, checking it out. In my Unicorn moment I became more able to integrate this questioning into my practice, including opening political views to scrutiny, for myself and in my work with others.

Critical self-awareness – this is the Pig that is so rooted in knowing itself. It moves forward without fear because it is grounded, earthed in self-knowledge.

Affirming my capacities for self-knowing through this research journey gave me confidence in my Pig-qualities, allowing me to rest in them and draw from them, made me more rooted. As this happened, my capacity to

³⁰⁴ Brydon-Miller M (2001) 'Education, research, and action. Theory and methods of participatory action research' in Tolman and Brydon-Miller (eds) *From Subjects to Subjectivities: a handbook of interpretive and participatory methods*. New York: New York University Press.

question became stronger, as the results were less unsettling, and more developed.

Noticing practices – has a very Deer-like quality. Its nature is to be watchful, not to just be complaisantly rooted.

My Deer-qualities have developed to act in concert and co-ordinate my other faculties, and act as micro cycles of inquiry; action and reflection. Along with Pig, this Deer quality ‘polices’ the Tiger and Unicorn aspects’ degenerative potentials.

So in a meta sense the imaginal belongs in ‘*Nimble*’, *moving about dynamic*, but the aspects of each quadrant are embodied by my learning journey animals.

What is different about this model of facilitation?

This model of facilitation advocates using the *whole* of one’s self. To do this responsibly I combine an awareness of the political, cultural and historical situatedness of self and others, with cultivating an in-depth critical awareness of my self and my emotional, intellectual and intuitive-symbolic responsiveness. This I propose as my, ever developing, discipline.

Through a careful process of ‘noticing’ the self, this model goes beyond the facilitation models offered by Chambers and Heron, as discussed in *Chapter 2, My Approaches to Inquiry*, and incorporates and builds on a range of noticing practices from other writers in the field of action research (Marshall, Torbert) and dialogue (Bohm).

By using the *whole* of myself I can have more awareness and more compassion in my work, and I’m not stuck within my own frame of the world. When we as facilitators get ‘stuck’ then the participants/clients we are working to facilitate also get stuck, this is because we are working in a ‘field’ relationship with them, we mirror each other. In this way my facilitation is co-created with the group because I have access to more of my self in a generative way.

This model of facilitation is different in that:

- It requires *self knowledge*, not just a knowledge of tools and techniques
- It requires an *acute awareness of power* in its diversity, and a commitment to work with it. (See *The interlinkages between the theories of power I have explored and my developing practice*, above, where I enlarge on this aspect)

- o It asks the same questions as Chambers (about use of the facilitators power vis a vis 'the facilitated'), and seeks to answer them by *committing to a strong and rigorous discipline of noticing*
- o It's more *political and humane* than Heron
- o It is not neutral, but is based on a political *commitment to change for social benefit*
- o It's *post-conventional* – it's not simply advocacy or campaigning, it engages with all of the system, it holds an attention for the whole systemic context and its qualities.

Working with metaphor and symbol

At an early stage in my development as a facilitator I felt that being 'professional' and having a 'career' required me to deny my witchiness³⁰⁵, and the use of the imaginal-symbolic and transpersonal in my practice. Now I believe that this is as misguided as trying to be neutral or not 'present' in my practice.

It is my experience that working with metaphor and images, working in more 'creative', 'looser' ways with a group brings a different quality to the outcome for the participants, particularly when we are working with different sorts of knowing in the group. The images and metaphors help me to make sense of the world, which then becomes a resource for the group. Because I'm working with different aspects of my own knowing it enhances the way I can work with a group to access their different ways of knowing, and we can work that material together.

It has surprised and delighted me over the last couple of years that I can share those things with those I work with. I think this happens because metaphors, images and symbols are the currency of the transpersonal, which we can all intuitively, instinctively understand. They mean something on a level which is fundamental, so that even when they are used in a way quite lightly with a group we can have a shared sense of what we are all talking about.

Who would find this model of facilitation useful?

I don't just believe this style of facilitation is optimal for me, I strongly contend that it is necessary for others too, particularly *for those in situations where there are power inequalities at work*, including development situations, facilitators working with issues of environmental sustainability, as well as social justice. I suggest it also offers something valuable for those with a less formal facilitation role but who need to be facilitative in their

³⁰⁵ See *Appendix 1, Crow* for a discussion of witchiness and an example of my discomfort with these aspects of myself.

work. I would have found this praxis useful as a social worker, community development worker, and as a teacher.

It is a style of facilitation that *seeks to be alert* to diversity, discrimination, oppressions, situatedness, who is heard and who is silenced, the dominant discourse, the crass and the subtle expressions of power. I would rather have any facilitator able to pay attention to all of the quadrants (Fig. 6), to the micro dynamics, and with an awareness of themselves, even if practicing in this way and with these values is not their primary purpose.

There are reasons why this will not be a model of practice to suit every facilitator. It is a value-based practice and one which requires a degree of personal courage to face areas of unresolved distress in the facilitator's personal history. Working with the imaginal is not within everyone's comfort zone. Working with compassion requires the facilitator to face up to and sit with the experience of oppressions and the other pains and conflicts experienced by clients and the groups they facilitate. That said I believe that the practice described here (and illustrated in Fig 7) also supports and nourishes a facilitator. For me it is a practice that enables me to work with power-with and power from within, and so to draw our own strength from what Starhawk calls *the dark*, our radical interconnectedness.

Endnote

In this thesis I believe you will find the qualities of persistence, openness to learning, self awareness, courage, judicious judgement, a refusal to be complaisant and a commitment to social effect.

I *notice* in the hope my facilitation practice can ultimately make a contribution to a more just and interconnected world. I write of it here in the hope that it will inform other facilitators, other inquiries.

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