



**Monograph Series  
No. 4**

**Engaging the Arts, Humanities and Design in Action  
Research and the Helping Professions**

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the Helping Professions**

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	5
Introduction: Setting the Stage	7
Integrating the Arts, Humanities and Design in Action Research for Social Betterment	10
Engaging the Arts, Humanities, and Design in Action Research	
Relevance of the Arts and Humanities to Action Research	
Developmental Aims and Emancipatory Ends	
Developmental Action Research and Design	
Legitimizing Aesthetics, Emotion, and Inspiration in Action Research	17
Popular and Participatory Arts and Humanities	
Design as a Product of Image and Representation	
The Aesthetic and Negative Aesthetic in the Arts, Humanities and Action Research	
Emotion in Action Research	
The Arts, Humanities, and Design to Achieve Multi-Level Reflexivity	24
Reflexivity: Individual and Group Levels	
Reflexivity and the Virtues of Participants	
Inspiration as Prelude to Design	
Community Reflexivity: Exhibition in a Public Forum	
Narrative as a Form of Artistic and Humanistic Expression	31
Evocative Narrative	
Diverse but Interrelated Narrative Forms	
Secondary Witnessing as a Form of Action Learning	
Inspiring Design through Developmental Action Research	38
Design as Knowledge Enactment	
The Design Objective as Practical and Ethical	
The Design Aesthetic	
Expanding the Aesthetic Frame and Knowledge Translation through the Design Studio	45
The Centrality of the Design Studio	
Expanding the Aesthetic Frame	
The Influence of Action Learning on the Emergence of Organizational Culture in the Arts, Humanities, and Design	

Conclusion: Creative Ethics and Their Embodiment in Action Research	57
Limitations and Possibilities	
Ethic of Dignity	
Relational Ethics and the Ethic of Authenticity	
Creative Ethics	
Ethic of Participation and the Potential of Transformative Change	
References	65

## **Engaging the Arts, Humanities and Design in Action Research and the Helping Professions**

### **Abstract**

By using content from two action research projects, the authors offer an original theory of developmental action research incorporating the benefits of the arts, humanities and design. Through identification of a problem or need for change, imagination of potential solutions, and mobilization of next steps, parallel methods in artistic and design processes and action research can converge to facilitate reflexivity and praxis as products of purposeful action to engage in social betterment in partnership with people who experience marginalization.

The authors offer a rationale for the inclusion of the arts, humanities and design linking action research and the helping professions. They then consider the aesthetic dimension of action research and show how the studio setting can serve as a safe environment for experimentation and self-expression through verbal and non-verbal modalities, where the artistic/design processes and products serve as metaphors for or equivalents of behaviors and experiences used to develop prototypes for action and change. Through reflection and validation from others, individuals gain insight and together work to design methods for individual and collective development and social activism. The process of creative self-expression involving action and reflection in groups facilitates catharsis, inspiration, and motivation steering subsequent action.

The authors propose how the arts, humanities and design augment action research goals through recognizing environmental and aesthetic impacts, reflection upon common experiences and identification of strengths and resources to motivate and effect change among those who experience social marginalization.

The arts, humanities and design contribute to action research by:

1. Putting a human face on a social issue; illuminating individuals' first-hand experiences with a social issue;
2. Helping to develop innovative strategies for individual and social change;
3. Contributing to social justice and the emancipation of marginalized people;
4. Creating community as people from diverse backgrounds discover common interests and mutuality;
5. Identifying potential solutions to social problems;
6. Facilitating expression of emotion;
7. Mobilizing action within the participants themselves, as well as public audiences; and
8. Challenging biases may bring to social issues.

In considering developmental action research that incorporates the arts, humanities and design the authors offer a set of ethical practices involving dignity, authenticity, creativity and participation that together can transform action for social betterment.

### **Introduction: Setting the Stage**

We devote this monograph to a consideration of the use of the arts and humanities as an integral part of action research, particularly when the aims of inquiry are developmental. As we explain further in the monograph development involves the use of creative processes for fostering innovation in the helping professions. By connecting the arts and humanities to design we are supporting a larger international trend appreciating how design facilitates human functioning (e.g., in community development, architecture, improvement or restoration of ecologies, and the advancement of helping and human services).

Within this monograph we draw from our experience as colleagues working together to help older African American women escape homelessness, a serious health compromising social issue increasingly affecting people in older life, particularly people of minority status. We have explained the project in a number of other venues (citations to authors' previous work) and so here we offer only an overview of the parent project.

The Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project (LHIRP) was founded in 2000 and lasted until 2010. In its lifespan over 530 women participated in the project. During that period intense collaboration occurred among our team comprised of the three authors, eight participants who served as governors of the project, and additional professionals from multiple disciplines (e.g., counseling psychology, fine art and graphic design). As we sought to illuminate the issues involved in this serious social problem, initially we undertook inquiry as an action research project. The project then took on more participatory and community-based features as the team developed partnerships with participants and involved them increasingly in the creation and testing of tools. Those tools were designed to reduce the negative consequences of homelessness and help participants emerge from this situation. The overarching aims of the project were fourfold: (a) develop strategies for protecting the self-efficacy of women from the

very negative and serious consequences of homelessness; (b) facilitate a protective group culture that would support subsequent social action; (c) test out strategies for helping participants remove themselves from homelessness; and (d) engage through the research in an educational campaign that informed community decision-makers about the severity of this issue in the urban context in which the project was undertaken. Informing those aims were multiple methods involving a range of tools from the social and health sciences. But within the project, the humanities, arts and design became prominent primarily for the contribution those could make to building and using narrative.

Thus, the scope of the project and its aims were limited in relationship to the very real complexity of homelessness and to the kind of strategies systemic change requires. The project did document the social issue, raise community awareness, and produce numerous ways of helping at individual, group and community levels. While the measure of success in homelessness involves enabling people to remove themselves from such health compromising and life threatening situations through policies, programs, and resources supporting work, income and housing options, much of what we did offered ways of protecting participants while we helped them achieve those ends. Once people have those resources, they will still confront a systemically induced form of vulnerability. Ultimately, homelessness is about poverty, race, gender, and sound policies, all of which reveal its complexity.

Approximately five years into the project, around 2005, we made the developmental aims of the project more explicit since our attention turned from our own action research questions about the nature of the social problem per se to questions pertaining to the design and testing of promising avenues useful in helping. Thus, what we refer to within the monograph as developmental action research (DAR) evolved from our effort to involve participants in the design process and in the testing of those designs in action.

Throughout the project we incorporated methods from the arts, humanities and design into LHIRP. We did not start with a coherent theory of those methods but consistent with action research we sought to develop a theoretical perspective on the incorporation of the arts and humanities into action research. As the project progressed, as we engaged the problem through the involvement of more participants, and as we tested various strategies from the arts and humanities we made our approach to developmental action research more explicit.

The content of the monograph is a product of considerable experimentation within LHIRP, the emergence of reflexivity within the investigators, and praxis - the joining of practice and theory in the arts and humanities through action research and learning. By melding the arts, humanities and design we experienced a means to advance innovation in helping professions' intervention into serious social issues confronting the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations (e.g., homeless women of color).

A second project entitled the Arts in Recovery (AiR) is being developed by the first author of the monograph to further document the role of the arts and humanities in the helping professions. In its early stages this project is devoted to appreciating the variation in the helping professions' use of the arts and humanities. Such use occurs in different domains of human services in which people are challenged by disease, serious social issues, and unproductive societal responses to the issues they face. From this content we developed our perspective on action learning and the formation of an organizational culture that incorporates the arts, humanities and design.

Our intent in this monograph is to make explicit the practice-theory nexus that shaped and framed our approach to action research in the human services. We engage in a highly reflective orientation to this purpose derived from a wide span of interdisciplinary research, from content involving the arts and humanities, from the design literature, and from our own

experience. Within each section we also seek to develop a way of seeing and thinking about the distinctive contributions the arts, humanities and design can make to advancing action research and the human services. We conclude with a set of ethical principles acquired from the contributions of the arts, humanities and design.

### **Integrating the Arts, Humanities and Design in Action Research for Social Betterment**

#### **Engaging the Arts, Humanities, and Design in Action Research**

We chose the arts, humanities, and design as three interrelated forms of action all of which influence one another. Each of the three areas stands as a complex realm of action, but each also contributes something distinctive to action, particularly in social action to address serious social issues within a given community. The humanities focus on what is most distinctive about the human experience and how this experience expresses itself through creative engagement of the world. Thus, the humanities are broad in its orientation to the human experience, particularly how culture and social factors influence this experience. Culture, therefore, is an encompassing idea and it influences all human action within a given situation. For us, the humanities tap into the human experience as a form of narrative in which story telling becomes a dominant way of documenting, interpreting, and communicating the substantive aspects of that experience. Within the given situation of action research, we engage the humanities through diverse forms of narrative and, as we offer in this monograph, narrative encompasses multiple forms that reveal the struggles, challenges, and triumphs human beings experience when what appear to be intractable situations stimulate imagination, creativity, innovation and ultimately invention. In our own work, we witness how that sequence culminating in invention works its way into forms of proactive coping and transcendence demonstrated regularly by the people with whom we have worked in their everyday lives. This

lived experience in which people who experience distress demonstrate considerable ingenuity in coping and adaptability reveals the importance of the story in capturing this experience.

Using story to transmit knowledge is fundamentally human and is rooted well in the humanities, whether this story is mediated by multiple art forms. Here the arts become an important element of action. For us, the arts serve as a form of representation but in multiple ways. Actually, the manner in which a participant chooses to reveal their story is at the root of the arts. While we can enumerate many forms of artistic representation what they share in common is how they capture the quality of experience. For our arts-engaged action research, representation is one strategy for helping participants engage their own experience and express, particularly emotionally, the quality of their situations. To do so, they frame, elaborate, experiment, and portray perhaps invoking multiple methods of representation. Thus, artful engagement is not confined to the use of traditional materials, like paints, or clay, but it can involve a whole range of ingredients. How a person arranges content brings experience into form. The process of bringing the story into form and, as a result, bringing about a distinctive and expressive product is the essence of the arts.

We also approach design as a form of understanding and action interrelated with the humanities and the arts. Within our action research, we view design as a story in action. The building blocks of that story in action may be physical involving brick and mortar, decoration, furnishings, and textiles. Still, design may involve the arrangements of those physical artifacts deepening ideas about action as the culture of the lived experience shapes the arrangement of space and its contents. Concepts and beliefs also may be fundamental building blocks of a design, as is values that participants use to shape environment, particularly a healing one in which group life unfolds in a process of participants' recovery from the damage their experience of serious social issues have induced.

Taken together the humanities, with its emphasis on how human experience unfolds within social and cultural contexts at multiple levels of action, the arts with a creative emphasis it places on portraying and expressing a person's direct or imaginary experience, and design that fosters human action in the formation of helping resources, supportive technologies, and nurturing environments converge as strategies for enabling human development in its most positive forms. Indeed, for us, action research that embraces the arts and humanities sets the stage for a more mindful and reflective approach to design whether this pertains to environments, technologies, or forms of human development and support.

By engaging the arts, humanities, and design in action research we have sought to use those perspectives, individually, and synergistically to foster positive human development in difficult if not overwhelming situations. This monograph captures that grander story about the nature of the action we have undertaken. Thus, the monograph itself reflects the engagement of the arts, humanities, and design in action research.

### **Relevance of the Arts and Humanities to Action Research**

What are the potential contributions of the arts to action research, and what distinctive roles can the arts serve in this form of research, particularly those genres that incorporate participatory ethos or properties? These questions are central to this monograph given the authors' search for synergies among the arts and action for social betterment through the helping professions. While the authors, possess their own distinctive backgrounds capable of potentially separating their work into what management theorists characterize as silos, instead we chose over the years of our collaboration to find a mutually productive focus in the arts and action research that produced a transdiscipline framework to guide our work, an art therapist, a nurse scientist, and a social worker.

The formation of a transdiscipline required a merging of our three perspectives, forcing us to find commonality of purpose, and requiring use of diverse methods. By forming a transdiscipline we sought to find new and creative pathways beyond the constraints that we may formerly have imposed in the practice of our individual disciplines. Koestler (1964) in his powerful book on creativity refers to this act as cross-fertilization. Engaging the arts and humanities were not only important for us, as researchers, but it also became important for our research participants as well. According to Kamin (2010) engaging the arts and humanities is an essential component of practice in action research carried out in the human service disciplines, the arts, and architecture.

Add to this mix the contributions of the humanities and the synergy strengthens as strategies that deepen perspective, knowledge and the impact of practice in the helping professions unified the authors' work in service to the aim of social betterment. In addition, the arts and humanities offer the possibility of placing a human face on the experience of those who possess firsthand knowledge of a serious social issue. We are very interested in understanding perspectives other than our own as Boylan (2008) asserts:

...the possibility of altruism is essential to the possibility of ethics. Most of the major theories of ethics concur that unless it is possible to act contrary to one's egoistic advantage, that the project of morality is doomed" (p. viii).

As we add design influenced by the arts and humanities with the aim of achieving social betterment, action researchers can become mindful of the important role of this form of research in advancing human well-being. Indeed, given the historic aims of amplifying the human perspective relative to these entities (and some may say the nonhuman perspective, such as physical environments, and other forms of being) the arts and humanities can inform action in such developmental work (Denzin, 2003).

## **Developmental Aims and Emancipatory Ends**

By developmental we refer to actions people can take to inform social betterment and realize products, outcomes or impacts that advance the well-being of individuals who find themselves in very difficult or even life threatening circumstances. Developmental aims suggest that initiating action research involves critiquing what exists (or what engineers may refer to as “as is” analysis), and it is this criticism that stimulates conceptions of what could be the essence of social betterment. Creativity and development are related concepts that require imagination (Malchiodi, 2002). However, failing to imagine those conceptions in sufficient detail could result in one becoming cynical and criticism without further conception could leave researchers and their participants without meaningful direction.

Criticism and conception set the conditions of the process of social research and development--of bringing into form new arrangements of care-giving or helping that, in turn, seek improvement in the well-being of individuals, groups or communities. The inception of those helping arrangements may serve as the aims of action research that can move it well beyond illuminatory objectives and imbue it with development of better arrangements for people who because of social forces over which they exercise little control populate the margins of a given society.

Implicit and often times explicit within this monograph, we embrace emancipatory ends of the arts and humanities in action (Kapitan, 2011). We also see the arts in action research as a form of social practice in which many engaged activities (e.g., aesthetic and inventive) produce knowledge about complex social issues (Jackson, 2011) in service to social betterment. As we embrace the idea of social betterment, we also outline how the linkage among the arts, humanities, and design can foster a form of action research that we see as developmental. Goldbard (2006) distinguishes engagement in the arts and humanities, which the author identifies

as community cultural development, from the work of community arts centers, which is predominantly educational. Within our framework involvement in social issues and action for change are dominant.

### **Developmental Action Research and Design**

As Moxley and Washington (2012a) indicate, developmental action research marries action and development. It is undertaken to produce innovation in helping through experimental practice, knowledge development, and theory development, the defining property of action research and one that imbues it with praxis - the bringing together of theory and practice. From this perspective, action research and the arts can easily fuse here: Practitioners examine their tacit responses and perceptions, engage phenomenon, learn from such engagement, examine critically their tacit responses and perceptions, make new and better informed decisions about inquiry, and come to new understandings or insights (Kapitan, 2010). Mediating relationships among these components are image, representation, and/or performance. Action researchers call this process that is at the heart of this form of inquiry, reflexivity.

Because action research is holistic in the manner in which praxis suggests the unification of practice, knowledge and theory is a central aim of the integration we seek. While design is a product of such holistic inquiry, it too is a product of a synergy resulting from the pursuit of praxis. Thus, design is a form of practice, a way to produce knowledge, and theory in action (Zeisel, 2004). Witness physical objects such as buildings, paintings, cell phones, or curricula, all diverse in their forms and functions, but nonetheless they emerge from a process of action that values inquiry and that integrates cognitive and emotional states with a form of social action.

Although those objects are all products of different processes they are nonetheless also products of intentional action that possess a reality, and serve as functional objects within given

cultures and subcultures. Their inceptions likely began with criticism that leads to conception, essential steps in developmental action research. And their physical forms are more than their functions. They also can enrich (or degrade) environment through their symbolism, image, representation, and meaning for particular communities and their members (Mitchell, 2005).

That a community can entertain both criticism of prevailing social arrangements and consider alternative prototypes is an act of creative engagement. Perhaps this function justifies most powerfully the integration of the arts, humanities, and design in action research, particularly when it embraces developmental aims. This justification emerges from the pursuit of creative expression and engagement in a problem situation that members of the general community simply do not understand or prefer to ignore. For the field of arts-inspired action research engaged art forms or social action art have emerged over the past two decades with considerable force (Jackson, 2011). When the arts and humanities fuse with advocacy objectives and education or awareness-building, coupled with the induction of a collective guilt, these combined elements can serve as important aims of social betterment in pursuit of equality or equity (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008).

Action research embodies the arts and humanities when creative processes are seen as legitimate if not essential ways of conducting inquiry linking practice, knowledge development, and ultimately social action (Golub, 2005; Kapitan, 2010; McNiff, 1998). Design plays a pivotal role here. Aims are developmental when those who undertake inquiry harness the arts and humanities for the purposes of instilling awareness, expanding the boundaries of what is possible, illuminating ethical or unethical behavior, challenging the status quo, and ultimately revealing prototypes that can guide subsequent action for social betterment (Kaplan, 2007; Lowe, 2001; Timm-Bottos, 2006). This is how the authors have come to see and practice action research immersed in the arts, humanities, and design.

## **Legitimizing Aesthetics, Emotion and Inspiration in Action Research**

### **Popular and Participatory Arts and Humanities**

Many communities and their institutions are moving through a re-orientation to both the arts and humanities (Cleveland, 2005; Falk & Dierking, 2000). One may argue that the arts and humanities are becoming more participatory, and engaged and, therefore, there is a paradigm shift occurring in which forms of knowledge once reserved for the wealthy and privileged, and the artists who enjoyed their support, are becoming more inclusive of individuals who are not privileged within the greater society (Hyde, 2007). Brute, vernacular, outsider, or folk art are all alternative forms of expression in which artists who are not necessarily privileged or who are not formally trained form images and represent their experiences in graphic and artful ways (Hyde, 1998). Outsider art is often seen as the product of disordered or marginal individuals (Rhodes, 2000) but this form of art may be another way of perceiving and portraying artistic production as popular, public, engaged, and inclusive. Many people who engage the arts and artists often instill wonder in their audiences based on the creativity expressed in their images and representations.

Carey (2006) amplifies this transition from art for the elite to art that is popular and produced by those who may be on the edge of a society:

Whereas high art is exclusive, popular art is receptive and accessible, not aimed at an educated minority. It emphasizes belonging, and so seeks to restore the cohesion of the hunter-gatherer groups (p. 36).

In addition, popular art can diminish what Carey calls “modern solitude” but for us it is a vehicle for cutting through marginalization, for humanizing those who have experienced dehumanization, and for tapping into the creative impulses that all humans possess, particularly when they search for innovative ways of thriving in the face of challenges (Kennedy, 2009;

McNiff, 2004; Stankewicz, 1989). Art itself, the making of it, and its viewing or consumption by audiences affirms community, reinforces the communal, and produces cohesion, a quality of group life essential to the development of mutual support (Carey, 2006; Eisner, 2004; Elmendorff, 2009; Jones, 1988; Knutson, et al., 2011; McNiff, 1992; Timm-Bottos, 2006; Yalom, 1985).

Who is now in a position to deny those artists, specialists in the humanities, or designers a proverbial “seat at the table?” The authority to legislate what is permissible or desirable in artistic expression is on the wane illuminating a shift in the social control of art and the humanities within given contexts (McDowell, 2011). Many people who take the risk and invest their creativity in art making, storytelling, and design can emerge as creators or co-creators when they undertake such creative activity with others (London, 1994; Moon, 1999; Phillips, 1992).

Perhaps what becomes salient is that both image and representation come together as a form of narrative in which people can show how their social locations influence perspective on what constitutes the normative. Image, in this sense, becomes a form of knowledge useful in informing action (Moon, 2004). The artist whom a local mental health entity may consider “seriously mentally ill” emerges as a voice of reason when his work indicts the treatment of people who are marginalized (Holmes, 1972). This artist knows what constitutes marginalization from firsthand experience and so he may choose to be an artist but one who also serves as a primary witness of marginalization and perhaps even abuse or neglect.

The documentary and educational power of his art becomes salient when he displays it in forums that engage community members who may not have any experience with the issues that this artist represents (Fulmer, Washington & Moxley, 2006; Junge, 1999; Potash & Ho, 2011). The images he offers can be disturbing, disquieting or even disgusting. Viewers cannot easily isolate themselves emotionally from such exposure and so in this case the arts serve as an

alternative form of community education. For this artist image and representation also serve as a form of knowledge, one that actually can be more powerful than other forms of knowledge, such as statistical or social scientific (Eisner, 1981; McNiff, 1998).

Such knowledge can be further augmented by an artist who is seeking to make sense of a particular situation associated with marginalization and who wishes to inform others. Forms of action that organize multiple forms of artistic representations emanating from the arts, humanities, and design can fuel action. Such installations can embody photography, photographic essays, photo voice content, poetry, written essays, paintings, sculptures and collages (Moxley, Washington, Feen-Calligan, 2008). One artist may offer all of this content acting solo or multiple artists can make distinct contributions using those modalities in which they excel. Narratives concerning the individual experiences of people often labeled in a pejorative manner (e.g., mentally ill) can tell their own stories in graphic ways perhaps using performance-oriented strategies such as reading narratives, acting, or engaging in verse or song (Moxley, Washington, Feen-Calligan, in press; Washington, Feen-Calligan, & Moxley 2009).

The artists and contributors themselves may construct a paradox - while the pejorative label may suggest incompetence the array of representation can communicate competence as viewers, guests and participants come to understand how people navigate oppression with their personal integrity intact. The viewers or guests can come to appreciate such a paradox as a fundamental form of personal education and enlightenment. What Marc Gold (1980) considered the competence-deviance hypothesis may come into play in this now dynamic learning context. Somehow in the human mind competence and deviance can join and, as a consequence, become a way of experiencing the richness of people as they combine particular peculiarities with visible competencies in the arts.

Although some artists may be considered odd the sheer competence of their work can help viewers of the artist's expressive products to accept them as individuals who have much to offer the community. This is the essence of the humanities - action and the products of action undertaken by people who are otherwise devalued in the general society gain credibility as their work influences how others come to comprehend their world.

As the arts and humanities can so ably blur categories and reveal paradoxes many of us may find it difficult to witness in such alternative contexts because we are so able and accustomed to protecting our cognitive equilibrium. Blurring categories and disputing questionable boundaries may be the most distinctive aims (and competencies) of the arts and humanities. When undertaken well, when seen as a force of inquiry and knowledge, the arts and humanities can challenge how we perceive and come to understand complex issues. They may expand our own boundaries of empathy and acceptance and, as a result, humanize us all (Golub, 2005).

### **Design as a Product of Image and Representation**

Still design too can be a central part of this process of image-making and representation. Imagine if the artist we portray previously is part of an advocacy effort that possesses a developmental aim of bettering the lot of people who struggle with the causes and consequences of serious mental illness, including the pejorative labeling process too often so integral to mental health systems. What if the artists themselves offer futuristic perspectives on how communities can become more competent, humane, and proactive in helping people who are too often marginalized from essential life resources and experiences (IRED, 2011; Moxley, Boeck, & Wachter, 2011).

Through multiple methods (such as performance, song, poetry, drawings, graphics, and painting) those artists portray new ways that people can support one another, explore how the environment, both physical and cultural, can change for the better in the direction of more supportive structures, and offer more and better opportunities for all (Denzin, 2003). In the conceptual language of social research and development we can refer to those activities as conceptual prototypes that can offer road maps for thinking differently about “what is” as communities seek to shift into new ways of thinking about “what could be.”

Image and representation are integral to how artists and those working in the humanities express themselves because they are essential to the process of creative engagement (Lowe, 2001). Images document process. They allow for return and reconsideration as well as deepening understanding, all steps that are indicative of formative processes of learning and perhaps relearning (Carolan, 2001; Feen-Calligan, Washington, & Moxley, 2008; Kapitan, 2011). Creativity likely starts with criticism of “what is” in service to emerging images of what can take its place. For Deutsch (2011) criticism and conjecture (inherent in prototyping) are fundamental to the realization of progress (or what we call social betterment) in a society.

### **The Aesthetic and Negative Aesthetic in the Arts, Humanities and Action Research**

The primitive, roughly hewn, imperfect or even non pleasing can stand as powerful images and expressions of human experience capturing for viewers what it means for the artist to connect him or herself with people living on the edge of humanity. While one culture may prize beauty as a polished form bright in color and polished in texture, a product of ornate materials, another culture may see beauty as the very absence of perfection - of dull color, rough-hewn and humble materials (Tanizaki, 1977). “Edge” here may involve what the majority labels as undesirable, pathetic, unattractive or even dangerous (Fulmer, Washington, & Moxley, 2006). For the “outsider or the other” the edge may constitute what is normal - or, really what they may

expect in a society in which they feel out of place, invisible or devalued. Such environments may be affirming and nurturing for the person who lives on the edge as an outsider. Or, such environments may be experienced as destructive projecting despair inherent in an anti-aesthetic.

The properties of such environments may violate the sensibilities of those whose aesthetic standards prevail and are expressed as acceptable evaluative judgments in a given society. Those properties themselves may form an anti-aesthetic - the negative. For those who do not occupy the edge its qualities may be a mystery, something dreaded, or something to be avoided perhaps at all costs. Another way of avoiding what the more powerful may consider as the negative aesthetic is to shield themselves from that which they construe as ugly.

The power of the arts is manifested in its ability to illuminate, enlighten and explain in powerful ways what scientific modalities may fail to achieve. Art somehow expands the limits of personal perspective, location, and politics. These are qualities that the arts and humanities authenticate that may otherwise be discounted in a science that prizes objectivity, distance, and dispassionate perspective. The power of the arts is substantially enhanced by the hands of those who occupy the edge. An international movement in the arts and humanities has successfully harnessed this power. This movement recognizes the power of the other or outsider in telling stories of oppression, discrimination, deprivation or mistreatment. It captures the dynamics of those social ills and is able to communicate alternatives to them.

### **Emotion in Action Research**

For one homeless woman on the streets of Detroit quilting, for example, helped her tell a story of deprivation (Washington, Moxley & Garriott, 2009). Not a general story but a very specific one - one she owns - her story. She joins with other homeless women in combining the individual patches of their work into a unified piece. While each piece captures a theme of the

individual artist's life story or present situation the quilt as a whole can constitute a "meta-story" of the collective problem society calls homelessness. Although in this example the arts involve quilting - we can further qualify it as folk art since the form incorporates the informal style developed within a specific group, and handed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition, demonstration, and teaching among those who are not formally trained (Moxley, Feen-Calligan, Washington & Garriott, 2011).

The quilt is a visible product but it also is a product of emotional engagement of the arts with the media and the social issues the participants seek to interpret: to themselves, their fellow travelers, the helpers, and perhaps ultimately the public. Emotion here comes in the form of what Kast (1994) calls "existential involvement." For Kast (1994) an emotion always has to do with existential involvement. "An attempt to eliminate emotions would result in persons who no longer permitted themselves to be involved with life" (p. 11).

The quilt as a unified narrative tells a powerful story, one studded with emotional involvement of its creators, and engaging the lived experience of participants characterized by Kast as "involved with life." The arts also are about emotion - emotions that an artist evokes individually or with other colleagues in a creative process of discovery. The arts and humanities along with good design (as we argue in a subsequent section) can legitimize emotion as a form of knowledge and as a way of learning.

Undertaken by an outsider or the other as artist, the creativity that a participant demonstrates likely comes from emotional content that takes form in creating the quilt patches. Kast (1994) emphasizes that "emotions literally mean something breaking into motion within us" (p. 14). If we hyphenate emotion (e-motion) we appreciate how motion is rooted in the feelings and moods one can experience and express within and through the arts and humanities. Here action requires motion - the doing of something since it is in the doing (or the experience that we

derive such action) that changes how we think and feel, the essence of action research, and art-making (McNiff, 1998; Spaniol, 2005).

### **The Arts, Humanities, and Design to Achieve Multi-Level Reflexivity**

#### **Reflexivity: Individual and Group**

From an action research perspective, the individual artist who is in an early stage of inquiry explores her own experience with homelessness (what researchers may refer to as the idiographic) and she may very well explore the emotional side of her experience as she ponders meaning through her quilting activity. The action researcher may view this person's work as a case but one that Stake (1995) refers to as "intrinsic" in that it informs only our understanding of that person's particular work, her process, and her life.

We have witnessed the emergence of such reflexivity in our collaborative research on homelessness. By bringing together those who are otherwise outsiders (because of their homelessness) into a small group the field of action expands. One need only project oneself into a context in which the participants are working together (so that the quilt in its fullness and entirety emerges from their collaborative activity) to be impressed with how creative endeavor can emerge as a form of group reflexivity. Perhaps reflexivity emerges here as the actions of the individual artist feedback in a reflective manner steering her subsequent decisions to bring different colors, textures, and forms into a thematic portrayal of her homeless or life experience. As individual participants share their work with colleagues - their fellow artists - the construction of multiple quilting patches proceeds in the group. There are discussions and conversations, a mutual sharing of themes, stories, and events that have shaped the outsider artists' lives, both in and out of homelessness (Washington & Moxley, 2008).

Great emotion can roil through the group as the artists identify common themes across their own life course. They tap into a racial identity mutually shared and punctuated by a commonality they have all experienced through historical events the experience of which is primary or secondary when great grandparents share narratives of past eras of their families' histories. So then perhaps reflexivity emerges on a group level - the members of what is now a quilting group make decisions about bringing the patches together as a whole portrait in tribute to some aspect of their coping with homelessness they feel will help others come to understand their individual realities. Group members (who have earlier shared painful experiences and expressed their deep feelings that the experience of homelessness has instilled in their spirits) stand back examining all of the patches provisionally organized and pinned together as "the quilt."

### **Reflexivity and the Virtues of Participants**

The artists' dialogue produces reflection as each of the patches captures how an artist views her own virtues - ones instrumental in enabling her to resist the many negative consequences of homelessness and find pathways out of this terrible life and degrading situation (or, "sheer hell" as one of our participants characterized her experience with homelessness). What do we mean by virtues? A common but erroneous opinion or stereotype regarding people who become homeless contends that they are not supposed to possess virtues. Instead, according to this stance, they likely reflect collections of deficits that have combined in some kind of situational manner so powerful as to thrust them into homelessness.

But remember, we are now observing how an artist characterizes her personal reality and how she understands it as manifest in her quilt patch and the quilt as a whole. There is truth inherent in those representations since they tell stories about a reality that others likely cannot

access. Detienne (1996) invokes from archaic Greece the idea of the “Praxidikai,” those who served as “workers of justice.” Their stories (often expressed lyrically in the form of poetry) memorialized injustice and, in turn, offered ways of bringing about justice. Inherent in reducing the discrepancy between injustice and justice is truth. For one woman a patch demonstrates her considerable spirituality and faith. For another woman a patch captures a theme of helping others while for yet another woman the theme of industry - of working at multiple jobs while she remains homeless is a tribute to her character. For a fourth member of the quilting group the virtue standing out in the patch is one of self-care. She manages her health well in the face of diabetes, no easy task for someone who is homeless who must address issues of expensive footwear, sound diet, and the continuous management of blood glucose. Each woman has her own reality - her own form of truth.

The group now reflects on all the patches and members discuss which patch will serve as the centerpiece of the quilt, the theme of which is “survival in the face of adversity.” Observing the group is not only interesting it also is moving emotionally. One sees the participants entering brief periods of remorse accompanied by cathartic expressions of deep emotions. Then one witnesses verbal interaction in which the women collectively discuss the virtues they have made explicit in the quilt panels.

The quilt provides an excellent example of an expression of truth that Boylan (2008) calls authenticity. It “sings the praises” of women who have experienced considerable damage. But their resilient souls transcended harm and so the quilt’s patches and the quilt as a whole convey their expressions of virtue in diverse forms. For Detienne (1996) “when the poet sings a person’s praises, he is following the path of justice (p. 76).” The incorporation of the arts and humanities in action research is one very important means for understanding plight, efficacy, and resilience and in this regard we can “sing the praises” of all participants. It is in such a

characterization of the participants' virtues that we strengthen the representational ethic of an action research project.

Although readers may think of this kind of work as therapeutic in process only, actually, it isn't. The power of such action can be therapeutic in context, process and outcomes. While the work, involves action research we must also recognize and respect how emotion drives action (Kast, 1994). That is how we undertook this research with our participants, eight women (out of some 530 participants) involved in a very specific action research project in which they worked with formally trained researchers to discover ways out of homelessness. All of the women emerged out of homelessness and came to find housing that met their needs. Some had an easier time than others, but all took advantage of social services along with the social support they found through LHIRP. But, for all of the women, the trauma of homelessness remained as yet another trauma. On-going support facilitated subsequent healing and so social support was a critical success factor in facilitating the dignity each of the Telling My Story women found in their independent (or interdependent) living.

Emotional expression was at the root of quilting in this case and it became the catalyst of creative self- and group expression among the participants. But so was the place in which the quilting was undertaken, the support of the principal instructor, and the support of peers who worked individually in small groups to craft their quilt narratives of leaving homelessness. McNiff (2004) identifies the importance of all those dimensions in creating healing contexts - ones in which experimentation, catharsis, perspective, and creative engagement with materials and in partnership with others all come together to help marginalized individuals navigate trauma.

The participants' emotional expression may have two forms: First, as a way of saying to themselves "this is what I experienced and I am alive to tell my story;" and, second, as a way of

directing emotion to others: “Here I am. I survived this. Appreciate my arduous journey.”

Action research cannot divorce itself from such emotion. It is not merely a cognitive enterprise. Indeed, action research may also be an integration of the cognitive and emotive thereby yielding what Austen (2010) amplifies as “cognitive emotions” (p. 166). Austen (2010) invokes curiosity, fascination, concentration, openness, and commitment as examples of cognitive emotions, a paradox since we are more comfortable in a Cartesian centered way to separate into distinct dimensions those two very essential qualities of human beings.

### **Inspiration as Prelude to Design**

Artistic expression likely demands such integration while it provokes raw feelings, particularly in people who have experienced the bite of oppression. Action research is not objective in the positivist sense of the word. It is engaged, active, contextual, and respectful of the powerful influence of both cognition and emotion in the researcher as well as the participant. Indeed, by uniting cognition and emotion the action researcher can set the stage for inspiration, which forms in a context of authenticity when participants document their actual experiences with considerable texture and granulation.

When we bring the arts and humanities into action research we may indeed search for the possibilities of inspiration. Inspiration emerges when emotions, cognition, ideas, and experience synergize to influence action (Kast, 1994). And the action itself may be inventive, innovative or generative. For Kast, inspiration can stir creativity in the form of action: “... I receive the power to act and give shape” (p. 110). Through acting and shaping we design and the actual artistic product may serve as the prototype of the design anticipating further refinement and subsequent operational form.

We recognized the power of the arts in the LHIRP project, and we were counting on reflexivity - how the power of reflection emerging out of action and influencing future action could help us chart innovative strategies of helping. Group reflexivity combined the knowledge base of the quilting participants and harnessed their first person experience with homelessness that together would allow for making explicit both experiential and personal knowledge.

As the individual outsider artist expressed an idiographic perspective the staging of more nomothetic knowledge took root in the quilting group. The participants, all outsider artists in this context, were discovering what they shared in common as homeless people. They came to appreciate virtues they possessed accentuated by their struggle with homelessness and their efforts to eventually leave it behind. A patch, a quilt as a whole narrative, an artist's own discovery of her virtues, and the group's affirmation of the knowledge they possessed together, is perhaps generalizable to form a theory of action, and indicates for us that the arts are a storehouse of both knowledge and wisdom. The arts and humanities are effective because they stir emotions and emotions power subsequent action. When that action is organized, it becomes purposeful, and intentional permitting the possibility of design to present itself sometimes yields an intense form of imaging called epiphany.

### **Community Reflexivity: Exhibition in a Public Forum**

This story reveals another level of reflexivity that resides in the public domain. The quilt is complete. The outsider artists stand back to admire their work and revel in the virtues the quilt reflects. "Each patch is about a part of the journey," one of the artists proclaims. With their group process mature, and each of the artists willing to share her perspective, they begin discussing the importance of educating the community about homelessness, and thus the idea of an exhibit emerges.

Flash forward some six months later and the quilting participants are now curators and docents hosting an exhibit on women and homelessness in the lobby of one of the city's premier corporations. Well over one hundred people attend this opening event. A crowd is gathering around the quilt - it is an evocative artifact of the parent research project, of the efforts of its outsider artists who individually and together illuminated their journeys through homelessness. Their work amplifies the challenges they faced and individually and together acts to enlighten others about homelessness among minority women (Moxley, Washington, Feen-Calligan, 2008).

People are asking questions of the artists and many are interested in the interpretation of homelessness that the women have communicated through the quilt. The quilt embodies the artists' knowledge centered on the first person experience of homelessness. It explains homelessness among minority women, knowledge potentially generalizable to older minority women as a particular at-risk group within society. Some of the visitors "get it" - one, in particular, weeps as she stands in front of the quilt which is on display in a glass case. "This could be me," the woman of African American descent mutters loud enough so others hear. She was attired in elegant dress and one could envision her behind an executive desk in a prestigious office possibly situated in the corporation that sponsored the exhibit. A docent asks: "why could it be you?" The visitor responded: "We are all fragile." The docent asked for no more clarification. The visitor only nodded her head in agreement for it was the quilt (and the exhibit as a whole event) that communicated in an evocative manner a set of general principles of how homelessness occurs.

As the research team interviewed visitors leaving the exhibit the team members were impressed with the powerful emotional and cognitive impact of the exhibit. Some visitors said "it touched me." Others said "it reminded me of how I could become homeless." Still others expressed strong feelings of anger directed toward officials who they perceived as failing to

intervene in this issue. Still others mentioned their own responsibility: a not too uncommon response was “how can I help? “What should I do?” The exhibit created a powerful reflexivity - intellectual awareness and emotional insight combined with informed perspective. Perhaps for some this nexus may not have lasted long but it helped others to redirect their lives, i.e., the visitors who asked that powerful morale question inherent in “what should I do?”

### **Narrative as a Form of Artistic and Humanistic Expression**

#### **Evocative Narrative**

The exhibit triggered other kinds of reactions among visitors. A health science educator approached the docents as they convened in a small group immediately following the close of the exhibit for the evening. She asked them if they would be willing to share their stories with her medical students, physician assistants, and allied health personnel who participated in a large lecture that she sponsored on health and poverty. Eventually the women visited the class. It was full of approximately 150 eager students. The women formed a panel. Some told their stories in personal detail forming powerful narratives. Others sang and some read their poetry. All of the content embodied themes that these artists made explicit in their quilt. Indeed, the quilting process and product likely catalyzed the content that the woman thought would inform the students both cognitively and emotionally, which it did. You could see reflected in the faces of the students many of the same emotional reactions that we had observed among the exhibit visitors. The content was evocative - it stimulated raw images that involuntarily connected with viewers emotions, which made the situation of caring for someone marginalized by poverty all too human.

This part of the story indicates how the humanities are an important contributor to action research. The humanities can reveal both the individual and personal realities of a social issue

by placing a human face on what would otherwise be merely an abstract concern. Humanizing the work of action researchers and demonstrating how knowledge incorporates the personal is a theme permeating our work as action researchers. In addition, the women's presentation to those students introduced yet an additional form of reflexivity.

### **Diverse but Interrelated Narrative Forms**

Action researchers can benefit from understanding the diversity of narrative, an insight the authors found useful in interacting with people who experience serious social issues and whose life stories are influenced dramatically by such narratives (Josselson & Lieblich, 2001). The *narrative of plight* encompasses how the person experiences the social issue(s) and how the issue(s) influences their quality of environment, quality of day and ultimately quality of life (Washington & Moxley, 2009). The narrative of plight reveals the degradation of daily life and the often times intractable problems with which the person must cope (Moxley, Washington, & Feen-Calligan, in press). Here the arts and humanities can be powerful forms of portrayal: first, in helping a person articulate their situation, which they may record in diaries or letters. For the researchers it is not unusual to find that people record their deepest thoughts in notebooks (Washington, Feen-Calligan, & Moxley, 2009). Such archives are treasure troves of primary experience in which people record descriptions of the issues they experience and their harsh treatment by some people in authority. The authors of those notebooks sometimes add sketches or diagrams. They also may record potential lyrics and verses of their own authorship. Moving through such a notebook is awe-inspiring because they reveal how the assumption that each and every person is a potential creator of valuable knowledge is validated in the participant generated materials that we hold in our hands.

Notebooks of this sort can inspire the narrative and the interplay between researcher and participant permits a full understanding of a person's plight to emerge. For example, Joanne's notebook revealed the essence of her homelessness. She could not find what she labeled as a "good job." Good defined the quality of the job she sought over the course of her working life, one that proved all too elusive. She sought a job with an adequate wage, more than the legal minimum wage, offering her meaningful work with regular and adequate hours. A good job included benefits with some personal time off, vacations, and sick time. She also wanted health benefits. At the time of our discussion Joanne could have retired if she had had the benefits from a life of working multiple jobs.

For Joanne, however, retirement was now out of reach and she was always calculating how she could make it financially in her old age with few if any resources on which she could rely. Work was central to Joanne's narrative of plight and whenever she found herself sitting in front of someone who could help her, when asked about her needs she would say "I need a good job." Anyone could peruse her journal and see her sketches of good work. Forming Joanne's plight were all the social factors conspiring against her securing what she called a "good job." This is the pathos of working with people whose status in the greater society is substantially diminished.

The narrative of plight often reveals grand themes of oppression, discrimination, and injustice. And, it is the narrative of plight that shows the interplay between individual strivings to remove oneself from homelessness and the social factors that prevent the realization of a vital resource, like a good job. How shall an action researcher proceed here? Ethically, to facilitate the success of an individual may fail to address the greater systemic factors creating homelessness. Nonetheless, by creating good jobs a project can go far in fostering a systemic response such as in the development of microenterprises, social enterprises, socially inspired

business, and a movement of people from the ranks of the homeless into more viable situations. In our work we see the interplay of helping individuals and addressing the larger social issue. Perhaps by documenting the desire for a good job, by designing action to help participants fulfill their aspirations for good work, and by scaling this action so that it is broader and more encompassing participants can come to engage in multiple forms of action all useful in addressing the complexities of a social issue like homelessness.

On this score the narrative here once again underscores the power of the humanities. One person can embody the dynamics of an entire social issue. To illustrate, powerful writing in the social sciences by Kozol (1988) and Liebow (1967) reveals this dynamic. These authors invoke specific narratives of individuals to reveal how social injustice forms and the factors that sustain it. For action research such narrative holds important implications for the emergence of reflexivity in both researchers and participants.

Joanne's story also reveals another form of narrative: what we, the researchers, came to describe as the *narrative of efficacy*. This narrative embodies a participant's strengths and assets and their mobilization to address the plight she faces. It may intertwine with a person's story of her plight but by listening closely one will hear the themes of efficacy. We can hear how tough a person is in the face of challenge, their virtues expressed in a strong work ethic, helping others, resisting the temptations of street drugs, and managing one's limited funds. One can hear other themes too that suggest how kind, considerate, and compassionate a person can be: sharing scarce food with another person, allowing another person to share an apartment, and waiting with friends in the emergency rooms of health centers when they need that kind of support. Here too may reside a strong orientation to spirituality, a strong faith in others, and an ethical code of conduct.

Those efficacious qualities can erode in the face of overwhelming and persistent stress. People are vulnerable in this regards since the distressing plight they face can be so overwhelming that social functioning can literally collapse along with mental and physical health. But the narrative of efficacy also holds out the possibility for transcendence or transformation. The narrative reflects the reservoir of virtues and resources a person has available to navigate the social issues they experience. If one inquires they may discover how the person has formed those virtues over the course of a lifetime. Through such inquiry, we come to understand the person as a social, cultural, and historic being. The potency of people's learning derives from their family life, kinship networks, neighborhood experiences, and local institutions that can factor into the life course as he or she shares those virtues with you. And, underscoring the relevance of the humanities from this perspective is drama that can emerge in the narrative: people can outline how they learned potent life lessons from a courageous grandparent who demonstrated right before their eyes how to confront the challenges of discrimination and oppression (Golub, 2005).

For groups with histories of marginalization such stories are abundant. The person who is telling their story typically tells of how she, at a very young age, witnessed that loved one deal with a very demanding situation. "She stood up for herself and me against that White person who said she wasn't welcome in the restaurant," Lilly told one of the researchers. "I was frightened. Scared. But this woman, some 75 years old knew I was watching closely. She did it to set an example because I know now she wanted me tough. Two days later she asked me what I thought of that. I said something like - Gramee you are the toughest person I know. She said don't forget that because you will need to be tough. Be tough but respectful. Be tough but kind. That was the code I grew up with and I try to keep it today."

Yet a third form of narrative, which also may intertwine with plight and efficacy, is what we call *resilience*. Resilience can come in the form of subplots that punctuate the greater narrative. Those subplots can show graphically how a person mobilizes her virtues to address the challenges she faces. The researchers may find themselves vulnerable given the magnitude of plight the person outlines.

Efficacy sets the stage for understanding a person's virtues. Participants' narrative of resilience can literally inspire and catalyze admiration and other positive emotional responses from the action researcher. While Joanne was living in a shelter she worked three part-time jobs devoid of benefits and did not pay an adequate wage to permit saving enough money to rent an apartment. Nonetheless Joanne worked all of them despite traveling long distances on unreliable buses often times in inclement weather. Each day she returned to the shelter as required (by 6:00 PM on any given day to retain her bed tired and worn, her bones aching with arthritis). She was up by 4:00 AM the following morning to get ready for work, catch an initial bus, transfer to a second bus, and arrive at work on time. Joanne repeated this routine on weekends for yet a second part-time job. Although plight and efficacy are intertwined in Joanne's life it is easy to recognize the themes of resilience operating in her grand narrative.

Appreciating narrative in action research further underscores the importance of the humanities. We stay focused on the person's story appreciating what they face (plight), the virtues and resources they possess (efficacy) and the manner in which they face those challenges in action and retain their integrity (resilience). We also remain mindful of the threats to a person's integrity, which requires us to figure out new ways of helping and supporting people who live on the edge. We can discover those possibilities within the immediate boundaries of a person's narrative that implies that helping someone like Joanne involves assistance in obtaining

and sustaining a “good job.” Such action requires what we call development. Pairing development with action research invokes a new genre - developmental action research.

The health science students witnessed for themselves the artists as educators who provide real life examples of what they initially only knew abstractly as “people in poverty.” Our study participants represent real life examples of the “it” the health science students learn about in statistical, algorithmic, procedural and removed sterile clinical situations where their encounters with the other or outsider most frequently occur. Many of the students did not expect the women to be powerful role models of integrity, virtue, courage, and transcendence. As the students learned more about these transcendent qualities that the women possessed, they oriented to them as models that could change how they perceived homelessness, an example of yet another form of reflexivity (Krensky & Lowe, 2008).

By placing a human face on the women’s situations students could personally begin to witness the very virtues that the women communicate in their quilt. For the students it was not merely the content of the narratives that caught their attention. It also was each woman’s style in telling her story that moved them. How a woman shared her story orally, physically, emotionally using alternative forms (such as verse and song) amplified something about the social issue of homelessness that the students could not capture through textbooks or lectures or even clinical experience. “Telling My Story,” as this part of our action research was named, provided a strategy for arousing emotions and creating new perspectives. Once again we are reminded of how the emotional dimension strengthens action research.

### **Secondary Witnessing as a Form of Action Learning**

In contrast with didactics, such exposure could change a practitioner’s understanding and they may come to better understand how health is broader than physicality as the women sing

about family, loss, spirituality, oppression, survival, transcendence and ultimately transformation. The health science students became beneficiaries of each woman's primary knowledge. We have come to call this "secondary witnessing," and it can be a powerful form of change inherent in knowledge dissemination. The witness is engaged by understanding a person's story - their narrative in all of its rich detail and contours. Given the centrality of story to the humanities (placing a human face on what otherwise could be lost in abstraction), it is understandable for action research to incorporate the arts and humanities (i.e., LHIRP) since a narrative approach to knowledge building serves as a key methodological strategy.

### **Inspiring Design through Developmental Action Research**

#### **Design as Knowledge Enactment**

As the title of this monograph indicates, there is yet one more level of contribution the arts and humanities can make to action research. We see design as a form of knowledge enactment through developmental action research (DAR). It is a product of our work with homeless women over a stretch of some 10 years of engagement in this social issue. DAR embraces that very question that an exhibit visitor asked us as she was leaving the event: "What should I do?"

We consider action research as a powerful methodology for understanding a serious complex social issue and responding to questions that emerge from that issue - such as questions pertaining to the causes of the issue, how people who are affected experience the issue, the strengths and virtues they must possess to resist the issue, and the negative consequences they suffer as a result of an issue, particularly those involving inequities. It is a powerful way to allow for the emergence of those questions as the researcher proceeds in the process of

understanding. Those questions are illuminatory. To ensure our understanding of the issue in context is a critical aim of inquiry.

But in the human services and helping professions we can advance action further, particularly that action we characterize as developmental. For developmental aims knowledge emerges from a process of enacting ways of resolving the causes and consequences of a serious social issue. Practitioners of this form of action research take action over time to formulate, test, and improve if not refine a way of helping. Recursive steps of action require capturing relevant data to enact solutions that emerge as promising, particularly from the experience of those participants who face the social issue first hand in everyday life. The knowledge here is likely contextualized in a given situation and locale and is bounded in perhaps an idiographic manner (in that it pertains to the immediate situation of inquiry). Further testing and ultimately summative evaluation may prove that the form of helping is useful within a given domain of the problem as it is universally experienced or defined by those who experience it.

Central to developmental action research is the design and here we have much to learn from the design professions broadly construed. Architecture, interior design, and industrial design are examples of professions in which the design of the product is the central focus of inquiry.

In the helping professions we likely do not know much about the form of the design and the ensuing product until we understand the social issue that confront and threaten people's health and well-being. That is why for us action research was such an important form of inquiry. We first approached a serious social issue using questions that we developed. As professionals we initially assessed a popular view surmising that older minority women tipping into homelessness faced grave issues pertaining to substance use and/or serious mental illness.

However, we soon came to recognize this view as stereotypic if not nonproductive thinking since we had not really considered the life course of a minority woman at mid-life and the issues she would have to face economically and socially. We did not consider how those issues influenced vulnerability and how they interacted to create even more vulnerability. That there could be multiple pathways into homelessness was a possibility that we did not consider until action research helped us clarify those pathways. Illuminatory action research was one way to resolve the lack of insight that we possessed early in LHIRP's development. Over time, LHIRP methods became more indicative of the humanities with considerable embodiment of narrative forms. Those forms are critical for not only understanding a social issue in graphic detail but for enabling people who carry the burden of that issue to share their stories with others. This sharing is in part restorative - people come to understand that they are not alone. This sharing is political if a homeless woman is willing to offer her portrayal to others ignorant of the issue, but who possess the power to address it. The design of any subsequent action likely anticipates this story, which can become an important building block of social action.

Armed with a survey approach from traditional social science methods and with a narrative approach influenced by our own focus on the humanities we soon remedied stereotypic thinking on our part. While the survey approach proved useful - it gave us the contours of homelessness among members of this population in a structured and quantitative way - the narrative approach was even more powerful. In a heuristic sense the narrative approach required us to relax our pre-ordinate questions and engage each woman as a narrator of her own homeless experience. Each woman told her own story, emphasized what she thought was important, and amplified the issues she experienced in early, middle, and late stages of homelessness. Here we also can see how the researchers can find reflexivity useful. The manner in which the researchers understand homelessness changed over the course of each participant's narration.

Themes converged to suggest new ways of perceiving the issue of homelessness among older African American women.

### **The Design Objective as Practical and Ethical**

The narratives also indicated potential designs for action. This is where the aims of developmental action research (DAR) became prominent. “What shall we do?” was a question echoing through our minds and through the collective mind of the interdisciplinary research team. This kind of question holds both practical and ethical implications. The conversion of this question to a design objective is an important step in the change process. The design objective gives us direction, stimulates reflection and reflexivity concerning action, and continues creative engagement. One can suggest that the design is inherent in answers to that question using as content the direction a narrator offers. A salient example here is spirituality defined in this paper as showing a capacity for binding to a higher transcendent power by engaging in religious involvement, prayer, meditation, and ceremony while seeking to make sense of one’s life from a power or being (e.g., in the Christian orientation described as God) that lies outside of material living (Murphy, 2006). This definition emerged from collective discussions with our participants. They offered this concept as a way of encompassing a diversity of experience involving how people choose to relate to a greater power.

We knew that spirituality is very relevant and meaningful to many African American families. That there are good reasons for the strength of faith and spirituality in this community is something that the research team and participants clarified early in its own development. We were to discover, however, that spirituality would come to play an important role in fortifying participants against homelessness and perhaps even opening up promising pathways for leaving it.

When collecting narratives from several older African American women (50 years of age and older) who were living in a shelter we learned from them how spirituality influenced their optimism and hope concerning their immediate situation and in fortifying their self-efficacy, particularly involving health. One woman shared with a researcher her recent diagnosis of HIV. She reported this in a manner that suggested to the interviewer that she was ready to move on in addressing this serious health issue in a proactive way. When asked what she found useful in taking action to improve her health she responded saying, “I have faith in God.” “God will protect me.” And, “I have spiritual support.”

The participant referring not only to her faith in what for her was an all-encompassing positive being in the universe but she was also referring to the instillation of hope within herself. She possessed a resource that for her “no one could take away from me.” When questioned about remorse associated with this diagnosis, she simply said “I have had time to deal with that.” While not involving HIV, other women indicated how spirituality served as an important resource for them personally helping them navigate considerable distress in their daily lives. In response to our question about photographing places that helped them, five women who undertook photo voice projects as part of the illuminatory stage of our action research project, shared photographs capturing spiritual iconography and places they perceived as sacred. They offered considerable insight into their motivation to capture those places: “I feel safe there.” “They welcome me.” “The only questions they ask are about what do you need.”

But how does this finding influence design? The narrative approach is powerful because it reveals how people think about and experience their worlds. We start with assumptions that people are experts in their own situations, and that they know intimately the issues they face, the choices they have made, and the needs they possess. Tuning into those themes enables a designer to figure out how to configure helping to be responsive to those areas of living that a

person identifies as important to them. For example, we came to honor a participant's approach to spirituality as a sustaining factor in their own daily experience. We also came to appreciate other factors in their narratives - issues pertaining to isolation, degradation of nutrition and health, reduction of compromising stress, and the accumulation of nonproductive emotions in the form of anger and even rage. Those qualities of narrative facilitate design of helping. For example, within LHIRP, we melded governance meetings with the arts. The arts came before governance decisions since there was an opportunity for the expression of thought and feelings, social interaction, and world views. Then food and fellowship followed to nurture the spirit. Decisions about the project formed naturally in such an informal yet purposeful context. Our principal action hypothesis here was that social action emerged from collective strength formed within group contexts in which participants experienced considerable support, an observation reinforced by other stories of successful social action (Horton).

Listening closely to people about the assets and strengths they mobilize enables the action researcher to understand potential helping strategies. Designers who embrace the IDEO approach stress this form of action (IDEO, 2011). They use methods that reveal how people function and cope effectively with the exigencies of daily life, and reflect on those, particularly with the person for whom the design is intended to help, and with the people who will enact the design. Note how we invoke peer-based social support as a common aspect of action. Support interacts with social action, and may be one of the most important natural qualities to muster in any design. It is why the design of social support - or better yet, the facilitation of its natural emergence within environments - that stood out as a principal objective of LHIRP. Simply put, social support instills resilience in groups.

## **The Design Aesthetic**

A sound design will likely embody an aesthetic the person using it will find fulfilling. Returning to spirituality as a resource for older African American women who are homeless understanding that resource early in the process of helping is likely an important strategy. The design comes as a series of questions that give the respondent, a homeless woman, ample control over the helping process. First, simply ask “Is spirituality or faith important to you?” If the person says no, then it is easy to abandon the subsequent line of questions. If the person says “yes” one simply needs to ask “how is it important to you?” Behind this question is how does it work for you? How does it protect you? How do you perceive spirituality as useful in your life?” Here we can surface the five features of a powerful resource: (a) affiliation, (b) meaning, (c) social support, (d) affirmation, and (e) practical assistance. Spirituality can sustain the person in the face of adversity, protect them from negative consequences or mitigate those consequences, strengthen the will and endurance to find needed resources, and facilitate exit. Helping the person to access those resources is yet another extension of that well focused design.

Punctuating our developmental action research were numerous designs. The quilting story comes out of our development and testing of the quilt workshop. Here the workshop takes its inspiration from the idea of the studio - a place in which artists take refuge for the purposes of enacting creative work. The studio is a place of creativity, of production and of education. Architects, sculptors, writers, and other artists are comfortable working in studio space. For people who have experienced deprivation, trauma, and discrimination uniting with others in collaborative creative effort may itself serve as a source of healing. Such collaboration is indicative of participatory forms of action research. The collaborative studio can catalyze reflexivity at individual and group levels. Thus, it is a potent source of action learning within the domain formed by a particular social issue.

## **Expanding the Aesthetic Frame and Knowledge Translation through the Design Studio**

### **The Centrality of the Design Studio**

Making the studio an integral component of action research is a novel direction for those undertaking such inquiry. Schon (1986) underscored the power of the studio in fostering reflective practice among professionals. While his work focused on architecture it remains relevant to the helping professions who are engaged in participatory forms of inquiry. The studio holds the promise of integrating people holding different perspectives who can collaborate on the utilization of the empirical products of action research in design. The IDEO (2011) model offers this kind of utilization strategy as an action learning team brings in multiple forms of data into the process of design prototyping.

Recently Edwards (2010) has advocated what he calls the artscience lab as a structure for fostering creativity in young people, particularly those for whom formal schooling does not work well or is simply too constraining for their learning styles (Falk, 2002). For Edwards the lab (which for our use represents a studio) is a place in which creativity expresses itself through the synergies produced by aesthetic, analytic, and synthetic thinking. For Edwards (2010), “the aesthetic process is the substance of hypothesis generation, while the analytic process is the substance of hypothesis testing. Inevitably we fuse both when we create anything new” (p. 4).

The fusion yields synthesis - something new arises from the members of the studio engaging in dialogic interaction, the kind Bohm (2004) describes as essential to creative action. A Bohmenian dialogue does not possess a strict process—it capitalizes on the introduction of multiple perspectives by a diverse membership of individuals who make their ideas explicit using the data and experience at hand. Often metaphor enters the picture to guide reflection and produce convergence such as how Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) describe approaches to product design by Japanese engineers that incorporate what they call abduction - that is, the use of

metaphor as a template guiding idea generation and subsequent design. Johnson (2010) offers several additional examples of how metaphor works to structure creativity and produce new designs. The use of metaphor often occurs in group settings as a way of stirring innovative thinking. The ensuing dialogue is essential to reflection since it can advance reflexivity - the essence of change in action research. Action changes us cognitively and emotionally. Processing that experience changes us even more and developing new hypotheses forms a heuristic that Edwards sees as part of the design process.

### **Expanding the Aesthetic Frame**

The design aesthetic is hard to grasp and it may be more intuitive than explicit and objective. The aesthetic also is sublime - it captures our attention and our senses and ultimately it may instill in us deep positive feelings expressed in the form of hope. For the helping professions the concept of the aesthetic receives little attention but one can only imagine its importance to people whose status is degraded along with the environments they occupy. People seeking and using assistance in the form of social services may highlight feelings of dignity and respect that they experience in entering the helping opportunity. The architecture in which the assistance is embedded - whether it is welcoming, communicates warmth, and does not stigmatize through its appearance or location - may be an important aesthetic quality. Nonetheless the architecture itself is part of a larger symbolic context in which the greater society communicates the value of people in need. The helping capacity of the architecture itself may be of critical importance - that it helps people gain control over those factors that facilitate homelessness.

The aesthetic frame can involve place, architecture and helping processes. That those dimensions possess coherence indicative of a strategic order both O'Donohue (2004) and

Arnheim (1971) assert as essential to the aesthetic is thus an important quality of social action. But its coherence is what the helping professions describe as person-centered: Indicating that it is centered in the person's aspirations and in a critical understanding of the social forces frustrating their realization. A studio can support such criticism and encourage the design of social action with the arts as medium. Creative spaces are another important aspect of this kind of design aesthetic for without them one will likely struggle with art-making especially if the host environment degrades one's existence, much like a person's incarceration does (Escobar, 1994; Sarason, 1972).

Studio space equipped for the purpose of supporting group work in the arts can become a point of staging for individuals seeking to take action in the greater society. It can foster group life, create cohesion, and serve as a learning environment supporting subsequent social action. Much like Myles Horton enacted through the Highlander School in the United States first in the development of leaders for labor movement and then for the preparation of leaders for social action in civil rights forms of art and humanities, such as song, helped members raise collective consciousness concerning the social forces of oppression. Artwork and preparation for social action can go hand in hand, and the studio can support such learning.

The assistance that studio space offers personalizes the visitor and their situations. Its implicit curriculum can recognize those strengths, assets and virtues participants bring to bear so they can achieve what they seek for themselves. Such a search may begin with expression and then result in the formation of collective critique. The helpers, the people who offer the assistance, come to know participants as people striving for something they value, affirm their plights, and valorize their efforts to address in assertive ways the issues they experience. Participants are not treated in ways that depersonalize them. They are people first and they are

not treated as a diagnosis, a problem, or a threat - that is, the response is careful not to fit them into a stereotypic category.

We have seen those aesthetic qualities captured by homeless women in their photo voice projects. When discussing particular images women captured through their photography of the homeless experience they often used words as kind, compassionate, welcoming, warm, and respectful to characterize the helping resources that they found truly beneficial. Those are important descriptions since they communicate the affection the women felt toward the entity reaching out to them with the kind of practical assistance that could protect or keep them out of harm's way.

Photography likely captures images of nondescript buildings or facilities but nonetheless the words the women use are indicative of how they see the helping aesthetic. Note that we are discussing responses to people who hold a diminished status within a society and they understand those responses that form an anti-aesthetic - that which degrades, dehumanizes, and mistreats (Foster, 1998). Thus, the aesthetic is likely neither ornamental nor decorative. The physical interacts with the psychosocial to produce the aesthetic, which actually on face may be austere but that produces positive emotions inherent in a sense of protection and safety, nurturance, and spiritual support.

For much of our action research in the area of homelessness the austere often is the expression of what in the Japanese folk arts is called Wabi Sabi. It is an eastern art tradition involving the juxtaposition of the austere (or what the Japanese may call koko) and impoverished beauty indicative of a powerful simplicity inherent in various folk art objects like Haiku, stoneware, structural and landscape architecture, and furniture.

Koren (1994) describes Wabi Sabi as

...A beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.

It is a beauty of things modest and humble.

It is a beauty of things unconventional.

In Koren's (1994) words, for Wabi Sabi, as a tradition in the arts, "beauty can be coaxed out of ugliness (p. 40). " For Tierney (1999) Wabi Sabi is about powerful evocative simplicity - in his words "arresting and austere" (p. 12). Wabi Sabi, however, is consistent with other forms of eastern folk art in the emphasis its practitioners place on what Yanagi (1972) sees as the need for "free play of imagination and intuition" expressed through a person's "first tools" - their hands through which they express an "inner nature." Harnessing the spirit and substance of this aesthetic opens up many paths for an action research that embodies Wabi Sabi as an aesthetic of the helping professions. Such an aesthetic would capture values of simplicity, the austere, humility, and creativity while the object itself communicates serenity (Juniper, 2003).

Wabi Sabi design looks for simplicity. It is an aesthetic that can contain the emotional remnants of the tragedy people of degraded status confront in their daily lives and it can produce settings and context in which the human spirit can thrive even in the face of threat, oppression, and indignity induced by the outside world. It is here where what Yanagi calls craft takes root: "good work proceeding from the whole man, heart, head, and hand, in proper balance" (p. 95).

There is an inherent dignity to Wabi Sabi given its emergence out of a belief system that perceives all life as meaningful (Crowley & Crowley, 2001). Such a belief system brings attention to the kind of respect one must bring to research in partnership with people whose lives have been degraded in a society preoccupied with success often defined by materialism and monetary wealth. Here the aesthetic converges with the ethic of developmental action research in which this form of research incorporates a deep respect for all participants and the quest for dignity in the design of helping. Each participant is treated as a potential designer and the

democratization of action research means that all can share those designs as a means to advance knowledge in action, what Heller and Vienne (2003) describe as citizen designers.

Actually, what happens within the creative process in the context of the reflexive lab is what Edwards describes as “idea translation.” And capturing the design aesthetic as part of a developmental process can be a central objective of creative engagement (Alvarez & Moxley, 2004). We realize idea translation through our interaction with others, which Edwards (2010) describes as learning (and which we also perceive as a form of reflective learning): “To remain curious, attentive, and moved by the rich process of idea translation, we seek out those from whom we can learn, and with whom we can discuss our experiences and dreams” (p. 7).

The first author has observed idea translation occur as part of a lab held in Oklahoma City. Young people formed a working team to formulate a concept and design that would help augment access to information useful to homeless individuals seeking assistance from community resources. They formulated an innovative idea focused on development of a community kiosk in which people could access timely and useful information through free standing portals placed in neighborhoods. The students enacted the spirit of the lab: they identified a relevant community need, formulated a design objective, began prototyping, introduced critical thinking, and provided useful data that led to beneficial technological solutions at different junctures of their work. Admittedly, this resource reinforces the idea that homelessness is perhaps a permanent issue in a given community. It does not challenge systemic factors that cause homelessness unless the information system connects people with resources truly useful in helping them escape homelessness. The system itself can link people to other groups seeking to help people get and stay out of poverty, to events in which collective action is directed against those systemic factors, and in building supportive self-help communities.

At the point that the first author interacted with the group they had matured into a powerful design team in which its members were reflecting on how to translate their ideas into physical reality. In conjunction with several other local “experts” on homelessness, the first author attended a meeting of the lab team to discuss this translation. One could see immediately the reflexivity of the group as they had developed a common reference, a set of ideas derived from exploring the problem of homelessness in the immediate community, and had collectively arrived at a potential solution to help people who were homeless access useful information (Boeck, Mosley & Wachter, 2011; Boeck, Wachter, & Moxley, 2010).

While listening to the young members of the lab interact with the other adult guests, one could see the potential for an engagement in prototyping, fabrication, and testing of their innovative physical device to be placed in actual neighborhood settings. The first author witnessed this application of idea translation in the context of action learning manifested in prototypic design. The substantive form of action matters here but the process of enacting design does not really vary. A design to address larger scale systemic factors can emerge through a studio environment. Moving the design out of the studio can facilitate testing and subsequent broadening of the innovation as participants become more mindful of what works and what doesn't. Bringing design into an explicit belief system and value set reveals how important it is to understand how a particular design reveals a particular world view, theory of action, or ideology. Indeed, making those factors explicit within a design studio can deepen and broaden the awareness of participants helping them to focus their critique of society and its policies. The studio can muster and integrate three forms of energy in pursuit of social change - emotional, cognitive, and social.

## **Structure and Contexts of Design Teams**

For action researchers idea translation likely occurs within an empirically driven context of reflection undertaken individually or in group settings. Groups are powerful settings in which idea translation can occur. Bohm's (2004) approach is relevant here but the success of such a context involves the presence of other core artists whose essential role is to help us learn about action from understanding (i.e. gaining insight into the issue calling for action) and then perhaps about action from meaningful design (i.e. in our case, the fabrication of strategies and interventions helpful to people who find themselves in a difficult situation).

Content from the arts, humanities, and narrative is instructive for design in the helping professions. Edwards (2010) invokes Bauhaus, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century movement in the arts and crafts. The distinctiveness of the Bauhaus as a movement resided in its capacity to bring together or orchestrate experimentation and experiential learning, exhibition, and production (Edwards, 2010, p. 8), which brought together students, crafts people, and scholars. It healed a prior division that had emerged between the arts and crafts (Bayles & Orland, 1993).

Thus, action research can advance through such team work in which members bring different perspectives together in the creation, testing, and ultimately a diffusion of innovative forms. Progressive forms of inquiry in action research heighten the role of the participant in all steps of the research process. Still, other forms of action research can involve the formally trained researcher in turning over the project to those who are directly affected by the issue under investigation: those who have substantial stakes in subsequent utilization of the resulting knowledge. Such empowered forms of inquiry in action research go well beyond participation.

The quilting workshop, for example, is a context in which idea translation occurred and enthusiastically captured the tenets of Wabi Sabi, particularly when we consider quilting as craft and folk art. First the workshop itself is a place where the participants use folk art not

necessarily for therapeutic purposes (although it can produce such ends). More importantly, the workshop enhanced the creation of new knowledge - in this case insight into coping, virtues, and ultimately how people successfully transcend a situation potentially destructive of life. We do not wish to discount the therapeutic here since from an action research perspective we frame such ends as a form of reflexivity in which engagement in the art technique enables participants (i.e., artists) to form new conceptions of themselves and their lives.

A second way of perceiving the quilt as craft is reflected in its conceptualization as a product involving the work of people who are not trained artists. While many if not most of our action research participants possessed considerable creative energy and artistic skills they were not principally quilters. Instead, they approached quilting as a form of knowledge building, first at the request of the principal researchers, and then on their own as a group. They collaborated with our research team to help us unearth their perspectives and find promising ways of effectively interpreting the homeless experience to others.

Designing a workshop for quilting released creativity and transformed the workshop into a space to support the translation of narrative in verbal form to a narrative in visual form. Consequently, bringing the quilt into an exhibit made it part of a public domain and concomitantly functioned as a resource for the enlightenment and education of others, those who likely have no personal experience with the primary social issue of homelessness. Edwards (2010) assigns considerable scope to the exhibit as a product of what he calls the artscience model: “The uniqueness of the artscience model relates principally to the centrality of cultural exhibition as a forum for idea expression, and to a multilab structure that funnels innovative ideas toward educational, cultural, commercial, and humanitarian benefits” (p. 8).

In this progression we can observe the value of developmental action research (DAR) in the helping professions. In partnership with the people who bear the primary negative effects of

a serious social issue we can forge ways of helping. Those ways can be designed collectively, informed by both primary and secondary witnessing, tested out in practice, improved over time, verified as useful, and perhaps then taught to others as a way of helping people address the social issues they face.

In this manner, through such a progression, developmental action research can build culture enhanced through the incorporation of the arts, humanities, and narrative. Tools emerge for the purposes of problem-solving and innovation. If they are found useful the group retains them and if found not to be useful they are discarded in the process of developmental action research. Entities incorporating the arts, humanities and design have available to them multiple tools to facilitate the creativity of their participants undertaken in a culture of creative engagement through social action (Washington, Moxley, Garriott, & Crystal, 2009).

### **The Influence of Action Learning on the Emergence of Organizational Culture in the Arts, Humanities, and Design**

If culture-building ensues the process of developmental action research can produce an organizational entity, one with strong identity and an identifiable image immersed in the social issue. Perhaps emerging as a competent, effective and innovative response to that issue the organization becomes a holding space for innovation. At this juncture, the use of the arts and humanities provides a way of interpreting people's situations and inspiring action through design. This long haul process is the essence of action learning (Moxley & Washington, 2012b). It is likely that an organization crystallizing here is vernacular in character: it is tied to small localized action designed to address the local manifestation of a greater social issue (Orr, 2006). Thus, in the case of the arts, humanities, and design, entities may cohere around local themes emerging from by nature, history, tradition, and social and economic development. Also the arts

themselves may be used as a vehicle for questioning the effectiveness of existing arrangements enabling a person who has been traumatized by those arrangements to question their effectiveness, portray their causes and consequences, and offer insights into better arrangements.

The arts also serve as a way of communicating the process of people's individuation manifested on one level as insight into their limitations and strengths (Hollis, 1998; 2000; 2001). Indeed, this process shares many commonalities with the process of humanization, a process in which the arts are integral to the achievement of such an aim although at least initially the artist may be unaware of the power of the media in which they engage (Storr, 1988).

The AiR project is relevant here. The first author of the monograph has analyzed web-based examples of the arts in healing and has identified specific artistic healing forms out of a small initial sample of 210 variants. Those entities integrate the arts, humanities or design to reach populations that are marginalized within the greater society. Examples include involving youth in juvenile corrections facilities in poetry and creative writing, helping people who are labeled as developmentally disabled to develop as artists, working with young girls to promote their development as artists-entrepreneurs, involving youth in creative performance on the streets of urban areas, and involving the elderly in furniture design and production.

Those forms link the arts with service to the community and enrich those communities through the arts, humanities or design. The entities may nest themselves within host health and human service organizations or stand independent of the network of helping resources within a community and focus purely on creative development of their participants as a form of social support. Why is this important? In many instances creativity may very well serve as the basis of our resilience (Hollis, 1996; Prêtat, 1994).

In addition, to some degree, the culture of those entities emerges out of the arts and humanities and, as a consequence, place considerable emphasis on understanding the lived

experience artists communicate through their narratives. What is likely visible is that the entities themselves appreciate their members' narratives of plight as the expression of a greater social issue, narratives of efficacy that strengthen their development as artists, and narratives of resilience that enable them to further develop as creative individuals.

These kinds of places are especially important since they serve to nurture the creative spirits of their members who have likely experienced considerable trauma. Those entities facilitate their members' personal development, productivity, and engagement in media forms in which they can share their perspectives through methods that they value as artists. The fact that these entities help people master roles inherent in artistry is yet another distinguishing quality of their cultures. In considering those entities in another paper we identify their distinctive properties as follows:

(a) participants engage in the production or co-production of art for the sake of understanding, finding meaning, and communicating societal response to them as members of a marginalized group, (b) grassroots artistic efforts emerge within a specific community facing numerous challenges, (c) participants craft recovery messages that are prominent in their artistic representation, (d) participants make their own decisions about the form of art they will learn and use to communicate their own recovery experience, and (e) participants emerge as artists who determine the value and quality of their work rather than placing this judgment in the hands of experts or critics.

Learning to be an artist is a form of action learning for an individual. Developing and supporting artists are yet other ways of engaging in action learning at the organizational level. Learning how to engage in such innovation is a continuous and likely informal process inherent in the relationships among emerging artists and instructional masters working collaboratively within a supportive culture in which the arts, humanities and design are highly valued.

This may indeed be the most critical aspects of putting the arts and humanities to work in action research. Such effort amplifies the distinctive qualities of action learning in specific contexts, typically organizational ones no matter how informal they may appear to outsiders. And it likely makes helping entities that embody the arts, humanities, and design to be qualitatively different from typical helping services; at least this is our hypothesis. Putting the arts, humanities, and design to work in service to marginalized groups engage “people in need” in active learning and develops their roles, identities, and capacities as creative individuals. It is possible that such creative development strengthens the resiliencies of participants and, therefore, the entities we consider here as relevant are those whose designs seek to foster human development through the arts and humanities (Greene, 2001). The cultures of the organizations the first author has chosen for AiR are indicative of such an orientation to action learning at the individual, dyadic (between emerging artists and teachers) group and organizational levels.

### **Conclusion: Creative Ethics and Their Embodiment in Action Research**

#### **Summary**

This monograph has sought to make explicit the practice-theory nexus of the arts, humanities and design in action research. We articulate an original treatment of developmental action research incorporating the benefits of the arts, humanities and design: through identification of a problem or need for change, imagination of potential solutions, and mobilization of next steps, parallel methods in artistic and design processes and action research converge to facilitate awareness and social betterment.

The studio setting is described as a safe environment for experimentation and self-expression through verbal and non-verbal modalities, where the artistic/design processes and products serve as metaphors for or equivalents of behaviors and experiences, used to develop

prototypes for action and change. Through reflection and validation from others, individuals gain insight and together work to design methods for individual and collective development and social activism. The process of creative self-expression involving action and reflection in groups facilitates catharsis, inspiration, and motivation for next steps. The authors propose how the arts, humanities and design augment action research goals through recognizing environmental and aesthetic impacts, reflection upon common experiences and identification of strengths and resources to motivate and effect change.

The arts, humanities and design contribute to action research by:

1. Putting a human face on a social issue; illuminating individuals' first-hand experiences with a social issue;
2. Helping to develop innovative strategies for individual and social change;
3. Contributing to social justice and the emancipation of marginalized people;
4. Creating community as people from diverse backgrounds discover common interests and mutuality;
5. Identifying potential solutions to social problems;
6. Facilitating expression of emotion;
7. Mobilizing action within the participants themselves, as well as public audiences; and
8. Challenging bias among students and other audiences.

Facilitating developmental action research utilizing the arts, humanities and design has resulted in the identification of a set of ethical principles that serve to inform theory and guide practice:

## **The Ethic of Dignity**

At the heart of participatory methods in action research is the preservation if not the promotion of the dignity of those individuals who possess diminished status. Photo voice projects participants undertook for the LHIRP project revealed too often images of places of helping or assistance (particularly health care facilities) in which they felt diminished, found disrespect, and experienced the loss of dignity. Within LHIRP, we sought to create a context in which the participants felt a strong sense of dignity. And, it appears that AiR entities do the same. That there are places of self-renewal for people who have experienced considerable indignity in life is itself an overarching ethic of inquiry, what Boylan (2008) sees as indicative of the good and beautiful.

From our experience the infusion of dignity in action research begins with appreciating the many virtues participants bring to inquiry. Those virtues are, in part, biological and sociological since participants are located social structurally in a physical reality in which they interact biologically as people who have strengths and needs as physical organisms. Numerous participants in our homeless project were hardy individuals with considerable physiological resilience even in the face of material and nutritional deprivation. But material deprivation is no virtue. It taxes the biology of anyone and demeans one's dignity.

That this toughness emerged from early lives in which they experienced considerable deprivation was a common theme cutting across the life stories of many LHIRP participants. Appreciating this resilience individually and collectively by the project principals (that could be expressed in the countenance of the participants' physical presentation, facial expression, and body configurations) established the legitimacy of the researchers and the project. Some participants could be explicitly and intentionally threatening in their appearance and demeanor.

### **Relational Ethics and the Ethic of Authenticity**

Communicating respect for this presentation, refraining from asking people to change it, and inquiring into this tough veneer when there was a good relationship influenced *the relational ethics* the researchers followed and that were subsequently embraced by the participants who governed the project. Relational ethics here implicate the importance of interacting among people with disparate backgrounds appreciating the considerable virtues each brings to the interaction. Treating them as survivors, experts, and ultimately as creative spirits were cardinal ethics guiding the researchers early in the life of the LHIRP project.

Perhaps this set of relational ethics was the first step in the integration of the arts and humanities into our action research. People who have experienced considerable marginalization are likely suspicious if not unwelcoming of those others whom they see as privileged. There is good reason for such a reaction - for the participants with whom we have worked there are too many good reasons for such reticence. Participants, however, very quickly present their narratives - their biographies inherent in the narratives of plight, efficacy and resilience we have discussed before, and it is incumbent upon action researchers working with people of diminished status to appreciate those narratives.

This means that the researchers welcome each person, appreciate how they have sculpted their resilience (as artists), and how they shaped the way they have coped with very challenging histories and circumstances. Both the arts and humanities offer numerous ways people can “tell their stories” and make their situations understood. Thus, here, an *ethic of authenticity* prevails - we are not asking people to be anyone other than who they are since we are confident that over time those virtues a person derives from life and brings to life will emerge in interaction with others.

The arts and humanities are a powerful vehicle for helping people frame and fill in those narratives with the details of their strengths, resiliencies, vulnerabilities, and experiences, particularly losses. If we are effective here the sheer humanity of the person comes to the fore. They may express this knowledge through diverse and multiple artistic forms and techniques. The researchers enter the situation assuming that each person is an artist - whether using storytelling, lyrics, verse, clay, movement, photography or brush - such diverse media enable participants to offer their perspectives as they construe them. It is an authentic story when virtue is well understood through a person's narrative since it stands as a form of beauty "with rationality based argumentation on the true and the good as a key component of our attaining authentic purpose" (Boylan, 2008, p. x).

### **Creative Ethic**

The toughness that we have observed in our participants interacts with a fund of other assets whether cognitive, affective, interpersonal, experiential or cultural ones. Taking time to understand those many assets each participant brings to the action research project and uses to advance her artistic work through image, representation and expression form the *creative ethic* of action research. We should not overlook the potential contributions creative expression can make in any given action research endeavor. One cannot even venture to ignore it when engaging the arts, humanities and design as elemental aims and forms in inquiry since the introduction of creativity into research is the purpose of those disciplines.

Creative ethics here means that the purpose of engaged research, particularly that which is undertaken in helping people reduce their vulnerability, as we discuss in this monograph, is to foster new designs of helping, ones that can help people improve their quality of environment, quality of day, and ultimately quality of life. Gawthrop (1984) underscores this observation as

integral to public service. Such design work requires what Gawthrop refers to as critical consciousness - the ability to reflect on new knowledge and engage that knowledge in what Edwards (2010) calls idea translation. Bringing forth the virtues of participants in a context of creative engagement sets the stage for liberating energy in service to helping people renew or transcend difficult situations.

For the authors critical consciousness is a product of reflexivity and we can get to this end through the use of the arts and humanities fueling new designs supporting the advancement of well-being among participants while we, researchers and participants, gain new insights that may advance a whole domain. Those designs may be small and focused or they may be of considerable scale encompassing whole communities. There is always the possibility too that those designs may encompass an entire society.

### **Ethic of Participation and the Potential of Transformative Change**

However, by bringing into the equation of action the creative contributions of those individuals who experience marginalization an *ethic of participation* offers hope for advancing civility, humility and humanity through the arts and humanities. The arts and humanities can instill within an action research project certain advantages that flow from bringing together people of disparate backgrounds to appreciate the virtues at hand and their incorporation into action for change at whatever scale this is achieved (Elmendorff, 2009). Influencing this kind of change is what Gawthrop refers to as *systems ethics*: the discovery of transformative purpose and its enactment to create for society, community and particularly for those groups who face marginalization new ways of advancing well being erected on a consciousness informed by the knowledge inherent in action undertaken for the public good.

We become better because we act to be better and, as a result, we become more conscious of how to enact change that advances the well-being of all. The arts and humanities are especially pertinent here: they place a human face on the nature of action research and learning. This embodiment of purpose that incorporates the virtues of participants informing and sustaining action are the precursors of good design. This is the crux of action research, its developmental and participatory forms, and ultimately of its fusion with the arts and humanities when it is undertaken in a space (e.g., studio) in which relational, authentic, creative, and participatory ethics serve to humanize action. It is through such humanization that whole systems can learn to be more human and ultimately more humane (Winner, 1986). This aim may constitute the ultimate purpose of action research and action learning.

### **Limitations and Possibilities**

As one considers these ethics, we must confront the limitations of the approach we offer in this monograph. There are many different forms of action research, and ones that focus too heavily on the lived experience of a particular group of individuals, as does LHIRP, possesses its own limitations relative to addressing causes and consequences of serious issues. Both the humanities and the arts prioritize the experience of individuals or small groups while the humanities, in particular, seeks more encompassing world views and explanations for illuminating the nature of individual, group and collective experience. For the arts, increasingly action is becoming systemic as artists coordinate collective action in partnership with institutions, groups, and whole communities. Thus, models are emerging in action research to capture this form of collective engagement.

An apologia is appropriate here. Early in our work with homeless minority women we were deeply committed to an intrinsic form of action: we engaged the issue in a particular urban

context and sought to facilitate action by a specific group of participants. This group grew over time as increasingly more women participated in the project. As the project grew, an indicator of the systemic features of the social issue in the urban context in which we worked, the possibilities of more systemic work emerged. As we gained clarity about the systemic dynamics of the problem our theory of action became more salient, particularly as we saw relevant cross cutting themes apparent in the narratives of the participants. For the core group, systemic change came to involve advancing housing rights and opportunities for homeless women. It involved efforts undertaken by members of the Telling My Story group to advance social benefits for older homeless women. The Telling My Story participants chose to speak on behalf of all older women who faced homelessness, and they did this by standing before audiences presenting issues in large forums, an activity that called upon all of their sincerity, motivation, and character. One strategy remained stable across the entire project: Any change effort they participants would undertake was grounded in the capacity to support one another. Thus, social support anticipated social action.

So cross-cutting themes served to guide more concerted social action, and offered us (participants, co-researchers, participants, and community members) a new laboratory for working with the artful materials participants brought to the project, ones indicative of the creative forms of mutual support the women developed over the course of the project. The community exhibit emerged as a new kind of holding space for action. The exhibit itself incorporated four aims: (a) offering avenues of self-expression for participants in communicating their lived experience of homelessness to community audiences, (b) amplifying the voice and experience of participants for privileged groups who would come to the exhibit as visitors, (c) expanding community awareness of the social issue, and (d) engaging other groups, those not primarily involved in the homeless experience, as partners who would contribute to

structural change, particularly around housing. Driven by the primary experiences of participants, the design of the exhibit incorporated their content, and opened up new roles as curators, narrators, and educators. The exhibit itself demonstrated how the participants' knowledge could influence social action as an important focus of action research.

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