

TRANSFORMING SUPPRESSION – PROCESS IN OUR PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRACTICE.

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There are many personal and cultural pathways into the worlds of action learning and action research. Despite this variety there is also a research and learning world that we share. It is not specific to any particular discipline, social group or outcome and we are very sensitive about identifying what is valid action research and learning and what is not. So how do we develop process in our practice so that we know where we are and that what we are doing is valid?

This keynote speech proposes some ways of distinguishing action research and learning processes in our practices – particularly with regard to experiences of reconciliation. Rather than naming a particular process as being generically recognisable as action research or learning, I reflect on how in my practice as a facilitator of participatory action research I recognise and develop process in the “nomadic” practices of facilitation. In particular I explore some of the possibilities that purpose and position offer as foundations for negotiating processes with participants. Using negotiation, collaborative reflection and decision-making as the fundamental practices of community building we can willingly bring our great range of position, purpose, practice and process into congruency. In this way we can legitimately work with a community of people who share an interest to address issues of concern to them in participatory ways. We can do this even when our own position may well be regarded as “marginal”. Our marginality is an opportunity to understand the dynamics of oppression in our own practice as well as an opportunity to educate those who would suppress us, as a transformative strategy with systemic potential.

Introduction

Let me begin by reminding you of a favourite nursery rhyme:

‘There was a crooked “wo-man”

Who walked a crooked mile

She found a crooked sixpence upon a cooked style

She bought a crooked walking stick and met a crooked mouse

And they all lived together in a little crooked house.”

As Bob Dick so beautifully acknowledges, each of us engaged in action research and learning arrives in this delightfully crooked house from our own unique starting points. We walk our own crooked mile to arrive at our own crooked and highly wrought ideas of what we are doing. It is inevitable, even necessary, that the many crooked styles that we have to climb over are of our own making. They can also be responses to our audacious realisation of unique research and learning strategies in the facilitation of change.

And yet, as Yoland Wadsworth proposes: *“despite our differing styles and practices, there is a growing mass of us who have come, overall, to reject a certain mainstream approach to inquiry and truth-formation which belong to ‘the researcher’, and to embrace another where the researcher becomes an active facilitator of - and more or less co-researcher in - collective inquiry processes”*. (1999)

In other words, we recognise suppression and its place in knowledge construction and use. Moreover, we know our theoretical excellence and cultural, academic and political identity by indicators of the principle of commitment to addressing this issue in our practice.

Being invited to deliver this Keynote Speech on process in our practice is a wonderful opportunity to walk a crooked mile with you. I want to think about how we construe process in our practice given the impossibly eclectic nature of our discipline and particularly given that we find our definitions of what we do in collective rejection, as much as collective assertion. My reflections take the form of strongly worded, public, self-critical analysis of how even when we are so deeply engaged in this careful endeavour we can knowingly and unknowingly continue to play our part in the complex ecology of oppression. I am proposing that it is incumbent upon us to resist blinding ourselves with ideologies (be they feminist, emancipatory, systemic or academic) or theories of practice that *become* ideologies. Our engagement in participatory research must make safe and creative spaces for profound learning about our own part in suppression. We must do this if we are to challenge and facilitate change in the dynamics and

mechanics of this human tragedy and actually generate epistemologies of practice that are effective in this essential collective work.

Basic indicators of process in practice:

The first crooked signpost on this road notes that I will address the question: “how do I come to know process in my practice?” In answering this question I want to open the gateway to this Congress stream to ways of knowing that our crookedness is an indication of genuine self-determination in renewable, accountable contexts, and not deeply embedded – even fearfully unconscious self-deceit and corruption. My reflections take three familiar forms:

- a) shared self reflective practice
- b) a case study that describes how I interpret theories of practice in action processes
- c) contextualisation of my hybrid process in my reconciliation practices.

When I reflect on how I weave process into my facilitation practice, it is my sense of **purpose** that holds the threads together. Let me refer to Peter Reason’s discussion about purpose. He says:

“Purpose or intention cannot be unitary: rather - different purposes will nest with each other... Holding sense of purpose is quite different from establishing an objective or setting a target, both of which I associate with alienated consciousness and unconscious participation....” (1994: 51).

Purpose is a way of discovering processes in participatory research practice that is very different from reflecting on goal, objective or target. In my experience, and as Reason states - these managerial concepts of purpose alienate my practice from me, even if I have colluded in determining the goal. I see that goals, objectives and targets drive practice backwards into pre-existent outcomes. The process that emerges risks being one of alienation and servitude ensuring that research never generates new knowledge.

Purpose on the other hand enables the objectives of *existing* power to be included in a research initiative without colonising and disempowering the intentions of *emergent* power.

In his paper on **wholeness** in terms of dimensions of power, Smith (1999) describes how he strategically shapes interventions in organisational management around purpose rather than goal setting. He claims that purpose creates a multi-dimensional power field with corresponding “appreciative, influence and control relationships”. His idea of control is not control over others, but control by containing and channeling resources or providing parameters for their use in serving the shared purpose.

I have come to understand that my purpose is realised in liberating knowledge. I set knowledge free from dead theory - theory that props up deadly power that together attempt to turn life into a kind of post mortem of eternal loss. I see my purpose as creating time and place for knowledge to flower into living, unpredictable and uncontrollable energies. I have only recently discovered that my process for liberating knowledge is initiating and resourcing participatory communities of congruent, rather than shared, intent. I want to share with you that I have been doing this work for over ten years - but it is only in writing this paper that the eloquence of purpose became clear to me.

To understand what I mean by “community” I refer to Liz Kelley’s illuminating definitions (1996) where she proposes community as being *located potential for social activism*. In reference to community-based responses to family violence for example, she sees social activism located in many forms – communities of place, interest, identity, experience and circumstance [Edleson, 1996, 71]. Marjorie DeVault [1999] names communities of resistance in her reflections [44].

I realise my purpose through my practice of facilitating participatory research actions. In this sense I distinguish process from practice by seeing **process** as decision-making that transforms tangible and intangible resources into realising congruent intentions. The transformation is guided by **practices**, which I see as a person’s embodied interpretation of a particular discipline or more likely - a mix of disciplines. Purpose however remains generic until the contingency of **position** is dealt with. Position is critical to how purpose is realised. Position does not just happen, is not static or without character. DeVault (1999) reflects at length on the epistemology of position – and its significance as a starting point for thought. She considers how positions are “*relative, cross cut by other differences, often situational and contingent*” (p39). She agrees that anyone’s position, no matter what the experience, social construction or privilege is a good starting point for inquiry (Smith 1992). It is this wonderful truth about our own authority to inquire that explains why it is that we each come from such different places to co-habit in this crooked house. We all realised that our position was as good as anyone else’s for beginning and investing our lives in human inquiry. I hardly need to state that this view about position and the human right to inquiry is not widely shared outside of participatory research environments. The non-participatory world controls the right to inquiry by locating it in positions that are beyond the reach of anyone who is not prepared to live their lives as alienated servitude to secure the benefits of privilege.

But to make our positions more than a starting point for inquiry – to make our positions a legitimate space where research practices and realisations can be used in daily life, is an activist’s position. It is a position that requires courage and strategy to negotiate with those intentions that would actively inhibit knowledge being anything other than deadly theory sustaining privileged position and mass, rampant oppression. In other words our epistemology of participatory research practice is social activism and we see it as valid, legitimate research in so being. It is illegitimate, in our framework, to see research as simply maintaining the status quo of suppression – or the denial, self-interest, fear and exhaustion of ecologies that generate and sustain oppression.

Susan Weil beautifully expresses her experience of such positions when she says that she speaks “... *as a passionate participant in this drama, not a distant observer... The legitimisation of alternative and exploratory spaces for systemic learning must be established... and our opportunities to learn from such spaces must be enhanced by new forms of policy making and systemic inquiry.*” (Weil. S. 1999).

As a nomadic research facilitator, position is central to my ability to determine my ecological niche on the map of each new contract. My position is known by my recognised negotiated rights and responsibilities to practice participatory research [Goff, 1999).

To look back on the road that we have just walked together, I discover that I come to know the processes of activist participatory research in my practice as a facilitator of such research by reflecting on my *purpose* and how I use *position* to *realise congruent intentions*. To help me out I reflect on my research and learning experiences and those of many others, including the agency and lay participants whom I have the great pleasure of working with, and recognised authors who face similar struggles to my own. I make decisions about these reflections and act on them in legitimate, accountable research contexts and by so doing come to an understanding about what I mean by the terms “process and practice”, and how they pertain to my research and learning actions.

This way of approaching process in practice has derived from a continual dilemma in my work:

Overhead 1:

To what extent does the actor have a right to shape what they see as their environment and to what extent does the actor have a responsibility to be shaped by the environment especially in conditions of gross inequity, self-interest, exhaustion and denial?

I find that I am self-facilitating process in my practice by continually working through this dilemma in the planning, delivery and evaluation of my research facilitation practice, and that I am helped enormously to do this by the binary principles of “self-determination and inter-dependency” – which I will explore in more detail in the following section.

Case study:

We are now at a second bend in our crooked pathway. The signpost is reading – “case study that describes how I interpret theories of practice in action processes” – which suits me because at this point I want to illustrate what my thinking up to now means in practice. I am purposeful choosing a relatively un-dramatic scenario because I want to illustrate how suppression and entrenched oppression operates even in relatively comfortable and insignificant contexts.

I want to tell you a story, which I am sure, will be recognisable to many and which focuses on the action process of working through my strategic question with the aid of the binary principles.

As well my professional work I am also the secretary of my local progress association. In Australia a progress association is a group of residents from a geographically determined community who meet regularly to discuss local issues. If anyone is interested in really honing process in practice skills I could not recommend a better training program.

We are an island community and for years various groups have tried to secure funding for a small-scale marina to solve our mooring problems. But the efforts have failed because of liability and maintenance issues. The problem persists however, so the progress association organised a meeting to pick the issue up again.

About ten people came to the evening, which was not a bad level of participation. We sat down around the table in the local hall and began to talk. Within five minutes I observed that the conversation had taken the form of competing solutions, old neighbourhood disputes and male participation muting female voices. In my position as secretary I claimed the right of intervention and said: “how would we like to go about this discussion?”

There was no response. In effect, I noticed what was happening because I was sensitive to the binary principles of self-determination and interdependency being realised. In so doing, and ironically, I momentarily severed my inter-dependency with my community through practicing self-determination.

The participants responded by simply ignoring me and re-engaging their contest. I let things go for a few more minutes and intervened a second time. By so doing I requested recognition or re-engagement in the inter-connectedness of community according to my terms. I said: "There are many people not talking and we seem to be jumping to solutions very quickly, how would we like to go about this discussion?"

When I make interventions of this nature in a professional context, it feels awkward enough but in my position as research facilitator I have a recognised right to do just this and am held responsible for the consequences for not doing it. In the setting of my own neighbourhood community however my position is very different. Progress associations tend to see secretaries as women who type up the letters that the Presidents (usually male) dictate to them. They also tend to hold the view that process is irrelevant – actioned outcomes are all that matters.

At this point in the meeting, one of the women said: "what do you mean Susan?" Gratefully I said: "Well, rather than spending a lot of time going round in circles over old ground, we could consider the history of the issue so we can understand why we are here - or do something else." I was changing my position from one of silent servitude to a space for negotiation.

After a confused and very thick silence, the conversation resumed - as if I had never spoken. Then interestingly, the same woman who had asked me what I meant interrupted the conversation herself and said: "Actually, I think we should look at the history of the issue before we go any further. We have heard all this before." She came into the space for negotiation with me.

By this simple statement she also decided to break from her interdependent relationships with her neighbours to self-determine a breach of tacitly accepted protocol. She had made the same distinction as myself – which gave it a reality to others. She looked over at me, so I responded to her cue and checked how other people felt about it. They nodded enthusiastically. So we mapped the history of the issue and in so doing rebuilt our connectedness with each other through active participation. Instead of rushing to conclusions and walking out with one winner, lots of angry losers and thus no inter-dependency to support the outcome, we agreed to a shared process to take us to the next step.

Given that this is the way that I saw it, and that if you asked someone else in the meeting you could get a very different view, I am using this story to illustrate how process in practice can enable radical change. In inequitable, self-interested and exhausted communities of mutual denial – of which many if not all of us are members – we need process in our practice to restore resources and health. The story also illustrates how relatively easy it is to question this tacit reality and how, with collective action, it can be legitimately changed, little by little.

Re-contextualisation of theory:

We now come across a bridge in our walk. The bridge seeks to relate this story to other contexts as a precursor to approaching the context of reconciliation around recognition of the sovereign human and environmental rights of indigenous people in this country.

How does this story about process in community practice equate to process in business practice, for example? In their paper on the Learning Organisation Meme, Price and Shaw (1996) identify that in the early '90's there was what they poetically refer to as a "radiative bloom of innovation" of process in management practice in the business sector. They list the following display:

Overhead 2:

Process Review
Process Simplification
Process Management
Process Innovation
Process Improvement
Process Control
Process Transformation, and
Process Re-engineering.

Did this radiative bloom cross the genetic divide between business and other sectors? The authors go on to say that it found many fertile soils. They list the following ecological niches for process in business practice (Learning Organisation Meme, Price and Shaw, 1996)

Overhead 3:

IT
Technology services
Property and estates management
Architecture
Interior design

Catering and hotel services

Engineering

Construction

Image processing

Consulting

It is interesting to note that they don't list human rights and environmental rehabilitation. Two years after this paper was written however, the Australian Quality Council did include social and environmental impact in its generic principles for good business practice. For those who are interested, the principle reads:

"developing a level of community and environmental responsibility appropriate to the organisation's activities". (1998)

We know that since the 80's there has been extraordinary "radiative bloom" in environmental and social responsibility when it comes to process in our practice. Feminist research, action research and action learning have pollinated this bloom. However when I searched the Internet for references I found 35,800 English Language sites for process management and 32,399 for process engineering but absolutely none for process + practice + human rights, or + reconciliation (other than book keeping practices) and only a very few for + environmental rehabilitation. So why is there such a lack of recognition of process in the practices of human rights and environmental rehabilitation?

Well, it seems that our bridge only made it half way across the river. We cannot proceed into the domain of reconciliation until we understand this issue. I suggest that we get into a canoe and start rowing.

Over the last two years my company has been engaged by the Australian Federal Government to use PAR to develop a framework for self-facilitating continuous improvement in the community crime prevention sector.

Like many non-corporate environments, community crime prevention is a critically impoverished and under recognised sector. It has to deal with historically entrenched transgression of human rights resulting from and feeding into social pain on structural, holistic and individual levels.

This situation exists for many reasons, not the least of which is that there is virtually no agreement at the inter-jurisdictional policy level as to what a crime prevention process is, or what best practice crime prevention means. Ideological differences between state governments perpetuate irreconcilable differences, except for the fact that the fearful law and order stick is trotted out at every election in every state to try to force the hand of so called democracy - an example of how dead theory is used by deadly power.

What we found in the PAR project was that while the language of process and practice in the form of best practice was widely used to secure funding, there were only a few realisations of best practice theory in "best practice" crime prevention processes. Policy makers in funding sources used the rhetoric largely for accounting purposes - to ensure that Project Officers' work stayed within policy guidelines. The result was that the Project Officers were on a survival course with their clients - they masterfully used the language to sustain their funding sources and spent much of their paid time ticking boxes instead of preventing crime. Their practice was being commandeered away from social science into book keeping. Facilitating a process of transforming ethically based management language to community practice in a consistent, coherent and documented manner was simply beyond their means - until they began to use PAR that is. This was even more so for Indigenous crime prevention initiatives - who were making exceptional headway with even less resourcing and stability than everyone else.

An explanation then, of why process in reconciliation, human rights and environmental rehabilitation practices is so under-recognised is that funding sources do not see the political value of adequately resourcing practice either in financial or in research terms in these domains. There is, as they see it, more political value in keeping such practices on the poverty line. This is a good example of how relatively minor suppression - for example - what is considered to be legitimate practice by political stakeholders - rapidly escalates to full scale, systemic oppression which maintains ongoing injustice and inequity on racial, economic, gender and ageist grounds.

Let us land our canoe at this point, and take this piece of information into a new field. If what I observed is a distinction for others, how can we construe process in our practices of human rights and reconciliation to overcome this invisibility?

DeVault [71] describes how feminist researchers focus on what is unsaid and unseen to make it a topic that can be spoken. Much of the feminist researcher's task is to generate processes that make oppression itself evident, and once having done so, support the oppressed to be visible and heard. In a PAR environment feminist research method has to do more than make the oppressed voices heard, we have to

negotiate research processes in the participants' practices that also make the *consequences* of exposing the oppressed to the oppressor visible. This is more than ethics in research practice, it is so we understand the dynamic of change in the context of the issues and the ways in which the issues are construed. In this position we must also work through the popular notion that the oppressed and the oppressor are people other than ourselves. There are no "common", "ordinary" or "real" people other than ourselves – we are all part of the same human ecology. This is not about political correctness, it is about recognising the enormity of the state of collapse that our social and environmental systems are in, world wide, and how absurd it is to think that we are not all in the same wrecked boat – that for example, those of "lower socio-economic" status are somehow "other" to those running research consultancies or carrying out corporate leadership roles.

There is a new signpost here that is reading "schema".

If Price (1996) talks about "stuckness" – how we are stuck in patterns and traditions, which sustain what he refers to as "flocking patterns". He comments that those who step outside of these flocking patterns are marked as stranger first, then unseen, unheard and rejected, second (p2).

I find this a very recognisable place. When I use my position of facilitator as a space for negotiation and then a place for realising shared intent, I sometimes do this by asking questions about treasured or feared flocking patterns. For example, in a recent project, a group of ten co-researchers worked for a day to design action plans. They agreed to give them to me at the end of the day so I could write them up and redistribute them to each other, but at the last moment they hesitated. They wanted to dot a few "I"s and cross a few "Ts" before I did so. They promised me that they would fax the plans the next day. Three weeks later I am still waiting. I have rung them individually, sent e-mails, asked questions about issues, technology or phone messages not getting through. One person said to me: "Susan, you have to realise that this is just the way it is here. If you want us to put a piece of paper in a fax machine you have to give us two weeks notice ahead of the two week deadline."

My probing is not about meeting deadlines, it is about making the principles of self determination and inter-dependency visible to the participants in their own actions - or lack of them. In so doing I not only uncovered flocking patterns of oppression - fear of what their peers or upper management would say, I also exposed flocking patterns of compliance and powerlessness to resist this oppression.

In his paper entitled "Learning and Disasters: Normal Academic reactions to non- normal conditions" Keijo Räsänen states:

"If a human being is in a situation where she or he is totally powerless, has no possibilities for resistance and there is no escape, then she or he can only change the state of consciousness."

Räsänen refers to many texts on survival situations. One of them is Ervin Goffman's (1961) book "Asylums" which is an analysis of total institutions (eg. concentration camp, mental hospital, prison, monastery/convent and army). Goffman identifies typical responses to totalitarianism as:

Overhead 4:

- Adaptation
- Withdrawal
- Resistance
- Colonisation
- Conversion

This schema is very recognisable to me – as an everyday reality – not just as an example of how people respond to so-called totalitarian institutions. I suggest to you that this state of powerlessness not only exists in public institutions as Räsänen so boldly stated, but also in corporations, small businesses, families and community networks - and even ourselves.

In my current PAR project, which is researching community development responses to family violence we (survivors, agencies and myself) are identifying that all of our responses - myself as facilitator, agency workers *and* community network member responses to those who seek help to cope with family violence can be self-interested, socially fragmented, depersonalised and disassociated just as much as they can they can be empowering. It is important to note that they can be BOTH. Participatory action research, because it works with a great variety of positions, voices and purposes can create prepositional knowledge to explore this "roundedness" which in other research forms would be seen as contradictory or inconsistent.

As Räsänen's paper claims, high levels of oppression cause depersonalisation and disassociation and are the precursors to colonisation and conversion to totalitarianism.

Given our current fascination with consciousness raising practices, constructivism and the liberating possibilities of information technology, could we even see these latest emancipatory hopes in the same

light as Räsänen's claim that in situations of no escape, all we can do is change our state of consciousness so we become disassociated from a reality that we are unable to be included in? In critiquing my process in my practice I am confronting the appalling possibility that my passion for emancipatory processes is not making that, which is invisible, visible. It is very possible that I am working emancipatory practices to make the painfully visible invisible to our new paradigm, technologically sophisticated and transcendent eyes. I am reminded of a quotation that my husband often uses, which comes from Russia where he spent some of his childhood. He says how the Russian people often say - "*you can take away my food, my freedom and even my life - but you cannot take away my pain.*" Perhaps I am making this final transgression.

Transforming suppression – process in our participatory action research practice:

To conclude my presentation, I want to walk with you through this last painful place - the place of reconciliation around the invisible horror of the continuing genocide of indigenous people in this country. I say continuing, because my friend, Tex Skuthorpe, tells me that in 1965 there were about 600,000 of his people left in Australia, and now there are less than 300,000.

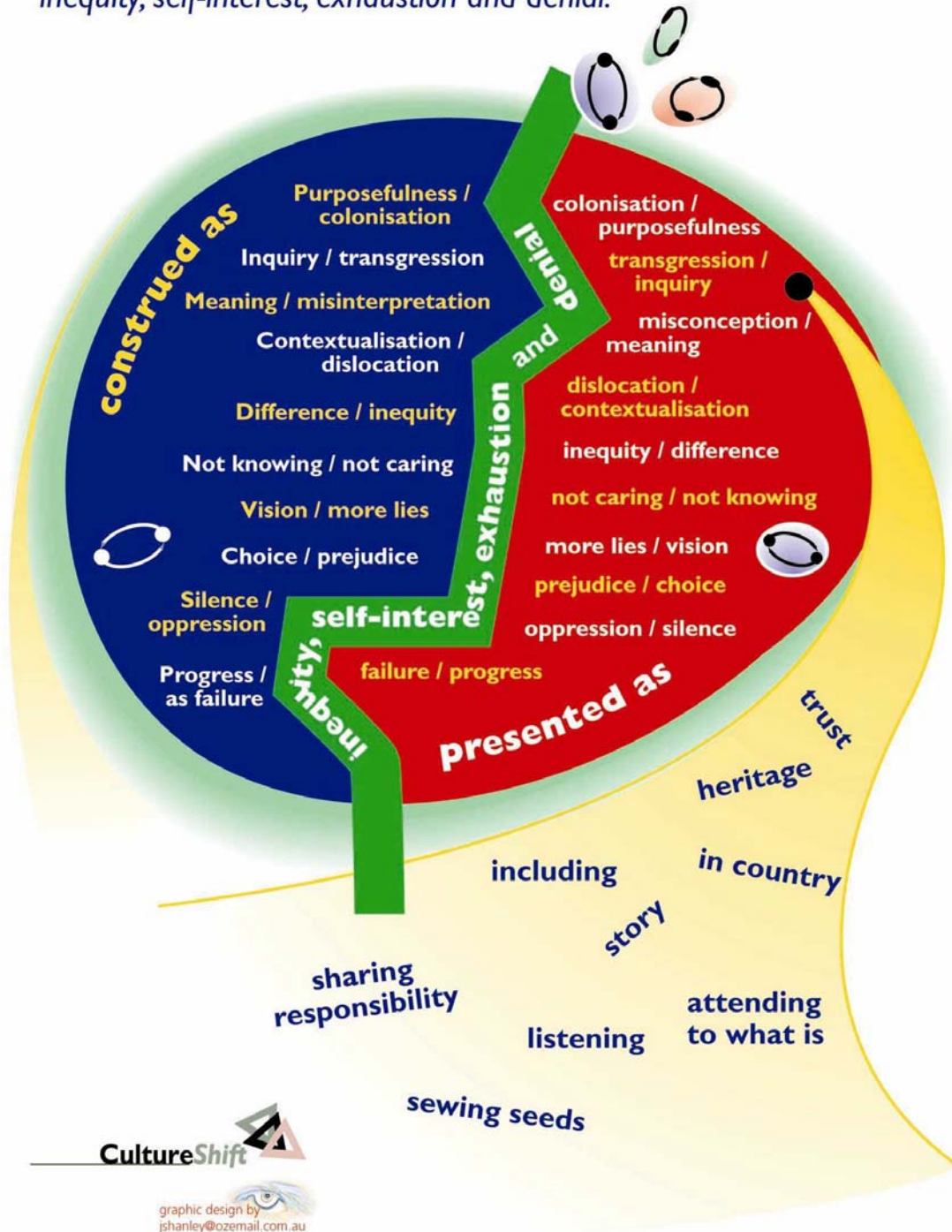
I have spent the last two years working in an informal association with the New South Wales Council for Reconciliation to establish a PAR initiative in the reconciliation arena. I have been completely unsuccessful. We approached white and black tertiary education bodies, government workers, religious groups and leaders, consultants, community groups and individuals. We engaged in one-off meetings and sustained sessions over several months. Some sessions were facilitated and some were informal. We wrote, spoke, interacted, listened, dreamed, learned, taught and cried.

Looking back and most particularly in the light of my current conversations with black friends and colleagues what I experienced and can now see was this:

See Overhead 10

Overhead 10

4th order of change: reconciliation in cultures of inequity, self-interest, exhaustion and denial:



What I am trying to show you is how my PAR practice with all its binary principles, its so called proven track record, passion and compassion was perceived by individual Aboriginal colleagues as nothing more than continued colonisation and all its consequences. While I came to them with wisdom and care, they could not see it. While I continue to deny on a superficial level that what they saw was not what I intended or even what would have eventuated, what they did was show me to myself through *their* eyes. I am proposing that it is not until we can see ourselves in this way that we can work with the depth of self-

critical analysis necessary to make oppression visible and to manage the consequences (in personal, structural, systemic, paradigmatic and ecological dimensions) of so doing. This is needed even when the current action is not suppressive, but can in fact mask or hide the systemic oppression by not being suppressive. I am proposing that rather than continually heading for emancipatory, elitist consciousness, that the participatory research community needs to stop, review our work from the perspective of how we are seen by those who we say we serve, and take responsibility for our place in maintaining the social order that makes it possible for us to keep referring to “them” - “the ordinary or common people”. Even though I learned to let go of what I thought I could offer, and to let go of what I thought I could offer once I had let go of it, deep in that empty, emergent space that I was left with I was still unable to do anything else but to make the visible pain of Indigenous Australians *invisible* - not just to me, but to them as well.

Instead of approaching this idea of reconciliation from a position of collective strategic effort, I am finding that my life path is leading into sometimes painful but always rewarding relationships with individual Aborigines. They are noticeable by their race to me, because I have to cross such vast spaces of social fragmentation and alienation to be “with” them - and they have to do the same to be “with” their white friend.

They are teaching me how to keep quiet when we are together (which is very difficult to do when you see yourself as a feminist researcher), to listen to the stories and understand their maps. They are teaching me not to translate their symbols into my context – in the sparse landscape of such dwindling numbers their totems of identity and place are far too precious for such mishandling. They are walking with me through the landscape and teaching me about indigenous ways and meanings of spirit. They are speaking with me about their pain and disclosing the complexities of how Indigenous leadership in a white world unfolds. They are claiming mutual responsibility with me for the current situation. They welcome my efforts to include them in my work, but make choices about the appropriateness of this act – sometimes it is right for them sometimes it is not, and I have to trust in their decisions. Most importantly they are teaching me that we cannot expect to ever see the fruits of our labours. We sow seed that we are unlikely to see bloom in our lifetime – “radiatively” or in any other way.

In response to my strategic question regarding rights and responsibilities to shape and be shaped by environment, in the situation of reconciliation I am learning to let my environment shape me entirely. Interestingly this realisation came out of the Peace workshop that I held on Saturday. The Indigenous ways of being that Elder Ted told us about the Kulin people in the Ballarat area include self-determination AND *environment* determination - because of the harshness of this landscape and its sacredness. I cannot facilitate PAR with others, but I can with myself - I have a right and responsibility to change my internal environment. I can use it to make space for the ignorance and fear that sustains exhaustion, inequity, self-interest and denial in *my* life and make it visible to myself in the company of indigenous people whom I know. I know that this realisation is nothing new to you, but it is new to me. Perhaps what is new to all of us is that this way of learning can be used not only in emancipatory environments that address participant oppression by “others”, but also in those in which we are knowingly and unknowingly the dominant force. This domination can exist through our own personal ignorance and also, simply by the colour of our skin, the accent with which we speak or even the practices that we use with all the best intentions. These indicators can represent domination to others no matter what we say and do. What we must not forget is that in other circumstances, they indicate our position to be dominated, suppressed and oppressed by *others*. With this awareness in place, we can transform suppression systemically with those who see themselves and us as active players in this repressive human drama.

My purpose is to find a way forward that somehow and at the very deepest level, restores respect and love within and between us in the midst of continued, visible and traumatically painful oppression. I am learning to feel Country under my feet and I long for its pull. I am learning to understand time as heritage and place as responsibility. I am seeing a place being made for me - a place of friendship with those who would trust me and forgive me for my ignorance. I am learning to relish a silence that is neither oppression nor ignorance – but a space of negotiating with myself a different process in the simple practice of willingness to be shaped by those whose expertise is surviving oppression.

Thankyou

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