

ARTICLE

Presentational form in first person research

Off-line collaborative reflection using art

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ABSTRACT

Rigorous reflection for the purposes of learning about and changing our own behavior as the foundation of an organizational change process (in the action science tradition) can include representing our tacit knowing with an artistic form and then applying explicit analytic techniques to the artistic form to generate actionable explicit knowing. This process is illustrated with an example of a collaborative off-line reflection process based on a presentational (or artistic) representation in which I learned in what ways and in which conditions I cooperate with and re-enforce power systems rather than speaking to or fighting the power. This process suggests: 1) the need for first person research in order to act as a third person change agent; 2) the need for second person research in order to do first person research; 3) the need to use multiple forms of representation and; 4) the advantages of presentational forms.

KEY WORDS

- presentational form
- power
- reflective practice
- theater

In the preface to the *Handbook of Action Research*, Reason and Bradbury suggest first person research:

address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act with awareness and to choose carefully and to assess effects in the outside world while acting. First person research practice brings inquiry into more and more of our moments of action – not as outside researchers but in the whole range of everyday activities. (2001a, p. xxvi)

The term first person alludes to grammar and indeed first person research is ‘I’ research. However, second person research is not strictly ‘you’ research, but rather research that works from a sense of you as being in relationship to me, so it is really ‘us’ research. Third person research reaches out to a wider world, to ‘him’ and ‘her’. Although the nomenclature ‘first person, second person, third person’ research (Torbert, 1998) is new to the field of management, ideas of self knowledge have existed in various traditions for thousands of years – for example: the Buddha’s long inquiry into the nature of human suffering, his understanding of the nature of the human mind and the meditative inquiry disciplines that arose from this; ancient first-person processes in the disciplines of Tai Chi and other martial arts; and in the teachings of Sufis, Meister Eckhart, Gurdjieff, and other mystical teachers.

In modern management theory, this first person research is best developed in the organizational change and development literature that suggests that transformational organizational change must include changing yourself. From Argyris’s ‘action science’ (Argyris, 1990, 1999; Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985) to Torbert’s ‘action inquiry’ (Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Torbert, 1991) to Quinn’s ‘advanced change theory’ (Quinn, 2000; Quinn, Spreitzer & Brown, 2000), there is a clear call to focus on our own behaviors, our own practices, our own action in the world. The underlying logic is that if we do not first look at our own behavior when we try to change others, then those others will see us as hypocrites as we ask/push/direct them to change but remain unwilling to change ourselves. Behind this there is also the idea that we are part of a social system and that by changing one part of the system – our own behavior – the rest of the system will adjust and change in response. In short, the idea is as Gandhi said, ‘be the change that you wish to see in the world’.

But how do we do this? How do we discover when, where and in what ways we are being the thing that we want changed and then how do we change our own behavior so that we are being the change we want to see in the world? In this article I present a method for bringing the tacit knowledge and effect of an experience into awareness and using that awareness to create explicit knowledge. I illustrate the method with a specific example of how I learned in what ways and in which conditions I co-operate with and re-enforce power systems rather than speaking to or fighting the power (Cuomo, 2000), which is one of the changes in

the world that I claim I would like to be. Based in this learning I may be more able to speak to power in the future – which I think is a key ability for any action researcher. The method consists of a collaborative off-line reflection process (Rudolph, Taylor & Foldy, 2001) that was based on a presentational (or artistic) representation of my experience. I will first offer a theoretical argument for using presentational forms and then use an example to discuss the process of applying an intellectual method to an artistic form, noting issues of form of representation and epistemology along the way.

Knowing and representation in first person inquiry

Aygris and colleagues (Argyris et al., 1985; Argyris & Schon, 1974) created the two-column case as a representation of our own experience for the purposes of inquiry and it has become the de facto standard within the action science world for representing such events. In the two-column case, a problematic moment is represented with the actual (or reconstructed) dialogue from the moment in one column and what the case-writer was thinking and feeling during the dialogue in the other column. As useful as the two-column case is (and I do find it very useful), it is important to recognize it as a very cognitive, intellectual representation of the moment. In order to consider more deeply the implications of working with this method, as well as the alternatives to it, I will review some thinking on epistemology and representation and apply them to the two-column case.

Heron and Reason (2001) explicitly consider different ways of knowing in inquiry. In their extended epistemology they define four ways of knowing, starting with our direct *experience*, then moving on to the representation of our knowing using *presentational* or aesthetic forms such as storytelling or dance, and then representing our knowing through *propositional* knowing such as ideas and theories, and finally *pragmatic* knowing that is expressed in action. The two middle ways of knowing are about how we represent our knowing. There are presentational/aesthetic forms of representation and discursive/propositional forms, which are fundamentally different. For example, presentational forms represent wholes, while discursive forms represent parts; presentational forms represent tacit knowledge, while discursive forms represent explicit knowledge (Langer, 1942). In these terms, the two-column case is somewhere on a continuum of representation that is somewhat presentational, to the degree that the case is told using artistic, literary methods such as metaphors, and somewhat propositional, to the degree that the case writer has analytically, intellectually represented their experience in terms of theories and intellectual categorizations, such as names of emotions. In a sense the case is presentational in that it ‘shows’ us what was happening and propositional in that it ‘tells’ us what happened. This distinction between forms of representation may seem overly laborious, but it is

at the heart of the use of artistic/expressive/presentational forms in first person research.

It is helpful to recognize that this extended epistemology was conceptualized in response to the tendency in modern times to privilege intellectual/propositional knowledge and largely ignore other ways of knowing. The focus on the primacy of intellectual knowledge finds a firm beginning in the 17th century and the enlightenment finding its voice in Descartes' famous dictum '*cogito ergo sum*'. Baumgarten (1936[1750]) responded to this by suggesting that in addition to logic, the study of intellectual knowledge, there should also be acknowledgement of aesthetics, the study of sensory knowledge. In more recent times, Polanyi (1958 (reprinted in 1978)) talked about things we know, but cannot say that we know. He called this tacit knowledge and contrasted it with explicit knowledge. Polanyi suggested that tacit knowledge cannot always be translated into explicit knowledge. Working in these same traditions, Langer (1942) theorized that presentational or artistic forms represented this tacit, sensory knowledge, while discursive or propositional forms represented explicit, intellectual knowledge. Of course, like most analytic categorizations, our actual knowing tends to be a messy combination of and movement between these different ways of knowing. However, this distinction provides a useful way of thinking about how we know and how we represent that knowing.

The major difficulty with not explicitly addressing different ways of knowing is that all knowing gets collapsed into intellectual, propositional knowledge. For example, with the two-column case format, the felt meaning of the moment is primarily represented in the written version of the case writer's thoughts and feelings. This means that the case writer has taken his or her felt experience and translated it into words such as 'I am so angry'. The feeling has been reduced to an intellectual expression of the feeling, and stripped of the felt meaning. Only the feelings that the case writer is conscious of and can directly articulate get captured. The richness, the textures, the subconscious, the contradictions, the messiness of the felt meaning have been removed and neatly packaged as 'angry'. Some case writers are more expressive and the experience is represented more richly as 'I'm sooooo angry I could just scream!!!' And if the case writer is a talented, even gifted, artistic writer, the case may be poetry that captures the richness of the felt experience. In this instance the two-column case/poem is a presentational form. As I said before, most writing has both presentational and propositional aspects, however, western society and the tradition of the enlightenment continually pushes us towards the propositional end of the continuum, it pushes us towards clarity, away from ambiguity, towards precise (and singular) meaning.

The use of presentational forms in first person research is the basis of the field of art therapy (Rubin, 2001). Art therapy can be roughly divided into two approaches (Malchiodi, 1998). The first focuses on the art-making process as

healing and looks at the art product, the presentational form that is produced, as simply a reminder of that process. In this approach the primary value is in the making of the art. In the second approach the primary value is in the art that is produced as a representation of the artist's inner experience. It is the tradition of this second approach that I draw on and have been arguing for here. That is not to say that I don't find the art-making process to be healing. In my own practice as a playwright it has been my tendency to write plays about things in my own life and practices that have bothered me in some way (Taylor, 2000) and I have found the writing process to be healing. But as a researcher I am interested in more than healing myself, I am interested in learning how I might learn from my experience (and by implication how others might learn from their experience) so that I might act differently in similar situations in the future. Art therapy draws on a variety of approaches for working with and making sense of the presentational form such as: Jungian therapy (Edwards, 2001); gestalt therapy (Rhyne, 2001); humanistic therapy (Garai, 2001); and behavioral therapy (Roth, 2001). I draw on an analytic tool/method from the action science (Argyris et al., 1985; Argyris & Schon, 1974); action inquiry (Fisher, Rooke & Torbert, 2001; Torbert, 1991) tradition; and the learning pathways grid (Rudolph et al., 2001).

Therefore, to summarize – and run the danger of oversimplifying as I attempt to translate all of this into a set of clear propositional statements – there are two fundamentally different types of knowing: embodied/tacit knowing and explicit/intellectual knowing. We can represent tacit knowing with presentational/artistic/expressive forms and we can represent explicit knowing with discursive/propositional forms. Rigorous reflection for the purposes of learning about and changing our own behavior as the foundation of an organizational change process (in the action science tradition) includes representing our experience/knowing in the largely propositional/discursive form of the two-column case. This leaves out the bulk of the tacit knowing. We can represent this tacit knowing with an artistic form and then use explicit analytic techniques on the artistic form to generate actionable (pragmatic in Heron and Reason's terms) explicit knowing. I will now give an example of this process.

An ugly story, thrice told

One starting place for first person research is to reflect on moments in which you felt stuck, frustrated, sad, angry, or had unsatisfactory outcomes. These should be moments that have a sense of familiarity about them, a sense that they represent a familiar dynamic in which you repeatedly find yourself, a sense that they represent an aspect of a 'behavioral footprint' (thus making the time invested in analysing and reflecting on a brief moment in time worthwhile). My practice for several years has been to reflect with an ongoing inquiry group on these sorts of moments.

The group members provide insights and understandings of my behavior to which I am otherwise blind (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Typically, I would write a two-column case to represent the moment. However, in the reflection process I am describing here, I used an artistic representation of the moment instead – a scene from a play.

The moment I explored had happened ten years before and was notable because a fair amount of pondering over it hadn't resolved my feelings of unease about it. I have used this moment in a conference presentation to illustrate the point that an action can have very positive instrumental outcomes while having very negative aesthetic outcomes and that while aesthetics do not have to be considered in support of instrumental goals (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997), aesthetics are worthy of consideration for their own sake (this point has been argued in a variety of ways, see Gagliardi, 1996; Guillet de Monthoux, 2000; Kuhn, 1996; Ramirez, 1996; Strati, 1990, 1996).

What follows is the way I tell the story in a typical academic setting. I attempt to tell a good story, but I am also attempting to convey 'data'. That is to say, I want it to sound like an 'objective description' of the event, but I also want it to convey subtly something of what I felt. It is a form (like most forms of representation) that has elements of both presentational and propositional forms. It is propositional in the sense that I say, these are the facts and these are some conclusions I draw from the facts. It is presentational in the sense that it communicates a holistic felt meaning (Courtney, 1995) to the audience.

I was employed in the consulting services group of a small, privately held, software firm that sold mainframe-based project management software. I shall refer to the firm with a pseudonym, PMS,¹ and all of the people involved other than myself will be given pseudonyms as well. None of them have been consulted about this account.

After about two years working there, I had been made head of the consulting services group and had successfully grown a staff of senior consultants. PMS was experiencing cash flow problems. I was called into the CEO's office. The VP of Support (my boss) was sitting there with the CEO. They talked about the cash flow problems and how they had to lay off someone from each group. Then they told me that I was the one from my group and that I should gather up my possessions and leave before the firm-wide meeting that would be held in about an hour. It was ugly.

Interestingly enough, if I had been asked who should be laid off in my group, I would have volunteered to be the one. I had been going to school for my Masters degree on a part time basis and I had been considering going full time. Being laid off gave me the opportunity to do that. The timing was good as it wasn't too late to register for the spring semester that was due to start the next month in January. From an instrumental perspective, being laid off was great. But aesthetically, the way it was done was just plain ugly. 'We have to let you go. Clear out your office and be gone by 11'. It was a completely disconnecting experience.

I tell the story in this way in academic settings some ten years after the actual event and I tell it here as a way of introducing the event to the reader and as part of my continuing reflection on the presentational to propositional continuum of form. Ten years earlier, my first way of telling the story was in a purely presentational form. Within a month of being laid off, I started writing a play that was inspired by the experience. The first scene that I wrote was the scene in which the main character gets laid off. It was written straight from my sensory, tacit knowledge of the event. That is to say, I did not try to translate my experience into intellectual propositional knowledge, but rather just let the writing come out as it would. I later titled the play 'Soft Targets' and the following is the lay-off scene.

(Boss enters the office. Boss is seated at the desk. Boss picks up an envelope and opens it. Boss pulls out a letter and reads it. Joe enters his boss's office. Boss motions for Joe to sit down. Joe sits down. Note: Boss is saying what Joe is hearing.)

BOSS: Due to economic conditions we are forced to implement a reduction in our work force, implement a reduction in our work force, reduction in our work force, work force. Terminated. Terminated. Terminated.

(Joe stands and looks at Boss, and takes off his tie, jacket, and pants.)

BOSS: Economic conditions forced to inform you that inform you that you are one are one of the individuals individuals affected affected. We are very appreciative of your efforts on B.A.'s² behalf, and we wish you well during this difficult time.

(Boss stands and walks around the desk to Joe. Boss slaps Joe in the face.)

BOSS: We regret to inform your employment with B.A. Labs is terminated. We are very appreciative of your efforts on B.A.'s behalf, and we wish you well during this difficult time, well during this difficult time, well during this difficult time.

(Joe sits down and buries his face in his hands. Boss jerks Joe upright so that he is forced to pay attention.)

BOSS: Due to economic implement reduction work force. We regret inform individuals effective effective today. Employment employment employment. Difficult difficult difficult time.

(Joe stands and tries to slap Boss. Boss blocks the slap and knees Joe in the groin. Joe falls to the floor in agony.)

BOSS: Effective today, we wish you well.

(Joe tries to stand and Boss steps on Joe, pinning him to the floor.)

BOSS: Please be advised that B.A. Labs considers all customer lists, prospect lists, price lists, lists, lists, lists confidential and proprietary information proprietary information and that B.A. Labs will enforce will enforce will enforce all

rights to maintain that confidentiality to the full extent of the law. Full extent of the law. Full extent of the law.

(Boss releases Joe and helps him up into the chair again. Joe tries to regain his composure.)

BOSS: B.A. Labs considers all confidential and proprietary information to the full extent of the law.

(Boss picks up Joe's clothes and throws them into Joe's face. Joe lets the clothes hit him and fall where they may. Boss picks up the clothes again and throws them at Joe's face again. Joe dodges the clothes.)

BOSS: Again, thank you very much for your efforts your efforts on behalf of B.A. Labs. We are very sorry that this action this action this action has to be taken, and we wish you good luck in your future future future endeavors.

(Boss picks up Joe's clothes, and goes through the pockets. Boss finds a small item of interest, takes it and then hands the clothes to Joe. Joe takes them, and holds on to them.)

BOSS: Your efforts on behalf of. Very sorry. This action. Taken. Taken. Future endeavors.

(Boss pulls Joe out of the chair and walks him towards the door. Boss stops and shakes Joe's hand.)

BOSS: Very much. Very much. Good. Good, good.

(Boss turns Joe to the door and pushes him out with great force. Boss returns to the desk and sits down. Boss picks up another envelope, opens it and looks at the letter inside. Boss exits.)

As you can see, the experience came out in a somewhat expressionistic way. This is a very different form than the classic two-column case; nonetheless, my study group³ did an intellectual analysis of the moment using the learning pathways grid (Rudolph et al., 2001). The grid is based on a simple model that people have various frames (which are broadly defined to include mental models, assumptions of all sorts, theories-in-use, espoused theories, and so on) that lead them to act in certain ways that in turn produce certain outcomes. The analysis identifies the actual outcomes in the situation, the actual actions that were taken that led to the outcomes, and the salient actual frames that led to those actions. The analysis also identifies a set of frames, actions and outcomes that might have produced more desirable results in the situation. The completed learning pathways grid from the analysis session is shown in Figure 1. The process for working through the grid is described in Rudolph et al. (2001) and it is not my intent to reiterate that process, nor discuss all of the results of that process for this example. Rather, I will focus on some of the unique difficulties and opportunities that came from

	Frames	Actions	Outcomes
Actual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am the right person to be laid off • I should be part of the decision making process • Decision making process is illegitimate • I'd be ashamed if something horrible happened to me • Negative feelings shouldn't be expressed (like shame and anger) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay silent • Be pleasant • When attacked, collude with the attackers • Leave peacefully, as told • Just take it • Pretend violence isn't happening to me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was gutted • I was beaten, stripped • I was defrocked • I was delegitimized • I felt disconnected • I felt betrayed
Desired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No matter what the external results are, I want to have a feeling of self respect based on how I acted • Self respect is being true to my own emotional experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask why I wasn't consulted • Say what I feel • Publicly own my emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be treated as member of the management team • Be treated as a co-creator of the situation • Have my ideas/views be part of the process • Feel okay about my actions

Figure 1

working with a presentational form and illustrate those with details from the analysis session.

Applying an intellectual tool like the learning pathways grid to a presentational form requires that the presentational knowing be translated into propositional knowing. It is translation in the sense that there are words in one language that do not exist in the other language, but to translate requires finding some way of expressing those words that don't exist in the language to which it is being translated. One of the potential difficulties with translating from presentational form into propositional form is in the opposite ways that the two forms generalize meaning. For artistic forms, meaning is subjective and connected to each person's own particular experience, thus there is a *divergent* generalizability – good art means different things to different people. Propositional forms try to achieve *convergent* generalizability where the same meaning is produced for everyone. The translation means moving from the rich, multifaceted meaning of the presentational form to the clarity and precision of the propositional form.

But this begs the question, clarity and precision about which facet of the presentational form, which subjective meaning? Our study group's methods for doing the learning pathways grid proved useful here. Our cardinal rule is that the analysis is being done to help the case writer, so as the various squares in the grid are filled out, we always inquire with the case writer as to whether the entry seems right for them. That is to say, we recognize that all interpretation requires making inferences (Argyris et al., 1985) and in our analysis we try to own our own process of inference making and test our inferences with the case writer. For example, when filling in the actual outcomes square of the grid, Jenny said, 'If I were to draw on Joe's experience in the play: gutted, kicked in the stomach, slapped, stepped on, left halfway naked. Did you feel exposed?'²⁴ In the first utterance she is being clear about what data she is drawing on, in the second she is testing a slightly higher level of inference when she asks if I felt exposed. Within this test is the recognition that the inference that I felt exposed is based on how Jenny is constructing the situation and comes from Jenny's experiences and frames and may not reflect how the case writer is constructing the situation. The purpose of the analysis is to determine how the case writer is constructing and making meaning of the situation so that the case writer may be able to change how they are constructing similar situations in the future and thus act differently. I felt that exposed wasn't quite right and after some discussion we arrived at the description that I felt defrocked. Thus of all the possible meanings and interpretations that could have been made from the presentational form, we focused on those that felt right for the me, the case writer, those that resonated with me, those that connected with me.

I noticed also that the presentational form pushed (or perhaps allowed) us to use more expressive language than was our norm, such as 'gutted' and 'left halfway naked'. Language runs the continuum from presentational forms such as poetry to propositional forms such as philosophic argument and our general use of it falls somewhere on that continuum. There is a tendency, especially for very analytic, academically trained people such as my study group, to try and be precise with our language (it is what we have been trained to do) – to push to the propositional end of the continuum with our language. Working with a presentational form helped us keep more of the presentational/expressive elements of language, which allows us to keep more of the feeling in our analysis, or to put it another way, it keeps us better connected to the actual experiential knowing.

The connection to the actual experiential knowing about the moment is important because it helps us see the core issues in the situation. These core issues are generally not about the instrumental results of the situation, but are about how we are acting with each other. These issues are often buried deeply in our subconscious. Bringing them into the intellectual analysis requires someone to articulate them, whether that is the case writer or those helping in the analysis. In this case, the deeper issue was about how I could respect myself when I allowed

myself to be treated in a way that left me feeling beaten up, stripped, defrocked, and delegitimized in this way? How could I speak to – rather than collude with – the power? Those issues would not have been obvious in a two-column case that provided the actual dialogue and what I could recount of my feelings because I was not consciously aware that that was a core issue. The scene from the play served to direct us to the issue and provided concrete data that we could draw on to illustrate our inferences while we worked to fill out the grid.

It is all too easy to miss the emotional core dynamics of a situation when doing intellectual analysis. There is often little direct data, such as dialogue, or even the thoughts and feelings of the two-column case to draw on. It requires following hunches, honoring our intuition, and being willing to struggle with the difficult translation process from tacit to explicit knowledge. Presentational form helps in this by providing external data and representation of the tacit knowledge of the case writer. As Langer says, ‘The primary function of art is to objectify experience so that we can contemplate and understand it’ (1962, p. 90). It provides an excellent base for intellectual analysis, it provides the traction that allows the intellectual analysis to take hold.

The core dynamic in this moment was the way in which I colluded with the voice of power and allowed (even helped) it to strip me of my dignity. The scene still bothered me ten years later because I was still mad at myself for allowing (and helping)⁵ this to happen. The learning pathways grid analysis process (see Rudolph et al., 2001 for a fuller description) brought salient frames to the surface, such as ‘I’d be ashamed if something horrible happened to me’, and ‘negative feelings shouldn’t be expressed’. I wasn’t conscious of either of these frames prior to the analysis and they provide a logical, rational explanation of why I acted in the way that I did. That is, those frames explain why I ignored the violence and colluded with my attackers.

It may not be surprising that I fell back on those deeply established frames when faced with a totally unexpected attack of this nature. It should not be surprising that the deeply embedded frames I held work to maintain the status quo and support the use of power while covering up the fact that power is being used. These are the sorts of frames that a social system creates and maintains in order to maintain itself and I was firmly embedded within the social system. It is not surprising, but it does show how difficult it may be for people to challenge the social system, for people to speak to the power. With this analysis, I now recognize the particular frames I hold which prevent me from speaking to power. The frames ‘negative feelings shouldn’t be expressed’ and ‘I’d be ashamed if something horrible happened to me’ now seem somewhat ridiculous and patently untrue. Now that they have been dragged out into the cold light of day I am more likely to recognize the moments I am acting from them and to be able to act differently in those situations. I now recognize that the cost of acting from those frames is a loss of my own dignity and integrity.

Although others may have similar frames, my aim is not to analyse why I was unable to speak to power, but rather to illustrate the process and practice of using presentational form in first person inquiry. The aim of this practice is to be able to act differently when faced with a similar situation – to come closer to being the change I wish to see in the world. I am pleased to say that I have been better (but there is still plenty of progress to be made) at speaking to power since doing this analysis. I have no heroic stories to tell, but in small ways (Marshall, 1999) in my day-to-day existence, I have been aware that I am angry when power is unilaterally exercised against me and because of this work I understand what is taking place when that happens. This has been illustrated in situations such as dealing with my mortgage company and the movers as we moved back to the US, and in one case interacting with a very rude (my framing of the situation which I recognize as saying more about me than it does about him) colleague at the Academy of Management meetings. In such instances, I have been able to take that awareness and make a choice about whether and how to speak to power. I have experimented with speaking strongly to the power (with the mortgage company and the movers) and with not responding (with the rude colleague) at all. The instrumental results have been mixed; however, I have managed to maintain a sense that I have protected my own sense of self and dignity. Protecting my own sense of self and dignity allows me to fully act from that sense of self (Quinn, 2000) in my roles as a teacher and change agent working within established organizations (Meyerson, 2001).

Questions of quality

In general, the subjective nature of first person research, in particular first person research that is based in artistic forms, seems to beg questions of validity and legitimacy. Reason and Bradbury (2001b) suggest five areas of questions that can be used to assess the quality of action research: relational practice; outcome and practice; plural ways of knowing; significance; and emergence and enduring consequence. I will visit each of these in turn to suggest in what ways this method can claim to be of quality.

Relational practice considers the quality of the interactions and the political forms that are created to sustain the inquiry. For this work, the political form that sustains the inquiry is the study group and the primary interactions occur within that group. I think that the best evidence of the quality of the form and interactions is the longevity of the study group, which has been in existence since 1996. I continued to attend the Boston area meetings via phone while I lived in England for two years, which I take as a sign of the level of commitment and the value that I and the other members of the group place on it. Indeed, without quality relationships within the study group I doubt that this work could exist.

The question of outcome and practice is both a simple and difficult one. I believe that the continued practice of this sort of off-line reflection (some using presentational form, some using more conventional two-column cases) has made a tremendous difference in my life and my practice. I cannot show much in the way of evidence, other than to point back to the examples I offered at the end of the last section. Here the outcomes are not large-scale instrumental changes, but rather small, moment-by-moment practices in everyday activities.

The plural ways of knowing questions are the easiest to address as this method is firmly based in bringing together presentational knowledge and propositional knowledge. Furthermore, it is based in what Bradbury and Reason (2001) refer to as the methodological appropriateness of the Rudolph et al. (2001) learning pathways grid method, which is one of their answers to the question of plural ways of knowing. The question of significance asks us to look at the values that are enacted in this research. At its core is a belief in the value of self-development through self-knowledge and discovery. There is also a belief that changing the world must start with first changing ourselves.

Finally I come to the questions of emergence and enduring consequence. The analysis has a very emergent feel while you are doing it. That is to say, I had no idea from the story or the play that this was about speaking to power and being abused by someone with power over me. The enduring consequence of this work is reflected in the longevity of the study group and the way this work has affected my life over the years. Again, I find it impossible to show you compelling evidence of differences in my practice (and on some days I don't see much difference myself), but I do believe this work has had a profound influence on me.

In short, the question of quality for this method is a question of practice. Off-line reflection in all of its forms should be seen as a practice, a discipline that informs and affects your day-to-day practice in the world, your moment-by-moment actions and interactions. The quality comes from regular practice, not just a one-time analysis, it comes from a sustaining and sustained community (in this case my study group).

Implications / lessons learned

I now turn to the implications for theory and practice. Rather than attempting to separate theory from practice (an approach that seems inappropriate within an action research tradition), I will consider four implications that cross theory and practice: 1) the need for first person research in order to act as a third person change agent; 2) the need for second person research in order to do first person research; 3) the need to use multiple forms of representation and; 4) the advantages of presentational forms. These implications might also be thought of as lessons I have learned from this process of off-line collaborative reflection using art.

Within the context of action research, I see being a change agent as an embodiment of third person research, that is, it is an attempt to reach out and influence ‘him’ and ‘her’. It seems clear to me that without first person research into this issue I would continue to act from the deeply held and unconscious frames that prevented me from speaking to power and thus limiting my effectiveness as a change agent. Others probably have different frames that limit their behavior. There are, of course, change agents who do not seem to have limiting frames, such as Gandhi, but for most of us there is plenty of opportunity to do research into our own practice and how we might more fully be the change we want to see in the world. As a change agent, by engaging in first person research, we are modeling engaging in the sort of personal change in which we are asking others to engage. By modeling the change process we are asking others to ‘do as we do’ rather than ‘do as we say’, which is likely to be more effective.

However, first person research that aims to unearth deeply held frames is not easy to do on your own. We are often unaware of the frames that limit our behavioral repertoire – the frames are so much a part of us that we cannot see them. We need others to help us see how we are behaving and offer insight into why we might be behaving that way. In short, just as I have suggested that we need first person research in order to be more effective in third person research, we need second person (or ‘us’) research in order to be effective in first person research. We need a community of inquiry (Fisher & Torbert, 1995) that supports our efforts to change our own practice. Neither of these first two implications is unique to the use of presentational form, they are implications for the relationships between first, second, and third person research that I believe hold regardless of the form of representation.

A third implication is the need to use multiple forms of representation in first person inquiry. In my experience, as we share our representations of our experience and knowing about that experience with others there is a tendency to be shy about sharing our less-than-masterfully-crafted works of art with others. There is a tendency to want to collapse the representation back into a co-mingling of forms. There is a tendency to want to tell the story as I first told it and not write the play and not do the learning pathways grid analysis – settling for the insight that is in the initial storytelling. As we combine forms into the mushy middle of the presentational to propositional spectrum, we lose the richness of the purely presentational form and the precision and sharpness of the purely propositional form. Compare the felt meaning of the story with the felt meaning of the play. Compare the analytic insight of the story with the analytic insight of the learning pathways grid analysis. Although it clearly seems possible to create forms that bring together a sense of aesthetic form and intellectual rigor in the same work it is also clear to me that it is very difficult (Taylor, 2000). There is also the danger that in trying to combine forms we will end up privileging whichever form in which we are more skilled. Artists will create art and academics will write arguments.

As academics we are familiar with the advantages of good propositional forms – the precision of thought, analytic rigor, generalizable theory and so on. The fourth implication of this work is the advantages that presentational form has for research (in this case first person). In addition to the way in which presentational forms can show us the richness and complexity of the felt meaning, it also allows me to embrace and explore contradictory feelings (without need of resolution). When I watch an actor perform the scene I can see the real compassion in the words of the Boss and at the same time, the uncaring violence of the action. I can see the personal connection between Boss and Joe alongside the impersonal organizational bureaucracy that is expressed in the legalese Boss speaks. The presentational form resists resolution of contradiction (which is required by formal Aristotelian reasoning), instead holding the tensions between them.

Concluding thoughts

As I have shown this process of collaborative off-line reflection, I have spoken from the position of having established practices of both an artistic form and a propositional form – I have been pursuing the craft of writing plays for 25 years and the skill of action science intervention for seven years. In that time I have learned to be willing to (even to want to) share my work with others as part of my process. But in my teaching, when I ask students who do not have established practices – either as an artist or in personal reflection – to engage in this sort of process there is often a great deal of resistance to producing and sharing presentational forms. I am told, ‘I can’t draw’, ‘I’m not artistic’, and so on. I suspect that all of the resistance doesn’t actually come from a sense of lack of competence, but nonetheless it is an important issue for this practice.

Winter (Winter, Buck & Sobiechowska, 1999) argues that you don’t have to be a skilled artist to use presentational forms for first person research. We can all write, draw, or craft forms that holistically represent what we are feeling. It is not important that these forms be beautifully crafted, what is important is that we allow these forms to express our felt meaning, our tacit knowledge, that we allow our experience to come out in an artistic form. I would suggest that similarly we do not have to be experts in the propositional analysis of human behavior in order to rigorously analyse our own practice. We do need tools, such as the learning pathways grid (Rudolph et al., 2001) and the ladder of inference (Argyris et al., 1985), and training in the use of those tools is helpful.

Underneath this issue is the sense of first person research as a practice, as a craft, as an art. Like any art, when approaching it as a novice it can be intimidating, mysterious, and difficult. Like any art, some people will have more aptitude for it than others. Like any art, mastery takes time and practice. And like any art,

with practice and mastery it is no longer intimidating and mysterious (it may still be difficult, but usually difficult in a very different way). When we think of first person research as an art, it seems to me to be natural that issues of form would be part of it. When we recognize first person research as an art, we open our research to the full complexity and richness of the human experience.

Notes

- 1 For 'Project Management Software'.
- 2 B.A. is the fictional company in the play that is based on my experience with PMS.
- 3 A group that I had been part of for over five years and was created to help the members develop their own practice of action science/action inquiry and to help each work with issues throughout their life.
- 4 We tape record all our meetings so that we have data such as this when we reflect on our reflections and to help in expanding this first person research progress into second and even third person research.
- 5 Helping is probably a more accurate term and is certainly more expressive and closer to the experience, but I only mention it parenthetically because it somehow feels less painful this way.

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