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A practice-led inquiry into the use of still images as a tool for reflective practice and organisational inquiry

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Key words: Practice-led inquiry, Reflective Practice, Provenance, Photolanguage, images, organisational inquiry

Abstract

This paper is twofold. Firstly, it posits a reflective practice model for the initial stages of practice-led inquiry, a qualitative research and professional practice inquiry methodology. Practice-led inquiry is generally associated with areas such as creative industries and arts and humanities (Gray 1996; Haseman & Mafe 2011; Wilson 2011). From our respective experiences and research interests we see the potential for the application of practice-led inquiry in other professional disciplines such as business and management. Our understanding is that practice-led inquiry is a natural extension of reflective practice, but in undertaking practice-led inquiry, we were challenged by practical ambiguities presented in the literature around practice-led inquiry, and what we perceived as a theory-practice disjuncture. Initially we found it challenging to know where to start. We have sought to find a way (or an approach) to help other professionals navigate this terrain. Our model is based on the premise that the inquirer is knowledgeable about the practice they are investigating and that starting an inquiry based on their existing knowledge and experience affirms their current practical experience. We see this as a useful and empowering springboard from which to launch into a deeper inquiry to enable further understanding and change.

In the second part of the paper we apply our reflective practice model to an inquiry common to both our professional practices. This entails a practice-led inquiry into the use of images to facilitate reflective practice in organisational settings. Our intention in this application phase is firstly to provide understanding of the power of images as a reflective and interpretive tool. We believe that images provide a powerful process for reflection and inquiry that is useful to professionals working in a range of disciplines. One particular tool called Photolanguage is

common to both our practices and in this inquiry we seek to make explicit our tacit knowledge of this tool and the broader practice of using images to facilitate reflective practice. Secondly our intent in applying the tool to a real practice inquiry helps to illuminate some of the pitfalls of our model and into undertaking practice-led inquiry with multiple inquirers.

Introduction

Practice-led inquiry involves practitioners researching their practice in a process of action and reflection (Gray 1996). It is one of a range of investigative approaches emerging from the paradigm debates that include Naturalistic Inquiry (Guba & Lincoln 1982) Practitioner Research (Stenhouse 1981; Anderson & Herr 1999) and Co-operative Inquiry (Heron & Reason 1984). Practice-led inquiry is intended to contribute to bodies of knowledge about specific practices by using practitioners' knowledge.

Practice-led inquiry involves reflection on practice. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle draws from both Dewey (1910) & Lewin (1948). These two iconic reflective practice writers, identify reflective observation as a step in the experiential learning cycle at which one understands and conceptualises experience. Practice is the experience being conceptualised and understood in practice-led inquiry. Often this practice is the inquirer's own practice as well as a practice evident in the broader community. Our investigative processes are described as an 'inquiry' in line with Reason's (1988) signifier of post positivist approaches to investigation.

Where do you start with practice-led inquiry?

In essence, practice-led inquiry begins with curiosity about a practice. Often this curiosity is based on perceived practical problems, framed in ways that are not evident at the beginning of an inquiry, but can be seen through analysis to not only set not only the problem, but also the ways in which it is solved. Schön (1983 42) refers to this as framing the practice, suggesting that it makes explicit the boundaries for investigating a practice. Framing also helps in situating a practice within a range of discourses and this can help to clarify both differences and similarities between a practitioner's understanding of their practice and the broader population's understanding of that same practice. Our process of reflective practice led us to a point where we could recognise how we had built our practice knowledge so that we could make comparisons to the ways that practice is discussed in the broader literature. In hindsight we identified four interrelated moments in a fluid dialogic process that we outline below.

Naming a practice

Sometimes a practice is specifically named in the literature. For example, reflective practice to which we have referred is associated with an extensive discourse (Dewey 1910; Lewin 1948; Schön 1983; Kolb 1984) which incorporates action inquiry models (Lewin 1948) and experiential learning models (Kolb 1984). Sometimes such discourses are not evident in mainstream literature, requiring practitioners to firstly name the subject of their investigation before proceeding to investigate it. As is evident in this paper, ahead of our investigation into a perceived common practice, we needed to give a name to the practice we were investigating.

Knowing the practice - A case for Provenance.

As the name practice-led inquiry suggests, it involves investigating a practice using the actual practice as a starting point. Wittgenstein is attributed as articulating the belief that *'practice is demonstrably able to speak for itself'* (Nicolini 2013). This 'speaking' can be accessed by encouraging professionals to talk about their practice and develop their professional practice stories. As the inquirer might also be a practitioner of this practice, a typical practice-led inquiry might involve reflection on the inquirer's own prior experiences with the practice being investigated. Richardson (1994) alludes to the inquirer's *'biographical, historical, and particularised social locations'* that inform their knowledge about a practice as well as their ideological preferences related to this practice. Maxwell (1996) suggests that *'every researcher begins with a substantial base of experience and theoretical knowledge, and these inevitably generate certain questions about the phenomena studied'*.

In the case of practice-led inquiry the phenomenon being studied is the practice of the inquirer. As is made evident in the application of our practice-led model later in this paper, the development of knowledge of the practice we investigated, using images for reflective practice, was influenced by our different experiences leading to our distinct repertoires of practice. To illuminate these differences we sought to tap into those individual histories with an iterative process that we describe as 'Provenance.'

Provenance

The term 'Provenance,' taken from the French *provenir*, "to come from", is drawn from discourse about art and antiques. Provenance signifies the life story of an item or collection and a record of its ultimate derivation and its passage through the hands of its various owners. In this paper, we are using the term to suggest that a practice has Provenance in the form of a general and a personal history. The general history is evident in the documented origins and an evolution of that practice available through the mainstream literature. The personal history illuminates the way in which the practice has evolved for a specific practitioner. It draws on the experiences in their professional development that enabled them to develop this practice and may include publications written by the practitioners themselves. Since introducing the notion of Provenance into our inquiry work, we have found the term similarly used to describe the exploration of the literature informing research and writing about reflexive practice (Finlay 2002). We are also cognisant of the traction this term has gained in other disciplines, such as agriculture, in which it is used to identify where produce originates. We propose that Provenance is a reflective practice tool that scaffolds a practitioner to recognise the elements and experiences that have contributed to their knowledge and acquisition of a practice.

Our process of Provenance begins with the practitioner identifying several critical incidents in their career that are related to the specific practice that they are investigating. Incidents might include the original exposure to the practice or specific events in which the practice was applied. The incidents can be organised chronologically and considered from a developmental lens. The sequence of critical incidents can be expressed in a narrative that explores how a professional came to adopt a particular practice and how that practice developed in their professional experience. Each time a narrative of practice is reviewed, new ideas are revealed, and so, rather than see this as a single writing or speaking incident, we see Provenance as an iterative process of systematically interrogating one's practice and identifying the factors that have informed that.

In practice-led inquiry, Provenance also serves the role of alerting the practitioner to the nuances of their own practice, and thus draws attention to bias they may have in analysing data (Vagle 2010, 403). Personal Provenance serves a second purpose in that it helps identify

the texts that have informed and will inform development of that practice. These texts provide insight regarding the way in which the practice is framed. Identifying key informing texts scaffolds the general history of the practice initiating what is described in traditional research practice as the literature review (Bruce 1994).

Concepts similar to what we term 'Provenance' are referred by others as 'origins' and 'historical background of professionalism' (Abbott 1988, 1&4), 'reflexive ethnography' (Finlay 2002, 536), 'self -reconnaissance' (Dillon 2008, 4), 'reflection on the pre-reflexive consciousness of past experience' (Hauw 2009, 342), 'fore-having' (Johns 2010, 14) 'history of personal experience' (Kemmis 2010, 150), auto-ethnography (Marshall 2011, 249) and Provenance (Finlay 2002, 536; Hill 2014).

Provenance needs to start from the moment that the research is conceived to embrace the investigator's motivations, assumptions and interests seeking to illuminate forces that might skew the research in particular directions (Finlay 2002, 536). Once undertaken, the investigator can mark those experiences and literature that may bias their analysis of other practitioners' descriptions of their practice, opening the ways in which they frame problems, make assumptions and understand power (Torbert 1991). This helps to locate the inquirer or sense maker in the inquiry (Eikeland 2001)

Framing a practice

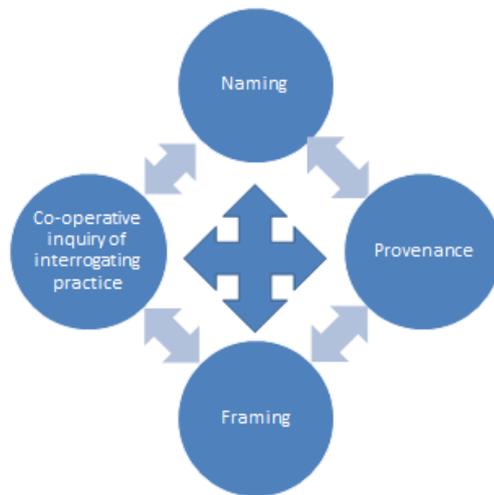
Schön (1983, 42) described 'framing' in the context of problem solving, suggesting that one firstly frames a problem, and poses solutions from the vantage of this frame. When we frame a practice in practice-led inquiry we do so by positioning the practice being investigated in contexts that other authors or references have established. Such framing also helps to establish what is currently known and published about the practice. It can also identify where there may be a lack of published material, thus identifying opportunities for contributions to knowledge about the practice. In reality there are multiple ways of framing a practice. Becoming aware of one's own frame is part of the explicit rigour that makes up practice-led inquiry, an example of which we later explore in this paper.

Interrogating the practice- a case of co-operative inquiry.

A platform for interrogating the practice emerges after naming the practice, knowing the practice through Provenance and consequently framing the practice. We liken this platform to Reason's (1988, 5) co-operative inquiry in which inquirers 'discuss and agree what they wish to research; what ideas and theories they may bring to the *research*; *what kind of research action they will undertake to explore these ideas*'. Each inquirer brings a range of questions to this collaboration; questions that populate dialogues with other practitioners as well as questions to help describe the part the investigated practice plays in one's professional life.

In addition to these questions, co-inquirers can bring to the process strategies that will encourage reflection on their respective practices. One strategy that we found useful in this collaborative illumination of practice was the completion of the sentence 'When I facilitate with images I ...'. This sentence was the catalyst for an iterative answer rather than a single writing incident. We questioned both our descriptions of practice and the Provenance of those descriptions to generate the practice descriptions we later use.

Figure 1
A model depicting the interaction between moments of initiating practice-led inquiry: the oscillation of the phases



Developed by authors

Each of these phases of inquiry, naming, Provenance, framing and co-operative inquiry, are presented as if sequential, but in reality they are an oscillating dialogue (Figure 1). At times the dialogue may appear structured following set questions or strategies, and at other times it is fluid, pursuing the direction of one or other of the inquirers as they articulate their practice. Although we developed this model in hindsight and through reflecting on our excursions into practice-led inquiry, we hope it provides a starting point for other practice-led inquirers. We now apply this model to our own inquiry.

Application of our inquiry model into the use of still images as a tool for reflective practice and organisational inquiry

In this section we apply the model we have developed for initiating a practice-led inquiry. We became aware of a common practice of using images for reflective practice while Cathryn undertook a practice-led doctoral degree, and Geof was her investigation supervisor. Cathryn, in her dissertation, described her practice associated with using images to facilitate reflective practice as 'image-in' (Lloyd 2011, 28).

Naming the practice

We are both facilitators working in areas of organisational development. We both use images as reflective tools, as intervention strategies to facilitate other people's exploration of their situations. Using images involves participants selecting an image or images from a broad collection, as a catalyst for discussion '*as a social and visual entry point to engage participants (in the workshop) in a process of inquiry, reflection and dialogue*' (Lloyd 2011,28).

In her doctoral dissertation Cathryn described her practice associated with using images to facilitate reflective practice as 'image-in' (Lloyd 2011, 28). Geof recognised the described practice of 'image-in' as similar to a practice he had adopted in his own management consultancy work that he called Photolanguage, after the brand name of the commercial

resource he used. The use of images to facilitate reflection sits within what we would describe as our creative repertoire of practice. The practice we have chosen to investigate is not as explicitly named, and because of the context we named shared practice as *'using still images as a tool for reflective practice and organisational inquiry'*.

We both use Photolanguage, although Cathryn's practice draws on a broader range of images including Picture This (2007) and her own photographic collection. Photolanguage was devised and developed by Pierre Babin, who along with two psycho-sociologists Claire Belisle and Alain Baptiste in France, developed and published the first collection of Photolanguage images in 1968. Belisle and Baptiste's work was inspired by Paolo Freire, who used photographs in his work of 'conscientisation' with peasant farmers in Brazil, and by Carl Rogers in group work (Cooney & Burton 1986). Subsequent series of photographs for other countries were later produced to reflect the social and cultural idioms of those countries.

Pierre Babin introduced Photolanguage to Australia in 1976, and in 1986 Jan Cooney and Kevin Burton published Photolanguage Australia through the Catholic Education Office (Lloyd 2011, 28-29). Photolanguage is a set of black and white photographs depicting a range of situations, relationships, landscapes and portraits designed to facilitate personal expression and interaction in groups. The following description by Bessel, Deese & Medina (2007, 568) reflects our understanding as to what Photolanguage offers in a facilitated environment:

"Photolanguage has the capacity to stimulate an individual's imagination, memory, and emotions while providing an opportunity to articulate an individual's thoughts by speaking through photographs using rich descriptions and imagery. [It also] provides an opportunity to build rapport and reduce anxiety and apprehension while eliciting these richly metaphorical verbal responses."

Stories of Provenance

Provenance begins by identifying critical incidents that can be expressed in a narrative form. The (abbreviated) Provenance narratives are as follows:

Geof

I was exposed to Photolanguage at an Art Therapy conference (Network in Creative Arts and Therapy NECTA) following my undergraduate psychology degree and subsequent graduate diploma in social communication that advanced my work as a crisis counsellor. I used the tool in the context of my drama therapy work. Later in my work in organisational communication working with groups of people in industry, I used the tool to help them understand the dynamics of their group, to attempt to identify when that group began to operate as a team and to tap into the values that underpinned their work.

Cathryn

Having a background in art and design the concept of using images as a communication and facilitation tool resonates totally for me. As a designer/arts practitioner I have created and 'told stories' through design, texts, and images. Over time, I have developed my creative facilitation practice, which has led me to find connections and ways in which art and design thinking can be in relationship with and add value to professional practice and organisational life. Through my doctoral inquiry I have explored why and how arts-based methodologies and tools can be used in professional management education. The use of images as part of my facilitation practice is a natural progression, not only working with existing and commercial photographic tools but also developing my own.

Framing the practice

Our discussions about our common practice and our statements of Provenance with this practice revealed two frames through which we perceive our management practices and subsequent research on these. Firstly, as we both work in business settings, we understand our practices as examples of creative ways to work in these settings. We also frame our practices through the context of the general call from professional organisations and certain writers for the development of a creative workforce for the 21st Century (Business Council of Australia 2006; PMSEIC 2005; Cox 2005; Oakley 2007). Through those lenses we see the value of making explicit our creative repertoires.

Using images can also be seen as one of many reflective practice strategies posited following Schön's (1983) popularisation of reflective practice. Commenting on this wide range of proposed strategies, Hatton & Smith (1995, 36) raised doubts about the efficacy of many of the claims, asking '*what counts as evidence of reflective practice?*' particularly within the context of education. Our inquiry is positioned within management practice, and yet the question is pertinent and thus brings to our inquiry a similar agenda about evidence of reflective practice.

Cooperative inquiry

Several questions emerged out of our discussions about our common practice:

- For what purposes do we use images?
- Why do we use images?
- How do we use images?

We sought to answer these questions by a strategy of describing instances of using images in both practices. This involved completing a beginning catalyst sentence:

'When I facilitate with images I...'

This was one of the strategies that populated our ongoing inquiry.

Practice descriptions

Geof

When I facilitate with images... I think about the issue I am investigating with a particular group and select photos which I believe will act as catalyst and trigger for people to think about and talk about that issue. I start with a smaller collection of photos I want to use for each individual outing from the 130 photographs. I aim for about twice as many photographs as there are participants in a group, and with a larger group, about 40 photographs. I want all the participants to see all the pictures, so I post them on the wall in plastic sleeves, so it looks like an art gallery. The pictures are covered while I talk with the participants about what the activity will involve.

I say that the activity is like walking through a gallery, and at different times different pictures catch your attention. I ask them to walk around the pictures, watching but not choosing, until I am sure that all the group has had a chance to see all the photos. I ask them to choose photos that resonate with the issue that we are exploring – such as teamwork or leadership, and say that they will be asked to discuss their choice with another person. I invite participants to choose one photo. If another person chooses the same photo, that determines that those two or three will form a discussion group. Other individuals who have chosen a photograph are encouraged to pair off with at least one other person, and in these groups to discuss the reasons for their choice. There is no obligation to report this to the larger group.

I usually add two riders. Firstly, I add a warning that sometimes the photographs can generate an emotional response and not to be surprised or fearful if that happens. Rarely has it happened, but I see this as risk avoidance. Secondly, I suggest if they don't resonate with a particular photo to choose the first photo they noticed and see where that leads.

After some time of pairs-discussion, I have a plenary sitting to discuss in general the ways in which the photographs can give voice to some of the issues that people have but find hard to articulate. There is no obligation to share in this larger group. I see this session as a chance to help people explore the value of Photolanguage to articulate issues.

After this activity I ask people to return the photographs. This is a practical requirement, given that I only have one set of photos and I want it to remain complete. This step for some people is an emotional one, particularly if the photograph was one which had helped them articulate difficult issues. There have been several instances that have remained in my mind long after the session. For example, several participants in a defence department group who were being encouraged to accept voluntary redundancies chose a Photolanguage image of an old soldier. This image helped them to articulate their sense of being a retired soldier.

When I know that I will meet a group again I note which photos were chosen by which people, so that we can remember these details when at a later date. I usually finish by asking whether anyone wants to say anything before we move onto another discussion. I see Photolanguage as a way of talking about the range of issues associated with the topic under investigation. For example, a workshop on teamwork might use the Photolanguage to explore the wide variety of constructs about a team and leadership; a workshop on change management might use the Photolanguage to explore issues about fear of change and taking risks.

Cathryn

When I facilitate with images... I use images in various of ways for various purposes, depending on the situation. I often select images on an intuitive basis, or in relation to the nature of the work with the group. I select those that in my opinion are the most relevant or appropriate. It is often not practical to have all the images on display. Even though I may use a range of commercial images as well as my own, I tend to refer to the still image inquiry process as 'image-in'. It is a play on words in which the use of images stimulates imagination and creativity to explore situations. The process is used as an individual and social visual entry point to engage participants in inquiry and thoughtful reflection.

Sometimes I use images simply as a 'warm-up' activity, or it may be more involved and used over a period of time. Sometimes I use the images multiple times over a period of time, such as at a conference or professional development retreat. I have used the images as a starting point, mid-way point and at the end, which often transpires as a way for participants to explore and tell their stories of their professional practice and organisational life.

I have also used images as a community relationship building process. I may place them on the ground in a random way, or as meandering pathway, to take people on a reflective journey, and they have also been placed on the wall. Time and space often dictates how I am able to present the images. When I use the images as ongoing 'touchpoints', rather than as a one off activity, they provide a way for people to revisit, reconnect and represent ideas and stories.

Reflection and discussion on practice

Several insights have emerged in applying our model incorporating naming, Provenance, framing and co-operative inquiry, several insights have emerged. Some of these insights connect our thinking and inquiry to a broader literature base.

Insight No 1: images act as catalysts for reflective practice

The initial common theme in our shared practice is that a still image has the potential to act as a catalyst for reflection, and in doing so it also provides a tool to articulate the new found knowledge arising from that reflection. At the heart of our practice is the generation of intentional dialogue (Clouder 2000; Brockbank, McGill & Beech 2002) so that participants generate new ways of seeing and understanding the nature of their situations and interactions from both an individual and shared perspective. We believe that choosing an image that resonates with a particular issue, helps workshop participants to identify their response to a situation, and to articulate their thinking. Often the image provides language that describes the metaphorical or symbolic characteristics of the image as well as a description or insight into their situation that is explored. Sometimes a still image can express something which words cannot (Sanders- Bustle 2003; Eisner 2008, 5). A picture tells a thousand words.

We have described this attribute as a tool of articulation in discussion about other reflective tools and suggest this applies here – images used for reflective practice are a tool of articulation (Lloyd & Hill 2013).

Insight No 2: Images as an affective reflective tool

Our practice comparisons reveal a common belief that aesthetic forms are powerful engagers of the senses, emotions and the imagination (Gagliardi 1999; Strati 2000; Eisner 2008). Geof's choice to forewarn participants of the possibility of emotional reaction to the images is driven by this belief. Cathryn has also seen participants rapidly become emotional in relation to a chosen image. Despite this capacity to draw out emotional responses, images can also provide emotional detachment through being 'just' an image (Taylor & Ladkin 2009). It is this level of detachment from the emotional side that can sometimes assist people to articulate a strongly charged emotional issue and thus give it voice in a forum of colleagues. Cathryn posited the addition of 'affective reflection' to Hatton & Smith's (1995) reflective framework that incorporated descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection (Lloyd 2010).

Insight No 3: Each image has multiple meanings

There is no doubt that images provide a multilayered approach for reflection and discussion. In response to Hatton & Smith's (1995) question about evidence of reflective practice, we look to what participants have said in the discussion that follows use of the images. This discourse provides evidence of revelations of personal insights as well as insights about peoples' interactions. Both of these constitute evidence of reflective practice. This would be appropriate data to solicit in order to advance our inquiry.

Recognising this evidence still leaves open the idea that individual images have multiple meanings. Since the invention of the first photograph in 1827, still images have provided a way of capturing moments in time. Even before this iconic event, ancient civilisations created images that were used to record events, relationships and landscapes. We use individual photos in this sense, and in that regard we acknowledge that people will put their own interpretation on each of the photos and each person has their own story about what the photo means for them. In her dissertation Lloyd (2011) drew attention to Akeret's (2000, 15)

statement that we do not approach photographs as a 'tabula rasa', but that we bring "assumptions, prejudices, preoccupations and fears" reaffirms our view that there are multiple meanings for each of the images.

Akeret (2000) further suggests that there are three stories for every photograph. This includes what we find depicted in the photo, the story around (or behind) the photo and the story we project on to the image. Finally he posits that it could be at the intersection of all three of these stories where we might find the story we have been searching for.

Berger (1972, 3) noted, "although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception of appreciation of an image depends upon our own way of seeing," In that sense each person will construct and make meaning from the image they select based on a number of antecedents, such as culture or experience. For instance, Cathryn used images with a leadership group where one participant commented that at the various points in the programme where they were invited to select an image to reflect what was going on for them, their choice of image stayed the same. Yet they realised that over the course of the programme, as learning occurred, their response to the image actually changed and took on a different meaning.

Insight No 4: Cultural considerations in using images for reflective practice

Leading on from this, we also recognise that some images are culturally more significant than others and may resonate in different ways. As noted at the beginning of this paper, Photolanguage has been developed in different countries to respond to and reflect the idioms of those particular places. What one person thinks might be appropriate or easily understood may not be so for others. It is easy to make assumptions that all people will immediately know or understand the ideas being explored in a learning situation. While the following example seems extreme it is a reminder to be mindful about what we do, why and for whom. Zander & Stone (2000) bring our attention to the Me'en people of Ethiopia who were presented with a range of images and photographs but were unable to 'read' them. They did not understand the concept of a two-dimensional image and did all sorts of things such as sniff it, chew it, and crumple it. Their conventions and experiences did not account for photos as a form of communication in the way many cultures may think about and use photos (Lloyd 2011).

The cultural context makes us aware of a limitation of photolanguage in relation to cultural immediacy. In particular, images can become dated and as a result may lose their meaning. While we recognise that some images become iconic and hold a classic quality and reference point, others simply become less relevant. In that sense while the authors of this paper recognise the power of Photolanguage images, there is also a sense that some of them are beginning to look dated. One of the unique themes in Cathryn's work, partially because of her background in design, is the use of additional photos alongside those in the Photolanguage set. By including other images, Cathryn builds on the idea that the authors of Photolanguage suggest "that experienced facilitators will be able to supplement this collection with other photos of their own selection which may be more relevant to specific groups in specialised situations and occupations" (Cooney & Burton 1986, 7).

Insight No 5: Reflecting on highly charged issues

Inviting people to reflect on their practice is not without complexity. Reflective practice might invite people to 'address and resolve some potentially difficult personal, professional and organisational issues' (Ghaye 2000, 6). The 'immediacy' (Egan 1976, 75) of these issues can make addressing the problems more complicated. This is what Geof found when he worked

with a group of retrenched defense workers, but despite the immediacy of the issue, Photolanguage eased them into discussion about the emotional effects of such a career critical incident.

Addressing highly charged issues can often be made more complicated by the inherent power within organisation hierarchies. That in turn can make it challenging for people to discuss such issues. In these sorts of situations dialogue can be stifled because of fear of reprisals from commenting about organisational relationships, environment, and values. It is within this context that some sort of intervention or facilitation may be required to uncover or explore the existing organisational dynamics. Images can provide a creative and imaginative way for people to gain new perspectives into a familiar situation.

From a practice-led inquiry perspective these five insights provide different directions that can be pursued in subsequent stages of a practice-led inquiry.

Insights into practice-led inquiry

While our initial inquiry into the use of images in reflective practice has provided insights for us about our specific practice, applying our posited model of practice-led inquiry has also provided insights into how effectively this model and process has worked for us. The process of making our investigative practice explicit has also led to some insights about practice-led inquiry. We make those insights explicit in an effort to contribute to the growing understanding of what it means to undertake practice-led inquiry.

Insight 1: Difficulties in getting started with practice- led inquiry

We argue that while there is a growing body of literature about practice-led inquiry (Smith & Dean 2009), professionals often struggle with what this means in terms of initiating investigations into their own or other practices. For example, what does it mean when Gray (1996, 3) talks about ‘...research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, and challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice and practitioners’. We have found that Provenance is a useful catalyst for framing the practice ahead of trying to identify problems and challenges. In the initial stage of co-operative inquiry what we have called ‘*our insights into practice*’ can each pose problems, challenges and opportunities that can be grounds for further investigation. In addition, our process of exploring the catalyst statement ‘*when I facilitate with images I ...*’ has led us to descriptions of practice which can then be interrogated in terms of questions, problems and challenges. Practice-led inquiry is often distinguished from other forms of inquiry in that it starts with the practice rather than the literature about the practice. What we have attempted here represents our efforts to pursue the idea of starting with the practice, and let it lead to the relevant literature about the practice.

Another example is Gray’s (1996, 12) definition of practice-led inquiry that draws attention to epistemology as a philosophical foundation. This term was not originally part of our language as creative management practitioners, although we came to understand its meaning through our respective explorations into research practice – Geof through exposure to action inquiry and Cathryn through undertaking her practice-led doctoral investigation. As Polyani’s (1967) suggests ‘*we know more than we can tell*’ and by applying our model to our use of images this enabled us to make explicit our tacit knowledge about this practice and thus recognise our epistemology of practice (Schön 1983). The reflective practice inherent in this process helped us surface assumptions about this particular practice, for example that each image has multiple meanings, and therefore how these assumptions inform professional decisions (Daudelin 1996).

Insight 2: The terminology related to the practice under investigation can also provide scaffolding for practice-led inquiry.

In taking the term Provenance, a concept mainly known in the arts and antiquities world, and using it as a tool to illuminate the context of our individual practices, we have used terms and techniques of a practice and repurposed them into language and methods of research (Haseman 2006). Similarly, we see that the opportunity afforded by the project of investigating Cathryn's practice through her doctoral degree is a good example of what Haseman & Mafe (2009, 217-218) propose as an inquiry driven by opportunity. The opportunity for this inquiry emerged as a consequence of Geof supervising and reading Cathryn's dissertation. As a result it has afforded a more detailed investigation of a small element of practice and articulated Geof and Cathryn's different experiences in the use of images as reflective tools for organisational inquiry.

Insight 3: Reflection and action are essential to practice-led inquiry

We propose that reflection and action are critical elements in practice-led inquiry and we identify that at the core of our professional practice is reflective practice. We acknowledge, as does the literature, that reflective practice is sometimes time consuming (Gray 2007) as well as challenging and confronting (Brookfield 2010; Johns 2010) and organisations are notoriously neglectful in creating time and space for reflection (Raelin 2001). The idea of engaging in a reflective dialogue *'provides a powerful strategy for fostering reflective action... in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, evening confronting, the trusted other... and creates an opportunity for giving voice to one's own thinking while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way'* (Hatton & Smith 1995, 41). This leads us to insight 4.

Insight 4: Critical friendship support practice-led inquiry

McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead (1996, 30) describe critical friends as one or more people you work with, who were willing to discuss your work sympathetically. As professional colleagues, working with similar processes we have found it useful to engage in dialogue based on the ways in which we individually describe our work. By interrogating each other on the basis of a deeper level of reflective practice we were able to examine our assumptions and beliefs about our practices. We have found that collaborating and employing each other as critical friends helps with decision-making and assists us in exploring our practice at a deeper level. As a result we have become aware of the similarities and differences that we have as professional practitioners and this has enhanced both our learning. As Clouder (2000, 520) suggests *'it may be argued that dialogue moves reflection into the public domain, broadening the scope for understanding for the complexities of practice by unpacking experiential learning and thereby enhancing practice as a consequence,'* We ultimately see this as a good thing and believe it would benefit other professional practitioners.

Drawing it to a conclusion

In this paper we have advanced the body of knowledge for people who want to use images as catalysts for reflective practice and organisational inquiry. In comparing our practices we have endeavoured to identify common threads in our work as well as the individual paths of development in our respective professional lives. We see the inquiry into images as reflective tools as part of a double loop learning model (Argyris & Schön, 1974). We have undertaken an inner cycle of investigating the practice of using images and we were also focused, by way of our model, on an outer cycle of investigating practice-led inquiry. In that regard we make

five contributions to the ongoing investigation into the use of images as a reflective tool for organisational inquiry. These are:

- i) Images act as catalysts for reflective practice.
- ii) Images act as an affective reflective tool.
- iii) Each image has multiple meanings.
- iv) Cultural considerations are necessary when using images for reflective practice.
- v) Images can help discharge highly charged issues.

In addition our model for beginning practice-led inquiry provides a scaffold for other would-be practice-led inquirers and contributes to the ongoing research into practice-led inquiry.

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