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# Reflexivity and Self-Care for Creative Facilitators: Stepping Outside the Circle

Amanda Moffatt, Mary Ryan and Georgina Barton

## Abstract

*Those who work with others to explore new and creative ways of thinking about community and organisational participation, ways of engaging with others, individual wellbeing, and creative solutions to problems, have a significant role in a cohesive society. Creative forms of learning can stimulate reflexive practices of self-care and lead to enhanced relationships and practices both personally and professionally. We argue that those who facilitate such practices for others do not always practice their own self-care, which potentially leads to burnout and disillusionment. This research sought to explore understandings and practices of self-care with such facilitators in order to develop resources or techniques to support more sustainable professional identities. A key finding is that reflexive processes are most effective and transforming when shared as a social practice.*

**Key words:** reflexivity; self care; creative facilitators; reflective practice; professional identity

## Introduction

Learning about oneself is one of the most powerful ways of developing a 'life worth living' (Archer, 2012). The concept of self-care is an ancient theme, taken up by Foucault (1986) as a dominant principle in what he calls 'the art of existence' (1986, p. 43). He asserts that one is never too young or too old to attend to oneself and that it is 'not simply a general attitude' (p. 50) but rather, it requires 'practical tasks, various activities' (p. 51) which take time, and indeed, take a lifetime to maintain happiness and fulfilment. Foucault points out, though, that care of the self is not an act of solitude; it is a social practice. Wong (2013) takes up Foucault's ideas about the social aspect of caring for the self, suggesting that reflexive practices can develop reciprocal relations. In this way, he argues that attending to oneself through examination of beliefs, attitudes and actions, *in relation to trusted others*, not only allows the individual to exercise autonomy

and freedom, but also leads to enlightenment and strengthened relations with others both personally and professionally. Allen (2004) suggests that more emphasis should be placed on the social aspect of self-care; otherwise it can become an exercise in pursuing self-care for its own sake rather than a way to 'guide, transform or impact one's relationships with others' (Allen, 2004, p.148). Myers (2008) and Randall and Munro (2010) similarly argue that self-care should be a social practice in which strategies can be developed to counter the effects of disciplinary power in life and work.

Attending to oneself has been linked to self-discipline and normalization of self (Foucault, 1977), however the individual always has power to make choices. Wong (2013) argues that by developing a relation with ourself, a strong structure to one's life is provided, without submitting to normalizing and disciplinary structures telling us how to act. Margaret Archer (1995, 2007) theorises reflexivity in terms of a distinct yet complementary relationship between structure and agency. She explains that one's internal conversations enable a weighing up of personal desires and motivations with the normalizing structures in place to decide on the best action for oneself at this time in this place. Archer's theory of reflexivity provides the tools to interrogate how individuals who care for others, can also care for themselves in an ongoing process of reflexive practice and professional identity building.

Those who work with others to explore new and creative ways of thinking about community and organisational participation, ways of engaging with others, individual wellbeing, and creative solutions to problems, have a significant role in a cohesive society. Creative forms of learning can stimulate what we suggest are reflexive practices (After Archer, 2010) of self-care and can lead to enhanced relationships and professional identity building. We argue that those who facilitate such practices for others do not always practice their own self-care, potentially leading to burnout and disillusionment. This research sought to explore understandings and practices of self-care with such facilitators in order to develop resources or techniques to support more sustainable 'lives worth living' (Archer, 2012) as professionals in this field. First, we explain the concept of creative facilitation, and then we use Archer's theory of reflexivity to explore

the experiences of creative facilitators in practising self-care, with and without a formal program to guide them. We conclude with some recommendations about the improvement of reflexive self-care for creative professionals who care for others.

### **Creative Facilitation**

The term creative facilitator, while not formally used within the literature, is used in this paper to encompass the multitude of creative industry practices that involve designing and conducting workshops using creative processes. Generally, creative facilitators engage with participants who do not identify as professional artists. They usually work within group sites including community-based organisations, educational contexts, workplace situations and government institutions (Balfour, 2010; Ife, 2002; Woodin, Crook & Carpentiers, 2010). Creative facilitators work collaboratively with these groups while managing participant engagement and outcomes. The associated practices within the field of creative facilitation fall into four general categories: social and community engagement; education and training; corporate and organisational wellbeing; and therapy and counselling.

One of the key themes to emerge from the literature pertaining to this broad field of creative facilitation is the concept of professional and personal sustainability. Coen (2000) identified a serious need for more sustainable practices for individual practitioners in community arts engagement. Coen argues that lack of available funding and long-term retention rates in the field; suggest a need for critical reflection (identifying areas/reasons for change) on professional practice. Lillie (2009) more recently identified a need for practitioners to begin to look after their own welfare, in the same way that they care for their participants. Lillie asserts the need for professional reflection opportunities within the industry as a form of self-care, whereby practitioners stop to weigh up the sustainability of their choices in both the short and long term.

The altruistic nature of many creative facilitation practices can potentially distance the practitioner from their personal response. Within the literature (Balfour, 2010; Ife, 2002) there is a sense that the practitioner's voice and

presence within the work of creative facilitation is silent or at best a quiet echo. When recounting stories of practice the use of 'I' is often relational to 'they'- meaning the participants, the project, the site, or the creative outcomes. Salverson (1996), on the other hand, argues that 'I' should be used in relation to one's own responses, emotions and practices in the context of the interaction with others. She particularly advocates the use of critical reflection on the forms and processes by practitioners when working with 'risky' content in a community based practice. Salverson (1996) explains that critical reflection includes the interrogation of one's responses and actions as a professional to determine whether they enable a sustainable professional identity. Risky content can include trauma, abuse, family breakdown, poverty and forms of anxiety among others (Case & Dalley, 2006). The potential for risky content to be shared in creative facilitation is high, given that emotions and wellbeing are explored in such contexts. Given the high emotional load that creative facilitators carry, we argue for the absolute necessity of self-conscious and critical self-care through reflexive processes as explained using Archer (2010, 2007) in the following section.

### **Theoretical framing: Reflection, reflexivity and self care**

Reflection, or reflective practice, has a long tradition and stems from philosophy, particularly the work of Dewey (1933) on reflective thinking for personal and intellectual growth. Dewey's approach is considered to be psychological, and is concerned with the nature of reflection and how it occurs. A more critical and transformative approach to reflection, which is rooted in critical social theory, is evident in the work of Friere (1972), Habermas (1974) and others who have followed their lead (see for example Hatton and Smith 1995, Mezirow 1990). Schon's (1983) work on the 'reflective practitioner' has also influenced many scholars interested in the work of professionals and how 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' can influence their professional education. Schon's approach is steeped in practice, particularly in building theory from practice. His ideas about improving practice through reflectivity and theory-in-use have inspired much debate around the role of espoused theory and theory-in-use (Ryan 2012). Schon favours theory that is built from everyday practice, however this view has been criticized for not moving beyond the immediate situation and for potentially perpetuating hegemonic or normalising

forms of practice rather than enacting change at a broader level (Gur-Ze'ev 2001). Such diverse theoretical underpinnings mean that reflection is multi-faceted and can be interpreted (and represented) in various ways (Fund, Court, and Kramarski 2002, Ryan 2012, Moon 1999).

For this paper, we find the theory of social realist, Margaret Archer (2010, 2007, 1995), very useful and generative as she explores the interplay and relationship between individuals and the social structures within which they operate and sees these as key to understanding action. Although some forms of reflective practice rely on metacognitive thinking strategies (Dahl 2004), that is, thinking about thinking, these alone fail to account for social contexts and structures which influence practice (Ryan, 2014b). Archer (2010) distinguishes between reflection and reflexivity. For Archer, reflection can be seen as an internal process where we look at our experiences from a personal viewpoint and begin to make meaning from these thoughts. For example, we might reflect on whether we were satisfied with the way we conducted a workshop for creative facilitators. We might think it went poorly as the participants seemed not to be engaged and we may feel that their responses were negative. However, reflexivity can be seen as a more active process that not only considers the personal response but also explores external factors such as society and the context. For example, we might analyse the previous example of the 'unsuccessful workshop': identify exact points during the workshop that seemed to work or not work; analyse what else was happening, what the discussion involved and what our response was at that point; consider our own emotions and why we might have felt negative about participants' responses – could it be related to something else we are worrying about rather than this particular context?; think about other possible scenarios or teaching strategies for the workshop and hypothesise possible outcomes; choose a way forward that we want to pursue. In this space between reflective thought and the external world reflexivity guides us to make choices for action. We then reflect on these actions and weigh up whether they produced a different and/or satisfactory outcome. By turning our thoughts back on themselves we can drive the next reflexive deliberation (Archer, 2007) in a continuous cycle of action and re-action. As the individual mediates between internal motivations and external circumstances,

they enter what Archer terms 'three Ds'. This reflexive cycle happens in stages from the first moment of 'discernment' resulting from an internal dialogue that identifies a concern and compares and contrasts possible actions; to 'deliberation' about priorities, motivations, influencing factors and what is possible at this time in this place; through to 'dedication' where a course of action is decided upon and then considered in its execution (Archer 2007, 2010).

Archer (1995, 2007) sees individuals as active agents, whose actions reflect a process of mediation between internal 'subjective' motivations, including knowledge, emotions and values, and their perceptions of external circumstances such as social structures and the expectations that lead the individual to act in a certain way (see also Ryan & Bourke, 2012). Archer (1995, p. 209) does not believe social structures are 'forces', but rather as "reasons for acting in particular ways". She contends that personal concerns are the drivers of the quest for a life worth living (Archer, 2012), and as such, individuals have agency even when social structures seek to normalise or discipline our bodies and practices. Archer (1995) asserts that, "society has no pre-set form or preferred state" (p. 5) and is therefore shaped rather than pre-determined. In this way, actions can be seen as 'morphogenetic' if they transform the social structures in which they operate. Alternatively, actions that maintain structural forms by reproducing the norms of existing contexts are seen as 'morphostatic' (1995, p. 5). The significance of this is that people such as creative facilitators have the power to shape their contextual conditions to enhance self-care.

By understanding their role as active agents within the social structures in which they operate, Archer's ideas offer the practitioner the power to examine and articulate their internal conversations and deliberations through a clear process of reflexivity, leading to intentional actions with the potential to transform and transcend the social structures in which they practice (Ryan & Bourke, 2012). Further, it should not be a way to normalise individuals, and thus it cannot be prescribed in specific ways. This idea resonates with the concept of self-care as an important and generative social practice undertaken in different ways by different individuals in different contexts (Randall & Munro, 2010; Wong, 2013).

By applying the transformative knowledge derived from a chosen process of critical reflection and reflexive action (Ryan, 2014a; Archer, 2010) the practitioner can begin to address both the unique requirements of their field and their individual experiences, consciously making them active agents in their own professional contexts.

### **Research design and methods**

By engaging the input of a variety of creative facilitation practitioners, this project aimed to gather data that represents contemporary understandings and experiences of reflective and/or reflexive practice within the creative facilitation field. The purpose was to create an industry specific professional reflection resource to support the practices of professional reflexivity, sustainability and self-care.

This was guided by the following questions:

1. What is professional reflection and how is it currently used in a creative facilitation context?
2. What experience do creative facilitators currently have with reflexive practice and self-care?
3. What are the key concerns for professional sustainability within the industry?
4. What could be used to support the development of professional reflection skills and reflexive actions for those working in creative facilitation contexts?

This paper reports on elements of a larger project that was designed around several layers of data. The first layer consisted of a survey that was distributed amongst a variety of creative facilitators throughout Queensland, Australia. The second layer involved interviews with two leaders in the field of creative facilitation in Queensland and the artistic directors of an emerging creative facilitation organisation in Brisbane. These interviews provided a deeper insight into the themes and ideas that emerged from the practitioner survey. The third



layer of data involved observations and interviews with an informal group of three Brisbane practitioners who identified as engaging in reflective improvisation. The findings from each of these layers contributed to the development of a trial program of strategies and resources to support reflexivity and self-care for creative facilitators. The final layer comprised feedback from a four month participatory group, who trialled the professional resources for this program.

This paper focuses on latter data from the project involving interviews and observations with the three participants of the reflective improvisation group; and reflections from three participants undertaking the trial program. We explain the following three elements of our methods in more detail:

1. Improvisation group
2. Development of the trial program
3. Trial program group

### **Improvisation group**

This phase of data collection involved an observation and interview process with a Brisbane based multimodal reflective practice group consisting of three practitioners from health and wellbeing contexts. This group used improvisational performance strategies as tools for professional reflection and personal self-care. Established for over 7 years, the group met weekly for a two-hour reflective session and then moved towards public performance. This phase utilised methods such as an informal group discussion with the participants about their practice, recorded unstructured interviews with the three practitioners separately and research observations of several sessions. The data were analysed and coded using Archer's (2007) subjective (internal) and objective (external) conditions to identify those things that matter when these participants weigh up their concerns. Additionally, Archer's (2007) three Ds of discernment, deliberation and dedication were used to identify what was prioritised in relation to self-care, what was discounted and what was chosen as a course of action.

### **Developing the program**

Using the first three phases of data and our own self-reflections as researchers, we began formulating questions to guide the reflective practice process. The main guiding question that yielded results for professional reflection during the interviews was 'How do I know how I am going?' The strength of this question in supporting critical or transformative reflection (leading to reflexivity) as argued by Ryan (2014), is the ability to turn the focus inward to one's own internal responses in relation to external factors as opposed to the more descriptive responses to the question 'how am I going?' By adding the dimension of having to articulate what indicators one can internally observe 'how do I know' in relation to the objective and subjective conditions was to make visible the reflexivity espoused by Archer (2007). In addition, using a *how* question promoted responses of action and material verbs relating to observable practices as opposed to *why* questions that potentially lead to more question loops and no concrete responses.

### **Trial program group**

The final phase of the data collection for this research involved gathering feedback from a group of creative facilitation professionals. Invitations were given through known networks that would ensure an even spread of representation from a variety of professional contexts within the creative facilitation field. Seven volunteers participated in this phase of the research. This group of professionals worked across various sites in the field of creative facilitation (with between 5-20 years experience) but they stemmed from the education and training sector (2), community arts (1) and predominately health and therapy contexts (4). This diversity was also evident in the creative modalities the feedback group used, with visual art, drama and writing being the three most popular mediums followed by expressive movement and music.

These practitioners were asked to actively participate in a 10 Week program that was designed to prompt reflexivity through sharing with others. Participants were asked to engage in the program either by attending facilitated workshops or engaging with website materials and collaborative tools. They were also

involved in three round table discussions across the four-month period, and shared multimodal (visual, written, oral, audio, corporeal or combinations of these) reflections via email, hardcopy, performance or online drop box. The group received weekly emails to help maintain motivation and ensure understanding. The program was uploaded week-by-week and adapted based on the feedback from the workshop discussions, indicative of the reflexive process of this research.

These data were analysed and coded using Archer's (2007) subjective (internal) and objective (external) conditions to identify those things that matter when these participants weigh up their concerns. Archer's (2007) three Ds of discernment, deliberation and dedication were used to identify what was prioritised in relation to self-care, what was discounted and what was chosen as a course of action. Additionally, specific concerns in relation to the program itself were identified, particularly those elements that led to reflexive action.

## **Data and analysis**

### **Improvisation group**

The first step in establishing a relationship with the case study participants (pseudonyms used) was to meet informally to discuss the project and the research process. Within this first meeting the three participants shared the story of the group and collectively described their reflective processes through performance. These processes, they explained, relied on impulsive and improvised responses to their own and others' bodies at that time and in that space – including movement, gesture and voice. From this meeting the group dynamic of collegial decision-making, trust and playfulness was observed. It also became evident that each member of the group had a commitment and passion for this type of improvised reflection to work through the 'risky content' (Case & Dalley, 2006) they faced daily in their therapy practices. A picture was painted of a space where individual participants were able to explore their own internal responses and impulses, whilst being supported by others in the group. Interaction, freedom and respect were identified as key tenets for the cohort.

The interview process included questions about how and why the group was formed, how they would identify themselves, what they did, whether there were any 'rules' or boundaries in the group and what constituted reflection in the group. We identified several common themes regarding the nature and activities of this case study group. The first was the relationship between the participants. Each spoke of the importance of engaging with like-minded practitioners who understood the improvisational nature of the space. Two of the participants believed the unique personalities currently in the group led to its success, while the third participant stated that anyone who was committed and had an understanding of the process could be a welcome addition. When questioned further about the relationship dynamic between the group members each participant alluded to the atmosphere of what Wong (2013) refers to as mutual trust that existed between the participants. This relationship built on trust was described by each group member as an important factor in fostering a collaborative safe space in which to explore and reflect. For example, Rohan articulates it here as a sacred space of respect, intimacy and vulnerability:

*I love the relationship I have with my friends. It is a really deep, meaningful relationship that includes vulnerability and intimacy and the tremendous respect you need to do that. So it's a sacred space for me. I get a lot out of it. I regard, you know, happiness fulfilment and health being all about being emotionally alive. (Rohan, 2012)*

Another key theme of trust identified by all three participants was the importance of the process and discipline of improvisation. Although each person spoke of the challenges involved in free-form improvisational reflection each noted their ability to trust themselves as practitioners to be present with the emergent stories in the space. In this way, the form was very important to each participant and all three identified links between reflexivity and the performative aspects of this process. For example, Rohan not only talks about trust in each other but also trust in the process itself:

*Trust in myself, trust the process and trust in the others. The longer we've been together the more trust there is together and the process can also be trusted together. (Rohan, 2012)*

Red Eye, on the other hand, calls it 'the craft'. She is constantly deliberating (Archer 2007) about what to bring to the group in terms of self-care and also in relation to the craft of performance. She explains 'the watcher' who is always there to help her make sure she doesn't cross boundaries when free-forming her craft.

*You can't free form if you're... I mean, there's a part of me in all of my life that is watching. The watcher, I call it. Making sure that I'm okay, that I'm... you know, just looking out. And there's a part of me as a professional performer that is also looking out for the craft. I'm always crafting. So that's your unconscious process that... I know they're there but I don't give them a lot of focus. (Red Eye, 2012)*

The collaborative nature of this process was also valued by each of the participants. The dynamic interactions that resulted from working together and the shared stories that were created enabled the participants to expand their own experiences, which was important to everyone in the group. Participants became more aware of others' needs within the process and each participant spoke of the energy that came from the whole group interactions compared with the solo activities. This was coupled with an expression from each of the participants about the importance of what we term supportive witnessing or collaborating within the reflection process (Allen, 2004; Wong, 2013). Being given the space to express your experiences while having the space 'held' by someone who understands the process was beneficial. The benefits of collaboration and of being witnessed in the reflection process as creative workers is a theme that has been present throughout all data sets within this research, from the surveys through to the personal reflective practice cycles of the researcher. The inclusion of a collaborative mentor or of supportive witnesses brings an added dimension to the reflection process and supports the critical evaluation and transformative reflexive learning of the creative

facilitators (Myers, 2008; Randall & Munro, 2010; Ryan, 2014a). For example, similar to Rohan's space of collaboration and trust described earlier, James explains how things change when he improvises with others vis-à-vis working alone:

*When I work alone I think the themes that come up, the words that come up, the patterns that come up are quite personal and there's an element of repetition because it's me and it's the thing I think and feel. But when I'm with others there's lots of tangential things that start to happen because we're interacting and we trust each other. (James, 2012)*

The scheduled participation and commitment to turn up to the process every week was identified as an important subjective (or personal) concern (Archer, 2007) for all members of the group. Each person noted there were times when they did not feel like participating but the support and anticipation of the other group members became a motivating factor for everyone. They also noted that when they did engage, even when they were not feeling enthused, the process would enliven them and often interesting discoveries would emerge – as articulated by Red Eye.

*We have a... what's the word, a commitment. Sometimes you don't know what the hell you're doing so it's really frustrating. Sometimes you're quite bored with it. So there are these real...we all go through these ups and downs. But the thing is to keep doing it. So there's a real value of just keeping on doing it. Keeping on turning up. And then new things come. (Red Eye, 2012)*

One of the key approaches of this group is the reflection that is expressed through sound, movement and performative expression. Each participant acknowledged they rarely came to the sessions with specific agendas or issues they wanted to explore. Instead the session became a space for allowing subconscious experiences to emerge. Tacit and internal understandings may present themselves and come into the awareness through the embodiment of the story being told. This allows the participants to play with these emergent

thoughts and experiences, allowing for new understandings and meaning to form.

*It's free association in terms of movement and language and image. I let it all just tumble forth and run with it for an hour. So sometimes maybe I imagine that maybe somebody's watching but mostly I'm really interested in just the fluent unfolding of image and word and movement. Part of me would like to be a little bit more specific about setting structure but it's glorious not to, it's glorious just to go open ended and let it unfold. (James, 2012)*

*I just go to start to play with experience as it emerges and why I call that pre-reflective. It's not intentional. It's playing with what comes up. Whereas the other form of reflective processing is really looking at what's going on and talking about. It's talking about and the other is more like being in experience. (Red Eye, 2012)*

Each participant in the improvisation group works within the health and therapy sector and the opportunity to engage with more verbal and formal reflective practice processes is readily available and valued by their profession. Two group members participate in formal supervision as it is mandated by their professional context. For these participants supervision provides a space to cognitively and intellectually explore issues and conflicts of practice with a mentor. This activity can be seen to be *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1983) and involves a process of critically evaluating professional experiences after the fact. Interestingly, neither of these participants used multimodality within this space but rather favoured verbal forms of reflection. Both participants felt this process although useful, did not provide the insight and emergent knowledge they experienced in the play space of the trusted case study group.

The third participant chose not to engage with the more formal and intentional forms of reflective practice available in her place of work as she felt that this was of little benefit to her current practice. All three group members stated that if they had to choose which form of reflection they felt was more beneficial they

would select the improvisational form of embodied reflection over the more formal cognitive supervision process as the experiential space allowed them to express and play with emergent knowledge in the moment and provided deeper understanding of experience than was available from simply thinking about the event.

Each of the participants noted that their involvement with the group was a vital part of their self-care and personal wellbeing. Rohan cited that the process became a sacred space in which new 'knowings' emerged and became part of each participants lived experience, bringing benefit to all facets of their lives. James suggested that part of the power of this work was the ability to take the dark and difficult bits of experience and play with them so they became a more integrated part of their being.

*Whatever I learn or embody or experience in my improvisation sessions I take with- into all parts of my life, in every way possible. It's not separate.*  
(James, 2012)

The key observations that came from these sessions related to the structure or lack thereof within the process, the participants' willingness to work collaboratively with emergent ideas and narratives whilst maintaining their own individual focus, and the random and varied nature of the content developed throughout the improvisations. All of these factors were consistent with the participants' accounts of the process individually and as a group. The group divided the evening into two parts: the first, a collaborative extended improvisational narrative, followed by individual embodied reflections as a performance for the others.

Within the group improvisation a minimal warm up task provided an initial starting point for the narrative. It involved movement with a soundscape. A narrative developed with each participant playing with story and character, sometimes interacting with others in the experience, other times remaining immersed in their own stories. The group seemed willing to accept and develop ideas that were handed to them from other characters in the space in a collegial



manner. Each narrative seemed to intuitively end, as another story would begin based on a sound or movement.

The second half of the session focused on short individual performances in a staged space, which were collaboratively witnessed by the other group members. These were guided by a simple time boundary such as 5 minutes to perform. After each performance there was some simple reflective discussion among the group about form or content, but this dialogue was kept to a minimum. The evening finished with little or no discussion after the process as the participants left quite promptly after the session.

The improvisation group highlighted many key areas relating to reflective practice processes including the use of multiple modes of expression and embodiment to facilitate emergent internal reflexive responses, the importance of relationship, trust and boundaries to support a collaborative meaning making process and the commitment to scheduled participation needed to sustain and develop a collegial professional reflection practice. The case study also demonstrated the transformative potential of engaging in regular reflection activities for the benefit of the participants' professional practice and all facets of their lived experience.

#### **Development of the trial program: Stepping outside the circle**

A program was developed based on the initial phases of data collection. It was outlined as approximately a 10-week program, designed to be undertaken through three face-to-face workshops and independent activities, or by accessing resources on a specifically designed website and sharing reflections and reflexive actions via discussion boards, email or online drop box. The program, 'Stepping Outside the Circle', was designed to explore the ways in which participants undertook reflexive processes; to prompt an interrogation of both subjective and objective concerns (Archer, 2012) for each individual facilitator and to stimulate reflection about the emotional indicators of such concerns; and finally, to reflect on the affordances or limitations of the program itself in terms of facilitating reflexivity and self-care. The next section explains the experiences of three participants in this program.

### **Trial program group**

Participants identified that reflecting in a group was a different experience from reflecting individually. Each method had positive and negative aspects. Some participants found they experienced more meaning from sharing with another and noted that, through dialogue they were able to transcend their own bias and habits of thought by interacting and reacting to the ideas of the other person (Randall & Munro, 2010). There was agreement from all participants that working collaboratively, particularly with someone who you have an established relationship with, is an important part of maximizing this program's outcomes. Issues of trust and boundaries were also discussed as important factors in this collaborative relationship. These data correlated with the findings from the improvisation reflection group.

A key finding from this part of the project was the importance of flexibility and resisting an inclination to prescribe activities or frameworks for reflexivity and self-care (Myers, 2008; Randall & Munro, 2010). All participants reported value in examining their personal responses and of creating a time to intentionally reflect, whether through an adaptable weekly program or a more flexible approach. The trial group participants had generally come to resist the more formal learning tools outlined in the program and opted to adapt the activities to meet their own needs. Participants reported being more intuitive with the process and used the program as a guide and anchor more than a prescriptive device. Many noted that being part of a program gave them motivation, structure and accountability to make time to implement a reflective practice routine. For others doing a program became a source of frustration, pressure and resistance.

### **Red Eye**

*My participation in this research has been very timely. I have been struggling with managing the concerns of burn out...The 10 weeks allowed me to build on my awareness of how I work, not specifically as a professional as I found my personal and professional life are essentially indivisible... I felt it gave me the opportunity to watch the dance of myself*

*as my eternal client and therapist, and build a more attentive self-dialogue. I feel a lot more in tune with what I need to care for myself and how important and subtle it can be. I also feel more in tune of warning signs that I am not caring for myself.*

As an experienced practitioner working in the health and wellbeing sector in both an organizational and freelance capacity, Red Eye entered this program from a place of burnout and frustration. For over 20 years she has been carving out a viable creative facilitation practice but cited a growing sense of frustration. As a creative facilitator I am ...“constantly undervalued by my society, my culture and in the end myself” (Red Eye, 2013). From the outset Red Eye identified that she wanted to improve her self-care and develop her own consistent reflection practice to support herself within her work.

Although Red Eye liked reflecting in a group, she expressed a deep satisfaction reflecting on her own. As a result Red Eye made time weekly to reflect, usually on a Thursday night. She developed a ritual around engaging in this process by setting up her space and creating an atmosphere with music. Even when her life became busy Red Eye made time to reflect before work at the start of the day and made this a priority. She cited that doing creative reflection felt like nurturing a part of herself, by giving time to reflect on her inner worlds. She has done a lot of this kind of processing in the past and enjoyed having the program to bring her focus back to this aspect of her self-care.

**Insert Figure 1. Red Eye’s reflexive action plan**

Red Eye used the 10 Week Program as a springboard for her reflections rather than following each activity precisely. In all of her reflections Red Eye demonstrated she was moving through Archer’s (2007) 3Ds from the internal response to the external meaning making. She was able to discern those concerns that mattered most to her, and deliberate about ways to use these in her self-care. Red Eye finished the program with some dedicated transformative actions (Figure 1).

## **Dancing Red Shoes**

*What I think I now know...*

*I can become overwhelmed even in the process of trying to self-care, I can take on too much, try to do too much.....but what I now realise that when I take one small thing and work with that change can emerge.*

*When I slow down...I notice when I am overwhelmed and notice I can choose to continue or to slow down... I notice what I value about the work I now have...I notice my family is still here.... I notice I haven't been present...so I slow down and make time for them...That 'presence' is what I currently search for...not 'more'...*

Similar to Red Eye, Dancing Red Shoes started this program from a place of exhaustion and burn out. She had recently found herself at a crossroads concerning her professional contexts. She noted that the invite to participate in this program was timely however it also proved challenging at times as personal issues came up in the process. This became a 'Pandora's box' but the program provided a container to hold this meaning making. She also noted her need to be a 'good girl' (Foucault, 1977) and as such completed the activities as they were designed in the allocated weekly timeslots. Dancing Red Shoes used the downloadable support material but she also built on these devices to create her own visual representations for each activity. This resulted in Dancing Red Shoes clearly working through the 3Ds of reflexivity using multimodal processes.

### **Insert Figure 2. Dancing Red Shoes' reflection**

Dancing Red Shoes is able to discern those concerns that matter to her, and though a process of sharing with others verbally, visually and in written mode, she is able to work through her deliberations and dedicate some action for self-care. She uses other texts and ideas that she has read to plan her actions. It is noteworthy that her visual image (Figure 2) depicts her 'multiple selves' with its formality on the left compared with free form on the right. She has identified this struggle within her and uses the sociality and multimodality of reflexivity to deliberate and plan.

## **Valentine**

*Personally I preferred the workshops to working with the online content - I do a lot of things on my own, so I'm more likely to be inspired or to push up against my edge when I'm with others. There's also a wonderful energy that a group creates.*

*Self-care often involves stopping to replenish ourselves and our physical resources, but also allows us time to integrate the masses of information that we are bombarded with daily.*

Valentine felt comfortable with reflective processes, as she had maintained a regular journaling practice for some years. She was relatively new to the creative facilitation practice in a therapy context and was doing a lot of internal reflecting about her professionalism in any case. Initially keen to engage with the program weekly and in a focused manner, as she progressed through the program her participation in the independent reflection fell away after week 6. However, she continued to actively participate in the workshop sessions. With a background in visual art Valentine was comfortable with art making however had not used it in a structured meaning making process. To her surprise she was resistant to the art making as part of the reflection process, citing she was more comfortable thinking, theorizing, writing and analysing rather than making. This was confusing for her as she had a strong desire to be making art again but realized this wasn't the avenue.

### **Insert Figure 3. Valentine's reflection**

Valentine noted that when she was in a group context this resistance was lessened and she felt more comfortable with the structure and format of the program activities. Many of Valentine's initial reflections resulted in reflexive actions (Archer, 2007) and her preference for textual forms of reflection were evident (Figure 3). She noted the culture of busyness she had observed in her workplace and broader society and articulated the value of the practitioner resource for people struggling to manage professionally.

Throughout the program Valentine realized she was doing a lot of self-care and was in a very positive place with her professional 'self'. This was in alignment with Valentine's initial aim for participating in the program; she had stated, "I would like to know that I'm supporting myself as well as I possibly can so that I can continue to fully engage in doing work that I love!"

### ***Summary of trial group***

Many of the key findings from the participant feedback group align with the broader research outlined in this project. The first of these is confirmation of the key elements of reflexive practice for creative facilitators: scheduled participation, multimodality and collaborative meaning making underpinned by trust and boundaries. Various participants modelled how these elements are necessary for the implementation of a critically evaluative reflective process resulting in transformative reflexive actions. For many practitioners, as demonstrated by the trial group, if one of these elements is missing from the process then participants may not achieve the same level of sustainable professional identity as when they combine all of the elements.

Scheduled participation does not necessarily have to be weekly or fortnightly as outlined in the 10-Week Program, however some commitment to make time to engage in reflection activities needs to be made for practitioners to overcome the inherent busyness reported by the research participants. This scheduled participation is closely linked with practitioners' perceived value and/or enjoyment of reflective activities. It should be noted that some participants stated that the 10-Week program was a little overwhelming in that once they had experienced an emergent understanding or transformative action they wanted to sit with this aspect of practice for sometime before going into another reflection. Others however, enjoyed the pace of the program and liked having a weekly structure around their reflections. This again supports the need for practitioners to design a schedule that suits their personal approach.

The commitment to scheduled participation appears to be closely linked with collaborative meaning making. Having a trusted companion hold the space for

reflection is an important motivator for many practitioners. Further, having the added dynamic of an interpersonal relationship in which to experience embodied responses and clarify meaning through dialogue appears to strengthen the understanding of many practitioners within the reflexive realm (Allen, 2004; Wong, 2013). The collaborative space is strengthened when this relationship is built on trust, not only for the people in the relationship but also trust in the process (Randall & Munro, 2010).

Multimodal ways of reflecting (Barton & Ryan, 2013) cater to the diverse and embodied learning styles of creative facilitators. For some the process is more productive when allowed to emerge through free form activities, for others a structured and formalized process allows for a more focused reflexive response. There is no one dominant mode of learning amongst these creative practitioners and as such any practitioner resource needs to facilitate a variety of learning styles and modalities. As Archer (2012) suggests, we all make our own way through any life project, we all deliberate different priorities and concerns through our internal conversations, and no two contexts are the same.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Creative facilitators tend to work in areas where care for others is paramount. They rarely take the time to care for self (Salverson, 1996; Lille, 2009) as part of their professional identity. Reflexivity is a way to discern our concerns and priorities within the contexts in which we live and work, in order to dedicate fruitful and sustaining action (Archer, 2012). This requires a stepping back or 'stepping outside the circle' to view self as the object under scrutiny. In this way, one can view 'life projects' as a series of choices and actions, not necessarily constrained by social structures, but both influenced and influencing such structures through agency. Our internal conversations (Archer, 2007) are powerful tools to deliberate the best course of action right here, right now, which will sustain us personally and professionally.

The key findings of this project suggest that 'stepping outside the circle' is not quite enough. These participants have illustrated that sitting on the rim of the circle *with someone else*, is a more productive way to achieve a 'life worth living'

(Archer, 2012) that embraces the personal alongside the professional. Taking time for reflexivity as self-care requires a dedication to self and a prioritisation of time. However, to truly understand oneself, it is necessary to make such reflexivity social (Foucault, 1986; Allen, 2004; Wong, 2013). Reflexivity as a social practice not only allows the individual to exercise autonomy and freedom, but also leads to professional and personal enlightenment and strengthened relations with others across these spheres of life. Thus the internal conversation (Archer, 2007) voiced and shared is a more powerful way to understand self in relation to others.

Throughout this research journey the key elements and considerations pertaining to a reflective practice framework in the creative facilitation field have been explored, culminating in a professional resource from which practitioners can design their own reflexive process. Four key tenets are of particular relevance: First, multimodality as a form of inquiry that facilitates the internal and emergent expression of reflective knowledge and validates practitioners' own internal sense of disciplinarity; second, collaborative reflection supporting practitioners in a collegial meaning making process; third, trust and boundaries as necessary elements when reflecting in a multimodal and collaborative paradigm; and fourth, the need for a scheduled and committed participation within the professional reflection process. By adopting these key elements within a reflexive and transformative learning process creative practitioners can bridge their internal deliberations with external meaning making. By engaging in this process the reflective practitioner becomes an active reflexive agent capable of transforming the social structures in which they operate (Randall & Munro, 2010). Ultimately this can enable the creative facilitator to develop understandings around professional sustainability and self-care on an individual and industry level.

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