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Theme-Lab «Sustainable Change in a Changing World»

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Poetry Practice & Potential

A heuristic inquiry into the role of poetry in support of engagement in reflexivity as part of the development of professional coaching practice

Project Information

This completed doctoral research study attends to the role of poetry in support of engagement in reflexivity as part of the development of professional coaching practice. Embracing a Heuristic Inquiry methodology, supported by a Heuristic Self Search Inquiry, the research considered the experience of seven co-researchers plus poetry written by the researcher in a time limited sphere. Such methodologies were selected to distil the lived experience of all those who volunteered to take part, with the aim of understanding more about the potential of poetry in support of the reflexive practice and growth of an executive coach. During the course of the research, coresearchers were invited to embrace a poetic writing task that included the opportunity to embrace reflexivity as a process and to write poetry as an associated task. The researcher expressed an interest that focuses upon the essence of the experience as opposed to any judgement with respect to poetic musings or reflexive practice.

Expressed interest in partaking in the poetic writing task was strong but actual participation was extremely limited, with a small number of people engaging in creative writing and even fewer engaging in the writing of poetry. Of those who took part, the majority experienced value in engaging with more creative expression and noted that the process had enabled an enhanced level of self-care as they were able to make sense of lived experience, realise some previously unconscious thinking, enabling alternative choices to be considered and embraced. Intense transformative learning over time and space was also cited as a key piece of the learning experience. One co-researcher expressed discomfort with the writing of poetry, based upon a perceived high-jacking of reflective engagement by the poetic structure.

Uncertainty was expressed by many co-researchers with respect to appreciating and practicing reflexivity as opposed to reflection and the limited engagement in the poetic writing task did invite questioning as to whether the challenge resides in writing poetry or practising reflexivity.

The importance of a clear appreciation and differentiation of reflexivity and its contribution to performance, development and ethical practice, emerges clearly. The value of the coach practitioner engaging with reflexive practice is rooted in concerns for awareness and accountability for self, whilst addressing potential limitations to personal growth, considering options and choices and proactively optimising supervision. Clarification and positioning of the role of reflexivity as an ongoing practice, with accountability for personal approach and practice residing with the coach is required.



Description of content of contribution

Writing poetry emerges as an innovative, disciplined approach for reflexive engagement, facilitating sense making, access to the subconscious and learning whilst acting as a useful receptacle for emotional release, objectification and perspective. The creative writing process offers space, time and perspective to facilitate deeper reflexive consideration of personal values and beliefs, the impact of inter- / intra- relationships in real time and retrospectively, bringing forth choice and opportunity for proactive learning and growth. From a research perspective, this study makes contributions to the use and application of Heuristic Inquiry by combining HI with HSSI. Additionally as part of the data analysis process, the innovative use of mind mapping and word cloud techniques are embraced in support of rigour and integrity of approach.

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