Beyond Text: the co-creation of dramatised character and iStory

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Abstract

Purpose – In exploring the impact of reflective and work applied approaches, the authors are curious how vivid new insights and collective "Eureka" momentums occur. These momentums can be forces for work communities to gain competitive advantages. However, the authors know little of how learning is actively involved in the processing of creating new insights and how such a turning to learning mode (Pässilä and Owens, 2016) can be facilitated. In the light of cultural studies and art education, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the method of dramatising characters (DC) in a specific innovation culture can be facilitated. In this viewpoint, the authors are suggesting one approach for this type of turning to learning which the authors call Beyond Text, outlining its theoretical underpinnings, its co-creative development and its application.
Design/methodology/approach – In this Beyond Text context, the authors are introducing the method of DC and the method of iStory both of which are the authors' own design based on the theory of the four existing categories of a research-based theatre.
Findings – The findings of this viewpoint paper are that both iStory as well as DC methods are useful and practical learning facilitation processes and platforms that can be adopted for use in organisations for promoting reflexivity. Especially they can act as a bridge between various forms of knowing and consummate the other knowledge types (experiential, practical and propositional) in a way that advances practice-based innovation.
Originality/value – The originality and value of iStory and DC is that they can be utilised as dialogical evaluation methods when traditional evaluation strategies and pre-determined indicators are unusable.
Keywords Arts-based research, Dramatizing characters, iStory, Research-based theatre
Paper type Viewpoint

In this paper, we introduce two practical methods: iStory and dramatising character. Both of these have been developed for use in the practical innovation context of organisations in Finland.

This is part of a larger exploration of impact within the work place, and in particular of reflective approaches. We are curious about how new insights and collective "Eureka" moments and momentums occur. These can be forces for work communities to gain competitive advantages. However, we know little of how learning is actively involved in the processing of creating new insights and how it can be facilitated (Pässilä and Owens, 2016). Both methods involve a type of learning which goes "Beyond Text", and we outline the theoretical underpinnings, co-creative development and applications of each.

This paper will be useful to managers in the following ways:

- it provides a concrete way to see blocks on an organisational micro level when their employees are implementing change related to innovation, for example, issues in organisations are often so sensitive as a result of power relations or misunderstandings that iStory can provide a safe means to approach them;

- it increases the number of producers of knowledge in their organisation, for example, it values "ordinary" employees' knowledge in innovation processes (not only the R&D employees); and

- it helps them to construct together with their employees a space where they can reflect together on each other's experiences and to break down assumptions related to their own perspectives, for example, sometimes different units in organisations become isolated silos, iStory allows for an overlap for the benefit of the whole organisation.

Dramatising characters (DC), iStory and research-based theatre (RBT)
In this Beyond Text context, we are introducing the method of DC and the method of iStory, both of which are our own design based on the theory of the four existing categories of RBT.

We suggest, based on the work of Pässilä (2012) that the works of Denzin (1997), Mienczakowski (2001), Saldaña (2003) and Rossiter *et al.* (2008, pp. 132-139) offer four categories of RBT:

(1) non-theatrical performances, which includes performances that employ a minimum of traditional theatrical conventions;

(2) theatrical RBT performances, which includes performances informed by the research process but do not strictly follow data and give primacy to artistic form;

(3) interactive or non-interactive ethnodramas, which includes vignettes (stories, quotations, point of views) from data; and

(4) fictional theatre performances, which includes works that are performed for the purposes of domain and are based on education rather than research.

We appreciate the approach of interactive and non-interactive ethnodrama (Rossiter *et al.*, 2008, p. 138) which:

> [...] entails the creation of "real-life" vignettes that emerge directly from data such as interviews, focus groups or ethnographic notes. Unlike non-theatrical performances, ethnodramas are theatrical; performances feature a variety of characters that engage the audience and each other through monologue and dialogue, and scenes contain elements of dramatic tension [...]. Ethnodramas aim to communicate research findings and to remain ardently faithful to the primary research subjects and the veracity of the data".

We also turn to Saldaña (2003, 2009) who suggested that arts-based approaches (ethnodrama and ethnotheatre) have a legitimate place in learning when they are part of a research-based encounter. In a turning to learning context, Beyond Text methods are practices in creation of space for inquiry, encountering and performative interview.

The Senettian team

Next, we break with academic convention to introduce the unique background of each member of our cooperation team. We do this in order to draw attention to the relational aspect which can be defined in a way as Sennet (2012, p. 5) does "as an exchange in which the participants benefits from the encounter". We, as a "Senettian" team, are underlining here that cooperation is a unique and situated process which allows us to accomplish something we cannot do alone. To this end, we would like to introduce our pracademic team Anne Pässilä, Allan Owens, Paula Kuusipalo-Määttä, Raquel Benmergui and Tuija Oikarinen. We have co-operatively created a reflexive learning form by using sketching and playback narration in making sense of lived experiences of innovation in action as we interactively interview and re-present that which we have heard and shared.

We have enjoyed listening and sharing experiences related to perplexity and innovation in the midst of practice. These next quotations are from our discussions: "I feel we learned something unique and precious from each other while co-creating iStory as a way of *inquiry*" Allan points out, and Paula continues "Yes, I feel that we have managed to create trust between us in order to open perplexed situations and the complex relations we have faced in managing innovation". Anne summarised that, "iStory draws on experience from prior runs of this method and the extensive experience of the authors in using arts based methodology in a wide range of workplace contexts to organise reflection". Tuija underlines that the methods of iStory or DC are based on alternative representational forms of knowledge like storytelling, illustrations, narratives and visualising. Tuija points out that by DC of consumers, the participants might be able to create space for imagination and playfulness, presence and interaction. However, we all as a Senettian team are paying attention to our assumptions that Beyond Text as an arts-based approach can be fostered by bridging

different kinds of knowing and knowledge in various types of contexts, for example, in public and private organisations and networks. From this point, we are trying to understand how to build learning spaces and facilitate learning arising from interaction of different knowledge, participants and contexts.

Collaborative reflective practice: tracing the connections

We have been designing and implementing a learning programme into an innovation management approach through a novel form of collaborative reflexive practice that deliberately brings into play the untapped potential of imagined experience. We think that organisations can be seen as sites where practitioners and scholars co-create knowledge. People and groups in organisations create knowledge by participating in and contributing to negotiations of meanings of actions and situations. Knowledge is seen as something that people create in their ongoing interaction rather than something they store or own (Gherardi, 2006; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Pässilä *et al.*, 2012).

This made us think carefully about why we cherish the idea of small corner encountering(s) where various type of micro-pedagogical actions are happening in short-terms encounters (Sennet, 2012) in a workplace context. We were and still are asking the question: Are we losing the skills of cooperation needed to make a complex society? (Sennet, 2012, p. 9). The bodily kinaesthetic – visual learning element is very relevant here, but we are not focussing on this as a learning style, rather on the space it creates for knowledge co-creation; in other words we are interested in what kind of reflection it allows on a micro level in an innovation process when it is happening in the workplace.

Even in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, there are some things we can control, measure, predict and answer correctly; however, there is also an unknowable future, with no indicators of impact to be set beforehand (Petrie, 2011). This is when we need discussion and to collectively make sense, to see, understand and influence and to act adaptively.

As such our work is linked with the three phases of adaptive action (Eoyang and Holladay, 2013) that can be applied to complex adaptive systems:

(1) What? (collecting information): what current patterns do we observe? What happened before? What surprises you?, etc.

(2) So what? (meaning making – analysis, discussion, interpretation): so what are the tensions? Is important? So what options do we have? What does success look like now?, etc.

(3) Now what? (actions to be taken): will we do, will we communicate, will we measure, will we look for next, etc.

In the VUCA world, individual agents have the freedom to act in unpredictable ways, and their actions are interconnected in such ways that they produce system-wide patterns. System-wide patterns in turn influence the behaviours of the agents allowing for new system-wide patterns to emerge (Eoyang and Holladay, 2013). This complexity and adaptivity led us to connect our work with different natures of knowing.

The multiple models: natures of knowing

There are multiple models to present various knowledge types and learning processes (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Park, 2001/2006). In this study, we base our research on the natures of knowing – experiential, presentational, propositional and practical – presented by Heron and Reason (2001/2006, Heron, 1992, 1996) (see Table I). Heron (1992) described an "extended epistemology" and suggested that good inquiry should crossepistemologies using different forms of knowledge. Each type of knowledge provides

Nature of knowing	Participation of knowing	Congruence of knowing
Propositional knowing	"About" something, is knowing through ideas and theories, expressed in informative statements	Knowing understood through theories which make sense
Practical knowing	Is knowing "how to" do something and is expressed in a skill, knack or competence	Knowing expressed in worthwhile action
Experiential knowing	Emerges through direct face-to-face encounter with a person, place or thing; it is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance	Knowing grounded in experience
Presentational knowing	Emerges from experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on	Knowing expressed through stories and images

Source: Heron and Reason (2001/2006, p. 184)

incomplete understanding on its own and is linked to and builds on each of the other forms. Various forms of knowledge together can create new knowledge. It is about sharing experiences and feelings when encountering one another and knowing happens at a level of binding and bonding together (cf. Kemmis, 2001/2006, p. 86). Therefore, this kind of learning and knowledge creation becomes a part of those who are related together. Heron and Reason (2001/2006) suggested a co-operative inquiry method that integrates experiential knowing through meeting and encounter; presentational knowing through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms; propositional knowing through words and concepts; and practical know-how in the exercise of diverse skills. According to Heron and Reason (2001/2006), learning and knowledge creation cycle through co-operative inquiry of reflection and action. The inquiry can be informative and transformative. In the context of practice-based innovation, transformative inquiry involves action, where people change their way of being and doing and relating in their world is more valid.

However, the leveraging of divergent knowledge by wide participation across organisations in networks does not occur as a matter of course, it needs to be facilitated. Heron and Reason (2001/2006, p. 149) emphasised the use of the expressive forms of presentational knowing (symbols, metaphors) to facilitate reflection phases from action to descriptive and propositional knowing. Presentational knowing can provide access to felt experience and draw upon emotional connection not only to the experience and self, but also to others and thus advance social bonding and networking (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009, p. 56). From an innovation point of view, the knowing is often intuitive, imaginative or sensuous and of all the forms of knowing, it is most accessible through presentational ways (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). So, the development of presentational knowledge is highlighted as an important, but often neglected bridge between experiential and propositional knowledge (Grisoni and Page, 2010). We propose DC and iStory as a new form of presentational knowing to facilitate the bridging of divergent knowledge and knowing in the learning processes of practice-based innovation in organisations.

In the context of DC and iStory the metaphor of a swing highlights the balance between the rationale and the intuitive. The swing emphasises two kinds of challenges in inviting the potential of different ways of knowing. The first is the political basis of the boundaries between different forms of knowledge and the role of power in the definition of "truth". As Phillips (1995) as well as Adams and Owens (2016) noted, there is a whole array of alternative representational practices (such as short stories, dance, film, sculpture, poetry, computerised hypertext) that constitute legitimate approaches to study knowledge

in organisations. There are multiple models to present various knowledge types and learning processes (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Park, 2001/2006).

Beyond Text challenges the traditional paradigm of science- and technology-driven innovation which often considers the production of new knowledge to be the responsibility of nominated experts, namely, scientists and researchers in the academia or R&D specialists in companies (Melkas and Harmaakorpi, 2012). Therefore, our Beyond Text vision is to hold the non-stupid hope that when employees, managers and customers of contemporary organisations face wicked problems, they will turn as naturally to Beyond Text methods as they do to rational, logic-oriented conventional learning and idea generation tools. Some of us might sense that we are still leaning on the old – the industrial age rational linearity even though the world around us is more or less in a continuous state of complexity and perplexity and for which we need novel modes of knowledge. Our assertion is that iStory, as well as DC, can be a useful way to make sense and meaning of hidden assumptions of our own thinking, acting and reacting.

Practical examples: iStory and DC

Next, we share one example of exploring the impact of a reflexive and work applied approach: in this iStory it means that the approach is a way to create understanding in perplexed situations.

Our pilot iStory centred on the use of micro-understanding in the relational aspects of innovation leadership. The following photos illustrate the reflexive process which took place in an atmosphere of sitting together around the kitchen table.

iStory aims to examine how the managers and leaders in an organisation create dialogue together by using Beyond Text methods with the help of skilled arts-based practitioners and researchers. iStory draws on a dramaturgical storytelling framework. The process starts as we listen to the story of a person or a group of people with much tacit knowledge and move through ten stages of a process designed to make this explicit. These sketches are examples of visualisations Anne made before this particular iStory-session. Sketching was a way to make Paula's experiences as an innovation manager visual. Anne also drew on her 11 years of knowledge around innovation studies when listening to Paula and making links to theory.

In this case, Paula began to tell of critical incidents in her career through which she felt she learnt much. As she talked Anne drew images symbolically representing what she heard and Allan wrote verbatim quotes and key phrases. Both asked dramaturgical questions about where the incidents took place, who exactly was present, where they were stood and moved to, what had happened prior to the incident, how exactly it started and what happened afterwards. When Paula stopped talking then Anne talked her through the symbolic sketches after which Paula did the same, commenting, clarifying, and elaborating. Allan then privately read back through the script he had been creating while listening, composed from Paula's words and the dialogue with Anne and himself, highlighting certain phrases, repeating them at points in the text, cut text and in so doing so created the meta story to be re-told. He selected music and started to tell the iStory whilst simultaneously Anne made a one-shot video on her phone of the symbolic sketches so that spoken words and images came together. The three of us watched the replay of the one-shot video. Paula suggested changes, we re-shot it twice listening to it each time afresh sharing the insights it was generating, seeing the implicit becoming explicit through this systematic, but relaxed informal reflexive process.

The relevant element of iStory is that it takes place in momentums; in a specific time, space and encountering. It is a collaborative form of creating knowledge in which the aim is to combine knowledge interests from lived experiences and theory alike.

Discussion

The knowing process facilitated by DC is illustrated in Figure 1. Through storytelling and narratives (written, told, drawn and improvised), the researchers, the artist, and the members of two organisations wanted to ideate and innovate new products to consumers.

The process had started prior to workshop with propositional knowledge of current situations, goals and requirements for the products and production. The aim of the workshop was to enable creativity and innovative learning, so we needed some kind of distancing elements to create an appropriate climate fostering co-operative inquiry. Thus, the session began with encounters so that each participant presented him/herself to the others one by one in pairs. They had brought symbols to illustrate themselves as innovators: how they usually work and what are their priorities and responsibilities. This prepared them for presentational knowing. First, they composed stories of imaginary consumers and drew ideas for new products (see Figure 2). This was done in pairs.

Then the dramatised consumer characters and product ideas were shared, and new ideas emerged in interaction. The next phase was to reflect on and analyse the product ideas in the groups by exploiting practical and experiential knowing: which were the most potential ideas estimated by nominated criteria (marketability, manufacturing ability and cost efficiency). For the most potential ideas, the participants reflected on what kinds of actions were needed to realise them. The session ended by propositional knowing and framing new co-operation practices. The main focus was on relationship-building between the members of two companies rather than on product design. It was more like an evocative process through storytelling and interpretation of stories. Behind the stories, new knowing emerged
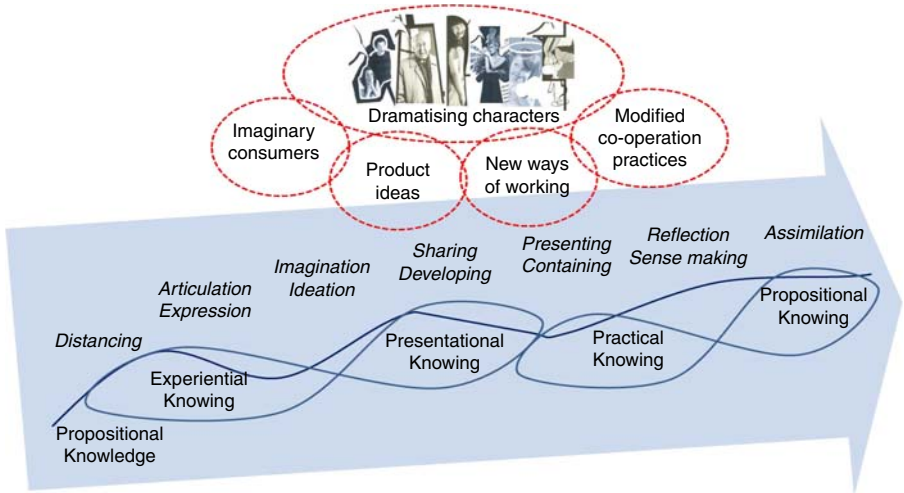

Figure 1.
Process of dramatising characters

Figure 2.
Examples of dramatised characters

and this knowing became a part of those who were engaged in the interpretation. The dramatised characters became containers and messengers of that knowledge.

Workplace learning in this context is more like co-operative puzzle-making than a linear problem-solving process. Art and various techniques of drama were used as co-operative inquiry practices to facilitate learning as a social, practical, collaborative, emancipatory, reflexive and critical process. Knowing is embedded in the conversations and stories. In this kind of process, existing problems are articulated and learning possibilities are defined in co-operation, and formulation is a dialogical negotiation. The logic of the practices between two companies is revealed through presented narratives and these help organisations' members to make sense of their own actions. The process does not by definition strive for unanimity. Instead, it is a polyphonic way to understand one's own world. Co-operative inquiry via DC and iStory can be seen as polyvocal transformations in which knowing and understanding are constructed evocatively through reading the other person's experience and ideas. In this kind of a process, learning and knowing are constructionist actions by all participants.

Considered from the workplace learning point of view, co-operative inquiry would naturally require multiple cycles of going through the phases of inquiry. In this study, we have only applied some principles and procedures of the method to advance participants' innovative learning. Putting into practice the ideas and plans created during workshop demands more learning opportunities in the network. The participants pointed out various obstacles which they would be facing in changing their operation models. For example, power, inertia, motivations, their own professional roles and the complex network relationships hinder the capacity for developing ideas and implementing them into action.

Conclusions

We are confident that the presentational knowing which leads us through the use of aesthetic, expressive forms as suggested by Heron and Reason (2001/2006) can act as a bridge between various forms of knowing and consummate the other knowledge types (experiential, practical and propositional) in a way that advances practice-based innovation. In addition, presentational knowledge is noted to bond co-learners to co-creation and act as a container for the learning outcomes. In order to cooperate in the midst of perplexity and complexity, we see how these different knowledge types move through the phases of adaptive action when DC and iStory are applied. We propose that when looking for new ways of measuring impact in the midst of uncertainty, we can turn to Beyond Text methods. These can be utilised as dialogical evaluation methods if traditional evaluation strategies and pre-determined indicators are unusable. Finally, this study suggests that DC and iStory are useful and practical learning facilitation processes and platforms that can be adopted for use in organisations for promoting reflexivity.

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