

Wild Margins playing at work and life

Chris Seeley

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2006

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Abstract

Action research theorists often stress our need to recognise that we know the world in many ways beyond the intellectual. How we understand, receive and respond to ourselves, our contexts and (both human and more than human) others comes from tacit and explicit knowing in our bodies, our hearts, our senses and our hands, as well as from the ideas, assumptions and theories that live in our heads. But, take a look through action research literatures and you'll see page after page of text, a great deal of emphasis on discussion and maybe a diagram or two, or perhaps an occasional poem. *Wild Margins: playing at work and life* explores the possible landscape of a holistic action research which more fully realises different ways of knowing (especially the presentational knowing of the "arts").

I draw on both the movements *in* towards presentational knowing from action researchers (including me) and the movements *out* from artists and performers (also including me) towards the emancipatory, participatory and transformational intentions of action research. This thesis dwells at the intersection of these different worlds, which are evolving in similar directions in response to the social and ecological concerns of sustainability and our lack of connectedness with our world.

Through looking at my own and others' practices in the (mainly) visual arts and (particularly) in improvisational clowning, I propose an epistemology of presentational knowing and map a possible territory for a more committed marriage of presentational knowing with action research.

From these foundations, I inquire into the lived realities and dynamics of evolving my professional practice as a facilitator and educator towards this more committed marriage. The contexts for my research are learning with underprivileged "lowers" (in international development settings) and learning with relatively overprivileged "uppers" (in Westernised educational establishments). Finally, I identify key themes which I believe enable and allow action research to become more "arty" and art to become more "action researchy" in service of the pressing issues of sustainability.

Keywords

action research, art, clowning, contact, embodied knowing, extended epistemology, freefall writing, improvisation, inquiry, international development, many ways of knowing, participation, playfulness, power, presentational knowing, sustainability