Research-in-action community • Thinking in public: previews

Introducing 'Thinking in public: previews'

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Thinking in public: previews is a collection of 'work in progress', produced by the research-in-action community. At the beginning of every journey, it is good to recall some of the conversations that led up to it. So below, Patricia and Luigi (as co-convenors of the community) and Alison (as someone who pays close attention to the 'social life' of writing), do some of the work of re-tracing, and of naming, what we find distinctive about this series of previews.

Taking others along

The earliest beginnings of *Thinking in public: previews* were probably in our aspiration to make visible some of the work that's beginning to happen in the research-in-action community. Lots happens 'back stage'—in the background of this website. A lot of that work involves circulating drafts, reading, listening to and commenting on them, exploring ways to pursue further some of the threads appearing in those early attempts.

Nurtured through person-to-person conversation between author, peers and mentors, this work belongs to what might be called 'sharpening one's vision' or 'finding deeper clarity' about the direction of one's inquiry. Metaphorically, it's the silence of the painter mixing new colours, trying new strokes, experimenting in the privacy of his/her *atelier*. There would be no creativity without this work happening quietly behind the curtains.

However, there is another edge in the work of any careful practitioner who is trying to draw attention to particular experiences that have been the source of insight/stirring/challenge for him or her. That is the work of finding forms of expression suitable to 'take others along'. This means moving away from one's preferred shorthand, and taking the step of meeting others (fellow practitioners, publishers, funders, collaborators) where they are. We invited Alison to work with us as we meet that edge, as someone who has not shared the history of the community so far, who can bring fresh ears and eyes to the work being produced.

Working with reviewers

This is the delicate edge of translation—of what might begin as 'insight'—into a more widely accessible piece of work. Make no mistake; here, misunderstanding will be an ongoing companion:

how does that comment tie in with what I am actually trying to do in this piece? You're not seeing what I want to show!

Olympic patience is needed in searching for words, or images, to bring others closer to the experiences explored in the work. Tackled alone, this can be the most disheartening 'edge' met by practitioners

seeking to bring something genuinely new and striking to the conversation in their field. It makes a big difference to meet this edge, not in isolation, but with the support of a community.

The research-in-action community aims to provide such support and thus to help thoughtful practitioners become more skilled at the work of 'claiming their ground' and 'bringing others along with them'. This *Thinking in public: previews* collection is less concerned with presenting finished pieces, than with opening up ways of seeing/saying/understanding that may shift what a practitioner judges is good to do, or not do, next.

'Previews' and 'releases'

The 'previews' sit alongside already published 'releases', as members of our community are also publishing some of their work through other channels. We wanted to gather the 'releases' as well, so that a coherent body of work might begin to appear. Hence, the two collections: one for work that's still in progress, and one for already formally published pieces. We liked the film association in 'previews and releases', but before we settled on that we played with a few other metaphors, such as boating ('unvarnished' and 'launched') and gardening ('seeds' and 'harvest'). When we tested the options with a few members of the community, the consensus was that 'previews and releases' was more recognisable, especially for an international readership.

Thinking in public

We still wanted an overall title that would disclose the unity of intention between the two collections. That's when *Thinking in public* came in. With this title, we are tipping our hats to the ongoing inspiration of Hannah Arendt. Arendt originally gave the title *For Love of the World* to her seminal text that was published as *The Human Condition* (1958).¹ In this work, she sought to give the phenomenon of action its proper place in a tradition that had tended to elevate withdrawal from the world in contemplation. For her, we cannot know who we are as humans until we appear among others, venturing forth in word and deed in the public realm. But hers was always an ethical concern: how to be thoughtful and not thoughtless as an actor in the world. The work of composing accounts of practice and sharing them with others allows us to enter one another's worlds, and create that enlarged mentality that Arendt advocates.

Footnotes

1. Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. [↗](#)