



## **The importance of imagining otherwise: exploring the antenarrative generation of change ideas through an appreciative approach to professional learning**

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### ***Abstract***

Imagining towards a different-to-now future is an essential ingredient of institutional change, yet is often downplayed in the neo-liberal university, where current statistical data drives pedagogies of efficiency (Ball, 2016). We challenge readers to consider the role of imagining in academia, not as a fanciful flight of extraordinary thinking, but as a vital element of practice inquiry (Zandee, 2013). Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008) is underpinned by collective storytelling and imagining, to generate possibilities from what already exists and works well, thereby challenging problem-only focused forms of scholarship. During four Appreciative Inquiry workshops in a large online institution, Associate Lecturers (tutors) immersed themselves in their own stories of practice and encountered stories created through Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) projects undertaken by others. Through inquiring into these different stories, we identified aspects of tuition that generated imaginings towards a different pedagogical future. Using Boje's (2001; 2011) notion of antenarrative, we explore how story fragments from the workshops were relationally produced and set in motion, challenging notions of practice stories as being static elements in scholarship writing, and as 'servicing' linear forms of scholarship which focus on 'quick win' solution finding (Saunders and Cooke, forthcoming). We argue that practices of imagining are key to liberating staff to be collectively agentic in generating change. We contend that an appreciative approach creates the space-time to experiment with what might be, repositioning practice stories and imagining in professional learning, leading towards a more generative space for change in higher education.

**Keywords:** appreciative inquiry; generative inquiry; professional learning; imagination; antenarrative.

## ***Imagining in higher education***

This paper, drawing from four professional learning workshops based on ‘Appreciative Approaches to Inquiry’ (Cooke and Saunders, 2023), explores the importance, challenges, and opportunities of (re)centring imaginative practices for creating momentum for change.

As noted by Watkins and Mohr and Ralph (2011), change (whether individual or organisational) can only happen at the speed of imagination, where imagining liberates our collective aspirations for the future (Bushe, 2007). The concept of imagining and its relationship to professional learning, has begun to gain interest in areas such as Love’s work on healing classrooms (2020) and Moravec’s work on ‘KnowMad Society’ (2012) in response to the ‘wicked problems’ (Lönngren and van Poeck, 2020) faced by society. However, imagining is still a disputed term with little definitional work to sustain shared understandings (von Wright, 2021). Von Wright defines imagination as ‘the mental ability to visualize what may lie beyond the immediate ... to “see” things that are not present ... [as] a central element of meaning creation ... between mental pictures and reality, between humans and the outside world, and between the past and the future’ (2021, p.1). Within this meaning making space we allow ourselves to consider multiple futures (Schwittay, 2022) broadening and pluralising what is possible.

However, within the neo-liberal university, this hope-full, pluralistic, imaginative praxis is often downplayed or discouraged, because statistical data from the present drives decision making, pedagogies of efficiency, and policy development (Ball, 2016). In this context, there lies an imperative for political hope, and a ‘belief that things can be different’ (Abegglan et al., 2023, p.4). Similarly, Schwittay argues that ‘contemporary crises cannot be solved from within the current epistemological, economic and political paradigms that have been instrumental in creating these crises’ (2022). Instead we need a radical shift in ways of being, knowing and making in the world, underpinned by creative methods, including creative writing, that give play to our imagination (Greene, 1995). Greene’s writings on imagination focus on the practice of ‘wideawakeness ... imaginative action and

... renewed consciousness of possibilities' (Greene, 1995, p.43), through which we shift our perspectives, see things differently, and generate possibilities.

## ***Appreciative Inquiry and storytelling***

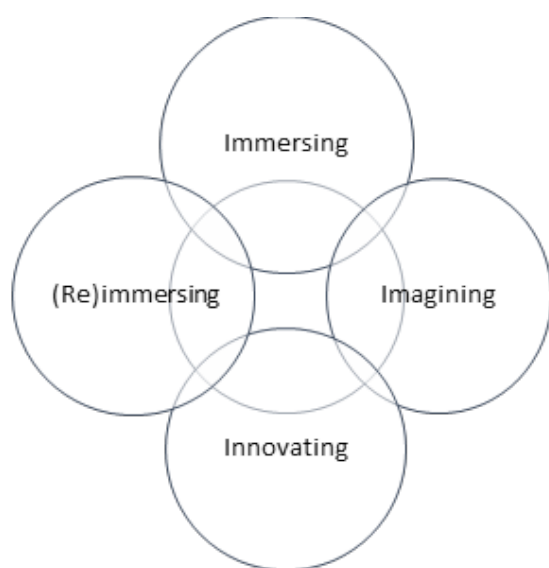
It is this process of 'wideawakeness' to the current and then 'imagining what if...' which underpins appreciative approaches to inquiry (Zandee, 2013) and provides the stimulus for the workshops that are the basis for this paper. We argue that applying Appreciative Inquiry, which can be defined as a collaborative, strengths-based approach to change, to professional learning liberates imagining and centres attention on practices that have generative impact. While recognising critiques of Appreciative Inquiry, particularly around the efficacy of the approach without changing mindsets around organisational change (Grant and Humphries, 2006), it can inspire and energise us to think differently, revealing new perspectives and possibilities for action (Ghaye et al., 2008). Our shared interest in appreciative approaches to inquiry aligns with our interest in story, how stories work in institutional and practice settings, and the connections between storying and imagining.

We therefore think with Boje's (2001) concept of 'antenarrative'. Boje distinguishes between three genres of storytelling, all of which can be entangled in any one moment. Narratives, traditionally described as a coherent sequence of events, are focused on the past, with a defined beginning, middle, and end, and reified into a single, simple, linear story. Boje describes these backward looking and fixed narratives as 'Grand Narratives'. 'Living stories' are performative and 'in-the-making' (2011) where there is continual momentum, emphasising the bringing together of stories in networks of relationality. Boje's third genre, antenarrative, describes stories which precede narrative in their fragmented and unconstructed form but that 'cling to other fragments and form interesting complexity patterns' (2011, p.3). Antenarratives are incomplete, speculative, and at times ambiguous, yet full of possibilities to be brought together in multiple ways, rather than coalescing around a single meaning. They can act as a 'bridging' between past narratives that are 'stuck' and living narratives, to recover the 'little wow moments' that narratives often diminish (Boje, 2001). It is exactly this open-ended opportunity of storytelling that appreciative approaches to professional learning enable, and which therefore makes the concept of antenarrative a useful theoretical frame for our work.

## ***The context***

The four workshops for a group of Associate Lecturers (tutors) working on Primary Education and Early Years modules at a large distance-learning higher education institution in the UK, focused on using Appreciative Inquiry (see Figure 1) to explore opportunities for changes to teaching practices.

**Figure 1. Appreciative approaches to inquiry, adapted from Cooke and Saunders, 2023.**



Ethical permission for the work was granted by our institutional ethics committee and all participants consented to their responses to the workshop materials and activities being used for research purposes. The initials we use in our analysis below simply distinguish between participants; they do not represent participants' real initials.

As such a large institution, with thousands of tutors, strong narratives about the institution's pedagogical approach persist, based on policies and adopted principles about online tuition (both synchronous tutorials and asynchronous tuition through marking, forums, and email support). These narratives and critiques about their limitations are well-rehearsed in many forums across the institution, but have recently come under greater scrutiny, with reiterations of some elements of policy and discussions about the future direction of tuition. In this context, tutors, as those working directly with students, have often been the subject of institutional changes, rather than at the forefront of developing

practices. Exploring changes to tuition with this group of tutors thus spoke to the power differentials at play and their sense of agency (or lack thereof) to influence change at such a large scale. The workshops (see Table 1), attempted to overcome some of this existing structural inequity by creating space for imagination and innovation. We explored each of the Appreciative Inquiry elements using creative writing tasks to surface existing stories (week 1) and move towards generating new possibilities for practice (week 4). By the final session, we had collectively begun to innovate new ideas about tuition, developed provocative propositions to create a vision of where we would collectively like to move towards, and shared initial first steps that we would take to reach it.

In designing and facilitating the sessions we were cognisant of how power dynamics between us and the tutors, between tutors, and between tutors and the institution, would shape the stories they told and the interactions that occurred. Our mixed use of individual creative writing tasks, collaborative but anonymous contributions (for example, an online noticeboard called Padlet), multimodal discussions (using mics and chatbox), as well as opportunities to speak in a relaxed, and lengthy way, were deliberately employed to mitigate some of this impact, while also giving space to allow such feelings to be surfaced.

**Table 1. Professional development session activities.**

Activities	Related research materials
Session 1: What do we mean by inquiry?	
Storytelling: positive learning experiences.	Chat box comments.
What does inquiry mean to you?	Padlet board of images, words and phrases.
Appreciating practices: individual notes about positive elements of own practice.	Individual notes. Chat box comments.
Homework: Individual stories of aspects of that excite, energise or intrigue.	Shared verbally in pairs in Session 2.
Session 2: Immersing	
What does it mean to immerse?	Chat box comments.

Highlighting stories of practice from Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project reports.	Tally chart denoting most often highlighted words and phrases.
Reading own stories of practice aloud.	Padlet board capturing commonalities and generative threads.
What are we noticing? Short statements capturing what had been most intriguing in the session.	Chat box comments.
Homework: Playing with Padlet data and 'What if..?' questions.	Padlet board.
<b>Session 3: Imagining</b>	
Last session and homework reflection.	Chat box comments.
What do we do when we imagine?	Chat box comments.
What if..?' Padlet: add statements, generate further statement, make links between posts.	Padlet.
Deciding a collective focus for group action.	Accumulated 'likes' on Padlet posts.
Using images to imagine practice.	Statements: 'We imagine our future tuition practices are like...'
Homework: write a provocative proposition about the agreed collective focus.	
<b>Session 4: Innovating and designing</b>	
Free writing: imagining future practice.	
Sharing provocative propositions.	Chat box comments.
Thought cloud: we will begin to change the nature of our interactions by...	Padlet board.
Breakout rooms: share provocative propositions and agree a collective proposition.	Provocative propositions.
Breakout rooms: game planning.	Game planning PowerPoint slides.
Individual and collective action.	Chat box comments.

In reflecting on the workshops, we were aware of how crucial imagining is to appreciative approaches and how challenging this process of imagining a different-from-now future had been for our tutors. We are therefore particularly interested in *how* imaginings happened and *how* Boje's (2001) idea of the intraplay between narratives, living stories, and antenarratives influenced the generation of these ideas. If imagining is key to innovating in a highly complex and changing world within higher education, then we argue we need to be more adept at supporting such imaginings and understand more about the challenges faced by those embedded in the current to undertake this kind of professional co-creation of innovation.

### ***Reading-with narrative intraplay***

Reading our research materials through an 'antenarrative' lens required us to acknowledge the unpredictable nature of the stories that unfolded. Boje makes a case for 'alternative narrative analyses...that are multi-voiced, rich with fragmentation and lacking in linearity' (2001, p.14). This requires us to pay attention to seemingly minor fragments, inconsequential in themselves, but which become critical when mapping across and between research materials (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It also enables close interrogation of particular words, paying attending to hidden discourses and listening to the voices of minor characters (Riessman, 2008). It is this intraplay, which Boje defines as sense-making 'with now-spective (in the present moment...), and retro-spective (backward looking)' (2011, p.1) that makes mapping such fragments imperative to understanding how and when imaginings occurred.

Thus, our own analysis mapped not only the stories that were constructed during one interaction or one online session, but also those that developed *across* the sessions and *through engaging with* the material artefacts and activities. These collective stories begin to reveal the extent to which appreciative approaches to inquiry can begin to generate new thinking and practice and can also draw attention to the presence of institutional narratives that might serve to control or restrain (Jørgensen, Klee and Canal, 2014) the generative process.

We began with the session transcripts, generated by the transcription tool in MS Teams, checking for accuracy against the session recordings. Working through the transcripts, we identified moments of generative dialogue, shifts in perspective, and the emergence of alternative stories of practice. We purposefully explored the rich connectivities between these moments and other elements (including material) of the session, including chat box conversations, Padlet activities, and images. This interweaving of these multimodal narrative fragments enabled us to consider the extent to which all these elements worked together to generate new stories of practice.

### ***Exploring stories of imagining practices***

In revisiting the research materials several moments or sequences of moments ‘stuck’ with us (Moxnes and Osgood, 2018). In acknowledging these, we explore the nature of *how* imaginings happened and the socio-material conditions, spaces, and activities that promoted them. In considering these questions we map micro-moments of intraplay between narratives, living stories, and antenarratives across sessions and different research materials. We acknowledge that due to the limits of a journal article, what follows is a condensed account of these sticky moments as one particular reading where more space to write and explore would allow for a greater contextual and analytical richness. In this way, these moments act here as provoking ideas rather than fully worked out cases in and of themselves.

### **Holding open spaces for imagining... and sometimes getting stuck**

This mapping explores ways in which the tutors, often using questions, began to move beyond dominant institutional narratives around student interactions that prevented them from collectively imagining differently, despite the challenge and discomfort this sometimes caused.

## Session 2: chat box contributions

AB: The main theme that stood out for me was the desire for interactivity and need for personalised support. And yet when students come to tutorials they don't want to come on the mic!

CD: Do you think this shows we need to challenge our own expectations and be open to looking more closely at what we are doing?

EF: Yes, that's it.

GH (Facilitator): Do you think this shows we need to generate new understandings of what interaction is?

CD: Or find a different way for some to engage?

AB: I got the sense that students are making the distinction between the more formal tutorials and the more open cafe style sessions – that seems to me, to be where we can be really open-ended and appreciative of emotions.

CD: Some are very hard to reach though – and maybe have chosen the OU so they don't have to be reached.

AB: The sense of community seemed to come from the open-ended question sessions.

This exchange begins with a well-rehearsed institutional narrative, that defines interaction largely in terms of the frequency with which students are prepared to use their microphones to participate in online tutorials. This narrative, positioning the student as in some way lacking, bumps uncomfortably up against a less dominant, quieter story, in which the student exercises agency, choosing not to be 'seen' in the expected sense, but perhaps open to different forms of engagement. Two 'do you think?' questions continue to hold open the possibilities of generative thinking beyond existing narratives. For AB, there is a story of an alternative context in which a different student response seems possible. CD goes further, offering a different framing of the student perspective that might require a different way of thinking about online tuition altogether.

EF returned to this thread in her reflections on session 4, willing by now to unravel her own practice:

I think if we always do tutorials in the same way, picking up on what I was saying really about things being quite staid, and we do things a certain way and we don't go on camera that we've become kind of, I suppose become less interactive and ... comfortable with that.

In acknowledging her discomfort, she nevertheless shifts to consider a change in her own practice, rather than positioning the student as somehow 'at fault' for a perceived lack of interaction in the session. There is a move towards connecting some of the perspectives collectively explored across the sessions to imagine new possibilities for practice.

Nevertheless, there were moments when institutional narratives around student interaction seemingly 'held on' to the space, resisting being opened up.

### **Session 3: transcript**

IJ: there seems to be a real desire for all of us to have much of an interaction with the students, and I think we know ... that the students that do well are the ones that interact the most. So again, it's that it's that tension, isn't it? How do we reach those ones that have joined the OU because they don't want to interact? How do we enable them to be successful still?

KL (Facilitator): And that that kind of goes back [to] what if interaction wasn't always person to person? What if interaction looked different?

EF: We're doing that at the moment, aren't we? With them, co-constructing on the forum. But I think sometimes it's very public and it's not about 1 to 1.

KL (Facilitator): So can we switch that around to a What if? How could that look different?

EF: Interaction is more groups, [which is] almost even more intimidating for some students...

EF: Maybe it's less intimidating to have [an individual] discussion is what I'm thinking.

KL (Facilitator): What if we didn't expect interaction? What if we didn't feel it was necessary?

MN: Well, I think we're all focusing on interaction and how positive it is and I keep coming back to that. What if the learners that are coming to the OU come to the OU because that's not what they want? It's not what they expect. And if they don't expect that and they don't want that, why should we expect that of them? Is it necessarily a good thing to have that expectation and is it necessarily something that we can force upon people if they don't want it?

Boje notes that 'not everyone wants grand narratives banished, which gives the tension between...grand narrative and the ante-narrating of little stories' (2001, p.10). In this particular mapping, we see how the persistent 'what if...' questions posed by the facilitator are instrumental in moving the discussion forward. They liberate the space for movement beyond the dominant narrative and MN's final contribution demonstrates the potential for an appreciative approach to surface alternative imaginings.

### **Messy intraplaying**

There were moments where tensions between narrative, living stories and antenarrative fragments were very present.

### **Session 3: transcript**

OP: when I have big groups of students, [they're] usually very hesitant to use microphones, but [with] three or six students in the group, then we all speak and it's a different dynamic, it's just wonderful [and] it's a different way of [doing] tutorials. If we say we are limiting this for six-seven students, but it will be interactive and using microphones and videos, it would create very different dynamics.

RS: ... in my head, there's a bit of a conflict going on ... I really like the co-construction, the smaller groups, that interaction and how we're enabling students, and the ... conflict is ... that people might choose to study with the [institution] for exactly the opposite reason. So how do you hold that inclusive space ... there's a little bit of me going on about the social justice...

OP's comments are infused by living stories, the 'wow' moments of experiencing greater microphone use that generated an imagining of a future practice. Nevertheless, she held onto the narrative of aiming to increase microphone use, through adapting instead the nature of the space. This immediately created tensions for RS, seeing that the assumptions embedded in this narrative were in tension with the institutional aims, but also her personal living stories of working with some students. The intraplay between existing narrative, living stories of students and interactions, and antenarrative moments surfaced these tensions. But it also created a generative direction which ultimately moved beyond existing assumptions and re-storied learning interactions away from tutors' assumptions, towards student needs and preferences.

However, at various moments across the sessions, tutors expressed hesitancy in their ability to imagine differently. These moments of tentative antenarrative generation alerted us to the uncomfortable nature of imagining otherwise, particularly for tutors working in a very large institution.

### **Week 3: Padlet task. Anonymous participant contributions**

'What if we **had an opportunity** to work with smaller groups of students and to give much more individual time to their needs?'

'What if individual or small groups **could be negotiated** on the basis of need from [assignment] feedback?'

'What if **we had better ways** of identifying the support students need and when they need it?'

The complex interplay between individual and institution is evident in the phrases we have highlighted in bold. These speculative antenarratives demonstrate a willingness to imagine but are tempered by uncertainty and vulnerability. In framing their responses in these terms, hesitant to imagine radical change, tutors are posing crucial questions about tutor agency and enactment in a large institution.

## Transdisciplinary connectivities

Some unexpected generative moments came from tutors thinking with anecdotes from beyond both the institution and the discipline of education. This type of thinking was evident in relation to working on projects with other institutions, engaging with TED Talks and YouTube platforms, and in this mapping, with experiences in health care.

### Session 4: transcript

TU: I [went] to hospital the other night and there wasn't a doctor ... so we had a virtual appointment with a doctor sitting at the [other] emergency room. We could speak with that person and the diagnosis was very quick ... They gave us ... a self-assessment ... [which] came to us via email, we could see in real time what the diagnosis is and what would be the next steps. [It's] very similar to live assessment.

TU: I think that there is a going to be a radical change in the way we use our platforms [through] games-based learning ... going back to my own personal experience in terms of treatment for a particular condition for someone ... they undertook some game space treatment in relation to the [emotional] ailment they have. They ... play particular games ... and interact with characters who respond to their emotional state.... This is very recent.

TU: What about if we move away from writing as a mode for assignments and we have a different modality to allow students to express their ideas ... because of AI ... I wondered whether to respond to that challenge, we might need to ... have other sorts of modality. Drawing a picture, perhaps... [or] I really like the idea of collage, [or] ... maybe designing a game.

TU's personal stories of experiencing new ways of using online platforms in healthcare settings entered our discussions around artificial intelligence. His detail-rich stories evoked an entirely different world (disciplinarily, but also technologically and interactively). In the moment, these stories felt at a disjunct to the conversation, with a struggle to engage immediately with the possibilities and to generate imaginings. However, it was evident later that the idea of multi-modality of interactions had developed through and with this moment, as these living stories intraplayed with living stories of tutorial and assessment practices.

In this way, making connections across and beyond immediate experiences, allowed generative thinking about alternative spaces, practices and interactions.

### **Re-storying with students' 'living stories'**

To immerse in the current, we shared student stories from scholarship reports. In entangling these existing stories with the tutors' own stories, we set living stories in motion, allowing the intraplay to re-story thinking and practices.

### **Week 2: transcript**

TU: one of the things that stood out to me was the value of emotion in the language, [they're] very much emotional thoughts ... talking about mental health ... talking about emotional support ... talking about feeling uncomfortable, of the social phobia of asking questions openly.

(after a gap of 10 minutes)

VW: I'm feeling a bit of resistance to the idea that the tutorial is a space for people to be emotional, and I thought maybe it's my understanding of that word...

TU: I think that ... as students or as practitioners we bring emotions to anything we do ... when we are asking students to respond or present ideas [or ask] a question and students are responding in the chat, even if they do not use their microphone ... they are expressing ideas, views [that] are factored by their emotions at that moment in time, whatever that those emotions are. For example if somebody said that I haven't had a chance to look at the [assignment] yet I think that [emotions] within that response ... there is courage because they are honest about it, but [also] some element of social phobia about how they might be perceived ... So, I think that's all emotionally modulated and driven in tutorials [by] both tutors and students in equal measures.

TU responded to the student stories differently from others, focusing not on the practicalities and stated preferences for learning, but instead reading the emotion of the students' words. This re-storying of learning as emotional work created dissonance for VW, who intimated that tutorial spaces are separated from pastoral work, something often

implied and reinforced through institutional documentation and discussions. Her openness to different understandings however, created space for an elaboration of the re-storying, giving the idea momentum to continue reverberating across the remaining sessions. Acknowledgment of emotions was (able to be) present as more imaginings were created. In this way, the re-storying of student stories generated alternative perspectives that might not otherwise have been possible.

### **Noticing ‘clinging’ antenarrative moments**

In session four, through a process of individual and then collective work towards a proposition for change, we began to see how the slow, careful work we had done to immerse, imagine, and innovate (Cooke and Saunders, 2023) had begun to re-story student tuition and tutor’s roles. This re-storying arose not from disparate imaginings, as individual and separated, but instead as ‘gatherings’ around generative possibilities that began to ‘cling’ together across discussions, activities, sessions, individuals.

### **Session 4: transcript**

KL(Facilitator): Did we land on separate propositions? Did we land on one proposition?

EF: One, I think.

KL (Facilitator): How exciting. Proposition 1: we will have an interactive tutorials menu. We will focus on our strengths and have groups of ALs focusing on particular tutorials.

RS: ...they were eaves dropping I think AB, weren't they!

AB: We... could have been in the same room.

(Chat box contribution) Proposition 2: We will use our strengths to offer varied tutorial opportunities to enable our students to thrive.

KL (Facilitator): I mean, it is scarily exciting.... If we had a proposition that was ‘we will create an interactive tutorials menu and use our strengths to offer varied tutorial opportunities to enable us to support students to thrive’, we’ve got a shared proposition pretty much.

In this final session, the group agreed on reimagining interactions with students as their collective focus for inquiry. The final Padlet, 'We will begin to change the nature of our interactions with students by...' was a collection of 'multi-stranded stories of experiences that lack collective consensus' (Boje, 2001, p.14). It was not a settled story of practice, but one of re-imaginings and emerging possibilities. For now, they co-existed as a plurivocal assemblage of possible futures in which tutorials are more student-led and the nature and purpose of interactivity begins to be reimagined.

The gatherings that had happened around interactivity, playing to tutor and student strengths, and variety of offer can be traced backwards throughout our discussions and activities, to our very first discussions around the tutors' own learning experiences. Such a backward reading would, as evidenced through all of the mappings we have shared, show a non-linear, rhizomatic, interrupted, tension-filled, vulnerable path to imagining differently. As such, the emotion felt during this moment was significant, as the realisation came that despite a fairly short introduction to Appreciative Inquiry, we had created spaces that collectively did move us towards a re-storying that we all felt invested with.

### ***Imagining practices***

By reading-with Boje's (2011) three story types and his concept of intraplay, our analysis highlights some particular features of imaginative practices that were present within our workshops. In discussing each, we suggest that attending to these features provides a way to consider the conditions needed and the facilitation required to engage in imaginative practices in higher education.

### **Generative momentum**

As with Koenig Kellas' (2008) work on momentum in interpersonal communication, we also find that momentum is a key feature of our imagining work. Koenig Kellas defines such momentum as the 'dynamic process by which stories are told and retold, making them fluid, evolving constructions' (2008, p.244). Within our illustrations we find that momentum comes not only from re-telling, but from active, attentive facilitation.

Such facilitation was not only by us as the workshop leaders, but was about the tutors, or the stories themselves, continuing to 'hold open' the space to allow momentum around a particular idea to develop. In this sense, the momentum wasn't linear and simple, but rhizomatic. Even when possible new stories of practice encountered obstacles (institutional narratives, systems and policy barriers, or other viewpoints) there was a willingness to take the narrative fragments in different directions, to maintain momentum.

However, the aim was not to maintain momentum around every fragment of story that was shared. To navigate around and through in order to maintain momentum, the particular fragments needed to have begun to 'cling' and coalesce into larger narrative fragments transcending facilitation and generating their own momentum.

### **Generative materiality**

Storytelling is a socio-material act, bringing together practices of writing or telling, threaded with socio-material engagements with others and environments. Across our mappings, we find evidence of how the lived experiences of the digital-material environment the tutors work with, shaped their thinking and storytelling about interactions, whether through microphone use, the limitations of video bandwidth, or the current practices students have for mediating their learning through the institutional web platform. In this way, the material environments took on a narrative quality of their own, also intersecting Boje's (2011) three types of stories. At a grand narrative level, the institutional story of microphone use 'stuck', while it was the living stories of digital experiences beyond the university (in health care or YouTube) that allowed rich 'wow' moments to intraplay with the current, allowing imaginings of future digital-material environments such as virtual reality, or uses of artificial intelligence. This acknowledgement of the way materials shaped the tutors' abilities to imagine differently, where the institutional digital experience was so prevalent that it took transdisciplinary experiences to open it up, promotes the notion that facilitating imagining needs to involve imagining different-to-now environments. Through our workshops we engaged tutors with images, metaphors, and storytelling that moved them 'beyond' the current contexts and environments they work with, to think 'across' environments. In doing so, we encouraged rich descriptions that kept in the material/human relationalities and affect.

## Generative bravery

Our analysis has demonstrated that appreciative approaches to inquiry can generate new possibilities. But we also noted the emotional labour, and even bravery, involved in imagining otherwise. Whilst the tutors have made some brave steps forward in re-storying existing practices, they sometimes drew back from such moments by retreating into existing institutional narratives.

This intraplay between the different types of narratives (grand, living and antenarrative) involved both in-the-moment and backward-looking sense-making (Boje, 2011). There were undoubtedly moments of tensions and conflict, times where 'given' institutional narratives were questioned or practices critiqued against perceived shared aims. Whilst the very nature of Appreciative Inquiry invites dialogue that transcends existing power structures (Cockell and McArthur Blair, 2020), it remains the case that institutional structures, narratives, and competing agendas can rise to the surface (Bushe, 2007). What became apparent in these moments, however, was the potential for appreciative approaches to maintain a generative momentum.

In our analysis, we recognised examples of moments when the power of imagining began to 'shatter' (Boje, 2001, p.10) pervasive narratives around students as in some way lacking, or deliberately resistant. Bushe's (2007) emphasis on the generative (rather than solely on the positive) potential of Appreciative Inquiry is helpful here. Its 'What if...' mode of imagining allows us to adopt what is referred to in improvisatory practices as a 'yes, and' (Johnstone, 1987) approach, acknowledging the tension that exists and moving forward to continue generating with it.

In this way, the bringing together of stories (from the scholarship reports as told through student voice, the practitioners living stories, and the institutional narratives) allowed the intraplay to occur, where the interferences between and across these stories created the conditions for antenarratives to exist. This leaves space for conflict and tension to be acknowledged, but for these moments to be reframed as full of generative possibilities (Dey and Mason, 2018). As a result, the pervasive narrative of students as lacking, or in some way resistant, began to be bravely but tentatively re-storied. Resituating stories of practice enabled a shift in perspective that positioned students as active decision makers in their own learning journeys, making it possible to imagine alternative practices in which

students might be at the heart of a learning relationship in which they were genuine partners. This was a shift away from the comforts and the collective security of the Grand narratives to something more personally vulnerable, more open and subject to critique, whereby through these brave initial steps, tutors began to re-tell their practice worlds.

## Conclusion

While our workshops were an initial foray into imaginative practices with our Associate Lecturers, it has raised significant questions about their abilities to imagine differently-to-now, the agency of their spaces to experiment and how they perceive institutional change. However, Bushe (2007) argues that through an appreciative and generative stance to inquiry, it is essential to allow those at the forefront of practice, to improvise and experiment towards an agreed future. In arguing for improvisatory change as a driver for institutional creativity, he argues that a different form of leadership is needed, not to try to control and transmit practices, but instead to track and fan (Figure 2) generative potential across an organisation.

**Figure 2. The role of fanning and tracking (Bushe, 2007, p.6).**



We hope that through our Appreciative Inquiry workshops we have begun to open up imagining conversations that allow our tutors to see themselves as able to improvise and

experiment in ways that we can track and fan as evidence for leadership of change. Through this distributed, imaginative, creative, improvised change, we need 'to speak with others as passionately and eloquently as we can ... look into each other's eyes and urge each other on to new beginnings' (Greene, 1995, p.43).

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