

From Fairytales to Sphercards: Towards a New Research Methodology for Improving Knowledge Productivity

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Abstract: With this article we hope to encourage researchers and practitioners in the field of Performative Social Science (PSS) to design research in which researchers and practitioners co-produce knowledge that can advance theory and practice in a given domain. In doing so, their work will contribute to the process of knowledge productivity and learning. We believe that identifying, gathering and interpreting relevant information, and using this information to develop new capabilities is crucial for success in our knowledge society. Co-producing knowledge asks for personal engagement.

The kind of research that contributes to co-production of knowledge is emergent, elastic, and nonlinear (TYLER, 2006) and provides the opportunity for researchers and practitioners to collaborate, move along with the research as it unfolds, take changes in the environment and in people as an integral element of the research, and look for ways to improve the performance of the participants and their practice.

This article contributes in two ways to the field of PSS. Firstly, it presents a model that connects researchers and practitioners in a collaborative learning experience as they wander through the stages of co-production. Secondly, it presents eight different methods that support the learning process of both researchers and practitioners through the different stages. These eight different methods show how art is used for the sake of aesthetics or beauty itself, and as a way of conducting research that enhances learning processes.

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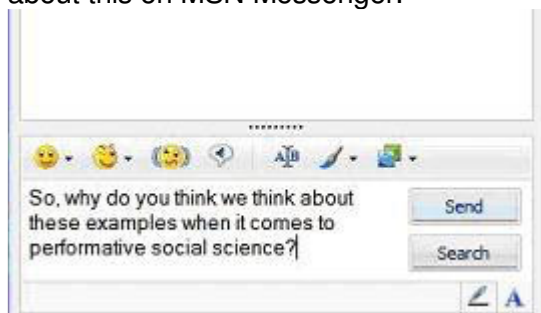
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1. Prologue—Once Upon a Time ...

... a small group of young researchers were triggered by reading the Call for Abstracts on Performative Social Science. Having experimented with various forms of creative, arty instruments in research (using poetry, stories, and posters instead of papers, reports, and accounts) this term felt like coming home—finally a word for what they had been doing the past three years! They started experimenting with these new forms of research because they felt the need to do research that not only studies practice but also contributes to it; that intervenes instead of observes; that is appreciative instead of pure critical; that is fun, and that engages the people who want to learn from the research in the research itself. Reading about the term Performative Social Science they came up with lots of examples from their own practice. Looking for a way to connect their passion for research as a learning enhancer to the exciting concept of Performative Social Science, two of them—Maaïke and Marloes—started up a conversation about this on MSN Messenger.



Maaïke says:

So, why do you think we come up with these examples when it comes to Performative Social Science?

Marloes says:

well, I'm not sure actually.

Marloes says:

to me it's mostly associative

Marloes says:

it's just the things I come up with, because they are creative, different, inspiring

Marloes says:

So my first association has nothing to do with arts in specific

Marloes says:

it's more about the creativity and the beauty of things

Maaïke says:

I agree. And I think that what makes them inspiring is that they do not only appeal to our analytical side, which is the side of us that is often associated with learning

Maaïke says:

It says that learning to us is about "experiencing"

Marloes says:

ah, that's a good point!

Marloes says:

it's about using all your senses, not just the thinking part

Maaïke says:

Exactly. It's about seeing, hearing,

imagining, tasting, feeling, ...

Marloes says:

yeah! and preferably all at the same time

Maaïke says:

So why do you think we find this so important, this "experiencing"? What makes this a powerful learning strategy?

Marloes says:

Well, nowadays it's much more common to combine learning and experiencing

Marloes says:

just think of competence based education

Marloes says:

and all the studies and works on "learning on the job"

Marloes says:

but what we add is not just learning by doing

Marloes says:

but also learning by feeling, hearing, touching, seeing, tasting

Marloes says:

it's about beauty: just using things that are pretty, nice to see, nice to work with. That truly inspires people and wakes up some parts of them that aren't normally used in their learning

Maaïke says:

You are right. When you think about the Kolb learning cycle, I think that often in learning situations we focus on the reflecting and conceptualization phases of the learning cycle. I guess that what we are saying here is that it's worthwhile to design a learning activity in which you go through all of the four stages: experiencing, reflecting, conceptualization and experimentation.

Marloes says:

...

Marloes says:

hm, I'm not sure about that actually

Marloes says:

<p>it's not just the cycle of going through all these stages</p> <p>Maaïke says: (hence the pause)</p> <p>Marloes says: haha</p> <p>Maaïke says: I agree, it's more</p> <p>Maaïke says: as you are saying: promoting learning is about inspiring people</p> <p>Marloes says: for me, it's also about—what I said earlier—the use of things that you don't normally use in learning</p> <p>Maaïke says: and different people are inspired in different ways</p> <p>Marloes says: that's for sure!</p> <p>Maaïke says: connecting them with the creative parts in themselves can be truly inspiring!</p> <p>Marloes says: it's about creating an experience that is new, unforgettable or just like a warm memory</p> <p>Maaïke says: Very well put</p> <p>Marloes says: exactly, that's it!</p> <p>Maaïke says: So what does all of this have to do with research?</p> <p>Marloes says: nice to see we agree on this one, the energy is bumping around on my screen !!!</p> <p>Marloes says: Anyway, to me research is a way to enhance learning processes.</p> <p>Marloes says: It's the "glance from the outside" that really helps reflect people on their doing</p> <p>Marloes says: and reflecting enhances learning</p> <p>Marloes says: or maybe: reflecting IS learning</p> <p>Marloes says: At our Research Practice, at Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company, we made this our number one goal:</p> <p>Marloes says: to create such ways of research that the learning processes of the people being studied, are enhanced and stimulated</p>	<p>Maaïke says: So are you saying then that using the arts (or creative methods) helps people to look "from the outside"?</p> <p>Marloes says: Uhm</p> <p>Marloes says: let me think ...</p> <p>Marloes says: I guess what I'm saying is: research is a way to reflect. And the quality or impact of that reflection can be broadened by using creative and inspiring methods.</p> <p>Marloes says: Am I making any sense?</p> <p>Maaïke says: You are. That's it exactly. Take the sphercards for example. You ask people to select a postcard that for them is associated with a situation, theme, feeling. It helps them to attach an image to that feeling. It takes you "outside your head".</p> <p>Maaïke says: I guess that is also an important part of it: these creative tools help people to connect to other, deeper levels of themselves apart from their cognitive side. Learning is about emotion and association!</p> <p>Marloes says: yeah, that's it!</p> <p>Marloes says: So this means by using creative methods we invite people to let go of their "normal" frame of reference.</p> <p>Marloes says: And by doing so, they open up new doors for themselves to create new learning experiences!</p> <p>Marloes says: A beautiful quote from Albert Einstein pops to mind...:</p> <p>Marloes says: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew."</p> <p>Marloes says: and to complete our thoughts, I refer to Einstein once more:</p> <p>Marloes says: (this one I really really love...!)</p> <p>Marloes says: "Logic will take you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."</p> <p>Maaïke says: Wow... that says it all! That Einstein, smart guy!</p>
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Table 1: MSN conversation Part 1 [1]

Being inspired, they started thinking about a way to write up their experiences so that the writing would be congruent with the practice of their research—creative, artistic and triggering several senses. This article is what came out of that thinking. An article that

- starts with an introduction about why it is so important to look at research as an intervention to stimulate knowledge productivity;
- continues to clearly state the research questions they set out with;
- explains the characteristics that are central to these new research methods;
- and describes some of the performative research methods they've developed. [2]

In the article, we use pictures, cartoons, text balloons, and MSN conversations to invite you to "experience our story." We hope you enjoy it! [3]

2. Introduction to this Article

When the aim of research is not to measure as precise as possible, nor to find the ultimate truth, but rather to find out how things work in order to stimulate a learning process of individuals, teams or organizations as a whole, you will need to find research methods that suit this goal. This article explores this perspective on research and subsequent research methods. We are interested in finding out what it takes to design research that helps to find out how things work in order to stimulate people's learning processes. [4]

The need for this kind of research is evident. GROEN, VASBINDER and VAN DE LINDE (2006) describe what they call a *knowledge paradox*. This concept refers to the phenomenon that knowledge created by scientific research does not lead to economic activity as much as was expected by scientists and policymakers. The authors describe a chasm. On one side of the chasm, knowledge is developed that meets the norms of scientific researchers. In this case, the criteria used are peer review, publications, and the frequency with which others may refer to these publications. On the other side of the chasm the knowledge is exploited. Scientific knowledge is combined with practical knowledge in order to solve problems or to develop new processes, products and services. This chasm became obvious when organizations came up with new innovative products, processes and services although they hardly invested in "official research" or specific "innovation departments" (GROEN et al., 2006; KANTER, 2006). There is a growing concern that academic research has become less useful for solving practical problems and that the gap between theory and practice is widening (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006). [5]

Traditionally, this gap between practice and academia was seen as a knowledge transfer problem (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006). This view originates in the assumption that practical knowledge derives (at least in part) from research knowledge. SCHÖN (1983) refers to this as technical rationality. He describes technical rationality as a heritage of Positivism,

"the powerful philosophical doctrine that grew up in the nineteenth century as an account of the rise of science and technology and as a social movement aimed at applying the achievements of science and technology to the well-being of mankind" (SCHÖN, 1983, p.31). [6]

Technical rationality caused professional activity to consist in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique. This concept of "application" leads to a view of professional knowledge as a hierarchy in which "general principles" occupy the highest level and "concrete problem solving" the lowest. For practitioners this way of looking to the world produces a dilemma since their definition of rigorous professional knowledge excludes phenomena they have learned to see as central to their practice. For scientists, on the other side, this world view accounts for them not understanding why organizations come up with new innovative products, processes, and services without investments in "official research" or specific "innovation departments" (GROEN et al., 2006; KANTER, 2006). [7]

The technical rational approach to research does not account for today's society. LAW and URRY (2004) argue that our social reality has changed and that new a research methodology is needed. Research used to be focused on fixing, demarcating and separating. It reflected the

nineteenth-century mindset that assumed that the world is out there, as a given thing, and that it is the job of both technical and social scientist to map reality. But times have changed. Current research methods do not resonate well with important developments LAW and URRY (2004) see in reality.

"They deal, for instance, poorly with the fleeting—that which is here today and gone tomorrow, only to reappear the day after tomorrow. They deal poorly with the distributed—that is to be found here and there but not in between—or that which slips and slides between one place and another. They deal poorly with the multiple—that which takes different shapes in different places. They deal poorly with the non-causal, the chaotic, and the complex. And such methods have difficulty dealing with the sensory—that which is subject to vision, sound, taste, smell; with the emotional—time-space compressed outbursts of anger, pain, rage, pleasure, desire, or the spiritual; and the kinaesthetic—the pleasures and pains that follow the movement and displacement of people, objects, information, and ideas" (LAW & URRY, 2004, p.403). [8]

Hence, social and physical changes in the world are—and need to be—paralleled by changes in the methods of social inquiry. The social sciences need to revise their worldview and their methods if they are to work productively in the twenty-first century where social relations appear increasingly complex, elusive, ephemeral, and unpredictable (LAW & URRY, 2004). [9]

So, what kind of society is it that we are living in? And what kind of methods will help to do justice to the problems this society is facing? [10]

DRUCKER (1993) characterized the society that we were heading for as a knowledge society. For organizations in this economy where knowledge is becoming more and more predominant, knowledge productivity is crucial for their success. Knowledge productivity entails: identifying, gathering and interpreting relevant information, and using this information to develop new capabilities. The process of knowledge productivity becomes visible in gradual improvement and radical innovation of operating procedures, products and services (KESSELS, 2001). Powerful learning processes lie at heart of this process (KEURSTEN, VERDONSCHOT, KESSELS & KWAKMAN, 2006; VAN POUCKE, 2005). Following this, researchers and practitioners should collaborate in order to become knowledge productive. This reveals a need for methods that include theoretical and practical knowledge. [11]

Considering practical knowledge as relevant as theoretical knowledge asks for a new way of framing knowledge. Several authors have mentioned in this respect an epistemology of practice (COOK & BROWN, 1999; SCHÖN, 1983). SCHÖN argues that

"if the model of Technical Rationality is incomplete, in that it fails to account for practical competence in 'divergent' situations, so much the worse for the model. Let us search, instead, for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (SCHÖN, 1983, p.49). [12]

POLANYI's argument that we know more than we can tell (POLANYI, 1983) became an important notion of this epistemology of practice. The tacit dimension of knowledge (NONAKA & TAKEUCHI, 1995; POLANYI, 1983) and the notion that knowledge is not only something *used* in action, but that it is also *part of* action (COOK & BROWN, 1999), were important breakthroughs in the way knowledge was viewed. The traditional technical rational and positivist way of looking at knowledge as something that needs to be developed *for* practice and subsequent research methods were abandoned. [13]

Now both scientists and practitioners are in search of new ways to collaborate. The methods they use should facilitate learning of the participants (both researchers and practitioners), and contribute to innovation. This requires unconventional methods: creative, inspiring, innovative ways to investigate. Using questionnaires and interviews guided purely by the researcher's topic list will not lead to learning since it hardly stimulates reflection and leaves little space for nuances. Research methods that enhance learning need to have a strong connection with the respondents' practice and their personal experiences. To meet the wish for more engaging research methods and for more interesting ways to present research, the concept of Performative Social Science might be of help. The editors of this Special Issue mention that the researchers engaged in Performative Social Science are "courageously developing arts-based

research methods and dissemination techniques in order to both investigate deeper and reach wider audiences" (GERGEN et al., 2007). This article examines what kind of research contributes to organizations' knowledge productivity and uses the concept of Performative Social Science to make this tangible. [14]

3. Research Questions

The chasm between scientific knowledge and practical knowledge (GROEN et al., 2006), and the concern that academic research has become less useful for solving practical problems (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006) gives rise to this study. This article examines which research methods help to examine deeper and wider and at the same time support the learning of participants involved in order to improve the performance of the participants and their practice. The concept of Performative Social Science (PSS) (GERGEN et al., 2007) is seen as an important concept in this search. The research questions are as follows: [15]

What methods are suitable for doing research that supports the learning process of both researchers and practitioners?

1. What are the characteristics of this kind of research?
2. What do examples of PSS look like?
3. What are the underlying mechanisms of PSS? [16]

The article is divided into two acts. In Act 1 we state the necessity of new research methods to address the issue of the gap between theory (scientific knowledge) and practice (practical knowledge). We will then explore the first sub question. In Act 2 sub question two and three will be answered. We analyze examples of PSS and look for the underlying mechanisms that make the research method a learning experience as well as a scientific effort. We make explicit how these methods engage people and help improve knowledge productivity. This leads us to the epilogue: the conclusions that answer the main question. [17]

4. Act 1. Characteristics of these New Research Methods

Besides the theoretical and societal motives for this research, it becomes clear from practice as well that there is a need for new "research products" and new research "forms." Researchers and practitioners have already developed all kinds of new research methods. Either because they faced practical problems (DANIELS, 2003) or because of their longing for congruence (JONES, 2006; SALDANA, 2003; STEINHÄUSER, 2006), they come up with creative research methods that have concern for aesthetics. The first paragraph elaborates on that. From this, the first characteristic of the new research methods we are looking for becomes clear, namely its concern with aesthetics. The second paragraph introduces the perspective of VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON (2006). They picture the new research methods that we are looking for, as *engaged scholarship* between researchers and practitioners. This is the second characteristic. We combine the two in the last paragraph where we present a "connection cycle" that visualizes how researchers and practitioners interact and what kind of products and forms they could use in what specific phases. [18]

4.1 Research methods with concern for aesthetics

DANIELS (2003) describes the linguistic, cultural, and ethnic constraints that she encountered in her research on community leadership with South African women: "Once we started understanding the community's people better, we became uncomfortable with whether the data that we had collected were enough to provide a more revealing reflection of the women's worlds and their understandings of their experience" (DANIELS, 2003, p.193). [19]

For her this was a reason to experiment with new research forms. She used photographs and drawings and she found that using these created the opportunity for the women to give better expression to their thoughts:

"What we find exciting about photography as a data collection method is that it is not dependant on one shared language or on the presence of the researcher. Photographs can be used as bridges of communication between strangers and have the potential to become pathways into unfamiliar, unforeseen environments" (DANIELS, 2003, p.194). [20]

For DANIELS, the choice of applying participative research practices was an attempt to work collaboratively with the participants on their community building roles. [21]

SALDAÑA (2003) reports of the use of new research methods as well. He is looking for ways to tell the stories of the participants in his research credibly, vividly, and persuasively and used ethno dramatic research representations. He works with plays and monologues to present findings in a way that is congruent with their content. STEINHÄUSER (2006) also is in search of a way to present the stories of her participants in congruence with the themes that she studies. She studies passion in corporate cultures and has chosen a novel-like form to present the interview reports. These interview reports are no rational overviews of what the respondents have said, but rather they are personal journeys to passion, written in the form of novel-like stories that engage immediately you as a reader into the research she has done. [22]

JONES (2006) gives us another example. He is dissatisfied with limitations in publication and presentation of his own biographic narrative data. He has begun, therefore, to look to the arts and humanities for possible tools in order to better disseminate his narrative interview material at conference gatherings. [23]

Either because of practical problems or because of the urge they felt to be congruent, these researchers have found new research methods that are in some ways related to arts. These expressions of new research methods relate to what HOLLOWAY and TODRES (2007) believe: that the purpose of (qualitative) research is not just a scientific concern with "truth" but also an aesthetic and ethical one. The purpose of qualitative research is to serve multiple kinds of knowledge with different epistemological emphases. At its best qualitative research is both art and science (HOLLOWAY & TODRES, 2007). Art forms are used not only for the sake of aesthetics or beauty itself, but they should be seen as a means to research that enhances learning of the researcher, the practitioner, as well as other actors who want to be involved in the research. [24]

4.2 Researchers and practitioners as engaged partners

VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON (2006) introduce an uncommon and appealing perspective. They state that a method of *engaged scholarship* between researchers and practitioners might be a promising way of closing the gap between research and practice. In engaged scholarship researchers and practitioners co-produce knowledge that can advance theory and practice in a given domain and, as such, contribute to the process of knowledge productivity. In this collaboration between researchers and practitioners, the knowledge that is needed to bridge the gap between theory and practice is created. Past literature has focused on the relevance and use of academic research *for* practice. VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON (2006), however, believe that researchers and practitioners should leverage their different perspectives to develop knowledge about a complex problem. Engaged scholarship is a collaborative form of research because the real-world problems that it is designed to address are too complex to be captured by any one investigator or perspective (AZEVEDO, 1997 in VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006). In the field of Corporate Education and Human Resource Development the scholar-practitioner partnerships and the need to find research-in-practice-settings is a significant force that should prompt further evolution (TYLER, 2006). TYLER, from her experience as both scholar and practitioner, suggests that research models that want to match the fingerprint of particular scholar-practitioner circumstances, need to possess three characteristics: emergence, elasticity, and nonlinearity:

- Emergence means that the initial research designs will evolve—often gradually, sometimes rapidly—as the research unfolds. The interdependent need will generate research and questions that are more profound than the initial question. As researchers and practitioners in co-production move along, they collaboratively make deliberate choices about the next stage of research in real time.

- Elasticity means that new research models need to be more pliable. Changes in the environment and in people are viewed as an integral element of the research.
- Nonlinearity is about practitioners looking for ways to improve their organizations. Waiting until the entire research process is complete to apply findings is not attractive for them. It will diminish their interest in collaborating with researchers. What works is to use small data collection cycles inside the arc of an overall plan. [25]

4.3 The connection cycle of co-production

Performing research in this way asks that researchers and practitioners work together as partners in a co-production, in order to find new kinds of research products and research methods which facilitate the learning process that they want to initiate in order to be knowledge productive. We will illustrate this with the "connection cycle" as depicted in Figure 1.

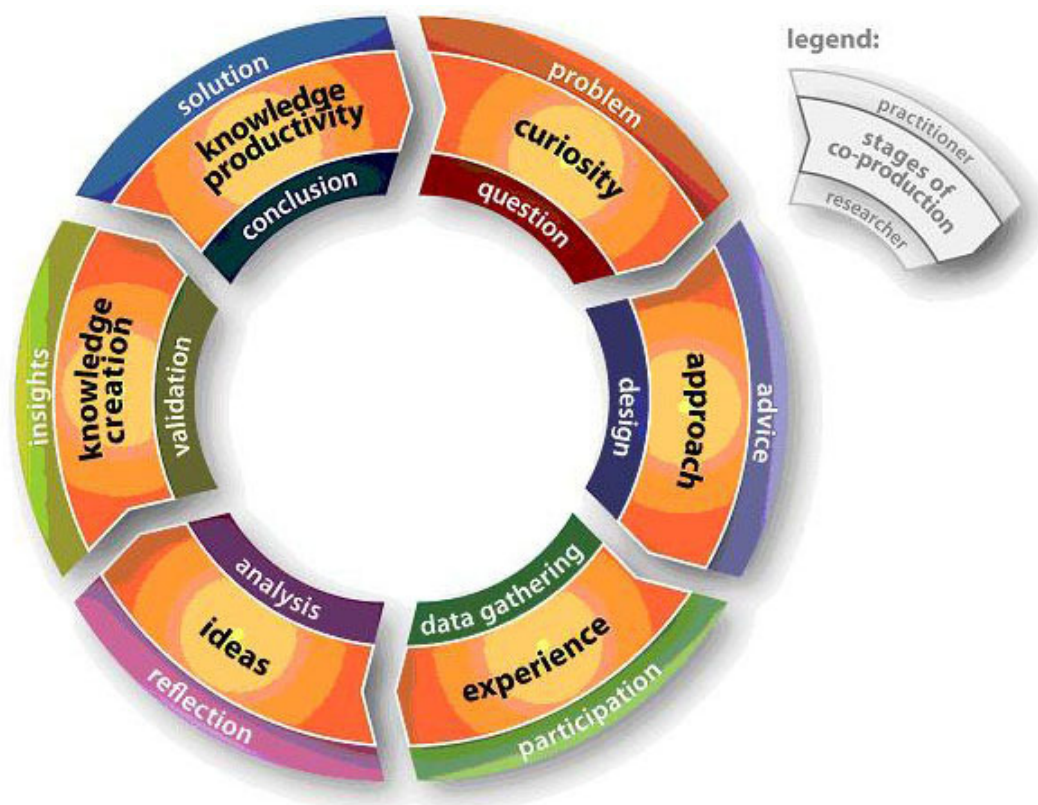


Figure 1: Connection cycle and stages of co-production in the learning cycles of researchers and practitioners [26]

The connection cycle is a model that puts words to the co-production stages. It shows how researchers and practitioners wander through the different stages of their co-production. The stages are 1) curiosity, 2) approach, 3) experience, 4) ideas, 5) knowledge creation, and 6) knowledge productivity. We view these stages as an elastic model that leaves room for emergent steps and may follow a nonlinear path. In each of these stages researchers and practitioners bring different interests and competencies to their co-production. [27]

In this figure the learning cycles of both researchers and practitioners are connected. The importance of connecting these two learning cycles is twofold. For practitioners this connection is necessary in order to use research as a powerful means of learning in order to find answers for new questions that they encounter. For researchers the importance lies in the fact that if they want the knowledge they develop to be useful for practice, the knowledge should be developed *together with* practice. In order to connect the two cycles, a powerful new way of research is necessary. The aesthetic research-forms and objects that can be used differ per phase. Section 6 of this article elaborates on concrete examples of performative research methods. [28]

4.3.1 Curiosity

An important starting point for engaged scholarship mentioned by VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON (2006) is something that both parties are curious for, a so-called "big question." What does the kind of problem that the practitioner struggles with in his or her organization look like as a research question? According to VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON, a good indicator of a big question is "its self evident capability to motivate the attention and enthusiasm of scholars and practitioners alike" (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006, p.810). This curiosity needs to be originated in the researcher's and practitioner's individual motives and they need to be formulated as an urgent and intriguing question in order to serve as a starting point for a process that leads to knowledge productivity (VERDONSCHOT & KEURSTEN, 2006). In this phase heedful accommodation and integration of diverse viewpoints is necessary. This yields a richer gestalt of the question being investigated than the sense making of a single stakeholder (MORGAN, 1983; WEICK, 1995). [29]

4.3.2 Approach

Entering the next stage, researcher and practitioner develop an approach together. Researchers need to become more explicit at the beginning of the study in articulating the kind of knowledge that the specific research to be engaged in might generate (HOLLOWAY & TODRES, 2007). The implications for the choices in the design of the study need to be clear to all partners. VAN DE VEN and JOHNSON (2006) encourage researchers to focus on opportunities in the differences instead of on the tension. Where practitioners are used to ask external advice to solve a problem they are now part of the research team as a "relative insider" (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006). Researchers as "relative outsiders" and practitioners as relative insiders engaging in a collaborative effort offer distinct advantages for integrating diverse perspectives on the problem or phenomenon being investigated (LOUIS & BARTUNEK, 1992). Most likely the approach that is designed, is not planned from beginning till end. It needs to be flexible enough to relate to the developments and questions in practice. [30]

4.3.3 Experience

The third stage creates a collaborative experience in which the researcher focuses on gathering data and the practitioner focuses on participation in the study. In this experience the interest of aesthetic (art) becomes apparent as the form of inquiry is characterized by imagination, creativity and aesthetics, and it is fluid, dynamic and flexible. What is important for the practitioner is to have a relationship of trust, candor and learning with the researchers (VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006). This can be created in mutual experiences. Time is critical for building relationships (MINTZBERG, 1979; PETTIGREW, 2001). The importance of spending more time on site to build direct and personal relationships with organizational participants has been argued to facilitate the implementation of research findings (LAWLER, MOHRMAN, MOHRMAN, LEDFORD & CUMMINGS, 1985; MINTZBERG, 1979; VAN DE VEN & JOHNSON, 2006) and to increase the likelihood of making advances in a scholarly discipline. [31]

4.3.4 Ideas

The fourth stage of the connection cycle addresses the issue of reflection and analysis. The researcher is skillful in analyzing obtained data using his or her research question. The practitioners are very much involved with their own practice and they will experience the phase of analysis as reflection upon their own practice. The way the researcher organizes the findings is helpful for the practitioner to look at their own practice in a different way. [32]

4.3.5 Knowledge creation

In this phase the reflections of the practitioners ("Hey I don't recognize this at all" or "These themes differ quite a lot from what I normally do") help the researcher to validate the results. For the practitioner this collaborative effort leads to new insights. In their joint activity new knowledge can be created. Kurt LEVIN (GREENWOOD & LEVIN, 1998) was one of the first ones to work on the idea of knowledge production based on solving real-life-problems. He

changed the role of research from being a distant observer into involvement in concrete problem solving. [33]

4.3.6 Knowledge productivity

It used to be common for researchers to present and disseminate their findings at professional conferences or publish them in scientific journals and books, generally for an academic or professional audience (HOLLOWAY & TODRES, 2007). The challenge now is to make dissemination activities more imaginative and engaging, and to take findings to citizens who may find these relevant and useful. For practitioners for whom the goal is to find solutions for their initial problem, and for researchers who have an interest in answering their research questions, it is now a matter of collaboration in order to take full advantage of their collaborative research efforts. The experiences they have had together, the ideas, and the phase of knowledge creation that they have gone through are all building blocks to work on the gradual improvements and radical innovations that form an answer to the initial research questions and urgent problems faced in practice. [34]

5. Act 2. Examples of Performative Social Science

The previous section presented a model that connects the two learning cycles of researchers and practitioners (Figure 1). This section presents examples of methods that can be used when conducting research which aims to connect the two cycles. We look for the underlying mechanisms that make the research method a learning experience as well as a scientific effort. Seven methods are described, and in the table below (Table 2) their link with the connection cycle is depicted.

Research method	Relation with the connection cycle
Sphercards: sharing curiosity to help people formulate their implicit thoughts and feelings	Curiosity: researchers address their ideas about possible research themes and practitioners formulate the problem they are facing
Interview guide: development and experiment towards a congruent approach	Approach: researcher and practitioner develop an approach together in congruence with their curiosity
Theatrical monologues: creating experience through practice-based monologues	Experience: researchers gather data and practitioners participate in the study
An exhibition with "pieces of art": sharing ideas in order to reflect upon research results	Ideas: researchers and practitioners analyze results and reflect upon their created practice multiple times
Cartoons: sharing ideas for critical reflection	Ideas: researchers and practitioners reflect upon their findings from a different perspective
Posters: creating new knowledge by presenting research results	Knowledge creation: researchers validate research findings and practitioners to obtain new insights from the presentation
Booklets and fairytales: spreading the knowledge as a product of research.	Knowledge productivity: researchers present conclusions and practitioners and others involved find solutions for the problem they want to deal with.
Postcards: general reflection by asking / giving feedback after a research meeting.	This can be used as a research tool in various phases.

Table 2: Relation between research methods and phases of the connection cycle [35]

On the next pages you'll find some of these examples enlightened with a description of the experience, the how-to-do-it's, and the effects that the particular method has. [36]

5.1 Sphercards: connecting through sharing curiosity by images

Maaïke once facilitated a research trajectory on balancing between the different roles of advisor and financier. There were no easy answers to this question and it was something with which every participant was struggling. She was looking for a way to help people connect through sharing their questions, thoughts and feelings about the theme. This is why she started off the meeting with sphercards, a pile of about sixty postcards with images, photos, lines or quotes. People were asked to pick one of these cards that had a meaning to them in relation to the meeting.



5.1.1 How to do it?

- Ask the group to sit in a circle. Place all the cards on a table. Make sure there are at least thrice the number of cards as there are participants.
- Give the assignment: pick a card from the table that suits the thoughts and feelings you're having right now, concerning this meeting, the core question or the main theme.
- Then ask them to show the cards to the others and share why they picked that card. [37]

The cards help people to have a conversation on a different, deeper level. This level is crucial, because learning requires *trust*. And if you want to generate trust, you need to show yourself on an authentic level. That's what these cards do: they help you to open up and share your genuine feelings.

5.1.2 The effect

Using the sphere cards showed the different questions people had in mind for the meeting as well as the different views of what their jobs entailed. It opened up the different perspectives and experiences in the room and that helped to see:

"together we can do this because we have all we need within this room!" [38]

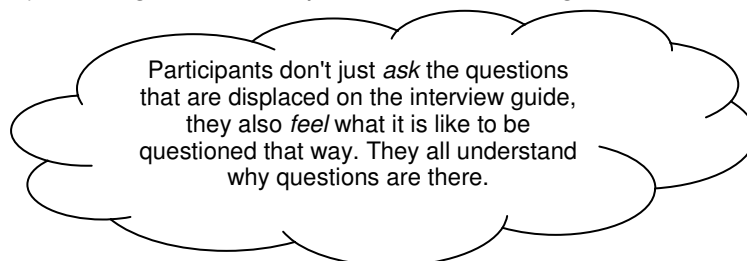
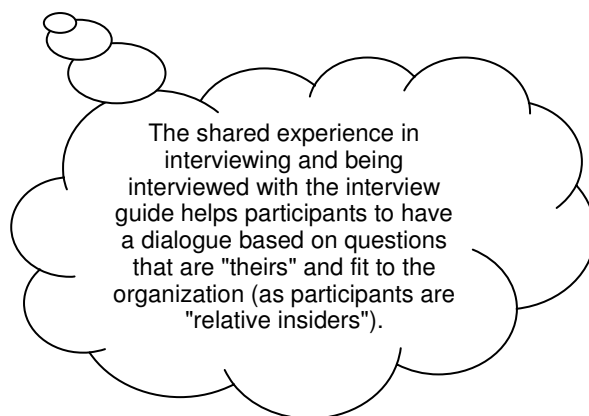
Participants don't just *hear* the story related to the image, but also *see* the image. Which gives them the opportunity to not just listen, but also watch and interpret it in their own way. That's PSS in a nutshell: triggering several senses enriches the experience.

5.2 Interview guide: Jointly developing a research approach

Anja and her colleague researcher once facilitated a research trajectory with five Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals around the question of how to improve the learning practice at their organization. The focus was on discovering good examples of work-related learning that already existed in their organization, as opposed to deficiencies in their learning practice. Who else can do that better than the insiders themselves? To make that work, the HRD-professionals and Anja and her colleague researcher teamed up in developing a research instrument. Researchers and practitioners co-produced an interview guide. We had a trial and adapted the guide together. [39]

5.2.1 How to do it?

- Prepare a work-in-progress interview guide to have something to start off with. Try to formulate questions that can be used and understood by non-researchers.
- Ask participants to team up in dyads to interview each other while using the interview guide. Invite them to imagine they are conducting the research with the people in their own organization.
- Allocate enough time to give everyone the opportunity to understand and experiment with the interview guide. This means that each dyad works in its own way: discussing, preparing in silence or immediately starting off questioning each other.
- All dyads write up their results on a flip-chart.
- Jointly reflect upon the results and process of interviewing (which questions worked, which ones were toughest, et cetera), and together develop the final interview guide. [40]



5.2.2 The effect

Developing and experimenting with the interview guide in a co-productive approach integrated the perspective of researchers and participants and provided them with a shared experience on the topic of interest. It promoted their understanding of what works and what doesn't in the interview guide and interview process. [41]

It helped them to develop ways to be flexible and relate to the developments and questions in practice. This resulted in the development of research capacity of both practitioners and researchers! Practitioners benefit from the experience in that they will be able to continue to look at their organization with "researching", or curious eyes. [42]

5.3 The use of theatrical monologues in a research on how people innovate

Suzanne and Marloes had been working on the development of principles for knowledge productivity for a period, building on the experiences of participants of innovative practices in the domain of innovative space-use. After having formulated eleven principles, they discovered that they only come to life once people start *working* with them, in relation to certain persons and within a certain context. So how to create an exercise that helps people to actually experience the action of the principles? And how to do it in such a way that working with the principles can be studied in itself? After all, seeing others using the principles collects interesting data on how the principles work. The researchers wrote five monologues based on true stories that were collected in an earlier stage: each one illustrating the perspective of one stakeholder in a process of innovation. [43]

5.3.1 How to do it

- After a period of data-collection try to find out who the keyplayers are (the main stakeholders) and what their basic point of view is. For instance: a user, a facilitator, an alderman, and a constructor. It helps starting off with quotes: just imagine what this person would say under these conditions?
- Start filling in these characters: make them alive, with real emotions, worries, and successes. Choose a form that suits you: write monologues, create a mood board or tape real persons who represent your key-persons by acting.
- Present your characters (Marloes and Suzanne actually invited 5 participants to perform and read the monologues out loud!) within a truth-based case and let participants work on this case with the tool you want them to use: a set of principles, a model, a game, et cetera.

George

In the beginning it felt a bit strange to me to be working on the city-renovation in the district where I work with so many people. I am used to my role as a linking pin in the process ...

Willy

The director of our construction company and me have been arguing with the local government for years now. Every time things just stopped, we didn't get the licenses needed to start building a business center ...

Rosemary

My husband works in one of those offices, and I find it unacceptable that he would work there day and night without any daylight. George, the alderman of Green Environment and Licenses with whom I was discussing this, reacted quite surprised.

Kim

I am a person who needs milestones. It's just the way I work. Things can't go too fast for me! I have a store in the park, where people from all corners come to.

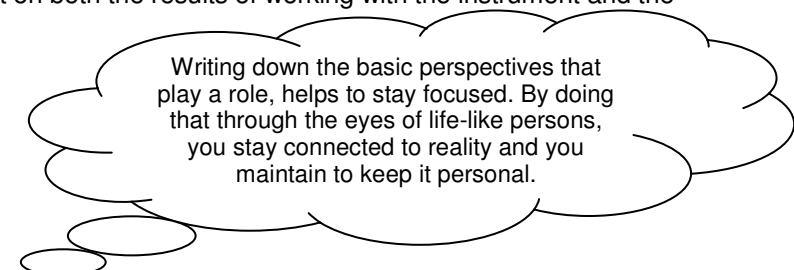
Tom

I get a lot of questions, and sometimes I don't know how to react. The Court of Mayor and Aldermen of our local government is getting impatient. They want to see results. And even though I totally trust our plans ...

- Together with the participants reflect on both the results of working with the instrument and the process of doing that. [44]

5.3.2 The effect

As the participants are working on the case with the researcher's tool, the researcher will have lots of opportunity to study that process: what happens, what works, what is striking in using this tool? Questions participants might ask are leads for improvement. The participant, at the same time, is using a new tool, therefore learning new skills and creating new knowledge. As a researcher, you end up with new material for your research on how your tool might be further developed. As a participant, you have experienced using a new tool. [45]



Writing down the basic perspectives that play a role, helps to stay focused. By doing that through the eyes of life-like persons, you stay connected to reality and you maintain to keep it personal.

5.4 The art-exhibition: appreciating and reflecting



After having done a lot of research together, the colleagues at the Research Practice of Kessels & Smit, *The Learning Company* felt the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of their research. They started to compare their research projects with pieces of art: something beautiful that tells a story about the researchers and the "subjects" of their work. So why not make an exhibition of the pieces of "art" they were most proud of and let these pieces of art serve as basis for their reflection? They invited visitors—their colleagues—to enrich the reflection and to inspire others. [46]

5.4.1 How to do it

- Invite everyone, including the visitors to bring at least one piece of "art," of which they are very proud. This could be everything from a research tool, pictures, a booklet, an experience, a website, an interview guide, or an e-mail from a client with feedback.
- Arrange the pieces of art in the room, do this with all of the artists. Let people walk around for a little while to stimulate their
- Jointly fill in the signage you always see in museums, with the name of the artist and the piece of art on it. Start randomly with one piece of art several people are interested in. While making the "nameplate," reflect on the following questions (see below) and write the answers on the card.
 - What does the artist want to say with this piece of art? Why is it here?
 - How can we describe the style of the artist?
 - What are the materials the artist used that make this piece of art so beautiful?
- For documenting general reflections about the whole exhibition (such as in this case: "what are the core principles underlying the way we do research?"), use a flip chart. [47]



Figure 2. 'Pieces of art' at the exhibition

Looking at your work as a piece of art, helps to appreciate the beauty of it. In doing so, it touches the heart, not just the brain. A completely new experience!

5.4.2 The effect

By going through these questions you jointly discover what made these pieces of art useful, effective or workable. It is a way of artful or creative reflection and therefore not only helps to formulate core principles, but also stimulates to relate to each other anew. Maybe most important: it is so much fun for both the "artists" as the visitors! All become incredibly energized—who wouldn't like to be appreciated for their work of art? [48]

The "fun" of it all makes the experience a memorable one. It also helps to create movement: even after the meeting, the research principles were further refined.

5.5 Using cartoons: Critical reflection through different perspectives

Once, while planning a conference on organizational learning, Maaïke was confronted with participants who found the central theme in this conference too vague to give meaning to it. How to make sure people leave the conference with some very strong images of how learning in organizations can look like? Participants were encouraged to share stories of learning to find out how organizational learning looked like in their own companies. To capture these stories and ideas, a cartoonist was asked to transform the stories and ideas into images. The cartoons were then used to jointly reflect upon the research data gathered.



Figure 3: Cartoon DE KONING, 2006 [49]

Cartoons appeal to the right side of the brain, where functions such as rhythm, spatial awareness, imagination, daydreaming, colour and dimension are located. Learning is enhanced when both sides of the brain are stimulated. So: more and different learning!

5.5.1 How to do it

- Making cartoons is a profession: invite a cartoonist and brief him on the subject of the meeting.
- In the meeting, introduce the cartoonist to all and explain what she/he will be doing.
- Arrange a space where the cartoons can be shown as they develop throughout the day. Make sure this place is in the same room where people work, so they can see the collection building up, and can have a look at it whenever they feel like it.
- Take some time during the meeting (for instance half way and at the end) to gather everyone around the cartoons and have them take a careful look at them. Reflect jointly upon what participants get out of the cartoons.
- After the meeting use the cartoons in any materials related to the meeting and follow-up. [50]

5.5.2 The effect

Having your picture drawn feels like looking in a mirror. It gives back your ideas in the form of an image. Furthermore the cartoons do not only reflect the content of a conversation, but also the way this is being talked about. Cartoons therefore show the participants their group characteristics, their routines, and struggles. [51]

By—respectfully!—mocking those everyday details, participants can bring them into perspective again and are inspired to find refreshing perspectives on the theme as well as on how to improve the quality of communication and relations. By incorporating and spreading the cartoons they help people to remember what they had been learning together, with a smile ...! [52]

In the words of cartoonist Bill BROOKS (2004): "Cartoons (...) highlight key issues and enable them to be viewed from a number of perspectives. It is the combination of exaggerated lines and humour which brings the message home in a profound and thought provoking way. This can allow local people to engage and connect with unfamiliar ideas by linking them with familiar characters, stories or images."

5.6 The use of posters to present research results

One of the methods that is becoming a common part of the uncommon work of the Research Practice is the use of posters to share the data that comes from interviews, observations, or other research methods. It was invented as a way to avoid boring conversation-reports, but still being able to give respondents the opportunity to check the results of their conversation. In this project many people had to be interviewed, but there wasn't enough time to write or read the reports that would come out of it. So after one day of many interviews, Marloes and her colleague researchers sat together and talked about their main findings. After writing them down shortly, a technical expert vaguely mentioned: "We could put this on a poster ...? I guess then you're done ...". And so they did! These reflections were printed on a large poster, that was hung up in the hallway where every respondent would pass, together with an invitation to write on it, complete, change et cetera. [53]

5.6.1 How to do it

- No poster without findings! Therefore start by interviewing people, just making some quick notes on your laptop or your notebook. A good way to do so is just to be present in an organization for a day and ask people for a short period of their time. They will generally be curious enough to share their time with you! Don't forget to take your camera with you.
- Reflect upon your findings with another interviewer based on questions like: "What is the main theme if you look at all the interviews? What strikes you? What are the three most mentioned situations?" This is like interviewing each other: helping each other to understand your implicit knowledge on what you found.
- Work out these reflections and do a short analysis: how do these results link to each other? What would we like to share with the respondents? If we had to summarize in one sentence, what would we tell? Also select several quotes from the interviews that illustrate your analysis.
- Present your findings on a flip chart or a more professionally printed poster and hang it somewhere everyone can see. Don't forget to use pictures!
- You can either leave it up to the people passing by to complete, change or question the results on their own, or do a short presentation and make it a group-validation session. [54]



Figure 4: Posters

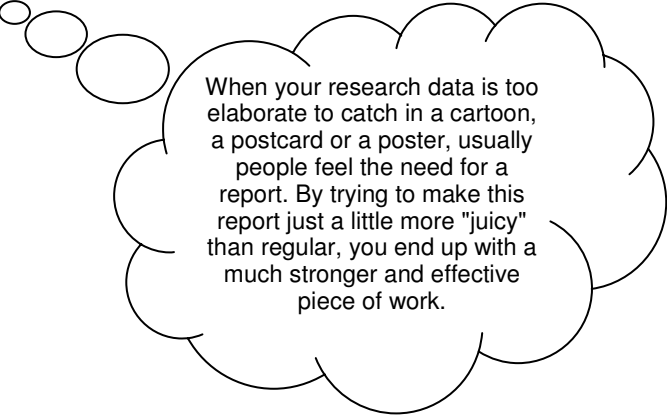
5.6.2 The effect

- People can immediately see the results of the interview they have given; it's simply pleasant to see your conversation has actually contributed to something!
- As the conversation will have stimulated their thinking, the summary of the collective results will stimulate their reflection and focus.
- By giving the opportunity to react upon the findings, people will also make connections with other visions and other people. It will therefore enhance mutual understanding of a problem, a theme or a process. [55]

5.7 The use of booklets and fairytales as a product of research

While creating a so-called learning history with a team, Marloes and her colleague discovered obvious phases in the development of the team. These phases reminded her of a typical fairytale, evolving from situating ("Once upon a time there was a corporation where ..."), via commotion ("Then suddenly the manager came in and asked, 'How do we use all the knowledge that is gathered?'") to the plot ("And so we ended up where the corporation is now: a place where everyone can come to with their questions ... and they lived happily ever after"). So if it looks like a fairytale and reads like a fairytale, why not write it as a fairytale? [56]

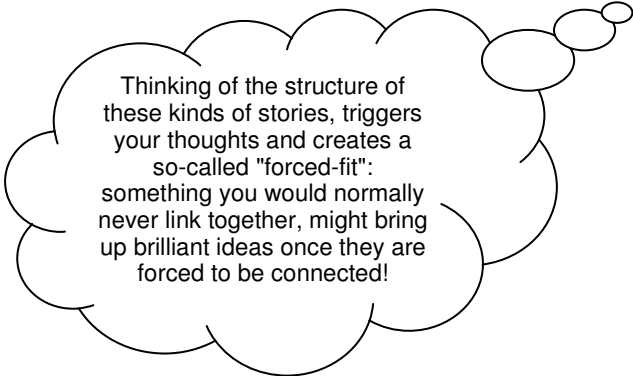
The gathered information was far too rich to summarize in just one fairytale though. They ended up writing the prologue as a fairytale, and added all the elaboration on and illustration of the phases in a "normal" story: an easy to read, personal, and exciting description of how things had gone so far. [57]



When your research data is too elaborate to catch in a cartoon, a postcard or a poster, usually people feel the need for a report. By trying to make this report just a little more "juicy" than regular, you end up with a much stronger and effective piece of work.

5.7.1 How to do it

- After having done your analysis, try to find a link between this "story" and a novel story, fairytale or any kind of non-academic story. Fit the story you want to tell into this structure.



Thinking of the structure of these kinds of stories, triggers your thoughts and creates a so-called "forced-fit": something you would normally never link together, might bring up brilliant ideas once they are forced to be connected!

- Once the structure is made, switch from "academic writing" to "diary writing."
- Meaning: use everyday words, reflect upon what you're feeling while writing (or: what you saw happening with the respondents for instance), dare to use blank spaces, unfinished sentences, questions that come to mind, et cetera (just like these text balloons we added!).

- Ask someone to read your story to find out how the message is being received, how well it reads, and what kind of suggestions someone has. This may be a participant in your research as well as your sister or partner! [58]

5.7.2 The effects

One of the most important effects can be noticed on the face of your reader: they will dive into the story, won't notice time passing by and will turn pages rapidly, curious for the next one. That is not only fun to see and enjoyable for the reader, but it also encourages the incorporation of the story. You can more easily remember the plot of your favorite novel than the conclusions of a boring research report, right? Besides that, this form of presenting results also inspires people not to just *read* it as a story, but also *consider* it as a personal narrative. That helps them to postpone judgments, or feel free to experience emotions and, therefore, to personally connect to the content, the participants and the ending! [59]

5.8 Using postcards to give feedback after a research meeting

Marloes once organized a workshop on how to work with different methods and approaches at the same time. Because it was about so many methods, just printing the handouts wouldn't be satisfying. Thinking about how to help participants to leave with concrete tools, she thought: "The thing you take with you from a workshop is the thing that triggered you most ..." So why not ask the participants to write down what they wanted to take home from the workshop and send this postcard to them afterwards? [60]

5.8.1 How to do it

- Buy a pile of blank postcards and envelopes and hand all participants one after your workshop, project, session or conversation.
- Ask them to write down their most striking realization, anything they would like to say about this experience. Maybe add a suggestion: what would you write to your best friend if you would share your thoughts on this. Don't tell them they're writing it to themselves!!
- Also let them write down their address, on the backside of the envelope. If people ask which one (private or business), let them choose, it will increase the surprise!
- Once you've gathered all cards read and analyze the shared thoughts. What themes come out of it, categories, maybe one central thought. It might be tough, but keep it short: just one quote, sentence or word should do it. If you like you can add an image as well. Print these conclusions on the other side of every card.
- Then send the cards to every participant. Use the old-fashioned post-box, that will increase the surprise!
- Wait patiently for the surprised reactions to come rolling in, like what happened in the above example: *"Thanks for the great reminder I received in my mailbox today, I was happily surprised!"*

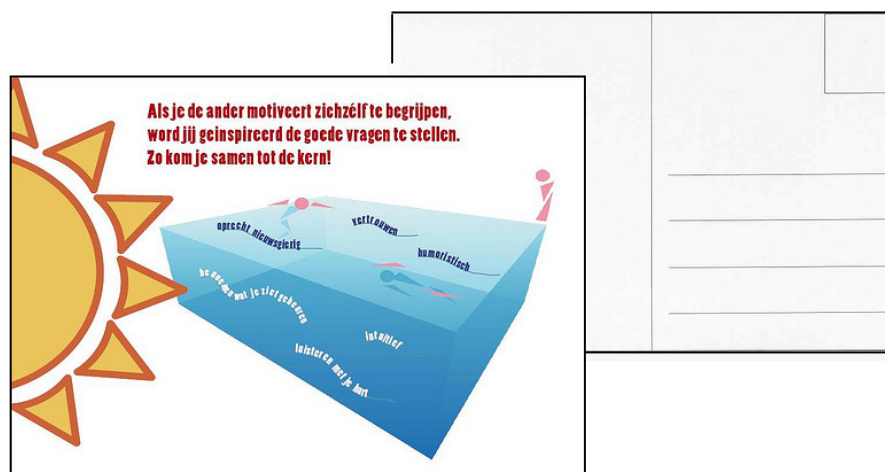
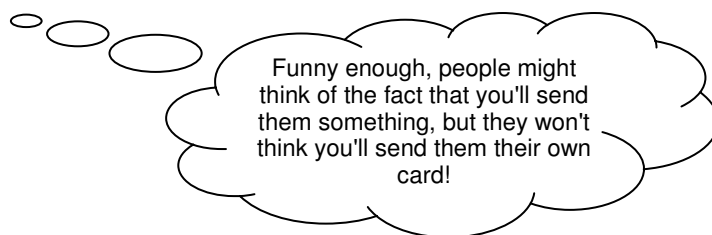


Figure 5. Example of a postcard [61]

5.8.2 The effects

Finding their own realizations in their post-box reminds them of their experience with you in a fun and personal way. Secondly, seeing their own handwriting (starting with the address!) works like looking in a mirror: it reminds them of where they were sitting, and what they were thinking and goes deeper than the written words on the card. It helps to take them back to the experience and therefore it stimulates further reflection. [62]

6. Epilogue

Looking back from where it all began: a small group of young researchers triggered by the Call for Abstracts on Performative Social Science. They wrote an article, developed a model, combined new perspectives, connected their passion for research as a learning enhancer to Performative Social Science. After finishing, three of them came together one more time on MSN Messenger and reflected upon what they had learned and how they would answer their research questions. Follow their conversation one last time ...



Practitioners and researchers partner in the research process

suzanne says:

So let's have a look at our research question

suzanne says:

What methodology is suitable for doing research that supports the learning process of both researchers and practitioners?

maaïke says:

Well, I think that the main thing we showed in our article is that this is a methodology where researchers and practitioners are equal partners in the research process

maaïke says:

They each have their own qualities to bring into the research.

suzanne says:

That sounds as an interesting way of collaborating. Then I immediately wonder: why didn't people do this already? Apparently this is not as easy as it sounds ...

maaïke says:

You're right. Maybe it is because traditionally, researchers and practitioners have defined their interests differently. The researcher wanted to generate "knowledge," and the

maaïke says:

practitioner wanted a solution to his or her problem.

suzanne says:

Hey this is fun, you are saying exactly what I'm thinking!

suzanne says:

And we say that these interests can be combined: each of them keeps his or her own interest

suzanne says:

but we define a collaborate practice in which they act and even enhance each other.

maaïke says:

Yes, and that they SHOULD be combined if we want to make sure that science and practice stay interlinked

anja says:

we look for ways to not only keep your own interest, but also connect with the other's interest (without getting frustrated about not understanding each other). And that is difficult to do, cause if you feel you're losing your interest, then there is no room for staying connected to interests of others

maaïke says:

I think that is what our connection cycle says: this type of research allows you to keep your own interests, learn about the interests of the other, AND jointly create a NEW interest. The $1 + 1 = 3$ idea ...!

Using the arts to connect to each other

suzanne says:

So, we needed ways for people to be able to hold on to their interest AND to collaborate

anja says:

indeed!

suzanne says:

and that's where arts come in

suzanne says:

so together with the relational aspect the arts come in

suzanne says:

actually not so surprising

suzanne says:

arts tend to connect to a different part of our brain: emotions

maaïke says:

Yes! And whereas traditionally emotions were far outside the scope of research (and problem solving), we say that they are crucial to the process

suzanne says:

exactly!

suzanne says:

In order to stay with that interest we need specific kinds of research methods. Methods that engage and inspire. "Traditional methods" and ways of doing research tend to make a link with our rational side. In order to hold on to your own interests (researchers AND practitioners) we need methods that support something else. .

maaike says:

Yes, exactly. We need methods that support relationship building in order to connect interests. And using the arts is an excellent way of doing so, because it connects to other sides of our brain!

How to "do" performative research

suzanne says:

so what do you think is needed for a researcher and a practitioner to DO this kind of research?

suzanne says:

it all sounds very idealistic ... can everybody do it?

maaike says:

Good question ...

anja says:

I think that as a researcher and practitioner you need to feel the urgency of something new, to reach new goals.

suzanne says:

so the starting point is this urgent and intriguing question that is not possible to answer with the knowledge you already have

suzanne says:

that is the driver for the new kind of collaboration

maaike says:

Yes! And I also think that as a researcher you need to be able to help practitioners to look at their own practice from a curious perspective: not judging This is a competence you need to develop as a researcher and help developing with practitioners.

suzanne says:

and the concrete methods we've described should help them on their way

anja says:

There is a drive that connects all. This can be a very personal one: wanting to be more effective, or wishing to stop the boring, stupid, end-up-in-the-drawer-research.

stopping the drawer-thing is definitely one of my drivers!

suzanne says:

So for practitioners it is important to be curious and to learn to do research. For researchers it is important to connect to questions that stem from practice and their personal interests and to be able to collaboratively do research.

A new metaphor for research!

anja says:

To me, this kind of research feels a bit like "dancing around."

anja says:

you let go of things that flow differently and hold on to new insights. As a researcher and practitioner you need to be flexible to dance and to surrender yourself to the process

maaike says:

Research as a dancing routine, I like that!

maaike says:

It reminds me of the tango—there are some basic steps, but you combine them as you wish, together with your partner. You have to be focused on the other to make it a beautiful dance that is both wonderful to do, and great to look at!

maaike says:

So whereas we used to look at research from the perspective of a cameraman, closely following the actor from one perspective, ...

maaike says:

... we now look at research as a dance, in which two people jointly create something beautiful. They do different things, they each make their own steps, and together they make something worthwhile

suzanne says:

wow, exactly!

suzanne says:

whereas "non-performative research" works with the camera-metaphor, including all the do's and don'ts like: don't change perspective while filming, don't walk around on the set while recording and create the final product only at the very end when everything is collected, without the help of the actors involved.

suzanne says:

we introduce "performative research" with the dance metaphor, in which researcher and practitioner are equal and both can take the lead

suzanne says:

In the dance, there is a movement of the two who dance. That movement is what we want to reach in Performative Social Science: learning is necessary because we do research in order

to stimulate knowledge productivity (improvements and innovations) and not only because of theory OR consultancy practice!

Table 4: MSN conversation Part 2 [63]

And so the story of our group of young researchers ended. We hope you enjoyed it.

To be continued? [64]

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The authors are all engaged in the *Research Practice* at Kessels & Smit *The Learning Company*, a consultancy firm. We founded the *Research Practice* because we felt the need to do research that not only studies practice but also contributes to it, that intervenes instead of observes, that is appreciative instead of pure critical, that is fun, and that engages the people who want to learn from the research in the research itself.

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