

Narrative: The Messiness of Human Interaction

Throughout the reflection process, it became evident that there was discord between areas on my leadership model: between goal orientation and deep collaboration and between the energy of my own ideas with my desire to establish a non-hierarchical learning community.

Excerpts from my journal read:

Usually, I go to the meetings with goals in mind, but I don't want to "plop my goals" on the teachers' heads. Depending on the teacher, some meetings are very focused on student learning, some are about "ticking boxes" - getting stuff on the planner and if I'm not careful sometimes planning meetings can just turn into a bit of a natter - pleasant, but not always productive.

Sometimes I feel guilty in pushing my own agenda, yet teachers seem to like it when I do get enthusiastic about ideas to share. Maybe it's the whole balance thing... to lead, I need to be a lead teacher, yet sometimes I hold back because I want to encourage teachers to develop their own ideas and then feel frustrated at the slow pace of change.

(Personal Journal, August 23rd, 2016)

My own opinion/ agenda/ beliefs on what is best for the school almost get squished, along with my ego, through a sponge/ filter which is the messiness of human interaction: the messiness of humans with their own agendas, beliefs, etc. Some of our "arrows" align; some bump heads, some distort each other. (Personal Journal, September 2nd,

2016)

I tried to represent this tension visually, but after finding it impossible to pin it down, discovered analogies and clarity in the artwork of Kandinsky and the music of Arnold Schoenberg.

Kandinsky's *Compositions VI* and *VIII* provided me with two very different visual ways of representing this tension. Though the context of *Composition VI* is far away from the context to which I apply it, the contrast of gentle, blurred colour juxtaposed with harsh, direct lines, compare to the gentle collegiality as precursor to intense colourful discussion, pierced and interrupted by the need for direction. The non-parallel direction of these groups of lines, have the potential to clash to "enter into a direct conflict" ("Comments of Kandinsky," 2008-2017).

Kandinsky comments: "Everything including the mutually contradictory elements became equal, so that none of them prevails over the others" ("Comments of Kandinsky," 2008-2017). The non-hierarchical leadership style which I aspire to, whilst needing gentle positivity, also needs directionality of purpose.

Kandinsky's *Composition VIII* of 1923 is visually different, but again provides anchor to these tensions. The eye is drawn to the large triangle slightly off-centre: a clear focus, yet non-dominating. This focal point is confused by the messiness around it: the balance of non-angular shapes support more gentle - may we say, "fluffy", conversations that support goal direction and depth.

Kandinsky said of the painting: "Form itself, even if completely abstract ... has its own inner sound" ("Composition VIII," 2008-2017). The more you observe the composition, the more you realise features of order. Observations from afar, remind me of Senge's "seeing the

whole” (Senge, 2006). You notice interconnectedness: patterns in line direction, the prevalence of circles scattered across the whole composition; elements of symmetry; pockets of patterns contrasted with irregularities. Take your gaze nearer; focus on the different elements and you see differently: the way new shapes are formed when wavy - seemingly random - lines intersect with the straight (left of centre); the way the circles clash with the grids of straight lines in the right-hand corner. In their very clashing, they produce new nuances of colour. When perspectives start to clash, we have the choice to move our viewpoint outwards again, or to focus in on that moment to see what new shapes and colours emerge.

Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra, Opus 16*, provided an auditory scaffold similar to the visual scaffold of Kandinsky. The first performances of this piece were met with boos and laughter (Glass, 2017). Indeed, upon first hearing, one may assume random messiness. Schoenberg’s move away from the traditional diatonic scale in which the hierarchical relationship of pitches provide a structure for our ears to cling to, created music which is unpredictable and leaves some listeners feeling uncomfortable. “May it not be that the new composer sees a logic in tonal relations that to the rest of us seem merely chaos at present, but the coherence of which may be clear enough to us all someday?” (Newman, 1912 as cited in Glass, 2017)

If you listen to this piece repeatedly, tuning in your ear from the whole, to detailed sounds, coherence and beauty can be found. An irregular push and pull between tone colours, sometimes so complex it is difficult to separate the sounds, sometimes as lonely lines of complementary timbres; tangles of seemingly unconnected melodic phrases, nonetheless wound around each other; the sudden interest in silent pauses. Musical elements similar to

diatonic music are also there if you really listen: short phrases of melodic beauty which emerge and leave you wanting more; climaxes, resolutions and sudden brightening of sound which other composers achieve through modulation or through the resolution of dissonance.

Every time I listen to this piece, I find a new nuance, a tone colour which I didn't experience before. Just as elements of Kandinsky's art clash and create something new, different clashes of pitch and timbre give opportunity for new auditory sensations to emerge. It keeps the listener alert and challenged - there is no relaxing and saying, "it's done."

Just as I have come to enjoy dissonance in visual art and music, so too must I embrace the ever-moving tension between my own ideas coupled with goal orientation on one side with holding back to allow ideas of others to emerge and allowing time for deep discussion on the other. Like the art that gave me representation, human interaction is messy. Learning to observe the tangles from afar and from nearby; to be able to tease out those moments of coherence, budding fresh ideas and potential uncovering of our assumptions, will remain a challenge of my leadership practice.

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