

Louise Phillips (2025). Embracing the Messy Complexities of Co-Creation: A Dialogic Approach to Participatory Qualitative Inquiry

By Carol Gorelick

Louise Phillips' *Embracing the Messy Complexities of Co-Creation: A Dialogic Approach to Participatory Qualitative Inquiry* is an unusually candid personal and dense theoretical book that integrates theoretical principles with participatory action research (qualitative inquiry) methods. Phillips describes individual and collective storytelling, scholarship and practice using creative poetic arts based methods to produce outcomes through knowledge production e.g. dance experiences and co-creating a graphic novel.

As a reader I was immersed in Dr. Phillips' unique style, writing in first person as an expert scholar, a humble reflective practitioner telling her story using a dialogic approach and emphasizing the paradox of writing a book on collaborative research alone.

Yet, the book is rigorous and relevant, a timely contribution to the fields of action research, organizational development and change as well as organizational learning. The book focuses on relational becoming and embodied experiential knowing through participatory methods. This makes it relevant and useful for both scholars and practitioners engaged in societal, organizational, group and/or individual transformation.

Grounded in social constructionism, the dialogic and relational elements of co-creation by directly identifying inherent tensions and messy complexities are woven throughout the book. Phillips wonderfully describes human moments to illustrate how co-creation can be enacted within a novel critical and constructive approach: IFADIA (Integrated Framework for Understanding and Analyzing the Dialogic Production and Communication of Knowledge).

For readers who are new to posthumanist or new materialist frameworks the dense diverse philosophical descriptions might be overwhelming. However, this is balanced by the authentic, engaging application through storytelling.

Fundamentally Dr. Phillips invites readers to co-create and produce new knowledge by embodying knowledge, through IFADIA. She weaves examples of the dynamic collaborative critical reflective analysis to understand tensions and introduces "stuttering knowledge" as the interface between knowing and unknowing for social change and social justice.

Her rich detailed descriptions and reflection on the Parkinson's Dance Research Project, demonstrates how co-creation unfolds in practice, balancing creative processes with tangible outcomes. The Parkinson's Dance is an engaging vivid example of collaborative meaning making workshops and creating a graphic novel as knowledge production in an easy-to-read case study within the book.

Multi-voiced dialogues, roles for participants and the experience of university researchers and co-researchers that includes Parkinson's aware dance teachers and institutional partners were well explained. Dr. Phillips skill and gift is acknowledging tensions and polarities e. g.,

“My account follows the different stages of the project in chronological order, but I don't try to give a detailed account of everything. I try my best to narrate how the agencies of everyone in the project are entangled with each other and with non-human agencies in the ongoing process of co-creation. But I can't avoid flattening the rich pulsating life of, and around the project – full of onto-epistemological and political investments and affective (inter) connectedness involving visceral feelings of joy, love and belonging, hurt, shame and anger – into a condensed relatively muted account of the project's relational practices. At the same time, I breathe more life into pockets of the project by zooming in on particular moments with quite detailed analyses both in the genre of autoethnographic storytelling and the genre of detached, academic analysis.” (p. 103)

Embracing the Messy Complexities of Co-Creation will be on my required reading list for students, researchers and practitioners, doing participatory action research or qualitative inquiry, using a dialogic approach and committed to collaborative learning for change.

As a North American action researcher, I was surprised that Gervase Bushe and Bob Marshak's extensive work on Dialogic OD is not referenced in the book (Bushe and Marshak 2015). This raised my awareness of the opportunity to explicitly cross pollinate the European, North American and South American streams of participatory action research. The approaches share foundational principles emphasizing dialogue as a central mechanism for change and knowledge creation. They embrace complexity, emergence and unpredictability in social systems. They all believe in socially constructed reality through conversations and interactions and prioritize including diverse voices. Bushe, Marshak and Phillips differ in focus. Bushe and Marshak are associated with organizational change. Phillips is oriented to social change (fostering social justice and societal impact) and equality.

References

- Phillips, L. (2025). *Embracing the Messy Complexities of Co-Creation: A Dialogic Approach to Participatory Qualitative Inquiry*. Routledge.
- Bushe, G. R., & Marshak, R. J. (2015). *Dialogic Organization Development: The Theory and Practice of Transformational Change*.

Carol Gorelick is Adjunct Professor and Graduate Faculty, at the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) Schmidhorst College of Business, Doctorate of Organization Development and Change (DODC), USA. Since its launch in 2019, Carol has worked with the BGSU DODC program supporting working professionals to become scholar practitioners by teaching/facilitating third-year dissertation courses to ensure graduation. In addition, her research is on organizational learning: structures and relationships that support cohorts becoming learning communities. Carol uses qualitative action research and collaborative change methods rooted in experiential, participative learning, emphasizing cycles of reflection, action and adjustment. She is an active member of the AOM OD&C Division and AR+ supporting Action Research for Transformations. As a reviewer she prioritizes works that demonstrate real-world applicability and impact through iterative learning.

Louise Phillips is Professor of Communication and head of the Dialogic Communication Research Group at the Department of Communication and Arts, Roskilde University, Denmark. Louise's research concentrates on collaborative, dialogic and participatory approaches to producing and communicating knowledge, including in the field of co-creation in participatory health research. She has written numerous journal articles and written or co-edited nine books on dialogic and sociocultural approaches to communication, culture and society. The reviewed book was funded by a Carlsberg Foundation Monograph Fellowship and builds on Louise's earlier monograph, *The Promise of Dialogue: The Dialogic Turn in the Production and Communication of Knowledge* (2011, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company).