Educational research: a showcase of creative approaches

Edited by Dr Rowena Senior,
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Creative research in education: enriching, connecting and community building

By Dr Rowena Senior, Prof Phillip Woods and Dr Elizabeth White

This special issue has been put together to showcase the arts-based and embodied research being carried out in the field of Education at the University of Hertfordshire. Inspired by work from the University of Cambridge's THIS (The Healthcare Improvement Studies) Institute (see Gardner et al, 2021), we wanted to provide a platform for arts-based and embodied work to support the culture of research in the university and connect the community of people that surround it. Here we provide examples in a succinct format designed to be a practical resource for and accessible to a wide audience. We aim to enhance the visibility of this enriching work and in so doing, increase the engagement with and use of such research methods across the university and beyond.

Research by its very nature can be seen as a process of creating; indeed research can become an explicit and documented act of such practice. For example, the success of a doctoral thesis (most researchers first extended foray into the world of research) is judged on its fulfilment of creating new knowledge. We want to support the notion that creativity can come at any stage of a project (Kara, 2020). For example, it can come at the very beginning as a co-created pre-research activity helping researchers focus on the issues that warrant study or it can come towards the end as a means of engaging with research users, or anywhere in between.

Creative research may also have the potential to offer a space for researchers in which they can enhance the alignment of their methods with their own professional identity (see for example, McKay and Sappa, 2020). It can be a space to explore inequity (see case study 1), may act as a provocation or a means of bringing important questions to the table (see case study 4). It can provide alternative insights for researchers and research users to engage with topics that directly impact their working lives and daily experiences (see case studies 3 and 5).

This collection covers a range of case studies each of which have designed an arts-based or embodied element as part of their data generation process and/or as part of the way the work was or is being disseminated. Case studies were not subjected to the normal double blind peer review, instead being reviewed by one of the editors of the journal for their suitability to this research showcase. We deemed this method of review as suitable because the purpose of this collection was not to focus on the findings but instead to present brief accounts on the use of the creative method itself, how it enriched the project and what these approaches added that other methods might not have realised.

Interestingly, selecting the collection put forward for this issue was not straightforward. As a first pass, categorising research methods and modes of dissemination as arts-based or embodied (or not) required an extended dialogue between the editors, revisiting the nuance of work, exploring how it was framed and what this meant for creativity within the research process. This process is especially challenging if you take the view that 'All research is creative...' (Kara, 2020, p. 43).

Even research which is arguably (methodologically speaking) more 'traditional' compared to some of those reviewed here, needs a design element; indeed, even the slightest tweak to a well-used design can be seen as a creative act. For researchers in this special issue, we wanted to give a reflective space for them to think openly and critically about what they had learned and the impact their work had. Such vulnerability in the research space (for us) is critical, opening the doors to the research experience (good, bad or average) enables it to be shared, understood and connected to the experiences of others within our research communities.

Creative research methods are both an established and a growth area with now dedicated conferences such as the International Creative Methods Conference. We hope that the collection in this special issue will support this growth and support others to engage so they can experience just how enriching, connecting and community-building work this can be.

References

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Kara, H. (2020) Creative Research Methods: A Practical Guide. The Policy Press

Mckay, L. & Sappa, V. (2020) 'Harnessing creativity through arts-based research to support teachers' identity development.' Journal of Adult and Continuing Education. 26(1) pp. 25-42.
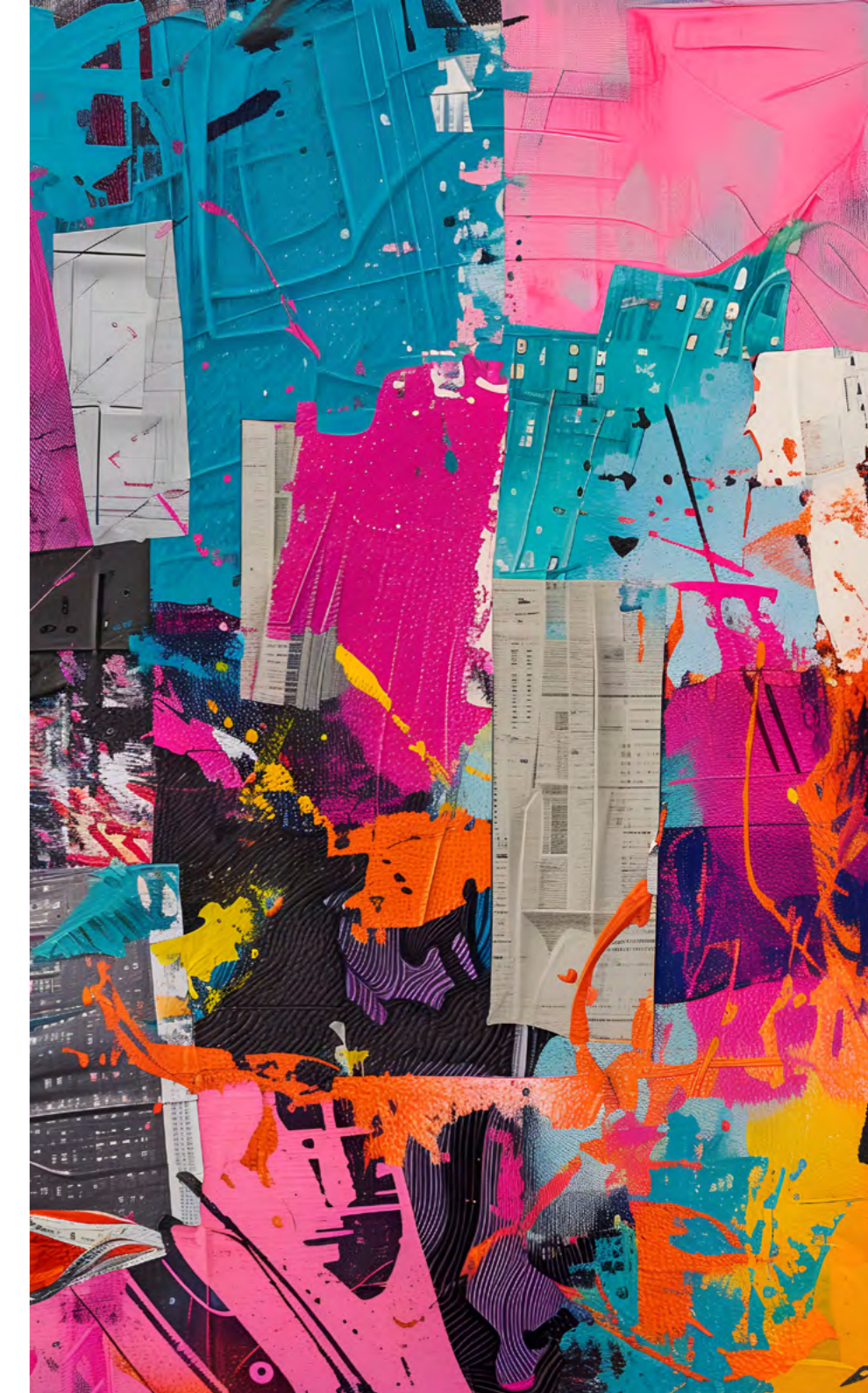
Collage as metaphor: arts-based research into belonging and transformation

By Sara de Sousa

The aim of this (in progress) research is to explore the nature of meaning-making around belonging and transformation amongst racially minoritised students.

What led you to this project?

In UK higher education, race inequity in favour of white students is evident across a range of measures, including drop-out rates, resits, degree classification and graduate employment. This project analyses the barriers preventing Black, Asian and minority ethnic students fulfilling their potential by exploring how they make meaning from their lived experience in a university context. The project focuses on how students interpret the concepts of 'belonging' and 'transformation' and whether race and ethnicity impact how they are experienced.

How were creative approaches used?

A two-stage arts-based method was chosen to offer students power over their own contribution, and a tool to enable reflection over a considerable length of time. Participants took photos of anything representing experiences, situations, contexts and/or times that they associated with a sense of belonging or transformation at university. They later gathered as a group to create abstract metaphors of these concepts using non-stick collage. The arts-based methods privileged the visual form as the vehicle for accessing inner thoughts and emotions and representing the context-specific meaning they made of them. Reflexive thematic analysis will create patterns of cross-case resonance in their stories.

Why did you take this approach?

Photo-elicitation enabled participants to reflect on their years at university, with all participants having studied for at least 18 months in the same context. Photos were then brought to a 1:1 semi-structured interview and used in place of questions to structure the discussion. Participants chose whether or not to show their photos to the researcher as they spoke about them. Weeks between individual interviews and the group collaging activity allowed further reflection upon experience to inform the non-stick abstract collages created. The two methods complemented each other, developing deeper aesthetic reflection over time, and group validation of shared experiences.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

Using visual arts with participants who do not study art subjects enabled the methods to remain judgement free; the skill of 'art' was not assessed or discussed. Using non-stick collage specifically allowed for free form movement within the method, as actions of placing and displacing collage materials could be encompassed in the discussion.

This research has impacted the 11 participants by offering an opportunity for them to gain group validation of their individual experiences, and thereby hopefully an increased sense of community and belonging. It also aims to impact staff compassion and inclusive practice in the University, and potentially beyond, through showcasing the various racialised experiences our Black, Asian and minority ethnic students are forced to encounter within society. Such understanding aims to in turn impact the student's sense of self-efficacy and belonging in the University environment. This impact will hopefully extend into other higher education settings via a staff training video exemplifying composite characters' stories taken from the participant and group interviews – this video will be created once the research is completed.

Any brief reflections?

I chose these methods in keeping with a constructionist approach which references the critical perspectives of decolonising methodologies and critical race theory. I aimed to give participants as much power over the process as possible without burdening them with planning meetings required by a fully participatory design

Case Study 2

Good Science in Primary School

By Dr Elizabeth White, Dr Claire Dickerson, Julia Macintosh and Dr Roger Levy

The aim of the project was to identify the principles of 'good science' in primary schools, from inspiring leadership to more effective teaching and learning.

What led you to this project?

There is continuing concern about declining interest in science and a shortage of scientists entering the labour market within the UK and across Europe. Engaging primary school children in inspirational science can lay a foundation for science literacy, future studies and careers. Our research was designed to evaluate the impact of the University of Hertfordshire primary science award programme, the Primary Science Quality Mark (PSQM) (https://www.herts.ac.uk/for-business/skills/psqm/), and to explore wider issues relating to primary science teaching, learning and subject leadership. The PSQM is a year-long programme where the science leader in a primary school is supported to develop the teaching of science across the school.

How were creative approaches used?

The research data were collected using questionnaires sent to the Director of the PSQM, PSQM hub leaders (programme mentors) and science leaders; semi-structured telephone interviews with PSQM stakeholders and a hub leader; a focus group with science leaders; and from schools' submissions for the PSQM award.

The findings were used to identify principles of good science learning, teaching and leading in primary schools considered from the perspective of children, parents, teachers, governors, science leaders and the senior leadership team. These principles were illustrated using a series of cartoon representations designed by Joel Cooper (http://www.joelcooper.co.uk/). A poster and a set of videos were produced using these cartoons that presented fresh ideas for schools and those working with them. The 28 cartoons were also created into sets of laminated cards (10 x 7.5 cm and postcard size) to use in professional development sessions. The sets of 62 cards included phrases from the research data describing good science in primary school.

Why did you take this approach?

By engaging an illustrator to depict the findings it was possible to provide visual stimuli for teacher development. The cards provided a way for teachers and science leaders to interact with the findings and develop their own discussions about what good science could look like in their schools. All the resources were used by the PSQM hub leaders for leading professional development in schools, both face to face and remotely.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The arts-based approach has enabled providers of professional development to support the learning, teaching and leadership of science in primary schools. The resources were translated into Welsh and Chinese. They have supported the PSQM to have an impact on the attitudes, pedagogy and practice of primary school teachers and subject leaders, and on the attitudes of pupils, governors, parents and the senior leadership team. Using this approach has also helped to inform professional associations.

Any brief reflections?

The voices of participants in research can be more powerful and engaging when represented as speech bubbles from a cartoon figure. By producing resources from the findings it is possible for the beneficiaries of the research to draw their own conclusions and to share their learning together more easily.

Additional or further reading

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White, E., Dickerson, C., Mackintosh, J. & Levy, R. (2016) Evaluation of the Primary Science Quality Mark 2013-15. University of Hertfordshire. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20170907024035/http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/17498/PSQM_programme_evaluation_2013_15_Final_report_13_June_2016.pdf?sequence=3

White, E., Dickerson, C., & Mackintosh, J. (2022) 'I have enjoyed teaching science more': changing the attitudes of primary teachers and pupils towards science. PRACTICE. Contemporary Issues in Practitioner Education, 4(3), 137–153.

Case Study 3

Supporting reflexive learning through visual storytelling

By Dr Amanda Roberts, Shirley Gibson, Val Hill, Dr Helen Seaman and Caroline Seabrook

WECHATT
We Change Things Together
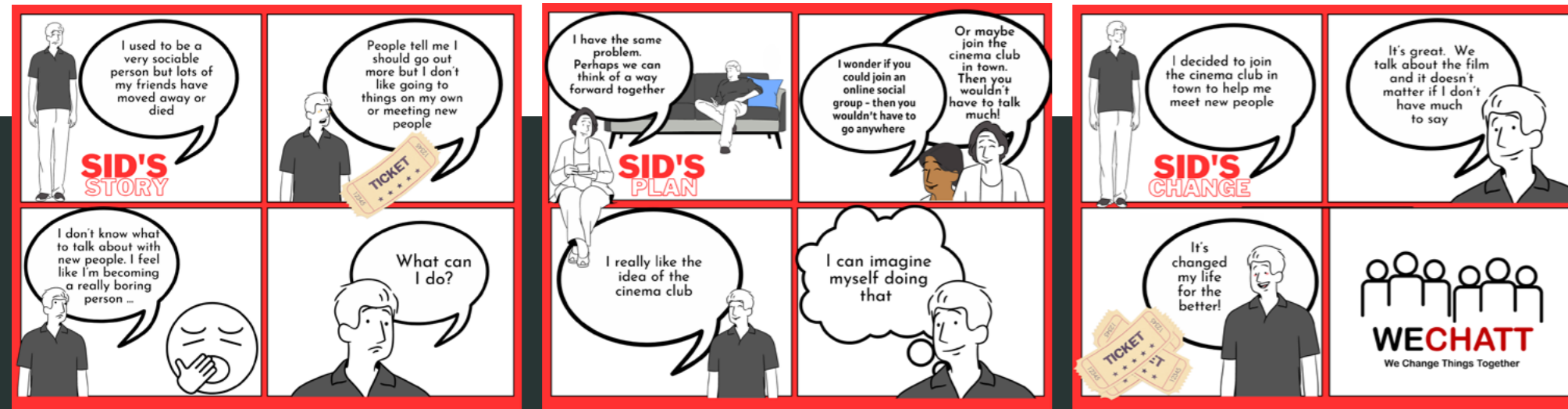
What led you to this project?

During the March 2020 lockdown, Amanda initiated a support group for adults with a life-limiting illness. Group members shared stories of issues caused by their chronic conditions and supported one another to change things for the better. Members wanted to encourage others to develop and learn as changemakers and looked for ways to stimulate the thinking process they saw as a key lever to action. The PATCHATT (Patients Changing Things Together) initiative was developed to fulfil this role.

How were creative approaches used?

Comics are used within the (in progress) PATCHATT initiative to stimulate group members to consider if life has to be this way and how they might act to change it. For example, Sid's story, the first part of his comic, is used in a workshop session to exemplify a common issue and the impact it has on those involved. Group members are asked for their reaction to this comic. They are then asked to consider what it teaches them about themselves and their own situation. The other two parts of Sid's comic are used to stimulate such reflexive thinking in subsequent sessions.

Why did you take this approach?

The combination of visuals and texts in comics proves a particularly effective storytelling form. It allows readers to make a story their own, inviting them to fill in gaps in dialogue and action through their imagination. Comics thus support the authentic engagement necessary for all learning and encourage the reflexive self-questioning needed for personal development. The structure of comics, with a space between panels, actively invites the reader to take the time needed for such activity. The agency attributed to readers in reader response theory can be seen in action here.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

Reactions to comics within the PATCHATT proof of concept group were very positive. Participants found the comic characters easy to connect with and therefore both inspiring and authentic. The simplicity of the stories allowed for varied and personal reactions, allowing participants to challenge the norms around illness and identity. The comics motivated participants to tell their own story and plan for action which re-affirmed them as agential beings.

Any brief reflections?

A reflexive response to evidence and experience is key to deep learning. Using comics to support such reflexivity illustrates their efficacy in challenging assumptions, supporting planning and action and underpinning experiential learning. Several teachers (attending conference presentations we delivered) advised they intend to trial this approach with students with learning difficulties.

Additional or further reading

Bruner, J. (2002) Making stories. London: Harvard University Press.

Gavalar, C. & Beavers, L. (2020) 'Clarifying closure.' Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics. 11(2) pp. 182-211.

Verdonk, P. (2015) 'When I say ... reflexivity.' Medical Education. 49(2) pp. 147-148.

Wombles, C. (2021) 'Graphic Medicine: Comics as a Patient Education Resource.' Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet. 25(3) pp. 310-318.

Case Study 4

A qualitative enquiry into the potential of storytelling to support patient-led change across the palliative care ecosystem, using a systematic review approach

By Dr Amanda Roberts

The aim of this research was to explore how patient-led change can be enabled across all levels of a palliative care ecosystem. This aim seemed best addressed by a two-phase, iterative enquiry. The research was also intended to inform practitioners and policymakers and contribute to their professional learning.
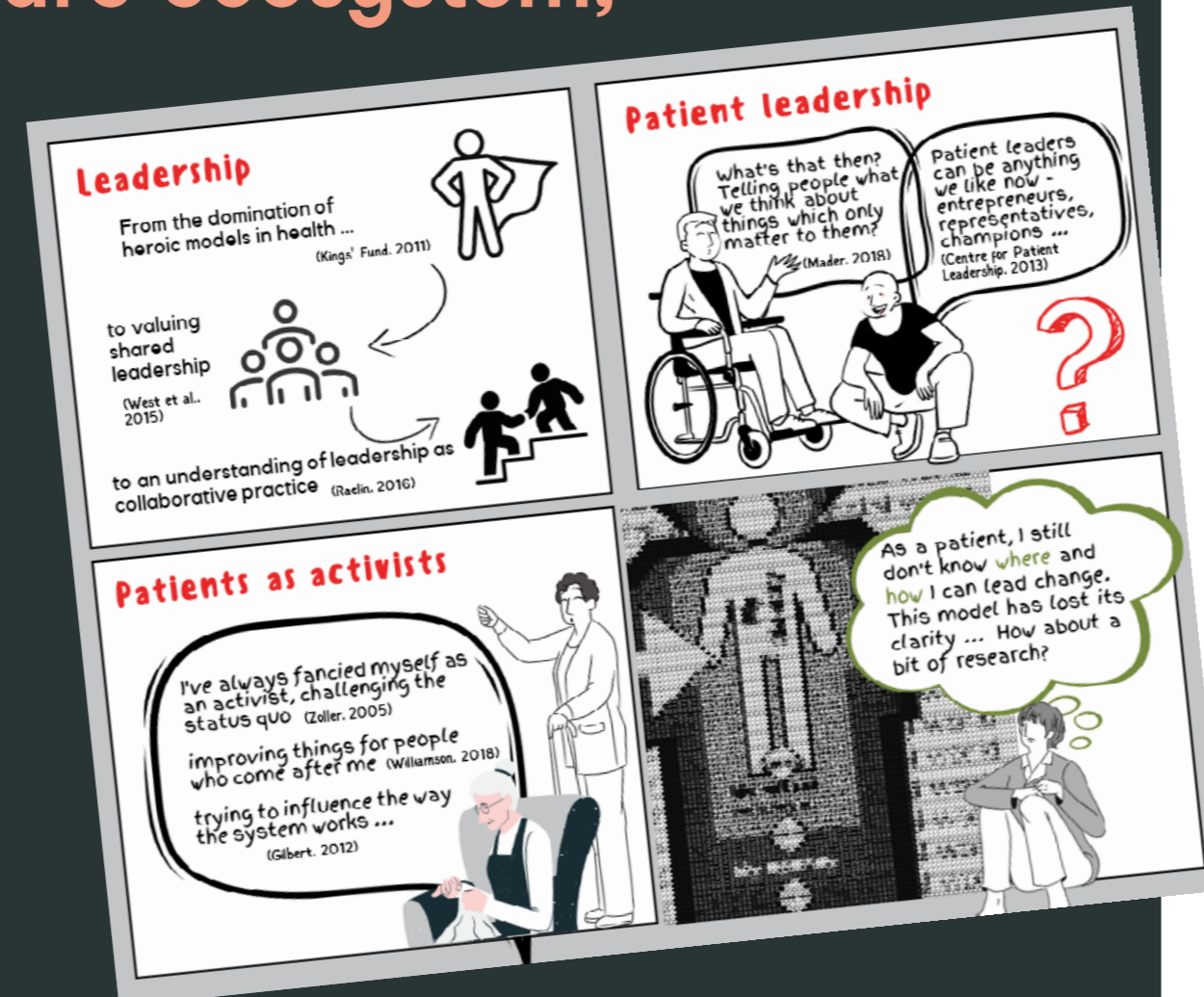
What led you to this project?

A life-limiting illness can impact on an individual's sense of identity, decreasing their positive self-view and belief in their own agency. It is proposed that leading change can help restore a sense of agential, positive self. Taking adequate account of the context, or ecosystem, in which change is attempted is key to its success. This two-phase, qualitative enquiry used a systematic review approach to explore how patient-led change can be enabled across all levels of a palliative care ecosystem.

How were creative approaches used?

This report argues for the value of storytelling in supporting patient-led change, partially through its capacity to initiate deep connectivity between teller and listener. The strength of connectivity achieved through visual narratives recommends them for conveying the process and results of this research. Each written chapter in this report was therefore preceded by a visual narrative, illuminating the main points of the following chapter's argument. This strengthened the potential of the audience to learn from the findings of the research.

Why did you take this approach?

Whilst stories can be told in many forms, Polanyi (1967, cited in Eisner, 2004) suggests many remain untold due to the difficulty of expressing the deepest of thoughts in propositional form. Woods' (2011) offer of non-linguistic forms of telling, such as music and art, was therefore appealing as I tried to tell the story of what I had learned about palliative care patient-led change from this project. The novelty of the comic form has attracted people to the report and therefore supported the dissemination of what I learned to a broad audience base.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The process of developing the visual summaries of chapters was hugely beneficial to the coherence of the written report. Presenting the argument in a summarised, visual form meant that I had to gain real clarity about what I was trying to say rather than rely on clever words to obscure woolly thinking. Being able to view the findings in a summary visual form allowed me to make connections which I might otherwise have missed. In addition, I produced an animated summary of the research to increase the potential for access and impact: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=052qSB8cY7E Both of these processes supported the development of a more nuanced discussion and added new layers of understanding.

Any brief reflections?

Developing this visual narrative was hugely enjoyable. It allowed me to put my beliefs around co-creation of knowledge into practice, in that the presentation of the argument in visual form leaves space for an authentic and individualised response to the findings which a tight textual argument can sometimes preclude.

Additional or further reading

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Eisner, E. (2004) 'What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?' International Journal of Education and the Arts. 5(4), pp. 1-13.

Woods, A. (2011) 'The limits of narrative: provocations for the Medical Humanities.' Medical Humanities. 37(2) pp. 73-78.

McCloud, S. (1993) Understanding comics. The invisible art. New York: Kitchen Sink Press.

VanDeCarr, P. (2015) Storytelling and social change: a strategy guide. Retrieved 2 September 2021 from https://workingnarratives.org/story-guide/

Case Study 5

The AECED project (Transforming Education for Democracy through Aesthetic and Embodied Learning, Responsive Pedagogies and Democracy-as-becoming)

By Prof Philip Woods, Prof Karen Mpamhanga, Dr Suzanne Culshaw, Prof Helen Payne and Hanna Reeves

and working with research teams from the

University Aberta (Portugal)

University of Lapland (Finland)

Philipps University Marburg (Germany)

Riga Technical University (Latvia)

and University of Zagreb (Croatia)

What did you aim to do with this project?

The intention of the (in progress) AECED project is to design an innovative aesthetic and embodied pedagogical framework which has an impact on the practice of education for democracy through associated guides to practice that support responsive, participatory pedagogies. Prototypes will be tested in multiple cases and settings (early years/primary education, secondary education, higher education and the adult/professional level). The framework and guides will be refined and disseminated for creative use by educators, learners and policy actors.

What led you to this project?

Democracy is under pressure and innovative ways of fostering and renewing democracy are needed. The learning theory on which most education for democracy is based omits a fundamental dimension of learning – that is, the aesthetic and embodied nature of learning. The ambition of this project is to remedy this omission. The research is being undertaken by a consortium of partners in six European countries, funded by Horizon Europe and UKRI.

How were creative approaches used?

Creative arts-based and embodied (ABE) methods are integral to developing innovative aesthetic and embodied approaches to education for democracy. They are therefore being used in the AECED project as pedagogical methods for teaching and learning purposes. Creative ABE approaches are also being used as methods of research data generation and analysis. The methods being developed and used (both for pedagogical purposes and as research methods) include approaches that emphasise the visual, such as collage-creation and photography, those that are often associated with the embodied, such as movement and sensory-based methods, and narrative approaches, such as story-telling and creative writing. ABE methods are also to be used in disseminating findings from, and information about, the project – for example, in webinars or seminars organised by the project. In some events, participants may be invited to take part in ABE activities so they have a chance to experience some of the ABE methods being used.

Why did you take this approach?

Creative arts-based and embodied (ABE) pedagogical approaches are integral to developing innovative ways of advancing aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy. ABE approaches used as research methods align with the principles and theory of ABE pedagogical approaches and are therefore particularly important for exploring participants' experience and responses to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy. ABE research methods enable participants to explore, surface and share creatively their experience and viewpoints as active contributors to the evaluation process in the project's case studies.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The proposition underlying the project is that much more can be done to activate the potential of aesthetic and embodied learning for fostering a rich form of holistic democracy that advances human growth, belonging, participation and mutual understanding. The impact sought by the project is transformation of education for democracy through imaginative and innovative ABE approaches to learning for democracy and to evaluating and reflecting on the experience of such learning.

Any brief reflections?

The project is in its very early stages. For further information please go to the project website at aeced.org.

Create, Speak, Thrive: Bringing Words to Life – the evaluation

By Prof Karen Mpamhanga and Dr Claire Dickerson (University of Hertfordshire) Helen Barnett & Muneerah Yate (Trestle Theatre Company)

What did you aim to do with this project?

The University of Hertfordshire is evaluating the Create, Speak, Thrive project - a project that uses drama and storytelling to support language acquisition in primary school-aged children. The project pairs artists and teachers in the co-creation of creative pedagogies to trial and test in classrooms. The teachers and artists are supported to develop new skills through bespoke professional development, embedded reflection, and inquiry.

What led you to this project?

The *Create, Speak, Thrive* project emerged through the work of the Royal Opera House Bridge who recognised a need in local primary schools for language acquisition support. They funded a pilot project to bring together artists and teachers in developing their skills, knowledge, and experience to embed drama and storytelling opportunities within the primary curriculum. A subsequent successful bid, submitted by Trestle Theatre Company, for Paul Hamlyn Foundation funding from the 5th round of The Teacher Development Fund, enabled the extension of this work to seven schools in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. The University of Hertfordshire led the evaluation of the pilot, and are evaluating the Create, Speak, Thrive project, this work is in progress.

How were creative approaches used?

The evaluation of the Create, Speak, Thrive project draws on a creative activity, trialled in the pilot, to foster reflection within focus groups at the beginning, middle, and end of the project. Participants are asked to draw storyboard scenes to reflect their feelings at the different points, and to caption and speak to their image. To disseminate the Create, Speak, Thrive project, a film has been developed to showcase some co-constructed drama and storytelling approaches in practice, and enable teachers, artists, and children to share their experiences of them.

Why did you take this approach?

Within the evaluation, the storyboard activity aligns well with the ethos of the Create, Speak, Thrive project as it allows for the combining of storytelling and narratives with pictures and words. We wanted this more visual approach to stimulate deeper reflection and offer a playful ending to the focus groups. The use of film as a dissemination output allows the embodied and creative nature of the drama and storytelling activities to be shared authentically, and enables viewers to envisage how the approaches can be used in classroom settings.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The snapshot storyboard frames capture key elements of individual experience. While the question is relatively open, similar motifs often feature in the responses. The focus group participants make creative use of metaphor, which they share and discuss. The storyboard activity is a quick and easy prompt for reflection that has been integrated into other reflective activities in the Create, Speak, Thrive wider project. The dissemination films will stimulate interest in the project, providing an accessible overview that can be easily shared.

Any brief reflections?

While some participants apologised for their artistic ability, the richness of the storyboard data goes beyond what we expected when we designed our initial pilot (see above). We have used the storyboard as one of a number of focus group activities; but such creative and visual data collection methods can easily standalone.

Additional or further reading

Year One Dissemination Video:
https://www.trestle.org.uk/create-speak-thrive-bringing-words-to-life

Lillyman, S. & Bennett, C. (2012) 'Using storyboarding to gain appreciative reflection in the classroom.' Reflective Practice. 13(4) pp. 533-539.

An investigation of adapted Art Therapy practices at 'The Community Table'

By Miriam Usiskin

The aim of this in progress research is to better understand the adapted art therapy model of practice known as "The Community Table" which has been used in humanitarian work with refugees. The objectives here were to provide better provision for delivering adapted art therapy, and to develop best practice in teaching adapted art therapy in such challenging contexts.

What led you to this project?

The research forms part of my EdD, which is exploring what Art Therapy can offer in a humanitarian setting, specifically working with refugees in the crisis context of Northern France. The research addresses a number of questions: why offer art therapy in a humanitarian crisis context? What are the meanings and impact of the practices? And what are the mechanisms of change that bring about that impact?

How were creative approaches used?

Arts based approaches have been integral in all aspects of my research. They have been used in gaining data from participants, to gain perceptions about the context the research, and as a researcher I have used arts-based approaches to understand my own responses to the project. A variety of art materials and media were used with participants (along with semi-structured interviews). These included photos, drawn images and visual responses including stop frame animation to understand both the context and my own responses to the research.

Why did you take this approach?

Art therapy is a visual arts-based profession, so it is important to be congruent with the field being explored. Arts-based approaches can be integral to all stages of research not only with participants to accrue data but with researchers too. For example, it can also be used to focus on interpreting participant experiences through researcher generated art, as well as be used to understand and define researchers own experiences of the research and is a way of engaging with reflexivity.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

Using visual arts with participants who do not study art subjects enabled It is anticipated (and is evidenced already) that this project will enable a more sense-based, perceptual, embodied way of gaining data and safely allowing access to emotions and feelings. It enables some forms of knowledge to be gained that are inaccessible through more traditional epistemologies or linear methods of investigation.

Any brief reflections?

Artmaking can be used in all stages Of research presenting a newperspective of a phenomenon. It is important to clarify the overall intent of the art making, what, why and how it is being used, considering subjectiveness and the context of how the art is made and viewed.

Additional or further reading

Lloyd, B. & Usiskin, M. (2020) 'Reimagining an emergency space: practice innovation within a frontline art therapy project on the France-UK border at Calais.' International Journal of Art Therapy. 25(3) pp. 132-142.

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Lloyd, B. & Usiskin, M. (2022). '"The Community Table" Developing art therapy studio on, in-between, and across borders.' In Brown, C. & Omand, H. (Eds) Contemporary Practice in Studio Art Therapy. Routledge: London.

Black and Asian primary student teachers' experiences of belonging and acceptance during their School-Based Training

By Kate Voss

The aim of this in progress research is to make meaning from Black and Asian primary student teacher's experiences and emotions of belonging, during school-based training. To research the importance of students being accepted and seen in the school community and how previous lived experiences affect their perceptions of belonging.
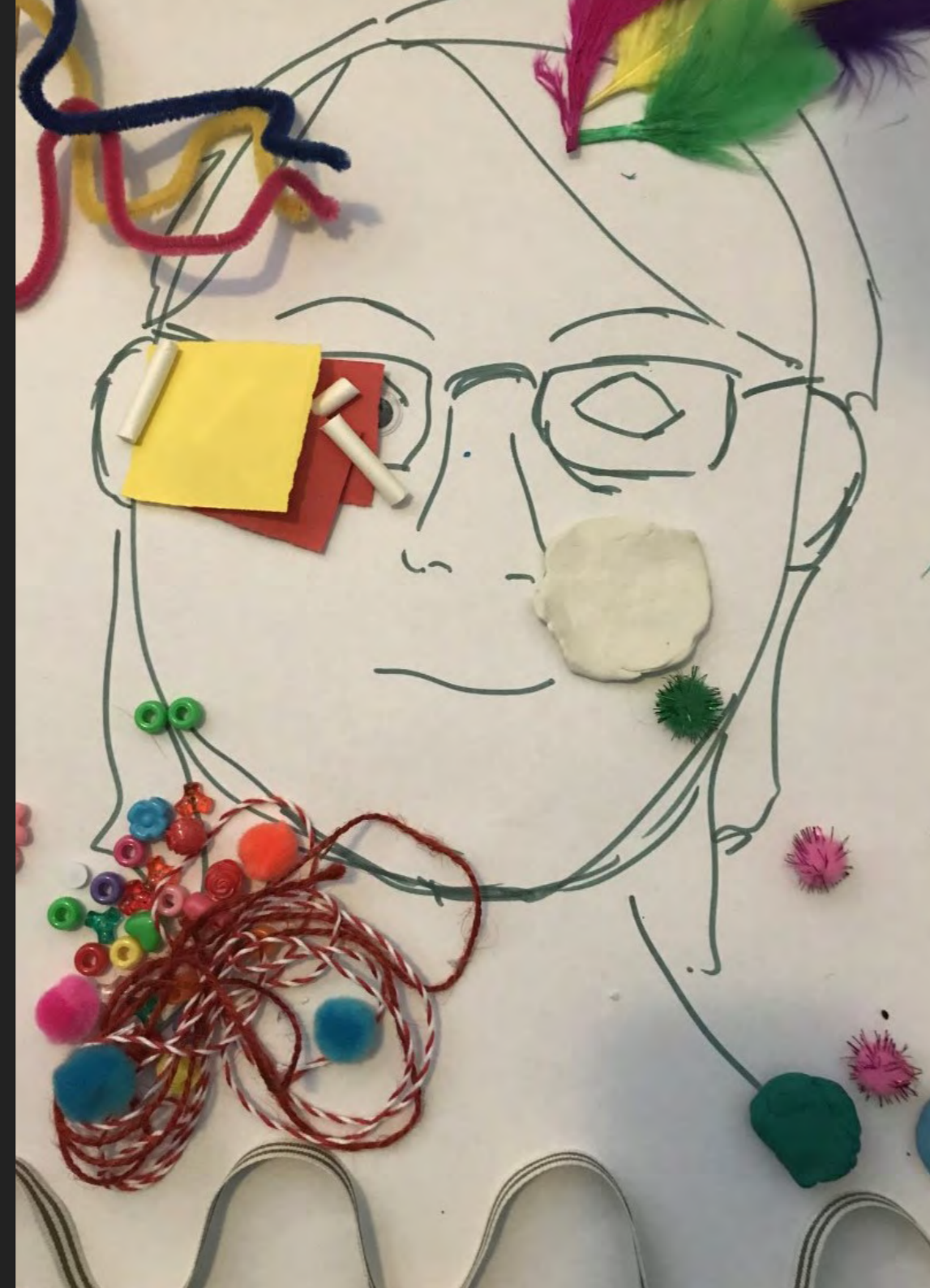
What led you to this project?

My previous small-scale project highlighted Black and Asian students' sense of belonging as an emerging key theme from their experiences during school-based training. A sense of belonging is a complex, fundamental social construct, a subjective feeling of connection and a core psychological need, promoting meaning in life. Belonging has a physical and mental impact on person's wellbeing and health, so may impact on the student's experiences and successes while in school, possibly leading them to fail or leave the profession.

How were creative approaches used?

Participants will create collages and self-portrait collages in response to questions about belonging, this will be repeated after their first and second school-based training experiences. After creating the collage there will be a conversation, allowing the participants to articulate their reflections on their collage, drawing out narratives of lived experiences and how they assess belonging. The participants will use a range of moveable collage materials positioned on paper, allowing time to select, move and place the materials. For the self-portrait collage, the participant will draw an outline of their face on paper before using the same non-stick collage materials.

Why did you take this approach?

Collage allows the juxtaposing of different visual elements, encouraging participants to represent their feelings, experiences, tell stories and make meaning using different materials. By creating collages and constructing meaning from them, the participants have a physical starting point to talk about the complexities of belonging. Collage can allow unstated ideas to be made explicit and new thinking to evolve, allowing different thinking and experiences to surface, which may not be articulated through an interview. During my small-scale project, the participants created a self-portrait, the responses were surprisingly personal and powerful, reflecting their experiences and insights into their perceptions of belonging.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

I want this research project to value the lived experiences of Black and Asian student teachers, making their voices heard, developing new knowledge about the student's perceptions of belonging during their school-based training. This will lead to recommendations on how partnership primary schools and the university can better support these students. Therefore, contributing to the students having successful and positive experiences of different school communities, consequently increasing the number of Black and Asian teachers in English primary schools.

Any brief reflections?

The physical, dynamic and creative aspect of collage methods allows for the surfacing of emotions and experiences which may be difficult to articulate. Through creating their own collages, the participants are leading the subsequent conversation, giving power to the participants to direct research, rather than the researcher.

Additional or further reading

Allen, K., Kern, K.L., Rozek, C.L., McInerney, D.M., & Slavich, G.M. (2021) 'Belonging: a review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research'. Australian Journal of Psychology. 73(1) pp.87-102.

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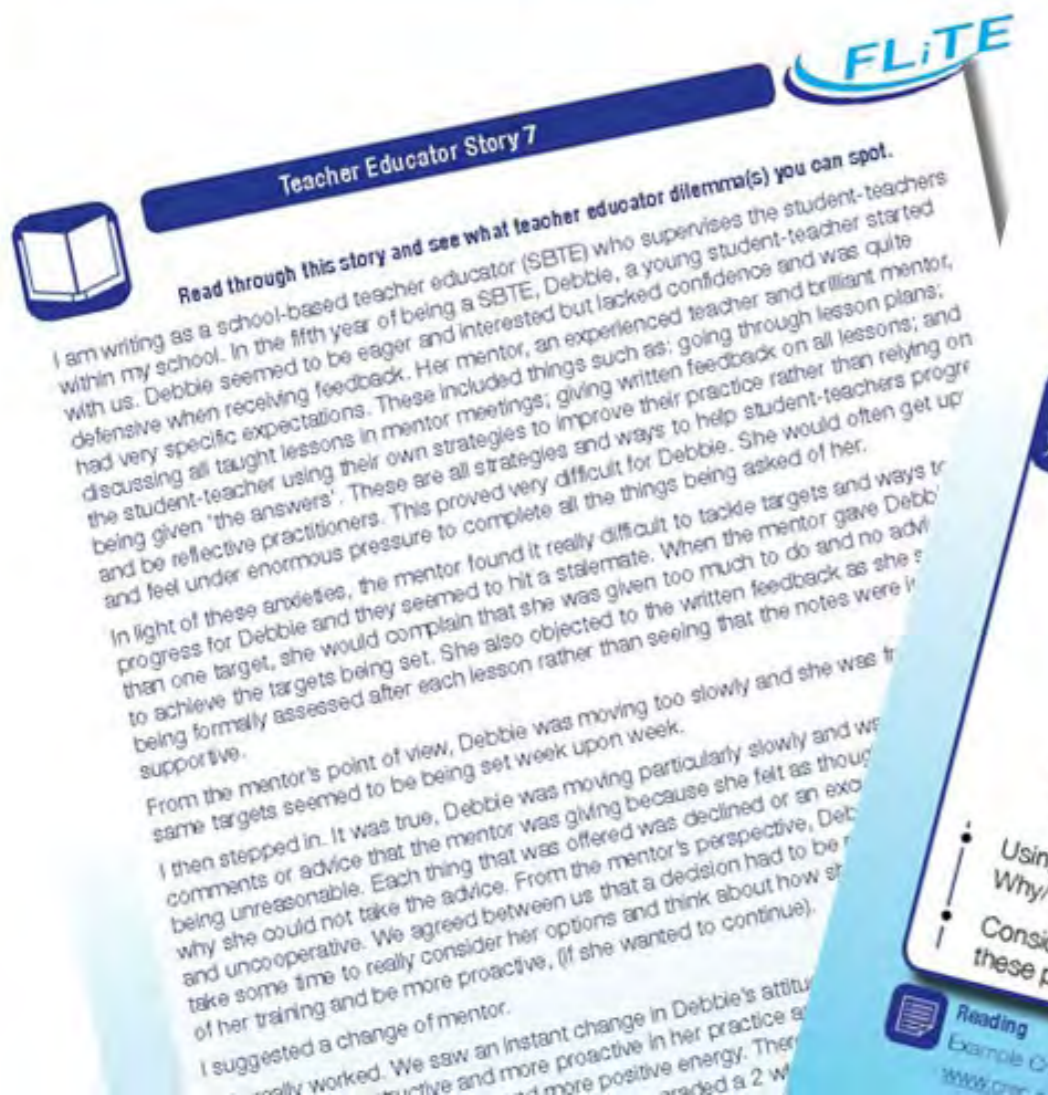
Holappa, A., Lassila, E. T., Lutovac, S., & Uitto, M. (2021) 'Vulnerability as an emotional dimension in student teachers' narrative identities told with self-Portraits'. Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, ahead-of-print (ahead-of-print) pp. 1-14.

Mannay, D. (2016) Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods. London: Routledge.

Case Study 9

For Learning in Teacher Education (FLiTE): Using Stories of Challenges in Practice

**By Dr Elizabeth White,
Dr Claire Dickerson (University
of Hertfordshire) and
Dr Miranda Timmermans
(Marnix Academie, Utrecht)**

What did you aim to do with this work?

The aim of the project was to investigate the experiences, emerging roles and professional development needs of school-based teacher educators and those working in partnership with them, such as mentors and university tutors. The project aimed to collect stories of challenges in practice which could be used to develop resources for supporting the professional development of teacher educators. Challenges were experienced around issues of professionalism, collaboration within the partnership, quality of provision, and guiding and assessing student teachers.

What led you to this project?

There has been a shift towards school-based teacher education in many OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, as opposed to more traditional university-led teacher education. This has led to an increase in the number of teachers in schools who have dual roles as teachers and school-based teacher educators. As school-based teacher educators they have responsibility for supervising and providing professional learning and development opportunities for student teachers and mentors. Teacher educator roles have diversified due to these rapid changes in teacher education, and there is a need to support the professional development for all the teacher educators working together in school-university partnerships.

How were creative approaches used?

The data generated for the research were a series of stories about challenges that teacher educators had experienced in practice. Twelve of these stories, illustrating a range of challenges, were chosen for dissemination. Activities were designed and tested using the stories as professional development tools. These stories and activities were developed into twelve downloadable worksheets in English, an illustrated story 'scrap' book in Dutch, and the Teacher Educator's Handbook in English. In each type of output, critical questions were posed and activities were designed to probe deeply into the stories and to support teacher educators' professional learning.

Why did you take this approach?

This creative approach was used to inspire critical reflection on school-based practice in teacher education; to deepen the professional learning and development of teacher educators; to develop collaborative working in initial teacher education partnerships; and to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for student teachers. By creating engaging resources that can be used either alone or in collaborative settings with other teacher educators, it is possible to put the research findings into the hands of practitioners so that they can extract professional learning that is relevant for them and their contexts.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The online resources are widely used by school-based teacher educators, teacher education providers and their partner schools, and practitioner associations internationally. There is qualitative evidence of significant impact on professional practice and learning, in English and Dutch speaking countries. A professional development leader found that delegates 'really liked the stories' and felt that the resources '...provoked the teacher educators' thinking about their understanding of the mentor role and the role of training trainees'.

Any brief reflections?

The use of stories of practice are a powerful tool for collaborative professional development, enabling deeper conversations around challenges and an appreciation of the different perspectives of teacher educators from teacher education providers and schools.

Additional or further reading

FLiTE website (no date) University of Hertfordshire.

White, E., Timmermans, M., & Dickerson, C. (2020) 'Learning from Professional Challenges Identified by School and Institute-based Teacher Educators within the Context of School-University Partnership.' European Journal of Teacher Education. 45(2) pp. 282–298.

White, E. (2021) The Teacher Educator's Handbook: A narrative approach to professional learning. Critical Publishing: St Albans.

Deepening understanding of disciplinary and professional thinking and learning processes

By Karen Clark, Dr Claire Dickerson, Prof Joy Jarvis and Dr Rebecca Thomas

The 'spotter cards' resource is designed to facilitate staff and students' exploration of ways of thinking and learning in disciplines and professions. The resource comprises a set of cards and a booklet that provides suggestions for supporting users to 'spot the thinking processes' when learning in disciplinary or professional contexts.

The resource was developed from a funded research project, which had three areas of focus: 1) focus groups with academic staff in two universities to identify the learning processes in disciplines which could usefully be explored with students; 2) staff working with an illustrator to develop appropriate visual images to support understanding of these processes; and 3) using the resource with students in the two universities, and the wider HE community, to identify the impact of the resource.

What led you to this project?

Learning to think in particular disciplinary or professional ways is essential for students' learning and development. Focusing on learning processes, as well as content and products, can help students to identify the ways of thinking required for learning and developing in their discipline or profession. Having deep understanding of one's own disciplinary or professional ways of thinking is also important in multi-disciplinary settings, where these insights enable clarity about one's own contribution, and an appreciation of the approaches of others.

How were creative approaches used?

The arts-based, creative approach takes the form of a set of cards and a booklet. Each of the cards represents a thinking process as an illustration (visual image) together with a word (verb). Processes such as analysing, communicating, noticing, questioning, reasoning, and thinking critically are represented. There is also a blank card so that users can personalise the set. The visual theme continues in the booklet, which includes images of the cards together with suggestions for how individuals or groups might use the set of cards, a subset, or an individual card to enable an overview of processes of thinking and learning.

Why did you take this approach?

This approach was taken because visual images are important to metaphorically connect users to a complex process. They enable connection between concrete and abstract thoughts. The images used in the spotter cards resource are symbolic but also point to features that support understanding of concepts. An image can direct readers to pertinent aspects of the topic through its connotative meanings so the image had to be carefully chosen. One aspect of trialling the use of the resource with students was to identify any issues with the visual images in relation to understanding of disciplinary processes.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The cards can be used to raise awareness of the forms of thinking used in a particular discipline or profession or to probe understanding more deeply. In feedback collected from staff working with students in the two universities:

• The visual and tactile nature of the resource was seen as a strength.

• Users noted that the cards were particularly useful for exploring understanding of language and concepts, reflecting on practice, and surfacing tacit knowledge.

• The cards were seen as non-threatening and a playful way of exploring concepts and developing deep thinking.

Any brief reflections?

The spotter cards resource, illustrated by Joel Cooper, provides an accessible and effective way of engaging with colleagues and students when looking at abstract concepts and processes.

### Additional or further reading

Donald, J. (2002) Learning to Think: Disciplinary Perspectives. Jossey Bass: San Francisco.

Eraut, M. (2000) 'Non formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work'. The British Journal of Educational Psychology. 70(1) pp. 113-136.

Jarvis, J., Clark, K., Dickerson, C. & Thomas, R. (2020) Spotter Cards Resource: Ideas for deepening understanding of disciplinary and professional thinking and learning processes. Available at: https://researchprofiles.herts.ac.uk/en/publications/spotter-cards-resource-ideas-for-deepening-understanding-of-disci

Pace, D. (2009) 'Opening History's "Black Boxes": Decoding the disciplinary unconscious of historians.' In Kreber, C. (Ed.) The University and its Disciplines: Teaching and learning within and beyond disciplinary boundaries. Routledge: Abingdon.

Weber, S. (2008) 'Visual Images in Research.' In Knowles, J. G. & Cole, A. L. (Eds.) Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research. London: Sage.

BEING CURIOUS
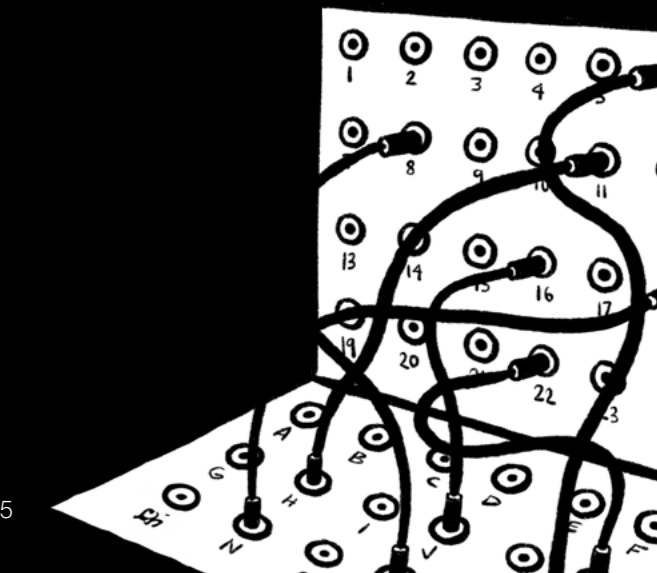
Case Study 11

ENABLES: European Arts-Based Development of Distributed Leadership and Innovation in Schools

By Prof Philip Woods, Dr Suzanne Culshaw, Prof Joy Jarvis, Professor Helen Payne, Dr Amanda Roberts and Prof Karen Mpamhanga

The ENABLES project's aims were to: strengthen the collaborative and distributed leadership of innovation in schools; explore how arts-based and embodied approaches might support leadership development; and develop and disseminate innovative methods of arts-based and embodied leadership development.

What led you to this project?

Distributed leadership is both an idea about what leadership is and a process in which more people practice and share leadership. It proposes that leadership is a collective phenomenon that arises from the ongoing and complex interactions between all those involved in a group or organisation.

Arts-based and embodied methods are often missing in more traditional forms of leadership development and training. Our proposal was that they have the potential to develop capabilities for distributed leadership. The ENABLES project therefore set out to explore the extent to which arts-based and embodied methods can strengthen capabilities for distributed leadership in schools. We were hoping to find evidence of such methods helping to activate reflection, enhance awareness, generate new thinking and broaden out perspectives, all of which are needed to develop capabilities for distributed leadership.

How were creative approaches used?

The five ENABLES project partners used a range of different arts-based and embodied approaches in their Action Research Trials. The idea was to develop, trial and reflect on the use of new approaches to promote and strengthen distributed leadership capabilities. The arts-based and embodied approaches used by the ENABLES partners were: collage and gesture (UK team); drama and improvisation (Latvia); visual imagery (Finland); narrative expression (Romania); vignettes and Design Thinking (Austria). For example, participants in the UK workshops (held online) were asked to express how they experience leading change by creating a collage (an arts-based method) and responding using gesture (an embodied approach). Participants used materials they had selected

themselves to create a collage; the gesture response offered a form of non-verbal communication in which movements of the hands or face, for example, communicated particular messages. Both of these expressive activities enabled participants to express a response to the question: how do you lead change with others? The online workshop was video-recorded so that we could capture the expressive activities themselves as well as participants' responses to - and reflections on - their own and other participants' activities.

Why did you take this approach?

A review of the literature shows that arts-based and embodied approaches can support leadership development, but the review highlighted a need for much more evidence on the influence of using such methods on leadership practice. The Action Research Trials undertaken by all five ENABLES partners therefore sought to explore how such methods might activate reflection, develop relational sensitivity and awareness of self and others, and other distributed leadership capabilities. We wanted to explore the extent to which arts-based and embodied approaches can help reshape collaborative learning and encourage different ways of relating to and thinking about leadership.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using creative approaches had on the project?

The potential for nurturing the development of distributed leadership through the use of arts-based and embodied approaches was evident. We collected a rich range of data, which comprise video recordings of the online workshop including the gesture responses, photos of collages, participants' written reflections and researcher observations. A particularly strong theme emerging from the data relates to how such methods can activate reflection, greater awareness as well as new thinking and perspectives amongst participants (in this case positional and non-positional school leaders, and students). The analytical approach was especially focussed on establishing the extent to which participants reported a change, i.e. a change in terms of new awareness and learning. As far as strengthening their capacity for distributed leadership was concerned, participants developed capabilities such as relational sensitivity, appreciation of leadership as an emergent, relational process,

greater self-awareness and self-reflection skills, openness to new solutions and perspectives, and identity development. They developed these capabilities through

- the arts-based and embodied activities,
- the interactions with other participants, and
- by experiencing the session as a safe space.

Any brief reflections?

The project offered the ENABLES partners the space to collaborate with others and to learn not only about the potential of arts-based and embodied methods to support leadership development, but also how they can be used with students and colleagues beyond the immediate scope of the project.

Additional or further reading

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2gKHZN1cgg This 5-minute video is one of the resources we created for the ENABLES website. It shows the range of collages created by participants in the ENABLES (UK) online workshops. The video illustrates how arts-based and embodied activities, in this case collage, can be used to support the development of collaborative, distributed leadership in schools.

Woods, P. A., Culshaw, S., Smith, K., Jarvis, J., Payne, H., & Roberts, A. (2023) 'Nurturing change: Processes and outcomes of workshops using collage and gesture to foster aesthetic qualities and capabilities for distributed leadership.' Professional Development in Education. 49(4) pp. 600-619.

Woods, P.A., Culshaw, S., Jarvis, J., Payne, H., Roberts, A. and Smith, K. (2021). Developing Distributed Leadership through Arts-based and Embodied Methods: An Evaluation of the UK Action Research Trials of Collage and Gesture Response. The European Arts-Based Development of Distributed Leadership and Innovation in Schools (ENABLES) project, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK: Centre for Educational Leadership, School of Education, University of Hertfordshire. Available at: https://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/340913/4.B.1_Collage-and-gesture_ARTs-report.pdf

Case Study 12

Enhancing research culture for doctoral researchers: the use of embodied and arts-based approaches to expand student's self-compassion whilst on their research journey

By Dr Rowena Senior and Prof Helen Payne

This (in progress) project aimed to use a one-day workshop to enable doctoral participants to meaningfully connect with their inner-critic, perfectionism and imposter syndrome and self-compassion through arts-based and embodied activities (Payne & Seaman, 2023). Specifically, through hand gestures and clay sculptures. Participants were then interviewed by an external interviewer not involved in the workshop about this experience.

Picture is for illustrative purposes only

What led you to this project?

Poor mental health and wellbeing are issues for doctoral students internationally, and a major reason for withdrawal from doctoral programmes. Self-compassion entails kindness and understanding toward oneself at times of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical. Accessing self-compassionate alternatives to self-criticism can be challenging within an achievement-focused context such as academia. One potential method is through embodied and arts-based activities.

How were creative approaches used?

During the workshop, participants were invited to consider the nature of their inner critic comprising perfectionism and imposter syndrome. Participants first made notes on this experience in relation to their doctoral journey and were then invited to create a hand gesture with eyes closed before moving into forming the clay sculpture phase. Participants were then invited to explore their experience of perfectionism, imposter syndrome and self-compassion in the same way as a method to support their mental health and well-being during their doctorate. The embodied activity, sculptures and the workshop were not analysed however, these were part of the data generation process and informed the discussion during the semi-structured interviews.

Why did you take this approach?

This arts-based approach was adopted to enable participants to explore representations of their experiences, the 'thin-stories' that are often connected to our inner critic and the alternatives available through connecting with self-compassion. The approach was adopted to explore if participants might engage with and develop deeper understanding of their inner critic, experience of perfectionism, imposter syndrome and/or self-compassion. In addition, the approach was hoped to enable participants to explore novel ways, meanings and perspectives in relation to their experiences of these states which can often be out of reach or difficult to articulate.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using creative approaches had on the project?

Research has shown high levels of self-compassion can act as a buffer against mental health issues and can also provide the foundation for the development of boundaryless compassion for others. It is intended that the current project will bring existing research findings together to inform an intervention that impacts the doctoral student community and research culture at UH and beyond.

The sculptures (with participant permission) were exhibited at a University art gallery to highlight experiences of the inner-critic, perfectionism, imposter syndrome and self-compassion during the doctoral journeys.

Any brief reflections?

Having a technician with expertise in ceramics was essential in supporting the practical aspects of participants creating their sculptures. Technical advice on how to ensure, as far as possible, the sculptures 'survived' the firing process was invaluable. In addition, embarking on a day-long workshop may seem like a luxury in terms devoting a considerable period of time to these subjects. However, it is hoped that creating this space to facilitate in-depth exploration helped to prevent the arts-based elements from feeling rushed, tokenistic or 'tagged-on'.

Additional or further reading

Richardson, C. M. E., Trusty, W. T. & George, K. A. (2020) 'Trainee wellness: self-critical perfectionism, self-compassion, depression, and burnout among doctoral trainees in psychology'. Counselling Psychology Quarterly. 33(2) pp. 187-198.

Hazell, C.M., Chapman, L., Valeix, S.F., Roberts, P., Niven, J. E., & Berry, C. (2020) 'Understanding the mental health of doctoral researchers: a mixed methods systematic review with meta-analysis and meta-synthesis.' Systematic Reviews. 9(197).

Payne, H & Seaman, H (2023) Embodied and arts approaches to research. Under review.

Creating arts-based digital stories to embody parents' emotional experiences of premature birth

By Dr Julia Petty
(plus Professors Joy Jarvis and Rebecca Thomas - my EdD supervisors)

What did you aim to do with this work?

- To explore parents' emotional experiences of neonatal care using narrative inquiry.

- To use an arts-based, embodied (ABE) approach to the development of digital stories to represent and capture those experiences.

- To disseminate the findings of parent narrative interviews focusing on emotional experiences using ABE digital stories.

What led you to this project?

In neonatal care, parents go through challenging emotional experiences following premature birth. Using digital stories constructed from patient narratives can educate others in line with 'arts-based knowledge translation (ABKT)', defined by Archibald et al (2018, p.2) as, 'the use of any art form to communicate knowledge (e.g., research from various sources)'. This includes dissemination of the findings from the above mentioned research study, an important stage of the research process in terms of ensuring learners and staff are educated about emotional experiences of parents in their care.
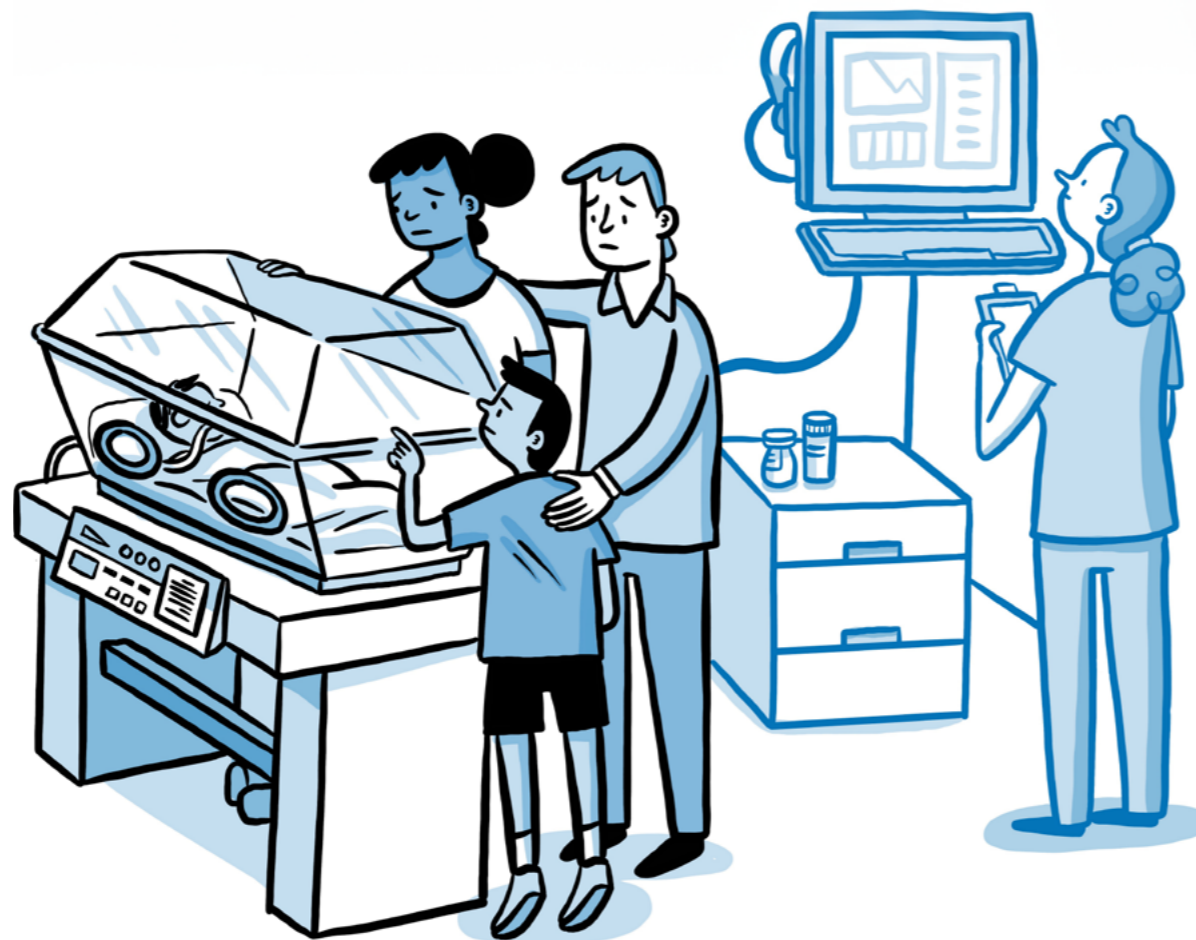
How were arts-based and embodied approaches used?

The ABE methods used to disseminate the research findings followed the process below:

- Using narratives of parent interviews about their neonatal care experience, core story creation was undertaken and composite themes formed by merging metaphor clusters, expressed by parents to describe emotional experience.

- Using said composite themes and a variety of multi-media, illustrations, photos, animations and voice, an ABE approach was used to create digital stories to capture and embody the parents' experiences.

- Following ABKT principles, parents' emotional experiences were disseminated widely using the digital stories, which have been positively evaluated in relation to the ABE element. A website was developed to host the digital stories- https://neonatalstories.com/

Why did you take this approach?

The essence of my research was to explore emotional experiences so it was essential to find a way of capturing emotion to translate and disseminate the knowledge gained from the study. Digital stories enabled this through a range of art-forms (illustrations /visual metaphors / animations /audio) as 'short, personal multimedia tales told from the heart' (Meadows, cited by Dogan, 2023).

This emphasises their emotive nature that engages people, enabling learning about others' experiences. Crucially, digital storytelling is an arts-based research dissemination method that can meaningfully capture peoples' experiences (Rieger et al, 2016; Timpani et al, 2021), a powerful way to embody the emotional component.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using an arts-based and embodied approach had on the project?

An evaluation that followed dissemination of the digital stories, the blending of art-based, multi-media aspects, was well-received, aided learning and had emotional impact. It was clear that digital was preferred over text-based stories. The digital stories contributed to embodying emotion and empathy by: engagement, authenticity, learning with the senses and making connections. For example, illustrations combined with voice was a strongly emotive feature that was engaging, held interest, captured the senses and participants found this helped them connect with the emotional side of the stories.

Any brief reflections?

I have learnt that using an ABE approach to research dissemination has a valuable and compelling role within my field of interest; that of the parent experience in neonatal care and has great potential in enhancing knowledge of the emotional elements of that experience to those working in neonatal care.

Additional or further reading

Archibald, M.M., Hartling, L., Ali, S., Caine, V. & Scott, S.D. (2018) 'Developing "My Asthma Diary": a process exemplar of a patient-driven arts-based knowledge translation tool.' BMC Pediatrics. 18(1) p. 186.

Dogan, B (2023) The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling https://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/page.cfm?id=27&cid=27 (accessed 19 November, 2023)

Petty, J. (2021) 'Arts-based digital storytelling within neonatal care to enhance empathy in children's nursing students.' Nursing Children and Young People. 33(4) pp. 13-18.

Petty, J., Jarvis, J. & Thomas, R. (2020) 'Using parent metaphors for learning about the neonatal care experience: an interpretive perspective.' Journal of Child Health Care. 24(4) pp. 529-543.

Rieger K.L., Chernomas, W.M., McMillan, D.E., Morin, F.L., & Demczuk, L. (2016) 'Effectiveness and experience of arts-based pedagogy among undergraduate nursing students: a mixed methods systematic review.' JBI Database System Rev Implement Rep. 14(11) pp. 139-239.

Timpani, S., Sweet, L., Sivertsen, N. (2021) 'Storytelling: One arts-based learning strategy to reflect on clinical placement. An integrative review.' Nurse Education in Practice. 52:103005.

Case Study 14

The nature of talk and interaction in primary process drama

By Elisabeth Lee

The aim of this work was to respond to the current gap in understanding of the nature of talk and interaction in primary process drama and the limited research into talk in open-ended creative contexts. It also responded to the criticism of qualitative research into process drama, which lacks transparency and rigour, by conducting my research in a credible manner.

In which element of the project does the arts-based and embodied element feature?

For my EdD, I researched talk and communication in primary process drama, an arts subject which is a highly creative and embodied practice. The embodied nature of my research is multimodal interaction analysis, which analyses by focusing on a range of modes, such as gaze, proxemics, gesture, facial expression and speech. All of these modes are present in process drama and therefore an apposite way to analyse the process drama. I also used thematic analysis, since I was researching the nature of talk and communication in process drama.

What did you aim to do with this work?

The aim of this work was to respond to the current gap in understanding of the nature of talk and interaction in primary process drama and the limited research into talk in open-ended creative contexts. It also responded to the criticism of qualitative research into process drama, which lacks transparency and rigour, by conducting my research in a credible manner.

What led you to this project?

When beginning my career at UH, I wrongly assumed that process drama was valued and widely used. However, I discovered that most ITE students rarely see teachers using process drama in their practice and this continues to be the case. Moreover, there is little research into talk in process drama, nor it's multimodal nature. I therefore focused on examining the nature of talk and the value of examining process drama through a multimodal lens.

How were arts-based and embodied approaches used in your project?

Process drama itself is an embodied classroom-based way of working, which encourages co-creation, negotiation, and collaboration between pupils and teachers and pupils. It supports autonomy, improvisation, empathy, perspective taking, critical and creative thinking, reflection, immersion, engagement and risk-taking through role-taking. Two forms of analysis were used, thematic analysis and multimodal interaction analysis. Multimodal Interaction analyses embodied, multiple modes of communicating. The latter, devised by Norris (2004), focuses on different modes such as gesture, movement, gaze or image, facial expression and not just talk. I used this analytical method to track moment by moment responses by teachers and pupils during times of high tension and emotion in the drama. I used the following grid to analyse the teacher, who was in role as a low status character, a mother from the graphic novel 'The Arrival' by Shaun Tan. This is not arts-based research, but the context was arts-based – process drama.

Why did you take this approach?

Thematic analysis was not sufficient to fully understand the nature of talk and interaction. Using thematic analysis, the empathetic nature of some talk in process drama was just a code. By combining this with multimodal interaction analysis, empathetic talk became a theme and one of three main types of talk identified through my research. Following Taylor (2012) and Cremin and Baker (2014), Norris' method of analysis using photos and written comment was adapted, to use a grid of different modes such as, posture and proxemics; gaze; or gesture, action, and haptics, allowing moment by moment analysis of interaction. I did not use photos in my research. Instead, I filmed the classroom drama. I also used voice recorders. The teachers had voice recorders and when children worked together in groups I handed out voice recorders to them as well, to record their drama or discussions.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using these approaches had on the project?

Multimodal interaction analysis corroborated unsubstantiated claims in the drama literature, that the status of a drama strategy, teacher-in-role (TiR) affects the nature of teacher pupil interactions and power relationships. A low-status TiR as a mother from a story about migration, powerfully evoked empathy in the pupils. This was evidenced through TiR facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and posture and the pupils' embodied responses to her and their empathic questions. A focus on talk alone would not have evidenced this.

Any brief reflections?

I've learned that multimodal interaction analysis is invaluable, when combined with other methods of analysis, to analyse and fully understand the nature of talk and interaction in embodied, arts-based forms of learning, such as process drama. Without it, the importance of empathetic talk would have been less evident.

Additional or further reading

Cremin, T. & Baker, S. (2014) 'Exploring the discursively constructed identities of a teacher-writer teaching writing.' English Teaching: Practice and Critique. 13(3) pp. 3-55.

Bezemer, J. & Jewitt, C. (2018) 'Multimodality: A Guide for Linguists.' In Litosseliti (Ed.) Research Methods in Linguisitics. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Norris, S. (2004) Analysing Multimodal Interaction: a methodological framework. London: Routledge.

Taylor, R. (2012) 'Messing about with metaphor: multimodal aspects of children's meaning-making'. Literacy. 46(3) pp. 156-166.

Exploring acculturation through a postcards home approach

By Prof Karen Mpamhanga, Dr Claire Dickerson and Prof Joy Jarvis

What did you aim to do with this work?

This small-scale project sought to explore the acculturation experiences of short-term sojourner transnational education students. During their initial six-month immersive and intensive stay in the UK, the experiences of eight international students were captured using arts-based methods, with the aim of better understanding how to support students on such visits.

What led you to this project?

Acculturation and adaptation into a different country, educational culture, and programme of study is challenging. In this project, the intensive visit, at the beginning of the programme, allowed participants to engage with the programme within its own context, before returning to their own country for the next programme phase. It was important to understand the impact of that visit, both for that cohort and for future cohorts, although Covid did, ultimately, impact significantly on the subsequent shape of the programme.

How were creative approaches used?

The production of weekly postcards formed the main arts-based approach. Participants were invited to draw, photograph or source an image for a postcard reflecting their experiences each week. On the back of their postcard, they were asked to add some text to support that reflection. Focus group sessions, at the middle and end of their visit, brought participants together to review their postcards. They developed a collective mapping of their experience, using string lines, to show the ups and downs of their group experience. Finally, participants used their postcards, within individual interviews, to recall personal experiences of their study visit.

Why did you take this approach?

The use of the postcard-home approach is a relatively novel data collection method, which researchers have found useful for recording 'noteworthy experiences' (Millman, 2013: 13). It seemed fitting as the participants were away from home. The approach was designed to be fun, and not time intensive. It was open and enabled the participants to choose the experiences that they wanted to share. The capturing of these experiences each week allowed for a kind of reflection-in-action, while the reviewing of postcards, collectively and individually, provided a stimulus to revisit particular experiences, and to see them as part of their wider journey.

What impact(s) or outcomes has using a creative approach had on the project?

The approach was light-touch and participants seemed to enjoy it. It enabled us to better understand their experiences, and what participants saw as important (and were happy to share). Some noted how the approach enabled them to reflect back on their own journeys, seeing things differently through that reflection. The approach also gave them the opportunity to experience new data collection methods, as a participant, which was helpful in terms of their own development as researchers.

Any brief reflections?

Although invited to draw, photograph or source an image for their postcard, those who did provide an image, drew it themselves. While not everyone drew a picture, or drew a picture on every postcard, all wrote a summary of their week, which perhaps shows a privileging of written text.

Additional or further reading

Millman, Z.K. (2013) 'Photographic Postcards as Research Tools: The 'Postcards from the Cut' Study.' Graduate Journal of Social Science. 10(2) pp. 54-75.

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