Foundations of a Bricolage *Method: Using Learning Stories for the Co-production of Curriculum Design, Impacting Experiences of Learning Difference within Higher Education*

EMMA WHEELER
University of South Wales

This paper presents early stage research activities, including observations of one woman's creative process investigating her own experiences of dyslexia. A bricolage *research method allows for emergent and responsive approaches to discovering potentially new Higher Education 'classroom-based' teaching methods which may work effectively and inclusively for differing learning needs. Book-making and story-telling are utilised in a project inquiring into learning and related emotional and behavioural landscapes. The planning process for gathering narratives, presenting, developing collaborations and making use of participatory action research strategies are described. The project offers empowerment of practice through working with students as partners, as well as offering the opportunity for wider staff development and for student development through reflective activity and co-production. It is hoped that individual stories may shape learning for all, seeking to act as an agent of change. Theoretical frameworks are drawn from critical education concepts and art psychotherapy practice.*

Introduction

The paper presents the design process of a research project aimed to be informed by the arts and arts therapies professions, while bringing change within an educational context. As a part-time Social Science Foundation Year tutor and a part-time art psychotherapist, I am finding that my choice of methodology is influenced by each discipline.

A *bricolage* methodology (Wibberley, 2017) has been chosen, providing opportunity to creatively take reflexive actions as learning develops and early themes emerge. The French word, *bricoleur*, describes a handy-person who makes use of the tools available to complete a task. Using multiple methods and perspectives in our research, *bricolage* signifies inter-disciplinarity (Kincheloe, 2001).

The aim of this paper is to present the early stages of the research project, which values the arts in informing educational research and curriculum design. The paper contributes towards an articulation of key aspects of art psychotherapy theory and practice for partners, collaborators and funders. The context for the paper is a contribution to a doctoral-level portfolio project. As a part-time Foundation Year tutor, leading "Principles of Youth and Community Work" and "Childhood Studies" modules, I am re-designing the curriculum in preparation for re-validation. The research project enables co-production with students, especially as new efforts are made to embed the Study Skills module into other modules making way for a more active learning ethos in some areas.

My two professional identities mutually inform practice, a synergy employed to find new approaches in a Higher Education context. The methodology of book-making is intended to particularly suit working with dyslexic learners as partners; it encourages non-text-based ways of telling personal stories. I am not dyslexic, which gives me a useful distance, while my familiarity with visual methods of inquiry can help to identify some of the needs of many dyslexic learners. Collaborations are being sought via Community Arts, Creative and Therapeutic Arts, Arts Therapies (Health Care Professions Council [HCPC] registered art, music and drama therapy professions) and Foundation Year students and practitioners. At this point, 29 potential participants have expressed an interest in the project; five Foundation Year students have attended a pilot workshop, four of whom have a dyslexia diagnosis, all with Individual Support Plans written by Student Support Services. The background to the research is mostly influenced by observations of a multi-disciplinary artist, Stephanie Roberts. The observations made from her "Case Study" exhibition (2017), have highlighted a theme of a psychological sense of loss and shame, associated with her dyslexia. The artist has given particular emphasis to the need for honesty, disclosing that people with dyslexia often find sophisticated ways to hide their struggles. This seems particularly relevant in light of my observations and experiences teaching Foundation Year students, noticing that some discover their dyslexia towards the end of the academic year, missing out on necessary support. It appears that responding to the invitation to access help from Student Services is uncomfortable for some in their early days at university.

"**Case Study**" **Exhibition**

Roberts, a multi-disciplinary artist with a specialism for mosaic, received an Arts Council of Wales grant to explore her difficulties with dyslexia and produce a final art exhibition, which she titled "Case Study". She had been practising as a professional community artist for over twenty years but early in 2017 she became depressed and felt, due to her dyslexia, that she was unable to move her business forward. As she started to make progress with explorative art-making, she realised that she was using her 'art as therapy' for herself and invited me to see her process; she says she was "intrigued by the language of art therapy". I met with Roberts monthly in her studio over a nine month period, which gave me insight into some of the needs of my Foundation Year students and prompted me to start writing. The first piece, "Learning about difference from observations of Case Study"*,* for the British Association of Art Therapists' (BAAT) *Newsbriefing* non-peer reviewed practice journal, is our first collaboration (Wheeler, 2018).

Early on in Roberts's process, she discovered that drawing doodles or 'blind drawings' in response to her emotions, helped her to extract out of her mind and body onto paper where she could see and explore further her difficulties. The pauses or spaces in her doodles became meaningful. She says, "... these pauses became the heart of the issue and the beginning of my

way out. It wasn't what I *could* understand in my drawings, it was what I *couldn't* that gave the insight..." (Wheeler, 2018).
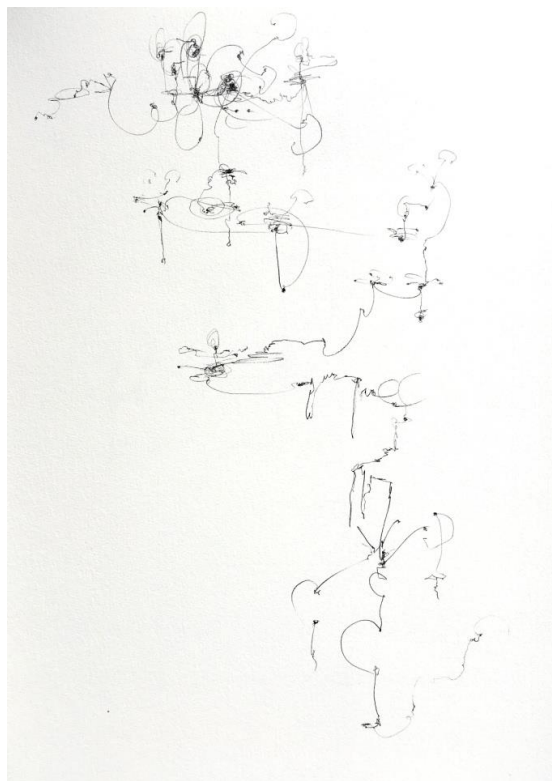

Figure 1. The meeting that went wrong (Roberts, 2017).

Over the nine month period of making art as a personal exploration, Roberts investigated these 'pauses', producing an array of visual expressions and new understandings of her difficulties. She began reframing her dyslexia as a 'gift' and, through collaboration with others, she has found helpful strategies which she is now eager to articulate and disseminate. These strategies have included using templates for writing and developing a doodling technique while listening that is useful to 'read' later. She says that this could be a strategy to help students when they listen in lectures and record alongside. Roberts suggests that the physical action of drawing, while noticing emotion at the time of hearing the words can aid comprehension, memory and learning.

     Roberts has talked to me about the sophisticated ways which many dyslexic learners find to hide their struggles, because they develop a sense of shame, early on believing that they are 'an idiot'. An opening line of text displayed at the entrance of "Case Study" exhibition read, "You idiot. I am an idiot…? I must be … an idiot." Roberts says that the stigma attached to dyslexia can be devastating.

The Influence of Art Psychotherapy

Art psychotherapy is a psychological intervention; the registered practitioner (HCPC) encourages an individual or group to use art materials expressively. We listen and talk about personal story and the 'art-making' process helps to find words, but sometimes the visual language com-

municates more. The therapist and client explore together within the context of a therapeutic relationship, and people are enabled to find new perspectives, "comprehensibility, manage-ability and meaning" (Jones, 1997 in Learmonth and Gibson, 2010), resulting in improved wellbeing. The space is held safely, within boundaries of time and place. Artwork provides a frame and psychoanalytical theory offers additional reference points for boundaries of relationship. Other theoretical frameworks have been introduced to include, for example, attachment, systemic psychological therapy and understandings from neuroscience.

Regular supervision sessions for art psychotherapists help to bring to light unconscious parallel processes. Through verbal conversation and art-making or viewing artwork made in sessions, new understandings can emerge. Art psychotherapists generally work with people who are suffering from distress. Learmonth explains, "… Art Therapists' legal, ethical and professional obligation to work within our competence releases us from diagnosis, and enjoins us to develop our existing expertise in health complexity." (2015, p.33) He references the Health Care Profes-sions Council (2012), identifying the number of frames of reference connected to disciplines including visual arts, aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, psychotherapy and medicine.

An opinion paper written by Neil Springham (2016) usefully presents a new approach to research within the UK Art Psychotherapy profession. He talks of a third wave, of using practice in an agnostic approach to theory development. He suggests that this third wave was preceded by a first wave he identifies as the pragmatic period, "… developing from how people value making art when they are distressed", and later a second wave, in which the emerging profession developed a psychoanalytical frame of reference. Springham suggests that this third wave may be viewed as a critical response to a theory–practice divide. He proposes that social constructionism offers effectiveness for the profession, knowledge becoming a reality within historical and social context.

Learmonth (2015) uses the term 'devout agnosticism', a deep respect for 'not knowing', when discussing the development of our existing expertise as art psychotherapists in health complexities. In setting the scene for the role art psychotherapy plays in the treatment of physical conditions, Learmonth (2015, p. 33) acknowledges the conflicted tangles connecting heart, mind, body, society and soul. He, alongside Springham, talks of art psychotherapists collectively seeking broader theoretical foundations and better descriptions of practice. It is this search for approaches to find what makes people well, that I think is relevant for Foundation Year teaching. Learmonth says "a new cartography is essential … therapists may need a new theory for everyone who walks through the door" (ibid). Likewise, I propose that the Higher Education classroom, especially Foundation Year, needs a responsiveness and fluidity to help people find courage to co-author new learning stories. Dyslexia could be categorised as dis-ability. But my sense from years of teaching practice, getting to know my students, and by observing Roberts, is that it is not a deficit or illness model which empowers, but rather as Learmonth makes reference to, Ivan Illich's (1976 in Learmonth 2015, p. 36) pragmatic view of health, nurturing resilience, making sense of our stories, through a process of adaptation.

"Art therapy is too often the referral of last resort for the most marginalised, oppressed, silenced, shamed, traumatised, 'hard to engage' and despairing or enraged people in health services" (Learmonth, 2015, p. 36). I propose that many Foundation Year students have experienced some similar "journeys through hell" within our educational system. Within the historical context of commonly termed 'second chance' education programmes, the implication might appear to be that students have 'failed' at their first chance. I hope that we, the educators, are first reflecting on our responsibilities and appreciating that the view from students who may have experienced trauma, oppression and shame, (some) directly from our 'system', may perceive the 'second chance' to be ours. This project seeks to facilitate collaboration with students as partners, in a mutual learning environment.

Critical Education

Critical pedagogy according to Brian Benoit (2015), examines the relationship between knowledge and education, power and society, as well as the social policies relating to education and learning. Paulo Freire (1968) wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was penned at a time of decolonisation in South America. A key discussion is that after the military have left a state, individual and collective colonial culture and language remains, internalised; people become oppressed, believing that they are incapable of contribution and making change. Julio Cammarota (2012) talks of the need for a decolonising of the self; he describes Freire's book as one of healing.

Freire (1968) uses the term 'critical literacy', a way of learning which liberates people from oppression. The more common terms used now are 'critical pedagogy' or 'critical education', a belief that oppression exists and that transformation is possible by people liberating themselves. People are enabled to identify the social and political factors causing their oppression and transformation takes place at a subjective individual level and an objective collective level. Freire states that oppression is dehumanising.

In the context of Foundation Year learning and teaching, I believe that many learners arrive having experienced different forms of oppression. Personal stories time and again reveal disempowerment and even in our best efforts to be inclusive by widening access and participation, I see a continuation of a model that Freire termed "the banking model", depositing knowledge for students to contain. In the spirit of both Freire and Augusto Boal's work (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, 1979, 2000), this project seeks to find active ways to flatten hierarchy, facilitate dialogue, ask questions and use the arts to explore and nurture skills which enable and challenge within the classroom environment. The arts and education are seen as political and transformative.

Art Therapy is a profession with pragmatic historical roots from the late 1930s, with early links to the trade union movement and a deep concern for disadvantaged groups. It is interesting to read Diane Waller's inaugural professorial lecture (2002) about the early development of art therapy training in the 1970s. Artists and art teachers, committed to a socio-cultural model of mental illness, created alliances with special education and higher education colleagues in an effort to shift from a loosely organised group of people campaigning for artists to continue their work in hospitals, and move towards a structured, regulated discipline delivering a form of psychotherapy accessible to all and free of charge within the NHS and Social Services. Waller (2002) concludes that,

> ...perhaps being in a state of creative tension, being both pragmatists and rebels, is inevitable and indeed desirable for people who straddle the arts and sciences, who engage deeply in individual process, the making of art on one hand, and on the other the socially important job of improving the quality of life for vulnerable, ill, isolated and damaged members of society.

Critical education theory offers a reference point that holds together multiple disciplines: on the one hand being able to witness and tolerate the oppression or dark side of a story, respecting students and patients as experts from experience of their own stories, while creatively facilitating environments which encourage empowerment and liberation to learn and see change. This project is participatory, offering empowerment for both the researcher and participants.

Dyslexia and Mental Health

Neil Alexander-Passe, a graphic designer initially trained at the University of South Wales, has written a significant amount on dyslexia, creativity and mental health; more recently (2015) he

has investigated depression amongst adult dyslexics, childhood school-based trauma and the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is particularly interesting for me, as the last two years of my art psychotherapy clinical work have been supporting people suffering from trauma and anxiety; my current work prepares for a pilot project working with people who are suffering from PTSD.

I have become aware within Foundation Year teaching that heightened levels of anxiety within the classroom setting can have a severe impact on the ability to listen to instructions or read and understand instructions and guidelines for assessment. Students are feeling over-whelmed with reading material. It appears that some students are 'freezing' with fear, becoming unable to learn.

A collective group of four women, including me (the only non-dyslexic) and Roberts, are building a collaborative relationship as an active response to the "Case Study" exhibition (2017). The group is named "Case to Study" and is currently working on an exhibition and explorative event and public dialogue to coincide with the anniversary of the "Case Study" exhibition (2017). This community participation is teaching me, as a form of action research, the particular needs directly attributed to dyslexic learners which can inform teaching practice with all learners in mind. The "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL) framework is founded on the architectural design concept that physical environments can be used from the outset by the widest possible range of people. Universally designed buildings, for example, provide flexibility, designed to anticipate alternatives and adaptations to meet the challenge of diversity, meeting the needs of individuals with disability while also being more accessible and functional for everyone (Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2010). Within the discipline of learning sciences, the "UDL" classroom environment is understood to ensure the means for learning, i.e., pedagogical goals, methods, materials and assessments are equally accessible, rather than only providing access to information. The principles outlined by Rose and Myer (2002 in CAST, 2010), offer this project a framework to consider a study of the needs of learners with dyslexia and other additional learning needs with the intention of innovating curriculum design which has implications for all learners.

> These principles address three critical features of any teaching and learning environment: the means by which information is presented to the learner; the means by which the learner is required to express what he or she knows; and the means by which students are engaged in learning. (Rose and Meyer 2002; Rose, Meyer, and Hitchcock 2005 in CAST 2010).

Roberts and I ran a pilot workshop with five Foundation Year students at the end of the last academic year. Roberts told part of her story and led the group through a series of doodle exercises, designed to develop a more visual approach to note-taking. Students looked at some of Roberts's processes from her "Case Study" process and books about dyslexia that she recommended. I introduced students to the research project, explaining the participatory approach. The group talked about their experiences of the year and each learnt to make and took away a blank origami book, in preparation for completing it when the project commences (see below, Narrative Inquiry, for further details). By making books with Roberts and the students, much was learnt about giving instructions and different difficult feelings students can experience when learning a new skill. Members showed understanding towards each other and offered support.

During a visit to Roberts's studio, I witnessed her emotional and panic state about evaluation and outcome. Roberts has accessed support from a number of people throughout her process and this gives her the confidence to own her process, find a sense of autonomy and accept the risk of not finding answers which produce outcome. By describing her exhibition as

'sketches', her attention and value for process rather than product helped her move forward meaningfully.

Space

During the writing of my first article (2018) about "Case Study", my mentor directed me to Peter Randall-Page (a sculptor) who had described aspects of his experience with dyslexia at the 7th Exeter Arts Therapies Conference in 2008, "Nature & Nurture: The image, the word and the world". I had a telephone conversation with both him and his wife, Charlotte Randall-Page; a significant part of our conversations was about space. The space between letters and words on a page, flowing like great white streams down a page, was a metaphor they used. Charlotte Randall-Page, a special educational needs teacher, spoke explicitly about her observations and understandings. I found parallels between Peter Randall-Page's experience, and that of Roberts: both people, even though dyslexia is a well-researched phenomenon, consider value in exploring it from the perspective of how the arts and arts therapies can offer a solution, not only for dyslexic students but for many learners. The more people with dyslexia I meet and with whom I collaborate, the more I learn about the needs of my students and discover potentially new strategies to help them.

Visual Art-Based Methods

Marion Milner's book, *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950, 2010), has inspired me to use art-based methods (McNiff, 1998) to reflect on an educational inquiry. During the first six weeks of my art psychotherapy training, I adopted a daily ritual of drawing using pastels, allowing freedom from conscious intention, with the aim of reducing anxiety to produce a polished product; I wanted to learn from process. A similar journey has been found by Roberts through blind drawing doodles in response to emotion. Where she paused when making doodles, she later investigated these spaces within the image, where she delved deep and found meaning.

I have recently completed a six week introductory botanical painting course, undertaken with the intention of trying to learn a new skill while reflecting on the initial two stages of the learning circle (Huckvale, 2009): 'unconscious incompetence', the stage of not knowing what you don't know, and 'conscious incompetence', the stage where you realise what you don't know and feel stupid. Both Randall-Page and Roberts have talked about feeling an idiot, particularly when a person is unable to learn to read with the competence of their peers. Huckvale (2017, personal communication) has recently added 'humiliation' to the second stage; she says, "We are particularly vulnerable to humiliation, anxiety and general resistance to learning in future if others comment unfavourably on our struggle at this stage."

LEARNING CIRCLE

WE ARE ARTICULATE ABOUT
THE SKILL FOR OURSELVES
AND OTHERS

5c

**REFLECTIVE
COMPETENCE**

LEARNING A NEW SKILL

1

**UNCONSCIOUS
INCOMPETENCE**

WE DON'T KNOW
HOW MUCH
WE DON'T KNOW

UNRELATED NEW LEARNING
TAKES US BACK TO STAGE 1

5b

**OVER
CONFIDENCE**

4

**UNCONSCIOUS
COMPETENCE**

RELATED NEW LEARNING
TAKES US BACK TO
STAGE 2

2

**CONSCIOUS
INCOMPETENCE**

WE REALISE WHAT
WE DON'T KNOW &
FEEL STUPID

WE BECOME
ARROGANT &
SLOPPINESS
DEVELOPS

THE SKILL IS SO
FAMILIAR WE CAN
DO IT WITHOUT
THINKING ABOUT IT

3

**CONSCIOUS
COMPETENCE**

2a

HUMILIATION

5a

**LACK OF
CONFIDENCE**

WE CAN DO THE NEW SKILL
BUT IT TAKES ALL OUR
CONCENTRATION

WE ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO
HUMILIATION, ANXIETY AND GENERAL
RESISTANCE TO LEARNING IN FUTURE IF
OTHERS COMMENT UNFAVOURABLY ON
OUR STRUGGLE AT STAGE 2.
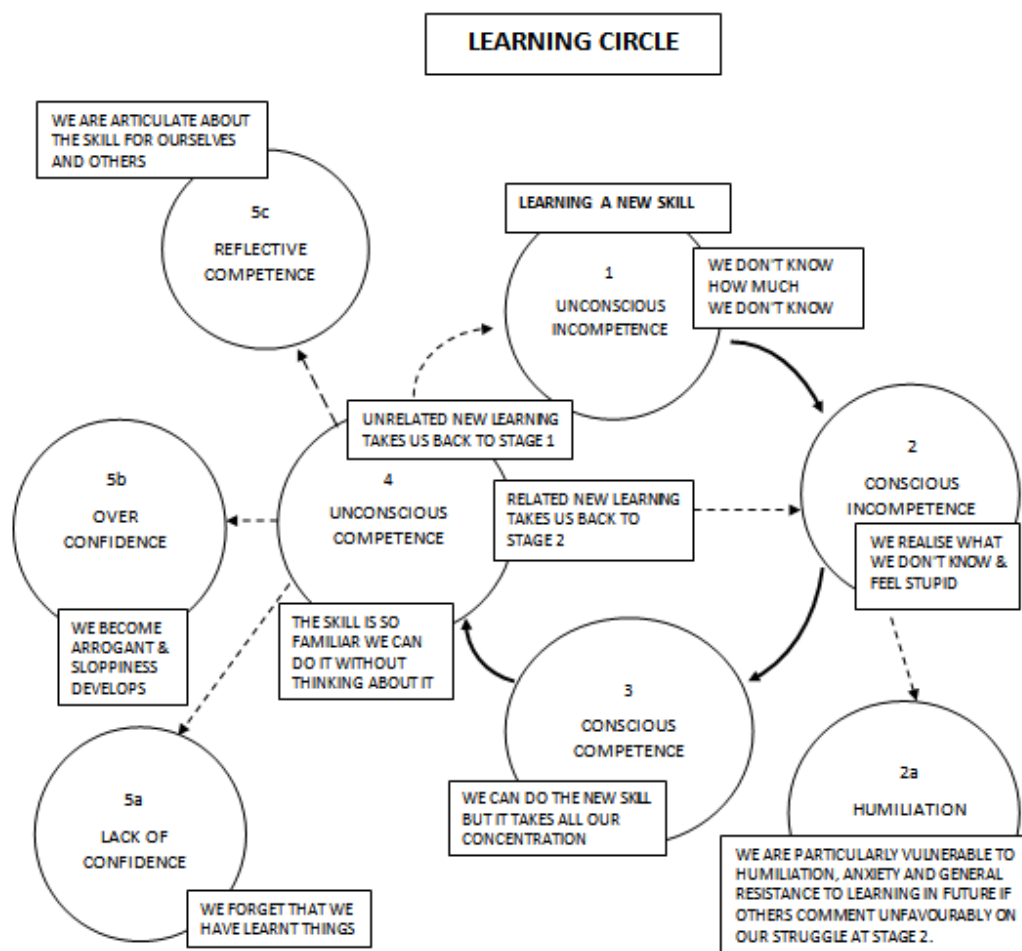
WE FORGET THAT WE
HAVE LEARNT THINGS

Figure 2. The Learning Circle (Huckvale, 2009, recently modified 2018).

The first two weeks of six introductory botanical painting sessions have helped me to think about the preparation time before a student begins Foundation Year. I followed a list of materials which had been sent from the tutor. This list indicated that I needed to come to the first session prepared. It also required me to make decisions about how many and which resources to purchase. As I visited different retailers and became familiar with specialised colours of paint, different types of paper and which brands were professional quality or not, I thought about the cost I was prepared to invest, or capable of investing, and the value placed on self and learning. I chose the best quality and I chose to purchase a minimal set of tubes of paint. I spent more money than I intended. The process revealed the extent of what I did not know, my 'unconscious incompetence'.

As I observed drawing and painting demonstrations, and 'had a go', I became aware of different approaches to learning within the group and insecurities I and my peers felt. Past experiences of learning stories were shared and feelings of 'stupidity' were common. Stage 2 of the learning circle, 'conscious incompetence', became apparent. Huckvale (2018, personal communication) says, "we realise what we don't know and feel stupid"; stage 2a is the place where "we are vulnerable to humiliation, anxiety and general resistance to learning in future if others comment unfavourably on our struggle at this stage".

The complex role that the tutor played in balancing demonstration, sharing her own experiences of learning, giving space for skills development, and offering encouragement and

guidance for improvement, as well as showing us the work of painters, was very interesting. Students appeared to be swallowing her every word and I found myself particularly inspired by phrases she offered which gave value to the arts and learning to paint within a wider view of personal development and life-long learning. After the first week, I repeatedly heard in my mind "get to know your leaf" – she quoted Ruskin, "If you can paint a leaf you can paint the world". My regular walks in local woodland changed. I was starting to notice differences and similarities, and I drew parallels with my teaching. The tutor is an inspiration and the developing relationship between tutor and student feels significant. I have been inspired to get to know my students well, to slow my teaching down, to simplify and to encourage close observation and detailed work. Roberts's pause resonates.

Narrative Inquiry

In the final session of an Arts and Health training (Insider Art, 2010), I learnt to make origami books in which pages can be completed as a traditional book; however, when folded in reverse, the other side of the pages become available to express a hidden story. When the book is refolded back to the original form, a hidden story can be contained between pages.

I initially thought that this could be an effective way for dyslexic learners to help me understand the difficult emotions related with having additional learning needs and discover classroom-based teaching methods most effective for such learners. I intend to record some of the stories and produce Audio Image Recordings (AIRs), a technique familiar to art psychotherapists, often used towards the end of a therapeutic relationship as a means to include people in evaluative processes.

My involvement, particularly with *A Thousand Voices* oral history heritage project (Maindee, Newport), has inspired me to consider presenting the final data of this research project in a more physical art form, as an exhibition, collaborating with local community artists, art therapists and student partners. Book-making using electro-conductive thread and paint to synthesise image with audio, is a process being explored by Cheung-Webber, Harwood and Lloyd-Carney (2018) as they develop the final exhibition, coordinated by Marion Cheung-Webber.

Another local participatory arts project *Maindee Stories*, led by Cheung-Webber (2016), has recently received the *Epic Award 2018* for Wales from *Voluntary Arts* for engaging a group of women (who had been experiencing isolation and depression) in a textile, embroidery and hand-bound books project, funded by Maindee Unlimited New Paths Grant (part of the Arts Council of Wales 'Ideas: People: Places' strand). The 'Women Making Change' exhibition was located in Abergavenny Museum (2017) for a year, and is currently situated in the Chapel Room, Community House Eton Road, Newport.

As I observe and engage with the creative and therapeutic arts activities of my local community, I realise that my initial conception of posting blank books to (non-Foundation Year) participants may not be the most meaningful and safe way of gathering information. I have met all the potential participants so far in person, and I realise that the nature of my project needs to be relational. As people hear about the project and naturally tell their learning stories to me, they are expressing difficult emotions. To ensure trust is established and people are enabled to be honest about the issues, face-to-face communication is important so that they feel believed and that their responses are valid. The fear of 'conscious incompetence' needs acknowledgment, not wanting people to feel 'stupid'. Wherever possible, I am deciding to create groups where participants may have a day, ideally with Roberts and me, where they learn about her story and complete the books with me present. My immersion in local community activity informs my study.

Bricolage

The interdisciplinary nature of both the arts therapies professions and the Foundation Year teaching environment creates a suitable context for a mixed method model of research. A patchwork quilt approach to research methodology allows for emergence, opportunity for responsiveness to continuous reflection on the process. This is a most natural way for an art psychotherapist to work: the training is firmly grounded in reflective and reflexive practice (Thompson, 2008; Etherington, 2004), and "the unknown" and "learning to sit with uncertainty" are popular phrases in therapy training which encourage curiosity, inquiry, analysis and some-times challenge. It is when we learn to tolerate the unknown that new understandings can emerge.

My MA thesis, 'Looking over the Edge in Art Psychotherapy: A qualitative study of environment, empowerment and boundaries' (2014), is still the cornerstone of my interest in flattening hierarchies, real or perceived. The work explored 'power' in the context of psycho-analytical theory of clinical spaces, thinking about the effect when a therapy session is outdoors, uncontained by the 'white box' of the safety of a room.

For this context, the boundaries of discipline and more traditional research approaches are pushed: Kincheloe talks about 'blurring the boundaries' (2001). The Foundation Year Net-work annual conference is a patchwork of varied disciplines where, through sharing practice, questions and collaboration, commonalities can be found, learning from difference.

My Foundation Year Network conference talk opens with a metaphor of greyness. A memory of a painting class exploring colourful greys has stayed with me; a concept of liminal, in-between places, celebrating doubt and questioning perceived truth. When we are able to look darkness in the eye, a vibrancy of creativity is often born. A photograph of a beach in mist is repeatedly screened to provide pause, a redirection from text and back to the storyteller. Roberts's Case Study (2017) is framed by that pause in the doodle in which she seriously played, explored and discovered.

Figure 3. Pause (Wheeler, 2018).

Conclusion

The paper opens with a discussion of my two professional identities which are informing practice, the aim being to bring change to Foundation Year teaching. Psychoanalytical understandings are being applied to educational research, helping the tutor to consider implications of loss emotions (Griffiths, 2016) and trauma (Alexander-Passe, 2015) that students may be experiencing. While the learning environment and curriculum design is a focus, the process also teaches the therapist the value of a psycho-educational approach within clinical contexts. When students or therapy clients experience the 'humiliation stage' of the learning circle (Huckvale, 2017 personal communication), anxiety can be reduced or avoided by offering sensitively directed (or structured) guidance, allowing the removal of all responsibility falling on the student or client (Huckvale, personal communication, 2018).

The bricolage methodology allows for responsiveness within the process of a relational approach to gathering stories. The reflective and reflexive nature of the discipline of art therapy, makes for a learning experience which empowers the researcher to use her tools, those being art-based. It is hoped that botanical painting training will continue to make live the theory of the learning circle.

Huckvale (2018, personal communication) references Kelly's personal construct theory (1955), which will be explored as the project develops. People evolve predictive systems for anticipating events, enabling them to respond quickly to situations. A tutor or a therapist who is able to anticipate what is likely to happen next, Huckvale (ibid) says, can help to contain some of the anxiety of not knowing. The learning circle model has a capacity for reframing anxiety.

The intention to use participatory approaches (Kitchin, 2001) makes reference to critical education philosophy as the foundation for empowering learners to engage in co-production of new curriculum design. By using the Universal Design for Learning framework (2002, 2010), participants are given opportunity to share their experiences and see their stories co-authored to offer transformation. The bargaining phase of Griffiths' growth cycle (2016) is recognised by people who have experienced loss, finding a way of making a difference for others.

Roberts's "Case Study" process and exhibition has offered the starting point and continues to offer collaboration with momentum to help others with learning difference. A collective group "Case to Study" will develop alongside this project, with me acting as a holding, supportive and participating member. It is the difference of being the only non-dyslexic member which informs an empathic response. This is realised through a consciousness of unconscious processes that are worked with in art psychotherapy. The work ensures that the project sits within and remains informed by community arts practice. As a group of multi-disciplined adults, we are in different ways experiencing the first sight of 'disability', yet fervently committed to enter the 'debateable lands' (Learmonth, 2015) of uncertainty and defence to find comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Jones, 1997 in Learmonth with Huckvale, 2015).

The next stage of the project commences by running workshops to produce books and record stories using audio equipment. The pilot workshop and community project engagement, including "Case to Study" collective, is informing decisions about how to gather stories of learning experience, and encourage a sense of ownership of the research project among current and former Foundation Year students. Art-based methods will be used to translate and present the learning stories, with the intention of delivering findings to inform Higher Education teaching, firstly at Foundation Year level and later beyond. A contemporary interpretation of critical education continues to be explored.

Like dyslexia, art therapy is non-linear (Learmonth with Huckvale, 2015), concerned with language unbound by words, yet creatively able to courageously navigate, while working hard

to study differences. Art and education are both transformative, and the research process hopefully enables with compassion.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to give special thanks to Stephanie Roberts, Karen Huckvale, Peter and Charlotte Randall-Page and Charles Reynolds; all have given express permission to be named in this article.

References

Alexander-Passe, N. (2015) Investigating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Triggered by the Experience of Dyslexia in Mainstream School Education? *Journal of Psychology & Psychotherapy*, *5*(6), 1. Retrieved from: https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/investigating-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-triggered-by-the-experience-of-dyslexia-in-mainstream-school-education-2161-0487-1000215.pdf. (Accessed: 13 May 2010).

Benoit, B.A. (2015) Understanding the Teacher Self: Learning through Critical Autoethnography. Retrieved from: http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1530130504144~183. (Accessed: 22 April 2018).

Boal, A. (2000) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Pluto Press.

Cammarota, J (2012) Critical Pedagogy Learning from Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRiL7YSzMjg. (Accessed: 19 May 2018).

CAST (2010) Universal Design for Learning. Retrieved from: http://www.cast.org/w/page/jff/l438;jsessionid=B7B6DA99E74D779DEAFD718B4CD501AD?0. (Accessed: 14 September 2018).

Cheung-Webber, M., Harwood, A., and Lloyd-Carney, A. (2018) *A Thousand Voices*. Touring Exhibition. Maindee Primary School, Newport. MON.

Cheung-Webber, M. (2017) *Maindee Stories.* Touring Exhibition. Abergavenny Museum, MON.

Etherington, K. (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using our selves in research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Books.

Griffiths, T. (2016) Understanding the Five Stages of Grief: Whirlpools of Emotion. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPK2YjziPN4. (Accessed: 20 May 2018)

Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2012) *Standards of Proficiency: Arts Therapist*. London: HCPC.

Huckvale, K., and Learmonth, M. (2009) A case example of art therapy in relation to dialectical behaviour therapy. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, *14*(2), 52-63.

Insider Art Ltd. (2009) *Arts and Health Participatory Visual Arts training* Now *Art in Health Practical Applications*. Retrieved from: http://www.insiderart.org.uk/our-services/44-courses-training. (Accessed: 24 May 2018).

Kincheloe, J. L. (2001) Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *7*(6), 679-692.

Kitchin, R. (2001). Using participatory action research approaches in geographical studies of disability: Some reflections. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *21*(4).

Learmonth, M. and Gibson, K. (2010) Art psychotherapy, disability issues, mental health, trauma and resilience: 'Things and people', *International Journal of Art Therapy*, *15*(2), 53-64.

Learmonth, M. with Huckvale, K. (2015) 'Does your body Mind? Does your Mind Matter? Art psychotherapy and the Complexity of Interactions Between Mind and Body', in Liebmann, M. and Weston, S. *Art Therapy with Physical Conditions*. London: Jessica Kinglsey Publishers, pp. 30-53.

McNiff, S. (1998) *Art-based Research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Milner, M. (2010) *On not being able to paint*. (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Roberts, S. (2017) *Case Study Exhibition*. Riverfront Arts Centre, Newport, MON.

Scott, S. S., McGuire, J. M., and Shaw, S. F. (2003) Universal Design for Instruction. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*(6), 369-379.

Thompson, N. and Thompson, S. (2008) *The Critically Reflective Practitioner*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Springham, N. (2016) Description as social construction in UK art therapy research, *International Journal of Art Therapy*, *21*(3), 104-115.

Waller. D. (2002) Art Therapists: Pragmatic Rebels. Retrieved from personal communication.

Wheeler, E. (2018) Learning about difference from observations of Case Study. *Newsbriefing*, July 2018.

Wibberley, C. (2017) Bricolage Research Methods. In E. A. Glasper and C. Rees (Eds.), *Health Care Research: at a glance.* Ch. 52 pp. 106-1071. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

About the Author

Emma Wheeler is a Foundation Year social science tutor, leading the "Childhood Studies" and "Principles of Youth and Community Work" modules at the University of South Wales. She has taught for 25 years, initially in primary schools, specialising in the creative arts curriculum and later facilitating educational and therapeutic groups with adults and young people in various community settings. Emma has extensive voluntary sector experience, working with people affected by domestic violence, homelessness and deprivation. She founded Skomer Art in 2009, to facilitate arts and health practice, and more recently has trained as an art psychotherapist, working outdoors where possible. Her current research investigates empowerment concepts in different environments, her philosophy espousing the principles and dialogue of critical education.

emma.wheeler@southwales.ac.uk or emma.wheeler@skomerart.org.uk