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Creative Approaches to Research adopts a highly original perspective on the activity and processes of research. Throughout its history it has provided opportunities for writers to explore areas of human experience that are inadequately understood or engaged with from the ‘respectable’ positions and ‘ways of knowing’ that dominate those paradigms and models of social science commonly imbued with authority and legitimacy. To say that knowledge and all ways of knowing should be open to challenge, contestation and rethinking is not to necessarily embrace a postmodernist philosophy of knowledge relativity. It can equally be seen as embracing the foundational perspective of criticality and creativity that has characterised innovation as a radical concept in human history and thought. New ways of knowing always build upon the past through an endeavour of re-imagining.

During these times, when journals proliferate by the minute and also profit from the control of and accessibility to ideas, it is refreshing to see the success of CAR and the opportunities it is providing for pushing against the boundaries of ‘authority’. CAR offers a breath of fresh air to its readers and opportunities for writers to engage across disciplinary boundaries, epistemologies, methodologies and traditions.
Over the last 10 years CAR has established itself as a significant journal providing space for writing of the highest quality, but also writing that is innovative, creative and thought-provoking. No small part of the credit for this goes to Mark Vicars who has just stepped down from the position of editor. His commitment to CAR as an open access journal publishing the very best work across disciplines in the human ‘sciences’ is inestimable. The current issue of the journal introduces a new editor, Ann Cheryl Armstrong, and all those associated with the journal wish her well in building on the success of the journal and of course making her own contribution to its future development.

**Professor Derrick Armstrong** is Deputy Vice Chancellor Research, Innovation and International at the University of the South Pacific. Before this, he was Deputy Vice Chancellor Education at The University of Sydney (Australia) where he currently holds the title of Emeritus Professor. Derrick has previously held positions at the University Sheffield (UK), where he co-directed the University Centre for Childhood and Youth and was Director of the national Research Priority Network Young People’s Pathways Into and Out of Crime, and at Lancaster University in the UK. During his career Professor Armstrong has published 9 books as well as 150 journal articles and papers.
Development of the Scholar–Practitioner Identity through Selected Pieces by Picasso

Abstract

Bringing together elements of aestheticism and authentic leadership this article seeks to demonstrate the potential of framing reflexive critical autobiographical inquiry within an arts-based context. The author engages in a subjective study of his identity as an emerging scholar–practitioner educational leader by reflecting on six selected paintings by Picasso that form for the researcher an analytical lens. These pieces form a portrait of the scholar–practitioner that frames fragments of the researcher’s experiences relating to his personal development as an educational leader. These areas are presented as leadership and academic profile, research and inquiry, scholarly accomplishments, the identity of the scholar–practitioner, and importance of the mentor. As such, Picasso the artist becomes a metaphor of the scholar–practitioner ideal, and his art collectively creates both a prompt and a structure for the complex theoretical work and bricolage of scholarly practice in leadership for social justice, equity, and care in education.

Keywords: aesthetic inquiry, critical autobiography, currere, Picasso, reflexivity, scholar–practitioner

The following self-examination forms a critical autobiographical portraiture as a form of reflexive qualitative inquiry. It represents an attempt to situate my personal and professional self as an educational leader in the work of

scholar–practitionership, and to question the authentic and aesthetic nature of my practice as a school principal. As an arts-based study, I draw from Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009) and Prendergast (2014); as a portraiture, this inquiry finds theoretical foundation in the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997); additionally, as an autobiographical inquiry and a revival of currere (Pinar, 1975), this endeavor of becoming sprouts from the roots of Greene (1988), Gru- met (1992), and Pinar (1994).

Through self-awareness and becoming critically conscious of my world as an educational leader and doctoral student, I encountered a newfound method of engagement—the reflective and reflexive act of self-study—that caused me to look at preparation, policy, and practice from different perspectives. As Prendergast (2014) has stated,

> Revelation of self can be argued as one of the central concerns of art. Self-study has informed art making to some degree for as long as we can know. Aesthetic philosophers, art critics and artists themselves have recognized self-portraiture, autobiography, memoir and confession as legitimate and often potent topics for artistic exploration. With this history of art practice in mind, what problem can there be for an arts-based educational researcher who wishes to engage in self-study? (p. 1)

Along with this newly discovered awareness I began to acknowledge that I had spent a great deal of my life viewing others as The Other, objectifying their lives and the value of their individual lived experiences. Likewise, I realized that I had lived much of my life in a state of anaesthetized ignorance. Arriving at this understanding, I found that I was perpetuating the ecological and socio-cultural attitudes and assumptions in which I had been raised.

During my doctoral studies I was introduced to the notion of scholarly practice and with it the ideas of authenticity and aesthetics in educational leadership. Dewey’s work on aesthetics in Art as Experience (“Experience as Aesthetic”) gave me pause to reconsider my experiences with the artistic in my life, my teaching, and my leadership. Concerning having an experience, Dewey (1981) maintained,

> Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get, are at odds with each other. (p. 555)

Moving from Art as Experience (1981) to Experience and Education (1938), I began to integrate Deweyan perspectives on reflective thinking (Rodgers, 2002)
into a self-reflection and self-awareness that employed artistic and poetic work as a critical lens to examine and interpret my previous practices as a teacher and current methods as a principal. As Jenlink (2006) states, “Dewey’s conception [of the educational administrator] reflects characteristics of a practitioner who is a scholar as well as practitioner, an individual who understands the intellectual, moral and social responsibility of education in relation to transforming society” (p. 56).

The interactions, the conflicts, the distractions, the unconscious “purposes” of doing to which Dewey alluded had been aspects taken-for-granted in the daily experience of my educational practice. Under an aesthetic lens of criticality I began to question the meaning and motives of my own administrative practices and the socio-political influences in my social setting—influences that had empowered me with discretionary decision making and led me to blindly accept policies as given.

The Scholar–Practitioner

For many in academic circles the notion of scholar-practitionership is centered on philosophies underscoring Ed.D. programs (as well as some M.Ed.) as professional-oriented degrees. Varying frameworks for the scholar-practitioner can be found at University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Brooks, n.d.), Pennsylvania State University (Miller, 2013), Benedictine University (Ludema, 2014), Capella University (Capella, 2015), and my alma mater, Stephen F. Austin State University. However, Jenlink (2001, 2003, 2010) and others (Bouck, 2011; Hebert, 2010; Lowery, Walker, Gautam, & Mays, 2015; Lowery, 2016) have pushed the scholar–practitioner identity beyond the definition of scholar-practitionership as a mere “professional degree” toward a moral intellectual engaged in theory and practice.

According to Jenlink (2006), the school leader as a scholar-practitioner is a bricoleur. This image of Levi-Straus’ mythical artisan of patchwork practice serves as a metaphor for the educational leader engaging in analysis and application, of thinking and doing, merging theory and practice to improve learning and schooling by advocating for social justice, equity, and care (Jenlink, 2001). Emerging from the work of bricolage—the praxis of the bricoleur—is an idea of scholar-practitionership that extends beyond the idea of a mere doctoral degree—specifically, the Ed.D. Instead, the bricoleur uses a variety of critical lenses to examine and investigate within the context of her or his particular field and craft. Jenlink (2006) conceptualized the scholar-practitioner educational leader in the following manner:

The construct of scholar-practitioner leadership is premised on an alternative epistemology of inquiry as practice, wherein the leader as scholar and his or her leadership practice are inseparable from scholarly and critically oriented inquiry. Scholar-practitioner leadership is grounded in a postmodern—postpositivist
view of leadership, which seeks to blur boundaries in the knowledge-practice and inquiry-practice relationships. (p. 55)

Jenlink (2006) proposes that the primary concern of the scholar-practitioner educational leader is a democratic work for social justice, equity, and care. From an autobiographical perspective, the academic coursework and portfolio assignments in Stephen F. Austin State University’s doctoral program present a currere (Pinar, 1975) outlined by the candidate’s profile, accomplishments, inquiry, identity, and interaction with mentors and cohort members. Integrated into the candidates’ currere are concepts of critical pragmatist and poststructuralist theory, together with spiritual, poetic, authentic, and aesthetic ways of knowing in leadership. These elements are designed to become theoretical lenses that candidates use to examine contemporary issues relating to education and to better comprehend the epistemological, ontological, and axiological nature of education in the patchwork context of present social conditions (Doctoral Cohort Candidates, Coleman, & Alford, 2007; Hickey, Gill, & Amonett, 2011; Lowery, Gautam, & Mays, 2016).

Over the course of the last several decades the philosophical underpinnings of education and schooling has diversified greatly. Debate over standards and accountability has continued to augment into the 21st century. Emerging concerns now directly impact practice, policy, and preparation. Token expressions such as globalization, digital citizenship, and media literacy, as well as asynchronous and anytime-anywhere learning are now commonplace in discussions relating to the development of students and educators alike. As well, ongoing concerns still exist in terms of race, diversity, at-risk, poverty, and the perceived and well-publicized achievement gap.

The new language of accountability and assessment is increasingly relevant to dialogues concerning preparation programs for educational leaders. New metaphors are being considered to better render and interpret the nature of the school leader as a public intellectual. According to Jenlink (2006),

Problematically, leadership preparation programs are challenged to prepare educational leaders equipped with a repertoire of skills, dispositions, knowledge, and methods up to the challenges that leaders face in the pragmatic world of schools. Increasingly, leaders and the programs that prepare leaders are faced with the challenge of reconceptualizing leadership preparation and practice. (p. 54)

In response to this growing concern, Jenlink (2006) offers the metaphor of the school leader as bricoleur. Implicated in this metaphor is the idea of bricolage—“a construction that arises from the reflexive interactions of different types of knowledge, mediating artifacts, and methods in relation to the social contexts, cultural patterns, and social actions and activities that comprise the daily events of the school” (p. 54). In this selection, the currere of reflexive inquiry comes to
the forefront of the methodological concern of the bricoleur as artisan and her or his research as an art form. With this in mind, I turn an intentional gaze on Picasso’s works as a means to aesthetically focus on critical autobiographical and reflexive inquiry to make meaning and sense of my first-person development as a scholar–practitioner.

Method of Reflexive Inquiry

Methodologically, Picasso and, specifically, six works of Picasso serve as a metaphorical and arts-based framework for inquiry into my own understanding of my work as a school leader in P20 educational settings. Drawn from the selected paintings are six reflective/reflexive sketches that depict the development of an educational leader as a scholar-practitioner. The pieces providing this framework are *The Old Guitarist*; *Ma Jolie, Woman with a Zither or Guitar*; *Girl before a Mirror*; *Self Portrait 1972*; *Self Portrait 1907*; and *A Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. Selecting these works, while based on subjective aesthetic values held by the researcher, was not a strictly arbitrary act. A balance of represented dispositions was sought out with a degree of intentionality. Three of these paintings signify the feminine nature of leadership while three depict a masculine aspect. Collectively these works of art epitomize a desired balance in the life and leadership style of the scholar–practitioner as well as his commitment to empathy, equity, emotions, and gender rights. Moreover, each was picked for its potential to represent the artist-leader’s subjective self in addition to its capacity to represent the scholar–practitioner’s leadership profile, individual growth, inquiry skills, academic accomplishments, identity through reflexive examination, and the relationship with mentors and fellow cohort members.

Consequently, each piece portrays a human figure—though one is extremely ambiguous and indefinable through cubic expression. This fact serves as a focal point to represent the extreme obligation that the scholar–practitioner holds as a human being toward humanity and to every individual with whom s/he comes into contact, even those s/he does not initially comprehend. While these particular pieces are works I consider to be among my favorite paintings by Picasso, they serve—through the process of a poetic/aesthetic analysis—a professional purpose as symbols of the work of scholarly practice.

Role of Radical Reflexivity

Cunliffe (2003) purposed that reflexive research “questions our relationship with our social world and the ways in which we account for our experiences” (p. 985). Per se, reflexivity is inherently linked to representation. As Cunliffe stated, “Reflexivity ‘unsettles’ representation by suggesting that we are constantly constructing meaning and social realities as we interact with others and talk about our ex-
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“experiences” (p. 985). Within the reflexive gaze the scholar–practitioner, as thinker and doer, is free to profoundly embrace an aesthetic way of knowing his world by seeking metaphors and metaphorical structures that provide “unspoken” meaning to events and ethical dilemmas that s/he faces. In other words, radical reflexive inquiry is primarily an act of making sense of what goes on in the lifeworld of the one that questions the value of the decisions to be made and problems to be resolved. By considering these issues through an arts-based lens a layer of significance can be explored that is fundamentally “unspeakable” without the aid of metaphorical explication.

**Arts-based Inquiry as Sense Making**

Intended here are portraits of the scholar–practitioner educational leader as viewed through a theoretical, critical, and aesthetic lens. It is not intended to be a comprehensive or complex analysis or interpretation of Picasso’s artwork in and of itself. Instead these images were chosen because of certain characteristics that I felt personally would exemplify the aesthetic and artistic work of scholarly practice as educational leadership. According to Eisner (2002), our environment is “in its most fundamental state, a qualitative one made up of sights and sounds, tastes and smells that can be experienced through our sensory system” (p. 1). How one experiences that environment is “a process that is shaped by culture, influenced by language, impacted by beliefs, affected by values, and moderated by the distinctive features of that part of ourselves we sometimes describe as our individuality” (p. 1).

The experiencing of a given environment—such as one in which a work of art is sensed or one in which an identity develops—depends on the subjective act of reflexivity on the part of the one experiencing it. As Eisner (2002) states,

Transforming the private into the public is a primary process of work in both art and science. Helping the young learn how to make that transformation is another of education’s most important aims. It is a process that depends initially upon the ability to experience the qualities of the environment, qualities that feed our conceptual life and that we then use to fuel our imaginative life. (pp. 2-3)

This transformation of the private to the public through the reflexive work of inquiries such as portraiture, grounded in ethnography and phenomenology (Cunliffe, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), provide a foundation for the important task of understanding not only the conceptual-practical tensions of the educational leader but also his or her identity as a scholar–practitioner. Paintings (i.e. images) selected for this reflexive inquiry form an outline defined by moral imagination—a representation that is “aimed at transforming the contents of consciousness within the constraints and affordances of a material” (Eisner, 2002, p. 6).
As such, art—or in this case, arts-based inquiry—plays a role paramount to transforming the scholar–practitioner’s conscious awareness of the leader that she or he is or is becoming. Due to the potentialities that could emerge, it would seem a purposeful selection of descriptors is required. These descriptors, which represent areas of the emergent scholar–practitioner educational leader identity, stem from reflection and reflexivity supplied in my doctoral studies and originated through a required portfolio as a means of authentic assessment for candidates’ in the Doctor of Education program.

Areas of the scholar–practitioner’s identity denoted in this reflection are leadership and academic profile, research and inquiry, scholarly accomplishments, the identity of the scholar–practitioner, and importance of mentors and cohorts of colleagues. The first painting presented here, *The Old Guitarist* (1903) from Picasso’s Blue Period, represents the scholar–practitioner’s leadership and academic profile.

**The Old Guitarist**

The old man in Picasso’s painting is not necessarily meant to symbolize the scholar–practitioner leader as an individual. Imagination, I believe, can move us deeper into an aesthetic analysis of the colors and contrasts of the aging musician and his environment as depicted in the piece. Picasso paints his elderly subject with the subject’s instrument of choice—the guitar. The guitar is an appresentation of sounds of quality and quantity—music is both a method and measurement of qualitative chords with notes and quantitative measures with rhythms. While the canvas is silent, if an astute observer listens to the strokes of the brush, the glide of the artist’s hand, an almost audible strum, soft and subtle, can be heard from the distant past. This is the sound of purpose, of meaning, of reflection, of wisdom, of lived experiences. The old guitarist exudes experiential data—what has been seen, what has been heard, what has been felt and tasted—from his tired, sad face. His grey hair and wrinkle skin tell a story of many hardships and the lonely hours of dark blue nights.

This symbol of lived experiences represents an element necessary to the work of the scholar–practitioner leader. In all actuality, leadership cannot happen without experience—without reflecting on past experience. Whether these experiences can be interpreted as good or bad is not our concern. Many bad or blue experiences lead to good outcomes—a dark past can make the light of the future much brighter—an academically “unacceptable” school can become a beautiful institution of learning and teaching for the whole child. However, the relationship between experience and leadership cannot be ignored. While many young inexperienced men become solid managers, take troops and platoons into battle, and become entrepreneurs, these things are accomplished through techniques, positional authority, or innovation.
Experience only provides the wisdom to discern the nuances of these strategies and make them useful in authentic and aesthetic leadership. Experience is gained through education, employment, scholarship and research, through internships and practicums, travels and immersion—in short, through a commitment to lifelong learning and continuous observation and reflection. If time is, as Heidegger (1962) purports, “the transcendental horizon for the question of Being” (p. xvi), then the understanding of every ontological question needs to be arrived at through experience. One’s educational philosophy, one’s leadership profile, one’s teaching and research statement, one’s social interactions with others can only evolve over time with meaningful experience.

In *The Old Guitarist* the subject holds his guitar upright and close to him as though he is embracing or caressing another human being. In this pose we can form extensions to issues of equity and care. We can visually extract his care and his awareness of humanity in his motionless figure just as in his face we can observe the marks of oppression, injustice, and the brokenness of our world. His head is turned downward, a symbol of prayerfulness and meditation, respect to others, and passive resistance. He is seated as one who rests from strife and stress, worry and war. In effect, his traits are those of a sacrificed messiah on a musical cross, having given up his soul on the sidewalk altars of the impoverished city streets. His unheard ancient songs would be ballads of forgiveness and forgotten-ness vocalized in a thick but pleasant and almost unintelligible Castilian accent.

Just as the educational leader is often alone in his or her endeavors to right social injustices or stand in opposition to inequitable policies, the old guitarist is absorbed into the darkness of his blue surroundings, isolated and misunderstood. Like the scholar-practitioner he is often a stranger in a strange land—even more so when he plays his melodies to his own people.

**Ma Jolie, Woman with a Zither or Guitar**

The next movement of the scholar–practitioner composition is one focused on the melodies of research and inquiry. To portray this as the hub of theory and practice, I have chosen Picasso’s *Ma Jolie*, otherwise called *Woman with a Zither or Guitar*. This cubist oil painting is both abstract and esoteric, representing one of the numerous women and loves of Picasso’s life, Marcelle “Eva” Humbert. For the scholar–practitioner research and inquiry are a romantic affair. While there is sufficient room for both quantitative and qualitative endeavors, the scholar–practitioner generally chooses the one yet often strays with the other in the act and art of *bricolage* (Jenlink, 2006). We may lean on statistics and covariance but explore the more sensual explications of academics and society through phenomenology and the composites of intimate ethnographic liaisons, seeking thick, rich descriptions of the world.
Upon first glance *Ma Jolie* seems more abstract and less cohesive than the woman hidden in the shadowy hues of browns and blacks. With a cautious, reflective gaze and analytical consideration one may ascertain the vague figure of the zither-playing femme nestled within the cubic helter-skelter that covers the canvas. For the researcher this is often the case: the subject is there, present, before our eyes, but the meaning is aloof, hidden. In other words, the sign is visible, tangible, but the signified is not so obvious. The research questions must be designed to extract the essence underlying the behaviors and the being; the methodology draws out the synthesis of the subject and its image through a scientific and profound act of inquiry.

Within the field we find that the form of the woman, like truth, is not intact; she is represented with a hand here and a fist there, a shock of hair in this space and a set of eyes in another. It is the observer’s responsibility to collect the data that make up the woman and her guitar, to mentally (re)arrange them in an understandable order, and to then report his or her findings and conclusions. In this case, the complete woman and instrument present difficulty and reality and the problematically beautiful; the way in which Picasso revealed these aspects of her existence is not easily accepted within the culture of our normalized way of viewing the world.

**Girl Before a Mirror**

Picasso is attributed to having said, “I have a horror of people who speak about the beautiful. What is beautiful? One must speak of problems in painting!” Recognizing a problem—or problem posing—is a Freirean (1970) concept related to the ability of reading the world. It is also of major importance to the reflective work of scholarly practice. For this reason, I have selected Picasso’s *Girl Before a Mirror* as the artistic representation for scholarly or academic accomplishments. What is an accomplishment? What is success? What is achievement? Is it what is defined by standardization and routinization? Is it defined by accountability and *No Child Left Behind* (now the *Every Student Succeeds Act*)?

Accomplishment can only be discovered in self-reflection or reflexive-subjective study. The cogitations of the meditating Ego must be brought into the picture. Consideration of the collage produced from many successes and the valuing of lessons in the form of failures have formed the context of one’s life and learning. Successes are often merely failures that are perceived as good at a given moment in time; and likewise, failures can effectively lead to personal improvement and self-actualization. When Picasso’s “Girl” looks in the “Mirror” she does not see what she is but instead perceives an alter image of herself. Perception is said to be reality—but only psychologically. The physical reality of the *Girl Before the Mirror* stands in a soft light, in shapely and smooth artistic lines on the left-hand, the
image perceived on the right is dark and surreal, a confused reflection riddled with self-doubt and failure.

Scholar–practitioners recognize the importance of perception nevertheless work to reveal the reality. Their obligation is to illuminate, to “seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their vision—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). It is through the reflection and meditation on life, self, and subjects of study that the scholar–practitioners engage in a criticality that does not seek to define but rather seeks to challenge accepted definitions. The girl gazes into the mirror and asks, “What is it that I see? Is it what I perceive or is there something more than what the superficial divulges? Is there something more—something essential? Is there something else beneath the reflected image? Do I see myself—my world—as I am—as it is? How does my fellow human being see me—it? Am I beautiful? Am I problematic? What is beautiful?”

Self Portrait 1972

Facing death, Picasso painted a somewhat disturbing self-portrait in 1972 (he died in 1972). The face in the portrait is haggard, unshaven, wide-eyed, and almost simian in features. The eyes, as with most of Picasso’s paintings, are offset, uneven; one is reddened. A section of the left-hand side of the head is missing, representing Picasso’s unrepresented “right hand” (which is visible in the photo associated with the art); the white shadow of the unseen right hand supports the serene forehead of a man engrossed in deep thought. The image is one of autobiographical revelation and auto/ethnographic material. Moreover, it depicts the significance of reflexivity for the educational leader and the turning of the critical lens upon one’s self.

Picasso sees neither himself nor the world as others see them—he sees things merely as they are. Humanity at large chooses to not see the world as it exists but subconsciously views the world as it is preferred and as it is readily understood. The Pablo Picassos and the Salvador Dalis of the world dare to look into the problematic and often surreal spirit of existence and paint it in its authentically disturbing and distorted realness. The product manifests in asymmetrical faces and melting clocks. Surreality surfaces in reality through their perspectives illustrated in images that are raw and real and rife with humanity.

Like Picasso in 1972, each of us faces death. And death has many faces. Daily we die—emotionally, spiritually. The scholar–practitioner educational leader gives him-/herself to theory and practice, to research and writing, on the cross of academia and student achievement. This philosopher-educator gives him-/herself to creative and critical endeavors that prepare today’s young to be tomorrow’s entrepreneurs, educators, and engineers. We challenge others and ourselves to look
beyond the mirror, beyond the accepted image, into the reality of our spiritual selves, pushing the edges of the normal, ever looking beyond, ever questioning the status quo. At the end of the day, the scholar–practitioner hopes to look within. S/he embodies a messiah–martyr concept that is “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3 NKJV). It is with weight of revelation concerning the state of affairs that the scholarly practitioner endeavors to effect change in the face of adversity.

For this individual, there is no difference between death and sacrifice. Both are a complete giving up of one’s Self. Picasso gave himself to a life of art, of blurring boundaries. In an academic sense, the scholar–practitioner does the same. The scholar–practitioner dies daily to the cause of social justice, equity, and care, taking on the role of co-emancipator—of Paraclete—coming along side of the oppressed and dying, as a co-struggler in the battle for life, liberty, and democracy. The scholar–practitioner leader disregards personal comfort for the sake of the moral and ethical. Incidentally, *Self Portrait 1972* was the last of Picasso’s series of self-portraits.

**Self Portrait 1907**

Although not the first of his self-portraits, Picasso’s 1907 work was completed during his work on the more famous *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. The final rendering of the latter painting, depicting nude females, is a *pentimento* of earlier work of two masculine figures. Upon reflecting on himself as an artistic and authentic being, Picasso was able to allow the true image of natural expression to surface and reach its destined state of perfection. Without the pause to reflect on the youthful and wide-eyed self he was at that time the final product may never have evolved.

So it is with the educational leader. Recreation always precedes re-creation. The work of the scholar–practitioner involves re-creating environments in which the Other can face the privileged and undemocratic practices that marginalize her or his becoming. Poverty and lack of privilege rob youthfulness and smother hope. Picasso’s self-portrait is an attempt to capture for perpetuity the face of childlike optimism—the work of the scholar–practitioner is no less. Although the essay, the editorial, the published research, the new theory, the application in practice may go unnoticed for a century or more, it remains etched into the consciousness of an ongoing dialogue of faith, hope, and humility, and an unending debate of why and how to educate and inform a much desired democratic citizenry. Dewey (1916) states,

> Certain traits of character have such an obvious connection with our social relationships that we call them “moral” in an emphatic sense—truthfulness, hon-
esty, chastity, amiability, etc. But this only means that they are, as compared with some other attitudes central:—that they carry other attitudes with them. They are moral in an emphatic sense not because they are isolated and exclusive, but because they are so intimately connected with thousands of other attitudes which we do not explicitly recognize—which perhaps we have not even names for. (p. 357)

Picasso’s earlier self-portrait is a work of morality—not based on religious convictions or legal structures or societal mores—but founded on the individual. It is an authentic painting in the youthfulness and innocence and naivety that it displays. The young man in and of himself does not possess the needed wisdom of leadership, but he harnesses the power of hope. Without hope wisdom is powerless. The scholar–practitioner looks into him-/herself at any stage of development and embraces the hope and juvenescence needed to stand, to reflect, to paint the world as it is.

Gertrude Stein

Jewish in her culture, hermetic in her nature, open in her sexual orientation, complete in her complexity, Gertrude Stein’s rhythmic stream-of-consciousness essays were attempts to get at the meaning of the unrealized life-world of the displaced and were the literary counterparts to Picasso’s cubism. She represented a maternal femininity and a strong pseudo-masculinity which attracted many artistic geniuses of her day: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Matisse, and Picasso included. The scholar–practitioner’s love for diversity and difference is embodied in this quote: “Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle” (Stein, 1997, p. 4). Stein’s critical genius, her love of creativity, and intimate relationship with Picasso are undeniable. Her place in this reflexive study is one representing mentorship and collegiality. Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein symbolizes a scholar–practitioner’s love and respect for his/her mentors and leaders, those who have instructed and guided, advised and fostered.

According to Wagner-Martin (1995), “A deep bond developed between Gertrude and Picasso, and . . . next to his mother and Fernande, Gertrude became the most important woman in his life” (p. 72). As Picasso painted the portrait of his companion the scholar–practitioner leader homages the work of his/her predecessors, professors, and former teachers. Wagner-Martin continues:

Because Picasso found Gertrude enigmatic and his own style somehow inadequate for the vision he had of her portrait, he could not finish the [portrait of her]. Telling Gertrude he could no longer “see” her, he painted out the head while he went to Spain for the summer. That autumn he painted a new head and face . . . to give the face unmatched eyes and surreal angle that distort its
otherwise realistic effect. When Picasso invited the Steins to see the painting, Gertrude was pleased: it was of the new. It expressed the same kind of difference she aimed for in her writing. (p. 73)

Often the protégé sees his/her mentor in an impossible-to-paint lighting. However, the light in which the mentor is perceived is a poetic one—simultaneously symbolic and actual. The mentor is the ideal—the unrealized goal. It matters not that the mentor has his or her own imperfections. The imperfections are human and natural—authentic. The design, the destination, the duty are what matters. Giving a face and eyes to the work at hand, realizing the impossible, going above and beyond the pattern that the mentor has presented and reaching out for a new and improved self, becoming a mentor—these things are the stuff of leadership. Scholarly practice, while not limited to, includes all of these. As Wagner-Martin describes, “Picasso’s painting of Gertrude became the icon of both her and his own ‘gloire.’ As she said, ‘For me, it is I . . . and it is the only reproduction of me, which is always I’” (p. 73).

It is with reflection on this portraiture that scholar-practitioner remembers his or her Gertrude Steins of life. Without these individuals, models and mentors, there would be no phenomenon of scholarly practice—there would be no reflective—no reflexive—self today. These individuals are the complex, hermetic, polyrhythmic doorways to that which the scholar–practitioner is (becoming). Without them there would be no self-portrait. Without these individuals there would be no new generation of researchers, there would be no new cohort of lifelong learners.

Conclusion

Picasso is attributed with having said, “An idea is a point of departure and no more. As soon as you elaborate it, it becomes transformed by thought.” Aesthetically, art begins, not in the paint, not in the canvas, and not in the conceptualization brought about when the paint soils the canvas. It is born in the mind of the artist—before the artist ever commits the first brushstroke or mark of charcoal to the woven cloth. Art is therefore an apt metaphor for reflection in leadership. Like artistic endeavors, the scholar–practitioner finds a metaphor and meaning not only in the work of artists but in his or her own reflexive inquiry.

Through integrating, synthesizing, and evaluating one’s development through leadership practice, research and inquiry skills, academic accomplishments, growth, and mentoring/collegiality, the identity the scholar–practitioner emerges and continues to emerge. The six Picasso paintings presented these aspects of scholarly development frame the identity of the scholar–practitioner educational leader as an agent of social justice, equity, and care. The scholar–practitioner
educational leader manifests in the figures of classroom teachers and lecture hall instructors, college professors and school principals, university presidents and school district superintendents.

Scholar–practitioners hold an obligation to be reflective and reflexive leaders who consider not only the politics of the community but also the needs of the individuals that form that community. They shape and are shaped by the nexus of democracy and art, aesthetics and authenticity, experience and education. They are the catalysts of equity and ethics and the moral advocates of care and justice. As such it is necessary that they frame their epistemological and ontological understanding of leadership and learning through consideration of the context and lived experiences of those they serve. Their work is one of meaning making and mindfulness. They are the artist and their agency the art.

References


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How Developing Shared Professional Identity Mitigates Cultural Differences in an EFL Research Setting

Tommy Che Vorst

Abstract

This study concerns the shared experiences of a foreign-born professor and the Korean teachers of English with whom he engaged during the course of a major research project. It seeks to demonstrate how focusing on shared professional identity (i.e. of educators) could mitigate the cultural differences between the two, as well as lessen the potential obstacles rooted in those differences. The inquiry was conducted within a TESOL certification program in which the professor taught the Korean teachers. It has implications for education researchers in any cross-cultural environments.

Keywords: cross-cultural research practice, identity, education, adult learners, Korea

Conducting research in a cross-cultural environment brings with it a series of additional, unique challenges. As a western-born researcher working in Korea, the most obvious of these are my foreignness and my lack of ability in the Korean language (and conversely, the challenges my research participants experience in English). Over the course of this study, other challenges became apparent: my age, my professional status, and potentially my pedagogy. This paper will illustrate how each of these challenges existed in the research context, and demonstrate how I as researcher employed an unwavering dedication to our shared professional
identity to reduce the effects of those challenges, and therefore enable (and possibly enhance the efficacy of) a major research project.

**Theoretical Context—the Ethos of the Project**

Much has been written on the topic of teachers’ professional identities, but it is certain specific perspectives which inform the current study. Freeman and Johnson, though writing in an academic journal, cite an excellent lay-language description of some of the base, fundamental components in the formation of professional identity: “teachers... enter teacher education programs with prior experiences, personal values, and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in their classrooms.” (1998: 401). Sachs offers a comparatively conservative—but nevertheless useful—definition of professional identity: “a set of attributes that are imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity itself... that enable the differentiation of one group from another” (2001: 153). I sought to place myself on the participants’ side of such differentiation. The attributes alluded to include teachers’ “knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests, and orientation towards work and change” (Drake, Spillane, and Hufferd-Ackles 2001: 2). It is out of respect for participants’ identities as described that I undertook this effort to rebalance the research relationship in the manner I did. Wenger suggests that “identity and practice [are] mirror images of each other,” and it is that perspective which most closely informs this project: teachers’ professional identity is a “negotiated experience. We define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify ourselves” (1998: 149). It is this negotiation that was the central dynamic of my efforts to redress imbalances, and its expression in our conversations was the primary source of data for the inquiry.

My own perspectives and motivations for undertaking the inquiry can be summed up as follows: I believe that “texts, any texts, are always partial and incomplete; socially, culturally, historically, racially, and sexually located, and can therefore never represent any truth except those truths that exhibit the same characteristics” (Lincoln, 2002, p. 333). Ontologically, I worked from the belief that reality is neither static nor fixable; but instead that it mutates and changes both on its own and as a reflection of those who experience its mutable layers. That being said, there was a critical substratum to my work. The construction of knowledge is, in my view, motivated by a desire for personal/social progress and/or emancipation from prevailing systems or idioms. In addition, the social construction of knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it takes place within a series of concentric social arenas, some of which are sociohistorical macro-realities over which the subject may have perceptive authority, but significantly less (if any) authorial control. For my project’s adult learners, these arenas included their classroom, the province hosting their program, their nation (both physical and abstract), their
professions and professional communities, and their families. Rossman and Rallis would classify me as a critical phenomenologist, as I am most interested in giving program adult learners an opportunity to give voice to their experiences, and perhaps thereby find self-empowerment from within (1998). I therefore undertook research in the phenomenological tradition, but not at the expense or to the exclusion of other paradigms, which proved themselves illustrative at certain junctures in the research process. It was the aim of drawing together individual threads of understanding into narratives of meaning, both for individual adult learners and the TESOL group as a whole that drew to me to choose phenomenology as the guiding principle for the project.

Methodology—Setting and Participants
The physical setting for the inquiry was a small, private university in a rural city in South Korea. The TESOL program is a certification open to final-year students in Education or English, as well as in-service professionals. It is officially connected to TEFL International and to the M.A. TESOL at a mid-sized American university. I employed convenience sampling: the sample consisted of all those teachers who volunteered for the study, from a population pool of a single TESOL cohort. The participants were 7 women and 3 men. Their ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-40s, and their teaching careers from not yet begun to over twenty years. Two of the men were full-time students at the time of the inquiry (though one had volunteered as an English tutor while studying in the US), and one of the women self-identified as a housewife. The others were all practicing education professionals to some degree. The remaining male was the longest-serving teacher, with a 20-year career in the English department at an international language high school. Four of the women were working as teachers/tutors in private academies. One of the teachers ran a preschool English academy, and one was preparing to re-enter the workplace by opening an academy. One taught English in her church, and the other began (midway through the inquiry) a new posting, teaching English in a middle school. The last woman participant is a career school administrator with neither teaching experience, nor any intention of teaching in the future. She would follow up her TESOL training with an M.A. TESOL at an American university, but prior to the inquiry was one of two participants who had had no experience with English-language education overseas. Throughout this paper the participants are pseudonymous to ensure privacy and for ease and continuity of reading.

Key Concerns of the Inquiry
The obstacles to the cross-cultural inquiry are delineated as follows:
1. Age 2. Foreignness 3. Professional Status 4. Other Obstacles
Age
At the outset of the TESOL program, we instructors were introduced to the participating students by name, age, and rank, in that order. My introduction, therefore, sounded like this (paraphrased):

Please welcome Dr. Tommy Vorst. He’s 41 years old, and is a Visiting Professor of English from New Zealand.

Notwithstanding being misidentified by nationality as well as by qualification, it is clear how this introduction erected two significant barriers between the students and myself: those of age and professional status. For the students’ awareness of my age seemed a source of comfort, however, and soon after many of them took the opportunity to inform me that they were younger (or older) than myself, and by how much. This was in keeping with their experiences within the group. Said Sarah:

I and the other teachers made sure of each other’s ages.

Nevertheless, I could not help but notice that this established a hierarchy to which several of them felt bound. Kyle spoke of the burden of responsibilities that came with being a senior member in the classroom, noting somewhat humorously those certain members of the TESOLT class:

are all my students, according to the age difference.

It would be naïve of me to think that such age-based perceptions (and strictures) were not extended to me. For better or worse, age was a factor in the classroom. The question of professional status I will address further along in this paper, but first I will outline the more obvious issue of my cultural outsider status.

Foreignness
There could of course be no disguising my status as a foreigner. I am a blue-eyed caucasian male with a blue metallic ring piercing my left nostril. Cross-cultural settings exact a greater sensitivity of the researcher than studying in one’s home environment. Indeed, “Doing cross-cultural research necessitates the acquisition of cultural knowledge of the social group that researchers wish to learn from” (Liamputtong 2008, 4). In part, I had already fulfilled that necessity by making South Korea my adopted home prior to the inquiry. For 4 years between 2001 and 2007, I lived and attempted to learn the language there, eventually marrying into the culture in 2005. These personal steps engaged me with the host culture. Living in semi-rural settings taught me the heightened attention to interpersonal communicative formality Korean country life demands. Communicating with
my new extended family and others on my self-propelled travels through the country meant I had become relatively comfortable in the Korean language. All of these interactions necessitated my understanding, recognition, acceptance, and participation in Korean cultural idioms.

The very foreignness of the English-only TESOL program itself—exported from a US university—led Deanna to say:

The TESOL program is for foreigners.

Indeed Brandy had never had extensive contact with a non-Korean before:

I have studied so many years during my middle school, high school, university. During that time, I can read in textbooks, but I have no opportunity to speak out with foreigner teachers.

By contrast, Kyle rooted his perception of the inherent difficulties of cross-cultural research in his many years of experience working together with foreigners.

You and I are different culturally in many ways...Especially about cultural things...we cannot get to 100% understanding....When we talk about cultural things it’s difficult to get some agreement between Korean teachers and foreign teachers.

That difficulty of understanding was illustrated to me in another aspect of the program. During the extra-curricular events, Sarah sought me out specifically on the basis of my foreignness. She enjoyed engaging me in discussions of culture, and ‘grilling’ me about the changes to Korean culture she saw going on around her, which she attributed to outside influences. Based on our verbal jousting, I believe she saw me as a representative of a western culture whose encroachment on modern-day Korea is not always a good thing.

Professional Status
The most unavoidable, unnatural obstacle erected between the students and myself was the one inherent in our professional relationship:

Deanna called it

The difference of my position

Kyle called it

Position differences

Most simply put, a professor in front of a room of students establishes a power hierarchy, a dynamic mostly dissected in Western contexts (Biesta 2006; Ranciere
In research, that hierarchy is in my opinion anathema to effective inquiry of any kind. At the outset of the project, it was this obstacle that I was most interested in dismantling. Some of this positional distance manifested itself as performance stress for the students:

> When I speak English, I have a lot of grammatical errors, and pronunciation, and proper vocabulary. So when I make a mistake, the teacher/professor may think me lower than me. So, because of this feel, I want not to talk to them a lot.

The least likely participant to self-identify as a teacher was Serge, who was the youngest member of the cohort. He was only one of two who had never taught/worked in education prior to enrolment. Yet on a shared bus ride from the campus one day near the conclusion of the program, I asked him if finishing TESOL felt any different from finishing his other courses. He said yes, and followed that by saying that the TESOL students:

> may have more in common, like we are all teachers or something.

Indeed, in the end only one participant did not unequivocally describe himself as a teacher. Nevertheless, even he was using the program as a springboard to a term position: teaching theatre stage management to drama students in Nepal.

**Other Obstacles**

In addition to the very common practice of apologizing for one’s lack of English ability, some mentions of linguistic obstacles did occur during the study. Kyle in particular observed that in addition to his own concerns:

> I have some language barrier, English barrier,

he had also been privy to the conversations of his peers on the matter. When I asked him if there was a risk that the English-only environment could be burdensome, or that other people are experiencing that feeling, he said:

> In a sense. Some students, some co-members are worried about that.

I have shown the four categories of difficulty that presented themselves to me during the course of the research. In the second part of this paper, I will outline how I sought to overcome these obstacles in order to successfully operate in a cross-cultural research EFL environment. I will examine how I overcame the obstacles in the same order I introduced them:

1. Age
2. Foreignness

3. Professional Status

4. Other Obstacles

**Overcoming Obstacles of Age**

As I have mentioned, my age was foregrounded at the outset of the program, and the participants all placed themselves on an age continuum relative to me and to their fellow students. However, it should be noted that while I was relatively powerless in combating this cultural tradition, some aspects of age were mitigated during the inquiry. Shauna observed that:

> In our group there are so many differences between the ages of people, so TESOL was quite helpful for me to understand each other.

That mutual understanding led to age being less important. As the oldest participant in the inquiry, it could be argued Kyle had the most to lose from an abdication of age-based status. Yet he said:

> We are all the same: colleagues, students. [We are] just friends.

It is entirely possible that the mere fact of studying in the TESOL certification program, therefore, led to the lessening of age-influence.

In one case, age also help ease the path toward shared identity. Kyle and I were effectively equals in terms of age and academic status. As he noted above, the major difference between us was that of my place of birth. By asserting our professional commonality, I believe I opened the door to what became camaraderie. In addition to sitting and singing together at dinners, Kyle and I were able to effortlessly shift our discussions from our careers and our jobs to our languages, our families, sports, culture, and world issues. We played sweat-soaked table tennis matches against one another as easily as we settled into a silent, brainy game of Hive (a modern abstract game similar to Go or Chess). In these ways the collegial atmosphere created by the students and the subsequent endorsement of my research model were key factors in mitigating the age barrier.
Overcoming the Obstacle of Foreignness

As a visible minority in Korea, my foreignness was an inescapable fact. There was no way to transcend or eliminate it, but mitigating its influence was something I felt was possible, or even probable. As the most personal attribute to be overcome, it was my personal relationships with individual members of the group that minimized this obstacle. Above, we saw how Sarah was able, on the basis of the equality I’d fostered, to use my foreignness to engage in a less formal, less academic relationship with me. I believe others did this, as well.

Shauna had been an expatriate herself, living in Ireland for a year prior to enrolling in the TESOL program. Remarkably, she referred to herself while living in Ireland as:

The real me.

Shauna saw herself as having two selves, and preferred the expatriate one to the one, which dominates in her home country. She often spoke of escaping her homeland, both as a physical place and as a culture in which she must bend her individualism to fit accepted norms. I believe her extraordinary emotional openness during the interviews was at least in part attributable to her seeing me as a fellow expatriate. I represented someone who could not just listen to, but also relate to her experiences. This could not have happened had I not been an expatriate myself. This led also to Brandy initiating conversations unlikely to have happened had I maintained the same professional distance the other members of my faculty did. Brandy lived and worked far away from the TESOL site. In order to allow her to participate in the research, I offered to commute the 2 hours to her hometown to conduct interviews, a development which surprised her. After her first interview, she asked me to join her for lunch in order to talk among other things about expat life. She was preparing to become an expatriate herself, with the program serving as a springboard to her participation in an M.A. TESOL in the USA.

The two younger men in the program sought me out as an older male (but younger than their fathers) to whom they could relate. At least part of this was due to my foreignness. Serge suggested that

of course you are my senior, but you are not my hyung*, you know?

*Korean term for older male, whether blood related (“big brother”) or not.

Pierre and I once met by chance downtown, and immediately caught each other looking at a pretty woman strolling by, after which he engaged me for a half-hour to solicit my opinions on the nature of Korean beauty. The same week, Serge and I engaged in conversations on the bus about the state of hip-
hop music, and he was quite pleased to learn that some of the western artists he listened to were also to be found on my mp3 player. I am certain that had these two perceived our relationship to be exclusively that of professor and student, those conversations would not have occurred.

**Overcoming Obstacles Based on Professional Status**

*The Researcher’s Status*

The unquestioned power I had as a professor relative to the students had to be dismantled if the research was to go forward as I wanted it. My first effort in this regard was administrative, and related to my role as researcher more than as a professor. I asked the program coordinator to recuse me from grading or evaluating the students in any way, and made this adjustment clear to the students. They therefore knew when deciding whether or not to join the research that I had no influence upon their grade in the program.

The second effort to reduce the power of the researcher was through an appeal. Instead of telling the students about the research and urging them to join in, I sent them each an explicitly worded invitation, one that reiterated the voluntary nature of participation.

When I finally got to meet them to discuss the project, they had therefore already become familiar with its details, its timeline, and its demands. My next move was instrumental, I believe, in establishing our collegial relationship: I asked them for a list of objections they had. My exact question to them was:

> What do I have to do to make participation more attractive to you?

A long list of objections followed, mostly related to time, work demands, and technology use. I gave in on all counts. It was vital for potential participants to understand that I could not do this without them, and that they were therefore in a position of power to make-or-break the project. Ten of thirteen students deciding to participate in the inquiry proved that my submission to their requirements was successful.

*The Professor’s Status*

In order to convey my dedication to the idea that we were professional equals, I subordinated myself and my presence to community of learning that was the TESOL program and the students in it. That is, I stressed their ownership of the classroom and of the learning community, and actively and ongoingly sought permission to enter it. When I visited the classroom on non-teaching days, I asked their permission to physically enter the classroom. Prior to all my lessons I
thanked them for having me as an instructor. I introduced lessons by asking them if there was any material in particular they wished to cover, rather than prioritize my own plans for the lesson. My classes were seminars (not lectures) and throughout my time in the classroom as a professor I encouraged a classroom atmosphere of mutual learning, as opposed to more traditional professor-led models. The participants clearly embraced this pedagogical model. Twyla said of the class:

Here, the colleagues all help each other. It’s very good.

She went on to say that whenever her own work was done but others were still busy, she (without any coaxing or seeking permission from me) left her seat and:

I was helping them.

Sarah also spoke of the collegiality that existed, saying:

After class, if I didn’t understand I make sure again [with] another student.

At the heart of mitigating the power imbalances in my dual position of professor and researcher was the identity I shared with the participants, that of an educator. If I could foreground our collegial ties as proof of our equality, the research could take place on some degree of equal footing. Deanna, who ordinarily considered her classroom identity to be “very nervous and uncomfortable”, went on to tell me:

But your class is very casual, and very practical, and very good. I had a good time to think about the content and the way to teach. What did the [other] professor want to teach us, I couldn’t understand her lecture... Your class was so good, because we took part.”

By encouraging an atmosphere in which students were comfortable operating as teachers to their peers—on an equal footing with myself—I established that we were in fact, a group of educators sharing knowledge together.

All of the participants in one way or another displayed an acceptance of my role as their equal. Sometimes the group did this as a whole, and specific instances were illustrative of the success of my determination to overcome obstacles and level the inquiry’s playing field. Three episodes in particular illustrated that my efforts were successful.

At several points in the program, students were required to perform in teaching demonstrations for which they would be graded. As I have noted, I was not involved in the grading process and the students knew this. As a result, I was able to spend several hours prior to the demonstrations advising the students. Had I
been part of the grading committee, I would have been unable to assist in that manner. On the date of the first demonstration, my advice was asked.

I told a flustered Jo not to panic, and to remember that the evaluating profs were rooting “for” them to succeed. Shauna asked me to repeat that, and rather than say it half a dozen times to individuals, I told the whole class: I told them “Hey, you’re teachers. This is what teachers do.” I told them how scared I still was standing in front of a room full of people, and that my perceiving them as my colleagues is what saved me every day.

On the second demonstration day, I observed that:

It’s very freeing, participating in these things without being allowed to grade them. The students all know—even those not in the study—that I am only there for moral support, and they seem to really thrive on that knowledge.

On several occasions during the program, the students asked me to go out on the town with them after class. Early on in the program I bowed out of the dinner, despite their protestations: I wasn’t sure yet of how the group saw me. I hadn’t thought I was going against societal participation norms since I was the instructor. I soon stood corrected, as Sarah reminded me that:

“we’re all teaching colleagues here.”

Dashed by my own words, everyone thought it was very funny. Twyla insisted I come along to the post-class dinner. She said she’d specifically asked the class if it was OK, and the unanimous response was that they’d be disappointed if I didn’t come. I was the only TESOL instructor in attendance. Assuming I wasn’t the only one invited, I asked if the others had demurred, to which Twyla replied:

they are not one of us.

Pierre backed her up, saying:

even when we’re in the classroom, you’re like one of the students, with us.

This was a tremendous validation of my goals, and was well-timed coming near the mid-point of the program. It was not until much later that a similarly powerful endorsement of my methods would appear.

At the program’s graduation ceremony the third of the illustrative episodes occurred. As was typical at such events, seats had been reserved for instructors at the back of the room, while the students sat nearer the front. I could not locate the chair with my nametag among the instructors’ seats. One of the students had
sneakily removed it and placed it on a chair in the midst of the students. When I located it, the students teased my befuddlement and Shauna said:

You belong here, with us

The ceremony was an emotionally powerful affair. Most of the students shed a few small tears, but two wept openly. Shauna and I leaned on one another while crying, and then slid into giggles as the ridiculousness of crying on such a happy day hit us. This could not have happened had I been sitting off to the side of the room with the other instructors. Shauna’s invitation for me to sit next to her—and my choice to accept it—during the ceremony made it possible. Ignoring prescribed or expected professional roles enhanced both of our experiences.

Overcoming Other Obstacles
As I have shown, several participants were hesitant about the all-English nature of the program, and by extension of my research. I took several measures to minimize their trepidation.

During my preamble to each of the interviews, I reminded all participants that I did not want them to consider language a barrier, and that if they felt they could not express themselves to their satisfaction in English, that they were welcome to switch to Korean at any time:

Speaking Korean slowly during the interview is OK.

As I was recording the interviews and had access to translation services, there would be no burden upon me as a result of their using their native tongue. To further emphasize this point, I told them this in Korean.

Deanna in particular, relied on occasional Korean use to make herself understood during the interviews. One example thereof was as follows:

It is very 야끼워요, 야끼워요: what is 야끼워요 in English?

To which I responded:

That’s OK. That’s all I need. I do the translation later, so you don’t have to worry. Any time you get into trouble, go ahead and say things like that. I’ll write them down and if I spell them correctly, I can find them and I know what you’re talking about.

By empowering participants to use their native tongue during the interview portion of the research, I reduced barriers that would have existed had I been dogmatic about English use. For Deanna in particular, this left an impression.
When I asked her at the conclusion of our first interview for her impressions of the process, she replied:

> It is also a good experience to me. It is the first time to talk English, only English, with a foreigner. So this is very impressive. I also remember when I will be a grandmother, I’ll say: ‘when I was young, younger than me, I had an experience, blah, blah, blah, blah,’ so this is very good experience, and thank you very much.

At times the allowances I made during the interviews stood out against the linguistic difficulties participants faced inside the English-only classroom. For Brandy, the interview portion of the inquiry stood in stark contrast to the challenges she faced in the classroom, and allowed her to identify the limitations she felt there:

> I want to have enough time to show my opinion. But now, it seems to me I have enough time to speak to you.

By approaching language as a non-issue, especially in an environment in which it was so important to the participants, I defused its oppressive power. Making it my responsibility instead of theirs further rebalanced our positions within the inquiry, as they no longer had to concern themselves with impressions made or perceptions taken.

## Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

As I have demonstrated, it was vital for me to have established and foregrounded a collegial relationship with the students if I wanted the research to proceed successfully. First and foremost it was incumbent upon me to recognize I was entering a community of professional practice. Bellah (1985) writes of such communities: they are “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (333). I further required the approval of the membership to enter their community, and my appeal to do so had to be rooted in the values espoused by the community as they created it. I made this entry both metaphorical and literal, as a means of reinforcing my desire to position myself as an equal, a colleague, rather than a professor/researcher. Despite all of my efforts, the sociocultural status of teachers in Korea meant my role in the TESOL classroom could have unduly influenced my participants. By foregrounding our shared professional identity, I sought to minimize these potential influences. Throughout my contact with the teachers in the classroom, I stressed our collegial relationship. All of these actions were taken with the same goal in mind: to enable the larger inquiry to take place in an environment of equality and
therefore legitimacy. I believe I have shown that this was very successful. I was accepted on equal terms into the group, and was able to conduct my research in the spirit it was intended. I have come to the conclusion that the inherent impediments of cross-cultural research can be transcended by a fundamental respect for participants as people. By observing strict rules of ethical conduct and creating an atmosphere of shared experience, researchers can more safely navigate the complexities and conundrums of cross-cultural research.

References


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Gifted Stories

How Well Do We Retell the Stories that Research Participants Give Us?

Kip Jones & Lee-Ann Fenge

We strain to hear the story, almost whispered. We strain because, as human beings we love stories, particularly when they are told to us . . . or narrated. There is a magical quality in listening to a story. We listen because we want to know how a life can be different from our own, or how it can be exactly the same. Stories compel us to compare. (Jones, 2010)
Abstract:

Narrative methods contribute greatly to the advances made in qualitative research. A narrative style should also be promoted in publications and presentations. A study on older LGBT citizens in rural Britain highlights this by means of a report on one part of that study—a Focus Group.

The paper demonstrates two ways of writing Focus Group material for publication. First, “data bits” extracted from the transcript are imbedded by interpretive categories. The authors ask, “How did this come about? Isn’t it time to shift our approach and report these experiences in a different way? Was this not a story of the interactions of strangers and a growing social group cohesion that was taking place by means of this very research exercise?”

Secondly, a large section of the Focus Group transcript is presented, including nuances such as breaks, how one person’s thought follows another’s, and the energy created when several people talk at once. Doing this without comment or interruption brings the reader closer to the group experience itself.

The Focus Group provided an opportunity for participants to share a common history and identify individual experiences. Focus Groups can provide marginalised groups with an opportunity to collectively create new knowledge and understanding about shared cultural and historical experiences.

Narrative researchers are natural storytellers and need to foreground this when reporting studies for publication. Qualitative research is always about story reporting and story making, and narrative research (listening to and retelling stories) is a key democratizing factor in qualitative social science research.

Keywords: biography, focus group, narrative, older lesbians & gay men, qualitative, storytelling

A Case for Narrativity

We passionately believe that as narrative researchers and storytellers we must promote narrative in the content and styles of our publications. To revert to a style of publication or presentation that is counter to this does a disservice to our commitments as narrativists.

Qualitative research is no longer the poor stepchild of quantitative enquiries. During the past quarter century, qualitative research has come into its own, particularly in terms of wider acceptance in academic and policy communities (Jones, 2004). Qualitative research has always been about story reporting and story making (beginning with The Polish Peasant in Europe and America in the 1920s [Thomas & Znaniecki 1958]). Narrative is, indeed, a democratizing factor in social science research.
According to Denzin (2001, p. 23), the turn to narrative in the social sciences had been taken by the start of this century, by then a fait accompli. It is now evident that since then the interviewer has evolved into a willing and often visible participant in a dialogic process as well. No longer simply a “good listener”, s/he is becoming a “good storyteller” too. Narrative storytelling offers up the opportunity to democratise the encounter of teller and listener (or performer and audience) by sharing the goal of participating in an experience, which reveals a shared ‘sameness’ (Porter cited in Denzin 2001, p. 25). Reporting this shared understanding to the best of our ability is the key to qualitative procedures and processes truly becoming liberated from slavish imitation of quantitative procedures.

We can no longer afford to ignore the great advances made in representation of qualitative data. These have been overwhelmingly demonstrated by the successes achieved in auto-ethnography, poetic enquiry, ethno drama, film, Performative Social Science and/or other arts-based efforts in research and dissemination (Leavy 2015). Once and for all, we must put aside a reporting system and a language that is imitative of quantitative reporting, strip off the lab coats of clichéd rigor, tick-box ethics, and pseudo-analyses, and finally take up a unique language and style of publication that we can truly claim as our own. We propose that the inspiration for this language and style is frequently found in the arts and humanities (Jones 2012a).

**Background to our Study**

What follows is a report on a research project and, more particularly, a Focus Group that was included as an element of that study. The *Gay and Pleasant Land? Project* was a research effort that took place as part of the *New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Programme* (a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils—ESRC, EPSRC, BBSRC, MRC and AHRC) on ageing in 21st Century Britain. The project at Bournemouth University was one of the seven projects in *The Grey and Pleasant Land?* group of projects funded by the NDA in southwest England and Wales. The Bournemouth project, “*Gay and Pleasant Land?* —a study about positioning, ageing and gay life in rural South West England and Wales” took place over three years. Through an exploration of the recollections, perceptions and storied biographies of older lesbians and gay men and their rural experiences, the project focused on connectivity and the intersections between place, space, age and identity for older lesbians and gay men.

The project used multi-methods which included visual ethnography, interviews using a biographic method, and later, a follow-up Focus Group. The aim of the project was to use a range of qualitative methods within an overarching multi-method participatory action research design to engage the voices of older lesbians and gay men not typically captured in traditional research. The project
was conceived as “multi-method” from its outset and includes ‘the conduct of two or more research methods, each conducted rigorously and complete in itself, in one project’ (Morse, 2003, p. 190). In this project, however, methods and stages in the research process informed one another and did not remain discrete in terms of knowledge sharing. These methods include the core Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Jones, 2001, 2003; Wengraf, 2001), a visual ethnographic study, a Focus Group and two days of improvisation of interview data led by a professional theatre director. In depth discussion of the methodological focus of the study, including Performative Social Science as the overarching methodological philosophy, are offered elsewhere (Fenge, L. A., Jones, K., & Read, R., 2010; Fenge, L. & Jones, K., 2011; Jones, K., Fenge, L., Read, R. & Cash, M., 2013).

Using a multi-method approach, early findings were able to inform later investigations. For example, after the biographic interviews were completed, it was clear that those interviewed who were now living in rural South West England or Wales did not necessarily have a history of continuous rural residency in situ—most had relocated over the life course from/to villages, towns and/or cities throughout England and Wales and even to other countries. Thus, mobility across the life course in terms of types of geographic locations was typical for the majority.

In spite of mountains of data accumulated from the study, there were a few questions that remained unanswered for the team following the biographic and site visit data collection. For this reason, we decided to hold a Focus Group, a device that could give us quick access to a variety of responses to the few remaining questions. The Focus Group (N=12), comprised of older gay (55 years plus) and lesbian volunteers, was assembled so that the researchers could explore further questions which had arisen after the biographic interviews as well as bring fresh perspectives and additional information to the study. Because of the geographic varieties over lifetimes uncovered earlier in the study, criteria for participation in the Focus Group was expanded to include those who had experience of living in the British countryside during one of more periods in their lives, but not necessarily continually or even at the time of the Focus Group. This contributed to the “multi-method” approach, by allowing one method to inform another.

Discussion in the Focus Group was facilitated by a number of questions that focused on sexual identity and rural living. These included:

1. What is/was it like being gay and living in the countryside?

2. How do you/did you cope with being gay and living in a small community?
3. How open are you/were you about being gay to neighbours and other people in the village?

4. How do people treat you differently because you are gay or when they suspect that you are different?

5. How do you/did you maintain friendships with other gay people in the countryside?

6. What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you because you are gay? What is the best thing?

7. How has growing older made a difference in the place that you live? Or how has the place that you live made a difference in growing older?

**Before and After: A Worked Example**

We will begin by reporting on the findings from the focus group in the fashion that has by now become routine in qualitative interview reports, i.e., breaking up the responses into categorised data chunks (coding and thematic analysis). We sorted responses by grouping them together with others that fit into similar niches. For those with a fondness for order, this is often justified as taking “messy” data and making it “neat”; in short, “data management”. We begin with examples of this “tried and true” reporting method below.

**Hidden Identities**

Participants described how same sex relationships have often been hidden in rural communities in order to find acceptance.

**Female participant:** My companion was very interested in politics, she went into politics in a big way. . . and she literally used to lie and used to refer to me as her sister and then I was accepted as her sister, and anybody can imagine we were so different she was about 5ft 2” and I am 5ft 9” . . . . . . I mean we are so different, we were obviously a couple and not sisters, but as long as the word sister was used, it was ok.

A Male participant: described a similar process in which the true nature of his relationship with his partner was hidden from view:

**Male participant:** I was thinking to myself how things have changed over the years I know, and I was with my partner for 23 years and we got together in 1974. . . we used to call each other in company my friend and um, things devel-
oped as things went on. It got to the point where I suppose you could say I came out to the world, in the early 90’s.

Keeping the nature of same-sex relationships hidden from view reinforces conformity to heteronormative assumptions about marriage and family life that are often imposed on individuals at certain key phases of their life course.

**Male participant:** Well it was all very much expected wasn’t it? When I was in my teens, early 20’s, er you were expected, you know, where’s your girlfriend? Are you getting married kind of thing? Friends were 20, 21, 22 and getting married, is there something, what’s wrong with you?

Such expectations about the nature of relationships and family, including having children and grandchildren, also were raised.

Although some participants spoke about experiencing acceptance in their rural communities, this was often tempered by a feeling that people’s curiosity was equally upsetting as facing overt prejudice or hostility. Capturing this, one Male participant concluded:

**Male participant:** Hostility is one thing, but being a constant source of curiosity, I think is just equal in irritation.

**Loneliness and Fear**

Fear of disclosing identity due to concerns about acceptance and prejudice can make life lonely for older lesbians and gay men, particularly in rural areas where opportunities for meeting other gay people may be limited. As one older lesbian participant commented:

**Female participant:** It was lonely, yes. Yes. That’s it, yes’. . . Well, in the rural areas, and teaching in the rural areas, and um, I had a partner for 37 years, but it was just us, yes.

As older lesbians and gay men people grew up during a time when homosexuality was illegal, many older gay men faced barriers to coming out due to fear of prosecution and/or mental health interventions. The oldest generation of gay men still live in fear of coming out because they came out when it was classed as illegal and this fear carried on throughout their lives. As a result this has made it difficult to explore a “gay identity”, particularly in rural communities where opportunities for meeting other gay people were limited. Participants within the Focus Group identified how they had to visit towns and cities to engage with a gay lifestyle.

**Male participant:** I was going away from the rural area to find other gay people and of course there was no coming out. . . because again I’m talking about years ago when one didn’t come out.
Another Male participant: recounted how he had encountered hostility from other residents after moving into a rural community due to his sexual orientation.

**Male participant:** I came out to a few people there, um, and one day these men turned up at the flat, and I didn't know who they were and said, 'Who are you?' 'We are the police'. . . apparently, to cut a long story short, some people were trying to stitch me up because I was a gay man. . . people would not talk to me where I lived on this scheme.

These experiences make individuals wary of coming out and being judged, and this seems to be particularly acute in insular rural communities.

**Intersections across Age, Place, Gender and Class**

It is important to recognise that the experience of being an older lesbian or gay male individual is nuanced and subject to many different intersections across age, gender, place, class, ethnicity, religion etc. It is, therefore, important to engage with individual experiences and narratives, alongside an appreciation of how a shared history can punctuate certain aspects of one’s life course. Some participants identified that socio-economic status in particular was an important factor in being able to come out, and that it may have been easier for those with a professional status to find acceptance than those from more working class origins.

**Male participant:** I think that’s another thing too I tended to perceive and that was while we professionally may be able to be fairly free and out, there were people that might be called ‘in’ and sort of working classes who weren’t free and they are still today and I know a couple of people who are in this awful situation um who couldn’t be ‘out’ they are essentially working class people, they have their families and are married but they’re also gay.

**The Need for Healthcare Stories**

From the Focus Group, we learned that participants had both positive and negative healthcare experiences. Some recounted understanding and sensitivity from health care professionals, whilst others had experienced discrimination and bias from nurses and other medical staff. Some had experienced labelling and identification based on their sexual orientation rather than their wider health care needs. There was a perception by researchers that interfacing with healthcare providers may or might be a problem, but was always a challenge to navigate, particularly for isolated older gay and lesbian citizens.

Particularly burning questions around healthcare experiences remained unanswered for the team following the biographic interview phase of the research. These included:
1. How might service providers such as doctors, nurses, and social workers treated older gay and lesbian study participants differently if they knew they were gay or suspected so?

2. How would participants handle it if they had to go to the doctor with a problem that may require them to say to the doctor, “I’m gay”?

Often cut off from the support of peer groups and others in rural settings, the Focus Group opportunity was particularly important to raising these issues amongst this particular group of participants (Jones & Fenge 2013).

Freeze Frame! Stop the Press!

Up to this point, we have been extracting quotations from the initial conversations and then reorganising them in a very familiar way. We have given them our own particular interpretive “spin” by delineating a “category” for each grouping, often reformattting them within our own interpretive “bracketing”. Nevertheless, where are the storytellers’ “stories”? How did they unfold on this particular occasion? Are we missing the point that the real “interpretation”, the “action” if you will, was the interactions between the narrators themselves within the storytelling setting? (What IS taking place between the anonymised participants in the photograph at the beginning of this article? [Figure 1.]) Is that not the “story” that needs to be explored instead? By erasure are we not camouflaging and masking the stories themselves, and even removing the possibility of retelling the stories that we meant to tell? Was this, in fact, not a story of the interactions of strangers and a growing social group cohesion that was taking place by means of this very research exercise? This certainly was the profoundly deep impression that remained following the researcher’s interaction with the participants. Particularly noted was that when the time ran out at the conclusion of the Focus Group, participants were very reluctant to leave and wanted to continue with the newfound group’s interactions.

Now we will try something else, something perhaps even somewhat daring. We will present the following extract from the Focus Group transcript verbatim and at length. By doing this, we hope to give the reader a sense of how the gathered participants interacted with one another and the researcher and began to coalesce by forming a new group dynamic through the very Focus Group process itself. This also allows the reader to engage more directly with the participants’ stories and begin to make interpretations of her/his own—also becoming a participant in the dialogic.

As we saw in the biographic interviews conducted using only one initial question, interview participants, when given the space and opportunity, will respond
by telling their stories in full. Rather than the more typical interview with a battery of questions prepared by a researcher, both the open-ended BNIM interviews and the Focus Group discussion, with its “light touch” questioning, led to in-depth responses. These were often embedded in life story detail told through conversation. In one sense, our investigations became more anthropological; i.e., the researcher as observer and scribe. By means of telling their stories to a group of peers, participants at last remembered them together, finally gaining strength in each other for something often misunderstood and/or condemned in their past isolated rural experiences. By honouring the (tran)script that demonstrates this, we reaffirm our positions as narrativists, dramurgists, and authors, acknowledging the potential readers as active audience members.

**Researcher:** OK, one question, how do service providers such as doctors, nurses, social service treat you differently, if they know you're gay, suspect your gay or if you have to go say to the doctor with a problem that may need you to have to say to the doctor, I'm gay and he wouldn't have any experience with?

**Male participant:** Our experience is very good I have to say, because my partner er died in January and had to go into intensive care and I hadn't been with him very long and we didn't have a partnership agreement or anything like that. It was just his partner and I was put at the head of the list above his family and everything, which I was very surprised and there was his sister who is difficult and other members of the family and when I sort of said who I was, I was at the head of the list to be informed about anything to do with, anything at all. They were XXX hospital and they were brilliant even though I didn't have a legal thing at all but er they were marvellous.

*Members of the group in unison—‘that’s good to hear’ etc.*

**Male participant:** It’s funny you say that as I have a friend at the moment who her partner is in XXX hospital totally paralysed all through from a boil on her spine or something, no an abscess sorry er they’ve operated and she’s totally paralysed at the moment and she has daughters as she was previously married and the daughters won’t let her partner go anywhere near her and I think that is so sad. The daughters have rights, but the partner is not on the list. They have said to the hospital, ‘No, you don’t let her in’. They’d been together years.

**Female participant:** Well I had a friend who was taken very ill to XXX hospital in Cornwall and er, I wanted to see her you see and um he said,

‘Are you a relative?’

I said, ‘No’.

‘Oh, you can’t go in’.
‘I’m her partner, let me in’.

When I used the word “partner: they let me in. So I used the word partner and they let me in though I wasn’t at the time, though I suppose I was, but anyway, that’s irrelevant whether I was or wasn’t.

**Male participant:** Unless you have that piece of paper . . .

**Male participant:** I was also very lucky my partner and I . . .

**Female participant:** If you use the word partner you are okay.

**Male participant:** By the time my partner and I had moved down here, we were in a civil partnership, we had to wait for the legislation to come through we had been together for 13 years and er he died last year and um we found um that the XX XXX Medical Centre in XXX excellent. We had absolutely no problem, it was common knowledge, and I must say moving, having moved from London we lived in Richmond, I’ve got to say the doctor’s facilities were horrible, but again the doctor was fine. We both had the same doctor and he was extremely supportive. One doctor went away to do research and the doctor who replaced him was equally good. We’ve been lucky in healthcare, extremely lucky.

**Researcher:** ‘Has anybody had any negative experiences?’

**Male participant:** I don’t know if this negative but I was asked by a consultant not long ago was I married and what I should have said but I didn’t, I said no, but what I should have said is ‘no I’m not in’ . . .

*speech unclear due to laughter*

. . . and that’s what I’ll do next time’. But I don’t know how he meant by married.

**Male participant:** I don’t know if this is negative um, I didn’t really know how to take this at the time. I er went to my doctor with um with questions about an irritable bowel problem that I have got and er my doctor er I can’t quite remember how he phrased it, but raised the question of gay sex and um er, and I wasn’t quite sure whether it was prejudice or not um you know. It shouldn’t have really been an issue with this condition, he as a doctor a medical person should know that um that is not something that affects the bowel. Yeah, yeah I was a little bit taken aback by his suggestion that maybe abstinence from gay sex, how does he know I’m not abstinent, because he didn’t ask um er and what’s that got to do with my condition. So I’m not quite sure where that was going.

**Male participant:** I suffer from the same condition so I can empathise with you, and no it has absolutely nothing to, I am a celiac so I have to . . .
**Male participant:** That’s right but it was raised as a question, this might help you with, considering no, considering your gay this might be counter productive, that sort of thing you know.

**Male participant:** It’s a ridiculous as saying oh you have an earache are you sure that might not have something to do with it!

**Male participant:** That’s right, that’s right!

**Male participant:** There still are doctors even in a town like XXX that when they know you are gay they say when did you last have an HIV test. That’s one of the first questions.

**Male participant:** I had major issues with the blood service um as a blanket policy because you’re gay you can’t give blood.

**Female participant:** Really?

**Male participant:** Yes!

**Researcher:** Oh yes, ever since the AIDS thing came in.

**Female participant:** They won’t take my blood because I’m too old.

**Male participant:** But because your gay you cannot give blood. This leads onto something else um . . .

**Female participant:** That’s outrageous!

*Group all talking at once cannot distinguish what is being said*

**Male participant:** There was a report the other day that they are very short of blood donors and they reckon that the amount of people that were refused because of being gay is the amount that they are short.

**Female participant:** Why are people so silly, I mean I have a very rare blood group you know, so it would be quite useful, they won’t take mine because I’m too old, it’s nonsense, you know they can have anything they like you know.

**Male participant:** I’m with the Dorset Echo online and um, whenever they raise questions or try or try to have a blood donation drive, very boringly, and I don’t give a damn if I’m tub-thumping or not, but boringly I keep raising this issue to make people aware.

**Female participant:** I had no idea they did that.
Male participant: I did raise this question with someone um, not too far from Wareham um, about who was connected with the blood transfusion service and it was thought of as perhaps my ideas on this were, because I’m gay, sensitive and um er, but it is um, very common to have sexually transmitted diseases if you’re gay er so if you’re straight you’re clean.

*Group laughter

Male participant: But that leads onto something that you were raising, the political side of being gay um, I um, I have difficulty because I am Christian but at the same time I think that there is a lot of accountability that straight people are avoiding now that they’re friends of the gay community um because of the accountability factor with the stiff upper lip business. It has caused so many problems that we have heard, suicides whatever, its caused so many problems and I don’t think um, and I don’t think that, gay people are now very happy to be accepted, this is fine and um I’m not advocating that um this should change but at the same time I don’t think that straight people need to be let off the hook for the damage that they have done over so many years um, by sending gay people into the closet. Um, I think they need to be held, to a certain level accountable for it. Um, they just do not realise.

Male participant: But that applies to all forms of discrimination . . . those people in minority groups who tended to suffer at the hands of the majority.

Researcher: How do you undo years of ill treatment?

Female participant: Ignore them; go away.

Group all talking at once cannot distinguish what is being said

Male participant: The damage is done. I thought when my late partner was sent from our local doctor to the hospital, I saw months and months later on his file that the original letter had said white, gay, active homosexual; that’s how the letter started and I was rather upset by that, would they have put um white, straight, active, mind you they would not have done that no, no. The other thing was the operation that was vital was held up for quite a time because they had been trying to get my late partner to agree to the AIDS test and he wouldn’t do it and he said it was a joint decision we had to make so it was held up because they hadn’t mentioned about this to me for nearly a week. Later I was having counselling and the councillor said to me well you should have insisted that the surgeon and anybody else involved in the operation should have also taken an AIDS test!

Male participant: Yes that’s true.

Male participant: Yes, because it could easily go from one to another. They automatically ordered the AIDS test, as he was the one gay male. He was referred to the Marie Curie cancer hospice and they didn’t for a week, didn’t bath him, didn’t shower him, didn’t do anything for him and I had to say that his catheter
bag was full to bursting and they hadn’t changed it, and I was having to leave my work and go to the hospice and change his catheter bag it was the only way for it to be done. I had to do it, and um I went to the matron and um told her about it, and the assistant matron got in trouble and my partner was moved from there back into the district hospital. . . . within an hour of my complaint and when he got back he’d only been gone about a week, he was transferred because there is a system where you are not allowed to stay in a hospital more than a certain time, they have to move on somewhere else and when he went back to the district hospital. The sister on the ward recognised him and said why are you back and we said we like this better than the Marie Curie hospital, she asked that three times, and she said, ‘It’s because you’re bloody gay isn’t it?’ This out to be brought. . . but nothing was ever done about it, I had enough problems going on. . . well I guess I should have done for other people, but it was quite distressing.

*Group talking all together cannot distinguish what is being said

**Male participant:** (continuing) Extremely good things as well. Like he was in a private ward for a few months and one day they said, “Can we put, do you mind going into the general ward?” and I said, ‘Come to think of it, why has he been in here?’, and they said, ‘You know, don’t you?’, and I said, ‘No!’ They said, ‘It’s to give you privacy’, which I thought was absolutely fantastic. So there were many good things. Also his sister went to ask about him in the later stages of his illness and she hadn’t asked for weeks and weeks before, so the ward sister said we had some woman come in purporting to be his sister, she said she had no evidence of it, of being his sister, she said ‘Kyle knows everything, do you know Kyle?’, and she said, ‘Oh yes’, and she said, ‘Well, you must ask Kyle then’. I thought that was all right. That was good. So those are the positives.

**Male participant:** I think the thing that maybe in the back of my mind is how I might have to face up to the experience of maybe having to go into a rest home. . . I think that’s the frightening thing for me. . . we do want to be integrated we don’t want to be isolated.

**Male participant:** I don’t think it is just about where you live and your living accommodation, it’s about people trying to be supportive in their own homes and how you are treated by others, social services, district nurses, whatever and it’s their attitude as well.

**Discussion**

The issues arising from the Focus Group discussion illuminate how coming together through the research process provided a valuable opportunity for participants to share a common history, as well as to identify individual experiences. In addition, the group experience offered an opportunity to say what many times had remained unsaid—sharing experiences lends credence and substance to individual thoughts and feelings. Focus Groups are a potentially empowering approach for
marginalised groups, enabling individuals to come together collectively to produce new knowledge and understanding (Hyams, 2004). This gives insight into the historical context of older lesbians’ and gay men’s lives (Sharek, 2014), and the impact of discrimination and prejudice across the life course. This is not presented as a “fail-safe” approach with lots of rules and procedures, but rather an opening up of the interview experience to possibility.

The Gay and Pleasant Land? Project’s Advisory Committee also provided an opportunity for a “talking shop” for another group of participants to share individual narratives where a natural group identity formed via gatherings over time (Jones et al. 2013). What was not expected, however, was that the same sense of “comradeship” from shared experiences would develop so quickly in the one-off Focus Group as well. Allowing participants to truly engage in conversation, rather than constantly being interrupted (methodologically) by a facilitator, may be one reason that the reported conversations grew out of the group’s interactions, as represented in the detail-rich description above.

Indeed, the Advisory Committee for the Gay and Pleasant Land? Project itself had become an opportunity for older gay and lesbian citizens to report their experiences in an informal setting, express their views, and often raise group consensus around various topics as well. They took on “ownership” of the project early, and many remained embedded in the process over six or seven years, up to and beyond the premier and distribution of the film, RUFUS STONE (Jones, 2012b), the key output of the Project.

Key issues arising from both the Focus Group and Advisory Committee meeting discussions illuminated the impact of hidden identities—often intersected by age, time, place, gender and class. Fear and loneliness can punctuate the lives of some older lesbian and gay male citizens, and this is a result of lifetime experiences including homophobia and heterosexism. Stories of suicide amongst older gay men were prevalent in the accounts that research participants told in their biographies as well as in stories reported by Advisory Committee members during meetings. The given reasons for these tragedies ranged from a profound inability to accept one’s sexuality, being “outed” or fear of being outed in the local community or becoming overwhelmed by family pressures. When these reports over time became too frequent to ignore, a decision was made to include suicide in the story for the film, RUFUS STONE.

As reported elsewhere (Jones et al., 2013, para 72):

A secondary danger was uncovered in an attitude of “We don’t like to mention it” regarding the sexuality of others amongst rural dwellers—a rural version of a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ mentality. We found that many older gay and lesbian citizens needed to negotiate ‘acceptance’ in rural areas by being extremely cautious about to whom and when they ‘came out’, if at all. Negotiation with service
providers also was often either fraught with difficulties or non-existent in many of the reported cases.

Although laws have changed as well as the attitudes of many towards sexual differences, we found that prejudice and fear of “the other” continues to run deep, particularly in rural British culture. In order to underscore this prevailing attitude, in the film *RUFUS STONE* (Jones, 2012b), the owner of the local Tea Shoppe, when happening upon the distressing suicide scene, remarks:

But we all knew he was...  
I mean we all...  
we didn’t like to say but...  
we all knew.

**Conclusions**

The case put forth by this paper is that as narrative researchers we are natural storytellers and need to keep this in the foreground when reporting studies, particularly in publications. This study has demonstrated that Focus Groups can provide marginalised groups with an important opportunity to collectively create new knowledge and understanding about shared cultural and historical experiences. As enlightened qualitative researchers, we must insist that qualitative research is always about story reporting and story making, and that narrative research (listening to and retelling stories) is a key democratising factor in social science research. Not only what research participants say, but also how they say it—both are equally important to report.

One of the virtues of qualitative research is its inclusionary nature and ability to give the quotidian a voice, both through the research process itself (for example, through a wide range of qualitative social science practices that include participatory action research, in-depth interviewing, ethnographic studies, visual anthropology, biographic narrative studies and so forth) and in reports, documents and presentations. Narrative is the bread and butter of qualitative work. Adopting a narrative rather than an empirical mode of inquiry allows investigators to get closer to the phenomena studied in several ways. First, the narrative provides access to the specific rather than the abstract; secondly, narratives allow experience to unfold in a temporal way; thirdly, everyday language and its nuances are encouraged; finally, narrative permits dynamics to reveal themselves in the actions and relationships presented.
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Dreams of Social Inclusion

True Experiences of Street Soccer through Fictional Representation

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Abstract

While sport has potential to be both divisive and exclusionary, at its best, sport offers vital benefits, including improved mental health, self-esteem, physical wellbeing, and positive community development and integration (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008). Recently, numerous sport for development opportunities serving marginalized people have emerged, with street soccer making a prominent global rise. Only a handful of studies have been conducted on street soccer, focusing almost exclusively on outcome benefits. Our study provides a rich, ethnographic look into the lived experience of a local, grassroots street soccer team in Victoria, BC, Canada. Drawing on nineteen months of participant observation, and thirty interviews, our original fictional representation highlights both tensions and positive contributions of street soccer, in contributing to the positive dialogue on sport, social inclusion, and creative approaches to qualitative research. Ultimately, our study will be deemed successful based on its catalytic validity and ability to move people to action (Sparkes, 2002).

Keywords: social inclusion, street soccer, fictional representation, truth, creative analytic practice
Sport has increasingly been recognized for its ability to bring people together and promote social inclusion (Magee, 2011; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Individual benefits of sport participation may include: improved self-esteem, physical wellbeing and mental health (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). Broader societal benefits may include crime prevention, health, education, economic benefits, and community development and integration (Skinner et al., 2008). By improving access to recreation and sporting opportunities, we can play a fundamental role in improving the social ills of marginalized populations (Trussell & Mair 2010). Facilitating increased access to sport for marginalized populations may not remedy all social inequalities, however, sport offers a unique context to improve individual welfare and build more inclusive communities (Jarvie, 2003).

Over the past decade, a global shift toward increased consideration and understanding of the social determinants of health and health inequities has occurred (Gore & Kothari, 2012; Ward, Meyer, Verity, Gill, & Luong 2011). The importance of our research is further illustrated by considering the social determinants of health and the damaging effects social exclusion has at both individual and societal levels (Carey, Riley, & Hammond, 2011). There is a strong connection between the social determinants of health, the social gradient, and social inclusion (Ward et al., 2011). It is clear, people lower on the social gradient have limited access to social opportunities including sports and leisure activities, further perpetuating their exclusion, and negatively impacting their health (Collins, 2004). As the positive potential of sport for social inclusion has gained recognition, there has been an emergence of different sport-based programs.

In recent years, street soccer has become a leading choice for sport for development programs. Street soccer is a global phenomenon and is found in more than 70 different nations (Streetfootballworld, 2015, para. 3). Through international networks such as Streetfootballworld, teams can connect to share resources, knowledge, and funding. Roughly twelve teams are affiliated with Street Soccer Canada. Street Soccer Canada’s mission is to: “engage and connect with marginalized shelter users and individuals that have been isolated or on the fringes, using the positive power of sport to enrich and empower” (Street Soccer Canada, 2013, para. 2).

Despite researchers and community stakeholders growing interest in these programs, there remains a paucity of research illustrating how such programs influence social inclusion (Skinner et al., 2008; Trussell & Mair, 2010). Sporting activities, such as street soccer, offer an excellent opportunity to foster a sense of belonging for marginalized populations, but also hold potential for conflict and disappointment. If public providers and non-profits are to successfully provide recreation spaces that promote social inclusion—while also recognizing and reducing potential negative impacts on program participants—they must intimately understand the culture of these programs (Seippel, 2006; Spaaij, 2012; Trussell...
A central focus for researchers then, should be documenting volunteer and participant experiences in sport for inclusion programs to illuminate how participation influences social inclusion, and what tensions exist within these experiences.

Researchers have studied sport and social inclusion programs, but no studies known to us have drawn on participant and volunteer experiences to explicitly understand how a local, free, drop-in, street soccer program impacts social inclusion. In this vein, we have drawn on the lead researcher’s nineteen months of involvement in street soccer in presenting an ethnographic account of the Victoria Dreams street soccer program. Through an original fictional representation, this study shares our own insights with the hope of facilitating wider access to the social reality of Victoria Dreams street soccer group. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader, ongoing discussion of creative approaches to research.

We begin by reviewing the existing literature on social inclusion, and street soccer. We then outline our methods, providing details for this study while framing them within a broader discussion of fictional representation methodology. The “results” are then storied through an original fictional representation and followed by a discussion of ontological and epistemological considerations as related to knowledge, truth and validity. To conclude, we offer some final thoughts on fictional representation while reconnecting with research implications on sport and social inclusion.

**Literature Review**

To better illustrate the meaning of social inclusion, it is useful to further examine what it means to be socially excluded. Researchers have identified four distinct determinants of social exclusion including: “denial of participation in civil affairs, denial of social goods, exclusion from social production, and economic social exclusion” (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010, p. 32). Denial of participation in civil affairs may occur from systemic forms of discrimination, legal sanctions, or other institutional mechanisms preventing a person from fully engaging in social pursuits. Denial of social goods occurs when a person does not have access to housing, employment, education or healthcare. Exclusion from social production is a restriction of engagement in cultural and social activities, including sports and leisure. This restriction often results from not having enough money to participate. Economic exclusion occurs when a person is unable to secure a job or generate personal income. As illustrated, these determinants are not exclusive, but rather interact to compound experiences of exclusion (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). While most participants in this study suffer exclusion through all of the aforementioned facets, this study focuses foremost on the exclusion from social production.
Social inclusion may be dependent then, on four main dimensions as described by Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud (1999): the capacity to consume; participation in economically or socially valuable activities; political engagement in local or national decision-making; and social interaction with family, friends and the community. Clearly, a complexity of intersections and factors can be used to define exclusion or inclusion, but simply put, exclusion is the negative, and inclusion is the positive. Again, it is the social interaction and capacity to participate with friends in the community on which our study focuses.

While sport and leisure participation may not satisfy all characterizations of social inclusion, it offers an accessible and impactful starting point. For stakeholders seeking to build social inclusion through sport and leisure, research suggests community-based social services should be low-cost or free, and located in a centralized area (Trussell & Mair 2010). Further, service providers should recognize people may be reluctant to participate if required to publicly declare or prove their low-income status to gain subsidies, and that marginalized people accessing public recreation or sport opportunities often report feeling unwelcomed (Trussell & Mair, 2010).

Though limited, the existing body of academic research on street soccer offers some important findings. Magee & Jeanes (2011) documented their experience of taking a group of Welsh players to the Homeless World Cup. First held in 2003, the Homeless World Cup is the hallmark event for many street soccer teams and was conceptualized by Mel Young and Harald Schmied as a way to “change the lives of homeless people through football” (Homeless World Cup, 2013, para. 3). Magee and Jeanes (2011) suggested the tournament experience was generally positive, but noted not all players benefitted equally. Specifically, there were times players felt overwhelmed and embarrassed after losing games by significant scores. Overall, Magee and Jeanes (2011) noted the tournament was successful in (1) encouraging and motivating players to be physically active, (2) providing an inclusive environment to raise self-esteem and personal dignity, and (3) challenging stereotypical views and media representations of homeless people. In a separate study, Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, and Lyras (2011) focused on volunteer experiences with Street Soccer USA—also at the Homeless World Cup—and noted interactions between participants and volunteers built increased understanding and community cohesion. Finally, (Author Citation) found local-level street soccer participants experienced expanded access to social capital, increased self-esteem, motivation to live healthier, and improved confidence and life-skills. While these past studies offer important insights into the Homeless World Cup, the lived experiences leading to these purported benefits—particularly at the local team level—require further investigation.
Methodology

Determining how to collect, analyze and represent qualitative data is a discussion wrought with conflict and ambiguity (Lichtman, 2013). However, a major strength of qualitative research is also this lack of hard boundaries, empowering researchers to draw on a combination of methodological approaches. Fictional representation encompasses a range of techniques and the process each researcher uses varies. Sparkes (2002) suggested all research tells a “tale.” Quantitative studies attach researcher objectivity, reliability, and validity, as means to construct truth in the “scientific tales” they present (Hopper et al., 2008; Sparkes 2002). Traditional qualitative research and representations use different language, but these “realist tales” apply many of the same underpinnings in positioning their research as true. Through triangulation, coding, process notes, and member-checks, researchers ensure they “got it right” (Patton 2002: Sparkes 2002). Contrary to these more traditional approaches, fictional representation does not always follow a strict methodological approach. While some fictional representations include a highly detailed methods section including data collection, analysis, editing, and the writing process, others include no methods section at all. In the author-evacuated positivist world of scientific tales, such omissions would be fatal. However, in fictional representation, some researchers maintain these details are unnecessary and actually detract from the impact of their work (Clough, 1999). While we have not explicitly revealed which aspects of this story were adapted, we have included methodological details below, which may help some readers further appreciate this study.

This fictional representation was based directly on the lead researcher’s nineteen months of participant observation with the Victoria Dreams at weekly practices. The Victoria Dreams are a local, volunteer-run, non-profit street soccer organization with the mission to “use sport as social inclusion to empower and build self-esteem” (Victoria Dreams, 2013, para. 2). Participants are men and women who may be homeless, in transitional or low-income housing, or suffering from mental health or addictions issues. Practices are held weekly on a drop-in basis, and are open to anyone. At the time we began the study, the group was entering their fourth season. The Victoria Dreams are independent in their day-to-day operations, but do consult with and receive some funding from Street Soccer Canada. Outside of tournaments or possible selection to the world cup team, social inclusion is experienced primarily at the local level.

Over a nineteen-month period—February 2013 to August 2014—the lead researcher engaged in participant observation through weekly Sunday afternoon practices and conducted a combined 30 interviews with both participants and volunteers. Duration and format of interviews varied given the participatory nature of the study. Whenever possible, interviews were recorded and transcribed...
verbatim, and extensive field notes were taken. This prolonged engagement, and frequency of direct observations was vital in gaining a rich, firsthand perspective of the Victoria Dreams (Patton, 1990; Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). Additionally, the lead researcher participated in two tournaments with the Dreams, including a 24-hour road trip to Comox, and a three-day two-night trip to Vancouver, where he and other teams slept together at an emergency shelter, ate their meals together, and spent their downtime socializing. For both trips, the lead researcher drove his personal van full with participants. These tournaments served as pivotal bonding moments that deepened our personal connections and trust, while furthering our understanding of the Dreams. They also broadened our range of contacts, and provided us the chance to meet with other teams’ players, coaches, volunteers, and the founder of Street Soccer Canada, who openly shared both the challenges and successes they faced.

Early in the study, it became clear traditional qualitative reporting methods were not ideal for capturing the complexity of the Dreams. As we familiarized ourselves with emerging qualitative approaches, we were drawn to fictional representation, a form of creative analytical practice (CAP) (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Encompassing a variety of creative techniques, CAP moves away from traditional qualitative representations. In utilizing CAP, Berbary (2015) noted we can use traditional data collection techniques and apply a creative representation to them, but ideally our data collection and study design should also be informed by our intention to use CAP in our representation. Accordingly, our research was guided by CAP from the start, informing our methodological decisions, and prompting the lead researcher to immerse himself as deeply as possible into the world of street soccer.

As the study progressed, the lead researcher began experimenting with different literary techniques and identified fictional representation as an ideal genre. Ultimately, a fictional representation was selected because of its ability to tell a “better story,” one that would be vivid and engaging, and appeal to a wider audience, while maintaining a factual basis and inspiration (Sparkes, 2002). To create an engaging story, a number of conventional literary techniques were used. Aspects of, “story, situation, persona, character, scene and summary” were actively considered (Narayan, 2007, p. 130). Compared to a strictly factual ethnography, our fictional representation provides a colourful and more memorable account. Initial drafts were shared informally with participants, volunteers, friends and colleagues. Through this reflective process, valuable insight on the meaning readers were drawing was gained. In response to their comments, the story was reworked with the intention of creating a more meaningful and emotional account of street soccer.

Narayan (2007) highlighted the role of editing as a critical piece of fictional representation noting, as an editor of “others” stories, our intervention as author is of paramount importance. Here we are reminded of the negotiation between
reader and researcher. The researchers package events and observations into the text, which the reader “unpacks” and experiences in relation to their own history. A truth is negotiated through this process, and at its most successful, catalytic validity achieved. Sparkes (2002) identified catalytic validity as the ability for research to influence the reader or consumer to feel a deep emotional response, actively influencing their life and ultimately moving them to action.

The process for fictional representation differs between researchers—and between creative nonfiction and creative fiction—but the goal remains to create an “experience of believing” (Clough, 1999). The story must speak to the reader. To be successful it matters not about reporting exact factual details, but matters most that it feels authentic. This authenticity, plausibility, and realness, can be described as verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002). To achieve verisimilitude, the researcher must have an intimate and “authentic” understanding of the subject they are writing about. Within fictional representation, this intimacy is often characterized as a result of the researcher “being there” through prolonged engagement and observation (Sparkes, 2002). The following composition draws on multiple experiences and interactions with players, volunteers, community sponsors, and national-level organizers in presenting our own observations and insights into street soccer.

Findings—The Dreams

The Rendezvous—This is Our Team

It’s five-fifteen am Saturday morning, and I’m supposed to pick up Jerry before meeting the rest of our group. He’s 20 minutes late, but he finally shows up. Jerry is flustered and sits down in the passenger seat beside me. He’s an imposing frame, bald with tattoos and shifty blue eyes. He’s in his mid-sixties. He’s talkative, unpredictable, and a true soccer fanatic. I like Jerry, but I’m already plotting how I might get him into the back seat for the rest of this road trip. He smells terribly of smoke and sweat, so I crack my window. Jerry apologizes for oversleeping. “The cops woke me up at three in the morning,” he says. “My son died last night, he was in a plane crash—so we have to win today, we have to do it for my son.”

“I’m so sorry Jerry, that’s terrible, I didn’t even know you had kids.”

“Yes, my son was a pilot. I have two daughters, they’re both doctors, they’re millionaires. I used to be a pilot too, in the Vietnam War—I’m an American, but they still won’t pay my pension.” It’s the first time I’ve really chatted with Jerry. He has some incredible stories. He served together with Elvis and they became best friends—he has a picture at home to prove it. Following his army days, he moved to Brazil where he played professional soccer for ten years. He’s wearing a Barcelona team jersey, personally autographed by some of the world’s greatest players. It was a gift in honour of his commitment to the game. I don’t push Jerry on any of the details, but I wonder which parts of his incredible stories are really true.
We meet the rest of our group on a notorious downtown street corner. Our team, “The Victoria Dreams” was cobbled together at last week’s practice and through a Facebook invite. If you were available and wanted to join, you were in. Our team is impressively diverse. Marie and her teenage kids, Galen and Sabrina, are a First Nations family living in subsidized housing. Edgar, from Mexico, spent the last couple of years in and out of homeless shelters—he has a job now and rents an apartment. Edgar is our unofficial captain and best player.

Edgar has been with the team since it formed three years ago. I’ve gotten to know Edgar well—he’s an open, honest, and sensitive individual. According to Edgar, he’s been playing soccer his whole life, and played in a competitive men’s league back in his hometown. When he first immigrated to Canada he struggled to make connections in the community. Already shy, his limited English compounded his lack of confidence.

“When I first came here, I was really depressed. I didn’t know anybody, and I didn’t have any family here. In Mexico family is with you everyday, you are never alone. I wanted to leave, I didn’t want to stay no more in Canada. I found a shelter where they played ping-pong, and I started going there every night. I’d play ping-pong all night, with anyone—some of them were drunk, but it was really good. Then I met an old guy who spoke Spanish. He was my first friend here, so I kept going back to this shelter to see him. One day, a lady came into the shelter. Actually, I remember it was a really bad day. I was so depressed; I thought I would go home in the next couple weeks. Well, the lady, Lisa, she put up a poster and told everyone she was starting a soccer team and needed players. It was the best day of my Canadian life—you know, I love soccer, but I could not afford to play here. Well, she said everything would be free, and they would have food at every practice. A lot of people wanted to join. I think a lot of bad things were happening in people’s lives that day, but the feeling changed in the shelter, people were really excited.

Since I joined this team I feel like I have a new family. It’s different than friends you make on the street. We play for each other and we got really nice team shirts, and new soccer boots. I’ve been to Vancouver twice for tournaments, and to Kelowna. We came first place in Kelowna—I want to be the champions again this year. Actually, the Dreams helped me a lot, because I also found a job through them. Darren is the guy who owns a catering company and makes food for us every practice. After a couple months playing, he invited me to come and work for him. So I go to different parties and help set up and make food. My life is a lot better. I miss my family, but I want to stay in Canada. The Dreams means everything to me. When I have a bad week, it doesn’t matter because I can come play on Sunday and score some nice goals. I want to make this team the best. But it’s hard—a lot of players stopped coming and our head volunteer isn’t around. They asked me to make Facebook posts but I’m not so good at writing, so I need more help. I’m worried the team won’t last. But in the future, I’m going to have my own little restaurant. I want to have all the team players over, make them some dinner—you know, I’m going to do that, it would be really nice.”
Paul is the newest member, and has moved here from Ghana. Paul is charismatic, always smiling but shy. He’s lean and athletic, with bursts of speed. I wonder how he got involved with this group—he’s a high school student, and seems well cared for. Evan is about thirty—he’s struggled through his life battling addictions and a learning disability, but recently took up soccer. He is dedicated to the team, and loves to play. He’s a bit “top-heavy”, but is an effective defender despite his lack of fitness and skill. Evan commutes an hour on the bus to attend practices—he is a diehard member, and refers to himself and teammates as a “bunch of misfits.” The final player for today is Robert. Robert is also First Nations and a regular since the team’s formation two years ago. Robert is short and round, but displays gifted hand-eye coordination—he played “any sport he could join” growing up. Robert has two young daughters and lives on a nearby reservation. Robert has attended every tournament the team has ever played—he is our goalkeeper.

The Supporting Cast
It’s a three-hour drive each way to the tournament, but we’re planning to make it there and back all in one day. I’m driving my station wagon, and Edgar is driving Darren’s BMW. Darren is a long-time street soccer supporter and generous “food-guy” for the team. We get the “team debit card” from Darren to cover gas, and a grocery bag full of bagel sandwiches he’s made as snacks. Darren never plays soccer with the team. Darren is not independently wealthy, nor is his business a runaway success, yet he never fails to deliver food after practices. Darren is a friend of Lisa’s, and helped her form the original team.

Lisa, the founder, is a reporter at a local newspaper. She heard about street soccer a few years ago, and thought Victoria would be an ideal community to start a team. She worked tirelessly the first year building connections and support for the team. She secured free soccer balls, jerseys, and cleats from a local sports store. Through a charity tournament, she received donations from the local fire station, and police association. She published a series of articles documenting the rise of the team, including the qualification of a Victoria player to the world cup tournament in Paris. This past year Lisa has been away on assignment in Asia, and team leadership and sponsorship efforts have suffered. In her absence volunteers have come and gone, and the team has dwindled. Lisa is keen to get back, to “keep her baby alive.” Lisa is genuinely committed to social justice and improving the community, but she is also busy professionally.

Navigating the Road Trip
Jerry’s gone inside Seven-Eleven to buy a coffee, so I offer Marie the front seat of my car, and she accepts. I’m nervous about offending Jerry but he doesn’t seem to notice. He assumes his new spot in the backseat without protest—I wonder if his backpack and gear are introducing bedbugs to my car, and I instantly feel guilty for thinking it.
It’s a beautiful drive to Comox Valley, and conversation flows effortlessly. Robert explains the usual format for Street Soccer Canada tournaments. Teams play on mini-fields, about a quarter of a full-sized field. There are three players plus a goalie on the field per team. The nets are roughly hockey-sized, and the goalie must stay within the six-foot crease line. Substitutions are unlimited, and made frequently “on-the-fly.” At the official Homeless World Cup men and women play separately, but for local tournaments like this, everyone plays together. Today’s tournament is the “Western Qualifier” for Street Soccer Canada, and will be used to select six players for the national team. The team will head to Poland for two weeks, all expenses paid. Robert says he was selected to go last year to Mexico, but there was some confusion with paperwork and his Visa—the disappointment is still raw in his voice.

Diversity of Teams

I’m getting excited to meet the other teams. There will be representatives from Calgary, Kelowna, Comox, and three teams from Vancouver. When we arrive at the field teams mingle, smoke and laugh with each other. There’s familiarity between players, with lots of returning members. Everyone has soccer cleats, matching team jerseys, equipment, and coaches are running warm-ups. I’m introduced to the head of Street Soccer Canada and learn more about the program. The model in Ontario, where Street Soccer Canada started, is vastly sophisticated from the fledgling teams here in BC. There are six teams in the Toronto area, and a board of directors running things. Street Soccer is promoted on a regular basis through workshops at the Salvation Army, and players have the chance to work in a laundry and dry-cleaning business started by the team.

In contrast, the Victoria Dreams appear to have very little infrastructure, but somehow stay afloat. They meet every Sunday, and play soccer for an hour. Teams are assembled as people arrive, usually four players per side. If a team is too strong, someone swaps sides. The games are fun, but competitive. The first time I showed up, about six months ago, I was struck by the diversity of players. I spoke to an older man who said he’d come with his friend to cheer him up because he was having a terrible day. They’d seen a poster at the shelter, and noticed it said soccer and free food. I haven’t seen either of them since. Now, for the summer season, we are playing outside. The game format remains the same, but it seems like fewer players are showing up. Two weeks ago only 3 people came to play. Most of the players fit the bill of “marginalized” but others I can’t figure out—a government worker, a law student, and a young couple driving a new car, but none of them are acting as “volunteers.” The regular members know I’m a student, and know I’m there to research the team, as well as play soccer. I feel like an insider now, and today’s tournament has solidified my membership into the group.
Let the Games Begin

Our first game of the day is against Vancouver. They have a talented side, and boast a former Homeless World Cup team Canada member. I am instructed to “watch out” for him, not to let him shoot. He scores three goals—our team scores none.

“That’s ok guys. First game, we just got to get focused. We need to move the ball faster.” Edgar is upbeat despite the lopsided loss. Our second game we really do play better. It is a close match. We finally score a goal, but lose two to one in the last minute. By game three our group is determined to win. Sabrina scores the opening goal, top corner and even the other team is cheering. The game goes back and forth with great goal tending at both ends. It ends in a tie, and we earn our first point of the tournament. With only one point, we have to win our next game to make it into the playoffs.

Eye on the Prize

Edgar leaned over the ball and struck a perfect shot just inside the far post. Our team erupted—we'd secured a spot into the quarterfinals. There was a sense of relief, mixed with a burden of new expectations. Ecstatic, our team captain Edgar gathered everyone together, and explained we must win our first playoff game if we were to become champions. We were introduced to our newest teammate. His name was Abelo. Edgar had spotted him on the adjacent field, passing a ball with a young and athletic group of African men. Edgar didn’t need to explain further. Those who were supposed to get the message did, and sat on the bench. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being selected to play while seeing the dejection of those sitting on the sidelines. Edgar’s enthusiasm to win at any cost was painful, but we were not the only team guilty of this kind of exclusion. Our opponents also played their best four players, and their coach shouted instructions aggressively from the sidelines. I was selected to start for this important game, but was soon called off the field by Edgar for a substitution—my lack of production was frustrating him. As I took my place on the bench beside Jerry, I considered the mantra of street soccer, and the goal of social inclusion. There was an irony to the whole tournament, as a selection process for the world cup team—only three players would be chosen for the Canadian team, while another forty would be excluded. In the end, we lost our only playoff game, despite Abelo’s dominant play. The finals saw Vancouver versus a team from Calgary. The level of skill was impressively high, as was the competitive drive of the players. The game was a draw and required a shootout. Vancouver’s goalie stopped all three shooters to secure the championship.

At the conclusion of the tournament our team seemed proud and cohesive again. Edgar and Robert recounted their goals, and surmised we were probably the third best team, because we’d lost in the quarterfinals to the eventual champions. Marie, Galen, and Paul seemed more impressed with the outing and sunshine than with the outcome of the games. For some players, winning was a really big deal, for others, it wasn’t. Throughout the day there was background chatter of who might be selected for the
World Cup team, mixed with an impromptu water-fight, smoke breaks, a free lunch, t-shirt, and lots of soccer.

The Barbecue—A Chance to Be Heard

The tournament culminated with a barbecue staged at a nearby campground turned permanent housing spot for many of Comox’s otherwise homeless population. The dinner was incredible, a bounty of food and legion of volunteers serving it—beyond hotdogs and hamburgers, there was steak, halibut, homemade salads, and chocolate desserts. It was revealed one community member had covered all of the food costs, but wished to remain anonymous. The barbecue was followed with some thoughtful and moving words by one host organizer:

“In the small community of Comox, homelessness and addiction has been a pervasive and contentious issue. Last year city council wanted to shut this very campground down, because it was not zoned for permanent residents and they claimed it was not safe. With the support of community members and a new mayor, we have maintained this site as a viable housing option for the homeless. Further, this space has become home to the new Comox street soccer team. Every week the team welcomes new players to play soccer and share a meal together. Today, we have been honoured and humbled to share good sportsmanship and friendly competition with all of you. I know some days in the future may not be as good or easy as today—but in those down times, and cold nights, we hope you can draw on and find resiliency in the special memories of today. There will be more soccer in the future, and more opportunities for everyone to enjoy together. We hope you found some inspiration in playing soccer today and can transfer the positives you have gained into other avenues of your life. You are all part of our team, and the greater street soccer community.”

Next the mic was passed around so a member from each team could speak. I was struck by the words of one young man who remarked with such earnestness:

“When I started playing street soccer just a few months ago I never imagined how far it could take me. I never imagined in my life that I could be here and do this. Thank you so much, and thank you for the volunteers and food.”

A player from another team, wearing large hoop earrings sitting at the far end of the table yelled at him “I can’t hear you!” The first man replied, “clean the shit out of your ears and maybe you’ll hear me.” The man’s teammates cheered at this quick retort. The young man who’d asked him to speak up looked sheepishly away. I saw nervous whispers between volunteers— the tone of camaraderie and sportsmanship waned temporarily. It was a revealing exchange. I was reminded that so many of these players came from “hard” lives. It was clear that egos were fragile, and maintaining “face” remained paramount to the participant’s survival. However, as the mic continued around, and different players had their chance to speak, the significance of the day was not lost. Players who’d likely never held a microphone, were asked to share their thoughts—one anxiety ridden man managed a simple “thank you so much everyone,”
but he was beaming with pride, having demonstrated the courage to stand up and speak. It was incredible to witness.

A Final Word
The Comox team coach and outreach worker for the homeless campsite closed with a final story. That morning one of his players had woken up early, unable to sleep in anticipation of the tournament. He'd decided to walk into town, and had come across a man asleep on a bench in the park. He walked past the man but then noticed a pair of soccer cleats clutched under his arm. He woke the man up, and led him back to the camp where they had breakfast. It turns out the sleeping man had missed the rendezvous with his team caravan the night before in Vancouver, but decided to make it out on his own. He'd caught the last ferry, then hitchhiked the rest of the way up island. He didn't have a phone and didn't know where the tournament was, but he figured he'd find it. He turned out to be the goalie for the eventual tournament winning team—the same goalie that'd stymied our chances in the quarterfinal. I pondered what compelled him to go to such lengths for a street soccer tournament—what does street soccer offer that isn't available in his daily life? As I considered the answer to this question, I realized the motivation for each and every participant was unique, but centered on belonging.

The Insightful Road Home
Sweaty, exhausted, and over-fed, we piled into the wagon for the long drive back. Evan was seated next to me, and as the chatter in the backseats lulled, I asked him how he got started with street soccer.

“Well, I was only about two years clean, and working one day a week, but I had ties to the street community, although not using, I knew lots of people down there because I worked there at the shelter. And you know I'm a little reluctant at first to join any kind of group, because I'm really shy. So I just kind of took a chance and showed up, and the first day I showed up, although I was nervous, I seen the level of everyone else, and my skill levels were low, but it didn't really matter because I was just there to make friends and be a part of something, and to stay active and busy. Connecting to other people has been a huge part of me staying clean. Through the years I've really gotten to know these guys and they are like brothers and sisters to me. You know we see each other on the street and we stop and talk and really ask each other how we are doing.”

So what is it about street soccer, what's different about being a member of the Dreams, versus meeting people at a shelter or through another kind of drop-in program? I asked Evan what he thought.

“With my experience, I've always noticed that it starts from within. You start healing within, and it goes outwards. Your life becomes so much better when you've overcome the inner struggle. When other people see the blossoming, that inspires them
to blossom too. We build real strong friendships through our ties in soccer you know, together as a team. And sometimes we have our differences but all in all we always get along. And every time we go to a tournament or we play a game, I always walk away with a feeling of a little stronger friendship with these guys. Since day one, when I came to soccer right, people were patting me on the back when I scored, encouraging me, that’s what I really need. I need a sense of community and building my confidence in life, because when you’re down and out you have no confidence, you’re just down spiralling out. You know before when I was on the street, yeah I had friends, but they weren’t really friends, they were just people that I knew, like I wouldn’t trust them. But I feel like I could trust the people I play with, and I kind of have to because they are my team. When you are on the street you can’t really trust anyone.”

Intuitively, Evan’s explanation made perfect sense, and I’d witnessed and experienced the same thing myself in playing sports that required teamwork and trust. Yet, I’d always taken for granted my access to these opportunities and the benefits of supportive teammates and communities which recreation and leisure participation facilitate. But what about the role of competition, do we need tournaments and competitions and score keeping? Evan told me about the second year he played with the team, and how he’d scored his first ever goal in a tournament.

“I haven’t touched drugs in a long time, but that goal gave me the same feeling. I was just lifted, it was like a magic moment man, it was a magic moment. Not only that, but I really came out of my shell and started talking with other people at the tournament, and shook their hands, and made connections with other people. I know most of those people are going to be at the next tournament, so it’s kind of like, maybe you’re not best friends, but you’re friends, and next time we play it’s like, oh I remember you.”

Back to Victoria
It was nearly midnight by the time we got back into town. Everyone was exhausted but thrilled with the day. The following week there was practice as usual for the Victoria Dreams. Most of the group from last week’s tournament turned up, plus a couple of new players. Paul had invited a young woman to come and play, also a new immigrant from Africa. She’d never played soccer before, but was keen to try. She’d heard from Paul about the adventure of last week’s tournament and wanted to get involved.

I saw Jerry later that week walking through downtown. He was carrying a soccer ball and talking loudly to himself. I realized then Jerry is schizophrenic, but more importantly, I realized the true significance and potential of the Victoria Dreams street soccer team. Soccer is one of the few places that Jerry fits, where he feels a part of something meaningful. The Victoria Dreams provide a safe place, where anyone is welcome, without public declaration of housing status, socioeconomic status, mental health or disability—you aren’t required to prove you belong here, inclusion is absolute.
Discussion

Using fictional representation, a researcher makes certain philosophical assumptions about knowledge and truth. Fictional representations “work” based on the ontological assumption that people’s subjective experiences are the foundation of their own beliefs and knowledge—their own reality. However, in reading a fictional representation, there is an interaction that takes place between the researcher and reader—together they create shared meanings and understandings of knowledge and truth, through an intersubjective process or “relativistic ontology” (Hopper et al., 2008). For example, when reading an article, the reader also draws on and incorporates their past experiences, and their “location.” In processing a fictional representation, the reader contextualizes new information with their old knowledge. This experience generates a response, and new piece of knowledge. Epistemologically then, an effective fictional representation assumes people are active agents, in control of their emotions and decision making—here the researcher assumes a voluntaristic view of people (p. 217).

A well written fictional representation is one that creates a strong sense of truth, an account that resonates with the reader. The experience and knowledge found in fictional representation is “as true and untrue as the reader makes it in consciousness” (Clough, 1999, p. 439). In a sense, how believable and engaging the researcher’s story is will determine the extent to which it becomes incorporated as knowledge and accepted as truth. As Sandelowski (1994) offered: “when you talk with me about my research do not ask what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data. . . I have told the truth. . . the proof is whether you believe them and whether they appeal to your heart” (p. 442). Similarly, we “found nothing” in the objective and empirical sense, but rather selectively crafted an experience for our readers hoping to elicit an emotional response—ultimately, it is the reader who “finds” something. Fictional representation allows readers a chance to discover more truths than facts alone would. By manipulating and creating characters and scenes, a range of truths and perspectives are experienced which readers would otherwise not be exposed to, effectively setting the truth free from the restraints of factual reporting (Vickers, 2010). Rolfe (2002, p. 89) suggested fiction could be seen as a “lie that helps us see the truth.” It is assumed the insights and knowledge a reader gains from a fictional representation are very real, and therefore can be internalized and used as legitimate knowledge.

Fictional representation assumes the reader will internalize their reading experience and draw knowledge out of this experience. The readers cannot separate themselves from the text, and as an emotional being, they must react. The reader response is real, thus the “knowledge” they acquire is real, and therefore legitimized. The question is raised whether this knowledge is “valid” or not. Sparkes
(2002) discussed this at length, and suggested when evaluating the fictional representation genre we cannot use traditional “scientific” views of validity. Instead, we should judge validity based on whether “the writing has made a difference and whether it has moved people to action,” what he terms catalytic validity (p. 202).

The purpose of this study was to provide an engaging and meaningful snapshot of the Victoria Dreams through which readers could develop their own assessments and insights into the program, by highlighting: (1) the demographic of players and their interpersonal interactions, (2) the atmosphere at local practices and regional tournaments, (3) basic gameplay and rules, and (4) the potential contribution of street soccer to social inclusion. Our goal was to facilitate a more intimate understanding of both the tensions and benefits of street soccer in building social inclusion. While we strove to construct an authentic story, some latitude was exercised in blending fact with fiction. Within this flexibility of praxis, we sought to construct a stronger truth, and greater sense of verisimilitude—to influence and engage the reader, and hopefully encourage a positive dialogue on sport, social inclusion, and the role of street soccer.

As a relatively inexperienced writer attempting a first fictional representation, the lead researcher was initially excited at the freedom he perceived fictional representation to embody. However, as he quickly encountered, fictional representation was not the “freeing” piece of research he’d envisioned. Stylistically, he was particularly apprehensive of falling prey to clichés and self-indulgent writing. Further, the story grew very quickly, and it was challenging to isolate and focus on which themes would be most salient to the reader.

As the lead researcher wrote, edited, and re-wrote the stories, he envisioned street soccer from multiple perspectives, and recognized the power he had as researcher. Whereas some methodologies imply objectivity and constrain the researcher with the burden of a strict “scientific” process, fictional representation enlightens the researcher to include their own subjectivity while also considering the subjectivity of the reader, in exploring and interpreting social phenomenon. As St. Pierre (1997) stated: “If data are the foundation on which knowledge rests, it is important to trouble the common-sense understanding of that signifier in post-foundational research that aims to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently” (p. 176). Ultimately, it is the individual reader who will decide if this study has been successful, if it has achieved catalytic validity and moves people to action.

**Conclusion**

Through our study, we strove to openly explore the tensions and negative aspects of street soccer, while also recognizing the positive implications. For example, the episode where a new player was brought in as a “ringer” for the semi-final
game, implicitly communicated to others they were not worthy to play, a very factual account of a difficult situation experienced by the lead researcher. Street soccer volunteers and organizers often espoused empowering participants to take ownership and occupy leadership roles as a way for participants to build their confidence and life skills through sport. There were clear instances these benefits were realized, however, we are cognizant of times—such as the incident described above—where expectations and responsibilities placed on participants exceeded their skill-set and led to negative experiences. Additionally, we recognize lessons learned on the field do not always develop into portable skills to be used off the field. To improve transfer, Gould and Carson (2008) noted learning opportunities should emerge organically with participants engaging of their own free will, rather than being “taught” through an instructor. In our study, the negative emotions and feelings players felt when they were passed-over for the world cup team, or benched in favour of a “ringer,” arguably presented real-world learning opportunities which emerged naturally, offering genuine opportunity to build resiliency and life skills. However, more detailed examination of marginalized participants’ ability to navigate disappointment and the role of competition within street soccer and other sport for inclusion programs is warranted. It is unclear at what point our expectations of participants may exceed their capacity, and lead to more damage than good. Future street soccer studies based on participant journaling or video-diaries could provide compelling insights on the role of expectations we place on participants and the disappointments and stress they experience.

To truly honour the voices of the participants we were required to think deeply about all aspects of their lives—what would they say, how would they act, what was most important to them? While characters were based very closely on actual participants, and most of the dialogue was quoted verbatim, we do not believe simply interviewing, recording, reproducing verbatim, and analyzing the participant’s words would have spawned the same sense of understanding or empathy, or translated to the same level of verisimilitude for readers, as this fictional representation has offered.

We have not measured outcomes, nor proven causality in linking street soccer to the many benefits which sport for development programs often claim. Rather, we have opened a window onto the Victoria Dreams and their unique culture. While our distinct viewpoints and experiences secure the foundation in which this window rests, there is open space for the reader to explore and experience their own insights. As highlighted in our introduction, social exclusion has critical repercussions for both individuals and communities at large. In exploring both the tensions and positive contributions of the Victoria Dreams, we have illustrated how participation in street soccer may provide a sense of social inclusion, so integral to the health and wellbeing of marginalized populations.
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On récolte se que l’on s’aime
An A/R/Tographical Exploration of Collaborative Art Teaching in the Taiga Forest

Jennifer Wicks

Abstract
By employing an a/r/tographical (Irwin, 2004) approach to research, the author investigates the nature of collaboration between two urbanite artist/teachers participating in an artist residency in northern Quebec. Information sources include audio recordings of conversations and soundscapes, photographs of the environment and activities, field notes, and mixed media drawings. The Residence des Possibles invites artists to explore the northern Taiga forest region in Quebec, Canada through art practice. The artists inhabit a cabin in the mountains/forest for a week with no electricity, landline or cell phone service, with access to studio space as a means to enhance and inspire art making. The collaborative art teaching and research project discussed invited passers-by to converse through the creation of drawn, painted and mixed media artworks.

Keywords: collaboration, a/r/tography, art education, identity, visual language, pedagogy of discomfort, critical inquiry

The Residence des Possibles is a research/creation artists’ residency that invites artists to explore the Taiga forest region in Quebec, Canada through art practice. In August of 2015, I embarked on a journey with fellow artist, teacher, and friend, Marko Savard, in the form of a collaborative and interactive art teaching project. Throughout the week-long residency, we communicated through art with
passers-by and each other, with the intention developing an understanding of our relationships to, and our experiences of the Taiga environment through the creation of mixed media artworks.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of this experience, I employed a/r/tography as a methodological approach to research through the lens of critical inquiry, examining the nature of collaboration between my colleague and myself, using art and writing to investigate how we fit into this unique environment (Irwin, 2004). A/r/tography subsumes art creation and writing as a means to think through research (Bickel et al., 2011). As such, I engaged in a critical analysis of field recordings and recorded conversations with my teaching partner, photographs, field notes, and mixed media drawings created during the residency, exploring the experience through art making—employing watercolor painting as contemplative praxis, and electroacoustic composition as iterative listening practice, resulting in the creation of a video and sound collage, viewed here: https://youtu.be/NDNNe8dBqdY. This praxis lead me to an exploration of a pedagogy of discomfort.

Engaging with Research Employing a Critical Approach

Through the development of a critical self-reflective practice, artists, educators and researchers expand their personal epistemology to unearth a deeper understanding of the nature and origins of their own knowledge (Urman & Roth, 2010, p. 9), and the subsequent impact on the essence of their beings (Aoki, 2009, p.105). Applying Freire’s (2000) notion of conscientização to reflect on our experiences, we expand our art, teaching, and research practice(s) and identities, becoming more than we have been conceived and conditioned to be (hooks, 1994; Pinar, 2012). Reflecting on situationality, we ponder the condition of our existence: critically thinking through the ways in which we are “in a situation” (Freire, 2000, p. 109). Foucault (1977) suggests that knowledge is power, and therefore as the researcher/teacher it is key that we acknowledge that each collaborator (be they researcher, teacher, artist or student) brings their ontology and epistemology, along with empirical knowledge, which are valid and significant parts of knowledge construction (Lather, 2010). As such, each “must look inside their identifications and de-identifications to discover who they are becoming” (Bey & Washington, 2013, p.123).

Adopting a critical approach to analysis establishes a method to “develop critical, reflective, and meaningful approaches to interpreting, critiquing, and producing images, objects and artifacts from visual culture” (Tavin, 2002, p. 47). This activates “activist, [and] restorative possibilities of art making” (Graham, 2007, p. 379), however, this process can also be difficult for the researcher. It is one in which we ask ourselves to re-evaluate the ways we understand ourselves and the
world, opening up to “feelings of anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance,” amongst others (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 107). Staying with and recognizing less positive aspects of ourselves, as artists, teachers and researchers can move us into a pedagogy of discomfort. Through this, we come to decipher and interpret “the ways in which we affect and are affected by the social contexts we inhabit” (MacEntee & Mandrona, 2015, p. 47). This aims to disrupt the assumptions we’ve previously come to make about ourselves (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015), and moves us outside of our comfort zones to embrace our vulnerabilities, acknowledging the limits of our knowledge and understanding, bringing us to a more authentic way of being in the world (Dutta et al., 2016).

La Residence des Possibles

Located in the Parc des Grands Jardins, five hours north of Montreal, in the mountains of Charlevoix, Quebec, Canada, the artist residency was open to artists of all disciplines—musicians, poets, performing and visual artists. This national park has an area of 310 km2 of Nordic vegetation and is designated a Taiga forest; home to a diverse population of animals from black bears to caribou. The impressive size of the spruce trees and mystical appearance of lichen evoke a recollection
of the splendor of English gardens hence its name of Les Grand Jardins (translation: the big gardens) (Global Internet, 2014). Throughout the week-long residency, we inhabited a chalet located at the top of the mountain, surrounded by forest. The chalet had no electricity, landline or cell phone service due to its remote location. We had 24-hour access to studio space, an indoor sunroom, as well as areas not attached to the chalet, such as a gazebo nestled in the woods, which loomed over the Lac Turgeon. That being said, most of the time the forest became our studio.

Figure 2: Le chateau Beaumont, © Wicks 2015

Our project invited passers-by to converse with us through the language of visual art (the creation of drawn, painted and mixed media artworks), with the intention of exploring our collective experiences of the Taiga forest. In the case that we had no participants, our intention was to exchange with each other. My colleague Marko is a professional ceramic artist and community art teacher, and although he doesn’t identify himself as a researcher in the traditional, academic sense of the word, I interpret the notion of researcher in this case as identifying with what Biggs & Buchler (2012) describe as a “holistic agent”—one who “resists having to divide his or her activity between what is traditional research and what is arts practice” (p.35). Our preliminary search for a common language by
which to express ourselves ultimately constitutes research and through this, my colleague becomes co-researcher and collaborator.

La Récolte

We entitled our project *On récolte ce que l’on s’aime* (translation: we reap what we love) as a call for collective engagement and communion, hoping to connect with others about the environment through art. As we prepared for our journey from Montreal to Charlevoix, we collected art materials for the project and discussed possibilities and procedures. We brought as diverse a reserve as possible to inspire each other and our visitors, in creation and conversation. Leaning on the notion of materiality as motivation (Strong Wilson & Ellis, 2007), we collected materials that would be exciting and fun to explore, regardless of the experience of and relationship to art making.

As our trip approached, I frequently connected with Marko to discuss plans—who is bringing what, and how we would proceed to work together throughout the week. I sensed a shared feeling of nervousness boil to the surface as we amassed everything but the kitchen sink, and on the morning of our departure, we attempted to stuff it all into the trunk of my car. We brought a sundry collection of art materials: rolls of paper—watercolor, kraft, academia, rice and recycled papers and cardboards; paint—watercolor, gouache, acrylic; drawing and printing inks; wax and watercolor crayons and pencils; charcoal, Conte, graphite and chalk; scotch, masking and packing tape; scissors, Xacto knives, rulers, paint brushes, and sponges, amongst other strange and mysterious materials we found lying about our studios. Our collection bordered on hoarding as anxieties about being far away from civilization mounted. We both started to worry, both interiorly and aloud, about running out of something, anything, and not having enough, even though it was clear that we were overcompensating.

I brought four cameras with me, and any recording device I could find, for, perish the thought, we run out of batteries. I kept charging everything up until the moment we embarked on our drive up the mountain. It was at this instant that Marko got excited about our project and getting some much needed time away from the city, and I found myself growing increasingly anxious. The recordings of our conversations show an audible change in my voice as we drove further and further up the mountain, away from the comforts and convenience of civilization.

When we arrived at the chalet, members of the *Residence des Possibles* collective welcomed us warmly. We dropped off our things in our room, took a quick tour of the building and were immediately drawn into the woods. As we walked, I started to feel like I was in another world. The forest grew thick instantaneously, and as the path narrowed we were suddenly immersed in a field of lichen and
mushrooms, covered by trees. It was now visibly apparent that we were very far from home.

As we set up for our first art encounters the differences between Marko and I, as educators, floated immediately to the surface. Colleagues since 1996, we had never taught together, and we were learning how to share space. We set our materials up in the sunroom, and as I expressed my desire to keep everything neatly in its place, Marko pushed to have the materials spread about for anyone to access. After negotiation and compromise, we stored some of the materials under a bench and left chosen materials out for visitors. We headed to the river, just a few dozen meters from the chalet, as a starting point. For guests that didn’t know who we were and what we were doing, we posted hand drawn signs about the project, encouraging them to experiment with the materials we left in the sunroom.

That first day we spent side by side, or not very far apart. I sat and drew, creating large pastel drawings of the forest around us, and talking to hikers, inviting them to draw with me. I encouraged visitors to draw on my work, or I integrated remnants of encounters into the work, through the inclusion of text or an outline of a shadow they had cast on my paper. These became mnemonic for our meetings and conversations, and a means to merge experiences visually. Marko played the role of facilitator, inviting participants in, and setting them up with materials to create. He did most of his artworks in a small book that he carried. As the days continued, I recognized that our core intentions as collaborators were not the same, which can happen in collaborative a/r/tographical projects (Bickel & Hugill, 2011). I liken our divergence to a contrast in teacher identity construction, and a disparity in interpretations of the purpose of the project. Marko seemed to be drawn to the concept of encouraging others to create, and explore materiality and artistry, and I became intent on inviting others to collaborate with me and develop a visual dialogue. Marko was the quintessential art teacher, whereas I had my researcher’s hat on. In our case, I felt, in the end, our differences added to the breadth and depth of the work.

The first evening we sat to discuss our experiences. I pointed out our difference in approach to Marko, and he disagreed. He had not observed anything of the sort and felt we had similar methods. As we continued to talk, I felt a need for own reflective process emerge, a written journal, which would become crucial to the ways in which I analyzed the experience thereafter. In the days that followed, I started and finished each day by journaling, noting down my experiences and emotions as they emerged.
Figure 3: Lichen, © Jennifer Wicks, 2015

Figure 4: Une petite note de Marko & Jenny, © Jennifer Wicks, 2015
Figure 5: Conversations in pastel, © Jennifer Wicks, 2015

Figure 6: Collisions, © Jennifer Wicks, 2015

It’s a feeling, a notion, when two beings collide, the space where, although we seem to have a profound understanding of the other, in fact, we don’t. It’s ego, asking for space.

Field notes, August 9, 2015.
We quickly settled into a routine—in the mornings we chose materials and decided on where we would work. Some days we ventured out into the forest together, and others we went our separate ways. A few mornings we started out in the sunroom and other moments we found ourselves running back for shelter when dark clouds gathered overhead. I spent numerous hours at multiple sites throughout the forest, armed with colorful art materials and beautiful papers.

When making art with others, I found myself working with dry pastels, using academia paper, torn into pieces. I drew sky after sky, with looming trees. When alone, I worked in watercolor and spent hours painstakingly working detailed paintings of trees and water. Although usually I am timid with strangers, I found myself instigating deep conversations with visitors as we drew side by side, sharing our lives, our views the forest, and the world, occasionally delving into the existential and metaphysical. It is as though being deep in the woods, away from even the simplest convenience of plugging in a lamp, had the power to bring me to a new, shared space, where I had the time just to sit, observe, and moreover to listen—to myself, to others, and to the echoing sounds of vastness.

It’s amazing to watch the evolution of the sky as it shifts from moment to moment, reminding me of this moment. Here I have the incredible privilege to just be. Without what has come before, or what will be in the future, I am becoming, moment by moment. Field notes, August 10, 2015.

I had the great fortune of witnessing Marko as he grew into the environment over the week, conversing with visitors and sharing his art practice. Although Marko has been a professional artist for 20 years, he began to emanate art—tied to his sketchbook, he drew and drew and drew. He created land art, and as I wan-
dered through the forest, I came across reminders of him—a stone with a charcoal heart or an arrow drawn on a piece of wood. His works became more extensive and bold as the week progressed, and he expressed to me how his felt his artist self was emerging. As an outside viewer, this was evident.

Figure 8: Hum, © Jennifer Wicks, 2015

Throughout the week, Marko and I had only been able to create one collaborative work of art. After a long day of conversations and art making with guests, I cajoled Marko into intervening in a pastel drawing on which I had been working. He hesitated, expressing concerns of ruining the piece. I should mention that there is a discernable aesthetic dichotomy between Marko’s art practice and my own. My drawings tend to be observational interpretations of nature, whereas he can create fantastical lands and creatures that are both compelling and playful. Throughout the week we had grown confident working with strangers, yet we were struggling to find ways to collaborate with each other. In the end we created what became, for both of us, the most compelling work created throughout the entire week—a panoramic sky and forest drawn by me in pastel on a torn piece of paper that was overrun with Marko’s signature flies and bunny rabbits soaring over and frolicking through our temporary habitat, drawn in colorful Conte.
Analysis

A/r/tography links the trifecta identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (typified by the a/r/t at the beginning of the word), in proximate relation to one another; no identifier is greater than the other, as they exist and interact “simultaneously in and through time and space” (Irwin et al., 2006, p. 70). The notion of proximity and contiguity of identities became the crux of my analysis of the experience of collaboration.

It took me months to process my experience of the residency, its personal meaning and my interpretations of the research project. My field notes border on prose, and as I re-read them, the words reflect a different state of being, brought on by the slowness of the forest. They were relaxed and explicative, deliberative and musing, as I philosophized about the meaning of space, sound and atmosphere, human relations, artistic endeavors and the impact this has on me. I explored the information I had collected through both artful and traditional research methods. I coded my notes, the images, and documentation of artworks. I noted the emergence of several reoccurring themes—the convergence/divergence of personalities, self and imposed professional identifications, ego, cooperation, negotiation, and the development of being.

I listened to the hours of recorded conversations between Marko and myself, on our way up the mountain to the residency, our arrival, our descent after the week was over, and of our art-filled debriefing, where we chronicled and processed our experiences as we drew. As I listened to the recordings, I painted. I employed a traditional wet in wet watercolor technique, using photos and drawings of the forest as well as Marko’s land art as source material to compose the piece.

As praxis, watercolor painting became a means for me to develop reflexivity. Due to the long drying times and a meticulous approach to painting, crucial for a controlled result, I had more time to reflect on the recordings, and my analysis of the experience, as I watched the water and pigment slowly soak into the rag paper, waiting to begin painting on an adjacent dry space. I relived the feeling of being deep in that unique forest—hearing sounds not only of leaves and wind and water, but the absence of electrical buzzing noises, so familiar in our daily lives.
The air felt different, cleaner, cooler, and there was more of it. Through visual arts production, I recognize a multitude of ways with which to perceive and communicate my views and experiences (Findley, 2011), provoking a profound sense of understanding relating to the awareness of self, as well as the ways in which I am in the world (Finley, 2008). As such the painting begins to “echo, yet transcend my understanding,” bringing me to “another place of knowing” (Irwin, 2006, p. 79), as I develop awareness through perception and production of art (Ritterman, 2011).

Looking back over my experience with Marko, reading my notes, listening to our recordings, and reflecting on the process, I noted our divergent approaches to the project, which at times found us at odds on how to proceed, and I associated this to our professional identities. Marko is a professional ceramic artist and educator that spends half of his day creating and the other half teaching art. I am a PhD candidate that spends a small portion of the week teaching art or art education, and the bulk of my time is focused on research and writing. It became evident that we were not merely creating, teaching or studying art; we were attempting to “live through these embodied experiences” with the hopes of understanding them in a purposeful way (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 72).

Leavy (2012) proclaims “we teach who we are,” (p.6), and this became evident as our professional identities came to the forefront. In my perpetual state of researcher, I was intent on keeping with my vision and reaching a clear outcome.
Marko put on his teacher cap when conversing with visitors, and as the week progressed his artist identity emerged as his central character. Through the process of collaboration, we were able to ebb and flow as our identities emerged and retreated to invite visitors to create, and we eventually found a way to connect with each other through art. As I played artist, he played teacher, inviting guests to sit and work with me, offering up materials and encouraging them to participate; when he played artist, I played researcher, taking photos of the events and documenting thoughts and conversations, allowing him to relinquish to the interwoven act of creation and communion. These performances of identity bespeak rhizomatic movements akin to a/r/tographic praxis (Bickel et al., 2011; Bicket & Hugell, 2011; Irwin, 2004). In the extensive listening and re-listening to the sound recordings and the creation of the sound collage, I employed the act of dissecting and splicing together the sound recordings as an iterative engagement with the information gathered and produced (Bessette, 2016) and gained a more in-depth perception of interactions within the collaborative process.

Continuing to listen, I felt uncomfortable. I went over my field notes repeatedly, and couldn’t help but read a tone of self-righteousness, one that also emerged in the multiple listenings of the recorded conversations. In my attempt to approach the project with criticality, I had been more critical of my partner’s approach than my own. As such, my ego had impacted the collaborative process, and inadvertently I expressed the notion that my way of the researcher/teacher, was superior to that of the teacher/artist. This became an a/r/tographical reverberation for me. I am referring to the movement—dynamic, dramatic or subtle, that, in this moment, compelled me to alter and adapt my understanding and analysis of the project, leading me to the discovery of something deeper, and shifting me “toward a slippage of meaning” (Springgay & Irwing, 2009, p. xxx). It was with time and dedication to this reflexive practice that I became constructive in my process, and grow as an artist, teacher, and researcher.

To understand the importance and catalytic nature of discomfort in our growth as scholars, Twerski (2009) lends us the metaphor of the lobster. Lobsters are enveloped by a hard, inflexible carapace, which can not expand. The lobster will grow to the size of its encasing, and in time it becomes both confining and oppressive. It is in this moment of discomfort that the lobster will seek shelter to protect itself from predators, and shed its shell, producing a new, more expansive housing. The lobster will continue this process of shedding and shell reproduction until the end its life. I relate this metaphor to a pedagogy of discomfort, one that has the potential to lead to an a/r/tographical opening. This approach of exploring and staying with discomfort is grounded in the notion that feeling uncomfortable is crucial in the challenging of “dominant beliefs, social habits and normative practices,” which perpetuate hegemonic social structures (Zembylas, 2015, p. 165). In this sense, instead of informing others of research outcomes,
I open myself up to contestations and possibilities, giving attention to “what is seen and known, and what is not seen and not known” (Springgay & Irwin, 2009, p.xxx) with the intention of developing something more profound within myself as an educator and researcher. Such openings create dialogue, both internal and external “as contradictions and resistance are faced and interfaced with other knowledge” (p.xxx).

The expression and analysis of my experience is presented in two formats—written, and as a video/sound collage: https://youtu.be/NDNNNe8dBqY. The two work together as a/r/tographical expression, informing each other to develop a holistic articulation of experience and understanding. Greirson (2009) states that arts researchers respond to the field of research by incorporating an awareness of what has passed, in order to bring a critical understanding to the present (p.155). In the practice of a/r/tography, acknowledgment of one’s bias and experience through the recognition of the root of personal practice or approach, creates a more holistic understanding of research, and pushes the researcher to go further than their common practice (p. 151). Through this, I experienced a truly “relational space” in which I felt compelled to expand my understandings (Burgum & Godkin, 2008, p. 610) not only of research, and teaching but of myself, and my ways of being in the world and how I perform my contiguous identities.

The teaching and learning explored within our project was rooted in the collaborative nature of a/r/tography (Bickel et al., 2011) which exemplifies a dialogical approach that can be applied to art making and the field of art education. Through attempting critically reflective dialogue (Barrett et al., 2014), as well sharing ideas and challenges, we were able to recognize an evolution in each and the other’s being and move toward the a/r/tographical notion becoming (Irwin, 2013), coming into ourselves as artists, teachers, and researchers. Nevertheless, it was in the singular reflexive process, that I felt I learned the most. As stated by Bickel et al. (2011), best practices in a/r/tographical collaborations come through the merging of theory and practice which emerge from “relational aesthetics (the artist’s contribution), relational inquiry (the researcher’s contribution) and relational learning (the teacher’s contribution) [. . . ]. The primary principle of a/r/tography is that none of these contributors, aspects, or situations is to be privileged over another, as they co-emerge simultaneously within and through time and space” (p. 88). This praxis, of writing and creating art to think through research has impacted me as a researcher through the development of creative ways to draw different understandings from within through multiple means of exploring research, and it has influenced me as a teacher by making me more aware of my ways of becoming in the world. A/r/tography, in this way, becomes an intricate dance of identities, melding ways to develop a rich and diverse praxis, lending itself to each situation as it materializes.
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References


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Opening up Spaces and Narratives of (Non-) Acceptance

Stacey A. Hawkins & Kate Ducak

Abstract

This arts-based research is about spaces; perceptions of space, contexts of space, movement within/from/through spaces, and the meanings associated with spaces. The purpose of this post-modern narrative research was to explore personal expressions and understandings of spaces of (non)-acceptance. The focus of this idea of ‘space’—in relation to perceived contexts of acceptance—was informed by three methods: 1) an unstructured narrative interview with one participant; 2) the primary author’s written, personal narrative account; and 3) visually representing these narratives spatially and temporally through a series of three abstract paintings. By illustrating and narrating these understandings of spaces of acceptance in textual and visual forms, the constituted ‘meanings’ of those spaces and the self over time were concurrently explored. It was found that both forms of representation were and are methods of thinking and analyzing, as well as rhetorical devices that can be used to convey those illuminated meanings.

Keywords: Arts-based research; post-modern; narrative inquiry; space; dementia
Introduction

This is a personal story about spaces: perceptions of space, contexts of space, movement within/from/through spaces, and the meanings associated with spaces. This story about spaces is also not the story I (the primary author) intended to tell. Throughout the process of learning different ways of doing qualitative inquiry, I felt challenged to turn the analytic lens upon myself, and upon one another, to explore, describe, and understand the nature of spaces of acceptance.

What emerged through the ‘doing,’ was a shift in my research gaze; I was challenged to stretch my understanding of reflexivity in the space of research. In some ways, exploring meanings of acceptance challenged me to re-examine my ontological foundations. Through this reflection, the different meanings of acceptance changed for me. I began to ask questions about the nature of spaces of acceptance, and how an individual’s perceptions of those spaces can shift, change, and evolve over time. Further, I began to question whether the associated meanings of these spaces were static, and whether meaning could be fundamentally different between persons, and over time.

These questions surrounding spaces of acceptance were crystalized during the process of conducting a phenomenological interview with Collette.¹ I was surprised and invigorated by the discussions surrounding construction and meaning-making in spaces of acceptance. I was also fascinated by how discussing these spaces raised questions for the interview participant, as well as an individual awareness of contradictory personal descriptions and understandings of those spaces. In other words, the process of discussing spaces of (non)-acceptance raised questions for both my participant Collette, and for me.

Admittedly, I have always been fascinated with the construction of spaces. This fascination began with my previous vocation as a classical pianist. I was always amazed by the complexity of a musical space: how the sound from a single instrument could evoke a relational experience with persons within a space; how the arrangement of sounds into music could transform a space; how the physical features of the space could transform the sound; how the act of playing forced me to consider myself in relation to the sound and the place. This fascination with space followed me into my fine art training in University. I became fascinated by the physical features of spaces, particularly the architecture, lighting, colour, and placement of elements of space. Creation of these spaces and manipulation of features of these spaces seemed to change some perceptible relational quality.

The relational elements of space, whereby the individual is constituted, have been a primary focus of my previous research on social experiences of persons within caring spaces. However, thinking about the movement of the person

¹. Pseudonym has been used to protect the privacy of the participant
through spaces of acceptance (via narrative accounts) has challenged me to consider these different elements of created spaces (e.g. light, sound, architecture, social/relational, and etc.) together. Additionally, this particular research has allowed me to further explore my own understandings of these spaces, and begin to answer some the fundamental questions about the constitution of the self through time and across spaces.

What I present is a post-modern narrative of spaces of acceptance. My personal narrative is presented in a written personal account of one space that holds particular meaning for me: my childhood home. My narrative and Collette’s narrative of space are illustrated through a series of three abstract paintings; by illustrating and narrating my understandings of spaces of acceptance in both textual and visual forms, I was concurrently exploring the constituted ‘meanings’ of those spaces over time.

Bochner (2000) states that the “purpose of self-narratives is to extract meaning from experiences, rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived… we narrate to make sense of experience over the course of time,” (p. 270). In this way, Bochner (2000) called narrative inquiry a poetic social science, whereby the “beauty and tragedy of the world are textually empowered by the carefully chosen constructions and subjective understandings of the author,” (p. 269-270). This is a reflection of Heidegger (2013) who argued that the language of thinking is inherently poetic.

This idea is echoed by Ely (2007) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) who described how the process of writing is a unique method of inquiry; writing is a way of thinking, knowing, learning, and discovering meaning. In other words, writing allows for concurrent data collection and data analysis (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2005). In this regard, the processes of writing and painting spaces of acceptance enabled me to more deeply explore and reflect upon the meanings these spaces held.

Although Ely (2005) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) were speaking explicitly about the process of writing a narrative, the process of painting a narrative served a similar function. Heidegger (2013) discussed the idea of thinking and uncovering through art, and the limitations of using singular modes of representation:

In the art work the truth of what is, has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work…The attempt to interpret this thing-character of the work with the aid of the usual thing-concepts failed—not only because these concepts do not lay hold of the thingly feature, but because, in raising the question of its thingly substructure, we force the work into a preconceived framework by which we obstruct our own access to the work-being of the work. (p.38-39)
Surprisingly, new meanings (meanings I did not know were there) were illuminated as I made choices about what themes were represented, and how they were visually represented spatially and temporally on the canvas. In this way, I would argue that both forms of representation were (i.e. writing and painting - are methods of thinking, as well as rhetorical devices that can be used to convey those illuminated meanings; the subsequent narrative research presented in this paper considers this through an exploration of spaces of acceptance.

Methodology
The purpose of this narrative research was to explore personal expressions and understandings of spaces of (non)-acceptance. The focus of this idea of ‘space’—in relation to perceived contexts of acceptance—was informed by:

1. An unstructured, narrative interview with one participant - Collette—to explore spaces of acceptance;

2. The creation of a written, personal narrative by the primary author related to spaces of acceptance;

3. A visual illustration of the key thematic elements of spaces of acceptance through a series of three abstract paintings.

Unstructured Interview
Interview questions and probes were guided by van Manen’s (1997) focus on embodied, temporal, spatial, and relational experiences of acceptance. The interview lasted approximately 80 minutes, and was digitally recorded and transcribed. Identifiers were removed from the transcripts to maintain the participant’s confidentiality. Collette’s interview transcript was thematically analyzed by both authors/researchers in order to identify passages pertaining to the creation of spaces of acceptance.

Interview ‘data’ was qualitatively analyzed by following Wertz’s (2011) phenomenological approach. Data analysis began by becoming acquainted with the data set by openly reading each interview transcript without the research agenda in mind, and then re-reading and highlighting key quotes; what Wertz (2011) refers to as “reading for a sense of the whole” (p. 131). Then a process of eidetic analysis (Wertz, 2011) commenced where meaning units were derived from the data by segmenting portions of each transcript into themes relevant to the research questions. This resulted in the creation of ‘meaning’ units. The researchers psychologically reflected on the essence of each meaning unit in the transcript, and then began naming and describing them (Wertz, 2011).
After the researchers independently developed their meaning units, they collectively examined them by being reflective, critical and collegial. This collaborative process of discussing meaning units led to the mutually agreed thematic essences.

**Personal Narrative**

Ellis’ (1999) approach to writing personal narratives was used to construct the written narrative. This process involved “using main events to structure the narrative, and filling in the emotional memories retrospectively (Ellis, 1999). Additionally, Ellis’ (1999) process of ‘emotional recall’ was used to explore and describe the emotional experiences associated with these events. This involved using memories to revisit the emotional and physical feelings associated the past (Ellis, 1999).

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000; as cited in Creswell, 2007) approach to narrative analysis was used to analyze the post-modern narrative. This involved analyzing the three-dimensional space of the narrative by examining interaction (i.e. personal and social), continuity (i.e. time), and situation (i.e. places and spaces).

**The Visual as an Analytic Tool and Form of Representation**

The thematic ideas explored by Collette through the interview process simultaneously raised questions about spaces of acceptance, and suggested a need to further explore personal understandings of space using a post-modern approach to narrative inquiry. The choice to use both written and visual forms of representation was an acknowledgement of the complex nature of experience, expression, and modes of representation. To adequately reflect this complexity, Parry and Johnson (2007) and Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots (2008) argued that expressing learned meanings can involve a variety of creative writing techniques, visual representations, genres, and so forth.

For the purposes of this research, key themes related to spaces of acceptance described by Collette and the primary author, were chosen to be further explored using visual representation (i.e. painting). A series of three paintings were constructed to visually narrate emergent themes identified through the analysis of Collette’s interview transcripts, and analysis of the post-modern narrative. A series of preliminary pencil sketches were completed prior to painting. A style of abstract impressionism was chosen, which included the use of visual symbols, abstract representations, colour, form, texture, and so forth. The chosen medium was acrylic paint on canvas pad, arranged in a triptych. The paintings were completed in a single session lasting approximately 5 hours.

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000; as cited in Creswell, 2007) three-dimensional approach to analysis was used concurrently with a visual analysis of the three paintings. Elements of form, shape, lighting, placement, and colour were examined, in addition to interaction, continuity, and situational elements.
Findings of the analyses are presented concurrently with reflexive commentary in the proceeding sections.

Findings and Discussion

Collette’s Visual Narrative
Collette described, in vivid detail, the construction of spaces of acceptance; the spaces of acceptance created a shared, relational sense of connectivity with other persons. Two key themes emerged: space being created by people and physical features of the environment; and lingering in spaces of connectivity. These thematic elements were questioned by both the primary researcher and Collette during the interview. What emerged were questions of complexity.

Collette discussed complex perceptions of spaces, which were both created by the persons within the space, and/or the physical features (e.g. architectural design, colour, temperature, sound, size, and etc.). In some of the discussions, Collette described how the social interactions within the space dictated whether or not the space was one of acceptance, while in other discussions she described how the physical features of the space limited the feelings of connectivity with persons (and therefore feelings of acceptance). For example, Collette described “funnels” of space (i.e. the yoga studio and the hallways of a University), which were purposeful designs; the architecture limited the social interaction, and even promoted movement away from the space itself:

“within that space that you know that people are there… for a purpose, they’re not just there to hang out… you might only have a couple seconds or, you know, it might turn into something more where you go and you go and sit down and talk to the person for a couple of minutes… the space does seem to be more of a, I don’t know what the word is, not a deterrent, but it can kind of change or influence maybe just what the interaction is or what the length of interaction could be…. yeah it almost acts maybe more like a funnel or something.”

In The Funnel (see Figure 1), I attempted to visually represent the physical features of a space that Collette described as dissuading acceptance. The intention of the design was to mimic Collette’s perceived feelings of being “funnelled” by the space. Contrasting shades of black, grey, and white were used to represent sharp architectural elements of spaces like the yoga studio and the University hallways. The steep contrasts of shape and shade are meant to convey a sense of intention, just as Collette described in her description; these are time-bound spaces created to deter prolonged interaction, and ultimately acceptance.

The upper portion of the canvas shows containment, but the triangular frame also pulls your eye downwards to a blurred outward space. Painting this space was a process of discovery; although Collette described how the spaces were de-
Figure 1: “The Funnel” (2014) Acrylic on Canvas
signed to move persons through an environment, the external world (outside of
the space) was not generally described. There seemed to be some notions of other
potential spaces of acceptance outside of the ‘bubble.’ In this way, the bottom
space of the canvas was not depicted with such sharp contrast as the upper por-
tion. Rather, this area was blurred, suggesting the potential for emergent spaces
of acceptance.

Collette contrasted these funnels of space (depicted in Figure 1) with physical
features that seemed to promote interaction and connection. For example, she
described a large area in one of the academic buildings where placement of fur-
niture and the size of the space seemed to imply that students were free to linger
and interact with others. She also described these elements in a discussion of two
different yoga studios:

“in terms of the physical differences, both the studios kind of have a warm, I
guess, surroundings, either with their paint colours and that they’d use wooden
floors, or the one studio had cork flooring, so they were both- both the layouts
was fairly natural and warm, but yeah there was definitely a difference in terms
of just how the space was laid out and how people’s attitudes were- yeah so it’s
kind of weird like that, that even though these little things in space and attitude
can make that much of a difference… through the space that they had there, it
almost made it easier for people as they were coming and going from the change
room and from the studio room that they have this seating area with tea and
these little… Asian tea bowls… the type of environment that they were trying
to create there really just fostered people being able to, you know, see each other
and to take the time to stop and talk even if you only have, you know, 5 minutes
after class, then just be able to get to know some of the people that you’re that
in class.”

In her descriptions of the physical features, Collette also described how the
social features (i.e. nature of social interactions with other persons) promoted feel-
ings of connectivity. In those spaces—which seemed to encompass both elements
of physical design and social connectivity—Collette discussed a desire to linger
in the “positive energy,” or “vibe.” For example, she described her desire to linger
at the yoga studio:

“they have this like seating area and they always have tea before and after class
and they say, you know, “if anyone has time please hang out for tea,” and, if you
have to go home [or] whatever after then they don’t have any problems with
that…the type of feeling and environment that you want to be in and to not re-
ally feel worried or self-conscious… that time that I have been sitting there and
having tea with people… just to be able to sit and find out what other people are
up to, or just sit and have a tea quietly.”
Figure 2: “The Lingering” (2014) Acrylic on Canvas
In this regard, her emotional response to the features of the space seemed to result in a desire to remain. *The Lingering* (see Figure 2) depicts the shared sense of connectivity described by Collette in spaces of acceptance. Complementary hues of greens, blues, and yellows are used to represent similarities between persons within the space, and rejuvenation (e.g. through drinking green tea). Connected rings in a chain-like pattern span the space of the canvas, and extend beyond. Gentle, sweeping-brush strokes suggest movement between the rings, and the blurred smokiness conveys a sense of lingering. However, the lack of clarity in the movement and placement of the forms suggests an underlying complexity and unanswered questions of self.

Collette’s description raised some questions about the perception of spaces of acceptance. In her descriptions of three different spaces—each of which served different purposes—she seemed to convey that a space of acceptance was more of a static process (i.e. subject to change, transition, new meanings), rather than a definitive thing. *The Lingering* is a reflection of the static nature spaces of acceptance. Further, Collette’s descriptions suggest a process of ongoing construction, whereby meaning associated with that space was malleable. I explored this malleability through proceeding personal narrative on the transformation of the home, and the accompanying painting “*The Ascension,***” (see Figure 3).

**Personal Narrative**

“Open Doors—Transformation of Home to House”

There is a space. It is a space, a place that has constantly changed, and is constantly changing. The changes involve the people who enter, occupy, and leave. I call it home, but it is a home in name only. It is a house: a structure, a shell, and a shelf for the living, being, and dying that happens within. The dying within the space seems to be ever-present now, and the living and being seem ever-distant.

I have returned again to this space after a process of trying to forget the last time I was here. Just enough time has passed, where I feel recovered enough to attempt to enter the house. I make the turn in my car onto the road that leads to home, and I begin an ascent, up the winding hill that leads to the house. The house is at the end of the road. I don’t think about the familiarity of the turns; the car seems to know where I am going. I have driven this road so many times before; I swear I could do it blind-folded, in a snow-storm, in the middle of the night.

Today I am optimistic: today will be different than the last. Things will be normal.

When I pull into the driveway, I am jarred back to the reality of now: there is a car in the driveway. Another car… a different car…always a different car. “For
Figure 3: “The Ascension” (2014) Acrylic on Canvas
fuck sakes.” I start wondering what the hell I am going to encounter when I walk through the door.

I sit for a second with the car running, wondering if I should turn around and leave. I see a head appear in the window. “Fuck.” Someone saw me. Now I have to go in or it will go in the notes that I showed up and left without coming inside. That or Mum will go into hysterics because she thinks I didn’t want to see her.

FAMILY CARE JOURNAL ENTRY:

Thursday, November 10, 2008 - Stacey

- Came home around 2:15 am and doors were all open (steel and wooden doors propped open). House smelled like something had been or was on fire.

- I found Mum in the washroom, on the toilet, crying again.

- Couldn’t explain what happened. She just kept saying: “He’s going to be mad at me,” and, “Jim was here.”

- Saw the microwave was unplugged and pulled out from the wall. It was hot, and I found something charred inside.

- Half-burned container in the sink.

- Mum was very shaken, scared, and worried (VERY STRESSED AND AGITATED)

- Mum could not figure out how to use her pads (has her period).
  - Blood all over herself and all over the bathroom
  - Had to show her how to wipe, and then had to clean her up (she had made a mess of herself; back of her legs and thighs were soiled)
  - Had to prompt her to wash her hands.

- I made her lunch and a cup of tea—I don’t think she ate anything today.
• She kept wincing, so I gave her 400 mg ibuprofen—I am guessing she might be having menstrual pains, but she can’t clearly tell me.

• Put on some classical music. This really calmed her down. She actually picked up the newspaper and started reading (hasn’t done that in a while!)

• Could not find Dad’s pager # - not sure who to call.

• Perhaps time to consider:
  
  • Meals on wheels

  • A home security system that has a connection to the fire alarms (we were lucky Jim was home from work and heard her screaming from next-door)

  • One of those children’s emergency cell phones (the kinds with the pre-programmed phone numbers & single button call placement??)

I AM SO FRUSTRATED.

END OF ENTRY

What will it be today? I wonder. One of the PSWs² is here, so he/she will undoubtedly be annoyed that I am here.

I take a deep breath, and I get out of the car.

As I walk toward the front door, I notice the homemade coffee-can, butt-stop my Dad has placed at the edge of the walkway… I also notice about a billion cigarette butts littered along the porch and in the garden. “Ignorant.” I bet that annoys the shit out of my Dad.

I approach the screen-door, and hear the scamper of the cat running down the wooden stairs to hide, and I hear someone say, “Brenda. Brenda—can you come back for a second.” As I step in the front door, Mum steps out from the hallway and says, “Hi!”

2. Personal Support Worker (PSW)
“Hi Mum! How are ‘ya?” I say. She doesn’t reply, but a PSW walks out behind her and says awkwardly, “Hello. Who are you?”

I tell her I am her daughter, and she says, “Oh really. I have never seen you before.”

Fuck you. You’re like one of 20 different PSWs I have seen in this house. What, is this your third time being here and suddenly you and my Mum are old friends? This is my house. You’re the stranger. Fuck off.

“Nice to meet you. I don’t usually visit during the day, but I had some time off today,” I say. I think, ‘fuck you,’ one last time.

She squints at me, and then says, “Well, Brenda and I have a busy morning. We were just going to have a shower. Come on honey.” She directs my Mum down the hallway and continually prompts her about 300 times with so many ‘dears,’ ‘sweeties,’ and ‘darlings’ that I want to puke. The door is left open for the whole shower battle… as usual.

I put the kettle on, and then proceed to rustle about in my bedroom. There was something I needed to bring back with me, but what it was escapes me now. I notice things have been moved slightly. There is now an old bath-chair sitting in my room. There is also a stockpile of incontinence briefs on my bed—Dad must have found a sale or something.

Mum finishes her shower and I hear the PSW begin the prompting-war: trying to dry Mum off and put the robe on her. I then feel someone looking at me, and turn around to find Mum in her robe at the doorway. I say “how was your shower?” and then the PSW appears to direct her to the bedroom to change.

Mum is at my bedroom door again. The PSW returns again, and this time is clearly annoyed. Her face is red, and she’s shooting me daggers. “Brenda, we really need to get some clothes on you before we have lunch.”

They return to the bedroom again, and I return to rustling about. I have remembered what I needed—my black portable music stand—but it’s not where I left it. I start moving through the other bedrooms, the basement, under the stairs… where the fuck is this thing? And who the fuck has been in my room, moving things around? The rooms smell curiously of baby-powder, pine-sol, strawberry-flavoured Ensure mixed with saliva, sweat laced with medication; the house smells like a ward. It is nauseating.

The PSW walks up to me and says, “You know, it’s really distracting for your Mum when you’re walking about while we’re trying to take showers and get dressed.”

My eyebrow arches up, and I stare at her. I say nothing, and she walks away.
I am irrationally angry. I am pissed off. In my mind, I am blowing up: Fuck, fuck, fuck. It's always something. Fuck this, fuck this place.

I mutter, “whatever… see you later.” No one notices me leave, no one will know I was there… unless the PSW puts it in the log.

I get in the car, slam the door, and grab at the seatbelt. The starter screams as I turn the ignition too forcefully. I back out of the driveway, feeling a rush of adrenaline as I fly into a rage. Descending the hill is a bizarre sensation. My anger is bubbling over, yet I am physically descending. I feel as though I can’t breathe, and I start to shake under the weight of the fury, wishing for something to release the feeling upon. As I move through this odd desire, I become frustrated that no release is possible or available, and an emotional descent begins to mirror the physical descent. I see the bottom of the hill—the road leading out—and I hit a bottom. The road becomes blurry and I squeeze the steering wheel until I can no longer feel my fingers. I pull the car over and sit. I can't move. I am stuck here for a while.

**Reflections: Storied Representations of Space**

Looking back on my personal narrative of the home, I am left wondering if I was not the visitor and the PSW was the family member. My visit was not a routine part of my day. However, the PSWs were there on a schedule. They had learned the intimate details of the house: the idiosyncrasies, the secret places. Not only did they know these spaces intimately, but they had learned them through a relational, intimate experience shared with my Mum. They knew where the teaspoons were; they could prepare a sandwich or a cup of tea as though they had been living there for years; they could fold the laundry and direct my Mum to place her socks in the right drawer, and the tea towels on the proper shelf in the linen closet. They knew which shampoo my Mum used; they knew they could put the dishwasher on before they left each morning, and my Dad would empty it when he got home from work. There were new routines and different actors who knew how things played out. I was no longer one of those players; I was no longer part of the play.

When I came to visit—and one of the PSWs was there—I felt like I was the stranger, stepping into an unknown space. It was not the space of my home, but someone’s nursing home where someone’s custodial care was performed. I became the outsider, the other, the foreign. I was angry that someone had decided that my family’s house should no longer be a home; the space had been aggressively taken over from my family and had been re-appropriated as a nursing home.

The transformation of the space always disturbed me. I could not stand to be in it for too long before I would find something that irritated me, focus on it, and then bolt. In reality, the rationale for leaving in a hurry was never a true reflection of what I was feeling. The reason was always far greater than the little
things I chose to dwell on. I would run out because I could not stand how I felt when I was in that environment: I felt angry, invaded, and out-of-place. I felt as though I couldn’t breathe, and I would shake under the weight of the fury, wishing for something to release the feeling upon. As I moved through this odd desire, I would inevitably become frustrated that no release was possible or available. Exasperation always followed the hatred. I couldn’t point to who was to blame for this hostile takeover, and so I collapsed under the weight of the hopelessness. For the first time in my life, I hated.

There was a new hierarchy in our house. What had once been a family structure, became a care provision factory. I went from being a daughter, to a place near the bottom. I was below the formal care providers, and far below the cat (who was now an official therapeutic resource under this new structure of care). When I was home, I was there to watch and wait until the care processes were completed. The PSWs knew more, and were better equipped to interact with my Mum. My 27 year relationship with my Mum was only called upon as a last resort to bathe Mum or toilet her when the PSW called in sick for work. I was always the alternate. My relationship with my Mum was gone, and irrelevant; our relationship did not relate to her care, so it was of no value. The past was gone.

People continued to come and go as they pleased. There was no privacy, no boundaries within the space, and everything that happened in that space was documented, recorded, and scrutinized. I felt like I was in some sort of laboratory. The formal care providers were like researchers, and my Mum—because of her advancing dementia symptoms—had become a research subject; not actively participating, but being put through the motions of living. They would direct my Mum, “Brenda sweetheart: lift your arms, take a bite, let me shave your legs, don’t touch the stove.” I saw the people who lived in the space, like my Dad, transform from loving partners to mere participants in care. I was something lower… a lurking variable perhaps. I was someone who could unexpectedly move into the space and disrupt the experiment.

I continually avoided the house. It was no longer a home, and it no longer contained a family. The warm, familial feelings were replaced with hatred. I hated my house. I hate the space the house contained. “It” no longer contained my family. It was a custodial space, a medical space. The rooms had been re-purposed, and transformed. Artifacts of this transformation were scattered in every corner of the space: packs of incontinence products, bathing devices, ointments, pills, health records, care notes, and cigarette butts left by the custodians of this space. The place smelled like strawberry Ensure, pine-sol, baby powder. To this day, I am transported back to this space when I encounter these same smells, and I panic and run away. I wanted to remove these things and smells from the space, but their presence was necessary. I was not necessary.
In the piece *The Ascension* (see Figure 3), I visually represented the process of coming and going from the space of the home through the vertical pathway; this pathway was a representation of the complex feelings of guilt, pain, rejection, anger, and grief I described through the preceding personal narrative. The smell of strawberry Ensure is visually represented through the contrasting shades of pink following the path of ascension. The subtle greys represent the cement roadways and walkways of the journeying to and from the space of the home. The cigarette butts left by the PSWs were depicted in yellow-staining on the grey pathways.

Colour and form were important elements of this piece. Together, they were intended to convey the emotional characteristics of the movement between spaces. The swirling pathway is complex, messy, and descending, just like the emotional falling described in my narrative. The strong use of black conveyed the emotional darkness, the stark use of white (contrasted against the black) depicts the complexity of this emotion: it is static, changing, and difficult to define.

The process of creating the piece - the act of painting the emotions of changing spaces of acceptance—was a transformative process. This echoes the ideas of Heidegger (2013), who argued that art opens up the world and de-conceals the truth of beings. He stated that, “this opening up…happens in the work… [but] Nothing can be discovered… so long as the pure self-subsistence of the work has not distinctly displayed itself,” (Heidegger, 2013, p. 38-39).

The act of painting and visually representing the emotions revealed new meanings about the nature of spaces of acceptance. Initially, I intended to represent my family home at the top of the canvas, with a road descending downs to the negative emotional state I experienced as I left the home. However, something happened through the process of painting, where the ‘emotional state’ and the exterior space of the home was visually reversed. The bottom blackness became a place (not an emotional state), in this case the family home, and the top portion became a city skyline (presumably my home in Hamilton).

The painting changed my perception of spaces of acceptance. Jones (2005) described a similar process whereby the act of writing can change our perception of our emotional experiences, and ultimately have a changing effect on the author. By rejecting a visual descent from my family home to an emotional state of being, and instead depicting an ascension from the family home (which held such negative emotions) to my Hamilton home, it was clear that somehow the meaning of ‘home’ had shifted. It was also clear that the emotional reaction to changing family home was not an end state, rather it was journey. Upon moving through this emotional journey, I opted to seek out a place associated with acceptance (in this case my Hamilton home).

*The Ascension* is a deliberate title chosen to describe the process of seeking out spaces of acceptance. It is also largely representative of the implied social-relational hierarchies described in the personal narrative, and visually illustrated
in the painting. These are ultimately hierarchies of personal meaning. The process of understanding how these meanings can change—over time—are described in the personal narrative, but are perhaps more apparent in the visual representation.

**Conclusions**

Daly (2007) states that “stories are the primary means by which we organize human experience and make it meaningful…individuals use story to make sense of their own lives,” (p. 109). However, how those stories are represented is not limited to written representations. In the preceding post-modern narrative analysis I presented a written narrative concurrently with a series of three visual illustrations of spaces of acceptance. The “post-modern approach to narrative celebrates the presence of many different stories,” (Daly, 2007, p. 118). The process of constructing post-modern written and visual narratives of spaces of acceptance revealed new understandings, and personal meanings.

Further, the process of representing and expressing through textual methods affirmed Ely (2007) and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre’s (2005) idea that writing can be both a vehicle of analysis and representation in research. Additionally, this research demonstrates that visual methods can serve a similar function, whereby the process of representing by painting can also serve an analytic purpose. In a similar way, the use of visual expression as a means of ‘setting up a world’ (Heidegger, 2013) concurrently allowed for an opening up of the spaces of (non)-acceptance within this research.

**References**

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