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Curricular Change at the Vortex

Jennifer McCloud, Gresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs, Rong Chang, Dyanis Popova, & Pamela Smart-Smith with Sandra Farmer, Deirdre Hand, Liz Klein, Xiaoyan Ma & Fairlight Meyer

Curricular Change: At the Center of the Vortex

Meeting, talking, thinking, processing.
Words in the air.
Words projected on wall.
Controversy/Agreement/Resolution.
Collaboration.
Therapy.
Catharsis.
Radical transformation through radical love (Freire).
Five women around the table.
No windows.
One door.
Projector humming.
Weighty air.

“Curriculum is change.
More than content.
More than materials. . . .
In this paper, we heuristically examine teacher education practices that challenge normative beliefs about race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and ability. Notions of diversity and multicultural education are infused throughout the program we examine, with resultant discussions that tend to create contentious and volatile interactions, both among students and between students and teacher. We reflect on those interactions that transformed a teacher’s practice and performance of teacher education in a graduate program to prepare teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL).

Following Norris’ (2009) work on playbuilding, we engaged in the process of “actors/researchers/teachers/[students who] generated data on chosen topics, told stories, and created and compiled scenes that were representative of their disparate and sometimes conflicting collective voices” (pp. 9-10). We worked in different groupings at different times to generate data over four years. The two principal authors Kris, a faculty member/advisor/program leader; and Jennifer, a recent doctoral graduate of the program. Kris and Jennifer collaborated with three additional authors, Pamela, Dyanis, and Rong, to generate the data that form the basis of the first two acts. The actors in act one represent composite pictures of students in a master’s cohort. All names are invented, with the exception of Kris. The data in act two were generated by the group of authors/actors/researchers who collectively recalled and told stories about the program. The interlude contains email correspondence from Claudia, a master’s student who graduated the following year. The third act highlights the experiences of a third cohort of master’s students, Sandra, Deirdre, Liz, and Fairlight, who wrote their contribution while taking the research class that Kris taught. Finally, Kris and Jennifer wrote the epilogue as a means of interpreting all three acts and the interlude.

The context for the play was a required multicultural/diversity research class that required 20 hours of service-learning at an afterschool program housed in a middle school designated as the Center for English Language Learners (ELLs) in a mid-size urban school district. The school division had invited Kris as the university partner for the 21st Century Grant that funded the afterschool program, whose intention was to provide additional academic support for the refugee and immigrant students attending the school. The grant also funded an adjunct faculty position to work as a liaison between the middle school and the university. First Pamela and then Rong held this position. Their responsibilities included scheduling and supervising the preservice teachers for the afterschool program and maintaining records for the required hours of service-learning. Kris’s role
in the grant had nothing to do with the day-to-day afterschool program operations—curriculum, program structure, behavior management, etc.

We use playbuilding (Norris, 2009) and collective autoethnography to reconstruct the experiences and events that provided the action and characters for the play. In a loosely postmodern fashion, each scene presents a certain time during the academic year, but rather than arranging the scenes in chronological order, we use them as links in the story of the whole process. Students and professor/advisor perform an improvised play that critically examines teaching practices and teaching mess-up. Throughout, each person’s recollections shape the story. Either Kris or Jennifer served as computer scribe for most of the work, and Liz transcribed dialogue for the section written by the last group of students. Our collective memories are faulty, and our reconstructed conversations are invented realities, but we agreed among ourselves at each step on the approximate veracity of the dialogue, or at least of its intent.

The dialogues that Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner recreate to examine experiences (e.g., Bochner & Ellis, 2013) inspired the dialogues in this play. We also attempt to represent the refractions of our own positionality (Davies, 2000; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), while we write as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). In the final epilogue, Kris and Jennifer engage in the crystallization process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to examine the scenes, acts, and interlude, interpreting the various words/perspectives of the multiple speakers. This process allows them to also view others’ perspectives as the emergent points of light from the prism.

Throughout the conceptualization and writing of the play, Kris engaged in a painful reflexive process that caused her to shift her gaze inward. She examined her teaching practices as a means of moving not only students, but also herself from one position, attitude, or action to a changed position, attitude, or action following deep discussion and reflection. By opening herself to really listen to the constructive comments her co-authors/students made in the course of the reflective discussion, teaching and learning could co-exist in a dialogical space (Freire, 1970, 1974/2008) that begged for change and transformation, with both actions constantly in a state of flux. Depending on the context of the moment, teacher and students moved within the conversation, lines of demarcation fuzzy and undefined in terms of position as teacher or learner at any given moment.

In a poststructural sense, the teacher-learner never arrives at a static or stable state of wholeness or completeness, but rather remains in a state of “restlessness, curiosity, and unfinishedness” (Freire, 1998, p. 121), opening the teacher-learner to critically reflect on developing an ethical and political pedagogy. Such practice is fluid, moving from one threshold of change and growth to another. To refer to Bronwyn Davies, “What the encounter with poststructuralism does is to enable the subject to see itself in all its shifting contradictory multiplicity and fragility.
[Davies, et al., 2001] and also to see the ongoing and constitutive force of the multiple discourses and practices through which it takes up its existence” (Davies et al., 2004, p. 363). Multiple autobiographies and multiple reflexivities gazed at multiple subjects and selves. The entire piece is comprised of multiple layers of reflection: students reflecting on students, instructor, and selves as future teacher educators; Kris reflecting on her role as instructor and learner; and Kris and Jennifer reflecting on everyone’s reflections, including their own.

**Act One**

**Scene One:** A frosty late afternoon in January. In the lab classroom in the School of Education, students spread out around a U-shaped configuration of tables. Animated conversation punctuates the disgruntled atmosphere, open mouths breaking the scowls on the students’ faces. Each week, numerous overlapping public conversations occurred at the same time, creating a sense of non-sequiturs.

**Kris:** For tonight, we’ll be looking at your field notes from your observations at the afterschool program so that you can . . . .

**Lucy (Interrupting):** I’m sorry, but someone is going to have to do something about discipline and organization at the afterschool program. I mean, Dixie the Diva never goes into the cafeteria. Neither do the other principals. And that site manager Edith was a total loser. So they got rid of her and replaced her with Barbie, who was Edith’s neighbor. Edith just wandered around looking lost. And now Barbie, mincing around on her too-large-four-inch heels and tugging at her 10-inch skirt and 8-inch top. Shoes too big, clothes too small. And the aides just standing around screaming at the kids. Kris, I know you’re busy and have a lot of things going on, but it really isn’t fair that you expect us to be there and you’re not.

**Kris:** Quite frankly, I don’t know that I would be welcome there every afternoon. When I go to the afterschool program, I go as a visitor. I don’t have any authority or clout or ability to change anything. My agreement with the grant is that the preservice teachers go to the afterschool program to help with whatever needs to be done. The school is responsible for the program itself—for curriculum, staffing, discipline, snacks. Period.

Now back to your field notes. . . .

**Brooke: (Interrupting).** Well, I have been at that middle school for the entire day because I got stuck student teaching there too, and when that 2:00 bell rings, I just wanna be outta there. I don’t wanna to stay to babysit a bunch of wild kids
with teachers and aides screaming at them. I plan to go back to my hometown to teach at my high school. I don’t plan to ever teach kids like these. Ever.

**Carolyn:** I know what you mean. I’m tired of hearing that those kids’ behavior has anything to do with poverty and language. They’re just unruly. Period. I’m tired of people in the textbooks we read telling me I need to feel guilty for being white and expecting me to overcompensate for my white guilt and their bad behavior by just accepting whatever they do.

**Caitlin:** But I love the kids. They’re so sweet, and they just love the activities we do. I don’t feel guilty or angry or anything like that. It’s just the disorganization that’s overwhelming.

**Kris:** Let’s talk about the observations you conducted . . .

* * *

The light fades and the curtain closes as preservice teachers continue to interrupt Kris and derail the class discussion with their grumbling comments about the afterschool program and their sense of injustice at having to participate in what they describe as chaos, and then having to attend a class that challenged their deeply held beliefs.

* * *

**Scene Two:** The same classroom, two weeks later. This scene highlights Kris’s passionate stance on issues of social justice and diversity and the preservice teachers’ growing resistance to the topics presented in the texts and to Kris’s teaching practices.

**Kris:** This week, we are discussing power and privilege in research and in teaching. Let’s take a look at how we enact power and privilege in our own classrooms.

**Brooke:** I don’t have any power or privilege. I’m just a poor graduate student.

**Caitlin:** How can we have power and privilege when we don’t even have any time to spend with our families? My husband is really unhappy because I’m never available. I mean I’m having to work really hard for my education. Nobody is giving it to me. I’m having to make lots of sacrifices and to work really hard.

**Kris:** Granted you do work hard, and granted this is an intense program that requires total dedication, but you are privileged by the very fact that not only were you able to attend a university, but you graduated with a bachelor’s degree and are in graduate school. How many of the students in the afterschool will have the privilege of attending university?
Carolyn: Anyone who wants to go to college can. It’s the American dream. If they don’t go to college, it’s because they didn’t want to and they didn’t try hard enough. If they work hard enough, they can go.

Kris: Okay, what is minimum wage?

Tonya: $7.15 an hour. I know ’cause that’s what I make.

Kris: So, if you work a 40-hour week, how much do you make per week? And per month?

Tonya: $286 a week. $1144 a month. But’s that not what you really make by the time they take out everything. And I don’t even make that, because I can only work 20 hours a week with student teaching.

Caitlin: How do you live on that?

Tonya: By the time I get out of here, I will owe my soul to the government to pay for all my student loans. Plus, my boyfriend works full time, and he helps with the bills.

Kris: But that’s the whole point. You CAN get loans (looking at Carolyn). We are talking about families where every penny they earn goes for food and shelter. No matter how hard they work, a lot of the kids in the afterschool can never get loans, whether due to the family’s economic situation or their English proficiency or their legal status.

(Stage direction): Eyes rolling around the room.

Brooke: We can’t do anything about their legal status. And we can’t do anything about who can get loans and who can’t. People always throw that in our faces like we can do something about it.

Kris: But as an ESL teacher, you are taking on the role not only of teacher, but also of counselor and advocate. You may be the only person in their lives who has the power and the knowledge to investigate ways to help them achieve their dreams.

Caitlin: So are you telling us we need to be activists?

Pause.
Kris: I guess I am. Isn’t that part of being an ESL teacher?

Brooke: I don’t have time for all that. I just want to teach ESL.

Carolyn: I just want to teach adults. I don’t want to have to advocate for anyone.

Kris: I am just curious. Why did you all decide to teach ESL? Certainly not for the money. This is an enigma to me. My dad was a coal miner, and I grew up in an environment where there wasn’t much money. I went to university on scholarships and loans in the 60’s when a lot of us were activists. I was out there protesting Viet Nam at the University of Illinois, getting hosed by the National Guard, supporting the Civil Rights movement and mourning the loss of Martin Luther King. I graduated in 1970 and went to work as the first ESL teacher for the Illinois Migrant Council in Aurora. I have been working as a teacher, interpreter, translator, advocate for heavens’ sake in the community I have loved and that has loved me since then. How can I NOT advocate? How can I NOT care? I just don’t get apathy.

Brooke: (Muttering under her breath). This isn’t the 60’s anymore . . .

**Act Two**

**Scene One:** A warm afternoon in early fall. Five women sprawled around the table in the warm seminar room in worn-out upholstered office chairs with unpredictable springs. Since the group meets over the lunch hour, lunches from home are spread all over the long table. The smells of coffee and spicy foods permeate the air. The scene opens as the women struggle with constructing a conference presentation focused on a partnership that was characterized by discord and resistance on the part of the preservice teachers. The reality of the previous year doesn’t align with the victory narrative about school/university partnerships of the original proposal. They all stare at the screen.

Dyanis: I don’t see how we can do this. When we sent that proposal in last fall, we were all totally convinced of the power of partnerships with schools in providing a multicultural social justice education (Banks & Banks, 2013). Then after the spring class, we were all frustrated by student resistance and anger, both to the topics and toward Kris. Now we are trying to say the pedagogy we believe in is a good thing, but reviewing last semester, I have to say, “Was it?”

Pamela: Yes, everything changed in the spring. New director at the afterschool program. More tension and emphasis on getting test scores up. More frustration with immigrant and refugee students whose language skills were not capable of
appropriate performance on those tests. More frustration with their sporadic attendance. More deficit notions all around.

Kris: Well, the school system’s approach to multiculturalism is totally different from ours. Ruby Payne’s work (2005) serves as the guide for understanding students who live in cultures of poverty. She doesn’t address the intersectionality of poverty with race, ethnicity, language, and other characteristics that shape cultural and life perspectives. There’s a clash when a program based on Freirean principles partners with a school based on Ruby Payne principles. With Freire, there is no deficit notion about students living in marginalized situations, whereas Ruby Payne continually presents students living in poverty through a deficit lens.

Pamela: The district even has a bus tour of where the students live in marginalized areas. I’ve never been on the tour, but from the descriptions, it sounds like poverty tourism so the haves can see how the have-nots live.

Dyanis: Well, it’s all about controlling unruly kids. Do they care anything about the kids as individuals? About the situations they have at home? Oh but wait! It all goes back to Ruby Payne’s words of wisdom—the cycle of poverty—all poor kids will . . . . Fill in the blank.

Collective sighs and grunts of disgust make their way around the table, accompanied by vigorous eye rolls.

Kris: But we have to recognize that it’s all so complex. At the middle school, all the teachers and staff are terrified about the state-mandated standardized tests. They know they need to bring their scores up, and they know that close to one-third of all students are learning English. Also, the students who are not English learners at the school are mostly living in poverty and classified as “at-risk.” They know they will be evaluated on their students’ test scores, not on how well they do multicultural education.

Jennifer: Excellent point. This goes back to the conundrum of university/community partnerships (Tilley-Lubbs & McCloud, 2012). We can’t go in and imply or overtly state that we do multicultural education best, and then dictate what the afterschool staff needs to do. At the same time, there are serious deficit notions being perpetuated and reinforced at the afterschool program. In many ways, what our preservice teachers experience and observe as the afterschool staff interacts with the kids at the afterschool undermines the multicultural education as social justice curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2013) of the master’s program.
Kris: Yes, and I think that is one of the reasons they became increasingly resistant to the curriculum in my classes. They are used to being in classes where the curriculum is determined by textbooks, and when we partner with the community, in essence, people become the text, whether we are talking about the staff or the students. In the standard classroom, our university students can control whether or not they do the readings and reflections, and how they participate in class discussions. They feel in control of what they do and the outcome of their actions. When they are thrown into a situation like an afterschool program, which by its nature incorporates a certain amount of chaos, they no longer feel in control. They see me as the authority figure, as the person responsible for what is going on in any aspect of the course, and they can't deal with the fact that whatever happens in a community, or school, setting is just as much beyond my control as it is beyond theirs.

Dyanis: I still remember how angry Lucy would get. She’d say, “Kris should be here dealing with all this.” If you had been there, you would have just been as frustrated as the rest of us—and you still couldn’t have changed anything. I think Lucy thought you could snap your fingers and make it all right.

Kris: Right, the way that grant was structured, I was virtually powerless in terms of the daily operations or curriculum. All Jefferson wanted from me were preservice teachers to work with them in the afterschool program and then for us to facilitate regular in-services about working with English language learners. They really didn’t want us to interfere with the daily operations of the afterschool program.

Rong: So how can we change things? It is so important for them to do their service-learning at Jefferson.

Kris: I still question whether partnering with the afterschool program was or is a good choice.

Jennifer: I have heard you talk about partnerships in the community and the community’s role in educating preservice teachers so often. It’s all about critical pedagogy. You cite Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg’s work like they are your best friends. It’s who you are and what you do.

Rong: It IS important for them to go to the middle school. They learn about students from everywhere. They learn to go beyond their own perspectives and to see how other people think. They learn so much about what multiculturalism really is.
Jennifer: Good point, Rong, but how could we change what we do so that we can develop relationships based on solidarity with both the students and the staff? How could we open a space for dialogue that allows for conscientization (Freire, 1970, 1974/2008) for all the stakeholders, including afterschool students and staff and university faculty, doctoral students, and preservice teachers. Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) forms the foundation for everything you do in your courses, Kris. The students read Freire. How can we talk about the disconnects between the readings and your expectations and what is happening in the afterschool?

Everyone sits in silence, lost in thought.

Rong: But what I want to know is what are we going to say for the presentation? How can we focus on the good things that happened with the program? The understanding the preservice teachers developed about multiculturalism, the enthusiasm they felt from time to time, the real-life experiences they had, changes in some of their attitudes towards diversity and social justice. Don’t forget there WAS a lot of good that came out of the year. . . .

***

Scene Two: A warm afternoon in early February. Still sweltering in the little seminar room, now due to the heating system and the airlessness of the windowless room. Five women spread out around the table. Lunches from home are still spread all over the long table, but now they heat cold weather foods in the microwave. The scene opens on a continuing, frustrating discussion of how to teach preservice teachers about hot button topics when they don’t want to have their previously held beliefs challenged.

Pamela: How can we write about that class in such a way that it doesn’t seem like we are just bashing the preservice teachers?

Jennifer: I know what you mean. Sometimes it feels as if we are just on a rant about how awful they were, and I know that is not what we aimed to do.

Kris: For example, when I reread our conversation about power and privilege, or the minimum wage, or the role of the ESL teacher as advocate, I still become angry with their indifference and apathy. Whether I read it out loud or to myself, I literally feel the hairs on my arms stick up and my heart starts thudding. I don’t know what my blood pressure does, but it probably goes up.
**Dyanis:** Kris, have you ever thought about presenting things in a different way? I mean, when you get all excited and go into activist mode, I love it. I agree with everything you say. But could it maybe be . . . that . . . people who don’t agree with your activist stance get turned off and defensive? I mean . . . it’s just a thought.

**Pamela:** I think the more passionate you became, the more defensive it made the students.

**Jennifer:** I think that when you referred to your time in the 60’s, it almost created an “us-them” situation. Maybe they felt judged and criticized, even though that is not what you had in mind.

**Kris:** So are you saying I shouldn’t share personal stories?

**Rong:** But I love your personal stories. They’re so interesting, and they always provide examples of what we’re talking about.

**Jennifer:** Maybe it’s the way you frame them.

**Kris:** So is the question about how to establish community and respect in a class that deals with tough topics?

**Jennifer:** Right. Some of these situations were due to the attitudes and beliefs the students brought to the class, but they were still fueled by teaching practices.

*Silence.* . . .

**Jennifer:** Kris, are you okay?

*Kris nods.*

*Silence.* . . .

**Kris:** See you all next Tuesday.

*Kris exits the room. Her co-authors remain.*  *Silence.* . . .

* * *
**Scene Three:** Kris's office, two days later. Kris sits preparing for class in her gold and terracotta comfort space, surrounded by photos of her family and the clutter of books and papers that always seem to be present. Jennifer and Pamela poke their heads in the door.

**Kris:** Come on in. I need a break from the boredom of answering emails!

**Jennifer:** We just wanted to check to make sure you're okay. You just looked a little bothered after our conversation the other day. We were afraid we hurt your feelings.

**Pamela:** We hope we didn’t say too much.

**Kris:** No, you didn’t say too much at all. You said what I needed to hear--it was just hard to hear. I think that down deep I knew what you told me, but it’s like Dyanis implied. I get into activist mode, and once I am on a roll, my brain turns off and I just keep talking. It’s as if activist Kris takes over my head and my mouth, and sensible Kris has no control.

**Pamela:** What you tell the preservice teachers is all true, and they may need to hear it in some way, but some of them are so resistant to hearing what you are saying that they turn off and get angry.

**Kris:** Your comments helped me to think about the fine balance between incorporating the personal while at the same time keeping the theory as the guiding framework for class discussions, especially with topics like race, class, gender, and so on. The actual question moves beyond examining the bad behavior of a group of students to the examination of what were the complex factors that created the class dynamics in the first place. I guess it’s time to do some reflecting and make some changes...

I guess it’s time to get to class. Just let me make these copies and I will be right there.

**Interlude I**

The interlude is comprised of an email letter from Claudia, a preservice teacher during the second year Kris partnered with the afterschool program. At the end of the year, Kris requested that the preservice teachers send her suggestions for the upcoming year. The previous year she had made changes in her teaching practices based on feedback from the other authors/students, but she realized further change was necessary.
The email read:

For me, the biggest strength of the program is its commitment to social justice. I believe this focus is especially important for teachers working with English language learners, immigrants, refugees, low-income students, urban students, and/or marginalized students. All student teachers working in [Riverview] City Schools (particularly those teaching ELL) need to have a strong background in multicultural education. Before I began taking the required courses for my program, I did not know about multicultural education, understand the overwhelming importance of culture in students’ lives, or know how to incorporate different viewpoints into my curriculum. I believe—no, I know—I am a better teacher for being exposed to multiculturalism in multiple courses in the program. I also appreciate that the entire program emphasized multiculturalism—it wasn’t a throw-away idea, taught by one teacher in one class. It was a program-wide standard, which, coincidentally, is something that multiculturalism emphasizes. I think most of the classmates in my cohort became teachers because we wanted to help students, and I believe the majority of us loved the social justice lens through which the program was taught. . . .

I understand that the program has an obligation to work with [the middle school], but once the obligation ends, I think it would be fair to allow students the opportunity to select their own service-learning experience. I think this would help students feel more invested in the experience and provide a more Freirean opportunity for students to create their own learning.

**Interlude II**

**Kris:** When I first read this letter from Claudia, I thought, “Aha, here is the victory narrative.” But as I thought about it, I realized that she had oversimplified Freire. For Claudia, Freire represented unstructured freedom, the freedom for students to do as they chose.

**Jennifer:** Right. If students were allowed to choose their own service-learning experiences without guidance, many would choose to do their hours in international student centers where they’d work with adult university students to teach them English. Although that can be a valuable experience, it doesn’t align with the intent of the research class, which focuses on the intersectionalities of class, gender, race, and ethnicity. When working in the community with refugee and immigrant students, preservice teachers experience through their students how power and privilege affect their students’ lives.
Pamela: I think it’s more about intentionality. As the instructor, you plan experiences that support the intent of the class, in this class, preparing teachers to teach English language learners in public schools.

Kris: When Freire talked about conscientization, he referred to working with people living in marginalized situations, helping them to understand the oppressive circumstances in their lives that were preventing their being able to find equity in society, and subsequently to find ways to overcome that oppression.

Jennifer: The students’ conscientization has to do with their growing awareness of their power and privilege in society as compared to the students with whom they work.

Pamela: Exactly. That’s why the service-learning has to be intentional. Do students always have the knowledge and experience to make those choices?

Rong: I think some of the students do have the knowledge and the experience to make good choices. But at the same time, I think it is really important for them to work at the afterschool program.

**Act Three**

**Scene One:** Two years later in the same hot room—new chairs, but just as uncomfortable. Still no windows, still dingy greenish-yellowish ivory walls, still stale smelling, still next to the unisex smelly bathroom. But with new faces, new attitudes, new beginnings in their second semester in the program. Kris had asked the current group of preservice teachers to read and provide feedback about acts one and two, and the interlude.

Deirdre: After reading the play, I see us in those students, as much as I wish I didn’t.

Liz: We do complain a lot about the middle school.

Deirdre: We do still have a lot of issues with the program.

Xiaoyan: Dr. Tilley-Lubbs and Rong warned us about the chaos before we ever went to the afterschool program. Maybe that’s why we’ve been able to deal a bit better with the situation.
Kris: Could it be that when we described the program as chaotic, we caused you to inadvertently do the same thing the previous students did—to regard the afterschool program and its staff as the Other, all one entity, all people who would approach teaching and learning in the same way? And to take that thought to a deeper level, did we perpetuate that perception when we talked about the afterschool program and told you what to expect? Was what we regarded as “informing” more likely “prejudicing?”

Fairlight: Perhaps so, but I do think that when we did the in-service with the staff, it broke down a lot of those barriers. That is the first time I felt like we regarded each other as people working together for a common goal.

Kris: I agree, Fairlight. Each year, the grant stipulated that as our part of the partnership, we should conduct three or four in-services, and Liz, the Director of the afterschool program, had never before requested that we facilitate an in-service to acquaint the afterschool staff with diverse cultural perspectives, as well as with effective teaching strategies for working with English language learners.

Deirdre: We felt different after the in-service. We felt like the staff treated us differently, and they were more aware of cultural considerations and strategies for working with English language learners.

Fairlight: I think it was an introduction of us to all the staff, too.

Xiaoyan: Then they knew who we were.

Deirdre: Before that I don’t know if that many of them knew that we were preparing to be ESL teachers. It was interesting to learn the background of teachers and it helped us realize that they did really want to help the kids. We had a better idea of where the teachers were coming from.

Liz: Yes, it helped us understand that they are doing the best they can.

Fairlight: But I don’t think it was just the in-service that changed things. We also built relationships with the students. I get excited when a student runs up to me and says, “I got an A.”

Liz: I liked getting to know siblings and cousins that I was teaching in the other schools. We got to know the community through conversation.

Jennifer: So there is still some frustration, and some is the same as from two years ago—the group from the first act of this play. There is still yelling at the afterschool program. People still don’t know their roles. What is different? What is
allowing you to analyze and deconstruct to understand rather than just to criticize and get angry?

**Deirdre:** Were we more receptive to the idea of multicultural education because of all the texts we read last semester? I think we really enjoyed talking about it, and I don’t get the impression that class really did.

**Fairlight:** Did we just come in with different perspectives and experiences than they did, or has the master’s program changed significantly between the time that group of students was in it and now?

**Kris:** Well, for one thing, we could never have had this conversation with that first group. We weren’t able to engage in dialogue. I know that one thing I have done is try and develop a sense of collegiality and community with all of you, and I never did that with the other group.

**Deirdre:** We also did a lot of reflecting on how to be critically conscious of our own backgrounds and cultural identities.

**Liz:** The majority of OUR group is white, middle class, and female and the students with whom we work are from very different backgrounds. Who knows what their lives were like then or even now? Would it be useful for us to work with students and their families in their homes instead of just working with them in the afterschool program?

**Sandra:** It would be a great opportunity to learn more about the students and their lives outside of school.

**Deirdre:** We could also make deeper and more personal connections with refugee and immigrant communities. . . .

*Conversation continues as students deconstruct their experiences and enthusiastically share other partnership ideas.*

**Epilogue: Three years later**

**Kris:** So here we are. This is how our original victory narrative morphed into a tale of defeat and then into a critical examination about critical pedagogy and the power of conscientization experiences that cause us to examine the way we teach.

**Jennifer:** In this play, you have gone through the stages of feeling anger at the students’ resentment toward hearing about multicultural and social justice issues to a space of deep reflection about your practice.
Kris: Throughout, my students led me to re-examine what I was doing and saying. When you all started telling me truths I didn’t want to hear, I can still remember falling apart inside and feeling like I just wanted to retire. That was another hitting the bottom of the ocean moment for me (Tilley-Lubbs, 2009).

Jennifer: Yes, I can also remember when Pamela, Dyanis, and I told you that your passionate activist stance was turning students off. After you had left, we all talked about what we had done and we wondered whether we should have said what we did. I looked at your face and I knew that you were hurt. That certainly wasn’t our intent. But we did know that you needed to hear what we had to say, and we also suspected that at some level, you wanted to hear it.

Kris: When your trusted group of doctoral students has the courage to tell you the truth, there is no recourse except to pay attention and either collapse and quit or make the necessary changes to be the teacher you want to be, the teacher they need for you to be. For me, when you all confronted me with the conversation about how I was creating alienation, I was ready to quit/retire/disappear right at that moment. It was definitely a pivotal point for me. Luckily, though, I was able to use that moment to reflect and examine, and eventually I moved from that stage of naïve consciousness where I thought I had it figured out about how to “teach/do diversity” to a stage of critical examination that resulted in critical consciousness regarding my own performance of teaching diversity (Freire, 1974/2008). At that point, I changed from imposing my opinions on the students to providing a dialogical space that would allow them to construct their own performances of diversity and multicultural education. I had to learn not to allow my passion about those issues to create a “me against them” situation.

Jennifer: Having that conversation was also about shifting our positions. And that was incredibly hard to do. At that moment, when we spoke up, we realized we had shifted from being your doctoral students who were criticizing their advisor to being your co-authors who were working with you to deconstruct a class that wasn’t working. I think that’s the point when the focus of the play changed from complaining about the students’ resistance to analyzing your teaching practices as a critical pedagogue.

Kris: That was such a courageous thing for you all to do. You placed an immense amount of trust in me—that I would accept what you said and not become totally punitive in my treatment of you as doctoral students. Your words and honesty truly began my journey toward painful examination and transformation of my teaching practices.
Jennifer: That was also part of my own journey in learning to be a teacher educator. Talking about shifting position, whenever we were giving you feedback, I was thinking about how I would “teach/do diversity” in my own classroom as a teacher educator. In this past year, as an assistant professor, this conversation and the themes of this play have replayed repeatedly in my head. This all connects to conscientization—to that self-examination that leads to change and transformation.

Kris: And the process of examination and transformation never ends.

References

Abstract

‘Aboriginal Health and Healing’ was an imaginative ethnographic research project that combined visual anthropology, participatory-action research, and decolonizing principles (Smith 1999) to explore the challenges of engaging economically and politically marginalized HIV positive individuals into care and treatment. The purpose of the paper is twofold. First, we consider some of the on-going political and methodological challenges in community-based research between impoverished, marginalized community members and academic researchers. As a case study, we focus here on our team’s travel to and participation at a national AIDS conference – at once, our biggest challenge and best achievement – where we were forced to negotiate travel arrangements, drug addictions, safety, health issues, and professional aspirations. Particular focus is given to addiction and drug use, and the impact of conventional narratives of these behaviours within our own work. Second, we draw on theoretical contributions in the field of critical disability studies to reimagine how we might approach studies with inner city residents who are both living with addictions and living with HIV/AIDS as a means to developing research practices that are democratic.
Key Words
Community based research, urban studies, addictions, critical disability studies, Vancouver, Canada

Introduction

In 2009 our research team attended a national health conference to give two presentations on our findings from a community based ethnographic project but this proved to be more demanding than any of us had imagined. Committed to involving our community based research assistants in all aspects of the research process, it was at once our biggest challenge and best achievement – where we were forced to balance travel arrangements, addictions, illnesses, and our private lives with professional aspirations and obligations at an academic conference. This paper is a critical reflection of our team’s experience carrying out an imaginative ethnography project within an urban community in Vancouver, Canada, highlighting the ways in which assumptions and mistakes made their way into our research practice (Castaneda 2005). Although there are risks of ‘airing our dirty laundry’ here, our intention is to provoke discussions about the tensions that emerge in ethnographic methodologies and research collaborations where there are intense inequities in education, power, privilege, and economics. It is with five years removed that we have been rereading field notes and emails from the team, listening to audios of team discussions, and reading the evaluations of our project.1 The purpose of this paper is to think about community based ethnographic practice as a moral and political intervention, and in doing so contributes to larger scholarly debates about the politics of ethnographic intervention and research more generally.

Many feminists and indigenous scholars have written about the inherent tensions of community based and participatory action projects, especially those involving ethnographers, but rarely do researchers highlight the messiness and the inherent everyday moral dilemmas in CBR practice.2 This paper aims to contribute to this literature by admitting to our failures, highlighting the disparities between what we aimed to do and what actually happened, and by provoking discussions on the politics of intervention through ethnography. In particular, we draw attention to the engagement of community based research assistants, or “peer” researchers as they are often referred to, and the challenges and rewards of

1 Our team as a whole thought this paper needed to be written and we all contributed to different parts of it in different ways while it was being developed but Marian and Denielle were responsible for writing the paper.

2 For instance, see Huismans 2008; Waldern 2006; Gone 2006; Evans et al 2009; Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Starn 2011; van der Riet 2008; Weems 2006.
engaging marginalized community members in research. We consider the politics and ethics of collaboration with research assistants in ethnographic community based research, and critically reflect on the ways in which addiction narratives insidiously shaped our research practice with the urban poor.

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside

Vancouver’s inner-city community, known as the Downtown Eastside (DTES), is a lively neighborhood with a history of community activism, poverty, and political and economic marginalization. Geographically it lies between Chinatown, Gastown, Strathcona, and the Grandview-Woodlands area. The neighborhood faces intense pressure from gentrification projects that are a part of the City of Vancouver’s plan for “urban renewal.” The media often describe it as a dangerous space, highlighting the unemployment, violence, drugs, disease, sexual transactions, and “disorder” and thus it has become well known for its public illicit drug markets, co-epidemics of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C infection, and abject poverty. It has historically been home to displaced Aboriginal peoples, working-class men, the unemployed, and impoverished new immigrants who are too poor to relocate, but over the past decade upscale lofts, renovated historic houses, and new condominium developments have attracted hipsters, students, artists, academics, among others. Although it is often painted as a dangerous, unregulated space, it is the most regulated and policed zone of the city.

Due to the highly politicized and mediatized nature of drug use and inner city life, the DTES is a popular place to undertake research; however researchers often only address the ‘sensational’, focusing on drugs and sex work, rather than everyday health issues and needs (for instance, such as the long term effects of poverty on health and wellbeing). Additionally, researchers in this community often find it easier to do research on disenfranchised people rather than with them. While some of this research is well intentioned, researchers often come into the community with preconceived ideas about what the community’s and residents’ needs are without grounding these understandings in the perspectives and desires of the

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3 For discussions of “peer researchers,” see Flicker et al 2008; Fry 2010; Bean and Silva 2010; Molyneux, Kamuya and Marsh 2010. Most projects in Vancouver refer to this as the “peer model” but we resisted referring to our research assistants as “peers” because we felt the distinction between community and university-based research assistants contributed to the inequities in research practice that we were trying to address. At the end of our project, our CBRAs were as well trained as graduate students in qualitative methodologies. “Peers” somehow seemed to diminish this. We think it’s important to note that this was not simply a case of involving community members who have shared experiences, or speak the same language, or are experiential; these local residents are expert research subjects, and offered sharp critical analyses of health and medicine in the inner city context. As Aboriginal, drug-using inner city residents, our community based research assistants were economically, politically and educationally marginalized. They were acutely aware of their marginalization and they were forced to negotiate this tension daily at work.

4 See, for instance, Janet Steffenhagen, “Our Four Blocks of Hell,” Vancouver Sun, 8 December 2006.
people who live there. University based researchers list community-based organizations (CBOs) as partners, collaborators or co-investigators but once funded, many CBOs are then forgotten, not involved in the research process, allocation of resources or dissemination of findings. These practices exacerbate community frustration with researchers in the DTES. This irritation is shaped in part by the density of research in the neighbourhood and among Aboriginal peoples nationally (resulting in “research fatigue”) but also by the positivist framework often adopted by health researchers. The positivist paradigm, usually characterized by quantitative methods, objectivist, researcher-driven, and searching for “true” or “real” facts, tends not to be conducive to meaningful community involvement, and thus leaves communities feeling exploited as “guinea pigs” or as commodities in the knowledge economy (Smith 2005). Although many Aboriginal communities in Canada, and elsewhere, successfully negotiate indigenous community needs with the scientific paradigm and university research priorities, it has been more difficult in the Downtown Eastside, an urban Aboriginal community characterized by diverse Aboriginal peoples (status, non-status, Metis, rural, urban, etc.) without a shared political body (such as a band council) (Browne, McDonald and Elliott 2009; Couzos et al 2005). As a team we were committed to exploring new research approaches that would not replicate the historical dominant scientific paradigm of knowing, although, due to the multidisciplinary composition of our team, what this meant in practice was not always agreed upon.5

The Project

Aboriginal Health and Healing (AHAH) was an ‘imaginative’ ethnographic research project that combined visual anthropology, participatory-action research, and decolonizing principles to explore the challenges of engaging Aboriginal HIV positive individuals into care and treatment in Vancouver’s inner city (Crapazano 2003; Castaneda 2006; AHAH 2007; Culhane 2011; Smith 1999).6 Funding for the 12-month project was obtained from the British Columbia Medical Services Foundation and was supplemented by in-kind donations from Vancouver Native Health Society (VNHS) and pharmaceutical industry ‘community grants’.

5 The tensions, and possibilities, between health sciences, particularly epidemiology, and anthropology have been well documented. For instance, see: Inhorn (1995); Inhorn and Whittle (2001); Bourgois (2002); Trostle and Sommerfield (1996).

6 Our project is guided by the research principles set out by the Centre for Imaginative Ethnography. See www.imaginativeethnography.org. Our project was shaped by creating diverse partnerships across the community and campus and included: Simon Fraser University, The University of British Columbia, The British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Vancouver Native Health Society and The Centre for Native Policy and Research. We feel that part of the strength of this project stemmed from its multi-disciplinary nature bridging nursing, sociology, epidemiology and anthropology. The project began in September 2006.
AHAH had two main goals: First, to engage four Aboriginal community members in research training, practice, analysis and dissemination strategies, and second, to create culturally-appropriate and methodologically sound research practices that contribute to community health, awareness and wellness. Using a participatory action research methodology, we aimed to create a framework for research and research training that followed a decolonizing methodology (Denzin 2001; Smith 1999). Influenced by the work of Linda Tuhuiwai Smith, this framework highlights forces of oppression that are linked to disparities in health, as well it emphasizes a partnership model that focuses on social transformation, mutual engagement and activism rather than on merely collecting information or data (Smith 1999). We are not reporting the findings from our research here; rather we are focusing on the ethical and methodological issues that emerged from our project.

In our attempt to define a research framework that was decolonizing and democratic, we faced many challenges. There are, of course, inherent power differentials between university-based researchers and community collaborators. Part of the philosophy of our project was to shift these power inequities by building capacity among the community partners and to critically reflect on our daily research practice as the project progressed. In the words of Linda Tuhuiwai Smith and Maui Hudson, we attempted to create a “negotiated space” (conceptually) “where indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge are respected as equally important and equally complete/incomplete knowledge systems” (Hudson et al 2012, 15). We did this, in part, through an internal-self evaluation – asking ourselves at regular intervals how we had done at the previous task, and by documenting this in interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was more often than not the community-based researchers who were able to reflect most critically on how things had been done, taking the university-based researchers to task.

The Methodological Approach

Our team was multidisciplinary and definitely eclectic. It included a university-based medical epidemiologist, Mark, whose research record and position (his CV ‘social capital’) helped us to obtain the grant. He was co-principle investigator however his research interests, focused in the DTES, did not include ethnography, participatory action research, or colonialism and medicine. The other co-principle investigator, Doreen, was the HIV program coordinator at VNHS. She is a nurse by training and at the time was director of one of the largest HIV/AIDS care pro-

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7 Other examples of similar approaches include, Smith 2005; Hudson et al 2012; Anderson 2008; Barnes 2000; Evans et al 2009; Patterson, Jackson and Edwards 2006.

8 Well documented by the following papers: Ibáñez-Carrasco and Riaño-Alcalá 2009; Flicker 2008; Smylie and Kaplan-Myrth 2004; Waldern 2006; van der Riet 2008.
grams in the country.\textsuperscript{9} Since AHAH, she has become involved in many research projects and has become a savvy research advocate for her agency but at the time she had little experience as a collaborator or investigator on a project. Denielle was the primary lead.\textsuperscript{10} The project emerged from her PhD work and conversations with Doreen, about the unintended consequences of medical research in the community and the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples from mainstream health services. We then hired a research coordinator, Marian, to develop and manage the project. She was a PhD student studying the sociology of medicine, and had a wealth of experience working with community-based research projects and urban health.\textsuperscript{11} She was responsible, in collaboration with Doreen, to hire four research assistants. Marian would manage the project for the entire year of funding.

Our project aimed to create social change through building capacity in two ways. First, we wanted to build capacity within an organization that was regularly flooded with requests from researchers. Although habitually a site of research, before the AHAH project Vancouver Native Health Society had never been invited to participate as co-investigators or co-PIs. They had little experience with drafting and submitting academic abstracts, writing research proposals, or applying for IRB approvals. They were used to being a place where researchers did work, rather than being involved in the process. They were not asked about their research priorities, what would work best with their participants, nor were they invited to analyse data collected about their participants, programs, or their staff. Second, we wanted to build capacity with those who lived in the community and so we committed to hiring four research assistants who either lived in the inner city or accessed services down there. Local residents offer precise and poignant critical commentaries on research practice and health service delivery and we expected they would inform our own research practices and theorizations about power relations in urban poor settings while receiving training in ethnographic methods.

We hired Archie, Rod, Lyanna, and Corrina as community-based research assistants. Each of these individuals has a unique personal historical relationship with the DTES community. All are Aboriginal and all rely on provincially funded income assistance as their main source of income. At various points in their lives they have used drugs and alcohol and lived in unstable housing or on the street. They also share experiences common to the wider population – illnesses, death of friends and family members, relationship troubles, and experiences of violence. They had all been involved in research prior to being hired by our team but usu-

\textsuperscript{9} She has since retired from this position.

\textsuperscript{10} But as a PhD student, she was prevented from applying for funding as one of the co-PIs so she was listed as a co-investigator.

\textsuperscript{11} This added to the complex power relations in our team. Both Marian and Denielle were PhD students but Marian was hired by and responsible to Denielle, even though they were equal in skills, age, and education.
ally as ‘research subjects’, answering questionnaires, surveys, or being mapped. Rod had worked briefly as a CBRA with an epidemiology project, where he was expected to give surveys to ‘peers,’ but received no training on research methods, analysis, and was certainly not involved in writing, team meetings, or dissemination of the findings.

We mutually agreed to meet twice a week for four hours at a time and began brainstorming the framework for learning about various types of research design and implementation. To facilitate thinking about the health of Aboriginal peoples with HIV and Hepatitis C in the DTES, we chose to adapt an approach to research that included a wide array of interactive training modules. The format of these training modules encouraged the CBRA to think about the content, the ethics, and form of qualitative research. Together we established that the best training methods for the group was one that had diversity – most modules were a combination of somewhat formal ‘class’ time with the research coordinator, mixed with team building exercises, journaling and field trips. After much debate about honorariums versus wages, and details of how and when ‘payday’ should occur, we decided on an hourly wage to be paid at the end of every session, dependent on attendance. Although there were tensions about the subtleties between being present and being able to meaningfully contribute, by and large this system worked well for us.

Unlike many other projects in the DTES, our goal was to spend a significant amount of time training the research assistants in the principles and application of innovative, qualitative research. We wanted everyone involved on the project to fully participate in designing and undertaking this research. Along with teaching critical research skills, the intent was to train the research assistants to have the capacity to undertake future research projects and the ability to provide basic training to other community members. We wanted them to leave the project with transferable employment skills given that they were under-employed in a community where research was a growing industry. While it is common for research projects in the DTES to hire community participants to assist them in research, rarely are CBRA provided with the intense support required for them to be successful as researchers. Residents in the DTES face serious barriers finding safe and affordable housing and frequently live in abject poverty as a result of a set of complex factors, including a punitive welfare system (Robertson and Culhane 2005). In this context, a research team must do more than simply provide training in methods to research assistants; we must be flexible, responsive, and innovative in our daily research training and practice. This meant at various times providing

12 Marian was paid a bimonthly salary through VNHS and Denielle received no financial remuneration.
13 For instance, we had to discuss what it meant to come to meetings high, or nodding out from methadone, and unable to engage in the material. These were always team discussions and decisions.
food, helping with housing issues, assisting with doctors’ appointments, arranging drug and alcohol treatment or support, and offering general emotional support. It was impossible for the CBRAs to be focused at work if they were worrying about where they were going to sleep that night.

The CBRAs were trained in qualitative research methods, ethnography, storytelling, and photography. We went on multiple field trips including to the Vancouver Art Gallery, Museum of Anthropology, City Archives, an ethnographic film screening, a photographic exhibit at City Hall with the former mayor, participated in seminars on HIV care and prevention, and attended an assortment of guest seminars by academic and community members. A key aspect of this project was for the CBRAs to record their experiences during the program, informed by the anthropological tradition of writing fieldnotes (Emerson 1995). Many of the themes discussed here emerged from these notes; journaling gave the research assistants a way to reflect on both mundane daily activities as well as overarching questions about the research project. Fieldnotes for all team members provided us with a built-in mechanism for self-evaluation and were part of the ‘data’ that we analysed as a means to gauge the effectiveness and responsiveness of our research practices. For one of the research assistants, these exercises rekindled his love of writing and he enrolled in a creative writing class.

Addictions

Although we rarely spoke about addictions in formal conversational contexts, it dominated the project in multiple forms. Drugs and alcohol were in our fieldnotes, in their fieldnotes, in their requests for support, and impacted our methodologies and everyday research practice. To illustrate, we share some fieldnote excerpts from Marian:

January 4

_They all showed up, sober and on time!_

February 14

_Everybody is here! Lyanna is looking good, Corrina too is looking rested, she is still talking about wanting to get into daytox. She said that she ran into Rod on the weekend, and he “gave her shit for not showing up for work”._

March 15

_Lyanna left at lunch and never came back – so frustrating, especially since she had just been talking about how she’s starting to feel healthier, and [therefore] that it’s getting harder to stay clean. She called me from a bar around 2:45 asking me if she could get the money that she “earned” in the morning, and I said no._
We knew from experience with other research projects that addictions would be a challenge for our project. From the onset there was a clear tension emerging from the different ways that different actors thought about addictions and how our research project would address it. Marian and Denielle’s understanding of addictions was shaped by historical and social analyses that focused on the relationships between regulation, criminalization, racial minorities and poverty (Boyd 2001; Mawani 2000). In our community work, it was simply a part of everyday life, and our project had to work creatively to ensure that the ups and downs of addictions were worked into the processes of the research. That meant not having a “three strikes and you’re out” policy regarding absences and tardiness. From the onset we agreed that if the research assistants stopped showing up for work, it meant we had to question our own practices rather than blaming them or their addictions. This meant that Marian was under intense pressure to develop innovative strategies to keep the CBRAs involved even when they were sick, depressed, or simply did not feel like going to work.

In this framing, alcoholism and drug addiction are understood as culturally and historically constructed states of being, and we were skeptical of the disease framing of addictions (Waldram 2004). Following thought in Critical Disability Studies, we tried to imagine addictions like a disability – not something we were trying to “fix”, but as an embodied state, defined in part by social exclusion and marginalization, which required consideration and concession during the research training and practice (Overboe 1999, 2007; Davis 1997). Yet in spite of this understanding, in the everyday course of our research project the nuances of such theoretical analyses disappeared and we retreated too often to seeing addiction as a ‘problem’ needing to be addressed. As further illustration, we turn to the details of our trip to a national AIDS conference in Toronto.

**Toronto**

After the majority of training and research had been completed, we began to present our findings at a variety of local conferences. The entire team was invigorated both by the response of audience members, and the pleasure evidenced by the CBRAs in sharing their expertise. Near the end of our project we submitted abstracts for review to a national conference on HIV/AIDS, one that historically favoured clinical and epidemiological research. We were pleasantly surprised when both of our abstracts, which were ethnographic and imaginative in methodology, were accepted for oral presentations. Through some creative strategies, we were

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14 We were aware that in other projects in the inner city, investigators would stipulate that if the participants missed more than three meetings, or commitments, then they were no longer in the project.

15 We owe thanks to Dara Culhane for linking the literature in disability studies to our work in the Downtown Eastside.
able to find funds to allow travel for all eight of our team members. The trip required endless preparation for all of us, including securing proper identification for air travel, organizing medications, writing the conference papers, and the hundreds of other details that accompany a journey such as this. For three of the four CBRAs, this would be their first trip on an airplane.

Marian’s field notes provide some context to the week prior to the Toronto conference:

April 2
*Today was a hard day. Archie and [his girlfriend] had a fight on Saturday, right before going shopping for conference clothes, and he just left without saying anything to me.*"16 Rod was the only other person who showed, so we postponed the trip. Lyanna is not doing well either, she’s still losing weight, has thrush, and has stomach problems, and is feeling scared. Corrina, well that’s a real problem. She didn’t come today, though she did call me a couple of times over the weekend. She got arrested over the weekend, and was crying when I talked with her on Saturday. Sunday she sounded a bit better, but she said that she’s having a hard time keeping herself together and that she’s making some bad choices.

April 5
*Everybody was in today, though Lyanna didn’t look well and was remarking that she’s having lots of physical problems again. Corrina seemed to be nodding off, had a super hard time focusing on anything and went home after an hour and a half. Denielle and Doreen came down, we talked about expectations of the trip (mostly about drug use and what we want to do), as well as I ran over the timeline. … Archie and I went shopping; he was really happy with the shoes and 3 shirts that he got. [A staff member] made lunch (personal Buffalo meatloaf) and we all had a relaxed lunch, though I did some running around with last minute details, getting I.D.’s and meds ready. I’m worried that neither Lyanna nor Corrina are going to make it to the conference.*

April 9
*Today was a wonderful day. Everybody was there and in good spirits; both Lyanna and Corrina looked really healthy, and we are all getting excited about the conference. I brought in Easter baskets for each of them, as well as individual conference binders with all the information they need in it. I showed them the new digital camera and Archie agreed to read the manual and give us tutorials so we’ll all know how to use it…. When we got back we went over the travel details one last time, and then went

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16 Aware that the CBRAs might not have clothing they felt they could wear at a conference, we offered all of them funds to buy clothes. As with all decisions, they were offered the option and it was up to them to decide. We tried to frame these options in a way that did not sound like we were suggesting they did not have proper clothes but sometimes we seemed to have failed and our offers were interpreted as judgments.
for lunch we looked at pictures of Toronto, a Toronto map and talked about some of the things that we want to do there. They’re definitely getting excited, though Corrina says she’s getting butterflies - I take that as a good sign, because it shows that she’s thinking about it, and thinking that she’ll be part of it. Archie really liked his new Moleskine journal and says he’s not going to open it to use it until the day they leave.

In our planning we discovered that the first day of the conference fell immediately after the monthly payday for those receiving income assistance, or ‘welfare day’. By the time cheque day arrives, many residents who use drugs are acutely ‘dope-sick,’ with little or no money for food. Welfare day becomes a celebration – food, drugs, and paying debts to those owed. For those who use drugs and alcohol daily, and whose use is often constrained by their lack of funds, the once monthly cheque that arrives sometimes results in a ‘bender’ or a party lasting a few days. In the DTES, many health care providers derogatively refer to it as “Mardi Gras.” With this knowledge well in advance, we all spoke honestly and openly about the dilemma this posed for our team. Our mutual concern was that Archie, Rod, Corrina and Lyanna would disappear for a few days, miss their flights, their presentations, and the opportunity to travel to Toronto. We were also concerned about drug use in Toronto not only due to addiction but also as a result from the stress of traveling, expectations we had of them, and their own nerves about presenting at a formal academic conference. The CBRAs had worked hard to prepare for the trip – on their presentations, on organizing things like identification, methadone prescriptions to carry, and other medicines. They were aware of the temptations that resulted from the stress of expectations and from cheque day. We considered many options – leaving early for the conference, giving up ATM bankcards to others, staying together to offer support. In the end, the team decided that Archie and Rod would stay together at one of their places, and Doreen, Corrina and Lyanna would stay together at a local airport hotel, the night before to offer each other support.

The evening before, and the flight itself, went relatively smoothly. Marian met Doreen and the CBRAs at the airport and everyone agreed that there would be free time before we all gathered to register the next morning. The hotel was located across the street from a large liquor store, and after checking out their rooms, the CBRAs went to “buy a few beers”. About a half an hour later Marian ran into Archie in the lobby who, with a mixture of pride, surprise, and awe stated that it had only taken him “15 minutes to find out where the drug dealers are”. Later that evening Denielle and Doreen joined colleagues in the hotel bar while Marian retired to her room. Early the next morning Marian was woken by a phone call

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17 Methadone prescriptions are intensely regulated and it is very difficult to get “carries,” methadone to go. Usually those taking methadone must go to the pharmacy or clinic daily under directly observed therapy, to receive their dose. The fear is that if given methadone to take home, it will be sold, traded, or stolen.
from one of the CBRAs crying about a fight she was having with one of the other CBRAs. Earlier in the evening Corrina dived into the hotel pool, fully clothed and very intoxicated. There was some confusing discussion of a drug deal gone badly. At one point in the late evening Archie bumped into one of the PIs who invited him for a drink. When the CBRA called Marian they had been drinking heavily for more than 12 hours. In frustration and at a loss with how to deal with the on-going arguments, much less their ability to present, Marian confiscated the remaining liquor in the room. Corrina became violently ill to the point we had to procure a doctor, and Archie became too depressed to leave his room after fighting over the phone with his girlfriend. Everyone was surly.

Tensions among team members fluctuated over the next two days. How to resolve these tensions in turn caused disagreement between Denielle and Marian, which the CBRAs were well aware of and played up to in their own negotiations of payment and responsibilities. We were a fragmented team. And yet, in the midst of these frustrations we had many enjoyable moments, both personally and professionally. We were tourists for an afternoon, explored the city, and had dinner in Chinatown. We had successful presentations, with several audience members approaching the CBRAs afterwards to congratulate them on their innovative work.

There were more disagreements, some public, some private, including Archie screaming “Fuck you!” to Denielle as she stood waiting for a taxi to the airport to leave for a postdoctoral position. He had then left abruptly, leaving the rest of us slightly confused and standing uncomfortably, to say good-bye. The travel to Toronto was challenging and maybe we all expected too much of each other but the research assistants reported that it was one of the most memorable experiences of their lives. For months later they repeated stories to friends and staff members in the DTES about their trip and presentations. For the CBRAs, it was a moment of intense pride and a sense of accomplishment. A trip of a lifetime, but we all returned to Vancouver (except Denielle) emotionally exhausted.

Marian’s field notes from the week following the conference:

May 3
Archie is still sick, and he and everyone else has pretty much just slept since returning. Had a long discussion about how it was normal to feel out of it on returning from a conference, and that it was natural to be burnt out, and just to take it easy for a while, and how proud I was of them for getting there, Rod and Lyanna doing the presentation and everyone going to at least one session. At one point Rod says, “what ever happened in Toronto stays in Toronto” to which Archie replied “It’s not that easy Rod”. There are tensions between the two of them.

Archie was right - it wasn’t that easy, tensions remained, and our sense of a ‘team’ slowly started to erode. The Toronto trip changed relationships between all
of us in some form. It also changed our relationships to research, to how we think about what it is we do.

**Re(Framing Addiction**

In general, there is a preoccupation with addictions in the DTES.\(^{18}\) It seems as if there are endless studies exploring drug prevention and drug treatment being conducted, too often at the expense of exploring health and wellness issues that are deemed most pressing by the residents themselves. The residents are also the targets of often aggressive, sometimes coercive, preventative and therapeutic programming from both state and community organizations aimed at addressing the problems associated with drug and alcohol addiction.\(^{19}\) Too often these strategies are justified by epidemiological studies linking addictions to HIV risk. The defining rhetoric in the Downtown Eastside constructs addiction as personal tragedy (read failure) and as a public liability for the cost to a state sponsored universal health care system, similar to the public discourse defining the disabled (Wilson 2002). For the most part, it is defined as an illness requiring biomedical intervention – including daytox, residential care, methadone, antipsychotics, and medical supervision.

Public health discourse in the community is focused on saving inner city residents from the downward spiral of addictions (although the financial investment from the province does not reflect this; drug and alcohol addictions support is underfunded). Our researcher partners, both situated in health sciences, also specifically seemed inclined to believe – incorrectly – that the research project might somehow work as a form of drug and alcohol treatment. Later, when the project was completed and the four research assistants still used drugs and alcohol, the co-principle investigators blamed the research project, suggesting that by paying the CBRAs for work, we contributed to their addictive habits.\(^{20}\) And later, the CBRAs repeated the same thought. Marian and Denielle were stunned. Although we refused this narrative publicly, as the above narratives illustrate too often we admittedly also framed our expectations of the CBRAs based on an understanding that we wanted them to ‘minimize’ and/or refrain from using drugs and alcohol when it was socially inappropriate. Although we were not trying to


\(^{19}\) For example, see Elliott 2007; Singer 2007.

\(^{20}\) We don’t have the space here to discuss a history of addictions but we must contextualize this ‘addicted’ community – a product of a colonial nation, with the violence that always accompanies it, particularly since Aboriginal peoples are overrepresented in the Downtown Eastside. For critical analyses of the links between colonialism, oppressed communities and the construction of addictions, see Culhane (1987), Waldram (2004), Spicer (2001), Quintero (2001), Fisher (1987), and Chatterjee (2003).
transform our research assistants from addicts to non-addicts, were we contributing to negative constructions of addiction? They were constantly under pressure from us to make the ‘right choices’ about drug and alcohol use. In part this was a result of the simple logistics of trying to complete a research project. It simply wasn’t possible for the team to be drunk or high all the time and show up when it suited an individual’s plan, even if we had been prepared to make these types of concessions in the research training. (We weren’t.)

Reflecting on the possibilities that the academics might also have addictions or mental health issues rarely came up in our discussions. Too many drinks, sudden weight gains, smoking cigarettes, or dysfunctional relationships among the investigators were simply not addressed in the context of the research project. These were considered intimate, private details – even though the CBRAs were expected to share equally intimate specifics from their lives. Marian’s fieldnotes from the trip reflect the paradox of this public/private dichotomy and the unequal playing field between the CBRAs and the investigators:

*The consumption of alcohol was also a tricky moment; I had been encouraging them not to drink (they had a ‘free’ day on Wednesday, and would again Saturday night/Sunday – while working, i.e. Thursday, Friday and Saturday day I asked them not to drink, knowing they would, but hopefully keep it to a minimum) but with others drinking it seemed as if they were being asked not to do something that everyone else could.*  

What if being addicted might be framed as simply a different state of being, neither abnormal nor pathology? Might we imagine it as simply a different state of consciousness, along a continuum, of which we are all embedded (Rapp and Ginsburg 2001)? If so, it may then be possible to develop an ethnographic ethic for urban research on health that reimagines addictions as a disability that is not antonymic to normality. Yet, we do not want to construct a naively romanticized version of addictions. We have all worked and/or lived in the community for many years and witnessed first-hand the devastating effects it can have on lives, relationships, and health. But the same could be said for the haphazard decisions we make each day, shaped by our mental/intellectual/emotional/physical state of being at any given moment. We suggest a counter-narrative that redefines addiction as a state not requiring intervention from us, as anthropologists, nor necessarily from biomedicine. The biomedical narrative of addictions in the inner city works to discipline the body by demanding the addict to constantly change, transform, or ‘get clean’ (Overboe 1999; Foucault 1979; Fischer et al 2004). All

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21 For instance, Denielle and Doreen met with colleagues for drinks in the evening at the hotel bar. Later when we talked about this, the research assistants pointed out how entirely how unfair and paternalistic this had been.
of us inadvertently participated in that regulation and negative construction at the conference and during training when we insisted (or begged) that the CBRAs come to work sober or ‘clean’.

Post-Toronto

The CBRAs have continued to work in community-based programming and research for the past six years, on and off, depending on their individual wellness. Three of them continue to hold part-time employment working in HIV/AIDS care and in research. Two are involved as co-investigators on a national research project on AIDS, and three are involved with local research projects in the School of Nursing as CBRAs and research advisory members. The three of them have successfully held employment for five years at the same organization. They all continue, off and on, to use drugs and alcohol.

The organization has benefited – since AHAH, the organization has formed a research advisory committee and attempted to set up an internal ethics review process to ensure that all research at VNHS respects the philosophy of the organization and the rights of the participants. It is clear that university-based researchers are simply not used to their community-based partners marking clear methodological and financial parameters of research projects. The organization has also subsequently developed more relationships with researchers at universities in Vancouver, British Columbia. The relationships remain inequitable – the doors at Vancouver Native Health Society are always open to researchers, but the doors at the university remain firmly shut for the CBRAs. Research priorities in the community, for the large part, continue to be set by academic researchers with little long-term investment in the community.

Conclusions

Several months after the conference Denielle received an email from Archie apologizing and highlighting the importance of relationships in ethnographic research:

I am looking forward to seeing you when you arrive in Vancouver. I know our last departure wasn’t on a good note, but I think I speak for the girls when I say it seems like we just get to know someone and put our trust and care into them and then they leave. We all love you very much and we were very upset to see you go, and we just didn’t want to say ‘see ya later.’ Please forgive me for my actions, as I don’t lose my temper too often, it wasn’t appropriate behaviour and I apologize from the bottom of my heart.

Archie’s response at Denielle’s departure was probably a result of a whole combination of factors – the stress of the conference, being tired and hung-over, an-
noyed that she was leaving them, and worried what would happen to the project as it was concluding. His email speaks to how critical and vulnerable relationships are in community-based research and ethnography. It forced Denielle to critically reflect on whether or not she had abandoned the project, and them, for professional aspirations at a new school.

Although we risk exposing our errors and our own weaknesses in this paper, we maintain that critical self-reflection is imperative for the further development of ethnographic research methodologies that are inclusive and collaborative. Reflections on our project support that there is a critical need for creating new conceptual spaces for research that increase the participation of marginalized community members into academic research (Hudson et al 2012). The experiences shared here have forced us to once again reconsider the politics and ethics of doing community based health research with inner city communities. Moreover, it forced us to rethink our own biases and assumptions about our research practice, specifically our good intentions in the messy work of community based ethnographic practice. There is nothing new about complicated field tensions or unequal power relations in ethnography. We are not suggesting that researchers should or should nor conduct research with groups of people deemed addicted. We do want to suggest a normalizing narrative that redefines those living with addictions as not necessarily requiring intervention. If we accept that ethnography is a moral and political intervention, then we must be sure that it intervenes by addressing structural inequities and oppressive ideologies in academia, medicine and scientific research, not in the personal lives or behaviors of disadvantaged community members.

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A paper like this could only be written with the support of a team that is open-minded, critical and willing to reflect back on our adventures, mishaps and successes. We owe particular thanks to our amazing community based research assistants and to Vancouver Native Health Society. We are also indebted to Dara Culhane who selflessly shares her thoughts, time and ethnographic imagination with us. It is only through endless discussions with her regarding the politics of research did we begin to think of our project as perhaps a misguided humanitari-

anism. Doreen Littlejohn is owed thanks for always supporting our work with endless enthusiasm. And a final thank you to Mark Tyndall because without his initial support, our project would have never got off the ground. Denielle would like to thank Marian for her enduring commitment to the project and her tireless effort as the ‘other parent.’ In turn Marian thanks Denielle for the opportunity to have been part of this project, and her on going commitment to innovative, ethical research.
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Abstract
In this paper, the author describes her son’s first psychotic break, subsequent hospitalizations, and outpatient care. By melding poetry, prose, dream journal entries and medical case notes, she tells the story of how she became his primary caregiver. This narrative describes interactions that she has had with her son’s psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians, framed by imagined interactions that she has had with a former mentee who is now mentoring her about autoethnographic research. In telling her story, she hopes to convey what it is like to be a single parent of a young man with mental illness in a community in which the quality of mental health care is abysmal. By invoking alternative modes of inquiry, such as autoethnographic narrative, poetry, and imagined interactions, she challenges traditional methods of social science inquiry.

Keywords
mental illness, parent-child-provider interaction, caregiver burnout, mentoring, autoethnography, poetry, imagined interactions
Elisabeth: Hey, Angel, have you read Laura Ellingson’s 2011 article about the poetics of professionalism among dialysis technicians? She does some really interesting work with poetic transcriptions.

Angel: I haven’t read that article, but I am a big fan of Laura Ellingson! Have you read her 2009 book on crystallization yet?

Elisabeth: I’m about one-third of the way through it. The book is like a box of Lindt truffles: It’s so good that I want to consume it all at once; however, I’m forcing myself to slow down and savor each morsel of wisdom. In the passage that I’m reading right now, she offers various strategies for incorporating multiple genres of representation into a coherent text. After urging researchers to consider their options, she reminds them to be playful. She says, “…drudgery does not yield morally, aesthetically, or intellectually superior work, counter to the impression fostered by some number of academics” (p. 81). (Laughter.)

Angel: I love her sense of humor! And you know what else I love? The interludes between chapters: I’ve found some really great exercises there for my qualitative research methods class.

Elisabeth: Right on! Her exercise about representing difference is brilliant. I plan to incorporate it into every class in which I discuss diversity. I’m also making a conscious effort to rethink the way that I represent social positioning—both mine and my respondents—in research.

Angel: That’s a great idea! Going back to the article that you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, can you tell me more about poetic transcription? I know that I’ve read some autoethnographic poetry—like Fox’s 2010 piece—that represent an individual’s lived experience in poetic form, but I’m not sure how that differs from poetic transcription.

Elisabeth: Well, poetic transcription takes excerpts of data that would typically be represented in a quotation in a traditional grounded theory analysis and instead represents them in poetic structures. You can write one poem for each theme that emerges in your analysis, grounding each poem in the experience of a different respondent: Laura demonstrates this technique in her 2011 article. Alternatively, you can write poems that are derived from one participant’s transcript: Carr employs this approach in her 2003 analysis of poetic expressions of vigilance.
Finally, you can combine autoethnographic poetry and poetic transcriptions: Carless and Douglas meld both approaches in their 2009 poetic representation of the sport experiences of men with severe mental health difficulties, as they juxtapose a poem about their response to conducting research in a mental health day program with poems about their respondents’ experiences. You can think of it as an alternative mode of representation that allows the reader to access the data in a novel way. As Laura explains in her 2011 article, “…aesthetic practices push the boundaries of traditional social science by retaining the rigor of qualitative analysis while offering more interpretive modes of presentation that embrace both rational and aesthetic modes of sensemaking” (p. 3).

Angel: She’s so freakin’ smart! Actually, that reminds me of something that Carolyn Ellis wrote—you know Carolyn was Laura’s advisor—in the 2000 *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. She and Art articulate the value of evocative autoethnographic narratives, as opposed to traditional analytic ethnography. At the risk of oversimplifying their arguments, evocative ethnography appeals to readers’ hearts and solar plexuses, as well as their heads: Personal narratives are the means by which authors can convey the emotion-laden realities of their lived experience in a way that challenges readers to become actively engaged with the text. Narratives that create an embodied response in the reader have the potential to stimulate cultural discourse about a topic by moving readers to interpret a text, rather than herding them to a certain conclusion. Unfortunately, it’s been more than a decade since Carolyn and Art wrote that chapter and there’s still a lot of prejudice out there toward alternative modes of inquiry.

Elisabeth: You’re telling me! Remember that respondent who refused to review my conference paper because she “wasn’t an expert in autoethnography and chose not to respond to anything written under a pen name”?

Angel: How could I forget! But didn’t you also receive some very strong praise from people who reviewed that piece?

Elisabeth: True. One of the reviewers for the journal in which that paper was published (Author, 2013) said that it was one of the most engaging essays that she had ever read. You know when you said that there is still a lot of prejudice out there toward alternative modes of inquiry? Christine Davis writes about this issue in her 2014 qualitative methods text: She tells a story about keynote speakers at a prestigious international qualitative research conference who disparaged authoethnography. According to Cris, their talks didn’t go over too well with the audience. (Laughter.)
Angel: Ha! Seriously, though, how do we go about debunking myths when they're being reified by respondents and keynote speakers at academic conferences where they ought to be critiqued?

Elisabeth: Well, we can begin by telling our stories…

Angel: …and listening to one another…

**Elisabeth’s Narrative**

*Dream Journal: July 21, 2003*

Last night I had a dream that a powerful storm was coming from the West. I’m not sure if it was a tornado or a derecho, but it sounded like a train. I was terrified. My son Gabe’s bedroom is on the west side of the house, so I knew that it would hit him first. I ran to his room and scooped him out of his bed. I knew that we should take cover in the bathtub, but the bathroom is also on the west side of the house. I wanted desperately to keep him safe, but there wasn’t any shelter on the east side of the house. Well, there was the closet, but there were spiders in there. I woke up, feeling stuck, heart pounding in my ribcage.

According to Dream Dictionary Now (2014), tornadoes represent emotional upheaval, destructive behavior, or sudden change; spiders represent fear about the future. When I had this dream eleven years ago, I thought that it represented the anxiety that I felt as a recently divorced mother of an adolescent boy: Naturally, I wanted to protect my son from the dangers that loomed on the horizon of his teenage years. As I look back on this dream today, I think it was a premonition of what was to come.

*Winter*

*Medical Case Notes: January 9, 2007*

This afternoon, I got a call from the school nurse: Gabe was being taken from school to the emergency room. I immediately rushed to the school and was horrified to find my 17-year-old son in a zombie-like state. It was like he wasn't there. He exhibited extreme disorientation, difficulty communicating, dilated pupils, slow visual tracking, and difficulty focusing. I followed the ambulance to the hospital, where the EMTs brought him to a waiting bed. We stayed in the ER for six hours, while the scrubs-clad staff performed a battery of tests on Gabe. Because his urine, blood, CAT scan, MRI, and brain scan were normal, they diagnosed him with a “spell of confusion” and sent him home.
Two days later, in the middle of the night, Gabe woke me up from a deep sleep.

“Mom?” he called out hoarsely, as he knocked on the bedroom door.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” I asked, sitting up in bed. As he came closer, I noticed that he was very agitated. His whole body was shaking. As I took his hands in mine, I noticed that his palms were cold and sweaty.

“I can’t sleep,” he said. “I tried to do yoga to calm down, but it didn’t work. I started to meditate and I suddenly realized what the problem is: I need to talk about my feelings. I’m sorry I’ve been ignoring you, Mom. I miss Dad and I want to talk to him. I feel guilty about Logan (a classmate who had dropped out of school). I think I need to go to counseling. It’s weird, but I feel like I don’t know who I am or who you are. I mean, I know you’re my mom, but I don’t know if you’re real. I know I’m here, but I feel like I’m not.”

As he became more agitated, his speech became increasingly rapid. He said, “Ohmygod ohmygod my heart is beating so fast I think I’m having a heart attack please mom take me to the ER I think I’m going to die.”

I jumped out of bed, threw a fleece over my pajamas, and raced out to the garage with Gabe. We jumped in the car, speeding through empty streets to the hospital, where Gabe was admitted to the ER and diagnosed with a panic attack. The gray-faced White male attending physician offered him an anti-anxiety drug, Ativan, to help him relax, but he was feeling better and had calmed down, so he refused the medication. We returned home, where he had a second panic attack at 6 a.m. Our neighbor, who is a nurse, came over and calmed him down. Later that morning, Gabe saw his pediatrician, a jovial middle-aged Indian man named Dr. B, who prescribed Ativan and referred him to a counselor. Gabe was very talkative and positive after seeing Dr. B and visited with his teachers and school counselor. After lunch, Gabe took a nap. When I woke him up to go to his counseling session, his affect was completely flat. He became very agitated on the way to the counseling session; his anxiety increased during the intake to the point where the counselor, Mr. L, a kind, older White man with soft eyes and white hair pulled back in a ponytail, gently told me that he was concerned about dissociation. He recommended that I give Gabe another Ativan and bring him to the ER. We went to a hospital in a nearby city, where an attending physician evaluated him and a social worker conducted a phone consultation with a staff psychiatrist. Because Gabe did not threaten to harm himself or others, he was discharged with a diagnosis of anxiety disorder and referred to a psychiatrist. We returned home, but Gabe decided to sleep at our neighbor’s house because he didn’t want to go to sleep in his room where he had his first panic attack.

That night, Gabe slept well and skipped his morning Ativan dose. Because it was not possible to get an appointment with a psychiatrist until later in the month (which was actually surprisingly quick—usually it takes 3-4 months to get in to
see a psychiatrist), I set up another counseling appointment—this time with Dr. E, a young White man with a freshly minted PhD and a Southern drawl, who came highly recommended for his ability to connect with teenage boys. Before the appointment, Gabe became extremely agitated. When I suggested he take an Ativan, he became oppositional and slammed the door, telling me he didn’t want to take drugs. When I reasoned with him and let him know that it was his choice, he decided to take the medicine. At the psychologist’s office, Gabe was alternately agitated and catatonic. His pupils were dilated and he displayed no affect, except flashes of anger/fear when his dad and our divorce were mentioned. Presenting similar physical symptoms as the previous night, Gabe begged me to take him to the hospital, afraid that he was going to die. He stated that he wanted this to be over; that it was my fault because I ignored him the way that my parents had ignored me. Dr. E noted that Gabe reported being afraid of counseling and seemed disoriented, with reduced cognitive functioning and short-term memory loss. He mentioned that Gabe’s symptoms could be the onset of bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Now, I’m a very analytic person, but at this point, I was feeling furious at the psychologist. How could he say those words about my son, right in front of him, as if he weren’t even there? Although I could identify the anger that I was feeling, I was unaware that I was in denial. It took me fifteen long months—and two of his hospitalizations—to accept the fact that my son had a serious mental illness.

The first time that my son was hospitalized, he was admitted because his statement that he “wanted this to be over” was interpreted as suicidal ideation (the equivalent of “Open Sesame” to mental health providers). Here’s what happened: When we finally got in to see Dr. S, a trim, meticulously groomed White male psychiatrist in his mid-40s, he prescribed an antidepressant for Gabe. Within a week, Gabe’s symptoms got worse. Although I didn’t know it at the time, this is what happens when doctors give antidepressants to people with bipolar disorder. His paranoia and disorganized thinking became more pronounced and he experienced some suicidal ideation (another side effect of antidepressants), so he was eventually hospitalized. During my son’s stay in the psychiatric unit, I wrote the following poem, entitled, “Grounds for a Miracle”:

Yesterday
I saw an angel
in my coffee cup. Heavyset for a spirit, she was built
like the Liberty Bell, her cardamom wings
designed for comfort, not for speed.
All day long, my cup
set on the kitchen counter,
lip tipped up like a satellite dish,
Columbian dregs draining away
from hallowed grounds.

At night, I lit a votive to Divine Mother.

*Please watch over my son. Let him know
that he is safe and loved and understood.*

The Virgin of Guadeloupe
shimmered on my bedroom wall.

This morning, I poured
a halo of organic milk
over Ash Wednesday’s apparition. Enrobed
in the last cup of Columbian,
she lent me her faith.

The night that he was admitted to the hospital, one of the nurses called to inform me that Gabe had become agitated, so they gave him an injection of Geodon (a powerful antipsychotic) to “help calm him down and go to sleep.” Unfortunately, Gabe had a dystonic reaction to the Geodon. He experienced tachycardia, muscle rigidity, and uncontrollable tongue movements. (According to Pfizer, 2014, Geodon is not approved for use in children or adolescents. An elevated risk
of acute dystonia has been observed in males and younger age groups.) After administering Benadryl and Cogentin to stop the dystonic reaction, the emergency room doctor recommended taking him off all medications. The attending psychiatrist, Dr. M, a handsome young man from India who had recently completed a fellowship at an Ivy League institution, diagnosed Gabe with anxiety, as well as a panic disorder and agoraphobia. He told me that being a single child of divorce, repressed aggression, self-blame, and low self-esteem were most likely contributing factors to Gabe’s illness. When I asked Dr. M critical questions about the side effects of the medications that Gabe had been given and inquired about alternative medicine (i.e., herbal supplements, such as St. John’s Wort and Valerian), he told me not to give Gabe any herbs. I asked if it was safe for him to drink chamomile tea, but the doctor didn’t know what chamomile was. He told me to chill out and stop asking so many questions because my anxiety was making Gabe more anxious. I don’t think he liked it when I asked him challenging questions.

A few days later, Gabe was discharged from the hospital: As his condition had stabilized and he was no longer on medication, the insurance company would no longer pay. I had to drive one and a half hours in a snowstorm to pick him up because the hospital wouldn’t keep him an extra night. The following week, when we went back to see Dr. S for outpatient care, he told us that he no longer needed to see Gabe, given that he wasn’t taking any medication. When I asked him his opinion about alternative medicines for anxiety and depression, he chastised me, because Dr. M had told me not to give Gabe any herbal supplements.

**Spring**

For the next 15 months, Gabe was relatively stable. He finished his junior year at school, won a scholarship to study abroad during the summer, then in the fall decided to move down south to live with his dad and stepmother. Unfortunately, one of the students in his new school gave him Adderall (a stimulant medication prescribed for ADHD that many students refer to as their “study buddy”). This medication spurred another cycle of agitation and catatonia in the spring of 2008, when he was hospitalized for the second time. This time, he was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and prescribed an antipsychotic and a mood stabilizer. After he was discharged from the hospital, his father and stepmother decided that they could no longer care for him. They wanted to put him in an Easter Seals daycare program, but his IQ was too high. That summer, he moved back home to live with me.

Now that Gabe finally had a diagnosis, I was no longer in denial about his mental illness. As I prepared to become his primary caregiver, I learned everything that I could about his condition. One invaluable resource that I discovered was the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). I started attending monthly support group meetings and enrolled in a free six-week educational program
called, “NAMI Basics.” Thanks to NAMI, I was able to learn about the biology and treatment of mental illness, as well as specific skills that I could employ to be a better parent to and advocate for my son. My NAMI friends also taught me that I was not alone.

It took Gabe a long time to recover from his second hospitalization. They say that each psychotic episode is like having a head injury. I believe it: When his psychologist tested Gabe in the fall of 2008, his working memory was at the level of someone with Alzheimer’s disease. Fortunately, Gabe’s psychologist was excellent, employing cognitive behavioral therapy to help manage his cognitive and emotional challenges. We also found a kind, intelligent, and caring Indian female psychiatrist—the only child psychiatrist in our city—to continue Gabe’s medication management. Although Gabe successfully finished high school, he had to find an adult psychiatrist after graduation. His new psychiatrist, Dr. A, a rather arrogant White man in his 50s, asked Gabe whether he thought it was realistic for him to go to college because of his reduced cognitive functioning. I was astounded that the psychiatrist could be so discouraging to my son. Hadn’t he ever heard of a self-fulfilling prophecy? Needless to say, that was our last visit to Dr. A.

A friend of mine suggested a new medical doctor for Gabe, a White male 60-something musician/physician named Cap. Although he was a family doctor, rather than a psychiatrist, my friend thought that he might be able to manage Gabe’s medication because he was intimately acquainted with mental illness: His own son had schizophrenia. Cap was incredibly compassionate: Rather than treating Gabe like a number, he saw Gabe as a person. He prescribed yoga asanas and ayurvedic supplements, as well as the lowest possible doses of psychotropic medications. Gabe liked Cap immensely and made good progress toward recovery, attending college and working part-time.

Summer
All was well until one day in 2011 when Cap recommended that Gabe go on a “medication vacation.” Like many people who live with mental illness, Gabe didn’t like the side effects of his medication, so he decided to take Cap’s advice. Unfortunately, Cap decided to take a real vacation at the same time that Gabe went on his “medication vacation.” At that time, Gabe experienced his first full-blown manic psychotic episode: He was unable to sleep, simultaneously engaging in homicidal ideation, echolalia (involuntary repetition of words) and maniacal laughter. I was all alone taking care of him and it was exhausting and scary. I was up most of the night with him for almost a week and I was afraid to leave him alone or take him anywhere because his behavior would frighten other people. I felt like a prisoner in my own house. Although I wanted desperately to keep him out of the hospital, I realized that I could not titrate his medication on my own. When he developed polydipsia (a potentially fatal compulsion to drink water), I
finally decided to bring him to a psychiatric unit in a nearby major metropolitan area, where they admitted him and immediately put him on a water restriction diet. It took a team of psychiatrists two weeks and two antipsychotics, in combination with an anti-seizure medication, to stabilize Gabe. At that time, his diagnosis was changed to bipolar disorder. (Altogether, he has been diagnosed with a spell of confusion, anxiety, depression, panic disorder, agoraphobia, schizoaffective disorder, and bipolar disorder. When doctors assign new labels, they don’t take away the old ones that no longer fit.)

When my son was in the hospital, I contemplated suing Cap for medical malpractice; instead, I decided to write him a poem. Although the poem did not provide compensation for brain damage, pain, or suffering, it nevertheless had a cathartic effect:

An Imagined Interaction with Cap’n Psych

I’m waiting for the psychiatrist
to give me my son’s prognosis:

independence, an antecedent variable the color of hope;

dependence, a constant shade of lead.

Instead, we discuss treatment options:

“Injection or oral antipsychotic?” he asks.

“The decision is up to you.”
When I ask for a cost-benefit analysis, he says that the injection works better and has fewer side effects. He neglects to mention that it costs $1,215 a month.

* * *

As I’m on hold, listening to brain-numbing muzak on Medco’s voice-mail system, I think,

*All day long, at 15-minute intervals,*
*you manage patients’ medication, writing orders to inject children with antipsychotics; then you hand them back to their mothers.*

*A third party administers the bill.*

*If you ask me, Cap, I’d say it’s something to think about as you eat, pray, and love at your ashram in India.*

I say, “representativerepresentativerepresentative,” until I get through.
Fall

After Gabe’s last hospitalization, I decided that it would be prudent to have his medication managed by Dr. K, one of the psychiatrists who stabilized him in the hospital. Gabe has been in recovery for three years, now. He continues to see Dr. K, a businesslike middle-aged Indian man, every three months for medication management. He sees his dad twice a year, usually on vacation at his paternal grandparents’ house. Dad gets to be the fun parent; I continue to serve as Gabe’s primary caregiver. He lives with me and I monitor his medication and finances. I pay for his education, health insurance, medical care, and prescription medication. I schedule appointments for him with medical, psychiatric, and psychological providers, as well as social services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation). I advocate for him in all areas. I drive him to appointments and classes that are too far for him to bike.

On a day-to-day basis, the biggest challenge is probably the act of juggling work, caregiving, and domestic labor. I feel like I can’t really succeed in any area because I’m spread so thin. I really don’t have much time for myself or for developing or maintaining friendships or intimate relationships. When I look at the big picture, it’s really depressing. If I let myself grieve the loss of my son as I knew him or the hopes and dreams that I had for him, I feel very sad. His prognosis is average, meaning that he probably will never become fully functional or independent. He’ll probably live with me—or possibly in a subsidized apartment—and work part-time in an entry-level job for the rest of his life. Sometimes, when I think that there’s no end in sight to my role as his primary caregiver, I feel very burned out and pessimistic.

On the bright side, Gabe is making progress. He is working on his associate degree and has a part-time custodial job. He has his learner’s permit and hopes to get his driver’s license soon. I praise him frequently about what a great job he’s doing in his recovery and how proud I am of his accomplishments and his commitment to making healthy choices (namely, avoiding drugs and alcohol). I know other young adults with brain or mood disorders who have double diagnoses (i.e., mental illness plus addiction) that complicate the recovery process. I feel fortunate that we have health insurance and that I have the ability to navigate the complex mental health care delivery system in order to ensure that Gabe gets adequate care. A 2009 study conducted by NAMI assigned the state in which we live a “D” for the quality of our mental health care. In this environment, I realize that my son’s wellbeing is contingent upon my ability and willingness to advocate for him. Thanks to my NAMI friends, my everyday heroines, I am constantly reminded that I’m not alone. I will never give up hope.
An Imagined Interaction Between Mentor and Mentee

**Angel:** Wow! First, let me say that your narrative is very powerful and moving. I think that your work creates an embodied experience in the reader. (This is a huge compliment from someone who does performative writing.) Hearing your story reminds me that knowledge is produced by the mind, body, and spirit. I love the images of coffee, haloes, and Mary in your first poem. It’s very profound to find the spiritual in our everyday rituals…sometimes these are the things that give us the faith to keep us going. Second, holy smokes! You have been through so much! I can’t believe how well you seem to handle everything. You are one strong, incredible momma!

**Elisabeth:** Thanks, Angel. That means a lot coming from you. Just for the record, though, let me say that my story is not unique: As I have become familiar with the research about parents who care for children with mental illness, I have realized that many caregivers of children with disabilities experience the emotions that I describe in my narrative: In 2000, Karp and Tanarugsachock reported that parents often experience emotional anomie before their child is diagnosed with mental illness: Fear, uncertainty, and confusion produce a kind of emotional limbo that can be paralyzing. As Bourke-Taylor, Howie, and Law found in 2009, mothers of children with disabilities sometimes feel immobilized by depression and anxiety; however, they have to be proactive in managing their children’s care because their children rely on them. In 2010, Johansson, Anderzen-Carlsson, Ahlin, and Andershed described how mothers with adult children with mental illness struggle with the constant strain of uncertainty about their children’s condition and future, as well as the daily stress of being hypervigilant and permanently on call. In her 2011 book about parenting mentally ill children, Lecroy echoed similar findings about the emotional burdens of everyday life, adding that role strain is an additional burden for working parents. Lecroy added that stigma against mental illness is particularly problematic for mothers, because society often blames the mother as incompetent or unfit when her child does not act in a socially appropriate manner: Johansson and her colleagues noted that this type of social judgment is even worse for single mothers.

**Angel:** So, whom do you blame when the doctor acts in a socially inappropriate manner? I was stunned when you described the psychologist and psychiatrist who talked about Gabe like he wasn’t there—I can’t imagine someone talking about my son in the third person, saying that he could be bipolar or schizophrenic or that it was unrealistic for him to go to college because he had a brain disorder. I
can think of a few choice adjectives that I would use to describe those doctors! (Laughter.)

Elisabeth: You are so funny! I can imagine what you would have said to the psychiatrist who told me that my divorce was a contributing factor in my son’s illness and that I should chill out and stop asking so many questions because my anxiety was making Gabe more anxious! Again, I have to point out that I’m not alone in experiencing these types of blaming messages from doctors: Way back in 1989, Lefley pointed out that there is an iatrogenic component that reinforces the self-stigmatization of family members of people with mental illness, including the “psychologically disturbing impact of avoidant or recriminative responses to familial overtures for information and support” (p. 557). More recently, participants in Karp and Tanarugsachock’s 2000 study identified health care professionals who told them that they were causing their child’s mental health problem. In 2005, Harden reported that most of her participants had been told that they were overreacting at some point in time by their child’s doctor. Honestly, when I think about the problematic interactions that I described in my narrative, I believe that most doctors were just trying to do their jobs. True, they could have communicated in a more relationally sensitive manner, but their basic messages—that Gabe had a serious mental illness; that college would be very difficult for him because of his cognitive characteristics; and that I was too anxious—were accurate. I felt angry at the time, but I think that was partly because I was in denial. Now that I understand that mental illnesses are brain disorders, I don’t feel angry or defensive when doctors make these types of analytic statements. It’s as if we’re having a conversation about managing diabetes.

Angel: I also liked how you chose to write a poem to the doctor who gave your son bad medical advice, rather than suing him for medical malpractice. What made you frame your second poem as an imagined interaction?

Elisabeth: Well, I’m not sure that this was what Honeycutt (2003) envisioned when he explicated the cathartic function of imagined interactions, but it certainly helped me release a ton of negative emotion that I had been carrying around—I feel so much lighter! (Laughter.) To answer your question, I thought of Honeycutt because so many of the women that I interviewed for my research project about the experiences of single mothers of children and young adults with mental illness used reported speech to describe instances of stigma that they had experienced from family, friends, coworkers, and health providers. Baxter (2011) pointed out that reported speech is a great place to look for evidence of dialectical tensions: I found that my respondents frequently used imagined interactions to give preferred responses in instances where they or their children were treated poorly. So,
that was the inspiration for my imagined interaction with Cap’n Psych, who is actually an amalgam of many of the psychiatrists who have diagnosed Gabe or managed his medications.

Angel: I can’t believe how expensive Gabe’s medication is! Rafe and I take the kids to the doctor for ear infections all the time, but the employee health clinic is free, so we only have to pay for the antibiotics, which are cheap because Amoxicillin comes in generic form.

Elisabeth: Most people have no idea how expensive antipsychotic medication is. Of course, you can buy generic drugs, which cost less than newer, brand name drugs, but they generally have more side effects. To be honest, I feel really privileged because I am a highly educated, White, middle-class person with health insurance and the financial and cognitive resources to ensure that Gabe receives the best possible care. One of the single moms in my study who describes herself as lower-middle-class and Pacific Islander told me that she knows that there are a lot of treatment options out there for her kids—she actually has two children with brain or mood disorders—but they’re just not feasible: first, she doesn’t have the money; second, she can’t take off time at work to bring her kids to the private clinics that are offering the services. So her kids go to the community health center, where she can do one-stop shopping for psychiatrists and psychologists and get her kids’ prescriptions for medication—generic, of course, because that’s what her insurance covers and she can afford.

Angel: Thanks for sharing her story with me. It really puts things in perspective: I can’t imagine how difficult it would be to be a low-income single mother of two kids with mental illness! I realize that physical and mental health are temporary states of well-being and I feel so fortunate that my kids are basically healthy and that I can afford to take them to the doctor when they’re sick—not to mention that I have a partner who can take them if I can’t get time off from work.

Elisabeth: Thank you for listening, Angel. I treasure the conversations that we have—real and imagined—and I am so grateful to have you as a mentor on this project. You have helped me develop a nascent appreciation not only for the art of autoethnographic research, but also for the recursive nature of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Angel: You’re welcome. I loved every moment of your beautiful, artistic text. I think that an evocative autoethnographic narrative is an excellent choice for sharing the complexities and insights of your experiences as a single parent of a young man with mental illness. This is a topic that people don’t talk about very often.
Hearing your story helped me to understand the vulnerable positions you are in with respect to caring for your son and dealing with the health care system. Engaging in dialogue about your work helped me connect your experience with the larger social problem of being a single parent of a child with mental illness. You have opened my eyes and softened my heart.

References


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Critical Discourse Analysis may be broadly understood as the analysis of linguistic structures to determine how they embody and reflect underlying power structures (Fairclough, 1989). More narrowly, it has been defined as having an explicit political aim: to frame discourse in such a fashion as to impose a dichotomy between a more powerful group and a less powerful group, and to empower the less powerful group (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This narrower normative definition has a strong implied value judgment. As defined by van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis “is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality” (van Dijk, 1993).

In 2013 a discussion of statements made in various Australian media in 2012 by members of the advocacy group Friends of Science in Medicine (FSM) was published by Jeff Flatt as “Critical Discourse Analysis of Rhetoric Against Complementary Medicine” (Flatt, 2013). By framing this discussion as Critical Discourse Analysis, it is clear that Flatt implicitly categorises FSM as a dominant group using language as an instrument of power abuse. As is made evident in the conclusion to his paper, he takes an explicit position of resistance to FSM as an
identified dominant group and makes positive assertions regarding the underlying facts of a social policy argument, which are irrelevant to the power structures of the discourse. (For example, “FSM contradict the literature in their viewpoint of complementary medicine and its use”; “FSM having an inaccurate understanding of complementary medicine and patients”).

Within its own terms of discourse the principal purpose of Flatt’s inquiry is certainly met, and his question can be answered in the affirmative within the broader definition of Critical Discourse Analysis: power and ideology are linguistically structured and deployed in FSM’s representation of complementary medicine. However, the prejudgment that FSM is a dominant group practicing the abuse of social power through language – the presupposition of the narrower normative definition of Critical Discourse Analysis – is not critically examined. More seriously, the validity or otherwise of this assertion is conflated by Flatt with an entirely different question: that is, the extent to which FSM’s representation of complementary medicine is correct.

In this letter I will discuss “Critical Discourse Analysis of Rhetoric Against Complementary Medicine” (CDARACM) (Flatt, 2013) as an example of ‘cargo-cult science’: the adoption of the external accidents of the scientific method without the adoption of the fundamental animating principles of the scientific method, with the resulting practice thus being entirely ineffective either in discovering new information or usefully organising existing information (Feynman, 1974). A conventional research paper in a scientific discipline is organised according to established forms: an introduction outlining the background literature, a methods section outlining the processes employed to gather results in order that the work can be reproduced, a results section which presents the results obtained, and discussion of those results (Hoogenboom & Manske, 2012; Perneger & Hudelson, 2004). CDARACM mimics the external form, but not the logical structure or substantive content, of such a research paper (Flatt, 2013).

In the introductory section of CDARACM, a number of opinion pieces are cited that have appeared from different vantage points of the debate on the role of complementary medicine in the Australian tertiary education sector and more broadly in Australian society (Komesaroff, 2012; Komesaroff, Moore, & Kerridge, 2012; Myers, Xue, Cohen, Phelps, & Lewith, 2012; Norrie, 2012; Novella, 2012; Spedding, 2012). However, these citations fall short of being an outline of the background knowledge required for understanding of the inquiry, the normal practice for introductory sections in research publications. Essential to such a background would be clear working definitions of what is understood by ‘complementary medicine’ and ‘science in medicine’. These terms are critical to understanding this debate but are left unsatisfactorily vague throughout CDARACM. An outline of the social and historical context of the debate and the relationship of the participants to power structures in Australian education and health care
would also seem to be essential background to an analysis of the discourse of interest.

The next section of CDARACM, headed ‘Research Design, Definitions, Aim and Limitations’ mimics the methods section of a conventional research paper. It begins with the words: “None of the publications cited above have systematically examined the FSM discourse.” This misrepresents the nature of the citations in the introduction by implying that they are peer-reviewed ‘publications’ which might realistically be expected to ‘systematically examine’ a discourse with a degree of objectivity, when in fact they are components of the discourse: opinion pieces, whether published on websites or as letters to medical journals. They, like the texts selected for analysis (ABC Breakfast, 2012; ABC Brisbane, 2012; ABC Central Coast, 2012; 2SER Razor’s Edge, 2012; Maclennan & Morrison, 2012; Token Skeptic, 2012; Science on Top, 2012; Skeptic Zone, 2012), are themselves part of the topic under investigation: the ongoing dialogue between the opponents and proponents of complementary medicine within the Australian context.

The ‘Definitions’ given in the section of CDARACM headed ‘Research Design, Definitions, Aim and Limitations’ are only of ‘discourse’, ‘power’, and ‘ideology’ and are not at all clear. As for the ‘research design’, this is contained entirely in the following few sentences:

“A concise paraphrased review of the FSM argument is presented, followed by a description of the main thematic areas of their discourse. Statements illustrating the FSM depiction of complementary medicine are extracted from these themes and CDA is applied.”(Flatt, 2013)

Thus the research method employed in CDARACM as described consists entirely of extraction of statements derived from a sample of textual artefacts, followed by subjective assessment to see whether these statements contain language that might be construed as enacting power abuse. It should be noted that the criteria used for extracting statements are not defined; the criteria for selecting textual artefacts for examination are not defined; and no criteria are given for determining whether and to what extent said statements are motivated by “ideology and power-based interests”. There is no discussion of how representative the selected statements are of statements made within the FSM community, or of the context of the textual artefacts. Context is all important, as a textual artefact made primarily for the internal consumption of a community, or in a forum where the community is a disadvantaged minority, cannot readily enact social power abuse or dominance. (It should be noted with reference to any perceived power disparity, that while approximately $1 billion is spent on complementary medicines each year in Australia (University of New England, 2011) FSM is unable to offer membership certificates or merchandise such as t-shirts or coffee cups due to extremely limited resources (Marron, 2014)).
The ‘concise paraphrased view of the FSM argument’ offered in CDARACM is reproduced below in toto.

“The primary contention within the FSM argument is that the tertiary teaching of complementary medicine undermines the credibility of Australian universities. They state that the delivery of these courses represents an invasion of ‘pseudoscience’ into academia that sullies genuine scientific teaching and research (Maclennan & Morrison, 2012). They claim that complementary medicine university health science courses are unscientific due to their theoretical groundings, which they say are untestable. They are ‘distressed’ that these therapies are given scientific validity and state that healthcare should not be taught or practiced unless it has scientific evidence (ABC Breakfast, 2012; ABC Brisbane, 2012; Token Skeptic, 2012; Science on Top, 2012).

Shortly after their initial media penetration, the FSM discourse moves away from a purely university focus. Their discussion widens to include the clinical practice of complementary medicine within Australia, which they claim uses fabricated scientific credibility to deceive the public. The presence of these practitioners in the community, FSM argue, leads to dilution of the health dollar and wastes public money (ABC Brisbane, 2012; ABC Central Coast, 2012; Skeptic Zone, 2012). Incredulity at the willingness of the public to engage with ‘nonsensical’ medicine is stated, and disbelief at the potential for intelligent people to suspend their normal judgment to pursue complementary medicine healthcare is present (ABC Brisbane, 2012; 2SER Razor’s Edge, 2012; Skeptic Zone, 2012).

This indicates that the focus of the FSM argument is not only the cessation of university delivery of complementary medicine but also the rejection of the practice and use of these healthcare practices within Australian society. Their discursive position is summarised within their contentions that ‘...the whole idea here is that we should abandon all alternative and complementary medicines’ and ‘...hopefully eventually getting rid of the whole concept of an alternative system...’(ABC Breakfast, 2012; ABC Brisbane, 2012)” (Flatt, 2013).

This ‘concise paraphrased view of the FSM argument’ is a fair and accurate portrayal of the positions reached by the argument of FSM. While as such it is a paraphrased view of the FSM argument, it should be noted that it is not a paraphrase of the FSM argument itself. Rather, it is a list of contentions made by FSM. (An alternative, non-paraphrased list of contentions may be found in the supplementary material to this polemic (Friends of Science in Medicine, 2014)). It is true that FSM argue that university delivery of complementary medicine should cease; that government should not fund complementary medicine; that complementary medicine practices should be comprehensively rejected within Australian society; and that it is distressing that such practices have been adopted so widely among the public. The argument that underpins these contentions is, however, nowhere
made. Implicit in CDARACM, rather than explicitly argued, is a presupposition that the positions of FSM are projections of an ideology of biomedical power and that their argument can be discounted on this basis without further consideration. I will offer my own paraphrase of the FSM argument now.

- There is such a thing as truth.¹

- Experiments are the only means of determining truth at our disposal.²

- Thus, courses of actions determined by statements, which have been demonstrated to be true by experiment, are likely to be more effective than alternative courses of action.

- In taking actions on behalf of the community at large, we have a moral duty to take the most effective courses of action possible.

- Thus, expenditure of public money should be directed according to statements that we can demonstrate experimentally to be true.

All the positions of FSM summarised in CDARACM can all be reached in a clear and logical manner from this paraphrase of the FSM argument. It is immoral to spend public money on teaching medical practices that have not been demonstrated empirically to be effective: i.e., for which there is not universally accepted scientific evidence. It is equally immoral to spend public money on these practices directly. It is pernicious and dangerous to create a false dichotomy between two forms of ‘medicine’, one conventional and one complementary, and hold the complementary one to a lower standard of evidence than the conventional one; it is also morally desirable to encourage individuals to spend their own resources on the practices that are most likely to be effective.

This argument of FSM as I have outlined it above can be engaged with directly in a number of ways, but no pathway of direct engagement is likely to have a great resonance with the public. It can be argued that the effectiveness of complementary medicine is attested to by other means than experiment (e.g., divine revelation). It can be argued that we do not have an absolute moral duty to spend public money in the most effective way, and as we waste a great deal of public money anyway, we may as well spend some more on potentially effective

1 I define a true proposition in the manner determined by the 19th century American Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce: i.e., the true explanation of any observation is the one that would be reached by the community of inquirers in an infinitely prolonged process of experimental investigation (Peirce, 1901).

2 This is a paraphrase of a statement attributed to the Nobel Laureate Max Planck.
treatments which have a considerable footprint in the community. Finally, it can be argued that complementary medicine has been experimentally determined to be as of similar effectiveness as conventional medicine. All of these arguments are weak. There is no universally recognised source of knowledge other than experiment – certainly none that correctly describes and predicts features of the external world with an effectiveness of the same order of science. While citizens are generally willing to be the beneficiaries of public money even if it is not optimally distributed for the good of the community, few wish their own contributions to be dispersed in such a manner. And while complementary medicines have shown marginal effectiveness in some cases (their use is indeed ‘evidence-based’), the vast preponderance of careful research studies suggest that cases where complementary medicine is likely to be of greater or equal effectiveness to conventional medicine are negligible for serious health complaints (Cancer Council of Australia, 2014; Beuth & Schierholz, 2007; Close et al., 2014; Fleming, Schwab, Nourer, Wan, & LeDoux, 2012; Garrow, 2007; Hunt & Ernst, 2011; Pandolfi & Zilletti, 2012; Rubinstein et al., 2010; Wanchai, Armer, & Stewart, 2013).

Flatt proceeds to describe ‘the main thematic areas of [the FSM] discourse’, rather than proceed directly with a critique of the contentions of FSM as he has presented them. These three thematic areas are only loosely connected with the listed contentions, and more loosely with the FSM argument as I have paraphrased it. They are: representations of complementary medicine practice, representations of complementary medicine patients, and understanding of the demarcation between complementary medicine and conventional medicine.

**CDARACM Analysis of the FSM Representation of Practice**

Flatt defines complementary medicine as a heterogeneous collection of practices, states that their practices are diverse, and declares that while they share a ‘cohesive practice method with theories of holism and vitalism’ this proposed ‘unity of method is not evident amongst all practitioners and these theories, their definition, and their application are contested in the complementary medicine literature’. CDARACM proceeds to criticise the FSM representation of complementary medicine practice for not first clearly defining complementary medicine, and of universalising features of some forms of complementary medicine to attack a ‘fictional grouping’. However, most of the statements quoted in the generally accurate summary of the FSM portrayal of complementary medicine practice given above do not support this interpretation; they are all accurate critiques of a real, not mythical, community of complementary medicine practice, or of strong streams within it.

The quoted FSM statements attacking the vitalistic theory given in CDARACM (‘…they’ve gotta have a mysteries energy that no-one can define and no-
one can locate and no-one can identify’, ‘… there’s always a mysterious energy involved’ and ‘… completely fanciful theory of mysterious energies …’) exhibit a very mild rhetoric and are strictly in accord with documented evidence. The definition of complementary medicine offered by Flatt asserts that theories of vitalism are, if not universal, very widespread among complementary medicine practitioners in such a degree as to be normative. Vitalist theories have been comprehensively discredited as explanations of biological phenomena in the wider community of inquirers for exactly the reasons quoted: they invoke energies which cannot be defined, located, or identified (Huxley, 1869).

The FSM statements ‘(t)here’s a huge placebo effect for many of these things’ and ‘(h)omeopathy … it’s a total placebo…’ are also rhetorically mild, and are supported by copious experimental evidence (Offit, 2012).

The FSM statements about the impact of complementary medicine on public health (‘…delays in effective treatment, side effects, drug interactions, health misinformation and distrust of conventional medicine’, ‘… public harm being done to patients’, ‘… there’s a lot of harm being caused in women’s and children’s health’, ‘… the threat is to society in general’ and ‘(l)ives have been lost over this’) are also factually true and can be verified. Numerous recent outbreaks of infectious disease in the developed world can be traced to anti-vaccine sentiment arising from distrust of conventional medicine and misplaced trust in complementary medicine (Gangarosa et al., 1998; Maltezou Helena & Wicker, 2013). There have also been numerous cases of patient deaths caused by delays in obtaining effective treatment where the patient relied on complementary medicine, (Mashta, 2009; Smith, Stephens, Werren, & Fischer, 2013) and deaths directly attributable to the effects of treatment with complementary medicine (Farley, 2010; Iwadate et al., 2003).

Only a few quotes are given in support of the assertion of CDARACM that FSM unfairly universalises complementary medicine practices: ‘…spring(ing) fully born into the mind of some German peasant or sort of a backwoods bloke in America as a fully blown theory’ (Top, 2012). ‘God knows why you should think that people who believe the world was flat are wiser than people now’. These particular pieces of rhetoric are inaccurate as characterisations of the founders of homeopathy and chiropractic, to which they are presumably intended to apply.\(^3\)

Without context, however, there is no way of knowing whether these statements are indeed universalisations, or are applied only to specific streams within the complementary medicine community. The general intent of the rhetoric, however, is not to highlight details of particular practices, but to stress the origin of most

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3 Samuel Hahnemann, founder of homeopathy, was as educated as any other country doctor of his time. While the facial hair of Daniel David Palmer (founder of chiropractic) might have suggested ‘backwoods bloke’ as recently as 2012, developments in male fashion mean he would not now be out of place on any Australian university campus, and he lived and worked in towns and cities throughout his career.
common complementary medicine practices in theories which were developed in isolation from the main community of medical inquirers and have not substantially altered in response to advances in knowledge made since their inception.

More broadly, the complaint of CDARACM that FSM unfairly paints all complementary medicine with a brush applicable only to some parts of complementary medicine is disingenuous and untenable. An ideological community can and should be held accountable for the beliefs and actions of all its members, unless it specifically repudiates those beliefs and actions. Maintaining silence enables the extreme members of the community and gives tacit approval for their beliefs and actions, and it is untenable for a community to then complain that they are being targeted unfairly because of those few members.

Flatt complains of FSM statements critical of complementary medicine practice that ‘... they are not presented with evidence to underpin their allegations, which undermines their validity.’ This is an artefact of the selection of the textual artefacts, which are either from popular media where extensive citation of evidence is uncommon, or from documents produced for internal consumption by an audience already familiar with this evidence. Evidence of the assertions made by FSM regarding complementary medicine in the excerpts above is abundant and clear (Atwood, 2011; Offit, 2012).

**CDARACM Analysis of the FSM Representation of Patients**

Flatt produces data about the fraction of Australian adults making use of complementary medicine, and quotes a number of FSM statements to support a contention that patients are regarded by FSM as naive and susceptible to mythology: ‘(p)eople should be free to choose what they like, and they always will’ ‘…. if they believe in the mythology, that’s up to them, they can go…’ ‘…ill informed choice from patients…’ ‘either gullible themselves or they are victims…’ ‘… when they tell you that they’ve got evidence for their treatment, it usually means something like, well it helped my grandmother’ ‘…whilst they can keep an open mind about therapies when they first investigate them, their mind should not be so open that their brain falls out’). These statements are not particularly rhetorically strong, and it is abundantly clear that human beings are in general naive and susceptible to mythology (Forer, 1949; Greenspan; Leman & Cinnirella, 2013; Preece & Baxter, 2000). In health, this susceptibility is particularly strong, because of the immediacy and importance of outcomes to individuals. In a complex situation where the personal stakes are so high, it is not surprising that otherwise reasonable people would grasp at any potential help in the case of serious health problems.

Flatt states: ‘FSM portray patients as uneducated and needing information, protection, and guidance. They say ‘…the public needs to be educated...’ and
authorities should be ‘…informing consumers and protecting them’, particularly ‘from what has absolutely no chance of helping them’.

These statements of FSM, and the others quoted above, are criticised on the grounds that they are paternalistic and belittle patients, but they are factually true and not hostile in tone. People in general, in their role as patients and otherwise, do need information, protection, and guidance. That is why we have, *inter alia*, schools and governments. The CDARACM criticism of FSM’s representation of complementary medicine is not in its essence a critique of representation, but an unsupported assertion that the public’s use of complementary medicine is reasonable and hence should not be criticised as unreasonable. Such an assertion must be demonstrated: in an argument about the reasonableness or otherwise of a proposition, it is not sufficient to simply reiterate that a position is reasonable. To reiterate: in an argument about the reasonableness or otherwise of a proposition, it is not sufficient to simply reiterate that a position is reasonable.

**CDARACM Analysis of the FSM Representation of Demarcation**

In this section, Flatt summarises the efforts of FSM to demarcate the line between conventional and complementary medicine. It is evident that complementary medicine practitioners, by labelling themselves as such, have clearly demarcated a division that is accepted by FSM. There is no disagreement about what is and what is not complementary medicine. There is, however, disagreement over what this difference consists of. FSM statements are quoted that clearly define the demarcation as one between science and non-science (‘…it’s not about knowledge, it’s about the presentation of absolute anti-science…’ ‘(t)hey are pseudoscience, or at best they are anti-science or non-science’.) Flatt summarises this as follows: “Statements of non-science status for complementary medicine are rife, which contributes to a marginalisation discourse.”

‘Science’ is not a label like ‘gentleman’ that has been drained entirely of meaning and ought to be applied to any respectably presented candidate out of courtesy. Science has a very specific meaning which is both more narrow and more powerful than ‘evidence-based’ (Fellows, 2012). Calling complementary medicine ‘non-science’ is a statement of fact, not a contribution to a ‘marginalisation discourse’.

The procedure of science is summarised in the following set of instructions given by the famous physicist Richard Feynman (Feynman, 1961):

- “In general, we look for a new law by the following process.
- First, we guess it.
• Then we compute the consequences of the guess to see what this law would imply.

• Then we compare those computation results to nature – to experiment, to experience. Compare it directly with observation to see if it works.

• If it disagrees with experiment, it’s wrong.

• In that simple statement is the key to science.”

The key term in Feynman’s analysis is not ‘evidence’, but ‘compute’. A scientific approach puts forwards a model, consistent with other knowledge, for a phenomenon, and predicts consequences that have not yet been observed, allowing the model to be falsified (Popper, 1934). A medical intervention that does not put forward a model, or that puts forward a model from which consequences can be computed which are contradicted by observations outside of medicine, is not a scientific medical intervention, regardless of whether or not a body of evidence exists suggesting that it is effective.

Flatt asserts that FSM criticises complementary medicine as not being ‘evidence based’ while ignoring evidence in favour of complementary medicine. This criticism disingenuously avoids what is unquestionably true: that the evidence for the effectiveness of conventional medicine is both qualitatively and quantitatively superior to the evidence for the effectiveness of complementary medicine. The documented increase in life expectancy worldwide over the past century is not correlated with an increased use of complementary medicine (National Institute on Aging, 2011).

The sections of CDARACM discussed above mimic the ‘results’ section of a research paper. They consist of quotations selected in an effort to show the use of language motivated by power abuse and ideology, but the quotations can be shown to be largely factually correct and the motivations claimed by Flatt are not supported by anything short of assertion. Indeed, this section is an extended polemic the aim of which is not to clarify and analyse the FSM’s discourse, but to defend complementary medicine by repeatedly asserting that the criticisms of it by FSM are unfair and unkind.

**CDARACM Discussion**

In further mimesis of a research paper, Flatt summarises the main features of the preceding polemic, reiterating the unfounded assertions made in the results and particularising them with unsupported statements regarding the motivation of
FSM that are presented as if they were derived by a process of reasoning from the ‘results’.

Firstly, the assertion is reiterated that FSM unfairly generalises specific practices to all of complementary medicine for criticism. As discussed above, this construction is not supported by the quotations given in CDARACM. Neither is any evidence presented for the assertion that such a generalisation is done in order to generate “fictional portrayals that constitute targetable entities for demarcation discourse and maintenance of professional dominance.”

Secondly, the assertion is reiterated that FSM demarcate conventional medicine as broadly scientific and complementary medicine as non-scientific. “FSM apply positive scientific qualities to biomedicine and negative non-scientific qualities to complementary medicine”. The statement is made that “definitions of science within such discourses are intentionally constructed to exclude non-scientific practices.” This is the rational behaviour of reasoning human beings who consider that words should have meanings. Flatt claims that this demarcation, which he correctly identifies, is motivated by a wish to maintain the dominance of a professional medical caste. However, this further assertion is not supported by any data presented in the paper.

Thirdly, the claim is reiterated that FSM does not provide sufficient evidence for the inefficacy of complementary medicine – an audacious statement considering the relative size and quality of the bodies of evidence already discussed above – which is made in the strong and indefensible form: ‘inability to provide proof for statements’.

The CDARACM discussion concludes with the following paragraph:

“What emerges from these findings is a discourse strategy that allows negative statements to be applied in an attempt to delimit complementary medicine. However, because FSM portray their subject matter in a manner contradictory to the literature their argument is symbolic rather than factual. This makes their discourse a ‘strategic manipulation of symbols to support a preconceived end’ (Hyde & Bineham, 2000). The result is a rhetorical construction of complementary medicine that is an expression of ideology and power concealed behind scientific and evidence-based objectivity. This finding reinforces the viewpoint of those who have previously commented on this discourse.”

There are no ‘findings’ in CDARACM. Use of this term is an unwarranted mimesis of true research practice. No evidence that FSM portray their subject matter in a manner contradictory to ‘the literature’ was presented in the paper, and this fact is irrelevant both to the stated aim of the paper as an analysis of the nature of the language used by FSM and to the objective truth of their claims: because science is not ‘the literature’. Non-scientific nonsense can readily take on the superficial qualities of science, pass through a careless peer-review process and take on a form
outwardly indistinguishable from science to all but the most careful examiners. It is CDARACM that is a ‘strategic manipulation of symbols to support a preconceived end’. Unwilling or unable to engage directly with the central argument of FSM and the community of inquiry that FSM represent, the author seeks to discredit the group with an *ad hominem* argument. Taking on the garb of a ‘research paper’ he presents a rhetorical construction of the opponents of complementary medicine that is an expression of ideology and power concealed behind a mimesis of scientific and evidence-based objectivity. This reinforces his pre-existing and unexamined prejudgment in favour of complementary medicine.

**CDARACM Conclusion**

The conclusion made by Flatt is disconnected from the ‘results’ presented and repeats the assertions made at the end of his discussion. The form the assertions take in their final appearance is yet more overtly that of a propagandist for complementary medicine. I will not quote it *in toto*, but will comment on the statements that comprise the last and part of the penultimate paragraphs of the conclusion.

“Their underlying desire to maintain power overrides any potential positive outcomes from within their view of complementary medicine, and contributes to a discourse that presents as diatribe.”

This statement made about motivation (and others made elsewhere in the conclusion) are not supported by any evidence, and the assertion that no positive outcomes can emerge from FSM’s view of complementary medicine can only be based on the prejudgment that complementary medicine is effective, an argument that is contested.

“The statements that FSM use have no respect for complementary medicine or its patients, create no potential for the application of science to this healthcare field, and leave no room for equitable scholarly debate.”

It is not necessary that statements have respect for complementary medicine, any more than statements made in other contexts of social policy need have respect for, *e.g.*, the policy positions of the Liberal Party. It is not demonstrated that FSM have a lack of respect for patients of complementary medicine in the quotes given in the paper: rather, the free choice of patients is explicitly recognised, while the desire that they be ‘informed and protected’ is a mark of respect, not disrespect. No quotes are given that would suggest FSM would oppose the application of science to complementary medicine: indeed, scientific investigation of the claims of complementary medicine is a major goal of FSM. For example, the following paragraph may be found prominently on the FSM website: “FSM strongly sup-
ports the need to conduct independent and disinterested scientific evaluations of those “Alternative and/or Complementary” therapies where the anecdotal evidence for benefit is strong and the underlying explanations are not incompatible with modern biological and physical sciences. Much that is of current therapeutic benefit was developed by such an approach” (Dwyer, 2012).

Furthermore, it is not possible to have equitable scholarly debate when one party to the debate rejects the foundation assumptions of scholarly debate. By holding complementary medicine to a lower evidential standard than conventional medicine and by refusing to engage directly with the central argument of the science-based medicine community, defenders of complementary medicine such as Flatt are forfeiting the field where scholarly debate is held.

“The negative implications of the presence of this type of imbalanced argument within the public sphere are not limited to the complementary medicine field. The knowledge community needs to carefully review these voices and conduct an ongoing critical analysis of the expressed demands.”

There is absolutely no evidence presented for the assertion that the style or content of the discourse conducted by FSM will have any impact beyond complementary medicine. The ‘knowledge community’, as defined broadly as ‘people who have experimentally verified knowledge of the facts of the matter’ is certainly active in conducting an ongoing critical analysis of the demands expressed by FSM and is broadly (although not overwhelmingly) in agreement that they are reasonable and should be met.

Finally, we come to the chilling last sentence of CDARACM:

“If this type of ideological discourse is allowed to flourish unchallenged, the possible consequences for freedom of knowledge and unfettered access to healthcare are significant.”

It is very clear from the citations made early on in CDARACM, and from the fact that it has appeared at all, that the discourse of FSM has been repeatedly challenged in the free marketplace of ideas. There is no danger whatsoever of it being allowed to flourish unchallenged. Given this background, I can only see in Flatt’s line an implied threat to inappropriately determine the truth or falsity of propositions not experimentally, but through the courts, in a way that has been destructively done in some overseas jurisdictions with regard to e.g., discussion of anthropogenic global warming (Adler, 2014). It is this, rather than continuing discourse, that could have a chilling effect on the ‘freedom of knowledge’. As for ‘unfettered access to healthcare’, it is an impossibility. It is not possible for any healthcare system to provide ‘unfettered access to healthcare’, for the reason that the total cost of the medical procedures that could be of benefit to individuals is
vastly greater than the total resources of the community. It is necessary to draw a
limit between what should be publicly-funded and what should not, and it makes
sense to draw this limit around those medical practices which are not merely
evidence-based, but have a firm grounding in science.

**Conclusion**

As CDARACM applies ‘critical discourse analysis’, it is no more than an exercise
of the *ad hominem* logical fallacy in an attempt to discredit FSM (Walton, 1985).
Rather than engage with the substantive argument of FSM, Flatt seeks to restruct-
ture a serious reality-based discussion of public policy as a simplistic narrative
of power abusers and victims. In phrasing his argument in the form of a peer-
reviewed research paper and using the esoteric language of a specialist research
community, he asserts a privileged position of power against FSM members who
make statements in less formal fora (Moran, 1998). This assertion of power is
made possible only by the demonstrated objectivity and effectiveness of peer-
reviewed research in the exact sciences (Macaulay, 1837; Popper, 1934; Sanford,
1899), which has led to the relatively high trust in which the results of research
papers are received by the wider community (Gauchat, 2012). Thus, Flatt is the
privileged beneficiary of the process of science that he implicitly rejects in the
body of his work.

“Critical Discourse Analysis of Rhetoric Against Complementary Medicine”
is a work of cargo-cult science, carried out in order to lend a patina of objectiv-
ity to a pre-judged conclusion. Rather than engage with the arguments of the
detractors of complementary medicine, Flatt seeks to pathologise their position
and make it a subject for analysis. Under this cloak he makes numerous unsup-
ported and weakly-supported statements towards his goal, which is to defend the
use of public funds for the teaching and practice of complementary medicine and
encourage patients to use the services of complementary medicine.

*Chris Fellows is a practicing physical scientist, educator, upholder of Peirce’s pragmatic
theory of truth, supporter of compassionate and effective public policy, free-speech ab-
solutist, and Friend of Science in Medicine.*

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Supplementary Material: Summary of Principles of Friends of Science in Medicine, August 2014 (Friends of Science in Medicine, 2014)

Conventional Medicine

- Medicine, together with its allied health professions, is an applied activity aimed at preventing, curing or ameliorating human ailments and diseases. Medicine is firmly based on proven theoretical principles of modern science and on the best experimental available evidence for effectiveness; and
- There is no place for interventions based in theories which do not conform with all the laws of Nature. If they do not conform to the laws of Nature discovered by science, and if there are no quality data to support their efficacy and safety, they are pseudoscience.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

- So-called ‘complementary and alternative medicines’ (CAMs) represent a disparate variety of interventions, many of which are not effective and are not based on any scientific principle, they therefore deceive the public, often for financial gain; and
- At their best, many CAMs ameliorate only minor ailments; they usually work because of the well-known ‘placebo effect’. At their worst, CAM interventions are unnecessarily dangerous - either because they cause direct harm or because they delay effective treatments.

Research

- Science has a well-established research methodology - it involves research which is published and able to be repeated by others - and allows a proposition to be either validated or refuted. All scientific theories and hypotheses must be amenable to research techniques. It is nonsense to claim that some of the theories behind CAMs cannot be analysed by valid research techniques;
- This principle applies to all types of medications and interventions, including conventional treatments, both to maximise efficacy and to minimise side-effects;
- We welcome research into traditional and herbal remedies. Many have been proven to contain valuable medicinal ingredients, which have subsequently been isolated and purified and used effectively by medical practitioners to treat illnesses; and
• Research into all CAM interventions is a valid role for universities. Once a remedy has been shown to be effective and safe, it will be incorporated into conventional scientific Medicine.

References


Purpose
After analyzing a multimodal video produced by sixth-grade students, we found it difficult to combine our distinctive voices and approaches into one final product. Nor did we feel readers would be well served by reading one full analysis followed by a second; eventually, we tried scripting the analyses as a play. As previous ethno-theater or dramatic research has focused on dramatizing data rather than analysis, and as little has been written about researchers presenting findings by assuming characters other than themselves or anyone else directly involved in the research, we offer our method in the hopes other scholars will find it useful.

Design/Methodology/Approach
Recalling the Apollonian and Dionysian approaches to understanding meaning, we assumed the characters of the half-brothers Apollo and Dionysus and performed the analyses, tinged with sibling rivalry, as a debate moderated by their father, Zeus.

Findings
In scripting, rehearsing, and performing as mythical characters, we gained further insight into the layers contained in the original data (the student-produced
video). In attending to the reactions of audience members (academic scholars attending a literacy conference), we also found we ‘observed against ourselves’ (Fetteryly, 1979) as we simultaneously identified with our roles as data objects and data creators.

**Keywords:**
Ethno-theater, dramatizing analysis, student-produced video, Apollo and Dionysus

Our initial project, conducted within the context of a doctoral seminar led by Jenifer, was to scrutinize the multimodal informative layers included in a video, produced by a group of sixth-grade students who were guided by two preservice teachers. In the first few passes through the data, Anne and Patriann—individually and without realizing they each had chosen the same video to analyze—applied to the video similar theories of perceiving information through visual, aural, spatial, choreographical, and other modes. After the seminar had ended, Jenifer encouraged Anne and Patriann to combine their analyses in the hopes the synthesis would help educators understand and evaluate student-produced multimedia work.

We discovered combining analyses was easier said than done. Finding a common voice seemed the obvious challenge, as we have very different academic writing styles and, because one of us grew up speaking American English while the other grew up speaking British English and a *patois*, different syntactical patterns. More difficult, however, was deciding how to address the process of evaluating the product without discussing the process of creating the product. In education, process and product are inextricably intertwined, but our purpose was to establish what could be learned by a detailed examination of the product apart from considerations of the process. When we shared our work informally, however, questions about process inevitably arose; acknowledging the questions seemed crucial. But how?

Anne knew from prior dramatic experience that one way to capture analytic complexity is to embody each perspective in a character, place the characters on a stage, and listen to their resultant dialogue. Recalling the Apollonian and the Dionysian approaches to understanding meaning (Athanases, 2008), we considered scripting the analyses through the voices of Apollo and Dionysus to explore our findings while also debating oppositional perspectives about the questions of evaluating product versus process, aesthetic versus pragmatic meanings, and immature versus mature artifacts. Theatricizing our analyses seemed to solve both problems, but we knew academic research methods must be documented and supported. In this paper, we discuss the processes of 1) evaluating the video, 2) combining our analyses of the video into a script, and 3) performing the scripted play at an academic conference.
“Waterbusters,” was one of several videos produced by teams of 6th grade students guided by preservice teachers who were themselves students in a writing/composition methods course taught by Jenifer (Schneider, Kozdras, Wolkenhauer, & Arias, 2014). All videos were submitted as part of a university-wide grant-writing project on sustainability. The final collection of student products were assembled in a 65-page report (Schneider, 2011b) to which the students contributed explanations and budgets for implementing their ideas.

A year later, as part of a doctoral seminar, Jenifer directed graduate students, including Anne, Patriann, and Aimee, to view any of the videos iteratively and to evaluate and analyze it in any order, showing “clear evidence that you have applied or re-appropriated concepts and strategies from the readings. Discuss your process and results…. [consider] text, images, movement, sound, camera shots, etc. … analyze themes, linguistics, discourse, technical production, etc.” (Schneider, 2012). On the fifth week, Jenifer pointed out that “rather than looking solely at images, or movement, or text, the authors [of our readings] examine the interstitial spaces,” (Schneider, 2012) and suggested we do the same. On the last week, Jenifer instructed us to look beyond the readings, to consider the video as part of a larger body of literature, and to contemplate what questions had not been asked or answered.

Independently, Anne and Patriann chose the same video, “Waterbusters,” to analyze. Each gravitated, separately, to Rodriguez and Dimitrova’s (2011) four-tiered, systematic model of considering the video at different levels. At the first level, the denotative level of interpreting visual elements, we described literally what we saw in the product. At the second stylistic level, we noted the choices made by the students and preservice teachers who functioned as videographers, sound editors, costumers, prop managers, actors, etc. Connotatively, the third level of Rodriguez and Dimitrova’s model, we interpreted symbolically what was presented in each scene. At the fourth level, we discussed the ideological representations conveyed by the product as a whole. We completed this process separately, and our resultant analyses were similar in some respects but, as the script will show, different in others.

Scripting the Scene: Theatricizing the Analyses

Patriann wrote about the entire video, while Anne focused more closely on the three opening scenes. We struggled with how to acknowledge the process-product dichotomy inherent in discussions of evaluating student (immature) work (informative composition? art?), and our attempts to find a common voice and ap-
proach fell flat. Finally, Anne, based on her experience with exploring theological and social conflicts through drama, suggested that rather than trying to minimize the differences between the two voices we magnify the disparities by embodying them in diametrically opposed characters. She also felt developing a theatricized reading of our analyses might lead us to further insight about the students and the video. We were intrigued by the idea, but we also were cautious. We began by exploring the literature about dramatized research.

We discovered that previous ethno-theater or dramatic research has highlighted differences by focusing on participant interviews or field notes (e.g., Anderson, 2007; Bird, 2011; Carter, 2010). In other instances, researchers theatricized and performed data in front of varying types of audiences (e.g., Schneider, King, Kozdras, Minick, & Welsh, 2011; White & Belliveau, 2011). Still, other researchers have used non-public dramatic storytelling sessions, constructed performances, fictional characters, and artistic renderings to present multiple voices (e.g., Greenwood & McCammon, 2007; Gray, 2009). Saldaña (2003) spoke to the concept of dramatizing data but did not address the researchers’ assuming characters other than themselves or anyone else directly involved in the research project. However, Saldaña (2003) discussed the “appropriateness of a story’s medium” (p. 219) and noted that playwrights have been “representing social life on stage” (pp. 230-231) for more than two millennia.

Although we were exploring conceptual ideas more than social life—we were not dramatizing the group production of the video nor our own process of viewing the data—we also recognized that playwrights have represented conceptual ideas on stage for more than two millennia. Jacobus (2005), for instance, noted, “The early Greek playwrights...emphasized the interaction between the will of the gods and the will of human beings, often pitting the truths of men and women against the truths of the gods” (2). More recently, Michael Frayn’s 2000 Tony-award winning play, Copenhagen, uses concepts of quantum physics to explore both the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the possible interpretations of historical events. Drawing on Saldaña’s (2003) thoughts about the “appropriateness of a story’s medium,” and bolstered with examples of exploring ideas and concepts through drama, we proceeded with our experiment of dramatizing our analyses through voices other than our own, but we remained reluctant to term this ethnotheatre. Additionally, because we used costumes and props, theatricizing the analyses seemed a more appropriate description.

The diametrically opposed voices of Appollo and Dionysus had suggested themselves to Anne in Athanases’ (2008) article describing the tension between product and process in terms of the dichotomy between the Greek gods Apollo—“god of theory, of clear and rational understanding” and “linked to the static arts of sculpture and architecture and of distanced introspection and repose”—and Dionysus—“god of dynamic arts such as drama, music, song, and dance; of art as
life in process” (p. 119). Callois (1958/2001) termed the divide as one between “ludus: play as a rule-governed system” and “paidea: a looser, more chaotic form of play” (as cited in Burns, 2009, p. 158), considering play metaphorically in terms of the game of life and in terms of creating compositions. Applying these analogies to the questions of evaluating children’s digital work and of determining whether the work has imaginative artistic value and/or conveys rational/pragmatic meaning raises further questions of who establishes the rules for producing such work, who establishes the standards by which such works are evaluated, and whether it is the final product or the process of creating it that ought to be examined. Voicing these questions through Apollo and Dionysus, even as “they” also analyzed the video itself, allowed multiple questions and perspectives to be argued simultaneously.

Throughout, Apollo spoke in the more formal style of Patriann and Dionysus spoke in the less formal style of Anne, although both presentations were exaggerated through gestures, emphasis, and asides. Generally speaking, but not always, Apollo spoke the words of Patriann and Dionysus those of Anne. The script at the end of this section includes text-boxed examples of the original analysis next to the dramatized version.

Theatricizing the analyses on paper, bringing the script to life, then tailoring the drama for presentation at an academic conference involved several iterations. Anne drafted a partial script using three voices—Apollo and Dionysus with their father, Zeus, doubling as Narrator. However, at the first read-through, Aimee was present, read the part of the narrator, and was agreeable to doing so at the conference. Hearing the four voices gave Anne the idea of changing the Narrator to a Greek Chorus, a typical device found in most classical Greek tragedies (Weiner, 1981). With the Chorus acting as a foil, Anne heightened the contrast between Dionysus and Apollo by adding visual and verbal comedic effects. Anne also included ideas for slides at particular points in the sketch and began drafting a playbill (Figure 1) to prepare attendees for a theatrical performance instead a more usual presentation. Jenifer created the slide show presentation, which included background information about the initial video-composing project.

At the second video-conference, we realized we had different conceptions about what kinds of information the audience needed. Jenifer felt the audience needed to see the entire three-minute video, while Anne felt the first 21 seconds was sufficient as the bulk of the analysis was focused on this segment. We also were scheduled to present last, and we were concerned we might not have a full 20 minutes to present. Saldana (2003) observed that entertainment is the goal of theatre artists—not education or enlightenment, which is the goal of most researchers—and we were experiencing the tension between those two goals. Saldana (2003) reminded us we had, a “responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectu-
Figure 1. Playbill for “Busting Open Waterbusters”

Our Players

ANNE ANDERSON. (Dionysus) Found for many years on the other side of the boards, Anne is pleased to be appearing as a doctoral candidate in Literacy Studies at the University of South Florida where she teaches children's literature and writing processes. Her research explores ideologies in and of children's literature and qualitative methodologies of text analysis.

AIMEE FRIER. (Chorus) Making her comedic debut, Aimee was discovered trapped under a pile of books at the University of South Florida, where she is a doctoral candidate in both the Literacy Studies and Special Education programs. Her research interests include new literacies for struggling or at-risk students.

JENIFER SCHNEIDER. (Zeus) A long-time company member at the University of South Florida, Jenifer currently appears as Associate Professor of Childhood Education and Literacy. Directing credits include Advanced Graduate Coordinator and the CLICK (Children's Literature Collection of Knowhow) Conference, a multimedia workshop/conference for young authors and illustrators. Jenifer's research focuses on writing development and writing instruction, multimedia composing, process drama, children's literature, and qualitative research methodologies, including the role of performance ethnography and ethno-theatre as tools for developing reflexive practice.

PATRIANN SMITH. (Apollo) Currently a company member of the University of Illinois, where she is an Assistant Professor in Literacy Studies, Patriann rejoins the cast for this theatricized production of “Busting Open Waterbusters.” Patriann's research explores the personal and professional challenges faced by multilingual teachers and other educators and the methodologies employed in empirical studies of the language and literacy practices of language learners.

Characters:

Zeus: Father of gods and men, god of the sky and of the heavens, brother to Poseidon (god of the sea) and Pluto (god of the underworld); married to his sister Hera, but many times unfaithful to her; “upheld law, justice and morals, [making] him the spiritual leader of both gods and men” (Zeus, 2005, p. 11). Wonder what Hera thought of that…

Apollo: Zeus's son by Leto, one of the Titans; twin to Artemis; associated with the sun; “god of theory, of…rational understanding” and “linked to the static arts of sculpture and architecture…of distanced introspection and repos[ee]” (Athanases, 2008, p. 119).

Dionysus: Zeus's son by Semele, a mortal; called by the Romans 'Bacchus'; “god of dynamic arts such as drama, music, song, and dance; of art as life in process” (Athanasis, 2008, p. 119), or what we today might call one wild and crazy guy.

Chorus: The Chorus as an “element of production” adds “to the general pleasure and understanding of the audience” (Weißen, 1980, p. 210), and our Chorus does just that!

Setting: The scene takes place on the lofty heights of Mount Olympus, where the gods dwell between heaven and earth. From Olympus, the gods observe a group of mortal 6th grade students working with a pre-

The data sources:

A student-produced video on sustainability (Schneider, 2011), produced under the direction of Jenifer Schneider, and the analyses of the video produced by Patriann Smith and Anne Anderson.

Questions considered by Apollo and Dionysus in this scene

How do we evaluate digital works, which may contain layers of multimodal texts, especially when produced by children? Each layer must be considered separately and in relation to the others. Such evaluations also raise the philosophical questions, debated through the ages, of:

• what constitutes art,
• what constitutes meaning, and
• whether art and meaning are to be found in the process or in the end product.

The analytical methods and theoretical discussions:

Iterative viewings of the video, written description of the multimodal information contained in each level (Rodriguez & Dimitrou, 2009):

• Denotative / Literal
• Stylistic / Technical Choices
• Connotative / Symbolic
• Ideological / Iconic

Written discussion of the findings, drawing on various theories. In this presentation, we focus on Eco’s (2003) idea of ostention, the de-realization of a person or object to represent an entire class.

Dramatizing the data using theatrical processes (Saldana, 2003). Athanaeus (2009) described the divide between two types of art / meaning / process in terms of the dichotomy between the Greek gods Apollo—“god of theory, of clear and rational understanding” and “linked to the static arts of sculpture and architecture and of distanced introspection and repos[ee]”—and Dionysus—“god of dynamic arts such as drama, music, song, and dance; of art as life in process” (p. 119). In that spirit, we present “Busting Open Waterbusters.”

References:


ally rich, and emotionally evocative” (p. 220), and we agreed the audience needed more information in order to enter into the aspect of being entertained. Too little knowledge might leave them merely confused or even angry at the thought their time was being wasted. Accordingly, we expanded the backstory by giving more information about the initial project, decided to show the video in full (Schneider, 2011a), and trimmed the dramatization.

Our third rehearsal took place in a hotel room at the conference. We tried on our costumes and practiced gestures. We coordinated dialogue with the timing of the slides and discussed how we would use the presentation room space. We planned a fourth rehearsal in the presentation room, but the room was unavailable, so we did a final read-through while we waited outside for the room to be vacated. We did not memorize the dialogue, but we learned it well enough to provide a theatrical reading with minimal use of the scripts.

Prior to the session, we distributed playbills to attendees to give them time to read about the characters, cast, and project. Jenifer introduced the project using the first slides, played the video, and explained the concept of presenting the analysis through the characters of Apollo, Dionysus, and Zeus. Then, we donned our costumes and began:

**Live! From Mount Olympus: “Busting Open Waterbusters”**

Characters:

Zeus/Researcher 1: Father of gods and men, god of the sky and of the heavens

Apollo/Researcher 2: Zeus’s son by Leto, a Titan; associated with sun and light, Apollo god of music, “prophecy, colonization, medicine, archery (but not for war or hunting), poetry, dance, intellectual inquiry and the carer of herds and flocks” (Apollo, 2004, ¶1).

Dionysus/Researcher 3: Zeus’s son by Semele, a mortal; called ‘Bacchus,’ Dionysus is “god of wine, agriculture… patron god of the Greek stage” (Dionysus, 2007, ¶1)


Costumes: ZEUS, APOLLO, and DIONYSUS wear laurel wreaths and simple scarves to resemble draped togas. The CHORUS wears a simple mask.
Props: Slides are projected throughout.

Setting: The lofty heights of Mount Olympus, where the gods dwell between heaven and earth.

(As the scene begins, RESEARCHERS 1, 2, and 3 (ZEUS, APOLLO, and DIONYSUS) sit at the conference table. The CHORUS stands and faces the audience. SLIDE: Title Slide shows the playbill logo, title, and researchers' names / affiliations)

CHORUS: (addressing the audience) Hail, mortal audience! Greetings in the name of Zeus, and (gestures to indicate the performance space) welcome to Mount Olympus, where the gods observe and comment on mortal lives. SLIDE: Theory & Theatre reads: Greek word thea means view / Theory and Theatre (Athanases, 2009, p. 119) Today, mortal researchers Jenifer Schneider (RESEARCHER 1 / ZEUS stands, dons costume, and looks down at an unseen earthly scene), Patriann Smith (RESEARCHER 2 / APOLLO stands, faces away from audience on one side of ZEUS, and dons costume), and Anne Anderson (RESEARCHER 3 / DIONYSUS stands, faces away from audience on the other side of ZEUS, and dons costume) assume the roles of ZEUS and his two sons—half-brothers—APOLLO, “god of theory...linked to the static arts,” and DIONYSUS, called Bacchus by the Romans and considered the “god of dynamic arts [such as theatre]...of art as life in process” (Athanases, 2009, p. 119). (Beat) One day, Zeus, looking down from Mount Olympus, saw a group of 6th grade students creating a video.

(APOLLO and DIONYSUS step forward and stand on either side of ZEUS)

ZEUS. (gestures below; APOLLO and DIONYSUS turn their attention to the scene) My sons, mortal children are staging scenes and creating a video, “Waterbusters” (SLIDE: beginning frame of video) to focus attention on the problem of broken sprinkler heads, at a university campus, wasting water and, by extension, money. What do you suppose this means?

APOLLO. (dismainfully) What possible meaning could be contained in something—especially video—made by children? Didn’t one of these mortals, Vygotsky, write that “a lack of technical skill prevents [children’s] creations, no matter how meaningful to their personality development, Compare the dialogue at left with Anne’s original analysis: Smagorinsky (2011) explained Lev Vygotsky’s perspectives on art and noted Vygotsky’s belief that “lack of technical skill prevents their [children’s] creations, no matter how meaningful to their per-
from reaching artistic status” (as cited in Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 325)?

**DIONYSUS**. Another mortal thinker, Figueiredo (2011), might call them “world builders”—“creating meaning from fragments of data” (p. 92). What a fluidly artistic process!

**APOLLO**. Static products such as sculpture, architecture, even painting are art—one can ponder and reflect on their meaning. But video produced by children? Let us consider this rationally, O Zeus. First, what do you mean when you ask what this means? Do you refer to the meaning contained in the product of the video itself?

**DIONYSUS**. Or to the meaning derived during the artistic process of creating the video?

**APOLLO**. Meaning only exists in a product.

*(CHORUS shakes head and makes an “Oh, please—not in front of our guests” sort of gesture during this next exchange)*

**DIONYSUS**. Process!

**APOLLO**. Product!

**DIONYSUS**. Process!

**ZEUS**. Silence! This cannot and will not be decided by bickering. At the moment, the question is how to evaluate such works. *(Beat)* You will view the multimodal text in four iterations using the model developed by other mortals, Rodriguez and Dimitrova. *(SLIDE: Levels of Visual Framing lists citation for Rodriguez & Dimitrova)*
(2011) and four pairs of words: Denotative / Literal, Stylistic / Techniques, Connotative / Symbolic, Ideological / Critical).


(SLIDE(S): Theory is on the screen during this next exchange, but is not read.

(1) “[M]ultimodal texts require different cognitive strategies from written texts because the meaning in visual images is derived from spatial relations whereas the meaning in written text emanates from its temporal sequence” (Serafini, 2011, p. 343)

(2) “Semiotic activity is about selecting which modes (e.g., spatial, visual, audio, gestural, and/or linguistic) need to be emphasized in a particular context to achieve a particular end” (Chandler-Olcott, 2008, p. 251)

(3) The goal of a multimedia project is to combine modalities to create “an entire semiotic product or event (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, as cited in Chandler-Olcott, 2008, p. 251).

(APOLLO and DIONYSUS both open their mouths as if to say something, but ZEUS speaks)

Zeus: And we will cast lots to determine who speaks first. (mimes taking a token from each son, shaking them together, closing his eyes, and drawing one) Apollo, you shall speak first. (APOLLO begins to smirk) Dionysus, you shall have the last word. (DIONYSUS smirks)

APOLLO and DIONYSUS. Agreed.

ZEUS. (ZEUS sits and assumes the role of moderator) Proceed.

APOLLO. (Imperiously) Considering visuals as denotative and stylistic-semiotic systems we examine the objects and elements observed in the visual, then consider the organization of these into themes (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 53). We begin, Consider Patriann’s analysis:

Furthermore, the fact that these individuals represent someone, that they signify a role in a play implies that they can also be considered stages in themselves. As Honzl (1976) notes, “although a stage is
therefore, with the *touch of disdain* stage. (Beat) Let it be known that, despite my disdain for their artistic value, I can speak to the "fluid arts" as well as my brother. *(DIONYSUS gestures "Oh, brother" and becomes increasingly bored, looks at imaginary watch, etc.) As Honzl (1940/1998) noted, "although a stage is usually a construction, it is not its constructional nature that makes it a stage but the fact that it represents dramatic place" (p. 270). So, for the first actor, the bench *(CHORUS gestures as game-show model and indicates bench in SLIDE)* on which he sits becomes a stage, while for the second and third, the steps *(CHORUS indicates steps)* and sidewalk *(CHORUS indicates sidewalk)* on which they move assume a stage-like quality. *(SLIDE includes three images: (1) the student on the bench, (2) the student going down the steps, and (3) the professor on the sidewalk.)*

**DIONYSUS.** *(overly polite)* My brother fails to note the stages he describes are static objects, the sculptures, if you will, of which he so highly speaks and on which mortal creatures play their parts. (Beat) *(CHORUS indicates various items as mentioned)* The opening scene fades in from a blur to a scene of a person, *(becoming more effusive)* wearing sneakers, green shorts, a white t-shirt, and a bright green wig!—love it!—sitting outdoors on a bench, head tilted back and resting on the back of the bench. The sound effect of a loud snore tells us the person is sleeping, and a subtitle *(in gold letters)* proclaims, “One day at the College of Education….” Because the person is wearing a school uniform, we assume he/she is a student. Almost immediately after the snore, we hear orchestral music playing a pastoral theme. This gentle music contrasts with the two streams of water that next begin to be directed, from an un-

**APOLLO.** The fact that these individuals represent someone, that they sig-
nify a role in a play (shudders) implies that they can also be considered stages in themselves.

DIONYSUS. (Ignoring Apollo) Next, we hear a snore and orchestral music (mimes gentle conducting; CHORUS joins in) playing a pastoral theme. This soft music contrasts with two streams of water (mimes shooting; CHORUS joins in; APOLLO looks down his nose) pow, pow, pow! directed, from an unseen source, at the student. The student raises his arms in defense but is overpowered and falls off of the bench. (DIONYSUS and CHORUS high five) seen source, at the student. The student raises his/her arms to defend himself/herself, but he/she is overpowered and falls off of the bench. Within this first scene, then, we see the modalities of the spatial (outdoors, moving from sitting on a bench to falling off a bench), visual (colors, costume/clothing, furniture, streams of water), the auditory (snore, music), gestural (raising arms to defend self), and linguistic (subtitle) to convey the idea of a helpless student being assaulted and overpowered by water. No words have been spoken, and the few words of written text only serve to ground the setting.

APOLLO. The sprinklers, while not visible in the film, produce water which functions, as Honzl puts it, as a “stage prop” (Honzl, 1940/1998, p. 274), symbolizing aggression.

DIONYSUS. (appealing to ZEUS) I thought we were not discussing connotations here.

ZEUS. (speaking to APOLLO) Your brother has a point.

APOLLO. My brother “discussed” connotations by his actions and extraneous verbalizations.

ZEUS. (speaking to DIONYSUS) Your brother has a point. Proceed.

DIONYSUS. Within this first scene, then, we see the modalities of the—

CHORUS. Spatial.

APOLLO. —outdoors, moving from sitting on a bench to falling off a bench—

CHORUS. Visual.

DIONYSUS. —colors, costumes/clothing, furniture, streams of water—
CHORUS. Audial.

APOLLO. —snore, music—

CHORUS. Choreographical and gestural.

DIONYSUS. —falling, raising arms to defend self—

CHORUS. Alphabetic.

APOLLO. —subtitles—

DIONYSUS. —all of which are stylistic choices made in the process of conveying the idea of a helpless student being assaulted and overpowered by water.

APOLLO. To answer the question, “Who or what is depicted here?” is partially to achieve the goal of describing the scene at its most basic level.

DIONYSUS. The scene fades, and a new scene takes its place, also set outdoors. This time—

APOLLO. (cuts DIONYSUS off to forestall more theatrics; DIONYSUS is left with his mouth open) This time a person in sunglasses, a hoodie, shorts, and sneakers, swaggers down a set of steps in time to a synthesized beat reminiscent of rap music.

DIONYSUS. A subtitle appears, which reads, “Later that same day…” Again—

APOLLO. (as before) Again, two streams of water assault the person. The person backs away.

DIONYSUS. The scene changes a third time, we are again outdoors. Now we see—

APOLLO. Now we see a person wearing a ball cap and the mask of a middle-aged man. “He” struts to a clarinet playing rag-jazz; and a subtitle appears, “Soon after…” This man, too—

DIONYSUS. (cuts APOLLO off and leaves APOLLO with his mouth open) —is assaulted by streams of water (mimes shooting; CHORUS joins in; APOLLO looks
—dzdzdzdz! He raises his hands, tries to defend himself, but is overpow-ered and falls flat on his back. (CHORUS and DIONYSUS high five)

APOLLO. (appealing to ZEUS) Really?

ZEUS. You must admit he is…entertaining. Proceed.

APOLLO. (SLIDE: Still Images / Other Scenes shows still images of the newscasters, protesters, and Waterbusters; CHORUS again assumes game-show model role) Continuation of the film reveals a makeshift newsroom set with two news reporters, wearing masks, who report events related to the sprinkler mishaps.

DIONYSUS. Outraged protesters bang (demonstrates) on closed doors of the maintenance office, demanding the sprinkler problems be solved (strikes a “Let justice be done” pose).

APOLLO. (ignoring DIONYSUS) Intermittently, the Waterbusters appear, collectively at times and individually during others, offering solutions.

DIONYSUS. (behaving himself) Stylistically, the videographers chose medium and full shots to frame the three subjects—

APOLLO.—signifying relationships ranging from personal to social (Rodriguez, and Dimitrova, 2011, p. 55). Aurally, the volume remains somewhat constant—there is no appreciable difference between one segment and the next—

DIONYSUS.—suggesting the viewer/hearer should give equal weight to each incident. The sleeping student is no more and no less significant than the other two people.

ZEUS. As you have introduced connotative meaning into the conversation, speak now to that which you have described in terms of the mortal Eco’s (1994) idea of ostention.

CHORUS. (Reads Slide: Ostention: a form of signifying, occurs when a person (or an object) is “picked up [from] among the existing physical bodies, [is] de-realiz[ed]…in order to make it stand for an entire class” (Eco, 1994, p. 281).) Ostention: a form of signifying, occurs when a person (or an object) is “picked up [from] among the existing physical bodies, [is] de-realiz[ed]…in order to make it stand for an entire class” (Eco, 1994, p. 281).
DIONYSUS. The first person wears student attire and a green frizzy wig, from a pep rally.

APOLLO. By ostention, this person symbolizes “rah-rah, go school” students, ones, perhaps who expend their energies in places other than class and end up sleeping on benches.

DIONYSUS. The second person wears a zipped-up sweatshirt with the hood pulled up. “Hoodies,” are worn by people of many races, but they have become particularly identified with African American youth. The hoodie and rap music ostend this person into symbolizing African American students, perhaps even all non-White students.

APOLLO. The third person wears a ball cap, suggesting someone not quite with the current trend of wig or hoodie. The ball cap, combined with the middle-aged face mask and Dixieland jazz, ostend the one person into all older people on campus.

DIONYSUS. Through the visual, aural, and choreographical modalities, then, we see a Typical (if stereotyped) White Student, a Typical (if stereotyped) non-White Student, and a Typical (if caricatured) Professor/Adult, each of whom has been the victim of renegade waters.

APOLLO. Clearly, the unverbalized—

DIONYSUS. —but not unspoken—message transcending the individual components is,

APOLLO, DIONYSUS, and CHORUS. (in unison) “This happened to us; it could happen to anyone; (pointing to audience) it could happen to you.”

ZEUS. And ideologically (Slide: Ideologies reads: (1) Who/what is threatened? (2) By whom? (3) Who/what has power to resolve the issue?)

APOLLO. In particular contexts (rolls eyes at DIONYSUS and CHORUS), water outbursts could be conceived of as fun. These water outbursts are portrayed, however, as harmful wastage. The Waterbusters represent those who see water outbursts as a threat, thereby creating the social context in which conservation versus wastage becomes the ideological abstraction.
DIONYSUS. The Waterbusters appear both collectively and individually, a choice (looks pointedly at APOLLO) suggesting the importance of approaching this problem in a unified manner while emphasizing each individual’s ability to make a difference.

APOLLO. Whatever the case, the semiotic phenomena are designed to function similarly to “everyday conversational interaction” (Eco, 1977, p. 286). Viewers may decide to listen, to become waterbusters themselves, to find a way to solve the problem, or to join the protest.

DIONYSUS. (triumphant) Did you say designed? Then you admit viewers derive cognitive and emotional meaning from the process the children used in deciding what to portray and how!

APOLLO. I said viewers MAY decide. While I am forced to applaud the children’s attempts, given the crudity of the product itself, it remains only an attempt at conveying meaning.

DIONYSUS. Meaning is in the process. Mortal, Figueiredo (2011), suggested comics creators—

APOLLO. Comics creators? Really, Dionysus—

DIONYSUS. Hear me out, Brother. Comics creators are information designers (p. 87) (SLIDE: Image of a comic strip: Comics creators work to “create meaning from fragments of data by organizing the selected pieces into an ordered view of the world” (Figueiredo, 2011, p. 92).) who “create meaning from fragments of data by organizing the selected pieces of data into an ordered view of the world” (p. 92) that flow across “segments of frozen scenes [enclosed] by a frame or panel” (Eisner, 1985, as cited in Figueiredo, 2011, p. 92).

APOLLO. And?

DIONYSUS. If we consider “Waterbusters” as a moving comic strip—each scene fluid, rather than frozen, but still enclosed by transitions from scene to scene that fragments data—and if we consider the creators of “Waterbusters” as artistic information designers—world builders,

APOLLO. Go on.
DIONYSUS. …our task is to consider the designing or artistic process involved in their making the world over in the image of the creators, in this case, the students’ own selves (p. 88).

APOLLO. (repeating slowly) “The world made over in the image of the crea--” You mean like gods? We’re supposed to think of these children as gods capable of creating worlds?

(CHORUS whispers in APOLLO’s ear)

APOLLO. Say! You’re right! (High fives CHORUS) Then you admit it is a product, a created world that is of ultimate importance?

ZEUS. (stands and interjects with laughter) It appears you both have been had. In arguing for a product, Apollo, you have dissected and evaluated the artistic process. And you, Dionysus, in arguing for the process, have ended up with a product on which your evaluations rest. I declare this debate a draw. Shake hands (APOLLO and DIONYSUS obey) and let us close the veil over this scene. (ZEUS waves his hand over the earthly scene and turns to leave)

APOLLO. (gathering his papers) Perhaps when these children have matured, they will produce something worthy of future discussion.

DIONYSUS. (gathering his papers) It would appear what “these children” produced in their present immaturity was worth our present discussion.

(APOLLO and DIONYSUS confront each other; the CHORUS cringes and covers her ears)

APOLLO. Future.

DIONYSUS. Present.

APOLLO. Future!

DIONYSUS. Present!

Zeus: (stepping between APOLLO and DIONYSUS) Silence!

(ZEUS, APOLLO, DIONYSUS, and CHORUS freeze for a two-count beat, then bow to audience)
Performance Post-Mortem: What We Discovered from Theatricizing the Analysis

Each of us approached this project with different levels of experience with drama. Anne had written, directed, and staged many short non-academic dramatic programs; additionally, she had taken a script-writing course and had created another script based on research. Jenifer had studied and taught process drama techniques and had written and acted in a research-based ethnodrama. Patriann and Aimee both are experienced instructors and presenters, but Aimee, in particular, admitted to “SEVERE drama anxiety,” saying “the prospect of performing was a bit intimidating” (Anderson, Smith, Schneider, & Frier, 2013). Despite our disparate theatrical backgrounds, we each made similar discoveries about the use of space and time, about the processes of composing and evaluating, and about the concepts of teaching and learning.

Discoveries About the Use of Space and Time

While technology allowed us to share thoughts and rehearse the script across time zones, we were struck by the physical differences when met for the third rehearsal. The presence of beds and luggage limited our movements, yet each of us felt more connected to the others and to the ideas of the script. As Jenifer put it, “It helped with body arrangement, tone, and timing.” Aimee noted the physical proximity relieved some of her anxiety about the performance and said, “Being in the same physical space allowed us to see gesture, gauge the physical spaces we needed for our roles, and bring it all together with costumes.” Nor was it just a matter of blocking movements; Jenifer said walking (as opposed to merely talking) through the script improved her understanding of the concepts.

Nevertheless, because we were not able to rehearse in the presentation room, we could only gauge the physical spaces needed. When we actually performed in the session, each of us felt physically awkward as the projector and screen pushed our presentation space to the sides of the room. Additionally, Jenifer had trouble putting her costume on while controlling the slide presentation and felt she did not go “into full acting” as she would have with more rehearsal; Anne felt she and Patriann did not use space as effectively as they could have to highlight the disagreement between the two perspectives. Aimee, whose part included comic moments, felt she “would have liked to execute my part with more ‘umph’” and could have done so with more practice in the actual space. However, despite Aimee’s feeling she could have delivered her part with more energy, Jenifer specifically commented that she had “never really understood Aimee’s denotative/connotative chant until she turned to the screen and read it over and over again. That was brilliant!”
We each recognized our rehearsal time was very limited. Anne, perhaps because of her more extensive experience with scripted drama, felt we had missed opportunities to connect more deeply with the data and the analysis, an opportunity that comes only with repeated “playing” with lines, inflection, gestures, and blocking. This led us to wonder how the processes of theatricizing academic data/analysis differ from other forms of theater. Or, perhaps, all theater analyzes life-data and academic writing imposes artificial constructs on the theatricizing of gathered data and resulting analysis.

Discoveries About the Processes of Composing and Evaluating

If we consider Rosenblatt’s (1994/1978) idea of readers constructing/composing meaning based on the reading of a text, then we as readers and actors were composing as much as the author of the script and as much as the students who created the original video. Perhaps theatricizing the data and/or analyses involves a realigning of relationships between people and between researcher(s) and the data. In writing the script, Anne was still very much in charge of shaping the analysis. In playing with characters, voices, and lines, we would have allowed the analysis more power to shape us and our thinking. However, Patriann, as Apollo, felt even the limited time we spent in rehearsal caused her to delve more deeply into the concepts and to engage more actively with the theorists we referenced:

I assumed an active role in “speaking to” the mortals who helped me make the case for or against the arguments surrounding the data presentation. But I also took on the perspective of the [student] actors/actresses who produced the film—I spoke their words and emulated their actions to convey their meanings, I embodied who they presented themselves to be at different points in their performance. In other words, I developed multiple personas in my theatricization that demanded my “entering into” the data and submersing . . . myself into it.

Aimee also noted theatricizing the analysis “presented the theory alongside the data/analysis. … Combining them this way provided . . . a space to consider the audiences.”

Audience reaction provides an immediate form of evaluation to any presentation, but how did our theatricizing position the audience—how does this method affect a reader’s or viewer’s receptive willingness and comprehension? Aimee, who observed the audience most, felt everyone was involved, whether or not they “‘got’ everything we were trying to say.” Jenifer received positive comments about the playbill both during and after the session. Patriann noted that performing the analysis subjected her work to as much critique as the children received: “I sensed a need to entertain [the audience]. If they laughed or watched on eagerly in anticipation of an interesting scene and I failed to fulfill their needs, I felt that my performance of the script was not effective.” Additionally, she connected with
the children as composers: “I believed that I gained a greater sense of satisfaction in the rehearsal procedures than in the actual performance, the reasons underlying this I cannot say. I felt more in tune with the script in the absence of the final audience.” Again, we were left with questions. How does an audience mediate performance and performance as product?

We discovered that the process of theatricizing the analysis—of producing a performed product—helped us to understand more clearly the role of the children as learners and to appreciate their products as meaningful in and of themselves. We learned, or re-learned, that we, as adult readers, glean some information from reading a passage, gain more information from talking about it, but grasp even more from acting it out. Similarly, the presence of an audience requires us to act in role even as we read and interpret our own analytic performance out of role. The philosophical questions of what constitutes art, what constitutes meaning, and whether art and meaning are to be found in the process or in the end product, are not resolved. In fact, through embodiment and role-play, the inherent tensions became even more complicated.

Note: The authors recreated the presentation the following year, recorded it, and uploaded it to:

https://youtu.be/ywzjAZqwBS8

References


An Environmental Artist and PhD Candidate’s Observations of Globalism’s Post GFC* Aftermath

Is There Economic Viability, for Marginalised Artists Creating the Culture of Environmental Sustainability?

*GFC: Global Financial Crisis

John Dahlsen

Abstract:

This paper discusses the career of environmental artist and Charles Darwin University PhD candidate and lecturer John Dahlsen, and explores opportunities in globalized economies for artists, whose environmental awareness aesthetic is creating the culture of a sustainable future.

The identity of contemporary career artists within our culture, particularly marginalised professionals, can be severely compromised because of economic disruptions like the Global Financial Crisis. These can surface as unemployment, marriage breakups and even homelessness for artists and can result in the total cessation of career activities or at best new career paths in associated fields.

Artists can contribute significantly to a sustainable future, especially when addressing how our globalised world economy affects them. Complications for marginalized artists have increased with globalism’s economic impact, resulting in challenges to respond to tougher times, by adequately adjusting to this new paradigm. It requires their re-education to equip them to respond in proactive ways to unexpected events like the GFC.

Providing insight through new research and education will fill gaps in this knowledge. For our cultural future to be guided by artists whose creativity is centred on environmental aesthetics, they need freeing up from financial constrictions to work effectively, all requiring significant shifts in consciousness.

Do these artists’ especially diverse and also fragile career paths necessitate their downfall during tough economic times? Is it socially justifiable that they compromise their creativity, or can we change this trend?

It is possible with industry and social backing to develop new education and support for those affected by contemporary unexpected economic outcomes, for difference and identity is increasingly paramount for artists expressing individualism.
This paper discusses my own practice and the early stages of a PhD exploring the impact for various sectors of the arts industry, of the Global Financial Crisis.

With the advent of the GFC, I observed other marginalized artists like myself, who relied on a buoyant economy for their success. They were as surprised with its consequences as I was.

I’ve developed a deep interest in how these artists responded and have looked into my own responses to it, given the options available at that time. Writing extensively about it and other arts related matters, eventually led me to doing my PhD.

Is it socially justifiable that these artists compromise their creativity, or can we change this trend? There is opportunity for artists to participate in finding solutions to existing ecological crises. This is possible with widespread industry support, coupled with those artists learning new ways of adapting to today’s uncertain economic times.

We can address the issue of marginalised artists in an increasingly changing world and economy. Complications for these artists are increasing because of globalism’s impact on the economy, resulting in artists being challenged to respond to uncertain economic times by adjusting to the new paradigms.
After a presentation at a conference earlier in the year, an audience member noted, the GFC caused death to the Avant-garde, the U.S. experienced massive drops in the mid to lower range of the art world. The top 10% survived, but that big chunk in the middle disappeared.

There is a need for re-education of artists in these fields, equipping them to respond in proactive ways to situations such as the GFC. The future success of these artists is underpinned by their ability to appeal to youth in our society.

Figure 3: Driftwood # 1Print Dahlsen 2013
According to Wildy; “The arts are uniquely positioned to play a positive part in influencing a change in environmental sensibilities”. (Wildy 2013).

There is a cringe that most artists feel at being categorised, relegated to an ‘Ism’ which forces them into a lifetime of conformism to that category.

As an artist I know it, having been called an environmental artist for the past fifteen years, with my art making ecological statements as assemblages, sculptures and installations made from plastic refuse collected from Australia’s beaches and made from other recycled materials.
My shift from painting, to the marginalised field of environmental art happened during the nineties.

In my mid-career memoir, I described this shift in the preamble, where I said that during these excursions to remote beaches, I stumbled again and again across vast amounts of plastic debris washed up on the shoreline…I felt compelled to collect it.
I was intrigued with the myriad forms: shapes and colours, textures and weathering. Upon emptying the sacks onto the floor of my studio I witnessed a giant painter’s palette.

Artists, whose creativity is focused particularly in an environmental awareness aesthetic, can help shape a future sustainable society that promotes altruism.
and interconnectedness. I believe a positive future, requires significant shifts in consciousness for across the board, including the artists who are influencing the future through their vision.

Elsewhere I have said that “our immediate and long-term future has the promise of positivity for humankind, science religion and art are now almost inseparable with their understanding of everything being connected, from the smallest organism to the vast expanses of the universe” (Dahlsen, John 2012).

My position as an environmental artist has had its own dualities: It included me into globalised society, helping to form my identity within art culture. It was also exclusive to the broader artistic community, because I was categorised in a marginalized field.

Definitions of environmental art are varied; In 2011 Wildy stated, “Environmental art has been defined as an art form where there is no specific stylistic approach,
Figure 9: Driftwood # 2 Print  Dahlsen 2013
where the artist actively engages with the environment” (Wildy 2011). She also said “Australia has followed global trends in investigating ecology, through artists addressing ecological and environmental awareness practices in Australia” (Wildy 2013).

Fowler-Smith referenced in relation to a definition of environmental art that; “In a general sense it is art that helps improve our relationship with the natural world and proposes new ways for us to co-exist with our environment” (Fowler-Smith 2013).
Figure 12: Studio Photo Dahlsen 2004
At another conference this year, an audience member also observed following my presentation that much of Australian Indigenous art could also fall under these categories. This led to an enquiry for me into this area and how the GFC also affected it.

I discovered that one of the art forms most significantly interrupted by the GFC, was the Indigenous art of Australia, which had seen a dream run in exhibition and auction sales since the boom in the 1980’s.

These boom years came crashing to an all-time low during 2007-2008 with the advent of the Global Financial Crisis.

Nicolas Rothwell stated as recently as August 2013 in his article for the Australian titled; ‘Plunging Sales Crisis for Indigenous Art’: “On the eve of the 30th
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annual National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in Darwin, the Indigenous art market is in crisis, felled by a combination of chaotic government policies, low buyer demand and an oversupply of new works. (Rothwell 2013).

The bubble had burst for sales of Australian Indigenous art. From the Australian Art Sales Digest “Figures show that Indigenous art sales peaked in 2007 at $26 million before plummeting by half a year later. And despite the economic recovery of recent years, this downwards trend has continued” (Australian Art Sales Digest 2013).

Ella Delaney said in her Special Report on Asian Art in the New York Times in 2011, titled; ‘Ancient Art Lost in Confusion’; “Five years ago, the market for Australian Aboriginal art was booming. But since the beginning of the global financial crisis, the market for Aboriginal art has suffered. As a result, buyers are much more
discerning, seeking “works of high quality, rarity and beauty with impeccable provenance” (Delany 2011).

Howard Morphy, in his book ‘Aboriginal Art’ described the original phenomenon of purity in Aboriginal art without pressures of economic forces as follows: “Art established a line of connection with the foundational events and enabled people to maintain contact with the spiritual dimension of existence. Art provides a sacred charter to the land and producing art is one of the conditions of existence” (Morphy 2010).
Figure 16: Big Yam *Emily Kame Kngwarreye* 1996

Figure 17: Mowanjum Ochre Products
Figure 18: Rope and Plastic Scape Dahlsen 2000

Figure 19: Beeline Dahlsen 1991
It is this purity of intention that has been highlighted as a result of recent unstable economic factors such as the GFC. As recent as 2013 in a post on ‘Research Gate’; the online portal for academic blogs, a post responding to the question posed by Jade Wildy: “To what extent do people believe that art can contribute to positive change?” - was from Mallory O’connor, from Santa Fe College, who stated: “…In most traditional (e.g. tribal, Non-western, indigenous, etc.) societies, there
Figure 21: Twin Peaks  *Dahlsen 1991*

Figure 22: Viewpoint  *Dahlsen 1991*

Figure 23: Barometer  *Dahlsen 2000*
isn’t even a separate word for “artist” or “art. Art is so interwoven into the concept of the social network that it doesn’t require a separate category; it is simply a function of social interaction” (O’connor 2013).

Then on the basis of that argument and by way of example, it is a misnomer to refer to the Indigenous Art Fair held at the Darwin Convention Centre in August 2013 as such. It appeared to me that it was largely a craft fair rather than an “Art Fair”. My argument for this is that the work on display was overly repetitive and very commercial, even though the work was clearly made with dexterity. I noted significant works that were on display which did fall into what I perceive as the “art” category were so powerful, and looked to be so much a part of the
Indigenous spiritual life, that to purchase them as objects to be hung on a lounge room wall would for me, belittle their value.

As a way of trusting in my aesthetic judgments about art, having been an active professional in the field of art for over thirty years, I believe these examples of

Figure 25: Beach plastics collecting photo Dahlsen 2003
more accomplished quality of work deserves to be in museums or contemporary public galleries. I argue that the Westerners running these artistic centres in these communities could think of revising the levels of production of these items in order to maintain a certain scarcity that any ‘limited edition’ aims to achieve. As a professional who has made limited edition print runs of my own work, I see the proliferation of large runs of ‘limited edition’ prints of Indigenous artworks is a further example of commodification that lessens the overall quality of it as a whole.

Any print run of up to ninety-nine or in some cases 3,000, merely turns quality items which could be seen as collectible artworks, if they were created in true limited edition print runs of a maximum of three, six or at the very most fourteen, into mass produced consumerist products. As an artist who believes in
artistic integrity in the creation of prints, I believe there needs to be significantly improved quality controls.

I don’t argue that it would have been better if Western influences had not entered into remote Indigenous communities with their large primed canvasses and bright acrylic paints in the first place. A recent trip into Kakadu in Western Arnhem Land to see the 40,000 year old Ubirr rock art was a spectacular and deeply impressive experience, for me this experience however, is on par with standing in the presence of a significant painting by the highly esteemed Anmatyerre painter Emily Kame Kngwarreye.
Figure 28: Rubbish art Photo: John Dahlsen 2013
I see that the development of contemporary artistic expression over the past forty years by some of our Indigenous artists has been nothing short of a tremendous gift for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian community as well as for the rest of the world.

Western influences have encouraged the contemporary Australian Indigenous art movement to establish itself in most extraordinary ways, resulting in the excellent work of some of our most exceptional Indigenous artists, such as Rover Thomas, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Kathleen Petyarre, Clifford Possum or Paddy Bedford to name a few.

My argument is that we can further add to the promotion of excellence within the Australian Indigenous art movement, by encouraging more quality control and by dissuading the involvement of those Western dealers, who are still operating in these communities in careless and unscrupulous ways with their main concern being increased profit margins for themselves.

The basis of my argument for reform in this industry is that I see the need to create a broad base of authenticity in Australian Indigenous art, and re-evaluate the way it is produced, because the production of paintings and exaggerated print run editions, have developed attitudes that do not aid the case for retaining and developing a true understanding of spiritual depth that the best of this art offers, as there has been so much wallpaper produced in order to prop up the bourgeoning system.

Figure 29: Primary Plastic Painting Dahlsen 2005
We may not know exactly how we got here, but we can navigate a way through and ahead, where the purity in Indigenous art of Australia can be harnessed and advanced, while the vagaries of fickle markets such as in New York can no longer deal such significant death blows to important movements as this one either as a result of a “Global Financial Crisis” or otherwise.

It may be now an appropriate time to weed out the best of this art and let the work that is determined to have value, be exalted to a level that it deserves, as it has happened previously during other times during the course of the history of art; where the best work has been meticulously preserved for the generations over hundreds and in some case thousands of years in our best institutions and the rest, the common production, has been left to literally fall away as the inconsequential product that much of it is. Unfortunately much of this merchandise, which could also be deemed as simply souvenirs, is being placed into a virtually untouchable realm, where it has achieved a kind of esteem that makes it almost beyond criticism, simply because of it being Indigenous.

At the 2013 ‘Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair’, I visited the ‘Mowanjum’ Aboriginal art stall; they are an art community from the Western Kimberley. Apart from the art and craft being produced and exhibited there, they have put together a production line of original ochre powders complete with an acrylic emulsion...
Figure 31: Coral Dahlsen 1998

Figure 32: Terumo Dahlsen 1998
Figure 33: Absolut Commission Dahlsen 2004
and brush kit for artists, which comprised three large glass jars of natural ochre, brushes and emulsion.

Possibly this is a sign of a new way forward, to create new employment options and product line possibilities that are clearly defined as that: products, - not
art, not craft. Clear distinctions will take away some of the grey areas and in doing that may help to preserve the authenticity of what is promoted as excellence in Australian Indigenous art.

Once and for all from the highest levels down, this could aid in getting rid of the excess that I, as a professional artist and as an academic, believe has gathered around an industry that has at its centre a sense of purity and a spirituality demanding protection and preservation.

Could it be that the long lasting overall effects of the GFC, having burst the bubble of Indigenous art, has caused a re-assessment which will assist in ushering in a new approach to what is currently being viewed as a tired story of having to put up with accepting craft in the place of art? Because of these questions, it may be that my PhD will expand its terms of reference and find its focus more on these issues and the implications of the differing interpretations that both Westerners and Indigenous have as a response to Indigenous art.

As Howard Morphy stated in his book ‘Aboriginal Art’: “The struggle for the recognition of Aboriginal art has been partly about definition, about the right to be defined in terms of its own history rather than according to Western preconceptions” (Morphy 2010).

Figure 35: Sorted collected objects at the studio Dahlsen 2007
As a Western non-Indigenous practicing environmental artist, the significance of my work is not only to help shift perceptions of the general public with my art, but also with contemporary artists within our culture, whose livelihood can be severely compromised by economic disruptions.

These disruptions can surface as unemployment, marriage breakups and homelessness for artists and can result in cessation of career activities or at best, new career paths in associated fields.

Is it possible for marginalised arts sectors, to be steered through choppy financial waters, rather than be sacrificed or abandoned on the altar of inconsequential art, by the arts industry elite? I know the marginalised art worker experience. For 20 years I practiced from my studio in Byron Bay, which categorised me as a ‘regional artist’, a lifestyle choice with its own consequences. My career was successful for many years, until I felt the full effects of the GFC. I, like most marginalised practitioners was always attracted to non-mainstream arts activity. At an early stage in my career, I also revealed signs of being a non-conforming artist. The art I produced as a painter, were described by critics as: “art that goes far beyond the need to make a saleable product.” (Bromfield 1991).

I raise the following questions:

Do marginalised artists who have had diverse career paths, need to experience downfalls during tough economic times?

Can artists working in marginal areas have long-term sustainable careers?

Do global economic crises, such as the GFC, mute, confound and destroy artists in non-elite sectors of the arts industry?

Today’s globalised society compels artists to express individualism in order to survive. As a result there are more artists working in marginalised arts practices.

The artists working in these disciplines have been most adversely affected, as they are more susceptible to globalism’s effects, bringing on events like the GFC.

It is possible for artists to be flexible with their marginalised practices in our contemporary society without creating negative alternatives, by educating and supporting those affected by the unexpected outcomes like the GFC.

Difference and identity and the need to belong to today’s globalised society, compels artists to express a greater individualism in order to survive.

It was during the time when the GFC began to have its effects, that I saw up-close the social consequences that economic disruptions can have on marginalised artists. How can our nation best nurture the talented altruistic artist, for whom love of the form takes precedent over high financial reward?

Marginalised, environmentally conscious and altruistic art-forms; may indeed become the trend for future contemporary art practice, if the Dali Lama’s address to the public at the Darwin Convention Centre, earlier in 2013 is any reflection.

When asked his advice for the individual in today’s world, he stated; “Be more altruistic and compassionate” (Lama 2013).
In my own career, I have reaped the rewards of my uniqueness, establishing myself in the field of environmental art. I also experienced that with the GFC, others and myself in this field, found very little or no support for our work.

Although it is widely recognised that ‘luxury’ items such as art are frontline industries to suffer in a GFC, the ramifications for non-elite art sectors haven’t been rigorously examined.
These individuals can be guided through economic downturns, whilst keeping their artistic integrity intact. Their contribution is vitally important to the variation of art produced within the arts sector.

Anecdotal evidence about a well-known Darwin environmentalist supports my findings. He is widely debated for his controversial creations, seen across Darwin’s sidewalks made from organic and inorganic rubbish found by him on the side of the road. Regardless of the ongoing debate, his work has taken a meaningful place in the cultural dialogue of the Northern Territory.
I intend through my own PhD research, to bring light to sociological disturbances fringe artists face now and have faced throughout history, and develop a broad base of support for them through education. The fringe art-worker deserves support and the public needs re-education about non-conformist art practices.

Reports of artists being harassed, fined, prisoned, or committed to asylums for promoting unusual work are numerous. The Russian girl band ‘Pussy Riot’ is an example. Schuler reported; “They are doing three years hard labour in a prison, after President Putin took offence to their musical protests” (Schuler 2013).

I contend that artists, who don’t conform to art industry norms, as defined by expectations among the elite, face inherent difficulties (financially, sociologically and psychologically) in sustaining their practice.

The history of art is a parade of non-conformists, who lived and worked outside accepted industry criteria, whose work now benchmarks the highest standards in the world of fine art.

It is possible to develop new education and support for those affected by unexpected economic outcomes, especially for artists working in non-mainstream practices.

In the regional area where I lived for twenty years, only five art galleries operated successfully.

To have four of them close within a year, spelt disaster for these regional artists who relied on sales through them to survive.

I noted few artists fully expressed their shock when they discovered no adequate support for them within their industry.

I wrote two as yet unpublished manuscripts on the subject. I saw it as an opportunity to bring together my skills to offer solutions to the issues that arose because of the GFC. I described in one manuscript, this silence amongst artists and educators in its introduction, “During my time at art school, an unspoken question lurked continuously in the back of my mind…Not a single soul spoke about it… The question was this: how am I going to make a living? There seemed to be an expectation that we would be miraculously ‘discovered’… But it was not, and still is not so easy” (Dahlsen, J 2013). Writing these manuscripts, apart from having income potential, was my attempt to help address problems I saw were exposed by the GFC.

This reversion to being ‘mute’ about realities of the business side of the arts, was to stubbornly come back throughout my and other artist’s lives, especially post GFC. I have felt it as my obligation to open up this dialogue, to encourage the artistic fraternity to speak up and articulate their concerns.

In my book titled: “An Artists Guide to a Successful Career” (Dahlsen, J 2013). I stated in the introductory pages; “I want to address the artist’s career issues by presenting realistic solutions that can be applied at the beginning of an art career. I have mapped these solutions out, so that information about all major themes an artist
is expected to encounter in their business and career is readily available” (Dahlsen, J 2013).

Marginalised artists work should never be homogenised as a by-product of globalization. Increasing numbers of fringe artists make art that succumbs to political and economic pressures, as a survival strategy, relegating avant-garde work to wallpaper, by satisfying trends in politics and blue chip status.

I have witnessed galleries applying artistic constraints, demanding repetition, size, style and framing restrictions, without consideration of artistic compromises. Governments try to control content in art.

In the case of Bill Henson the Australian photographer, the media fray that erupted had politicians point scoring, while missing the real issue of freedom of artistic expression.

It is important to both identify marginalized, non-conformist artists and provide support for them, by arming them with rigorously investigated and tested information, skills, tools and new knowledge.

**Conclusion**

Artistic practices like environmental art are growth sectors. Yet perhaps because of their marginalised nature, the artist can pay unnecessarily high personal prices for participation in them. Adverse impacts for these artists from globalism are preventable.

Exposing industry gaps will develop systems for maintaining the integrity of altruistic artists, and their contribution to a healthy, broad-based arts industry.

With our contemporary globalised society, confidently embracing creativity and community diversity; Some of the lessons we are learning from the GFC are that it is necessary as a socially justifiable imperative, to safeguard those on the fringes who wish to tell their unique truths.

And in the case of the Indigenous art movement, the unfettered blurring of the lines between fine art and craft is not necessary. A redefinition as a result of the GFC and an introduction of clear delineation will assist in re-asserting integrity across the board within this art movement.

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Learning About the Money-Story through Stories, Art and Silences

Applying Indigenous Research Methodologies

Vinita Godinho, Roslyn Russell, & Supriya Singh

Abstract

Indigenous people are amongst the most financially excluded community in Australia i.e. lack access to safe, affordable and appropriate financial services (Connolly et al 2013). Though most have access to a bank account, a disproportionately high percentage is ‘under-banked’ i.e. lacks access to financial products and services from mainstream providers, relying instead on the informal or alternative finance sector for their financial needs.

Collaborative, cross-sectoral efforts by the government, industry and community to improve Indigenous financial inclusion have not yielded much success. Literature on money and financial management in Indigenous Australia is patchy, with few studies focusing on how Indigenous people themselves understand, want to use and manage money. Banking policy and product design in Australia are heavily influenced by middle-income, ‘Anglo-Celtic’ (non-Indigenous) understandings of money.

Using a research paradigm which privileges Indigenous understandings, we examine the cultural shaping of money in remote Indigenous communities i.e. study ‘Indigenous money’. The Indigenous research paradigm, and associated Indigenous research methodologies allow us to ‘see’ money through the eyes of our Indigenous participants. We find that it is as important to listen to our partici-
pants’ silences, as well as their stories about money. Our participants’ drawings about money also expose deep-seated beliefs, values and feelings, which conversations alone cannot capture.

This ‘deep listening’ allows us to learn how history, culture and relationships (family and community) have influenced modern-day ‘Indigenous money’. This culturally distinctive understanding of money influences many aspects of daily financial decision-making for our Indigenous participants living in remote communities. This paper describes how the researchers learned to listen to the participants’ silences, and ‘read’ the stories embedded in their art, instead of just focusing on listening to their stories.

**Keywords**
Indigenous research methods, Indigenous culture, Indigenous money, money management, financial inclusion

**Post-colonial Indigenous Research Paradigm and Methodology**

Indigenous people are the ‘most researched people in the world’ (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Indigenous Australians are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged, with lower than average outcomes for education, employment, income and health. The methodological design of this research therefore privileged the Indigenous viewpoint, and was informed by national guidelines on ethical research with Indigenous people (GERAIS 2012), and a post-colonial Indigenous research paradigm (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Chilisa, 2012).

This paradigm acknowledges there are multiple socially-constructed realities, shaped by relationships that humans have with their living and non-living environment. It also focuses on developing Indigenous knowledge that carries hope, promotes transformation and social change. The main tenets of this literature are:

- the intended research should reflect the priorities and interests of the Indigenous communities, rather than those of the researcher;
- cultural sensitivity should apply to all aspects of consultation, negotiation, consent and involvement of communities in the design, facilitation and publication of research;
- social transformation and change must be guided by Indigenous people themselves; and
- Indigenous knowledge and intellectual property should increase as a result of the research
Although we have used the term ‘Indigenous’ to include all Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ABS 2006), we acknowledge the rich diversity within Indigenous groups in Australia, including different languages, cultural norms and perspectives.

We are aware that some research amongst Indigenous communities has been criticized for portraying Indigenous people as a ‘problem’ to be solved, rendering them passive ‘objects’ that require assistance from external expert researchers (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Whilst recognising the disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians in remote communities, we aim to move past pathological descriptions of their history, towards a ‘strengths-based’ approach to enhancing their financial inclusion and capability, based on a better understanding of ‘Indigenous money’. We describe in the sections below, our approach to using the Indigenous research paradigm and methodology in practise.

Privileging Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous people have unique knowledge systems that can contribute to all fields of research, yet this knowledge is not always acknowledged or valued appropriately (Inspiring Australia Strategy 2014). Their socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge, ecological understandings and wellbeing are interdependent, and embedded within relationships to country, natural resources and each other (Maffi, 2001; Burgess et al 2009).

The growing focus on environmental sustainability since the late 20th century has meant that Western science has become increasingly aware of the intrinsic resilience of Indigenous communities, and their ways of living and knowing. However the role that Indigenous people play is largely limited to being informants, and having their diverse knowledge recognised is still a struggle (Rigney, 2001). Indigenous knowledge systems are complex, holistic and interdisciplinary, not merely potential subsets of Western knowledge systems – this can lead to a tension between the two systems. However efforts to combine the two systems as complementary rather than competing partners, can lead to highly successful and innovative outcomes.

As Australia moves toward a knowledge-based economy, appropriately acknowledging the contribution that Indigenous knowledge systems make, will build their capacity to contribute even more via enhanced local and regional economic participation, and improved national productivity.

Both-ways learning Approach

One approach to combining Western and Indigenous knowledge systems is ‘both-ways’ or ‘two-ways’ learning, developed and implemented by Indigenous teacher trainees, most significantly Mandawuy Yunupingu and Nalwarri Ngaruwwurthun, in the 1980’s (Wunungmurra, 1989; Yunupingu, 1989; Harris, 1990). Adopted
into school curriculum, this approach enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous (‘Western’) knowledge systems to work collaboratively, to develop mutually compatible learning which benefited both cultures (AhChee, 1991). By respecting and recognising Indigenous culture and customs, this ‘both-ways’ curriculum was found to reduce conflict and improve learning outcomes. Although there is limited academic literature on this approach, it has influenced some on the ground practice, and has been incorporated into Remote Teaching Service school curricula (Department of Education 2012).

Proponents of ‘both-ways’ learning emphasise the importance of finding a ‘common language’ in cross-cultural communication, as talking does not necessarily equal to understanding (ASIC 2012). This applies equally to education as it does to studies of financial decision-making in Indigenous communities. Researchers exploring Indigenous financial and commercial capability must use financial ‘language’ that makes sense ‘both-ways’ i.e. to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners. There are often differences in the Indigenous understanding of ‘Western’ commercial concepts, including the separation of business vs. personal money; ‘hidden’ costs involved in running a commercial enterprise; and the impact of business income on Centrelink entitlements (ASIC 2012).

Our research has adopted the principles of the ‘both-ways’ learning approach, as we find it perfectly complements the Indigenous research paradigm, and allows us to take a strengths-based approach to understanding Indigenous financial behaviour (Godinho & Russell, 2013). In the sections below, we discuss the many ways in which this approach has guided our research.

Preparing for Fieldwork - Access & Participation
The topic of this research came from respected Indigenous community leaders, who have proactively collaborated with Australian banks to promote financial inclusion for their people (Godinho & Singh, forthcoming). The lead researcher Godinho’s personal and professional networks brought her in touch with these community leaders who guided her research, and facilitated introductions to local elders, Indigenous organisations and traditional owners who had expressed a particular interest in improving financial capability for their communities. Although 75% of the Indigenous population is now concentrated in regional / urban areas (ABS 2006), the researchers decided to first pilot the research in remote communities, and refine the research design via learnings from this pilot before expanding the research into regional and urban areas. This paper is based on the learnings from this phase of remote community consultation.

Our remote community consultations were facilitated by local elders after formal approval from a University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (‘HREC’) and the relevant Indigenous land councils were obtained. The guidance and support of community elders included important ethical considerations such as re-
spective ways to inform participants about the research, ways to withdraw from participating, record consent for those with lower literacy skills, avoid direct questioning and allow silences. Visual aids such as posters were displayed in prominent locations to inform participants about the research and invite their participation. Groups of people were addressed in public spaces, so that individuals could decide whether to join in, leave at will or have individual conversations. Participant permission was sought to record verbal consent and audio-tape conversations.

Being introduced to community members by respected Indigenous elders is an important precursor to undertaking any fieldwork. Researchers working in remote communities must also be sensitive to issues of traditional polity such as who represents the community, whether elders represent the community as a whole, and gender nuances associated with access to locations, people, activities and even topics of discussion. The lead researcher (Godinho) was able to negotiate these sometimes thorny issues by allowing herself to be guided by the elders, and following their lead. One elder who introduced her to his remote community during the pilot study, was a respected traditional owner and leader. He introduced her to ‘strong’ women she could speak to, and also invited other men to join a yarning circle. At another remote community, a female elder and traditional owner first introduced her to a group of women weaving baskets.

Building trust and genuine relationships with community members takes time, and multiple visits enabled people in all the consultation sites, to get to know Godinho better. As an ‘outsider’ (‘balanda’ or non-Indigenous) to the remote communities which retain strong links to traditional culture, she carefully considered how best to introduce herself, and ‘connect’ with people. Despite external differences (i.e. race, language, culture, education, profession etc.) she focused instead on what she shared in common with participants i.e. a traditional upbringing (in India) where relationships, family obligations and reciprocity are paramount, language and cultural heritage revered. Instead of a business card, she used a photo of her extended family including her children and parents, to introduce herself to people. This proved to be an ideal starting point, as people invariably responded by introducing their own families, particularly their children, before they sat down to chat.

Remote Pilot Study
Elders from two remote communities (referenced herein as ‘InlandTown’ and ‘CoastalTown’) invited the lead researcher to conduct her study in their communities. This research involved 66 participants via five yarning circles with 16 attendees (two with women, one with men, two with mixed groups) and 31 open-ended interviews (20 participants, and 11 key informants). The key informants included subject matter experts or specialists such as academics, linguists, consultants and those involved in service delivery to remote communities.
Godinho was also invited to observe a private workshop (6 attendees), and participate in conferences on remote Indigenous financial capability. Six participants from other remote communities, who were visiting or moving to Darwin, were also interviewed.

Ninety-five per cent of the population of InlandTown and CoastalTown is Indigenous (less than 1,500 people each) and more than a third are under 20 years of age. Each town has a vibrant, distinctive language and culture, and a history of pre-colonial trade with Macassans. They face the common challenges of limited employment opportunities which cause high unemployment and welfare dependency. There are chronic housing shortages leading to overcrowding and high maintenance costs. Expensive freight rates drive up prices of everyday necessities.

The communities have limited access to financial infrastructure - InlandTown has a bank branch while CoastalTown has none. Both have Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (‘EFTPOS’) and Automated Teller Machines (‘ATMs’) located in the community store. Despite minor differences between the two communities studied, the researchers found a very similar understanding of, and attitude to money.

Travel in remote communities is difficult and expensive - CoastalTown was relatively easy to access from Darwin, but InlandTown required an expensive flight on a small charter plane. Godinho visited InlandTown thrice, and Coastal-Town twice between September 2011 and September 2013.

Indigenous Research Methods

A basic tenet of the Indigenous research paradigm is the recognition that how we go about acquiring knowledge in Indigenous communities is just as critical for the elimination of disparities as the actual knowledge that is gained about a particular problem (Cochran et al 2008). This means that researchers must collaboratively identify research methods that are inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, so that the research can lead to sustainable, efficacious services that redress Indigenous disadvantage without violating their rights or preferences.

In the sections below, we describe how we originally designed our research method around story-telling, but quickly learned to expand our methods to also incorporate ‘deep-listening’ via learning to listen to participants’ silences, and discerning stories from their artwork.

Participant Observation, Yarning Circles & Story-telling

This research was introduced to the participants via ‘yarning circles’, an informal method of consulting community members on a particular topic. Usually held in a public space over a shared meal, participants are introduced to the researcher by a known and trusted local elder and the consultation begins only when partici-
pants are comfortable with the researcher (Demosthenous et al. 2006). Yarning circles allowed the topic to be introduced and stories shared, in a relaxed, informal setting with community members as a group, usually in a public space of their choice (eg. under the shade of a tree while weaving baskets, in the shire office or church hall). In some cases, these were followed up with a more intensive open-ended, one on one interview with interested participants.

The study included informal conversations and stories, focusing on individual experiences with money, rather than the household economy. The lead researcher asked participants for their stories about how they use money in their homes. She explored how people talk about money, with whom they share money, and where appropriate, their experience with banking and how this might be improved.

Organising an appropriate meal to share as a group provided the perfect ice-breaker, especially for participants who were often shy and wary of strangers. The meals also allowed Godinho an opportunity to reciprocate the participants’ warm hospitality and graciousness. A carefully planned ‘thank-you’ bag, hand-painted by her children and decorated with family photos, was also offered to each interviewee. She noticed that invariably, the treats in these bags would be immediately shared with whoever happened to be in the vicinity. In a very touching gesture, one interviewee re-filled the bag with her own gifts, handing it to the lead researcher before she left the community the following day.

Throughout the research, participants were mindful of not representing others’ views or generalising on behalf of the community as a whole. Yarning circles and interviews were audio-taped wherever participants permitted it - Godinho also took extensive field notes and maintained an electronic journal. The latter proved to be very valuable, as an aide-de-memoir for conversations that were not able to be audio-taped, and as a record of her own reflections.

Other additional data included powerpoint presentations from a conference, online resources from relevant websites, brochures and pamphlets. All data was stored securely and backed up regularly. Audio-recordings were deleted from the voice-recorder after being transferred to secure storage, while transcripts used pseudonyms to de-identity people and locations, thereby ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

Learning from Silences
Excited about her very first consultation, Godinho described her experiences and what the data was saying, to her supervisor Singh - however she was blind-sided when Singh queried about what the participants did not say. This led Godinho to reflect on the consultation, and listen to the recorded conversations again. This time, she noticed something she had previously missed – there were distinct silences in the consultations.
Ignoring natural silences in-between conversing, she could identify that typically the meaningful silences occurred when the topic of conversation led to a sensitive issue which could lead to shame, such as the use of money to gamble or buy drugs, or when a participant recounted a story of domestic violence and financial abuse from her partner. The silences came first from the elders, and then the weight of the silence would be passed down to the other participants. If, as in one case, a younger participant piped up with a comment, or much to her shame, Godinho herself jumped in to fill the silence with a follow-up question, the continuing silence from the elders would make itself very obvious, which would then lead to the other person to stop too.

This learning became an essential component of our approach to future consultations. Godinho became very aware of silences, and when it became obvious that there was one, she would no longer jump in to fill the silence, or continue her questioning. In this way, she did everything she could to avoid shame for the participants.

Through the silences, she also gleaned the importance of the role that the elders play in the community. Their support (or lack of support through their continued silence) is an essential cue for the others to either continuing discussing a topic or stop doing so. It also led her to understand the role of the elders in role-modelling the ‘right’ behaviour in the community. It also made her conscious of the way in which elders prefer to teach i.e. not by reprimanding or overtly stopping the conversation, but by gently steering it away from a vexatious topic, by their silence. Their elders undoubtedly influence the way Indigenous people talk about money and use it.

**Visual ‘Story-telling’ - Artwork**

In one of the early community consultations for the remote pilot study, Godinho was introduced to a group of local ‘strong’ women, who were artists. Reflecting on the yarning circle that had been conducted with these women, Godinho realised that not all the women were contributing to the conversations – one reason could be that English was a second or third language for many of these women. Given their obvious artistic skills, Godinho wondered whether it would make it easier for more participants to contribute, if she asked them to draw a picture about money instead. Given previous studies on art as a culturally appropriate way to engage Indigenous knowledge-making (Morphy, 1991), she was fortunate to soon have two opportunities to test this method of conducting her research.

Godinho was invited to observe six participants at a private workshop on financial matters for an Indigenous governance body, conducted by a consultant who is well-known for practising ‘both-ways’ learning. Building on Indigenous protocols for good communication and understanding, this workshop included story-telling, visual representation and action-based learning to establish a ‘com-
mon language’ for financial and commercial knowledge, so that these concepts can be talked about in a way that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners can understand (Godinho & Russell 2013).

A vital part of this workshop revolved around a visual model of ‘Two Roads’ for business management (see Figure 1 below). One represents the Indigenous road, the use of which is governed by Indigenous laws. The other represents ‘mainstream’society, for which non-Indigenous laws must be obeyed. Using this analogy, the model explores how Indigenous business owners must understand and rely on, both their own world-view and the world-view of non-indigenous people, in order to navigate the maze of everyday financial decisions. This ‘both-ways’ understanding of issues that are most likely to have a significant negative impact on the viability and sustainability of a cross-cultural business is then extended to further explore business planning and risk management strategies.

Godinho used this style of researching at a future consultation - as part of introducing the research to participants, she asked them to draw how they felt about money. The group painted this stunning picture, reproduced with permission below.

Figure 1: The Money-Story system (reproduced with permission)
When asked to explain what their artwork represented, one by one each participant started telling Godinho about how they saw the artwork, and what it meant to them, in the context of their experience with money. Their explanations were eye opening, as each one built on the previous participants’ discussion, enriching the story that slowly began to unfold from the artwork.

The group waited for their elder, a sprightly 60-something white-haired Miah, to have the first go, and she explained that the background of the painting is ochre, representing a strong identification with the traditional Indigenous palette.

It is our colour – it tells us that this painting is meant for us, not them whitefella folk.

Scattered throughout the middle of the painting are faint black swirling patterns – these represent a ‘willy-willy’ (hurricane), depicting the chaos that money problems can produce for Indigenous people. Young Willa, a shy 20-year old accompanied by her mother Yangara, explained this in almost poetic terms - the money ‘willy-willy’ can suck up everything in its way, and then spits the person out far away from where they originally started.

The other participants nodded their agreement - this is a common pattern for their people i.e. if they get caught up in money problems, things can escalate very quickly. In particular younger people often end up in debt-spirals, or credit problems, which can seriously mar their future financial lives.
Middle-aged Mogo, who had so far been a quiet observer, joined in with the ladies – he explained that the faint white handprints around the edges of the painting denote that there is help available for Indigenous people who find themselves in financial difficulties. People are not always aware that there are financial counsellors who can help them with specialist money advice – they usually just rely on their family and friends, who may not be very money-savvy themselves. This was a very pertinent observation, as research demonstrates that Indigenous people are the least likely to be aware of where to find help, should they find themselves in financial difficulties (NIMMA 2007).

Dorak, a young father, pointed out that not everything is sad about the story in the painting. The bright yellow sun in the middle of the painting, along with the watercourse which has been drawn, shows nourishing, life-giving things such as honey-ants, dingo tracks and boomerangs. These show that if people are able to navigate the ‘money-track’ wisely, they will be able to sustainably manage their money-life and achieve their goals.

Explaining that he works part-time as a money management worker, Dorak said he always tells people who seek his advice, that with some help, they too can manage their money more wisely, and ‘get that money to work for them’. Research corroborates this – people with higher financial capability are able to achieve higher well being, not just for themselves but also for their family and the wider community (Taylor, 2009).

Other participants joined in to explain that the painting also shows footsteps and secret meeting places for both men and women, which reflects the different ways in which gender plays out in managing money in everyday life. They felt that men and women have different ways of managing their money – men want to hide money away for themselves but women always share everything they’ve got with their family, often to the point that they have nothing left for themselves. However if men and women work together to manage their money, this will make it easier for the family as a whole to thrive.

Middle-aged Tathra also highlighted that in addition to the meeting places for men and women, she had put in some meeting places in black (representing Indigenous people) and white (non-Indigenous people) where both communities can come together, and work collaboratively on helping Indigenous people to manage money wisely. She likened this collaboration to playing a piano:

You have to learn to play both the black and the white keys, in order to make beautiful music.

This call for collaborative action on improving Indigenous financial capability is echoed in policy documents (NIMMA 2007; ASIC 2013) which recommend
this as the only sustainable way to end the ‘wicked’ problem that is Indigenous financial exclusion.

Miah also explained that the entire painting is linked by a cord of string, which connects the tools and resources available to the community depicted by ‘coolamons’ (vessel or dish, shaped roughly like a canoe dugout). This shows that good communications, trust and respect will bind her community together. Young Ulla then proudly pointed out a personal touch to this group painting that we hadn’t discussed yet - she had drawn an outline of lips scattered throughout the background, because she shows her love for her family, through the way she uses money.

Listening to the way in which our participants explained the stories that lie within this artwork helped us to increase our understanding of our data in two very important ways – firstly, allowing participants to express themselves via art in a group effort, made them much more relaxed. Participants could communicate with the researchers in a way that showcased their skills and artistry instead of having to talk about how they managed money, a topic that often incurred shame.

Secondly, being in a group helped the shyer participants, particularly the younger ones who usually defer to the elders, to contribute without being singled out. When we asked them to explain their artwork, they volunteered several ideas that they may not have spoken about, as part of a yarning circle or interview. Their art ‘spoke’ in their stead - this allowed us to explore their true feelings more deeply, without making them uncomfortable.

Deep-Listening
A study conducted on education and cultural renewal in Indigenous communities (Brearley, 2010) developed the concept of Indigenous ‘Deep Listening’. This concept, which appears in many Indigenous cultures, describes a process of listening deeply and respectfully, in ways that build understanding and a sense of community. A collaboration between the corporate sector, academia and the Indigenous community, this project encouraged people to explore fresh ways of generating new ideas and to learn from the rich and ancient heritage of Australian Indigenous culture, knowledge and understandings.

By allowing Indigenous post-graduate students to present their research findings via a series of creative events and multi-media outcomes, the Indigenous Deep Listening Project provides a framework for research to be communicated to the Indigenous community in creative ways – a way of learning, working and being together. It means listening and observing the many ways in which people communicate – via stories, silences, gestures, art or even observing. From a research perspective, Deep Listening provides multiple ways of knowing to gather, analyse and represent data – data emerges from participants’ stories, dreams, country, music, art and being.
Deep Listening has several parallels in Western thinking and organisational culture, example the term ‘intuition’ which describes the ability to listen to the heart, as opposed to the head, to know what’s right and how to behave in any circumstance. This awareness creates ‘mindfulness’ which can keep us safe, form stronger relationships and improve performance – all of which are values that the Indigenous communities hold dear.

Conclusion

Using the Indigenous research paradigm and associated methodologies in practice is often a steep learning curve for any researcher – we found that it is vital to ‘listen deeply’ to not just our participants stories, but also their silences, and their artwork, in order to understand how they feel about money, and how they want to use it, to meet their objectives.

References


