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What's in a Moment?
**Using Creative Practices to Capture Emotion and Experience in Career Turning
Points. An Autoethnographic Exploration.**

by

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**Thesis submitted
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

2018

Contents

Abstract	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter One Introduction	1
Research questions	2
To begin	3
Moments	3
Where did the idea come from?	6
My aims for the work	13
Outline of chapters	14
Chapter Two Setting the Context	16
Introduction	16
Setting the scene	17
A historical foray	18
Career theory	19
Law's storyboarding for career management	23
Career guidance and career counselling. Is there a difference?	25
Career guidance	25
Career counselling	26
Concluding thoughts	28
Chapter Three Literature Review	30
Introduction	30
Moments of becoming	30
Moments of learning	33
Moments of decision making: rationality or intuition?	37
Moments of serendipity	41
Moments of creativity	43
Moments of autoethnography	46
Theoretical 'friends'	48
Concluding thoughts	50
Chapter Four Methodology	51
Introduction	51
My philosophy	51
Methodology	54
Biographical approaches	54
Autoethnography	56
Critiques of autoethnography	58
The reliability and validity of autoethnography	60
Research Instruments	62
Writing as inquiry	62
Considering the ethical implications	65
Interviews and transcripts	67
Journal writing	73
Other research tools	74

Analysis of material	75
Interlude	77
Chapter Five My Story	78
Introduction	78
Looking through the stained-glass window: analysing the story	87
The particularities of my story	88
Endings	91
Beginnings	93
The spiritual being	93
Spirituality? Career calling or something else?	94
Summary	96
My salient moment	97
My creative piece	98
How I did my creative piece	99
Concluding thoughts: responding to my ‘other’	105
Chapter Six Beth’s Story	108
Introduction	108
Beth’s story	108
Analysis	114
The particularities of Beth’s story	115
Change and other life aspects	118
The importance of ‘others’	122
Area to consider	124
Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions	125
Chapter Seven Carol’s Story	128
Introduction	128
Carol’s story	128
The particularities of Carol’s story	135
Learning	137
Chance, intuition and fate	139
Summary	140
Carol’s salient moment	140
Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions	143
Chapter Eight Sara’s Story	146
Introduction	146
Sara’s story	146
The particularities of Sara’s story	153
A touch of chance a pinch of intuition?	154
Motherhood and work	155
Sara’s salient moment and another helping of chance	156
Summary	156
The creative piece	157
The process Sara adopted	158
Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions	163

Chapter Nine An Imagined Conversation	166
Setting the scene	168
Tea with everything: discussing the idea	170
A gathering of thinking	170
Concluding thoughts: a conversation with myself	177
Chapter Ten Uniting the ‘Whole’	181
Introduction	181
Returning to the research problem and questions	181
How do creative practices help individuals ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?	182
How do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?	184
What part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?	187
Main themes to emerge from the study	188
Why did I choose this methodology?	189
Did I limit the study findings?	191
How does the study contribute to career guidance knowledge?	192
Chapter Eleven Conclusion	195
Aims and discoveries	195
The Creative Interactive Career Process: a developing idea	196
Autoethnography: methodology of my heart	199
After thought	204
References	206
Figures	
1. My first attempt	100
2. My second attempt	102
3. My final creative piece	104
4. Beth’s creative piece	118
5. Carol’s creative piece	145
6. Sara’s creative piece	165
Appendices	
1. Follow-up interview questions	222
2. Participant help sheet	223
3. Interview proforma	224
4. Transcript of interview 1 with Carol with analysis	232
5. ‘Disrupted’ text	248
Consent Form	250

Word count: 103,312 (incl. abstract and acknowledgments)

Abstract

This thesis considers career turning points in the lives of four women who work in educational guidance. I am one of these women. As a practising Career Guidance Counsellor, I have seen people struggle to make career-related decisions, yet in their pasts they seemingly made autonomous decisions with little thought other than it seemed right at the time. My own understanding of decision making, influenced by my cultural heritage, appeared to be informed by intuitive responses and chance occurrences. I wanted to explore if others had similar experiences, to satisfy a personal curiosity and a professional desire to see if creative practices could capture the emotion and experience of past career turning points. Perhaps they can draw upon the knowledge gained in times of uncertainty to aid future decision-making.

The study is also the story of my doctoral voyage and utilising an autoethnographic approach, enabled me to position myself in the work. Autoethnography, is both method and methodology, exploring the writer's experience of life. The tensions between the distinct roles of researcher, participant and observer of both, were explored.

I wrote my story and initial, loosely-structured interviews captured the life-career stories of the other participants. Following the first interview, they were given time and space to create artefacts of their own choosing. Second interviews used questions, but allowed for the natural voicing of thoughts to maintain the informality of casual conversation. All interviews were personally transcribed and shared with co-participants to ensure transparency and accuracy. Transcriptions were utilised to create case studies and my narrative of each interview was also recorded in a personal journal. As such, there was a layering to each experience, different 'truths' of the same event. Creativity flowed through this work in the form of poetic text, imaginative prose, journal excerpts and a fictionalised chapter. The aim was to provide genuineness and trustworthiness as verification.

Adopting a holistic approach to analysis enabled thoughts to emerge prior to, during and after interactions. A proforma (Merrill and West, 2009) provided the vehicle to capture the process and emerging themes. Additionally, writing on the transcripts in coloured ink, added a playful quality to investigations. Writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2000, 2008), encouraged an openness to analysis as I displayed both the writing process and product. In addition to Richardson, my theoretical framework was supported by the work of Jarvis (2006), and his notion of 'disjuncture', when something happens which makes us stop and reconsider our positioning in the world, was illuminating. Rogers' (1961, 1980) inclusive consideration of the whole person, rather than a separation of the various characteristics of a life, has informed my practice to accept that occupation is but one life role. A person can have many roles which can influence a life-career. Throughout the work I have attempted to use rich textual

descriptions to show rather than tell the narrative. This is pertinent to evocative autoethnography as extolled by Ellis (2004) and in doing so, I hoped to draw others into the text. Kahneman's (2011) discussions on rational and intuitive thinking and Krumboltz and Levin's (2004) understanding of happenstance or chance, have also been a main consideration in this work. Such experiences can be reflected on as we construct our working stories (Savickas, 2011). These theoretical 'friends' and others, made me review my positioning in the study and as a result, I gained new knowledge about myself and my place in the world.

I have discovered that creative practices appeared to help participants to learn something about themselves; they gained personal insight by engaging with deep reflective and reflexive processes. Knowledge which could be used to inform their future career decision-making when they are feeling uncertain. As such, creative practices could help individuals think again, with a new perspective.

Acknowledgements

How do I acknowledge all the people who have touched my life, since embarking on this doctoral voyage? Like wisps of mist, some lingered for a moment, but their presence was an illumination so bright that it made me stop and gaze in wonder. These were people like Dr Bill Law and Dr Gideon Arulmani who took the time at a conference to listen to me and tell me my work was interesting, inspiring me to continue.

I wish to thank Canterbury Christ Church University, for without this prestigious body of learning I would not have embarked on a knowledge gathering quest in adulthood. How different things may have been if I had not had a salient career moment which changed my life.

My desire to delve into the ever-churning waters of career guidance and counselling was sparked by my Qualification in Career Guidance tutors. They created a haven for learning which I will always remember, and I thank them.

I came to know my Supervisor, Professor Hazel Reid, whilst studying the Qualification in Career Guidance and it was her belief in me that led to this life-career moment. My second Supervisor, Dr Alan Bainbridge in sharing his knowledge, brought new insights to the work. Together, they held me through this voyage. I thank them for more than I can express.

There are others who must be acknowledged and I now turn to my participants, Beth, Carol and Sara. Your stories were a wondrous, generous gift and I thank you for allowing me the honour of documenting them in the lived experience of my study.

To my dear family and friends, you never told me to stop when times grew difficult. You never allowed me to give in when thoughts turned dark. You always showed me love and support even when I probably did not deserve it. My love and thanks are limitless.

Finally, to my husband who gave me wings to fly. I am not the girl you married but the woman I have become thanks you for giving her time and space to learn her way. For believing in me and letting me become who I am today.

Chapter 1

Introduction

When I look to the past I can recall with clarity life defining moments; those times when I knew I was making the right decision. Why can I recall the colours, sights and smells of a significant moment and the people who inhabited that time and space? What has made that moment so salient for me that it still resonates? Re-visiting memories as I wrote my MA thesis, sparked a desire to study for a doctorate. Then, I wrote about factors that impinged on my career identity, discovering that ingrained familial beliefs and assumptions (Arulmani and Nag-Arulmani, 2004) still influenced my ways of thinking and doing. For example, I was brought up to consider superstition, spirituality and religion to be integral to everyday living; if something happened it was reasoned to be an act of God, or because of the ‘evil eye’ often resulting in burning chillies to counteract the affliction. Spirituality, a highly-contested concept, was considered in the same vein as religion. Yet, I see it as a way of life, an aspect of being which brings meaning and purpose and not necessarily having religious connotations. My understanding of spirituality will be discussed in the chapter where I tell my story.

I am fascinated by the concept of using creative practices to capture feelings and thoughts about times which resonate for individuals. Perhaps in the moment, a person makes a decision which seemed out of character but felt so right at the time. In making their decision they felt a sense of autonomy and self-assurance. If we are feeling uncertain about the future, struggling to make decisions we know will affect our work and lives in general, perhaps we can recollect salient moments and our emotions in those experiences. It may just make us stop and think again about our present situations. Our future then can be informed by our past in the present. The desire to do this study is born of such musings. Exploring the turning points in our lives and then capturing the feelings felt using creative practices, is I find, an exciting prospect. Creativity is central to this work and I have included aspects which I hope will engage the reader and illuminate my reasoning. Each chapter offers further flavours of creativity to entice the reader to venture deeper into the work, igniting reflective thought.

My professional world is career guidance and counselling and I prefer to be known as a Career Counsellor, working as a holistic practitioner to consider the person’s whole life, rather than just their occupation. Work today for many is beset with insecurity as people seek to navigate their own paths to uncertain futures. Traditional working patterns and the ideal of a job for life are aspects of working life in the last century. Where once organisations were seen to take responsibility for their employees, now people are responsible for their own working futures. More of this will be discussed in Chapter Two. For now, it is enough to say

that privatisation and marketisation of public goods, as well as technological advancements, has left many feeling lost.

Through my work, I came to see that whilst people were struggling to move from their current predicament, they had previously made salient decisions with seemingly little effort, often acting on impulse. Yet, in our discussions they could not always vocalise their thoughts on their own ability to do so. It was the ‘seeing’ it for themselves that had the most significant impact, helping them move forward in their lives. Sometimes such clarity did not come in a career interaction, but later when they had taken time to reflect and to be reflexive. Taking the time, being in the moment could be a catalyst for change.

This introductory chapter will explore the rationale supporting the study and consider if there is a place today for creative practices in career work. Also, there will be a brief explanation of what I consider ‘career’ to mean although this will be discussed in more depth in an ensuing chapter. I will begin with the topic questions so the reader is aware from the start what I want to explore.

The research questions

In considering a framework for the topic, I asked myself “what is it I actually want to find out?” and then devised the following questions: -

- How do creative practices help individuals to ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?
- How do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?
- What part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?

Originally, I wanted to consider if individuals considered their spirituality in their salient career moments. However, after many wonderings through illusionary mindscapes I came to realise rather than looking to find what others believed, I was looking to find what I believed in others, that is, my understanding of spirituality. Consequently, I decided to remove this question from the study as there was a risk of looking for and finding what I wanted to see, and not seeing what was actually there.

This is a personal quest and as such the work will be of an autoethnographic nature, which places the individual at the core of the account, but it also acknowledges auto/biographical material with the inclusion of others’ narratives. My intention is to offer the story of the research journey alongside the stories of the study participants. We are all women working in education guidance and as such, share commonalities in our work. I wanted to know if we

also shared similarities in other areas of our lives, which may have bearing on our occupations. Importantly, I wanted to know about their perceived salient moments, what influenced their decision-making and if a creative practice could support future thinking. I recognise the gendered nature of the work and whilst I acknowledge the wider influences on women, the focus of this study is a consideration of salient moments and how creative practices might support future thinking. The possible limitations of using only female participants is discussed in Chapter Ten.

I now turn to the beginning of this story.

To begin

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who decided that when she grew up she would be like her mummy and work in an office like her mummy and then have babies like her mummy. She thought this was a wonderful plan and as time passed she did indeed grow up to work in an office and to have her babies. For a time, she thought this was everything she wanted, but there were moments that made her stop and consider her life and in those moments, she made life changing decisions. One decision was to study for a mysterious qualification known as a doctorate, so she cautiously knocked on the door to the halls of academia and was permitted entry. The ending to this story is yet to be written, the beginning is known; it is the middle that beckons with moments yet to unfold.

Moments

When I look to the past to conjure memories I ask myself “what am I doing here?” There is a desire within me, driven by forces that struggle to be explained, yet have persisted over time and space, pervading my consciousness to demand acknowledgement. As I become more aware of a devouring need to do ‘something’ I also become aware of myself. A person may look back and say “oh, I have changed from the person I was”, but that would be in hindsight.

We are the gatekeepers of memories of moments that have meaning for us. As we move backwards through time, we view our mental imaginings of these moments and we can tell others stories about these events using our retrospective observations, our hindsight. In this heightened state of consciousness, our minds are accompanied by other reactions. Ellis (1997) notes, cognitive awareness can be accompanied by responses which are emotional and felt in our bodies. The whole person is brought to the fore as we tell stories of our lives imbued with our cultural values and beliefs, which have been forged in our communities of interaction. ‘The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depend on the context – biographical, historical, cultural – in which they are embedded’ (Mezirow, 2000, p3).

Over time, individuals continually deconstruct and construct their stories so they can only be viewed as partial narratives (Meekums, 2008); moments caught in an imagined net to be 'fished' from the capacious pool of our memories. Furthermore, as Etherington (2004) suggests, 'we tell different stories for different purposes and at different times, for different audiences' (p146). Our stories are not fixed and can change as we encounter new communities and in doing so, we draw on different ways of knowing. The memory pool then becomes a sea of undulating waters ever moving, surging forward or dissipating to peaceful ripples. The story I would have told twenty years ago, is different to the one I want to tell this audience now. Then, my story involved my family, not knowing what to do with my life and how a moment in time led to working as a Teaching Assistant in a secondary school, sparking a desire to return to formal education. Monk, Winslade and Sinclair (2008), suggest our identities change over time and shift in response to our social contexts. I wanted to add further roles to the repertoire of identities I had become known by; I wanted to be a worker, a colleague and in time, a student.

The story today draws on the emotions felt in that moment, and how over time it has fuelled an inquisitiveness to investigate the emotions and feelings we have when we make salient career decisions. Since childhood, I have taken solace in writing down my thoughts and through creative prose I try to express that which I struggle to vocalise. 'Writing is an 'act' in which we express our unique perspective on the world' (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p54). What is unique? When I consider the word 'unique' I see it as denoting 'one of a kind' and incomparable. Therefore, when I state an experience is unique, I am suggesting it cannot be compared against other similar experiences because each experience will be viewed by the individual through their own lens. The written word is my preferred creative outlet but there are others, such as art-based mediums, which could become unique vehicles of creative expression.

I want to capture significant career moments using creative practices. Through creative interactions it is possible for an individual to become immersed again in a time when they felt they made an important decision and to consider their autonomy in their decision-making. It would be a chance to re-visit and revise significant career turning points, which stand apart from the daily routines constituting their working and non-working lives (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). By returning to a significant moment and reflecting on that event, individuals take the time to think, to listen to their inner voices about what matters to them. Essentially, the person creates a historical artefact which not only captures their salient moment, but also stands as testimony of the time of creation, with the potential to become another important life moment.

The moments that make us stop and think ‘that’s different’, ‘how can that be?’ or ‘I’m going to do that!’, potentially stand out for us more than other moments in our lives. We may just stop, look and carry on with our lives seemingly unchanged by our interaction with the outside world, but in stopping and looking we have acknowledged the event and in doing so, we have affected an internal change. Jarvis (2006), refers to this phenomenon as ‘disjuncture’; dissonance resulting from the point of contact between our inner and outer worlds. In the moment we become conscious of our existence in an experience, we learn something that affects a change in our understanding of our world as we know it.

Damasio (1999) notes, consciousness amplifies feelings as ‘consciousness helps us to develop a concern for ourselves and improve the art of life’ (p5). In fact, ‘a life is a work of art, probably the greatest one we produce’ (Bruner, 1999, p7). So, conscious awareness of our being enables us to continually paint, adding colour, texture and form to our life-canvas whilst acknowledging the aspects of our being that do not change; our core consciousness. There will always be parts of us that will not change and these are the parts which are exclusive to us. Therefore, when we have an experience, it will always be our experience. Participation by others in an interaction may result in similar, but they will not be the same unique creative experience.

Damasio (1999), further suggests core consciousness is not linked to memories or reasoning, but retains a stability over a lifetime. An extended consciousness however, is constructed from different levels of awareness which are born from memories attained across a lifetime. Core consciousness could be a ‘rite of passage into knowing...’ (Damasio, *ibid*, p17) but it can be argued, ‘... the levels of knowing which permit human creativity are those which only extended consciousness allows’ (*ibid*). Here, Damasio acknowledges whilst we all have aspects of our being which guide our understandings, we are forever evolving and ‘becoming’ as we gather memories, moments which inform our present and future selves. Jarvis and Damasio are discussed further in the literature review, although it should be noted, as I ventured forth, I discovered new writings to inform the work. Throughout, I deliberate these jewels of knowledge in the context of their discovery.

Alterations to how we see the world may change who we perceive ourselves to be and could affect who we are to become. We move from a state of harmony with our daily existence to one of tension brought forth by an occurrence which has made us stop and re-consider our place in the world. We experience a life-career turning point, a critical moment. Hodkinson et al (1996) refer to Strauss (1962), who considered turning points to be when we re-evaluate our circumstances and revise what actions we may or may not wish to embark on. A turning point can be a ‘fleeting moment in which a deep knowledge can emerge’ (Damasio, 1999,

p172). It can also be a 'turn in the road' (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich, 2001), when an especially significant moment affects a change in a life trajectory. Unlike a transition, which is more of a passage in our circumstances, a turning point could be a change in a life direction.

Such a moment changed my life and proved to be the catalytic turning point that sparked my decision to study for a doctorate. Later I will share a narrative of that moment but first, it would be prudent to discuss the origins mentioned earlier, for my chosen topic.

Where did the idea come from?

The impetus for this study began whilst writing my MA, when I re-visited moments in time that were important to me; times which stood apart from other times so that they made me stop and think about the experience. The written word became a vehicle to document experience and emotion in a very personal way which in turn enabled me to 'see' my process of 'becoming' who I am today. Furthermore, the writing became a process of discovery (Richardson, 1997) about my topic and my place within the research. The intimate nature of the work was captured through a free-flowing journal which supported an autoethnographical exploration of the influences that affected my career identity. The journal could be deemed a 'textual artefact' (Chang, 2008, p107) that illuminated my thinking at the time and through which I recognised my cultural and historical perceptions.

I attempted to illustrate my story with text so those who would read it could envisage an image of my life through my words. I wanted to use words to 'paint' pictures of textual imagery. Norris (1987), discusses Derrida's notion that spoken words are signs adopted to communicate our thoughts and ideas. There are times when I become 'tongue-tied' and the words in my head struggle to be audibly vocalised. Writing enables me to express, I hope with clarity, aspects of my thinking as it occurs and this often happens in the writing (St Pierre, 2008). 'The act of writing out one's story is a powerful experience' (Grant and Johnston, 2006, p114).

By 'telling' my story I brought meaning to the experiences and constructed a holistic image of my life (McMahon, Watson, Chetty and Hoelson, 2012), drawing on the social, cultural and environmental elements that impinged on my identity. I attempted to unite aspects of 'me-ness' which hitherto had been fragmented elements, coming to see that although I had interacted with different communities and in doing so gained new ways of knowing, I had also retained my family's ingrained cultural assumptions and values. These influences affected the way I approached career opportunities and envisaged the future. In truth, I accepted I had denied much of my heritage and utilising an autoethnographic methodology enabled me to write my own way about emotional bonds to my family traditions. In doing so,

I could re-visit salient career or 'life' moments, allowing myself absolution from feelings and memories that had tied me to the past.

I have referred to career or life moments and it is important to offer an explanation. When considering the word 'career' people often substitute occupation, vocation or job. These words signify a role that is a part of our lives. We also have other parts such as parent, child, student, friend as well as colleague, employer and employee. Indeed, the importance of recognising our life roles was acknowledged by the psychologist Donald Super (1980) in his 'life-career rainbow' model, which notes people assume different roles during the course of their lives and that they can move in and out of certain roles during their life-course, for example women returning to work after raising their children.

Savickas (2011), suggests the objective nature of career could be described as the sequence of roles occupied by an individual, from school to retirement, which are observable by others. This implies a linear quality to career, possibly viewed as an expectation of traditional working life with an anticipation of a 'job for life'. It has been predicted people are likely to have several jobs spanning different career areas throughout their lives (National Careers Council-England, 2013). Such mobility has the potential to bring uncertainty and confusion as individuals struggle to find their place in the world of work.

In contrast to objectivity, Savickas (2011) proposes people are building subjective careers that emerge from thinking about constructing a working-life story. To do this, the person needs to return to the past whilst considering the present, so they can visualise a potential future. By reflecting on our interpersonal experiences, we begin a process of 'building ourselves from the outside in...' (p17). We have the chance to 'see' ourselves again, the selves we may want to engage in the future.

Returning to Super's model, roles such as parent, home maker, spouse, worker, citizen, student and child were identified. There are other roles not referenced such as sibling and friend which may be of importance to an individual. However, all our roles contribute to who we are and can affect who we may want to be. I suggest when considering career decisions, it is pertinent to see it as a process which encompasses an individual's life and all the roles therein. As such, when something happens in our lives it could bear significance on our occupational outcomes. I see this as an individual's life-career. The contested nature of 'career' will be discussed more in Chapter Two.

Within my life-career, I also recall with clarity times when I made 'risky' career decisions that were totally out of character but seemed so right in the moment. These were my 'I'm just going to do it' moments. Whilst writing my story I came to recognise that certain moments resonated with me; I could 'see' them in my mind's eye and recalled aspects of those times

with clarity. I became a mental time traveller as I told of my autobiographical journey (Horsdal, 2014).

I began to consider creative writing practices as possible ways to record salient life-career moments, and how they could be used to enhance professional practice. Would others embrace such strategies to gain deeper personal understanding? I noted, not everyone wants to explore creative writing strategies and decided rather than asking individuals to follow my creative preference, they would be asked to utilise a creative practice of their choosing. This way they could make an autonomous choice rather than being ‘told’ what to do. Also, there are feelings in these important moments when individuals can experience a myriad of emotions. Enabling the documentation of both experience and emotion through creative practices could aide personal understanding of important life-career moments (Simpson, 2011).

My fascination blossomed and I decided to explore further by studying for a PhD, however that decision did not manifest until I attended an event during which I experienced what I consider to be an ‘epiphany’. Such occurrences are described by Denzin (1989) as ‘interactional moments and experiences that leave marks on people’s lives’ (ibid, p70). What follows is the story of the event previously mentioned, attempting to ‘show’ the emotions and feelings induced during the event as opposed to ‘telling’ about the incident (Chase, 2008). The account will be depicted in italic font to differentiate it from the main body of the text.

She found a corner seat in the lecture hall. She liked corner seats; the comfortable way they contained your body, snug but with room to write notes if the mood took you. She liked writing notes as they served both as a memento of the occasion and an aide memoire of ‘just in case’ future writings. In the past, they fought valiantly lest they become forgotten scribblings, written on loose pages that were put aside in favour of the latest vocalisation, text or visual imagery that demanded recognition. Now she ritualised her musings in note books and journals, the latter being a special friend that took on board frustrations, sorrows, confessions and joys.

Her attendance at the Narrative Research Conference was exciting for her as it was the first international conference she had attended, but there remained a small voice inside her which kept telling her that she did not belong. Every now and then she recognises someone and passed a moment’s pleasantry. Still the voice persisted so she drew breath and slayed it with a single stroke. This voice had sisters who would come in time to wreak vengeance. Yet, for now there was peace but at the same time a yearning for something to fill a widening chasm. For she had let out the demons that had plagued her and the doorway had remained open.

More than a year had passed since she had completed her master’s degree and in the time, she had realised a dream to have work published in a professional journal... She had changed in that time. The journey of self-discovery which had been acknowledged through her study had left her with a need to reconsider her professional identity as a careers practitioner. She could no longer practice as an adviser with the connotations of a mechanistic being who operated via an organisational adherence to past notions of best practice. Now she confirmed her identity as a careers counsellor who offered a holistic practice considering the whole person and not just the role that occupation played. She took

her notebook, opened it to a clean page, unscrewed the top of her specially chosen pen and waited for the first words that would dare to mark the virgin page. The conference began.

She smiled in response to the speaker's eloquently delivered articulation. She started to listen intently to the words enunciated. The speaker spoke of a deep depression that a person could feel once the activity they had been engaged in for so long ceased. The speaker spoke of travelling through a dense forest and arriving at a clearing that was full of light. She moved forward in her seat to get closer to the speaker. Her pen lay in her hand, the page in her book still pure. She felt filled with a sense of something unexplainable, she did not know what she felt but she had a strong desire to stand up and shout 'YES!' Her eyes filled with tears that threatened but did not fall. 'Thank you' a mental sign to the universal being that walked beside her. After writing the journal article she had 'shut down'. She was unable to read or think with clarity; something had left her. The feeling of loss had persisted until the moment she heard the speaker's words. She realised that she needed all of her, mind, body and spirit to function. To deny one part was to impoverish the others. She needed to continue her journey of discovery to locate her place in the world. She had thought about returning to study but indecision had beset her. Clarity came and in that moment, she decided to continue her academic quest.

Had I been reckoning with time as suggested by Ricoeur (1980) and determined it had been the wrong time to start a study, but by listening to that speaker at that time I changed my mind-set and decided that the time was right? How did I know it was the right time? Would others also have experienced such feelings and emotions in their career turning points?

This recollection is a 'fragment' of my educational biography (Domincé, 2000, p133). I was transformed in a moment and in that moment, I 'knew' I was going to study for a PhD. I did not know how I knew, only sensing it was the right thing to do. I considered this to be a spiritual moment and it is natural for me to see spirituality through my lens as something that brings purpose and meaning to my life, but it means different things to different people. For example, within career counselling interviews some look toward a 'kind of stillness, openness and undoing' (Hansen and Amundson, 2009, p34). The creation of a space for calm, for not rushing and for giving time to seek meaning and answers to control inner turmoil.

My cultural belief is, in accordance with Hansen (2001), that there is a higher power operating within the universe and I knew that moment in the conference was a turning point in my life. If I had not gone to the event and listened to that speaker would I have pursued thoughts of further study? Was serendipity then a factor in my decision-making? I feel I have a connection to the word 'serendipity' as it is also used by various travel operatives to describe the place of my birth, Sri Lanka. The word in question is said to have been fashioned in the eighteenth century by the writer Horace Walpole who was inspired by a Persian fairy tale, 'The Three Princes of Serendip' (Michels, 2004). The heroes of the story made discoveries by chance and it is from this notion that Walpole invented the word. Importantly for me, it is said to also be the original name for Ceylon which was later re-named Sri Lanka. Serendipity, chance, coincidence, happenstance or fate, I consider the words to have similar meaning which is something happens that you have not foreseen, appeared to play a part in

the development of my topic. As such, I felt there was resonance with my reasoning for this undertaking but also with the way the study unfolded. There have been unplanned events and contributions to the work from people whom I have met co-incidentally and from those who agreed to participate. All, have provided valuable material, enhancing the study and providing a deeper understanding of the topic.

I wanted to record material relating to the study and aspects which may not normally be included in the work. These could be the forgotten moments when something happens that could enrich the account. To this end, when I decided to study for a doctorate I began a journal to capture not just the academic expedition but the twists and turns, the occurrences that made me stop and think along the way. These are part of the researcher's journey and have fashioned my knowledge acquisition affecting how I moved forward in the work. Therefore, the study is not only about the researched but also about the researcher; the researcher is integral to the study.

My thoughts and emotions before, during and after interviews, whilst writing and researching, and salient moments were noted and immersed in the work to provide 'verisimilitude' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p751); the lived experience. By including journal excerpts in the body of the work I have attempted to provide reflective and reflexive musings, offering windows to my worlds of researcher and researched, the different roles I play (Goffman, 1959). They impact on my concept of my being, showing my vulnerabilities and fears as I progressed through the research. I have chosen to write descriptively to display my feelings and emotions. I have also chosen to share excerpts from my journal so others too can see the events in my life, as a researcher and my other selves, as they are captured on the page.

It made sense to use autoethnography as a research methodology and to incorporate creative practices as part of the research process. Autoethnography explores the writer's experience of life, a personal narrative that expresses multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis, 2004). It is a self-narrative which analyses the self in social contexts. The intention was to explore my own experiences as a researcher from my perspective, salient moments of my life-career journey, and those of my participants, utilising written and visual creative practices. As I am the story and the storyteller, material for the study was sourced from my own life-career experiences, from the past and throughout the research journey. I became my own research instrument, examining personal interactions which are integral to the experience (Wall, 2006), seeking material to enlighten career perceptions. Additionally, three others participated in the study and were asked to document a moment that mattered to them, using a creative practice of their choice. When a participant was unsure of what to do, I tentatively suggested different creative

forms and offered a ‘help sheet’ of feasible options. I am forever grateful to those who have taken part in this work as their contribution has added breath and richness to the narrative.

To offer further clarity, I am suggesting this work is predominantly of an autoethnographic nature, as I will offer discussions based on my own experiences within the study. I am attempting to explain and show my positioning in interactions with others, so layers of consciousness are made transparent by the writing. Additionally, participants’ stories will be explored and unpacked auto/biographically and the story of the researcher will also be present through the inclusion of journal excerpts.

In autoethnography the researcher is also the researched, so I am attempting to show the reader who I am in this work. Who is the researcher? Is it the doctoral student, the mother, the wife, the grandmother, the daughter, the career guidance practitioner? I am these parts and more, and when I write I bring all the aspects of myself into the room. Each voice vies for attention, demanding to be included. I want to celebrate and illuminate the roles that support me as a researcher to enrich and enliven the work. My hope, is the reader will engage with the writing on various levels and consider their own selves as they turn each page.

In agreement with Andrews (2007), I care about the topic I want to explore. I want to capture the emotions individuals feel in salient career moments but I am mindful that including others in the work needed an awareness of how they would be portrayed. Even though I have shared interview transcripts with participants, these documents are still my interpretation of the interactions and it is my ‘interpretive framework that structures understanding’ (Josselson, 1996, pxii). Hence, my topic title became: ‘What’s in a moment? Using creative practices to capture emotion and experience in career turning points. An autoethnographic exploration’.

I have attempted to explain earlier my reasoning for the study and the questions seemed to me to naturally evolve from the aspects already discussed. In considering the ‘how’ in the questions, it could be implied that creative practices are already used by individuals when considering their important life-career moments. However, as suggested by Holliday (2007) initial research questions can direct the researcher in a certain direction. I wanted to discover the unique characteristics individuals employ when they adopt a creative practice of their own choosing to depict their salient life-career moment.

Initial questions can lead to further questions to explore what participants experience when they are creating their piece, and if utilising a creative practice assists in the re-membering of their important moment. I wondered if they could re-connect with the emotions they once experienced when they re-called their moment. Deliberations considered possibilities for different feelings in the creative process; a layering of emotion which acknowledges those of the past and those felt in the present.

In consideration of choosing their creative practice and the moment participants want to depict, there is the opportunity to reflect on their experience, both in the past and in the now of the study process. As such the reflexive nature of their contribution would also be of notable value. The emotions evoked may once have led them to act, seemingly seen as out of character or surprising, but regardless, they moved forward. They could have felt in control of their actions and with positive personal agency, as opposed to turning to others for support, made their career decision.

In discussing the concept of agency, Bandura (1989) suggests, successful outcomes are determined by the belief people have in their own ability to manage tasks. We have an expectation that something will turn out a certain way when we apply our knowledge and perceptions. People may avoid a situation because they feel they will not be able to cope, choosing instead activities they feel they will be comfortable in. Self-efficacy, is our belief that we can cope with somethings and not others, and when we feel confident we may achieve a desired outcome. We become agents when we monitor our actions, drawing on our reasoning and self-imposed incentives to produce personal changes. Agency is when our self-efficacy supports our actions to achieve our desired outcomes. However, this premise may appear to suggest that all are able to employ an agentic disposition when they consider career turning points. For some, career is about working to live and changing a life direction is not seen as a possibility. Additionally, an individual's cultural values may see personal career change as a communal decision rather than individual action. Agency then, may be dependent on how the person views their life-career.

I want to understand if the individuals in my study acted on their emotions, with seemingly little thought for their actions, other than it seemed right at the time. When I began my research, 'instinct' was the word I used to acknowledge those responses individuals have when they appear to act spontaneously. My reference was for instinct as a colloquialism, to express a sensing that something is right for the individual, not a primal response. Conversely intuition, an immediate cognition, is informed by knowledge gathered throughout life experiences and could be an aspect of salient moments. My third research question changed in recognition of this notion and will be discussed further throughout this work. Perhaps, other aspects were also at play during participants career turning points.

Maybe our social and cultural inclinations determine our understandings of happenstance and chance. As a researcher, I have attempted to approach this work with a 'not knowing' attitude as in accordance with Etherington (2004), there is a desire to seek new knowledge as opposed to seeking that which 'fits' with my understandings of the world. While inquisitive to explore the knowledge sought, the problematic nature of trying to balance the researcher's own

cultural predispositions whilst trying to comprehend and distinguish participants' unique inclinations, raised tensions within me and were acknowledged in the research process. Thereby, the work revealed aspects that may not normally be included in a study but their addition provided a rich descriptive quality as extolled by Geertz (1973), illuminating the text.

This introductory chapter has provided an explanation for the study, exploring my reasoning for delving into salient life-career moments. Our lives are made up of a vast array of distinct episodes 'but we explicitly remember only a small fraction of them' (Schacter, 1996, p16). It may be possible to draw on the emotions felt in these times and think again about what made them stand apart from the routine of our daily lives. Capturing them using creative practices can provide the opportunity to think about that time, considering how our past actions have impacted on our present and how they could potentially inform our future selves. There is a chance to be transformed through a deeply meaningful personal learning experience (Dirkx, 1997) and to potentially view the world through a different lens. The methodology adopted and the addition of journal excerpts will I hope leave 'the blood in' (Moriarty, 2013); those evocative and messy texts describing moments through the research process that may otherwise have been lost if not fixed on the page. However, what is my aim for this work? Will it find a place in the frenetic world we live and work in?

My aims for the work

I believe there is a place for creative practices in career guidance. Theoretical perspectives which acknowledge such work include the use of narratives (Cochran, 1997), metaphors (Inkson, 2007), Law's storyboarding (2008) in which individuals draw a scene to depict a turning point in their lives, and Savickas's career story interview (2011) where the client is asked specific questions to construct a life portrait. Peavy's (2004) SocioDynamic approach regards creativity, together with strength building and cooperative engagement, to be a necessary aspect of an 'inspiring and liberating process' (ibid, p8) where personal strengths are identified through 'meaningful dialogue and activity' (ibid). Within each creative activity, the client is not a passive participant but an active collaborator in the creation of creative environments. McMahon (2006) discusses career counselling and creativity, noting career interactions can in themselves produce highly creative dialogues when ascertaining what certain facts mean to individuals, suggesting there is little need for resources other than the counsellor and the client. The meaning derived from information shared, creates a creative interplay between the parties involved and ensuing conversations can create new knowledge and opportunities for learning. However, the combination of meaningful dialogue, personal reflection and reflexivity culminating with the creation of a creative piece, is I believe a powerful, dynamic prospect for career counselling work.

In a utopian existence, there would be time and place for this work. That said, career guidance workshops could acknowledge the therapeutic quality of taking time to think about salient moments, assimilating with mindfulness and other well-being practices. Mindfulness is when a person learns to accept moment to moment aspects that come to their minds even if uncomfortable to them, but through the acceptance of their feelings, they learn not to judge them (Amundson, Mills and Smith, 2014). This could be useful for those uncertain about their career management. The nature of mindfulness is rooted in traditions such as Buddhism where ‘conscious attention and awareness are actively cultivated’ (Brown and Ryan, 2003, p822). I am asking participants to actively think about a salient moment so they can capture the experience and emotions felt within a creative piece. Turning the ‘lens’ inward to their subjective state of consciousness, as opposed to using an external ‘objective’ tool such as a computer programme, could prove enlightening for the individual. This is not suggesting computer resources do not have their merits. Rather, I am suggesting a different approach can sometimes encourage deeper thinking. Creative on-line resources may reach a wide audience enabling individuals who are experiencing indecision and unease, to be playful in their creativity. Careers practitioners could support such work either face to face or remotely. This study focusses on internal experiences to provide clarity to support future career decision making. However, from internal contemplations participants can move to external environments where they interact with others to better inform their thinking and gain new perspectives of a moment in time.

Helping people to see when they felt they were more in control of a situation, in times when they felt uncertain and at the mercy of factors beyond their control, could be a catalyst for change. Not necessarily to act, but perhaps to acknowledge the positive in their lives. Time to stop for a moment and to take stock of our life-careers. I want to make a difference to my practice and the career counselling profession. Perhaps if more practitioners embraced their and their client’s natural creativity, the services offered would move on from objective matching ideals to consider the needs of the whole person, supporting and motivating personal growth. How then will the thesis respond to this chapter’s deliberations?

Outline of chapters

Chapter Two considers the positioning and context for the topic. Here, I discuss career guidance and career counselling, considering how the historical, social and cultural concepts of career philosophies have developed since the last century and whether there is space in today’s frenetic world for creative practices in career interventions.

Chapter Three offers a literature review which acknowledges reading materials sought from a broad spectrum of disciplines including career theory, psychology, sociology and biographical

publications. But, as noted previously, literature will also be discussed throughout the work, as possibly already evidenced in this introductory chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on the chosen methodology and provides an insight to the epistemological and ontological aspects of my thinking. There is an exploration of biographical approaches, offering justification for the utilisation of autoethnography. The chapter reflects on the research instruments adopted, providing elucidation for using ‘writing as inquiry’ to learn something that I did not know before the writing. It also considers interviewing, transcribing and the ethical implications of working with others. Finally, I offer reasoning for the inclusion of journal excerpts and a discussion on my analytical approach.

Chapters Five to Eight focus on participant stories. I begin with my story in Chapter Five and in the ensuing Chapters introduce Beth, Carol and Sara. Their stories contain case studies compiled from transcripts, followed by excerpts from my journal to show different layers to the accounts. All chapters include analysis of and with the stories, and participant creative work.

Chapter Nine brings the work together by way of a fictionalised account. I wanted to maintain the flow of creativity throughout the work and felt this would offer not only an interesting interlude for the reader, but also provide me with an imaginative medium to express my thinking.

Chapter Ten will synthesise findings as I return to the research questions, clarify the main themes that emerged from the analysis identified in the previous chapters. The limitations of the work will be discussed and finally, I will consider how the study contributes to existing career guidance knowledge.

Chapter 11 will consider my concluding thoughts. Here, I will discuss where and how the research could develop and be disseminated. I will reflect on the past five years of research and contemplate, ‘what would I do differently?’ and ‘what lies ahead?’

Chapter 2

Setting the Context

4/8/12

Have been in Cornwall visiting Mum and Dad. Whilst we were there we went to the Tate in St Ives. There was an Alex Katz exhibition on and his work has a glamorous 1920/1930s feel about it. I was struck by a painting entitled 'Give me tomorrow' which had a timeless quality even though the clothing etc. placed the picture in time. I read the gallery's information notice and immediately was taken by these words, stated by the painter, who tried to paint so that there was 'a sense of eternity in every moment'.

I wanted to include this journal excerpt as the painter's words have stayed with me. Through the creative process, I and the other participants experienced a time-with-in-time (Ricoeur, 1980), a sense of eternity in the moment. I was also reminded of those who are feeling lost in the moment, seeing time as an eternal sea of uncertainty. They may seek guidance about their working lives but their stories also include other personal aspects to provide a fuller picture of who they are, how they live, work and interact with others. They often do not feel in control of their situation or if they will ever be able to envisage a different future. Perhaps they do not want to change their external environment and maybe it would not be a possibility for them, but rather they want to affect an internal change, to re-view their lives and to see the positive in their everyday activities. As a result, they can feel a semblance of autonomy where they gain inner peace as they traverse rapidly changing communal, social and economic landscapes.

Introduction

There is extensive literature regarding the origins of 'career work' and within the limitations of this chapter I will attempt to provide an understanding of the world of career, for indeed it is a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Reid (2016), explains the word 'career' noting its derivation from the Latin 'cursus' which could be linked to words such as course and journey. My dictionary explains 'career' as a progression through working life and as a means to earn a living (Watson, 1968). My alternative dictionary (Soanes, Spooner and Hawker, 2001), considers it to be an occupation constituting a substantial period of someone's life. Both publications also describe 'career' as moving swiftly in an uncontrollable, erratic way. On the one hand, you have an expected linear progression but conversely, the possibility of a fast-paced unpredictable movement through time where the person is not able to foresee an intended outcome. Such is the world of career in the 21st Century. Life's unpredictable twists and turns, have left many feeling insecure and uncertain.

Career practitioners today need to consider a plethora of social, cultural and historical aspects when working with their clients. They also need to consider their own ingrained assumptions

and beliefs, which they bring to the career guidance counselling relationship. Some adhere to a more objective approach to their work; possibly due to their own ways of working or maybe because of organisation imperatives for outcome-based practices. Others seek a more subjective, holistic stance which incorporates counselling skills as they forge relationships. In this chapter, consideration will be given to the nature of career guidance and career counselling, considering the development of these separate, yet integrated aspects. This will be a synopsis rather than an in-depth explanation of career work as I am attempting to 'set the scene' rather than write the play.

Setting the scene

The world of work today is different to the one past generations may have known. Then, an expected linear stability to employment left many feeling safe in the knowledge they could have a job for life. Moving to different companies was often with the understanding that there would be 'career prospects' for advancement. Gaining qualifications generally meant there would be rewards such as increased income. People believed they knew where they stood.

Yet, the world has undergone social, cultural and technological changes which affect every aspect of our lives including the way we approach 'career'. The demise of the young person's career service, Connexions in 2012, saw the beginning of a fragmentation of career provision across England as organisations vied for a piece of the 'action'. The National Careers Service was introduced as a provision that would provide 'the right advice at the right time' (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012) with an aim to deliver careers information, advice and guidance to adults and young people from the age of thirteen. This service was to participate in 'a flourishing market in inspiring, exciting services and products to help people make career choices...' (Hayes, 2012, p3). However, Barnardo's (2013) suggest, those at school want advice from people they trust and under this provision, they could only access on-line and telephone services, which '... can never truly replace the advice and guidance elements that are present in face-to-face interaction' (p3).

Still, an integration of computer technologies into career support services, could engage people of all ages by delivering information and providing automated interactions as channels of communication (Hooley, Hutchinson and Watts, 2010). However, to make full use of these advancements individuals need to have access to technological devices and they need the skills to be able to use them effectively. This is not just the case for individuals seeking support but also for those providing the service. Without the technological knowledge clients and professionals are left feeling uncertain and insecure, and global advancements in computerised industries continue to develop at a rapid pace leaving many reeling in their wake. If you do not have access you are left behind. Children are 'technology natives' being

taught the language and process alongside literacy and numeracy, but for some adults there is a fear of the unknown which imprisons them in self-imposed cages. They adhere to the past and feel unable to reach out to a potential future.

Giddens (1999), discusses globalisation and changes to traditional ways of living. Our futures are more open, unpredictable and unstable which has led to a need for individuals to continuously make career-related decisions (Alheit, 2009). People have been encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions, resulting in many feeling lost and fearful about work and other areas of their lives. Organisations cannot guarantee the longevity of a job as they are at the mercy of economic and governmental imperatives. The zeitgeist legacy of the 20th Century. To consider how creative practices could support individuals when they are feeling lost in a sea of indecision, it is useful to offer an insight into the development of career work.

A historical foray

In 1976, I started working for a local government. I secured my job by writing a 'Dear Sir/Madam' letter to the Head of Personnel and was duly called for an interview. I worked in the Social Services Department registry and hated every minute. It was not the job for me. I then moved to central government where I worked as a Clerical Officer and hated every minute. The reason I tell you this is because in the 1970s it was possible to get a job with little effort. If you did not like one job you could move to another fairly easily. Nineteen years earlier, following a period of austerity, the UK experienced relative abundance which led the 1957 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to state 'You've never had it so good'. The 1960s saw the UK leading the world in fashion and innovation, exports boomed and the world looked to the UK for leading examples in industry. People, particularly those from the Commonwealth, wanted to participate in the lifestyle that could be provided in the land where the streets 'were paved in gold'.

This was the dream of my parents, to bring their children to a country where they could grow up and find 'good' secure jobs. When I started working in 1976 I found a relatively good job fairly easily. However, the tide had changed and the country was to become burdened with massive debts and high inflation.

By the 1980s there was mass unemployment. Coal and steel industries, once seen as the backbone of the economy, were being eroded together with generations of skilled workers. The life-blood of communities drained away. New industries led by advanced technologies were emerging and required different skill-sets. People needed to change. There was a necessity for a skilled workforce that could grasp developing technologies. The 1990s embraced the idea of privatisation and neoliberal idealism where marketisation and individualisation were encouraged. Women could work, raise families and have a social life.

Men could be responsible for childcare. The world had become smaller with globalisation encouraging worldwide industrial trading and cultural exchange.

By the 21st Century, the decline of tradition industries and jobs where people could expect advancement and eventual retirement having worked for the same organisation, had been eroded. Now individualisation encouraged people to take responsibility for their own futures, rather than allowing the company to think for them. There was a saying once, 'he's a company man'. Highly sexist but it encompasses the loyalty people had for the organisations they worked for. Now people navigate a sea of troubled waters where there are different working patterns, so instead of the security former generations may have experienced, some are constantly in a state of flux. 'Work in the 21st Century leaves people anxious and insecure' (Savickas, 2011, p3). The liquidity of our world, as noted by Bauman (2006), means we need to be changeable vessels, ever developing so we can find some firm ground. As the nature of career has changed, so have the theories which informs the industry.

Career theory

The 20th Century saw the rise of vocational psychology and the adoption of a scientific assessment approach to career guidance. In America, a most notable advocate of this work was Frank Parsons (1909), possibly seen as the father of the vocational guidance movement (Jayasinghe, 2001). His book 'Choosing a Vocation' (Parsons, 1909), considers the theory of matching personal traits and characteristics to occupation factors. There is a belief, if someone finds a job that matches their personal qualities they will be more satisfied and thus, more productive; outcomes deemed successful and unproblematic.

Others have explored the concept of matching traits and occupational factors further including Holland (1985; 1997), who's 'person-environment fit' model of vocational guidance, has as its main proposition that people make occupational choices which are harmonious with their interests. However, the idea of matching traits and factors, fails to consider how the individual felt about the identified occupational role. Nor does it acknowledge choices made could change over time and that these choices could depend on life roles which could also change.

Yet, matching models of vocational guidance dominated the field until the 1960s saw movement towards models derived from developmental theories. Here, there was less emphasis on objective outcomes and more on helping the person with their decision-making. Donald Super's (1957) developmental theory acknowledged career decision-making as a process continuing throughout a person's life, allowing for adjustments along the way. Super considered five stages of career development: growth; exploration; establishment; maintenance and decline. The problem here is the linear aspect of this approach. Super's approach in a similar vein to that of matching, was of its time; people had an expectation of a

job for life and the assumption was they would leave school, enter employment and proceed to climb a career ladder until they reached a position where they would stay until they retired.

Traditional psychological career theorists Super (1957) and Holland (1985), acknowledge people attempt to choose and use their interests and self-concepts in the process of their career decision-making, but as Kidd (2006) points out, they do ‘... this against a backdrop of structural constraints over which they have little control’(p29).

This was also a view expressed by Roberts (1997), whose sociological opportunity structures theory suggests people are affected by the structures that surround them. So, with these concepts in mind, it would seem when individuals consider what is available to them, they could consider the limitations of the communities they interact with, and that they may feel unable to look beyond their ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). Hodkinson and his colleagues were discussing young people’s career decision-making, but Hodkinson (2008) later noted, this was a limiting view and did not consider that young people’s situations can change just as those of adults. Circumstances can change providing a fresh perspective and equally, change can also result in insecurity as the person faces new unforeseen beginnings. Both scenarios are seen in adulthood too, so whilst my study involved adult participants, I could have worked with young people in schools or colleges as career uncertainty, from my perspective of a whole life approach, can affect individuals at different times throughout their lives.

Furthermore, Law’s Community Interaction Theory (1981), which attempts to bridge the psychological and sociological divide, proposes our understanding of the world is based on our selective responses to others and autonomy is gained by deciding who we pay attention to. For example, young people may look to friends, family, teachers and career practitioners for career guidance. ‘An inner life unfurnished with what other people offer would be a poor one’ (Law, 1996, p60). Therefore, the complex nature of career cannot be expressed through the deployment of objective assessment processes alone, but must also acknowledge the subjective aspects of a person’s life.

People experience ‘turns in their roads’ which can alter their course. They may consider a different job role later in life and return to a period of exploration. That said, Kidd (2006) notes, until the 1960s careers practitioners were tasked with ‘diagnosing individuals’ attributes and prescribing appropriate occupations’ (p21). The career adviser was thus seen as an expert in a similar vein to a medical doctor. In contrast, a developmental approach would consider self-awareness and possible opportunities, aiming to facilitate an individual’s career decision-making process. Acknowledging the ‘self’ in career saw a shift from the objective to

the subjective where assessment tools were employed to support client's self-understanding rather than a practitioner's evaluation.

Super's model evolved and he acknowledged a person could have a variety of roles. His 'life-career rainbow' (1980) model, illustrates roles such as child, student, worker, homemaker, parent and pensioner. Importantly, Super recognised people can move in and out of different roles at different times in their lives. The temporal nature of life-career is not then a straight line, but a diverging path where a person can go back to explore a different route or step of the path for various reasons. However, as Kidd (2006) notes, Super's theory offers a general description, failing to consider the psychological consequences when a person experiences changes in their work roles. For example, when a person becomes a working parent their feelings may affect their different life roles. Emotion is often absent in discussions surrounding career development and management (Kidd, 2004) yet it governs how we approach our life-career.

Career interactions need to acknowledge the person's life circumstances, as noted by McMahon and Patton (2006), and to do this there should be an openness to a variety of theoretical approaches. It would be like creating a bespoke garment. Just as a designer alters a neckline or a sleeve shape, the career practitioner could design an interaction to suit the needs of the client. A little bit of trait and factor matching, perhaps a career story interview or as I propose a 'creative interactive career process' (I discuss this further in Chapter 11), which allows the individual to take time, to be mindful and reflect.

Additionally, Hughes (2013) suggests a need for 'resilience' as people face the challenges of work in the 21st Century and calls for continuous training opportunities throughout working life. Here, I am reminded of Super's 'rainbow' in that a person can move from worker to student or be both at the same time. In order to develop as a career practitioner, I have embarked on higher education and participated in career enhancing training sessions to develop my skills. The 'honing' of my craft involves a continuous stream of learning possibilities, active and passive, whilst continuing my practice.

Sultana (2011), cites Barnett (2000), as he discusses the 'super complexities' people face as they take responsibility for continually reconstructing themselves throughout their lives. Sultana notes this can be liberating, if individuals do not feel persistently threatened by forces impacting on their daily existence. He considers that the neo-liberal concepts of marketisation, where 'users' are encouraged to take responsibility, has meant people need to be more flexible, adaptable and self-resilient. Thus, people need a range of skills and attitudes to deal with life and work insecurities.

Chen (2001), considers career and life as integral, noting career problems are intertwined with other life situations. There is a need then to look at these and the circumstances in a person's general life context; a concept also extolled by Peavy (2004), who acknowledges our interaction with others in our lives. In consideration of his SocioDynamic approach, a philosophy to help others as they attempt to 'solve problems in contemporary social life' (ibid, p2), Peavy justly considers the place of the career practitioner and what it means to help others through a counselling process. I am moved by his 'credo',

'Fellow human beings, we are in this world together. Let us find ways to combine our intelligence, creativity, and experience on behalf of goals that you value. If we work together, we may be able to create better conditions for you and your life than either of us alone can achieve. The very act of joining together in a common effort to find a better path for you will make my life better' (ibid, p44).

These words acknowledge that the collaborative nature of the career interaction has the capacity to enrich both the participant and the practitioner. From a researcher's perspective, I have experienced an increased sense of well-being when participants have expressed personal growth, gained from participating in this work. Perhaps it is not the researcher who is experiencing this warm glow of satisfaction. Nor is it the career practitioner, but the whole person. As such, there are times when our worlds collide and we cannot be one thing or another; we are 'being' in the moment.

There are many different theoretical approaches to support career practice and some will be explored further during this study. However, it is interesting to note that the legacy of matching personal traits to occupation factors continues to dominate careers work today (Bimrose, 2010), over a hundred years after its inception. There could be an argument for a 'shift' from an adherence for traditional career-related models, to those which acknowledge how individuals construct their understanding of their worlds. Similarly, practitioners need to comprehend their own worlds to 'understand and accommodate the cultural contexts in which their clients live and work' (Watson, 2006, p55). So, as the world has changed and continues to change, career models need to evolve in response, enabling practitioners to utilise the most appropriate approach to meet the client's needs.

Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Eduarda Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck and van Vianen (2009), suggest there is a case for considering life trajectories in which people progressively design and build their own lives. Young people are not the only ones who ask what they should do with their lives. It is a question we ask ourselves as we negotiate turning points in health, relationships and work. Work is no longer seen as a continuous, smooth pathway, but rather a crazy paving and '...fragmented working life is thus subsumed into the greater whole...' (Kileen, 1996, p12).

Individuals need to take risks if they want to embrace the life chances and opportunities that come their way. Career practitioners need to re-think the application of traditional career theories, using them as necessary to meet the needs of the individual seeking support, as opposed to employing them as their 'fail safe tools'. Just as with a recipe, if you follow it rigidly you are likely to have similar results with each cooking experience. But, if you replace an ingredient, you could develop a new dish which is much better than the original, delighting the diner. In other words, incorporating concepts from different theories could generate new insights to career practices and in turn, invigorate career industries. An idea which inspired my thinking and which embraces creativity is Law's (2008) Three Stage Storyboarding.

Law's storyboarding for career management

Law's concept provides a visual account of an important moment in an individual's life. This is not a whole story but a special episode, a moment in their life which stands out for them and on which they can reflect. They create the story of the moment using three scenes. There is a filmic quality to this process and the individual is encouraged to re-imagine the moment like a 'movie-in-the-brain' (Damasio, 1999, p9). A process for reflecting pictorially on an experience, the person is invited to draw images to depict what they remember of the event in the first scene. In the second scene, they draw pictures to show the actual moment, that is what they feel occurred, and in the third scene draw what they will do in the future as a result of the moment. This is the action they may wish to take, for example, considering the things they want to do next such as studying a course.

Through their drawings, the individual can stand back from their moment, to possibly see the scene from different viewpoints, to think about the relationships they have with those they have included in their story, as well as the feelings evoked. Law discusses the notion of 'journey' and 'race'. It is not about entering a competitive race to arrive at a destination, but about beginning an exploratory journey to engage in a process of self-discovery. In this I agree with Law, as the creative journey I and my participants engaged with, have appeared to raise aspects of the self that have made us each stop and think about our place in the world and what we want to make of that space.

Law suggests his process provides an opportunity for some to have a 'voice' because each storyboard is the unique expression of its creator. However, some may be reluctant to put pencil to paper. I wondered if the individual would be able to express their uniqueness if they were aided with the drawing. Would it still be their voice or an interpretation due to the style of the person doing the drawing? Law, considering the embodiment of the individual engaged in the process, suggests thought bubbles as opposed to speech bubbles, are used to express what is connoted during the story depicted. Thus, the language used is that of the storyteller

and not of the person drawing. Nonetheless, even a minimal stylised drawing has a ‘unique’ signature so there is a risk for multiple narratives unless the work is that of the individual who is expressing the moment. I offered support, but consider it important for the individual to produce the creative work themselves, as it is the process of reflecting on the work and the reflexive expressions that occur whilst doing the piece, that provides their unique signature. The time taken to contemplate their moment can encourage a deep deliberation and through such thinking, emerges self-discovery and possible paths for the future.

I was drawn to Law’s idea of storyboarding as it focusses on turning points in people’s lives. ‘Focus on turning points opens doors to unforeseen possibilities and ready for anything flexibility’ (Law, 2012, p29). There is acknowledgement that the process can support well-being through reflection, helping people to see a way to move on with their lives. Recognising a special moment can help an individual to notice what may be missing in their lives or to see when they were surprised by their reaction to an occurrence. To think about what may be holding them back and what they may want to change. To consider the possibilities for their lives and to think about how they can become ready for them. It may be that an individual is not ready or does not want to make changes but as Law (ibid) notes, this is also important to the person involved, as a turning point in their lives for a direction not taken.

When someone draws, or in my opinion any form of creative activity which engages mind and body, they have the potential to become immersed in their own worlds, where they can engage in internal dialogues which may provide answers to self-imposed questions. Such embodiment can be enlightening in a way that only has meaning for the individual who is open to, and engaged with such practices. We have the chance to listen to the internal voices that perhaps in our busy lives we have not been able to hear before and in doing so, we gain self-knowledge.

In agreement with Law, when considering occupation in a person’s life, I also consider all the roles that are encompassed within their life-career. Work is one aspect of life and different life-roles bring an individual into contact with other people, in various places and times throughout their lives. Our behaviour can change as we encounter different experiences. In some, we may feel more confident and capable than in other areas of our lives; our self-efficacy as discussed by Bandura (1977), is changeable. Activities that can help us to see ourselves at times which we feel are significant, could potentially enable us to ponder how we can emulate times of positivity, into areas where we may feel uncertain about ourselves. Processes such as storyboarding and other creative activities provide mindful reflective opportunities for embodied engagement to evoke self-insight and to gain knowledge of our place in the world.

However, new ideas may be discussed and tried in practice but are often at the mercy of organisation constraints, which can stifle imaginative and creative thinking. The aim of this study is to explore the possibility of using creative mediums to offer new ingredients to entice the development of creative career practice.

Career practitioners need to find ways to support those who are struggling to make life-career decisions, at times when they are feeling vulnerable and lost. They need to encourage individuals to tell their story their way, but is there time and space for creativity in career guidance counselling? I believe so, but to offer some answers consideration should first be given to the terms career guidance and career counselling; one is born of the past and the other possibly informs the future.

Career guidance and career counselling. Is there a difference?

When I talk about career guidance and career counselling I generally mean the same thing and as Reid (2016) notes, these terms are used interchangeably. However, it would be useful to discuss both.

Careers guidance

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004) advise,

‘Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers’ (OECD, 2004, p19).

Importantly, this statement suggests career guidance supports individuals of any age and at any time in their lives. Career work is often seen as something carried out with young people who are embarking on working life. Yet, clearly there is a need for guidance to be available when it is wanted and needed, at any point in an individual’s life. Especially if career is seen as the activities and influences on a person’s whole life and not only related to an occupational role.

The OECD definition (ibid) acknowledges possible multiple transitions and these transitions as previously discussed, can occur at any point throughout a person’s life. Within some adult outcome-based services, there could be constraints on the types of activities available, to meet organisational demands. Nor is it always possible within a careers guidance interview to offer guidance; rather there is a return to information and advice, accessible from computer websites. Hawthorn (1996) suggests a need to devise imaginative approaches to career work in the adult sector to sit within and alongside existing provision. There is scope to be creative if the practitioner is prepared to take a risk and can offer an alternative to computer websites and matching exercises. The OECD definition refers to such activities but also adds that there

should be an intention to assist. However, good intentions do not always translate into good practice and public accountability demands evidenced based outcomes (Jayasinghe, 2001).

A longitudinal study by Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton (2004), considers what makes effective career guidance. Their findings suggest, individuals found career guidance to be most useful when it encouraged a 'constructive change' (p3), such as increased self-confidence, and created opportunities for reflection and discussion. The participants wanted the 'transformative power of the process' (ibid). Positive outcomes from what was deemed 'useful guidance' were seen as measurements of change in the client and included change in attitudes, behaviour and thinking. As such, utilising creative practices within a guidance process could have the power to transform thinking by offering an opportunity to be both reflexive and reflective in the possible transformative creative process. Of course, as was noted by Bimrose and her colleagues, external influences on the client are beyond the control of the career practitioner. Yet, it could be argued that such influences could be incorporated into the creative piece to acknowledge and accept their existence. In this way, an issue could be viewed from a different vantage point thus enabling the individual to 'see' a possible barrier to a preferred future. They could feel an element of control over a situation which previously, they saw as controlling them.

Kidd (2006) notes, career guidance is often seen as an 'umbrella term' (p3) to describe the different aspects of careers support. These include activities such as, self-help undertakings and career counselling. The Unit for the Development of Adult Education (UDACE) (1986), described guidance activities as: informing, advising, counselling, assessing, enabling, advocating and feeding back. Career counselling is acknowledged as an integral aspect of career guidance and requires further discussion.

Career counselling

Throughout this work, I have used the term career practitioner rather than the commonly accepted career adviser. My preference is to be known as a career counsellor, but when I say this to people they say, "oh yes a counsellor". I then embark on a practised speech about how I use counselling skills within the context of my work, but that I am not a trained counsellor. Generally, at this point their expressions glaze over as their attention shifts. They may have an assumption that a counsellor is someone a person turns to when they have a crisis. Some seek career services offering specific information and advice, dismissing the idea of counselling as unnecessary and surplus to their exacting requirements (Reid, 2016). The rise of a therapeutic culture has been discussed by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) who suggest there is a popular obsession with people's emotional fragility which culminates in a 'diminished self' (ibid, pxii).

Certainly, as an adolescent, counselling was not something considered within my family. Our understanding of this term was based on the American television programmes we watched, where counsellors offered ‘couch’ therapy and people left saying, “thank you, I feel so much better now”. Rather, it was viewed as ‘airing dirty washing in public’. Jayasinghe (2001), considers McLeod’s (1997) acknowledgement of the cultural norms surrounding the idea of counselling, suggesting it is a sanctioned form of healing whereby people are able to reflect on their values and needs. It could be said that in some cultural settings, family and community are where individuals seek career guidance or career counselling, rather than via an external source of support. Arulmani and Nag-Arulmani (2004) discuss the influences on a person’s career development and note that the Western world encourages independent thinking, whilst the East looks to non-independent decision-making. Communal support may be highly valued in career development and the influence of significant others is considered effective when making career choices. The nature of cultural influences on life-career will be considered further in the chapter where I tell my own story.

It would appear that the public view of career guidance is regarded as a separate entity to career counselling (Kidd, 2006). Yet life, job and occupation are not separate. What is perhaps missing are the multiple roles an individual portrays through life which a life-career approach acknowledges. Through career counselling meaningful life themes are identified and acknowledged as an integral aspect of an individual’s biography (Reid, 2016). Career counsellors consider the whole person within an interaction, rather than just focussing on issues relating to occupational outcomes. It draws on humanistic counselling which offers a client-centred orientation (Rogers, 1961), viewing each interaction as unique. Career counsellors/practitioners acknowledge within a person’s life, aspects such as education and health, can play a part in how they approach the opportunities that may be available. It is also about helping someone to see that which they thought was not possible. A career interview can be a safe place to say things a person has not said aloud before and they may disclose aspects of their life they see as barriers to a desired future. Kidd (2006) acknowledges the multiple overlapping aspects that can be brought to a career interview and offers a definition for career counselling as,

‘A one to one interaction between a practitioner and client, usually ongoing, involving the application of psychological theory and a recognised set of communication skills. The primary focus is on helping the client make career-related decisions and deal with career-related issues’ (p1).’

Career-related decisions and career-related issues implies a need to consider all aspects of a person’s life, as other areas have the potential to affect a job and a job can affect a person’s other life areas. Career guidance could be seen to offer information gathering whereas career counselling is more about helping clients to deal with the ‘not knowing’ Jayasinghe (2001).

Herr (1997), proposes those who follow a career counselling orientation, should not maintain a distinction between career and non-career domains. Rather, the process is one of continuous interventions which includes self and occupation awareness, exploring possibilities, career learning and planning, stress reduction and issues of indecisiveness. Within this understanding of career, career as occupation and career as life are strands that are continuously woven together.

Concluding thoughts

Savickas's (2011) career construction theory, suggests the self is constructed through work and the relationships we have with others. He acknowledges individuals may seek different career services dependent on their needs; whether that be a requirement for matching assessment tools, or a more personal counselling approach. As such, it is not a case of one or the other, but a merging of the established with emerging possibilities. The risk of an increasingly insecure labour market has left many feeling stressed and uncertain. Savickas notes, to promote well-being individuals need to 'take possession of their lives by connecting who they are to what they do' (ibid, p13). It is not then a case of telling someone what to do, but of helping them to understand themselves; helping them to make their lives work for themselves.

I believe there is a place for creativity in careers work which will support people to gain a deeper understanding of the self. Career counselling in the 21st Century is not the linear provision of the past introduced on the point of entry to employment, but one that is required to support a diversity of social and cultural needs. Work-life balance, career transitions, unemployment, stress, and lifelong learning, need career services across the life-span (Watts and Sultana, 2004), in readiness for possible change. Those who adopt a constructivist world view, which considers that people construct their understandings of the world from a viewpoint informed by others (Reid, 2006), embrace listening deeply to the individual's story to understand how they make meaning of their lives. It is a holistic interconnectedness between the person and their environment. As they tell their story, they and the listener become aware of their worldview, past, present and future. Offering the opportunity to capture a salient moment provides space to reflect and to be reflexive as people consider how they felt in a life-career turning point.

The nature of my research may appear to veer towards therapeutic counselling, and granted it may well have therapeutic effects. As a qualified experienced career practitioner, I am fully aware of the boundaries and limitations of my practice. There is a need to consider a variety of tools in career guidance counselling so that the practitioner is prepared to walk with

individuals who traverse uncharted landscapes, being open to how they want to tell aspects of their story, becoming a ‘companion on the inner journey’ (Wright, 2010, p288).

In the following chapter, I review literature utilised in the compilation of this study.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Introduction

This study asks the question ‘what’s in a moment?’ proceeding to state creative practices will be used to capture experience and emotion in career turning points and, that it will be an autoethnographic study. I have engaged with extensive reading materials from bodies of knowledge including psychology, sociology, career perspectives and biography. This led me to see little has been written specifically about using creative practices to capture the emotions felt in the experience of a career turning point. Therefore, a review of literature will be offered considering ‘what’s in a moment’ weaving creativity, experience, emotion, career turning points and autoethnography into the work to create cohesive material. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, literature was explored as the work unfolded and what follows is not conclusive, more a sample of those texts. A characteristic of the study explored moments of ‘becoming’ and literature was considered accordingly.

Moments of becoming

The study introduced me to new literary worlds, helped me to re-visit others and thus, my knowledge expanded. When Rogers (1961) wrote about ‘becoming a person’, he acknowledged different moments in his career when he made discoveries about the knowledge informing his practice. He questioned previously accepted conceptual frameworks of how he saw the world and his viewpoint developed out of his own experiences. Similarly, I have questioned my world view and in my continued ‘becoming’ I learn to accept who I am, my social and cultural predilections.

Key to this study and the Creative Interactive Career Process, a tool for practice which has emerged from this work and which I discuss in Chapter Eleven, is the development of unique relationships, as championed by Rogers, and founded on trustworthiness, dependability and consistency. He suggested that counselling practitioners deal with the tensions in human relationships by forming unique relationships with individual clients. Rather, than adhering to a specific set of ruling beliefs which sees people as objects to be diagnostically evaluated. My own belief systems which incorporate my understanding of spirituality and an openness to phenomena, have supported my practice, so I feel a togetherness with Rogers’ views. He suggests that a deeply therapeutic relationship requires the continuous personal growth of the practitioner and to do this, you need to be yourself to build constructive relationships. The practitioner begins the process of facilitating others to move forward in their lives by accepting them as they see themselves. I think what is interesting here, is that Rogers is not

advocating providing people with knowledge which they could use in their lives but is suggesting that through a unique relationship they discover within themselves aspects about themselves. They are not dependent on the practitioner but can use the relationship for growth, personal development and change. In this, the person can come to see that they are not fixed in their lives, but in a process of becoming. There is congruence with Moustakas's (2001) heuristic notion of self-discovery which considers an understanding of personal essential qualities through a 'process of illumination'. This is also discussed further in Chapter Eleven.

There are conditions which Rogers suggests are necessary to develop such relationships. It must be genuine, that is the practitioner needs to be aware of their own feelings and attitudes and should be willing to express them. Through such awareness, they communicate the message they truly want to give, as opposed to one where they appear to be interested but show the opposite. Practitioners need to be accepting of others, showing warm unconditional positive regard for them in the interaction. Regardless of the client's attitude, they continue to show empathy and that they want to understand how the person sees the world. They need to listen with real understanding and not pretend otherwise; a wandering mind is not truly in the relationship. It is a special quality and I do not feel it is one that is easily achieved in an interaction. It requires the whole person to give themselves up to the relationship and this is not easy in daily career guidance practice when tied to time and organisation constraints. By accepting them, Rogers suggests the person is then free to explore on a conscious and non-conscious level aspects which may be hidden. 'The mainspring of life' according to Rogers (1961, p35) is the tendency for growth, perhaps concealed within defensive psychological layers of an individual's lived experiences. By providing the right conditions, it may be possible to uncover the layers and allow growth to occur. Rogers states that the relationship can be defined as supporting a '... more functional use of the latent inner resources of the individual' (ibid, p40). They come to see that they are several different selves which make the whole person. Through the relationship and the right environmental conditions, they feel accepted for who they are and that they do not have to behave in ways they feel others want them to behave. They are then able to be themselves and facilitate their own growth.

In the moment of being with the other, there is almost an otherworldly timeless quality to the relationship. By being in the experience the practitioner and the client become aware of what exists in themselves in the situation. Rogers considers there to be congruence in a relationship when there is a matching of experience and awareness, that is we are in the experience and we are aware of how we feel in the experience. Indeed, I noted that such awareness of being, appeared to be heightened by the Creative Interactive Career Process, and particularly when participants created their creative pieces. As practitioners we can only strive to achieve such

understandings as advocated by Rogers, but when we understand ourselves, then we become congruent in our experiences. Our clients feel valued because we are genuine and we both grow.

Rogers (1961) suggests, when an individual accepts who they are, change comes almost unnoticed. I have changed from the person I was to the person I am, from working part-time as a Classroom Assistant to qualified Career Guidance Counsellor studying for a doctorate. Rogers (ibid) notes we need to trust ourselves and our intuition to do the things that feel worth doing, suggesting the 'total organismic sensing of a situation is more trustworthy than my intellect' (ibid, p22). I have tried to trust my intuition, taking paths that seemed right. In doing so, I gained understanding of myself and what was right for me in the moment. In accepting ourselves and trusting our emotional responses, Rogers implies individuals need to embrace the process of change as we are in a continuous state of becoming. Bearing in mind this was the 1960s, many people were expecting a safe, stable career that spanned their lives. Rogers suggests individuals are fluid not fixed, and it is this fluidity that enables us to accept and adapt to change. Consequently, Rogers's ideals have traversed time and space, influencing this researcher.

Others have considered moments which have influenced an individual's life course.

Dunn's (2006) book 'When they were 22', focussed on a single year in the life of one hundred extraordinary lives, when they were twenty-two years old, capturing their defining moments. February 25th1964, young boxer Claius Clay made boxing history when he took the world heavy weight title from reigning champion Sonny Liston. This fight marked a turning point in the life of the young boxer. A few weeks later he re-named himself Mohammed Ali, a name he said was given to him by his spiritual mentor Elijah Muhammad. He went on to become one of the greatest boxers in history, changing his religion and identity. What were Ali's thoughts, feelings and emotions when he made these decisions? There may be documentation elsewhere but Dunn does not say, adhering to the historical facts.

In contrast 'The moment I Knew: Reflections from Women on Life's Defining Moments' (Nelson, 2011), is a compilation of stories written by women in their own voice, style and time. These essays and poems epitomise the concept of verisimilitude, a lived experience, as discussed by Ellis and Bochner (2000). In one story, the writer documents the day she miscarried for the second time. The opening line 'I see the blood in my underwear and know it is happening' instantly holds the attention and she gives chosen words life with speech marks to show they are said aloud denoting them with italic font,

"I can't handle this again. It's too much for me. Come on God, you wouldn't give me this deal again would you? I thought you liked me. I'm a good

person. I'm nice to people. I bend over backwards to make others feel comfortable. Two miscarriages in a row? Me? I'm healthy. I try to be good. Why me? Why the hell is this happening? I want to have this baby. Time is running out for me, you just sit there in the clouds-or wherever you are-just watching this happen" (Evans, 2011, p 54).

The use of italic font is used later as a response to her fading pregnancy when she mentally recalls the precise moment she decided to relinquish a dream of becoming an elite gymnast because she could not master a 'back hand spring'. Her account takes the reader back in time to the gymnasium and returns them to the present '*... I can still see the scoreboard high on the gymnasium wall. I can still smell the rubber gym mat. And today I can feel the sadness pouring down my chest like thick syrup*' (ibid, p58). For the writer, the recollection of her miscarriage was a series of moments that took place over a period of weeks. Yet, she could remember with clarity the moment she decided she would not follow a gymnastic career and the sadness of one moment bled over time into the other.

These accounts express how individuals have undergone transformative experiences, engaging in a learning process which involves a subjective reframing of how they see their world and their place within it. In the introductory chapter, I referred to Mezirow (2000), who suggests the justification for our beliefs and values is due to our biographical, historical and cultural backgrounds. Hunt (2013), considers this to be 'fundamentally relativist' (p10) and does not appreciate how knowledge can be obtained. When considering learning through creative writing, Hunt suggests Mezirow's concept of transformative learning to be consciously rational as the focus is on critical reflection, ignoring the role of feeling and emotion in learning.

Moments of learning

Jarvis (2006) considers learning to be an essential element of being. In the awareness of our existence 'the process of realising what we might become – being is always becoming...'
(Jarvis, 2006, p5). He discusses his notion of disjuncture; dissonance resulting from the point of contact between our inner and outer worlds. The moment we acknowledge our existence in an experience, we learn something that affects a change in our understanding of our world as we know it.

According to Jarvis, we live in our own life-world which is subject to change both in the wider world context in which it exists, and our involvement in it. The individual learns to become a person in their own life-world by using experience, emotion and feeling. These are influenced by their heightened awareness of the flow of time, their spatial consciousness and the culture into which they are born. Thought and feeling are present in the moment of contact with the world and in this moment of consciousness – the now (ibid, p73), the individual

becomes aware of time as it appears to slow down. Jarvis acknowledges the flow of time cannot be stopped but recognises people do focus on specific objects or events at certain moments in their lives. They create stories or narratives which reference time and space. Cochran (1997) and Schacter (2004) note individuals have episodes that stand out from other events because they are distinctly significant to them. Whilst Cochran considers the 'causality' of how one thing happens due to another, Schacter thinks our memories are rooted in everyday incidents and these memories are records of how we experience events, not replicas of the events. In contemplation of Jarvis, Cochran and Schacter, it would seem when considering significant moments, reflection on what happened prior to the moment, the memory of the moment including the felt emotions and what occurred following the moment, all contribute to the importance assigned to that moment. Additionally, Savickas (2011) suggests people need experience to reflect upon and their memories are re-constructed to meet the needs of their current situations. Further, our understanding of ourselves and our experiences are reviewed over time (Andrews, 2007); how we place ourselves in history is dependent on the significance we place on an experience.

Ricoeur (1980), discusses the temporal structure of narrative 'within-time-ness'; how time assigned to events differs from 'linear-time'. The latter is often how the world is referenced; the former recognises a story consists of several events which form the plot, bringing together temporality and narrative to form a story; 'to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of the plot' (ibid, p171). Therefore, when something happens it can be made more salient by the events that surround it. Ricoeur, also suggests within-time-ness is something the individual calculates. Thus, it can be afforded existential descriptions such as 'taking time to...' We may assign time, as in 'it wasn't my time', and thereby consequently we reckon with time (ibid). Perhaps a moment can be what we determine it to be. Maybe we consider how it fits with our preoccupations, as suggested by Savickas (2011) and how we then narrate our story of our salient career turning point. In the moment, we have the propensity to experience our own subjectivity and the story in the present moment according to Stern (2004), carries a 'world in a grain of sand' (p58). Stern recognises, in accordance with others (Andrews, 2007; McMahon and Patton, 2006; Richardson, 1997; Savickas, 2011), experience is subject to review over time. Also, conveyed by Super (1980) through his 'Life Rainbow' model, which notes people can and do move in and out of different life roles through their lives. Some experiences may be considered more successful than others because the outcome is deemed desired.

We luxuriate in a harmonious state when the knowledge of our world and the emotions we share with others are enacted successfully. When repeating such successes, we may feel

comfortable in the world. However, Jarvis (2006) proposes we learn when our inner and outer worlds interact, often as a result of tension, then 'disjuncture' is the result. We can feel unease if our biographical accumulation is not sufficient to manage the situation and our harmony is disrupted. This state makes the individual stop and time also appears to stop, as they consider the moment. They become consciously aware of their situation in the world. Having questioned and cogitated, they consider what they have learnt. This may be comparable to Kolb's experiential cycle (1984), but Jarvis (2012) takes the concept further by suggesting learning is both experiential and existential.

Individuals take their life-world for granted, adjusting behaviour to fit the situation until there is disjuncture. Then, they consider their emotions, thoughts and possible actions. They have changed from who they were and are on the path to who they are to become. Of course, much learning is incidental and continues through life with little acknowledgement. Yet, knowledge continues to be absorbed and as such, individuals continue to change, albeit with seemingly little recourse to their life worlds. At these times, time appears to fly by as we are absorbed in our worlds. Some may choose not to acknowledge disjuncture or want to learn from their experience, however, they will have changed and learnt incidentally. There is congruence with Rogers (1961) view on 'becoming', but Jarvis appears to be suggesting a person receives a 'jolt' through disjuncture which results in change, whereas Rogers is advocating gentle change through self-acceptance. Perhaps Jarvis's disjuncture can lead to an embrace of calm self-acceptance, knowledge acquisition and change over time. The stories you will later read, I hope, will offer deeper understanding of this, in particular mine and Carol's, where moments of learning in later life repaired our relationships with formal education, helping us to achieve what we were unable to do earlier in our lives (Domincé, 2000).

Paths to learning can be varied for women, as noted by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), and perhaps I and other study participants needed to learn from life experiences beyond a classroom environment before re-engaging with formal education. According to Bateson (1989) we are all different but have much in common, so whilst I acknowledge literature discussing the wider concerns regarding women, they are not the specific focus of this study which considers 'what's in a moment?'

An additional point relevant to this work is Jarvis's discussion on 'magic moments'. These are moments that stop us in our path. They come 'out of the blue', from what we perceive as normal, and are also considered disjuncture. They fill us with astonishment, awe and other similar emotions. Maybe this is like Denzin's (1989) description of epiphanies as interactional moments that leave their mark on people's lives. He suggests epiphanies are 'ruptures' in the structure of our daily lives. Denzin (ibid), also suggests 'they are often moments of crisis'

(p53), which could be viewed with positive or negative connotations. In this, epiphanies could be moments of disjuncture as described by Jarvis.

However, in his biography Nelson Mandela (1995) states he did not have an epiphany or a revelation that steered him to fight the apartheid system. Rather, it was a series of unremembered moments accumulated over time. So, what some call an epiphany may for others be an intuitive recognition that the moment was right. Here, there is resonance with Rogers (1961) who, as noted previously, suggests individuals trust themselves to do the things they feel are worth doing.

Either way, they could be memorable transformative turning points, rooted in previous experience, thereby creating a new present from the past. Hodkinson et al (1996), have noted turning points are not always predictable and those seemingly significant for life may differ from those deemed important within a small segment of it. They consider Strauss (1962), who suggests they are a point in time when an individual re-examines their situation. However, a lack of resources in a person's life may not provide the space for them to re-examine their situation. So, the depth of feelings and emotions experienced in the moment when an individual reaches a turning point and their consideration of that point are likely to differ.

McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich (2001) consider transitions in life trajectories to be 'turns in the road' that hold significance. They suggest 'what is experienced as tragedy or loss to later be seen as epiphany or insight leading to growth' (p xvii). McAdams and Bowman (2001) consider the story of the black police officer assigned as Martin Luther King's bodyguard when he visited a small Midwest city. This person dreamed of becoming a police chief but no black officer had ever been promoted to sergeant in that city. People told him not to take the sergeant's exam. King told him to never give up. This one voice had an impact. Perhaps, as noted by Honneth (2001), there was a sense of recognition, which is discussed further in Chapter Six. A moment in time resulted in an emotional response that effected a life change. He took the sergeant's exam, was promoted and in time, he became a police chief. This story depicts how an individual made meaning from a life-career transition. McAdams et al (2001) propose the stories we tell about major transitions in our lives contribute to our identities, helping us to cope with life challenges. Rogers (1961) expands on this suggesting when we express our uniqueness to others, it could speak deeply to them; as such, 'what is most personal is most general' (p26).

Turning points in a person's life-career may be viewed as transitions, but Enz and Talarico (2015), consider the two to be separate. 'Turning' denotes a change of direction in a person's life and 'point' signifies a specific moment in time. So, turning points are seen as personal changes in life directions. Transitions are viewed as external changes in daily circumstances.

Both are said to be linked by events. Results from their work suggest, transitions organise autobiographical memory and turning points author life stories, but as Reid (2016) notes, turning points can disrupt biographies when we question our sense of self.

Returning to the notion of disjuncture, I wonder if it is a by-product of the 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2006) of an ever-changing world. Perhaps individuals continually try to achieve a state of harmony, but feel continuous disjuncture as they become more uncertain of their place in the world.

Disjuncture can also occur when individuals reflect on experiences where they felt something could have had a more positive outcome. In effect, disjuncture can occur and cause dissonance in any aspect of the individual (Jarvis, 2012). Bruner (1990) notes, emotions are transformed by learning experiences which in turn affect beliefs, attitudes and values. In being we become and through learning we experience the process of that becoming (Jarvis, 2009). Others have considered the rational and emotional aspects of decision-making in the moment.

Moments of decision making: rationality or intuition?

Traditional career and decision-making theories are considered to have an absence of emotion (Kidd, 1998) with outcomes deemed unproblematic. Yet, the move to acknowledging emotionality in decision-making does not necessarily mean an absence of rationality. Lehrer (2009), considers some decisions are made in the 'heat' of the moment and are not necessarily rational or emotional, but are perhaps a blending of both feeling and reason. The process of thinking requires feeling to comprehend information as 'reason without emotion is impotent' (ibid, p31). As practicing professionals, it is possible to 'feel' when something is right. Lehrer, provides examples including one when an American footballer stated he did not know how he knew where to pass the ball, but felt that he was going in the right direction. Unconsciously he may have amassed knowledge based on practice so when required, he intuitively knew what to do. We could be continuously gathering evidence from our life moments and when faced with a salient decision-making moment we know what to do, based on the relevancy of subconsciously stored knowledge. In other words, we are mentally noting along the life course that which we seek but yet, consciously know we want. The sense that something is right and the emotional arousal felt may be brought on by subconscious recognition.

Arguably, Damasio (1999) suggests consciousness amplifies our feelings; therefore, by acknowledging those feelings in our own way we may gain realisation and possibly bring about life changes. Feelings are mental expressions of emotion and are private to the individual, but emotions can be observed by others. They are re-visited when something is

brought back from memory. Damasio (ibid), considers memories as objects which are continuously created in the brain. When they are recalled they interact with the person and cause a change. Consequently, when capturing a significant moment using a creative practice whilst considering feelings and emotions, new knowledge will be created, igniting change.

However, in his study of how undergraduate students approach career decision-making, Greenbank (2014) found the preference was to make decisions utilising informal information gathered from their communities and personal intuition, as opposed to more rational approaches. Greenbank further proposes these students tended to make decisions with a propensity for their present situation rather than the future. The implication is, those involved followed their intuition based on the knowledge gained from the influences that surrounded them. He concluded the students needed to critically evaluate how they make their career decisions to promote their agency and alleviate any dependency. Yet, it could be an intuitive approach to career decision making is in fact like rational reasoning but rather than a conscious process, takes place unconsciously, quickly and effortlessly using information stored in the brain. Whereas rational career decision making requires further information to be amassed thereby taking more time.

Daniel Kahneman (2011), also considers conscious and non-conscious decision-making processes, deliberating the concept of 'thinking fast and thinking slow'. He relays an account of a firefighter commander who suddenly without warning, told his crew to evacuate a burning building, attributing his action to his 'sixth sense'. Later he recalled elements of the moment, such as the quietness of the fire. This triggered his expert intuition of fire activity so he was unconsciously aware of what was about to happen when the fire went quiet. He recognised something was wrong and took immediate action. Kahneman proposes a two-system approach to judgement and choice; the first, System One involves the fast thinking of intuition and System Two, the slower more controlled rationalised thought process. The first encompasses the expert, the heuristic and automatic mental activities. The second more deliberate and effortful thinking. With System One, Kahneman suggests the individual is the 'secret author' (ibid, p13) of their choices and judgements as this approach is used effortlessly. Yet, it can provide the impressions and feelings which become the source of explicit beliefs informing the thoughtful choices of System Two. Thus, intuition becomes an important source of knowledge used to facilitate and support rational reasoning. Furthermore, it has been suggested intuition as knowledge, requires adequate opportunity and the appropriate environment to develop sufficient validity (Kahneman and Klein, 2009). The fire fighter commander previously mentioned, would have amassed his expertise of dealing with different fires through real and simulated environments. Kahneman and Klein (ibid), endorse Simon's (1992) definition, which simply sees intuition as a form of recognition provided by

situational cues. The fire fighter commander may have recognised the quietness of the fire as a prequel to imminent danger and so evacuated his crew. Some may refer to intuition as a ‘gut feeling’.

These, according to Gigerenzer (2007), provide judgements that appear quickly in our consciousness and are strong enough for us to act on. Gigerenzer suggests, intuition has its own rationale which he refers to as a heuristic ‘rule of thumb’. These are informed by ‘evolved capacities’ or things we have come to believe, and are shaped by the environments we have inhabited. Societal and environmental systems as discussed by McMahon and Patten (2006), involve relationships, locations and political influences. These can have a profound impact on an individual and can affect how they view their world.

We continually store information in our minds and when required or given a cue, we draw on our mental libraries. The unconscious part of the mind decides on something without the knowing conscious self, knowing the reason, so we are unaware that we have made a decision. If there is little awareness of thought, then an individual could make decisions quickly using their own knowledge. For some, less time and information could be more fortuitous, as they make decisions which they may not make if they had more time to consider. So, the temporal nature of decision-making is also worthy of consideration.

Drawing on our ‘remembering-self’ (Kahneman, 2011) is not always something to be trusted as confusing an experience with a memory of that experience could be deemed a ‘compelling cognitive illusion’ (ibid, p381) (also noted by Chang, 2008). Emotions take a person into an experience attaching them to others; emotion is the embodiment of experience (Damasio, 1999; Denzin, 1985; Horsdal, 2014). Adler (1933) suggests the mind develops phantasies which help individuals to identify themselves with good and bad situations. These phantasies bring forth feelings which the body acts on and responses to experiences can be heavily influenced by our memory feelings (Fine, 1992).

The passage of time becomes less important as life experiences the self as compiled of moments, each having its own value. The remembering-self according to Kahneman (2011), tells stories and makes choices with little reference to chronological time. When a story is told, the length of time for a critical moment is ignored. Thus, a single moment could be an entire story. The remembering-self is a construction of the rational System Two, but the way it evaluates moments are characteristic of our memory, which is typical of System One. In our memories, the duration of a moment is not important and the remembering-self ignores the reality of time. If there is a desired outcome, we tend to forget the actual time-period of any difficulties encountered along the way.

Furthermore, when people make decisions intuitively, they can incorporate biases into the process as they use the information stored in their memory, as noted by Schacter (2004). These colour the lenses through which individuals see the world. Equally, those who favour a more rational approach could be restricted by their thinking, as they are unable to collect and process all the information available. They may find when sifting through information, they move into the biases subsumed into their unconscious intuitive mental processes.

In espousing Career Learning Theory, Law (1996) considers Tanya Arroba's (1977) six typologies of decision making styles: a logical objective appraisal, a no-thought style for routinely encountered situations, a hesitant inability to make decisions, emotional decision-making based on feelings and preferences, a compliant style founded on perceived expectations of others and finally, an intuitive style which is internally derived and purported to seem 'right' to the individual. The situation is likely to prompt a particular style of decision making, so people vary how they make their decisions. Yet, in considering an intuitive approach to decision making, Blanchard (1989) ponders the transformative nature of intuition as expressed through the stories of the women she studied. She proposes intuition as both a concept and a phenomenon and for her study, defined intuition as the 'simultaneous perception of wholeness' (p757). Blanchard, elucidates perception as manifesting in an image or symbol which is placed in the story told. Wholeness she suggests, involves a spiritual element and refers to Carl Jung's (1964) book 'Man and his Symbols' where he explains that when an image has emotional meaning, it acquires a psychic quality which generates a consequence. In other words, something must come from it. Utilising an intuitive approach to decision-making enables what Blanchard (1989) refers to as '...a wholistic contextual mode of perception ...' (p758), compatible with how many women gain insight both personal and otherwise. Belenky et al (1986), also note this concept, suggesting intuitive understanding is a primary route to knowledge for many women. This could suggest that women are more naturally inclined to utilise their intuitive perceptions when making decisions, and as noted by Gigerenzer (2007), there is a tendency for women to be perceived as being more intuitive than men. Perhaps this thinking is conducive to the rationalised connotations of the early twentieth century and less so for those who adopt a more holistic stance. However, as Gigerenzer acknowledges, even though men and women have their own intuitions both '... share the same adaptive toolbox' (ibid, p73).

Perhaps the most effective decisions incorporate both intuition and rationality, one complementing the other (Hartung and Blustein, 2002). Nicols (2006), considers the functionality and detrimentality of decision-making strategies to the rehabilitation counselling process, looking to both rational and non-rational choice models, concluding individuals utilised both processes when they make decisions. Krieshok, Black and McKay (2009)

concur, suggesting both rational and intuitive processes combine in effective decision-making. Gellat (1989), also advocates the combined use of rationality and intuition, proposing 'positive uncertainty' to plan for decision-making about an unknown future. So, if intuitive decisions are not successful a person could consider a more rational approach, and rationality could be supported by intuition. This would suggest rational and non-rational approaches to career decision-making have an interchangeable quality to be called upon by the individual as required, dependent on the situational cues they receive and the demands of the environment in which they find themselves. However, experiences may manifest 'out of the blue' and serendipity or luck can also influence salient career moments.

Moments of serendipity

Miller (1983), notes the importance of chance in career decision-making, describing the role of happenstance as an 'unplanned event that measurably alters one's behaviour' (p17). However, Miller does not express how behaviour is measurably altered or what people should do. Whereas, Krumboltz and Levin (2004), advocate planning for happenstance suggesting people create their own unexpected life enhancing events, transforming them into opportunities. 'Each event sets the stage for further events' (p13); perhaps this could also be linked to Cochran's (1997) concept of episodes and causality, where one thing leads to another. 'It was meant to be' may come to mind when serendipitous unplanned events suddenly enter a life passage. Krumboltz and Levin (2004) note, good luck happens to people who engage in constructive activities, being less so for those waiting passively for something to happen. They suggest some may not take chances for fear of failure, but propose we need to learn from our mistakes. Thus, events can have multiple consequences. Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz (1999), point to five skills to create chance: curiosity, persistence, optimism, flexibility and risk-taking. Perhaps it is the final skill that stops many from taking opportunities as they are presented. So, it would seem prudent to plan for the unexpected, ensuring adaptability to our career (Savickas, 1997) and recognising the importance of playful serendipity (Watts, 1996). Yet, individuals' experiences may involve others, so social complexities, such as how an opportunity may affect a relationship or an occupational decision, should also be acknowledged.

Bright, Pryor, Wilkenfield and Earl (2005), propose unplanned serendipitous events as significantly influential on the career decisions-making process. However, their study involved young people who are also influenced by their cultural and social backgrounds. At this stage, they may be laying the stepping stones for future career decision-making, by gathering material from a variety of sources, including chance events, sifting it for relevancy in readiness for the right moment in their life course. Indeed, Betsworth and Hanson (1996)

suggest, older adults' careers have been influenced by serendipitous events which could uphold such considerations. Savickas (2011), further strengthens this argument by adding many career counselling clients intuitively know what to do to bridge the transitions they face. How, if not for the information they have stored in readiness, for the moment they make what they consider to be a significant life-career decision. In recognising the importance of serendipity to an individual's life-career, there is also recognition of integrating subjective career approaches to complement more traditional practices, such as the matching models of trait and factor discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, we are 'weaving our lives into a meaningful whole' (Hansen, 2001, p267). Returning to Bright et al (2005), who noted little attention has been given to the understanding of chance events which can be chaotic and unforeseen. Consequently, contextual factors, the social and the cultural, and unplanned serendipitous events are influential when individuals make salient career decisions.

Hirschi (2010), suggests individuals, whose internal perception is they have less control over their career development and therefore less agency over their situation, consider chance events to be more influential. Conversely, those who believe they have more external control beliefs, seemed to have more chance events in their lives. Bright et al (2005) also note the relationship between the locus of control and chance events. They suggest in a similar vein to Hirschi, people with a propensity to see external factors as beyond their control were more likely to report occurrences as chance events. There is then a level of influence and a level of control as noted by Bright, Pryor, Chan and Rijanto (2009). They propose people become more focussed on control in their lives when the level of chance events on them increased and less focused on control when chance events had little impact on their careers. So, if individuals can gain a sense of agency over their careers, if they can recognise a significant moment when they felt more in control over their lives, there is the possibility that they can recognise when an opportunity could have a desired outcome. They may proactively construct their own career (Savickas et al, 2009).

This implies the need for openness, rather than decidedness (Krumboltz, 2009) when considering our life-careers. In considering openness, Gelatt (1989) proposes, people need to incorporate 'positive uncertainty', accepting uncertainty as 'reality is a subjective creation in a personal frame of reference' (p253). Gelatt advocates moving toward intuitive choice-making. Of course, our beliefs influence the way we see our lives and if we believe we can take chances that come our way. Gelatt considers beliefs to be like spectacles; changing spectacles can bring renewed vision and different ways of seeing the world. Our choices can reflect what we believe will happen in the future. Law (2008), suggests luck is an event, coincidental but an event nonetheless. We are exposed to numerous experiences some of which will be assigned to chance occurrences but our responses to our experiences will

determine if we see them as serendipitous events (Super, 1957), or integral to personal career planning. Either way, feelings and emotions are involved and the study explored the use of creativity to capture these aspects of a life-career turning point.

Moments of creativity

A constructivist view, proposes people have the capacity to construct their own realities (Young and Collin, 2004). Through interpersonal processes, individuals construct meaning in their life-career. Constructivist approaches focus on personal meaning making, rather than the objective matching approaches of the early 20th Century. Social constructionism considers the cognitive engagement employed in the construction of knowledge and meaning, as individuals draw on historical, cultural and social processes. As Young and Collin (ibid) note, both terms share commonalities yet the former focuses on the individual and the latter on the social. Those who employ constructivist methodology, seek to work together with others, supporting them to construct meaning in the context of their lives, whilst recognising the wider focus in an individual's world.

The constructivist perspective emphasises the active nature of the individual as self-renewing. Within career counselling, the constructivist practitioner focusses on the individual and the way they operate in their social and environmental contexts. It recognises that individual development is ongoing and that the person's world view is constructed from their own thinking and processing. McMahon and Patton (2006) consider that an individual's cognition in an interaction is informed by environmental interactions, further endorsed by their Systems Theory Framework discussed in this work. 'Constructivism therefore views the person as an open system constantly interacting with the environment, seeking stability through ongoing change' (ibid, p4). Here there is congruence with Alheit's (1992) notion of 'biographicity' where individuals utilise their biographical knowledge to repeatedly re-construct their lives. It is the process that matters, which I hope readers will come to see when they read the participant stories and ensuing analysis.

Constructivism acknowledges that individuals are proactive in their knowledge acquisition and that they actively construct their own reality. This suggests that constructivism considers the social and the psychological influences on individual meaning making. It supports the construction of their worlds utilising their social interactions with others. By employing cognitive processes, it is possible for someone to have a perception of their reality based on a system of personally and socially held beliefs. Subsequently, this approach emphasises the self as organising and proactively knowing. This then, provides a view from which life-career changes, including that of occupation and work, acknowledges the individual as more self-directed agents able to manage the changing aspects of work in their lives.

The quality of the holistic relationship, as noted by Rogers (1961) and McMahon and Patton (2006), between the career practitioner and their client is key to this approach. Practitioners work in collaboration with clients, encouraging them to reflect and revise in their life-careers. Essentially, through an exchange of dialogue with the career practitioner, individuals come to see that the construction and reconstruction of their understanding of reality is an ongoing aspect of meaning making and knowledge acquisition. Story telling is fundamental to this approach as life narratives represent how a person sees their reality. I agree with McMahon and Patton who see the client practitioner relationship as a therapeutic conversation where those in the interaction come together to create a new version of reality. Further, they cite Amundson (1998) who considers Rogers (1961) values of genuineness, unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding as essential building blocks for a career counselling relationship, as well as an openness to creativity.

Stories are key to a constructivist approach as they reveal an individual's life themes based on their view of themselves in the world. When a client reveals a story to a practitioner, they are vocalising their thoughts informed by their values, beliefs and assumptions. They may begin to see themes and connections between events where previously none had been considered. They become active participants who see how a past experience may contain information which they re-interpret as new knowledge to inform future career experiences. The career practitioner needs to listen for these themes and, according to McMahon and Patton (2006), act as biographers who interpret clients lives.

Listening to the story and not for a story, as noted by Savickas (2011) and then discussing the life-themes that emerge, can help provide context for turning points which in turn, can help the person to better understand their current transition. Savickas (ibid) suggests people draw on their biographicity to bridge their transitions. Self construction is a life project and we build ourselves when we tell our stories. Savickas (2012) considers work in this century has a model for career counselling which is rooted in social constructivism and identity formation, instead of one endorsing positivity and personality. In his Career Construction Theory, Savickas considers that people think about themselves in relation to their social roles and the self is interpreted through narratives. Identity formation is a lifelong process which undergoes continuous revision by integrating new experiences. When a person encounters a new situation, their story changes and this can leave them feeling uncertain as they struggle to find biographical knowledge within their memory bank to inform this novel circumstance. They may seek help to revise and incorporate this new occurrence into their life-career. Stories are construction tools for building identities and careers from complex social interactions (Savickas, ibid). By telling their stories, individuals have an opportunity to listen to their own wisdom and as such, come to see they intuitively know what they need to do. Savickas

discusses the notion of 'self' suggesting that in the twenty-first century, our understandings do not come from a theoretical deduction but are formed from our experiences.

Creativity is a way for individuals to express their realities; how they see the world and their place within it. For example, Inkson (2007) discusses the use of metaphor to help people express how they feel about their career, such as 'a roller coaster ride' and Nelson Mandela (1995) saw his career as a 'long walk'. Commonly, career is expressed as a journey which includes turning points. The stories we tell, whether vocalised or written, often contain metaphors to express our place in time and space.

Heppner, O'Brien, Hinkelman and Humphrey (1994), discuss the use of creativity in career counselling, suggesting the application of tools including collage and art-mediums. Such tools have a place in career guidance interactions and Heppner et al (ibid) suggest career practitioners need to break out of their normal routines and employ creative interventions. However, how practitioners can employ these practices within time-restricted interventions for cash-strapped organisations is not discussed. Creativity in practice has also been discussed by Yates (2014), who sees creative practices as coaching tools. Law (2008), proposes storyboarding to identify career turning points through visual depiction and Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010), view visual imagery as multiple ways of doing and understanding.

Writing is my preference of creative expression. Those who engage with autoethnography aim to critically examine their own story and challenge the accepted surrounding stories (Bolton, 2005; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 1990; Sparkes, 2002). Our stories are within stories and are never our stories alone (Bolton, 2005; Hunt and Sampson, 2006). Richardson (1990), considers all forms of writing are selective expressions sustained by self-conscious writers. Butler-Kisber (2010) expands this, suggesting doing, reading and writing qualitative research are acts of inquiry which make meaning of the world. Writing as inquiry (Richardson and St Pierre, 2008), is my expression of meaning making in this study. Hunt and Sampson (2006), also consider writing to express unique world perspectives, adding, we take responsibility for our writing. Our work is shaped by our ways of writing and the language we use is expressing our version of reality. People then make sense of their lives and their worlds through the narratives they construct (Bolton, 1999; Ellis, 2004; Hunt and Sampson, 2006; Richardson, 1990). Indeed, fictionalised prose as noted by Clough (2002) and Speedy (2008) offers a way to express such realities.

Creative practices including collage and drawing, can also be unique expressions of the creator's reality. Ellis (2004) notes, some arts-based researchers combine their art with story; images and writing together. Through telling their story their way and choosing their own moment to recall, individuals can reflect on their experience in a 'sacred space' (Richardson,

1997) of their making. Yet, it is hard to be creative to order, as noted by Jarvis (2006). He draws on Wallis's (1926) four stages of creativity: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification, in his work.

Miller (2007) suggests, topics for biographical research could investigate the lives of others, reflect personal experience or be a combination of both and participants could re-present their life stories in text, image or multimedia forms. It could be argued, those who participate in biographical research have the opportunity to play as 'only in playing, the child or the adult is free to be creative' (Winnicott, 1971, p62). My intention to encourage my participants to express their own account of a salient moment, could be deemed an opportunity for play. There is possibility for 'childlike' self-expression. Peavy (2004) suggests, we are all in the process of self-creation and can be guided from within. Additionally, our autobiographical selves are constructed when we give 'voice' to our different experiences and each 'voice' tells the story of a particular self; congruent with Super's life-career rainbow model which recognises different life roles and Goffman (1959), who notes individuals play different parts at different times in their lives to suit different purposes.

Bollas (1992) discusses 'mnemic objects' that when used, can help us to think about different parts of ourselves and others. Such 'objects' may provide a key to unlocking that which may be hidden, even from the individual. Winnicott (1971), considers a 'transitional space' between innermost thoughts and feelings, actions, events and other people. Individuals may hide private thoughts and feelings, but the transitional space allows a person to play with them. By providing the 'space' people may have the opportunity to document a salient moment, a time when they felt they had made decisions for themselves. Kline (1999), advocates the provision of space to think quietly and unrushed. From such thinking 'sparkling moments' (Brott, 2001, p306) can arise which describe high points in a person's life. There could also be times when decisions resonate with individuals, so they erect barriers to their progression. This aspect will be problematised within the course of the work.

Moments of autoethnography

In Ellis's (2004) methodological novel, 'The Ethnographic I', the author narrates a story about autoethnography through her positioning as a lecturer and writer. She defines autoethnography as 'writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness' (p37). She expresses her movement, backwards and forwards, until the distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred. This is not a simplistic methodology but requires the researcher to go deep within themselves and what they find may not be palatable,

as I discovered when I researched the influences on my career identity whilst studying my MA. Ellis continues to describe this approach as,

‘Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts and language’ (p38).

The autoethnographer can utilise a variety of creative tools, including visual methods in exploration of their story, but others are involved and need to be acknowledged. They are implicated in our personal stories so we have ethical responsibilities (Andrews, 2007; Josselson, 1996; Sparkes, 2013). When we write our stories, we give events substance as ‘what is written is real, what is written really happened’ (Josselson, 1996, p60). As such, memories of our experiences can be used as data (Chang, 2008; Wall, 2008). Still, Chang (2008) considers, whilst ‘memories can open doors to the richness of the past’ (p71) it can also censor past experience, being unpredictable and unreliable. Events can be fondly remembered as pleasant or dismissed as bad. The experiences I write about are open to consideration through the creative analytical process (Richardson, 2000) of autoethnography.

Autoethnography is ‘research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political’ (Ellis, 2004, pxix); a concept also echoed by Spry (2001) and Holman Jones (2008), who suggest it offers multiple reflections of worldviews. Further, theorising rather than theory, according to Boylorn and Orbe (2014), can take different forms and our engagement with these forms can be through ‘multiple points of contact and streams of processing’ (p235). They continue, suggesting such conceptions ‘cannot be regulated to rigid conceptualizations of what should or should not be counted as scholarship’ (ibid). I remember an exercise from a Qualification in Career Guidance theory class where we students were asked to stand in a line and place ourselves where we thought we stood regarding theory. Uneducated in the understandings of theory, I placed myself in the middle, which I thought was the less risky option. I did not want to voice an opinion on what I did not comprehend. My understandings of theory now, is that it is an idea and ideas can change, adapt and offer different perspectives, or theorising, depending on the individual’s worldview.

I have chosen to tell the story of the research. The narrative will also include my story so readers can come to know me through the telling. Indeed, I found like St Pierre (2008) that thought manifested in the writing. I enter an emotional, embodied relationship with others through autoethnography where I display my vulnerability (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013).

Autoethnography, can be considered narcissistic (Sparkes, 2002) but Ellis (2004) suggests, it is self-absorbing to think of yourself outside the topic studied and not be affected by the same as others. Further, Ellis (ibid) notes, experience can never fully be captured. The meaning is in the detailed ‘thick’ descriptions (Geertz, 1973), imbued with verisimilitude (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) to offer credible accounts. ‘Good autoethnographic writing is truthful, vulnerable, evocative and therapeutic’ (Ellis, 2004, p135). My thoughts and feelings through this research journey have been documented in a journal and excerpts are included to offer richness and visibility of my experience within the experience. In this way, I became the ‘naked scholar’ (Anderson, 2012, p169) as I revealed myself to myself. However, my three participants stories are auto/biographical as the work is my construction of their biographical material. Auto/biography is discussed further in the next chapter.

Narrative truths however, cannot substitute historic truths, but Muncey (2010) considers Romanyshyn’s (1982) proposed ‘imaginal reconstructions’, whereby understanding is gained when we imagine a person. We create stories when we imagine or make sense of ourselves and others. I am asking readers to imagine and ‘see’ my story through creative prose. ‘If every text is situated in a moment in time and place, then with retelling of an account there is a newness of perspective and therefore development’ (Muncey, 2010, p113).

Theoretical ‘friends’

Whilst a study of literature enriched my knowledge, there were prominent theoretical ‘friends’ who informed the framework I took into the study analysis and findings. Savickas, Ellis, Richardson, Jarvis and Rogers, who have all been discussed in this chapter and will continue to contribute to the ensuing work, I count among my theoretical ‘friends’. Kahneman and Krumboltz and Levin have also contributed to my ways of thinking. I will now attempt to explain how they have influenced how I see my place in the world.

I suggest people may know what they need to do when faced with life-career decisions, but they may struggle to explain their thinking or see how they can achieve a desired change in their lives. Savickas (2011) tells us that people can proactively build their own careers and in doing so, construct working stories. He also explains that they know what to do to move on with their lives. So, if we can construct meaning in our lives, through our interactions with others, then we possibly possess the tools to reveal personal knowledge which can help us with career decision-making. Rogers (1961, 1980) has helped me to see that a holistic understanding which considers the whole person, would avoid the separation of occupation and other life roles. This begins with myself, as when I come to understand and accept who I am, then I can strive to better understand the needs of others. According to Jarvis (2006),

people are always in a state of becoming and as such, during this time, we have the potential to acquire intuitive knowledge.

Time, is a commodity which we often feel we do not have in our busy lives. By stopping to consider a salient moment, and capturing the emotions felt, there is the possibility to feel as if time has slowed for the person as they ponder their chosen moment. Additionally, Jarvis's (2006) discussion on disjuncture, influenced the way I question moments that stand apart from those that inform daily life. My experience of such times, made me stop and consider my place in the world and what I wanted to make of the space I inhabited. I changed because of deep cogitation and it occurred to me, that disjuncture could be an aspect of life which fuels feelings of uncertainty. If this is so, then recognising times when people have made important life decisions, and attempting to capture emotions felt with creative practices, not only provides time to reflect and be reflexive, but also to consider the reasoning for uncertainty in our lives. We may be able to alter our present situations or perhaps come to feel more at ease with our existence. Then, our stories change as we come to know something about ourselves for ourselves.

Ellis (2004) introduced me to evocative autoethnography and throughout this study, I have attempted to write thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences which show and tell stories. By being with the story, rather than just telling of the story, I gained deep insights which I have tried to capture on the page. My hope is to arouse a trusting familiarity, so others feel drawn into the text. I wanted to display layers of awareness, full of emotion and expressing lived experiences. Ellis (ibid) helped me to see that by being self-conscious in the writing, I was being true to myself, revealing aspects to readers which might otherwise be omitted. In doing so, I hope to gain their trust that the account they read is genuine.

Similarly, writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2000, 2008) allowed me to explore material and acknowledge thoughts and feelings as they emerged in the prose. This enabled me to acknowledge when my thinking changed, whereas if I tried to express myself in a different way, I doubt my words would have the level of verisimilitude I have tried to offer. Through my writing I try to express my meaning of the world and make sense of my life through the narratives I construct. In a similar way, I hope that individuals will be able to make sense of their worlds when they re-construct a moment of their reality and see for themselves, how their thinking may have changed.

This framework draws on my personal philosophical background and my openness to phenomena. In this, I am drawn to Kahneman's (2011) concept of thinking fast and thinking slow. I consider when I made a salient life-career decision that my intuition influenced that decision-making and I wanted to find out if others felt the same way or if they adopted a more

rational approach. Similarly, I wondered if chance (Krumboltz and Levin, 2004) was also influential in perceived salient decisions.

In attempting to understand myself, my participants and my clients, I construct a reassessment of my positioning in the world. My belief is that ‘things happen for reasons’. My framework is couched in my cultural belief systems, forged in Western ideals but grounded in Eastern values. As such, the holistic stance I have applied embraces my understanding of otherworldliness. I try to make visible and explicit my involvement in my research, but what others do in their creative practices, may be what they have decided to make visible to the world. There may be censorship of what they find painful as the creative piece only tells a partial story. So, whilst this study has explored the self as active in constructing meaning, it acknowledges there are different assumptions in the world.

People need experiences to reflect upon, according to Savickas (2011), and they reconstruct memories to meet a current need. They also need adaptability in readiness for possible opportunities. Recording a salient moment with a creative practice of choice, has the propensity to provide the time and space for individuals to acknowledge their existence in the moment of their creativity.

Concluding thoughts

Autoethnography is a way to tell my story from a cultural and social perspective; moments in time and place. Indeed, I want to paint my story with words. Denzin (1989), considers interpretive autoethnographic stories to be like pictures where old paint is scraped away to reveal something new. He suggests writing autoethnographic life stories provides the conditions for rediscovering meaning. When I started, I did not know what literature would support me on this quest. This chapter has discussed a portion of what I discovered.

The next chapter will consider the methodology adopted.

Chapter Four

Methodology

13/1/13

I feel sick! Not as in I want to be sick, but that all-encompassing emotion when your body wants to lie on the sofa with a soft snuggly blanket pulled up to the chin and basically... hide. Tomorrow is the induction day for the PhD. I am so scared that they will see through me. There I will stand naked except for my covering of bravado. My 'academic façade' that tells the world "look I belong here, can't you see?"

Introduction

Such neurosis accompanied me through the study; an unwelcome companion on this journey and perhaps this internal battle of wills is the very thing that propelled me forward. From childhood, I have struggled to feel 'good enough' (my chapter offers further explanation) so possibly this is why at times I want to hide 'under a blanket'. But, this study provided a vehicle to explain how I see the world and in this chapter, I attempt to elucidate aspects of my thinking pertinent to my topic. It will deliberate and critique autoethnography, considering the credibility of this methodology. Research instruments utilised will also be discussed and I will conclude with a brief outline of the analytical approach adopted. To begin, I attempt to explain my philosophical stance.

My philosophy

My philosophy, is informed by my life experiences which construct my version of reality. This contrasts with an epistemology that extols a positivistic view of knowledge generation and seeks universal truths. Whereas, I am exploring the stories of experiences and the possible connections between events. Individuals in their context provide personal narratives which express different ways of knowing and the focus is on what is meaningful to the person. Reid (2018) suggests, the criteria for a biographical narrative approach should: fully explain and display the methodology, clarify the need to work collaboratively with participants, engage the reader, demonstrate an understanding of ethical implications and express credibility, providing a sense of verisimilitude. I hope this criterion will become evident as the work unfolds.

Hodkinson et al (1996) in their study on how young people make career decisions, consider the theory that emerged from what they were told and what they observed. They note the study would not have been the same without the detailed information they collected. Such personal 'data' offers 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973), including elements of a life which brings the account alive. Geertz suggests those who venture into the research field need to

question both what is being said in an occurrence and the participant's involvement in the occurrence. It is important not to obscure the different facets of the lived experience.

There is a difference between explanation and description. The former is a requirement for clarification and can be explained with facts. The latter suggests a desire for detail, to paint a picture of the occurrence, to show what has been seen through a particular view. Inscription would be a way to capture thick description, providing an impression of the phenomena through the personal penmanship of the writer. As such, an interpretation of the episode, using words to create vivid, vibrant accounts may make readers trust what they are reading is a version of that reality. I want to look deep into the quality of life and I search for meaning to lead me to a greater understanding of the aspects I explore. I see the world through an interpretivist lens, in the quest to produce my version of reality from my perspective; an 'ideal' knowledge as discussed by Reid (2008).

Those who follow interpretivist ontology see the world as socially constructed and subjective, with the observer integral to what is being observed. It could be argued that as science is driven by human interests, it is not possible to objectify individuals, either those who carry out the research or those who are studied. The researcher brings to the research predispositions which colour the way they work and the way they interact with others. Perhaps this bias comes in the moment a researcher interprets the material collected. Interestingly, Hodkinson (1998) discusses Gadamer (1979) who argues all understanding is hermeneutical as the researcher only sees their subject from their own viewpoint, which is historically, socially and culturally situated. Conceivably, knowledge is then an interpretation of what we sense. Further, Richardson (1997) argues by 'objectifying ourselves out of existence, we void our own experiences' (p18-19). My study is about my experiences, including my interpretation and re-presentation of the experiences of others; consequently, it requires a subjective stance.

Interpretivist ontology recognises people understand the world from their viewpoint and thus, produce their versions of reality; accordingly, researchers adopt a qualitative approach to their work. I struggle to follow charts and columns of figures and find my mind drifting when confronted with tables and lists. These were the knowledge building blocks of my youth. Today, I appreciate there are other ways to gain the information needed. Stories are also ways to learn. They facilitate understanding, help us to make sense of events in our lives and require plausible documentation of the meanings and beliefs construed, as well as the events experienced. 'Stories create the social contexts without which we could not live' (Alheit, 2005, p202) and I want to know about the aspect of life I have chosen to study. My research is based on a constructivist view, looking at how meaning is made through relationships with

people, objects, and events with events. By this I mean how we create an event when we talk about another one, and each event carries its own story. I will return to this point in due course.

I bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to my research derived from my cultural heritage, my professional training, the literature I have engaged with and the advice I have received from others. The axiological assumption prevalent in qualitative research is that the researcher's own values are made known in the study (Creswell, 2009). They position themselves within the study, making visible in the text their values and biases alongside the principles of those who may participate in the work. By utilising inductive processes, the researcher seeks to develop a framework to the study, allowing theory to be created from the story of the research (Reid, 2008). Such thinking resonates with me as it allows for the possibility of 'becoming' as the research progresses, an opportunity for personal growth for the researcher and those who participate. Those who follow a constructivist paradigm recognise the importance of their background in shaping their interpretation of the research and this interpretation stems from their personal, cultural and historical experiences. My intention is to place myself within my text, to offer critical reflection and reflexivity. Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggest 'reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher' (p210) and by placing myself within the research text, I become a research instrument integral to the experience (Wall, 2006).

Who am I? How do my career roles come together to make me unique in the world? When I consider these questions, I am immediately struck by the metaphor of a 'crazy patchwork' quilt. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) consider the metaphor of a qualitative researcher as a quilt maker or 'bricoleur', who produces a 'bricolage', a 'pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation' (p4). They suggest the interpretive bricoleur understands research as an interactive process shaped by their own personal aspects such as history and biography, and by others within the context. So, the researcher pieces together the research material and the construction that emerges can change as new tools and interpretations are added or invented to support the needs of the study. Aesthetics come into play as the methods adopted should enhance the work and add to the overall design. Thus, it becomes possible to consider a variety of research tools when gathering material.

Moving on, consideration will now be given to the methodological characteristics of the research.

Methodology

The title of the study states the intended methodology is 'autoethnographic'. This affords an exploration of the writer's life, a personal narrative that expresses multiple layers of consciousness. A self-narrative which analyses the self in social contexts. The intention is to explore the experiences of my life-career. Inkson (2007), discusses career as a journey and proposes 'career maps' as representation of terrain and direction. He notes individuals do not always start with a map, indeed, even with one they can get lost. Yet, unplanned opportunities can lead to new directions and new career paths. These 'turns in the road', the detours and the delays, can lead to career turning points and the capturing of such moments utilising creative practices, lies at the heart of this work. I want to include the stories of others' salient moments. The cultural context of my career story will be prominent for 'the path we travel in time and space is unique to each individual' (Horsdal, 2012, p3), but others will add richness to the text as 'we exist by virtue of others, and we did not give birth to ourselves' (ibid). It would be prudent to briefly discuss biographical approaches to express further my reasoning for adopting autoethnography to show my story and that of the study journey, and auto/biography to express other participant stories.

Biographical Approaches

According to Watson (1968), biography is a written account of a person's life. The story of who they were, who they have become and possibly suggesting where they hope to go in the future. The aim is to breathe life into the person described on the page. Biographies also explore the relationships encountered by the person whose story unfolds and indeed 'our stories are the vantage point from which we understand others...' (Reid, 2003, p67).

Individuals tell their stories in relation to history and the social structures they encounter, and in doing so contribute to the shaping of society, as discussed by C. Wright Mills (1959) in 'the sociological imagination'. The individual plays out their notion of history as they continually revise problems encountered in their lives, and these revisions provide their biographical narratives. Denzin (1989) has defined 'the biographical method as the studied use and collection of life documents...which describe turning point moments in individuals' lives' (p7). He expresses biographies as written with the 'other' in mind and suggests a biographer attempts to give the 'real' details of a person's life. This is not to say that the writer is stating the 'real' details, but is in fact writing the interpreted life details of a person who lives within the words of the text. The historical and social aspects of the biography come together to provide a credible, believable account. However, this credibility can be questioned if the reader struggles to 'see' the real person through the written words.

Conversely, autobiographies are personally written accounts of lived first-hand experiences that entice the reader to believe in their authenticity. Of course, autobiographies can omit details the author does not want disclosed and equally those who write biographies can include facets of an individual's life they may not want known. Therefore, the concept is not simplistic. When boundaries become blurred, the work is auto/biographical which Merrill and West (2009) suggest aims to 'draw attention to the inter-relationship between the construction of one's own life through autobiography and the construction of the life of another through biography' (p31). Auto/biographical approaches locate individuals' in the wider social, cultural and historical context they inhabit, utilising psychosocial theoretical approaches as discussed by Reid and West (2011), to offer explanations and interpretations of life experiences.

Personally written stories about ourselves, include others so as we write, we construct their lives. Also, our writings about their life histories incorporate reflections of our own, including culturally and socially sited values and biases. In other words, what we choose to write about others could be motivated by our own interests. So, when writing the stories of others, it is possible that issues in the researcher's own biography are raised. For example, we may begin to consider how our salient others feel about our deepening involvement with our research. When participants told me their stories I was taken back to times in my own story and personal relationships, recording my thinking in my journal. Auto/biography is being aware of the extent we use others' stories as we try to make sense of our own, and how we use our own lives to make sense of the lived experience of others.

Biography and autobiography, according to Stanley (1992) discuss accounts of lives and she acknowledges feminist discussions which reject generic distinctions and separations of these terms but advocates using the same analytical tools when engaging with all forms of life writing. Auto/biographers construct a product using fragments of selected memories which they have chosen to tell a story. Stanley (1992) notes all biographical research involves making choices about what is considered knowledge about a participant; she suggests the writer makes epistemological choices which results in a particular construction of the person and their social world. In a similar way to autoethnographical accounts, the reader decides if the story is plausible.

I am central to this text because I am the writer and the story teller, but I am also writing accounts of others who have given me their story to put on the page. This work then is the autoethnographical depiction of my story and the auto/biographical narratives of the stories of my place within the stories of my participants. To this end, I decided to include interviews with women from the world of education guidance as this is my professional arena. My

reasoning is simple. There is resonance in our mutual understanding of the experiences of those whom we encounter in our daily working lives. We share a bond in our desire to support and enable others along their career trajectories. I want to know if these women have had similar experiences to me; have they had significant life moments which were to change their lives and could they remember the emotions felt in those moments?

Researchers may utilise biographical methodologies to enable some 'power' to speak for themselves. However, this notion can be contested by asking "who has the power in the relationship?" Langdrige (2004), considers when people are asked to contribute their biographies, it may be done in a collaborative way. Yet, the caution is if it will continue to be the participant's story if used in the researcher's written account. When asking questions of others, researchers may well be asking questions of themselves (West, 2003). The participant will not be present in the re-telling or reading of the story so who will own the material? Further, Roberts (2007) argues 'that the 'voice' of the researcher-writer will be present in the representation of research, including 'emotional' reactions' (p81). Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware that when using biographical approaches, it is not a voyeuristic exercise, rather an empathetic sharing of life stories. Additionally, the inclusion of the researcher's story adds depth to, and shapes the research process. Consequently, through our stories as researchers, we write our own version of events, in a historical, social and cultural context which is informed by our ontological and methodological stance. Autoethnography is the approach I adopted and I will now offer an exploration of this biographical methodology.

Autoethnography

The origins of autoethnography lie within anthropology and with the way anthropologists wrote ethnographies about the people they studied. In 1975 Karl Heider used the term 'autoethnography' when referring to an indigenous group's own account of what people do (Ellis, 2004). However, David Hayano (1979), is mostly accredited as the originator of the term. He suggests 'auto-ethnography' is not a specific research technique, method or theory but that it affects all three in fieldwork as the ethnographer becomes more involved with the group they study. Muncey (2010) notes Hayano went on to develop his criteria for autoethnography to include: 'some prior knowledge of the people, their culture and language' and an 'ability to be accepted to some degree or to pass as a native member' (p32). Ellis (2004) discusses this as evidenced by professional poker player Hayano's study of other players, epitomising his ideal of studying his 'own people'.

Autoethnography is considered a qualitative research method which explores the personal, describing method and text. A 'self narrative that critiques the situatedness with others in a social context' (Spry, 2001, p710) and a creative analytical process (Richardson and St Pierre,

2008) in which the researcher becomes the research instrument. As such it made sense to include the stories of others who are part of my cultural and social community and who may be present in experiences I wish to record. Denzin (2014) considers you cannot undertake autoethnography without consideration to the 'Other'. Such texts are written with an 'other' in mind. This could be family members or someone else whose story has contributed to the work. My story also includes elements of my mother's and I talked to her about her life to add authenticity.

Undertaking such work requires the researcher to consider the ethical implications involved and to ensure they adhere to their institution's ethical policies and those of other organisations, such as the principles outlined by the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2011). Autoethnography can be considered narcissistic and self-absorbing, but Ellis (2004) believes researchers are integral to their studies, being influenced by the same forces as others. Whilst autoethnography enables me as the researcher to 'go inside' I am mindful of the harm that could be caused without due care to those who participate, including myself. There must be a commitment to non-maleficence, to ensure I do not knowingly bring harm to anyone. Additionally, as noted by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), becoming upset in an interview is not the same as being 'harmed'. This will be discussed further in the research tools section.

The main purpose of personal narrative text is to understand the self as a part of a life lived in a cultural context and participants are encouraged to think of themselves as co-authors as they 'author their own lives in their own voices' (Ellis, 2004, p46). Whilst studying for my master's, Etherington's (2004) 'Becoming a Reflexive Researcher', provided inspiration as she discussed her own master's journey. The personal account drew me as the reader into the text so that I felt a part of the story. Etherington used diary extracts and other creative practices to enrich her text, providing a narrative structure to tell a partial story of her life, thus providing an account deep in emotion, full of subjectivity and individualism. Stead and Baker (2010) propose people weave personal stories around what is culturally known to them; this can influence the researcher's choice for research topics and their reasoning for choosing them. However, the autoethnographical approach is more than an exploration of the boundaries between the cultural and the personal, it is about writing about the self and that writing does not come easily. My desire is to 'show' rather than just tell a story; the meaning is in the detail. The words can come at any time or place and I endeavour to embrace the task of writing down the thoughts, feelings and emotions that cascade through me as a new story unfolds. As I tell my story and those of others, I am also telling the stories to myself as I write and as a result, I am changed by them. I have re-authored my story by writing about my experiences and it continues to change as I gather new experiences. Those who use this

approach cannot separate research from life as the autoethnographer is the researcher and the research.

Critiques of autoethnography

Whilst autoethnography provides a vehicle for the researcher to immerse themselves within the context of their research, Sparkes (2002) argues these alternative genres do not necessarily provide an enhanced result. Etherington (2004) warns although reflexive research can be useful, there is a danger of becoming involved because it is a personal study. Evocative autoethnography, as extolled by Ellis (2004), arouses an emotional response both from the writer and the reader. In contrast, Anderson (2006) proposes,

‘analytic’ autoethnography is research in which the researcher is a full member in the research group setting, is visible as such a member in published texts and is committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena’ (p373).

Whilst Anderson applauds the inherent creativity, he is concerned that emotional autoethnography,

‘may have the unintended consequences of eclipsing other versions of what autoethnography can be and of obscuring the ways in which it may fit productively in other traditions of social inquiry’ (p374).

The criteria Anderson discusses, is voiced in a language reminiscent of the scientific values of those who adhere to an objective ontology. That is not to say such a stance does not have merit, but for autoethnographers seeking uniqueness, individuality and a greater awareness of the self, the evocative school of thought is a methodology fit for purpose. I am open to the possibilities that concepts can emerge through the research process and to enable this, I need to be able to write from my heart.

Ellis and Bochner (2006) on describing analytic ethnographers state, ‘We think of ethnography as a journey; they think of it as a destination’ (p431), whereas those who work more evocatively, embrace phenomena as they emerge. They also consider Anderson’s (2006) criteria, suggesting the autoethnographic researcher is always a fully visible member of the research setting and autoethnographic stories should include other characters, reaching beyond the writer, thus it was Anderson’s third point regarding theorisation, these authors conclude is the real crux of the matter. They suggest Anderson ‘sees theory as somehow superior to the story’ (p439); as such it could be construed as a call for more traditional generalisations in sociological research.

In her controversial paper, Delamont (2007) argues that autoethnography is ‘pernicious’ (p2) and cites her reasoning on six counts, which I have depicted in bold font to distinguish them from my responses: -

- **Autoethnography cannot fight familiarity suggesting this is not possible in society even with data.** Why would the researcher seek the familiar? I want to approach my research with ‘openness’ to the strange (Holliday, 2007). It is the uniqueness that I seek not nomothetic generalisations.
- **Autoethnography is almost impossible to write and publish ethically and the ‘others’ in the text cannot be disguised or protected. Delamont states that as those who read autoethnographic text wish for ‘true’ accounts, regardless of disclaimers others in the text are identifiable.** I agree that it is problematic to write autoethnographic stories without bringing others alive in the text. Meekums (2008) struggled with the ethical implications of her work and acknowledged that someone may one day read her work and be offended by what she has written. As a researcher, I am aware of the responsibility of putting words on a page that may cause distress and I take care to share what I have written with those whom I write about. These are my words; my interpretation of the events and miss-interpretations can be corrected if I work in collaboration with my ‘others’.
- **In agreement with Atkinson (2006), Delamont suggests research is supposed to be analytic and she continues that autoethnography is all experience, lacking in analytic outcome.** When a researcher critically reflects and engages reflexively, they gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in a social context. The stories they write are imbued with verisimilitude, not logical investigations. I may not seek statistical data to support verification of findings, but the rich descriptions that I hope will imbue the work, will offer material worthy of deep analysis and as such, authentication.
- **Autoethnography focuses on the powerful and not the powerless.** As an autoethnographic researcher I am in a position of power as what I write places me at an advantage. However, I sought collaborative relationships, whereby participants offered their own creative contribution. Also, participant interactions were recorded and shared so that there was transparency in the process. Therefore, although I recognise an in-balance of power, I endeavoured to offer re-balanced relationships.
- **Delamont considers that it is the ‘duty’ of researchers to go out and collect data, not to sit ‘obsessing’ about themselves; it is not what they are being paid for.** Going out and collecting data is inherent in the job description for a researcher and if the methodology sought is one that requires amassing statistical data, the researcher must address the task in-hand. However, the research I pursue is of a softer nature, it requires a quietness of mind and space to recollect. I went ‘out there’ when I interviewed participants and investigated my cultural heritage. I also utilised the tools

to-hand such as written documentation to gain access to the material I sought. Further, not all who engage in research are paid; some seek knowledge regardless of financial remuneration.

- **She considers that researchers are not interesting enough to be the subject matter of sociological research.** All researchers have life experiences and as such are interesting. If they were a member of a cultural group that another researcher wanted to study, they would be deemed worthy of attention.

‘Autoethnography has been criticised for being nonanalytic, self-indulgent, sentimental and romantic’ (Denzin, 2014, p69). It has been seen as non-scientific and non-theoretical. It may be seen as lacking reliability and validity. Attention will now turn to addressing these latter concerns.

The reliability and validity of autoethnography

Reliability and validity are words possibly more comfortable with those who seek to generalise their findings across a cultural group. Some qualitative researchers may triangulate their data sources to justify possible emerging themes. If the researcher can establish there are themes across several sources, it can be seen as supporting the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2008), consider Flick (2002), who suggests triangulation offers rigor and complexity to an inquiry and therefore, would be a worthy alternative to scientific validation. Such considerations are pertinent to the type of research undertaken yet, may come with the premise that the story is static, that one size fits all. Stories are constructions of their time and those of the past inform the present. Consequently, storied truths are personal constructs based on an individual’s interpretation of the events. Another person could be present but their version of the truth would be different as it is an alternative re-presentation of the occurrence. It is still the truth, but by another viewpoint. Truth is not fixed and what a person writes today maybe different to what they wrote yesterday or what they may write tomorrow. ‘Mine too is a story of its time’ (Etherington, 2004, p27). Those who engage with autoethnography may look to alternative ways to provide reliable, valid work.

Denzin (2014) notes, the autoethnographer’s credibility as a writer and observer demonstrates the reliability of their work. He questions what credibility means. My computer ‘synonyms’ suggests it is among other descriptions, trustworthiness. As previously noted, it is possible for different people to tell different versions of the same experience, even for the same person to tell a story differently as they re-construct their memories to meet the needs of their current situation (Savickas, 2011). The truth is judged by how the ‘story is used, understood and responded to’ (Denzin, 2014, p70). Subsequently, the meaning and context applied to terms

such as reliability, validity and generalizability can alter when used with autoethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011).

When considering validity those who apply this methodology ask if the work has verisimilitude. The writer seeks to evoke a feeling in the reader that the experience documented is lifelike, believable and a true representation. The story has coherence, connecting the reader to the writer's world. Possible generalisations are determined not through traditional random sampling, but by how the reader reacts to the representation. Did the story speak to them about their experiences or about those of others they know? Ellis (2004) states 'Readers provide theoretical validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why' (p195). She recognises Stake's (1994) concept of a 'naturalistic generalisation' whereby the reader comes to know something as if they have experienced it. In other words, the work speaks to the reader, they test the work.

Richardson (2008) suggests, postmodernist thinking has challenged traditional qualitative writing practices altering their presentation so that researchers write in different ways for different audiences. Yet, the ethnographies have commonality as they are produced through Creative Analytical Practices or processes (CAP). Such work moves beyond conventional social scientific writing and is seen as a valid representation of social life. Richardson suggests CAP are both creative and analytical stating to think otherwise would be 'dinosaurian' and 'doomed to extinction' (p477). Importantly, those who engage in CAP display the writing process as well as the writing product; they are interwoven. 'The product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing' (p478). Therefore, such writing is about the writer, of the writer and by the writer, which may appear egotistical but it requires a depth of inquiry that questions an individual's known world, and they may interpret life differently thereafter.

So how can autoethnography be authenticated? Here, Richardson considers the process of crystallisation as an appropriate alternative to triangulation when considering mixed genre text. A triangle is a rigid, two-dimension object offering a fixed point. As such, the researcher will continue to see the phenomena from that position, which could narrow their focus and obstruct their view to the unknowable aspects that would enrich their study. A crystal on the other hand, is changeable, a prism sending shards of light from multiple plains. What is seen is dependent on the individual's view, their angle of approach, 'not triangulation but rather crystallization' (Richardson, 2008, p478). There are multiple truths as the depth of verisimilitude offered validates the writing.

The nature of this concept suggests the autoethnographer can produce work in a multitude of forms: stories, poetry, novels, personal essays, journals, art based, performance-related and more. The criteria has been discussed previously in this work but a re-cap would be judicious and calls on Ellingson's (2009) principles of crystallisation: there should be thick descriptions offering detailed interpretations to gain understanding of a phenomena; the work should represent multiple ways of knowing, including contrasting viewpoints; a variety of writing genres and or other creative mediums may be utilised; the work should evidence the researcher's reflexivity through the process, design, collection of material and representation; the notion of only one version of truth is avoided.

Knowledge cannot claim to be unbiased. Equally, the autoethnographic researcher should not romanticise their work, others may offer versions of the truth that violate the depiction of the researcher. My intention is to offer analysis through crystallisation as authentication and acknowledgement of the truth to enable congruence with my study. To support my aim, I utilised various research instruments.

Research Instruments

Writing as inquiry

There are times when I am paralysed with fear on seeing a blank notebook page or computer screen. To desecrate the purity of such perfection with black marks that scratch, marring the surface is sometimes too much too bear. These markings are like vultures pecking at a carcass until all that is left are the bones and it is at that point, when the seemingly impenetrable cloak of indecision is stripped from my ever cautious, ever present self that my writing self comes forward.

To express what writing means to me I offer a journal excerpt, in italic font to enable it to be different but still a part of the text.

7/3/14

To write is to breath. Steady unconscious actions in and out, in and out. To write is to give life to thought. To bring thought out into the world. A re-birth of experience, of thought, of feeling. It is of the person. A child to be nurtured, loved. It demands attention daily but often. It wants and needs discipline but at the same time it needs freedom to fly freely to grow. It is loved but sometimes the writer of the words can become frustrated with the form. Never out of love but just as when a person loves another person there can be annoyances. To write is to bring words to life. To write is for me to live.

Natalie Goldberg (2005), acknowledges the fear and intimidation some experience when faced with a blank page, suggesting it is through practice that such trepidation is overcome. She advises writing ideas as they emerge to move beyond the 'I can't think of anything to write' stage. In a similar vein, a researcher can heighten awareness of the world by

documenting their observations and the processes involved. The writing becomes a way to gain meaning and knowledge that acknowledging an observation of an experience alone cannot provide. In agreement with Ellis (2013), writing helps me to find out what I need to do and more importantly, how I need to do it.

Writing as inquiry, according to Speedy (2005), makes the selection and editing of texts transparently explicit and is not like 'writing up' final findings. It is a research tool and a way of re-presenting the words of participants which can be more about description than explanation. Utilising this process enables the researcher to evidence their curiosity for knowledge about their study, in a reflective and reflexive way. They can be playful with words and express their thoughts in a myriad of ways, for example through poetry. Also, the researcher can be experimental with the font, layout and spacing of their text, so the experience is shaped in a way that is not expected by either the writer or the reader. This is unlike traditional social studies texts which may appear to have an adherence to linear, objectifying prose. Further, Speedy notes such work is more suitable to small scale studies where there is a desire to illustrate and suggest phenomena, rather than explain and evaluate findings. However, I suggest, even with larger studies it may be possible to offer a more intimate window on the researcher's experience of the study, providing an opportunity to gain understanding of the researcher's insights, thereby enriching the text for the reader.

Writing as inquiry attempts to capture the reader's attention, drawing them in so they feel involved in what they read, wanting in turn to share their stories with the writer and others. Yet, the work must balance the need to offer a scholarly contribution with the space to engage the reader's imagination. It is not a case of anything goes, but as a research practice, writing as inquiry allows the researcher to explore themselves and what they are investigating. It gives permission to the researcher-writer to look at things in diverse ways, to discover new aspects of their topic. Richardson (2000), recognises this process as providing multiple ways to learn and suggests form and content cannot be separated. As a child, I was taught to find out the information first and write up what I had found out in a mechanistic way. Richardson notes, such indoctrination ignores the 'dynamic creative process of writing' (ibid, p924) and continues to suggest such working '... requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as containments' (ibid, p925). Therefore, writing as inquiry will provide the vehicle for knowledge to spill on to a page as the 'writing is a process of discovery' (ibid, p936).

One way to evidence knowledge is through 'writing stories' which Richardson considers are stories about other aspects of our own lives, such as our work, family and personal history. Through such constructions, I hope to induce questions about myself and my study, thereby I

become grounded in the work, integral in the process of the writing. Thus, providing space for the writing to become a site to collect material as discussed by St. Pierre (2008). She considers collecting material which could otherwise be passed over as not being relevant, for example a dream or a memory of the day of an interview. To support this concept, I would also interject the importance of personal nuances that may not be record in the writing, emotions felt when recalling a dream or a memory and possible difficulties experienced in the writing.

Speedy (2013) discusses the difficulty she experienced whilst trying to start a paper for a journal publication. She acknowledges the way the writing would start and then disappear into ‘... deeply inhabited silence’ (ibid, p28). These crowded silences that shout painfully from inside your head but are so difficult to express in words, are also data that would be lost if not recorded in the writing. Such material may not be in the interview transcripts or even in the accompanying notes but they exist nonetheless in our minds and bodies and only emerge when they are captured or collected in the writing. Also, St. Pierre (2008) discusses how thought happens in the writing, becoming a method of data analysis. As she wrote, ideas not thought of before came in the writing so essentially, she analysed as she wrote. This concept fascinates me as it affords the researcher the chance to breach possible conventions of narrative inquiry, which consider collection and analysis as separated, but to see them as occurring simultaneously in the writing. However, this is not a question of analysis dilution; on the contrary, I would argue the opportunity to examine the writing throughout the study will provide increased transparency and trustworthiness. It is important to recognise the tensions that can arise when writing as we come to the page with complexities that try to claim the space. Through the writing, I gathered resources to inform my study and as noted by Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) as we create texts, we are also created by them. Muncey (2010) describes a technique that ‘cuts up’ a text and then reassembles it into poetic form. I wanted to play with my journal extract mentioned previously, to see it in a different way. Now punctuation has been added to suggest intonation and the layout, I feel, mimics that of breathing. Thus, words have movement and life. I also gave it a title thereby bestowing acknowledgement of the new form.

Word Song

*To write is,
to breath.*

*Steady... unconscious... actions...
in and out, in and out.*

*To write is to give life,
to thought.*

To bring thought out into the world.

*A re-birth of experience,
of thought, of feeling.*

*It is of the person.
A child to be nurtured,
loved.
It demands attention daily,
but often?*

*It wants
and needs discipline!
But, at the same time
it needs
freedom to fly freely.*

To grow.

*It is loved,
but sometimes the writer of the words
can become frustrated with the form.
Never out of love but...
just as when a person loves another person there can be,
annoyances.*

*To write is to bring words to life.
To write is for me,
to live.*

As my work involved others, there were ethical connotations to acknowledge in the text. It is to this topic I now return.

Considering the ethical implications

In my professional role, I interview individuals utilising skills and knowledge gained through training and everyday practice. I know when I have reached the boundaries of my professional abilities; then I refer to more appropriate support without feeling a loss of proficiency. So why did I feel nervous and anxious about interviewing people for my research? Maybe participants will not be happy about what I write about them. Perhaps those who read the work will not see it as a believable, honest and trustworthy account. I put myself into my work attempting to address these concerns, but as researchers we enter relationships with others when they participate, or read our work. Yet, the ethical implications involved may not have necessarily been given due consideration.

Etherington (2007), suggests researchers employ reflexivity to include themselves, their values and beliefs, which impact on the research process as well as the outcomes. This transparency acknowledges we influence our work and whilst advocating collaboration with participants, ultimately, we put their words on the page. We may attempt to capture their

intonations and speech nuances, but we cannot write what they were thinking in the interaction unless we specifically ask at that moment. This puts us in a position of power, mentioned earlier, as we include or exclude material depending on the importance we attach to it. This very thought made me fearful as I hoped for open, honest, trustworthy relationships with my participants. I worried that omissions would be thought dishonest, resulting in loss of trust.

Reflexive writing makes visible the researcher's understanding of what was discovered and how it was discovered; thereby, highlighting possible ethical inferences. Further, Etherington (ibid) considers the reasoning supporting traditional ethical practices such as: gaining participant consent to emphasize fairness in the relationship, making apparent the purpose, process, outcomes, and explaining that the participant has the autonomy to withdraw from the research. Confidentiality is discussed to ensure the participant is aware their privacy is assured. Yet, how far do these factors go in upholding a person's self-worth? I approached my participants prior to their involvement in the research, obtaining their consent having offered information on the research purpose and practice. However, I was not able to provide information about processes yet to happen as I could not say for sure what would occur. Therefore, there is a need to talk to our participants about the potential dilemmas that could arise and for the researcher to record those that do occur. The researcher's responsibilities do not stop once participants have signed consent forms, on the contrary a researcher should continue to check, as I did, throughout the entire process that participants are comfortable and happy to proceed. Also, I did not discount contact beyond the research relationship if the participant wished it. Such aspects were discussed with my participants, thereby striving to provide the collaborative relationship integral to this work.

Josselson (1996), also struggled with personal anxiety over the ethical implications of her narrative work. She worries, as I do, how people will feel about what she writes about them, suggesting that there is an intrusiveness to the experience of being 'fixed in print' (ibid, p62), as it renders the individual '... reduced in some way to what the words contain' (ibid). When we write, we can only allude to the person we are writing about. We cannot express them fully, but only hope to provide enough of their essence so that they know who they are.

Further, a researcher can make their participants feel important because they are interested enough to research and write about them, which Josselson refers to as the 'aggrandizement' (ibid, p65) of participants. However, the researcher knows they control the relationship as they know what they are seeking. Paradoxically, this could be what makes the researcher feel uncomfortable. On the one hand, they can further the participant's personal growth, but on the other, they diminish them as they only want what is necessary for their study. Perhaps it is

only through being aware of what we are doing and why we are doing it throughout participant interactions, and by recording all the aspects that can arise, can we maintain an ethical consciousness. Maybe it is discomfort that stops researchers from going beyond ethical boundaries. My anxiety is something I wore as a protective cloak, as a reminder of the responsibility I have as a researcher to honour my participants.

In the next section, I will discuss other research instruments utilised.

Interviews and Transcripts

Initial interviews were loosely-structured to allow for naturalness. Hollway and Jefferson (2000), consider the meaning underlying the participant's narrative is best retrieved spontaneously; that is, participants say what is on their mind. This could open a door to the cognitive workings of the participant and not perhaps, what the researcher may have thought the participant would say. Conversely, second interviews were supported by questions (Appendix 1) to aid my focus when I viewed and discussed participants' creative pieces. Still, I wanted to remain open to possible unfolding phenomena and asked further questions as I would naturally in a shared exchange. Thereby, the questions became subsumed within a framework, positioning the participant and myself in a social context.

Merrill and West (2009), consider the word inter-view as denoting relationship. 'Inter' suggests for me, something inside something else, factors that lie within an outer casing. 'View' is what can be observed by someone and each person would have a different, unique viewpoint depending on where they stand. So, I see an interview as the unique process of viewing individual internal and external factors. This is highly subjective and those who follow an objective stance may suggest that to ensure reliability and validity the researcher needs to be detached from the interaction. As such, other researchers would be able to work with the same people and hopefully achieve comparable results. The building of relationships would not be a significant aspect of the process. Yet, the quality of a biographical interaction depends on the researcher's understanding of the participant's context; cultural and historical. Our interpretation of such factors means we cannot be passive in the interaction and we respond as individuals to how we see the situation. When we are involved in the interaction we do not sit submissively listening to the response. We reflect in the action, responding to vocalisations because we want to acknowledge the dialogue or because we want to discover more. Kvale (1996), considers the qualitative inter-view to be a '... construction site for knowledge' (p2); there is structure and purpose. During the interaction, the interviewee may come to see aspects of their story in a way they had not considered before. They may have told their story in the past, but maybe not in the way they are telling it in the time and context of the interview structure.

The interviewer-researcher comes to the interaction with a defining purpose but Kvale suggests they should adopt a deliberate naiveté (p35) so they are open to unexpected phenomena, which an adherence to set questions or categories may not reveal. Indeed 'in the interview, knowledge is created inter the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee' (p124). The sharing of insight brings enlightenment to the moment. Similarly, as researchers transcribing interviews, we construct new knowledge when we feel emotion and think in the act of transcription. When transcribing, an openness is required in our approach to the act. Tensions should be acknowledged alongside any daydream material to provide genuineness to the material.

I decided to transcribe the interviews myself as I felt this would allow me to stay close to the experience. Maybe, I should have stepped back and allowed others to do the transcriptions but they would only be able to type the words they heard. They would not have access to memories of moments when things were said, which made me stop and think again about the meaning of the individual's words. Further, they would not consider other aspects such as the cultural beliefs held by myself and my participants.

People come to interviews with philosophies which inform how they see the world and these principles need recognition when transcribing. A computer transcription programme would certainly be quicker and far easier than a personally transcribed document, but it would be a mechanical operation devoid of emotion and the cinematic possibilities of a mind immersed in re-visiting the interview experience. Indeed, the very act of a biographical interview is itself an interpretation of a social relationship. Considering the researcher's perspective, Merrill and West (2009), suggest the interaction can be shaped through the process adopted and the qualities that emerge from a potentially creative space. This space enables and fosters the emergence of emotion and intangible insight for those involved within the safety of the experience. However, for the interview to be successful the interviewer should consider what they can bring to the interaction.

In considering transcription, I need to admit I am not comfortable with technology, but I wanted participants to see I was truly listening as I looked at them and not a notepad. I wanted to focus on what was said and what was not said, so I used an audio-recorder and checked that I had enough space to cover over an hour of conversation. Any longer may be intrusive and tiring for both parties concerned. However, it is interesting that Moustakas (2001) considers the process of an interview to be more of an inner experience to gain deeper self-awareness and not bound by time limitations. This concept is more about relationships and connections to the other through a natural dialogue exchange of thoughts and feelings, also extolled by Rogers (1961, 1980). Moustakas, like Rogers, also considers the creation of a climate that

encourages trust, openness and self-discovery to be essential when working closely with others. The interviewer must be open to themselves and listen empathetically to others' stories. Yet, I was mindful of the time it would take to transcribe and process the recording.

The transcription process adopted was not one adhered to by scholars who follow a linguistic analysis involving line numbering and symbolic marking, which to the uninitiated would make the document difficult to read. Rather, I adopted a similar approach to Merrill and West (2009) and transcribed the interviews in a vein akin to oral history conventions and as with Merrill and West (*ibid*), felt that this reflected my interpretative stance. I also followed a similar approach to their transcript format, where I transcribed the text with recognition of speech nuances such as 'ums' and 'errs'. Pauses were indicated with three dots and longer pauses were shown by three dots and a dash. I did not time the pauses as again, this was not an attempt at a linguistic analysis. Additions to the words spoken, such as interpolations were placed in squared brackets so they could be identified as descriptive elements to enhance the recorded spoken words. The pace of speech was considered and the punctuation introduced, attempted to be seamlessly added so speech continued to flow on the page as it would orally. Preservation of anonymity was attempted by changing names and locations.

During an interview, it may appear the interviewee has authority if they are providing much of the dialogue. However, material could be 'provoked' by asking someone what they think and feel as suggested by Silverman (2011), implying immediacy as it would not be something the participant would naturally be thinking, but has been brought to their mind by the researcher. Such provocations were noted and included in material analysis to provide transparency of interpretation. Yet, I recognise elements from face to face conversations may have been lost in my transcription of the interview.

Davidson (2009) discusses imperatives for transcription, considering the impossibility of recording all the features of an interaction and consequently, transcriptions are selective documents. Similarly, by providing form to speech, transcribers could also be seen to control the transcription process. Text selection would need to be acknowledged and explained in relation to the research aim. Yet, unexpected information that comes out of the blue in the interview can make the participant and the researcher think again, thereby adding another dimension to the study. Constructing knowledge as discussed earlier. Such material may not appear at first to be relevant to the interviewer but it is of the participant's contextual perspective. Further, Silverman (2011) suggests omitting what may seem trivial but possibly important aspects such as participant gestures and glances, could dilute the reliability of the interpretation of the transcript. Gestures and glances are expressions of the individual and how they operate in their world. A participant could depict a cultural inclination to emphasise

speech using their hands or use their eyes to express an inner pain. Dependent on my memory of the experience, these have been included as have other elements that may naturally occur when two people have a conversation.

Initially the transcription process lacked grace as I played the tape recording for a few seconds, stopped it and typed what I thought I had heard. After a while, I did not seem to feel or think, only surface listened and typed. I found I could only sustain this state for a few hours at a time as it was exhausting. On completing the first draft I allowed myself time, to return with fresh eyes. I had created a document from the words I had typed yet it did not possess 'life' as it was just words on a page; they were flat without expression. I wanted the transcript to illustrate evidence of the lived experience Richardson (2000) extols. I wanted to 'show' those who would read the document rather than 'tell' them about the experience, as suggested by Chase (2008).

On returning, I listened as I read and began to hear the story; I was taken back to the interview, immersing myself in the music of the sounds that filled my head. I could detect subtleties in the language used, how speech nuances such as 'Mmm' could seem to mean agreement at one time but polite acknowledgement at another. Laughter could be used to cover embarrassment, uncertainty or just because something funny had been said. My mind was filled with the vision of the scene and I could 'see' my participants as I heard their voices. The transcription process enabled me to become an observer of participants for a second time, to return to the experience and in doing so, I discovered new material. Not only did I observe participants, I observed myself and also became an observer of both, as I listened and re-visualised the scene. I came to realise there were layers of consciousness to the story; how I interpreted how my participants saw their place in the world, how I interpreted how I saw myself and how I interpreted how I saw our relationship in the interaction.

The temporal aspect of the act of transcription, is a reminder that what is felt at one time may be different if viewed in another. Indeed, Riessman (1993) suggests, texts can have unstable meanings as they could be viewed in different ways, by different people, in different times. I returned for a third time and once again listened as I read. I felt an urgency to 'get it right' but noticed little details that I had missed on both the previous occasions. These were the background noises which placed my participants in their wider locations and such inclusion helped to create the 'lived' experience I sought to provide.

My desire for an intimate relationship with the research material, I believe enabled me to stay close to the ethos of placing myself in the situatedness of the context. I am in the study and the study is within me. I said things in my journal that I may not have otherwise placed

immediately on a page. These were my 'dream' thoughts; they came to me in the writing. For example, prior to transcribing my first interview, I wrote in my journal,

5/5/2014

... Today I want to start transcribing but first I want to listen to the recording and jot down anything that comes to mind. I feel nervous for some reason. This is taking the study to the next level. I have moved beyond the talking, reading and writing to a place of responsibility. I am responsible for my participant – how I make them feel and what I ask of them. It feels like a burden. But I must make sure that I make notes on how I feel through this process. Part of me wants to run away and say, "no thank you, I don't want to do this anymore" but of course that would not be the responsible thing to do. This is a turning point in the study. I can see that it is real, no longer 'when I start to interview' but 'I am now interviewing'.

This excerpt expresses my felt positioning in the study at a specific point in time, noting the tensions that existed between the personal and my role as a researcher-interviewer. My perspective recognises I am present within all the research experiences, demanding I concede what I am reluctant to admit. Tentatively, I displayed my vulnerability, which Ellis and Bochner (2006) consider necessary of autoethnographic researchers. I also recognise I have been changed by this process; I experienced 'disjuncture' (Jarvis, 2006) as harmony with my world had been disrupted and I paused to consider the moment, becoming consciously aware of my situation in the world.

Once printed, a transcript becomes a tangible historical object; we hold a moment in time in our hands when spoken words were recorded. Those words once placed on a page, may not always be accepted by the person who said them. By passing the transcript to the participant, I hoped to provide the opportunity for them to check my interpretation of their account. They could decide to change what was said previously, considering where they now stand in their contextual insights. This is something I needed to consider. I recognised their right to want changes and decided I would acknowledge participants' views in my writing but maintain the original document as this was what happened at the time of the interview.

Participants bring their own set of assumptions to an interview and answer questions from their viewpoint. These may be overlooked by the researcher as they conduct the interaction according to their understanding of the questions. There could be misunderstanding of meaning resulting in an assumption that the responses elicited were what the participant meant, when in fact they are the researcher's interpretation of what was said. I audio-recorded interactions to capture what was said and what may have been misconstrued. Personally transcribing the transcripts, endeavoured to ensure I maintained a close relationship with the text. Even so, additional factors were given consideration.

Greenfield (2002), considers that not acknowledging the participant's cultural inclinations in an interview, could result in misinterpretations. By explaining that the interview is a series of

interactions: preparation, introduction, conversation, ending and activities following the interview, the participant is clearer in what will be expected. This provides a transparency and clarity to the process. I shared transcripts with the participant to alleviate any possible misunderstandings and I also arranged for a follow-up more structured interview during which they could express any concerns. I took care to avoid verbal misunderstandings and considered what was not said in the interviews. Hollway and Jefferson (2000), tell us silences are valuable data. I allowed time for thinking, asking my participants to share their thoughts and noting my own during these pauses.

Bruner (1990) notes, the importance of not acting out of character when interviewing others; the aim is to encourage people to tell about their lives their way. This is certainly true when utilising informal techniques, as there needs to be consistency to build trusting relationships. There is the possibility to encourage participants to become open to development and change, which may not be available in more structured interactions. People like to tell stories, but perhaps only when they believe the person listening really wants to hear them, will they tell the stories they want heard.

To tell their stories their way, participants need to feel safe and comfortable. Richardson (1997) discusses sacred spaces for writers as locations where people feel safe to experiment with who they are becoming and to feel a connection with others. An interview has the potential to offer a space that is deemed sacred by virtue of the participant disclosing personal information with an 'other' (Cashwell, Bentley and Bigbee, 2007). The researcher-interviewer and the participant comes to see that what they are doing will make a difference to both their lives. Letting the participant choose the interview location, as proposed by Horsdal (2012), and timing thereby fitting in with their activities, offered a sign that I respected the individual's autonomy and valued the gift of their story.

A point worthy of note, is the importance of recording details of the interaction that may not be vocalised. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) suggest interviewers may take what is said by an interviewee on face value and as such, could miss the deeper meaning for the individual of an experience. If the interviewer fails to notice possible contradictions, changes in tone or the subtleties Bruner (1990) describes as 'signature expressions' (p123), their interpretation could impoverish the analysis of the material. Although, this is understandable given they want to enable participants to 'voice' how it is for them. I attempted to be vigilant during interviews and looked for the details in the discussions. In addition to interviewing, I employed other instruments to ensure enriching material was sought and captured.

Journal writing

When I was a child my mother bought me a diary. I do not remember the colour or the size but I do remember that it had a lock and key and that excited me most. It was somewhere I could write secret thoughts I did not want exposed. It was not for sharing; it was for me and I could lock myself into my diary. However, I was not careful with the key and often left it with the book. Then one day I found out my mother had read my diary, all the anguishes, torments and anxieties that inhabit the passage of youth as a girl begins to notice changes in body and mind. She did not think she had done anything wrong as she was my mother and that seemingly, gave her dispensation. I could not write again in that book and childhood passed into womanhood, with thoughts locked away inside my head screaming to be released.

Learning instigated a return to recording personal prose, but now it was tempered with a flavour of academia, a writing for study purpose. On deciding to study for a doctorate, I duly purchased a note book and started to record my thoughts, feelings, fears, frustrations, dreams, in short anything that came into my mind as I traversed this academic road. In our representations of our research, we may include our emotional reactions and maintaining a journal enables a documentation of emotive response to, during and after interactions. In writing my journal I follow the rules that Baldwin (1991) as discussed by Bolton (1999) sets; number one: date all entries, number two: do not make any other rules. I included excerpts from my journal, as an integral element of the study to evidence my understanding of an experience.

Maintaining a journal provided a bank of material that I drew on to support a point or enrich an account. Further, the journal acted as an aide memoire bringing back memories of an experience. By writing my 'head notes' I hoped to recall details that enriched my writings, hopefully bringing the words to life for readers. Muncey (2010), proposes good ideas can come at inopportune moments. I found poems and thoughts about participants came to me during housework chores, driving and taking walks; times I thought I was not thinking about the study. By writing these thoughts down in my journal I could capture them. They provided a different perspective on my worldview, showing me that being a researcher did not stop when I physically move away from the work, but continued in the recesses of my mind, cogitating, analysing and processing material.

Of course, the words on the page are always in retrospection, being written after the event, but they provide valuable material that would otherwise be lost if not recorded. I attempted to make visible the observations I have of myself and others by including excerpts in this thesis so those who read the work gain an awareness of my experiences through the descriptions provided. Encouraged by Hunt and Sampson (2006), I took responsibility for writing in my

journal, choosing when to 'sign on' and 'sign off' (ibid). I interpret this as not just a starting and an ending point, but what to include and exclude. For me, it is those personal elements that add to the study and make it 'real' for the writer and the reader. Etherington (2004), discussed journal keeping with PhD students she worked with and notes one student who considered journal writing in a similar way to 'writing meditation' (p135). The therapeutic value of writing as noted by Bolton (1999), is cathartic, providing a release for the writer at times when they feel stressed, lost and alone. My journal is a 'dumping ground' for the chaotic dialogue in my head, for numerous voices to emerge and sprawl themselves luxuriously on the page. Once sated, I can begin anew. The journal has become a safe space for me, holding me securely. Before moving on, I would like to express further what my journal has meant to me,

13/4/2014

I write in my journal to express my thoughts and feelings, the tensions that I encounter can be discussed with myself. I can let my dream thoughts unfold. My journal is a safe space for me to go to and in here I can whisper my fears, lock them away between the lines of the page. My journal 'allows' me to be a child, it laughs with me, cries with me, listens to me when I rant about life, forgives me, holds me and hugs me. It is my therapy where through internal dialogue I come to know myself, sparking insights. I can structure my thoughts, describe events and acknowledge that which I cannot say aloud because the words fail me and I feel stupid. My journal is a place for me to observe myself and others and I can become immersed again in the experiences I have encountered. A place of analysis? Actually, I don't like that word. I prefer deeper thinking, insight, personal interpretations. My journal is a place of reflection and reflexivity which enables me to come to know my researcher self and my other selves. So, it has become a place to learn and a place of knowledge and personal growth. A layering of thought process acquisition? Do I mean that? Yes, I think I do. Each thought sits on another but also reaches out tendrils to capture others – bringing clarity when there is a tangled mess of thinking strands. My journal is my companion when I walk this long research road. It helps me to bottle the monsters in the shadows.

Thank you for listening.

Other research tools

I wanted to bring a multiple approach to the research to capture the complexity of life. By encouraging participants to show their moment their way, they make visible their version of reality, affording them the chance to be heard in the way they wish to be. A 'help sheet' of creative practices was offered to support their choices (Appendix 2). Adopting a fresh approach to material collection provides a variety of possibilities to gain information. These included creative writing, visual and art-based forms, on-line information, academic literature and other publications. Serendipitous conversations also provided avenues to follow. One such occasion led to the acquisition of a critical friend who provided valuable insights. Maintaining an open mind enabled me to see inimitable opportunities for material collection which informed the work and contributed to analysis.

Analysis of material

Just as researchers are involved in their research from the onset, there could also be merit in being open to the task of analysing material from the beginning. Merrill and West (2009) acknowledge the highly interpretive nature of analysing information. My belief is waiting to analyse material following an interaction may lead the researcher to ignore valuable material that could add richness, and thereby what is analysed may be impoverished by the omission. There is scope to start before the interaction, to capture thoughts and feelings prior to the experience. By starting early, what is gained from initial thoughts could inform later experiences.

I adopted West's (2009) proforma to identify possible characteristics which could emerge (Appendix 3). The document has the potential to aid understanding of the participant's unique story. I found it started a thinking process that deepened on immersion in the narrative, whilst listening to recorded conversations and on reading transcripts. Additionally, as discussed earlier, recording my researcher and other experiences in my journal added a different dimension to the analysis. Both the proforma and the journal offer analytical spaces to develop creative, imaginative thought. Yet, I wanted to be closer to the transcript, to feel that it was a living document that would converse with me. Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) in her discussion on teaching writing workshops and writing as inquiry, considers how the persistent voices in her head urge her to write in a logical way almost overwhelming the curious childlike voice that wants to play and wonder at everything. The proforma provided a structure but I also needed the freedom to play and allow my thoughts to emerge as I re-engaged with the transcript. 'The experience of not knowing what we are going to write until it appears on paper, or the computer screen, is both familiar and mysterious' (ibid, pp406-7). It is through the writing that I inquire, discover and analyse. In the spirit of playfulness, I decided to type in purple coloured italic text, partly to differentiate the new addition from the original but also because purple is a favourite colour appealing to my inner child (Appendix 4). I felt as if I was embarking on a new adventure, to an unknown destination.

Further, to the proforma, journal and enhanced transcript accounts I can add the interview stories. The transcripts became the source of information from which I constructed case studies. I discovered I could utilise my participants' words by using inclusions from the transcripts, placed within speech marks, and my own words to tell their story. It was as if they were interrupting me to say aspects of their story again. I felt this method enabled a 'truer' account to be shown to the reader. This approach also supported analysis which had begun prior to the first interview, providing another opportunity to 'see' and 'hear' the text again.

As such, there exists different accounts of the same experience, different views from different times. I am reminded of Richardson's (2008) concept of crystallisation which considers that when a crystal is seen from different positions the viewer will not see the same view because a crystal has multitude of facets. By employing different analytical tools, I was able to see alternative views, providing verisimilitude in the account.

Ellis (2004), considers different layers of analysis where the researcher looks to a narrative analysis which is with a story, or an analysis of a narrative which is about the story. With the former, the story is seen as whole and attempts to see something of a life in the experience. With the latter, the aim is to analyse the content of the story and find themes or categories that come out of the story. I attempted to incorporate both aspects. I was drawn to analysis with a story to analyse my story and the stories of others. Here there was scope to explore the messiness of life and celebrate the diversity of lived experience. However, themes that emerge were also acknowledged, adding deeper insight.

Such analysis is offered in the next chapter which begins with my story.

Interlude

From this point in the study the gaze turns to life-career stories, but first I offer a reminder of the research questions: -

- How do creative practices help individuals to ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?
- How do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?
- What part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?

In Chapter Five my story explores the cultural heritage which informs much of who I am today. Hesitantly, I make visible those aspects of ‘me-ness’, such as the spiritual beliefs I alluded to in the Introductory Chapter.

Chapter Six is the story of Beth, a Youth Worker whose understanding of young people is informed by her experiences of being bullied for being what she terms “different or alternative”.

Chapter Seven introduces Carol, who as an adult, embraced learning and the acquisition of qualifications as evidence that she is ‘getting it right’.

Chapter Eight is Sara’s story and tells of how she wants to make a change in her life, any change, but finds it difficult due to her responsibilities.

Each of these chapters begins with a case study compiled using the transcripts from two interviews and where possible I have utilised the individual’s words and phrases to preserve the authenticity. Excerpts from my journal will hopefully provide verisimilitude of the research experience, followed by an analysis with the story (Ellis, 2004) together with an analysis of the story, as I explored the particularities of Beth, Carol and Sara’s stories.

Accompanied by my theoretical ‘friends’, Ellis (2004), Jarvis (2006), Rogers (1961, 1980), Richardson (2000, 2008) and Savickas (2011), as well as others including Kahneman (2011) and Krumboltz and Levin (2004), I endeavour to express my conceptual framework.

Chapter 5

My Story

6/6/15

Today I started to write my story and as I typed I could conjure up the images from the movie in my brain. The voices came to me, all chattering at once. Childhood memories of innocence. My mother and father as a young couple, my grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Laughter fills my head and I smile as I type. I frown when I think about some of my familial values; thank God, I don't subscribe to that thinking, but life seemed so simple in my youth. Not complicated. I can hear the accents, the speech patterns and sayings 'Ah nay child' except child is pronounced 'ch-iy-ld'. The mannerisms; the shaking of someone's head from side to side when confirming something heard – we called it 'dolly-heads'. So many things return to my mind and I can smell the cooking in my grandmother's kitchen and salivate at the thought. Memories and feelings together.

Introduction

The title 'my story' is not strictly true. It cannot be my story alone as to tell it, I must tell the stories of those who have been and may still be, in my life-career. As such, I found myself stopping and thinking, conversations with myself along the lines of, "will this make me and others vulnerable in the future?" To be an autoethnographical account I must expose my thinking and feeling, but at the same time I do not want to cause pain to others. Aspects of my mother's life are woven with mine, the weft and the waft, becoming a felted memory cloth. Yes, her story is ubiquitous and casts a net over mine. Family influences beset the decisions I made and it was only through my autoethnographic writing that I came to value their significance on who I am today, 'because the act of writing itself becomes a way of being and knowing' (Foley, 2002, p475).

I decided to interview my Mother (this was shortly after my Father had died, and she considered it therapeutic) as part of my study and she revealed aspects of her life during a period of civil war in Sri Lanka, which I found horrific. Her words conjured pictures in my mind which still prevail. I have not included these elements in my account as it is of my Mother's story and I could only offer a trace of her experience; I could not begin to feel as she must have felt. So, this is not just my story, but aspects of the stories of others who touched my life in time and space. It is also my version of the tale of my life, from my perspective today, and it may well be a different story if told tomorrow. Following my life-career story, the chapter will offer an analytical discussion based on findings drawn from a proforma (Merrill and West, 2009) and an analysis with the story (Ellis, 2004) where I returned to the account and captured my thinking in purple coloured font (as discussed in the Methodological Chapter) on the page. My creative piece and the process involved in the creation is incorporated in the work. Finally, concluding thoughts will explore the material, considering

how the experience of creating a work to depict my salient moment could aid my future career thinking. Therefore, I invite the reader to make themselves comfortable and I will begin.

I am not from here. I am not sure where I am from but I was born in Sri Lanka or Ceylon as it was then known. My mother was seventeen and my father twenty-four. They met at Mum's thirteenth birthday party when Dad brought his sister, who was one of Mum's best friends, to the 'do'. Torrential rain had soaked Dad's shirt and my grandfather lent him one of his whilst Dad's dried. My parents danced for the first time that night. Dad asked Mum to marry him when she was fourteen. They were at the cinema watching Harry Belafonte in 'Island in the Sun'. Mum was scared to tell her parents so her sister did the deed. It was the custom at the time for the man to write a letter to the father of the girl formerly requesting her hand in marriage. My grandfather did not respond until Mum's fifteenth birthday and my parents married in 1959 when Mum was sixteen. I was born a year later when Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the world's first female Prime Minister. Times were changing but my parents were young and in love and I was a girl who one day, God willing, would grow up to get married and have a family. Her husband would provide for her and she would be safe. This reasoning was forged in a different time and stemmed from a Eurasian Burgher heritage. A melding of Dutch, German, Portuguese and English ancestry. It is important to point out that not all of such heritage followed this doctrine and although the Burgher legacy combined Eastern and Western cultures there was not a common ethnicity; rather an eclectic blend of European and Asian ideologies. There was a tendency in my family to 'pick and choose' what was acceptable from the Eastern cultural traits and they stringently adhered to appealing Western social qualities. A plethora of behaviours and values that had been passed down through the generations, until it became a watery soup of social niceties to be served up daily, so the diner would not forget what was and what was not acceptable.

This was the world I was deemed to inherit, until my brother was born. Burghers in Ceylon were a minority group who no longer held the power and privileges bestowed by a colonial past. The future had become uncertain and so my parents decided to follow other family members and transport themselves to England. My mother had a British passport courtesy of her father's lineage but my Father had to 'work some magic' to extract himself from his homeland due to his past employment with the Royal Ceylon Air Force, and his position as a reservist. Attempted assassinations on Government officials and social unrest deemed him a valuable commodity. However, he managed to extract himself from the situation and we duly sailed on the 'Canberra' bound for Southampton, England, in 1963. My Mother was sea-sick and rarely came on deck but I would walk with my Father, holding his hand in case I should fall into the churning waters. There was a story told that a Greek waiter took a 'shine' to me and wanted to buy me from my parents. My Mother was scared that I would be taken when the ship docked. I had to be kept safe.

I do not remember how we arrived in England or any train journey, but I do remember walking in the dark to where my aunt, uncle and cousins lived in Croydon. It was frightening, everything smelled different and the buildings were shadowy and tall. My aunt and uncle lived in a flat in an imposing run-down Victorian stone house, next to other shabby run-down houses. Facades from another era cut up into pieces to suit an immigrant population. In our building there were three flats, the third was occupied by a family from Burma who were to become lifelong family friends. In fact, coincidentally, the eldest son was my husband's best friend at school and Best Man at our wedding. We moved from there when Dad got an engineering job in Kent. He was to spend years studying mechanical engineering late into the night whilst working long hours during the day. Eventually he became a Consultant Mechanical Engineer who travelled the world.

The job came with a house and when we moved in, Mum did not know how to light a coal fire so the neighbours had to show her. Auntie Gladys and Uncle Fred were kind and generous people. My brother learnt to talk with a London 'cockney' accent by Uncle Fred and even to this day he drops the odd 'h'. This used to drive my Mum crazy as she was a stickler for pronunciation. Uncle Fred had a motorbike and I can remember being taken for a 'spin'. I hung on tight, my face pushed into his leather jacket and the wind catching my hair, pulling it from the scalp constricting plaits Mum insisted on torturing me with. I think I was about five. I forgot to mention that by now I also had a little sister and so our family was complete.

Mum and I have always got on; I think it's because we are so close in age. At times, we were more like sisters but of course that also meant we could fall out too. She is the youngest of three sisters who were all brought up to be 'ladies'. My grandmother believed they should not go out to work but instead be 'groomed' for marriage, a sentiment derived from her father who thought it 'unladylike' to work. He was employed by the British Treasury in East Africa and eventually died there of Black Water Fever. My grandmother told stories of his visits home and of 'bodyguards' with elongated necks adorned with many rings, who stood guard whilst he slept. So, her ideals were born of a different life and time. My grandmother was nicknamed 'Duchess' due to her persona of social grandeur. Whilst complying with her mother's wishes, my Mum insists that she was the rebel in the family who wanted to be different. She wanted to be an artist and dreamt of a bohemian life which of course would have been totally unacceptable. Mum and her sisters all married men older than themselves, which was a normal practice as it was considered an older man would be better able to provide for a wife and family. It was expected that children would swiftly follow marriage and my Mum and her sisters duly complied.

When I think of my Dad back then, I think of someone who was rarely at home but who you avoided when he was. He based his parenting values on his own Victorian patriarchal upbringing where children were seen and not heard. Children were to support their parents and so from a young age, I had to do chores around the house and look after my brother and sister. I feel like I have always had responsibilities; I have always felt responsible. My grandmother used to tell me that I had to be the "little mother" which I hated. Yes, I always felt responsible.

School was not a place where I wanted to be. As children, we did not mix with others very much apart from our cousins. Mine was a very close, extended family unit and we would have a party for most occasions, birthdays, anniversaries, the Queen's Jubilee in 1977 when we all dressed in patriotic red, white and blue. Other children rarely came into our sphere of socialising unless they were the offspring of our parents' friends. Somehow that meant we were expected to get along. My memory of my first day at school is being left in a classroom of noisy happy individuals playing with sand and water whilst I stood at the door staring at the receding back of my Mother as she walked away. I felt abandoned and could not comprehend why this person who was the centre of my life could leave me here with these strange people. I was not excluded but I was not included either, I was different to the other children, quieter, a deep thinker who possessed an imagination that could take me away from the hard-edged desks and cold concrete floors where we had to sit for 'story time'. My imagination inspired me to write stories that helped me to escape this educational prison and stimulated a lifelong passion for words and writing. I still get excited when I come across a word I do not recognise and grab a dictionary to extract the meaning. Story writing became my escapism from a world that I did not like.

We moved a lot when I was a child and although I did not like my first school in Kent, I hated the one I had to attend when we moved to South London. Here the green fields had given way

to tarmac and the playground was a place to venture about with caution. I experienced bullying for the first time and struggled to understand why people would deliberately be unkind to others. Why would a baying group taunt a child until they cried or encourage a normally placid person to hit another for no reason other than their entertainment? And why did it seem that the teaching staff let them? I could not understand and still do not understand this mentality. I saw poverty when children came to school without warm clothing in the bleakest of winters and I saw abuse when others would come subdued, bruised and broken. There are pictures in my mind that I cannot remove and even now writing about it brings a lump to my throat and I swiftly blink the tears away. I hated this and I hated that my Mother was working.

Dad being the eldest son and therefore responsible for his family in Sri Lanka, was sending money back 'home' each month so Mum began to work to bring extra money in. To be fair she had been working all along. When we lived in Kent she had been a 'piecemeal' machinist for a local clothing factory and would sew away into the night while everyone was asleep. She hated sewing and decided to become a typist instead, pounding keys until she achieved the level of proficiency she was happy with. In time, she was to become a Personal Assistant to a government official, but that's another story. Returning to this one, Mum working meant coming home to an empty house and having to stay indoors during the school holidays because Mum and Dad were at work. I was about seven when I first had to turn the key in the door and enter an empty house, usually with my brother in tow. There was no one whom we could go to so it had to be that way. We were living in Windsor at the time and when we moved to South London, I had to be responsible for my sister as well.

I used to want to be a secretary like my Mum, probably because that was all I could think of. Then, I got it into my head that I would become a physiotherapist. What a fabulous word! At that time, you needed to study all three main sciences but I just could not get to grips with physics and when I basically 'bombed' in my mock exams I lost all inclination to become a physiotherapist. Now I do remember having a careers interview with a lovely lady who said, "Now dear, what is it that you would like to do when you leave school?" To which I replied something like "I'm going to work for the council". "Oh, that's wonderful dear. Good luck. Can you send the next girl in please?" And that was my careers interview. My favourite subjects at school were English, History and Domestic Science (now Food Technology) and when I told my teachers that I was not going on to Sixth Form they were disappointed and tried to persuade me to stay. No way! It is a shame no one told me that I could have done A levels at a college, maybe I would have gone down that route but to be honest, I think I just wanted a change. I wanted to go to work where no one would know me; I could be someone new. This was the time that I officially became 'Laurie' not just to my friends but to the world at large. So, I got a job working for the Borough Council.

Boring! Talk about square pegs and round holes! It was probably the worst type of job for me and what made it worse was that my boss was a male, chauvinist, racist bigoted bully. This was the mid-seventies and a lot of things were accepted that would not be allowed in the workplace today. He would make remarks that made me feel uncomfortable but as a sixteen-year-old I did not know how to respond so I did my best to keep out of his way. From there I moved to another position which was much better and then onto the local college. This was more of a family atmosphere and I was to stay there until I got engaged to my future husband. His job classed him as self-employed and we needed to make sure we could have a regular income to get a mortgage. So, I decided to move to the Home Office which meant that I could get more money and better 'perks'. My Mum was working there too but she later moved to London with her boss. I worked as a Clerical Officer in various sections until we moved to Shropshire where my husband was going to work. At this time, I also became pregnant with

our daughter. This was a salient moment for me as I had been on infertility treatment for three years. I was told when I was seventeen that it would be difficult for me to get pregnant. I remember feeling empty when the consultant coldly told me in clipped tones I would need to have treatment to shorten my overly long 'cycle'. Not having children had never entered my head and I always thought no matter what, I would be a mother. I got married at nineteen and a year later, the doctors felt I was a candidate for infertility treatment. Monthly injections, temperature charts, pills and more pills and three years later a miracle. A new start and a new baby; God was smiling on us.

We lived in Shropshire for seven years during which time our son was born. This was probably the first time I participated in community activities beyond the family. Attendance at mother and toddler groups and later school-related activities and organising outings for friends, soon made me see that I liked people. They would seek me out to tell me their problems. They said I was a 'good listener'. I did not know what I could do that would encompass this skill and thought working in a school would be a good idea as I could then be around for the children. I wanted to be there when they came home from school. When my husband changed his job, we moved to Kent.

I suppose my first working experience was volunteering in the children's school and then moving onto a paid classroom assistant job in a secondary school. My job was to support a girl who did not want to be in school, for fifteen hours a week. I can remember knitting and reading whilst she did her work! I literally only had to be there with her. Over time, I started to offer suggestions to the student and gradually the knitting and reading was put aside as we worked together. She began to attend regularly. However, although we found our routine, it was stressful trying to juggle home and getting to work on time. I then worked with my husband in his retail business for about five years. Interestingly though, I never stopped learning, whether it was how to weave, arrange flowers, use a computer, it was informal but learning nonetheless.

As I have always loved history, from reading Greek mythology as a child, studying it for my O' Level and devouring historical novels, I began to think about becoming a history teacher. This was fuelled by conversations with people who would come into the shop and who worked in education. I learnt that you could do an Adult Access course at college which could give me the qualifications to do a university degree. Without A levels, I had always felt that I did not have a chance of attaining a professional position and so had convinced myself it was better to stick with what I knew. When I was accepted for the course instead of feeling elated I felt terrified. What had I done? Then I received a call from someone I knew who worked as a history teacher in a secondary school. She said there was a classroom assistant position going and that she had told the SENCO about me. I sent a letter, attended an informal meeting and got the job. I reasoned it would help me to decide if I wanted to teach, but I think it was a life-line as the thought of entering formal education again was just too scary. I think this was an important moment for me because I was not ready to do this course. I did not have the confidence at that time that I have now.

Working in the school helped me to return to formal education and it was by working alongside the students and supporting them in their Maths class, that I gained a GCSE in Maths at the age of thirty-nine. I have always struggled with numbers and I do not seem to have a 'logical' brain. When I was at school, my teacher had written on my report card that even though I tried hard I just did not 'get it'. To gain a qualification in Maths was an amazing feat for me and it spurred me on to further study. However, I did my qualification at evening classes as I felt it would have been too embarrassing to do it at the school; what if I failed? No, best to be anonymous. When it came to sit the exams, I remember feeling sick with

anxiety and not in control. I had invigilated exams at the school, so I could now truly empathise with the students. Other people were telling me what to do and I felt like a child. I still feel uneasiness when I think back to sitting in that exam hall. I also feel I should have done it sooner but it was my own fear of failure stopping me. Maybe you just have to have a leap of faith? A passion for learning had been unleashed and I was to gain a variety of qualifications. I was in love with learning because I had discovered I could 'do it'. Anyway, I was to stay at the school for thirteen years and move from Classroom Assistant to Senior Classroom Assistant. Even though I carried on studying during this period I did not have a plan until one day a teacher I had worked with returned to the school as a senior manager. She was responsible for 'Work Related Learning' and suggested I apply for the new position of 'Aimhigher Mentor and Work-Related Administrator'. I had been feeling disillusioned with my job for some time and this seemed like an interesting opportunity. I applied and got the job which involved mentoring students and talking to them about their aspirations and future career pathways. The work was exciting, new and different, and brought me into contact with students across the school. I loved talking to them, listening to their stories, helping them and seeing them grow when they discovered something about themselves for themselves.

Connexions was a youth organisation that came into the school and offered careers education, information, advice and guidance to young people. My role brought me into contact with the assigned Personal Advisers and as I had worked with them over the years we had a comfortable relationship. Together we developed the careers provision in the school. I mentioned to my boss that I would like to become more involved in careers and the next thing I knew, I had become the Careers Co-ordinator. I quickly attended a couple of residential courses which helped me to get to grips with what the role would entail and basically that was that! I had my own office and budget so set to work ordering resources for the careers library. Although so much had changed for me in a short time, I do not see this as a salient moment, more of a natural progression. I was fascinated by the jobs people do and would always ask about their qualifications. It seemed to me that the ones that interested me most usually required a university degree. Maybe it was because I did not have one. Perhaps then when I think of a salient moment the one that comes instantly to mind is this one.

*I was in my office working at the computer when the Connexions Adviser came in and sat down. We were friends so I did not mind. We started to talk about careers and she said that I should do the *Qualification in Careers Guidance (QCG)*. I think I laughed it off because how could I do something without a degree. I remember her looking at me and saying "so what? You have lots of experience and can write a piece of work". That was the moment that made a difference. I believed that I could do something I had thought out of my reach. I could become a Careers Adviser. I showed my boss a printout outlining the course details and the school agreed to pay part of the fees if I was accepted. I remember thinking it did not matter if I could not get a place but knowing it did. I was called for an interview and remember arriving early so sat in my car trying to imagine what it was going to be like to be interviewed by a 'teacher'. It was nothing like I had imagined it to be and the interviewer was wonderful, quickly putting me at ease. When I got the letter saying I had a place I cried because finally I saw 'a way in' rather than standing on the 'side line'.*

The course was two years part-time so I could carry on working in the school but during that time my boss took another role and although I knew the person who took over, the relationship was not the same. She and others saw my role as an administrator. I remember one evening trying to collate worksheets for an entire Year activity the following day and no one from the department came to help. Looking at the rows of papers made me think 'you are better than this'. I wanted to be what I was training to be, a Careers Adviser. Studying brought me into contact with a world that I did not know existed and I felt I belonged there. I

could talk to people and they listened to what I had to say. At work, I felt I was in the background without a voice.

Going home, I always took the country lanes and I would pass a stone church with a tall steeple. A wooden arch beckoned people to enter and walk up a path lined with flowers, to a thick wooden door which opened on to a flagstone floor and aged wooden pews. I had driven past for years but this time I stopped and took the walk through the arch. There was a bench by a side wall and I sat down to look over the flower border to the yellow field beyond. I decided to talk to God and hoped he would help me find an answer.

I should say I am not a religious person but I consider myself to be a spiritual one. My family were very religious and we would have 'Sacred Heart' pictures around the house. I have one in mine, not sure why, comfort? We went to church every week until we were old enough to say that we did not want to go anymore. Dad was very devout but Mum did not see the point in going to church when she could pray perfectly well at home. We decided to follow our Mum's way of thinking. Mum and Dad had been brought up to see God and all the saints as the solution to everything. If something went missing it was always 'pray and you will find it' or if you were worried about something 'pray and you will get the answer'.

I think I need to go back in time and tell you a bit about my familial inclination towards 'other worldliness'. What I mean is their deep belief in the supernatural. My Mum is a Medium and to varying degrees most of my family are aware of the spiritual realm. Mum can see and talk to spirits whereas I have a heightened sense of awareness; I can sense a presence. To us it is perfectly natural to talk to spirits as if they are in the room with us. Growing up, every house we lived in had to be blessed by a Priest and 'cleansed' by my Mother. That did not mean that the spirits left. It just meant that they left us alone. But I need to take you back further. When my Mum was born, she had a 'cowl' covering her face. Now, this is a much-prized thing. Sailors coveted this membrane of skin as it is said to keep them safe. Others see it as a lucky charm which would bring wealth and prosperity. My Grandmother said it was 'stolen' when Mum was born but she knew her baby daughter was a very 'special child'. When I and my siblings were born they looked out for cowls but we were not so blessed. When Mum was five she had her first memorable encounter with spirits who made egg cups dance for her amusement. She called her mother to see the spectacle who promptly had a screaming fit and called for another house blessing! After that my Mum did not say too much about any visitations, but my Grandmother was someone with a great propensity for superstition and spiritual encounter. I will give you a couple of examples.

My Mum's family struggled financially when she was little and they did not have much in the way of entertainment. Going to the market was something that they all looked forward to as a daily adventure. Food had to be bought fresh as in the heat it would not last. I should also point out that despite their poverty, they did have a servant. From a Western viewpoint, this could be seen as something unnecessary and archaic. For those living in Ceylon at that time, it was a social responsibility. In return for their work, the family would look after the person, feeding, clothing and accommodating them and possibly the wealthier, would look after their family too. Anyway, returning to the story, on this particular day my Grandmother, my Mum and her sisters and the servant all went to the market. My Grandmother was a dressmaker and she had been paid that day, so the family were going to have a beef curry for their dinner. Meat was purchased first and put at the bottom of the shopping bag and vegetables were bought and placed on top. The servant was carrying the bag. On their walk back they passed a cemetery. Suddenly, the servant started to shout that the meat was on the ground. Everyone stopped to see and sure enough the neatly bound parcel of beef had somehow jumped out of the bag, lost its paper covering and was lying naked in the dirt. The vegetables were still in

the bag which by the way, was intact so nothing had fallen from the bottom. My Grandmother accused the servant of dropping the precious meat and the servant denied touching it. Everyone looked to the cemetery and decided it was the work of evil spirits. The meat was quickly lifted from the ground, re-wrapped and the party rushed home to tell of their encounter.

On another occasion my Grandmother heard of a 'gathering' on the beach which was to take place at night. Now such gatherings were rumoured to be when 'black magic' was practised. There are places on the Island people avoided, and still do, which are surrounded in ethereal mysteries. Evil eye and charm casting are synonymous with such beliefs which are very much alive today. My Grandmother, ever the curious, decided to take my Mum with her to the beach that night to see what was occurring. They witnessed chanting and dancing which was purported to bring forth a demon. My Grandmother was standing by some leafy foliage and as she witnessed the frenetic activity, the breeze moved a branch which stroked her bare arm. On returning home she went to bed but later that night she started to scream and shout, moving so erratically that my poor grandfather who was quite dumbfounded, decided that a Priest had to be called to 'remove' what had possessed his wife. There was a strong belief that a demon had taken hold of my Grandmother. Of course, it could have been an over active imagination that when she was brushed by the branch, she was being touched by something else, but the demonic possession story was so much better!

When my Mum was around 15 years old, there was civil war in the country. By now she was the only one left at home as her sisters were married and she herself was engaged to my Dad. Mum has told me stories of that time which frankly are too horrendous for me to write. But I can tell you, their deeply religious beliefs brought them comfort when carnage was taking place beyond their garden gates. When they heard the baying crowds in the street, they would kneel in front of their Sacred Heart picture and pray until the noise grew dim and the danger had passed. I only heard of this time when I asked Mum to tell me what it was like when she was growing up in Ceylon, as research for my study. They say if you ask the questions you will get the answers. Mum went to a convent school so religion was a major part of her life. Yet, being a member of a minority group brought discrimination due to a European heritage. She told me about the separate lines in the school playground; one for the Ceylonese girls and one for the Burgher girls, which of course was much shorter. Segregation was alive on this small island. She knew that she was different from her friends because the system told her so. Prayer, religion, the supernatural, spirituality and being deemed different, have all influenced my family and in turn me.

Returning to my story and the church bench, I think giving yourself some quiet time or even meditation is helpful, but I should confess that I do 'talk' to God too. And that is what I did that evening with the sun shining and a warm breeze stirring the air, I talked to God and asked him to help me to find a solution. If the truth be told, I knew what I wanted to do, but I guess I wanted a second opinion. A few days later, I received an email from someone who worked at the local college saying a careers adviser position was going to be advertised. I applied and was offered the position. It was the start of a new beginning.

I love being a Career Guidance Adviser and this title has changed since I first took up this role, from Adviser to Counsellor to Consultant. They are all basically the same but my preference is for Counsellor as I think this encapsulates my kind of practice. Working at the college brought me into contact with so many different people, students and the wider community. Even though I would do workshops and classroom activities my favourite part of the job was the one to one interviews. Sadly, this is one aspect that takes time and is seen as expensive. It is also quite hard to stay impartial as you could be called on to 'persuade'

people to certain courses of action. This did not rest easy with me and I would say so; I think I probably upset some people. During my time at the college I met many interesting individuals who worked in advice and guidance of one form or another and I think those relationships enriched my own practice, because we shared our knowledge of our educational world. Networking is important in my line of work and will be more so if I decide to be a freelancer in the future.

Whilst working as a Career Counsellor, I decided to study for my Masters in Career Guidance (MACG). It felt like coming home studying again even though this time it was mostly self-directed. I decided to look at the influences that had impinged on my career identity and it was also an autoethnographical study, having discovered this 'methodology of the heart' to coin Pelias. I got a distinction for this work and my graduation was one of the best days of my life. I did not stop smiling all day. Then it all went flat. Studying is a selfish thing to do. You are squirrelled away in a room for what can be hours (in my case) at a time with little thought for anyone else in the house. I would come home from work and go straight to the study to read for an hour rather than spend time with my husband, so I promised him when the course finished I would not do anymore studying, for a while. It was a year before I applied for another course and that was this PhD. I was feeling bored with my job as it no longer challenged me and wanted something to ignite me. Spurred on by the person who was to become my Doctoral Supervisor, I wrote an article for a journal which was published. Now that was a special moment, seeing something I had written printed in a journal. I wanted to write more but just did not seem to have the impetus to get going. It was attending a conference at the university where I had been a student that changed everything.

One of the speakers talked about how when something that had been a big part of your life ended, it was like standing in a dark forest. Then something comes along that takes you into the light. I remember hearing the speaker and it was as if a lightbulb had lit up inside my head. I had been waiting for a sign to show me the way forward and here it was. The 'light' for me was to study for a PhD. I knew there was a way to go on my academic journey. So once again I filled out an application form, attended an interview and miraculously got accepted. Of course, it was not easy and filling out the form was a challenge. I self-funded my study and maybe that had something to do with being accepted. I did apply in the first year for funding but was told it was very unlikely as I was studying part-time and true enough I did not get it. On the one hand, I was quite angry about this as I would have liked to have had the funds to study full-time but on the other, it would have meant that I was at the mercy of the institution and, it would have been difficult to practice. I am a great believer that things happen for reasons. Growing up I would join in with Doris Day and sing 'que sera sera whatever will be will be, the future's not ours to see, que sera sera'. So 'whatever will be will be' I think would be one of my mottos; nod to Mark Savickas here! I started the doctorate in January 2013 and in March my Dad passed away. The world did not stand still while I grieved but a part of me has never been the same since. Death does not affect you until it affects you if you see what I mean. Dad dying made me realise how precious our time is; we need to use it wisely. I wrote a paper about my relationship with my Dad and presented it at a postgraduate conference. It was not easy, but people came up to me afterwards and said how it made them think about their relationships with their fathers and fathers told me they thought about their relationships with their children. I am glad I presented the paper. But let us move on.

As I have said, networking I think is important and it was during my time as a Career Counsellor that I met many people from other educational institutions, some whom became good friends. One person had worked as a university Careers Adviser and continued to do so on a part-time basis at the university I am affiliated with when she retired. One evening out of

the blue, we had not spoken to each other in over a year, she rang. There was an opportunity to do a job-share with her and was I interested. Talk about surprise! This had come at a point when I just did not see a way forward in my current position, so I arranged to send my CV to the person acting as Head of Careers. I went for an informal interview and was offered the job. I was thinking with my heart not my head. I did not think about giving up a permanent position to take on a temporary part-time post. I did not think about the repercussions to my pension or anything else. I wanted to make a change and I wanted a new challenge and I enjoyed every minute of working there.

Other moments have stood out for me on this doctoral quest; conferences where I presented papers and talked to eminent career theorists like Bill Law, Tony Watts and Gideon Arulmani. I felt like a child who got everything she wanted on Christmas Day. I also attended the first European Doctoral School for Career Guidance practitioners in Padova. I was more worried about travelling on my own than presenting a paper to my peers! I have to say it was a wonderful experience and I think what really astounded me was these individuals were interested in my topic. But, change is never too far away.

For some time, my husband and I have been thinking of re-locating to Cambridgeshire as our daughter and her family live there. When my contract ended, we put the house on the market and my husband started to close his business. We were both out of work waiting for the house sale to be finalised so we could start our new life. I can fully understand when people tell me they are struggling to find a job as I was in that position myself. I was not known in Cambridge so why would anyone take a chance on an 'unknown'. I tentatively applied for a couple of positions and had interviews. I was over qualified for some things and underqualified for others. My face was not known and I needed to start again. It is hard when you are in your mid-fifties to face rejection. Maybe it is a chance to try something new but I am a Career Counsellor. It is a time of opportunity and it is true that I identify with my professional role; it is an essential part of me and I need to feed it. I decided to take positive action and started to research careers provision in Cambridge. I made a phone call to the Adult Careers Service, was told that a Careers Adviser position was about to be advertised and to cut the story short, I applied and got the post. To be honest I also think that making the effort to come up to Cambridge and talking to the head of the service before applying for the job was helpful and got me 'noticed'. However, working for a target-driven service did not sit well with me; having to complete on-line paperwork with the client within a strict time-bound interaction left little time for actual guidance. It was more a case of information and advice and this is not how I practice. Sadly, and it was with regret, I started looking for another position and fate stepped in again and I secured a job as an Independent Careers Guidance Adviser. My role is full-time working across three schools. It is frenetic, stressful and I love it! I do not know what the future holds, I still think I will work in a freelance capacity one day. Fate, serendipity or chance will no doubt have a hand to play in what happens next, but I do know what I am doing is right for me; it is my calling.

What's in a moment? Everything. I have learnt that many moments can lead up to a salient moment. I have learnt that you make the best of life as it can change in a moment. Life must be lived while we have it. At my father's funeral, the Priest said we give thanks for the gift of life. I see each moment as a present, some I have already received in my past and some I hope to have in my future.

Looking through the stained-glass window: Analysing the story

When you look through coloured glass your vision is distorted by the different hues. Is the world bathed in a calming green or does a fiery red stir the senses? My analogy is an attempt

to show that my analysis of the story may not be what the reader(s) may see as our worlds are seen through different coloured lenses. It is Rogers (1961) who guides me here and my vision derives from my own experience, from writing the story and the memories of the events. 'The touchstone of validity is my own experience' (ibid, p23). Yet, this cannot be an encompassing view. I must not forget that my experience is sited in a historical, cultural and social context and it is verisimilitude that makes it trustworthy. In the next section I explore my relationship with my family and suggest, whilst I have encountered different communal groups, values learned in childhood have influenced life-career moments.

The particularities of my story

Strong cultural roots informing my familial values and beliefs were passed down through the generations and as a child, I felt bound by the constricting tendrils. Arulmani (2004, 2007) notes the influence of family and wider community in India as vital support for young people as they traverse the road to adulthood. Growing up, my extended family were the community who offered advice and guidance alongside parental influences. They also acted as 'gatekeepers' for young female members. Either my father or my uncle would ensure we were safely taken to and brought home from a night out and we were told in no uncertain terms we were to keep ourselves 'safe' in the intervening time. Paradoxically, whilst encouraged to go out and find a man to marry, there was an unswerving expectation that virginity was to be maintained at all costs. Loss of face within the community, both in the UK and back 'home' in Sri Lanka, was something that would not be countered and parental disapproval was deemed a powerful deterrent. I was reminded of these aspects of my life in the writing of my story and through the writing and reading, further memories arose.

As Meekums (2008) notes, our cultural backgrounds inform our stories and we re-author them when we write about our experiences. For example, the adopting of Western and Eastern practices to suit a purpose was not uncommon in my family. My parents would purchase an item and the cost would be announced to the family-community with great aplomb.

Expressions of social standing and wealth mattered; how well you were doing mattered because it was something for others overseas to be proud of too. Yet, to western friends no such announcements would be made. My family would pick and choose aspects of their heritage to suit their purpose, the situation and the time. My family it would seem, could adopt a variety of roles, ranging from successful professional workers, to compliant cultural protagonists, dependent on how they enacted their life narratives (Goffman, 1959). Miller (2007) suggests, we actively construct the past when we write about it. As a child, I was confused and struggled to identify with my heritage. In writing my cultural stories, I came to understand that my folk narratives were deeply seated within me, informing who I am today.

Indeed, Bruner (1990) discusses ‘folk psychology’ which we learn from an early age, in a similar way to learning a language. Our knowledge of the world is informed by our beliefs and our beliefs inform our assumptions of the world. As such, even though I have engaged with different communities of practice, I still adhere to my ingrained beliefs.

An aspect of my upbringing was being responsible for others from an early age. It was an accepted practice that the oldest child would look after younger siblings. Today, some parents appear to organise their children’s spare time with a variety of activities. My granddaughter attends numerous clubs, before and after school, and has a plethora of weekend options. Such activities would have been ‘treats’ if they were indeed available when I was a child. Being responsible meant doing it ‘right’ so I would strive for perfection not only when looking after others, but in other areas of my life, school and work. My Father would ask “did you do your best?” which often led me to feel I could have done better. Trying to be perfect does not make someone happy, also acknowledged by Krumboltz and Levin (2004), and as an adult I accept it is okay to make mistakes. Of course, I am telling of this ‘tale’ in the now, and the story in the ‘then’ would likely be different. I cannot fully capture the experience as noted by Ellis (2004), but in this time and in this space, this is the story that seems meaningful in the present. Although I engaged with different groups, the cultural practices of my familial community continued to inform my ways of being. As a child and young adult, I struggled to express my inner voice, that which Belenky et al (1986) consider unique to me. I would stay in the shadows whilst the person who was accepted, moved in the world. Moving away to start a new life instigated change.

According to McMahon and Patton (2006) our life narratives represent our own realities and as such, when I moved away from my family I wrote a new chapter to my story. I looked to others in the wider community for succour and found others looked to me for aid. It was a time of personal growth. Without realising, I adopted a constructivist perspective and actively began to build myself, no longer passively accepting the known family rhetoric, but seeing myself as a ‘self-organising system’ (ibid, p13).

When considering reality, it would be simplistic to accept one version of the events and returning to my analogy of a stained-glass window, what we see is dependent on which piece of coloured glass we look through. Etherington (2004) considers reality to be viewed as socially and personally constructed stories that are products of their time, which may well change, as I noted earlier. Yet, they have a propensity to enable someone to be heard, and when the person has a different life perspective, the stories change. Virginia Woolf (1945) asks ‘what is meant by reality? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable...’ (p127). As such, reality can change depending on the person who sees it

from their unique perspective. Woolf (ibid) adds ‘... whatever it touches it fixes and makes permanent’. I am not suggesting that my view is the only view and acknowledge events take place in a wider external context. Historical events happened and if I say they did not take place, it will not change the fact that they did. I choose to tell of a coming to ‘voice’ through my interaction with a non-familial community of practice. This continued to develop and grow through learning as an adult. Through engagement with an area which had been unknown to me, I found my ‘voice’.

When I moved away from my family I adopted different roles; now I was a mother who engaged in wider community actions. These roles revealed different aspects of myself (Law, 2003) hitherto unknown. I embraced the responsibility of motherhood through love not a sense of duty, as perhaps at times I may have felt in the past as ‘the little mother’. Supporting community activities enabled a sense of self-efficacy which blossomed as I realised I had qualities of worth. These qualities were intrinsic, but my narratives had been limited (Richardson, 1997), shaped by family and work, little existed beyond these aspects so I did not feel what I had to say was worth listening to. I believe this was a time of personal awakening which ultimately led to informal and then formal learning activities.

The thought of returning to formal education was terrifying and by deciding not to do an Access course, I justified my actions by suggesting it was not the right time thereby, creating what I considered to be a good decision. I convinced myself this was not a failure but a positive outcome and the decision was right (Murtagh, Lopes and Lyons, 2011). Further, Alheit (1992) tells us that our actions may appear intentional, to justify changes in our plans so that we feel we act autonomously. It was the moment I decided to study the Qualification in Career Guidance (QCG), my life changed. Similarly to Muncey (2010), I discovered I could express my views in front of others and not be seen as wrong. My inherent skills for caring and listening came to the fore and as a woman in her mid-forties, I suddenly realised my career anchors (Schein, 1993) were not forged in maintaining stability as taught by my parents, but in work that mattered to me. I highly value my own family life, but work enticed as something that could be fulfilling, rather than an unsatisfactory routine activity. To follow what I wanted rather than what I thought was safe, I made career decisions which threatened the continuous continuity of my life with ‘discontinuity’ (Cochran, 1997, p83). There would be sacrifices which would change my life and the lives of my husband and children. Yet, as Krumboltz and Levin (2004) note ‘the only guarantee is that doing nothing will get you nowhere’ (p5). So, as my children grew, I grew too, engaging with a Masters in Career Guidance and ultimately, this doctoral work. However, no life-career is without twists and turns, some expected, some catastrophic.

Endings

In my story, I tell of different events which have influenced my life-career, causing me to stop and re-think about my place in the world, but perhaps the most traumatic time was when my Father died. Originally, I did not intend to include the following excerpt from my journal, but it is an expression of a 'concrete lived experience' (Ellis and Bochner, 2014, p9), offering a critical examination of an interpersonal cultural occurrence. As such, I decided it had a place in this work:

27/3/13

My Dad died this morning at 9.10am. He was on the golf course, complained of feeling 'giddy' and collapsed. In a month's time he would have been 78 years old. I'm in shock, I want to scream and there is pain, anguish and raw emotions I can't describe. I saw a message (voicemail). It was from my husband. I called.

"Hi darling".

"Hi, how are you?"

"Yes, okay, what's up?"

"Your Mum called... your Dad died this morning".

"What?"

"Your Dad died. I'm sorry to tell you like this".

"Okay... Okay (the tears come and run down my face) Okay... I don't know what to do".

"Ring me back".

"Okay".

I call him back and say I will go home. My colleague hugs me and ask if I will be alright driving. I walk, one foot in front of the other. I drive the car and keep telling myself out loud "don't cry... get home first". I sit at traffic lights and smile. My Dad always wanted to 'go' on the course. He got his wish. I get home. Bag in kitchen. Walk up the stairs, drop the laptop by the post, drop to my knees and... howl. The tears cascade and the sobs come from deep within me. I cover my mouth... frightened by the emotional storm. "Keep it together!" I phone my Mum, brother and sister. United in grief. I wait. I have to phone my children. I wait. I will phone Mum later. I wait.

I'm waiting for my Dad, but he won't come. My chest hurts and the tears flow. I will not see him again. I won't hear his voice out loud, only in my memories. I won't hear him call me 'Daughter' except in my dreams. I can't touch his face or look at him. I can't say "I love you Dad", except in my heart.

I write through the pain. I write to ease the pain.

Ellis (2002) documented her feelings on loss in a letter to 'Bill' (William Tierney) on why she had not contributed to a conversation regarding a paper he had written. She explained how she moved in and out of her own grief on losing her mother, whilst experiencing collective world suffering in the wake of the terrorists' attacks on 11th September 2001. There was chaos and uncertainty in the world which heightened her sense of personal loss. Love for others in her life intensified as mine did for family members. I often wrote personal comments in green ink when making notes on articles I have read and I was moved by Ellis to write,

This reminds me of when Dad died – everything was seen through my frame of reference – of loss and loving people more just as she did. Now when I hear of loss in the world or closer to home I feel intense grief and empathy for those who have lost those they love.

Richardson (1990) suggests, writing to create a particular view of reality and it was through writing in my journal that I began to heal. I wrote on the day my Dad died capturing the raw, frightening emotions which threatened to engulf me. Such entries created my own view of reality at that time. Another entry was a poetic text to express the shell-like quality of my perceived existence,

5/4/13

Why is death so tiring?

Why do I feel as if I have run an emotional marathon?

Why is there an empty hole inside me?

Why do I go through the motions of living an everyday life?

Why do I draw deep painful breaths that make my chest hurt?

Why do I now feel so calm?

Is there a storm coming?

This entry is included to show the depth of feeling experienced, which others may well understand for the meaning is in the writing and reading of the text (Chang, 2008). The writer and the reader create different meanings from the text. The ‘true’ meaning lies within the social and historical context of when it was created and the meaning will be different for those inside a cultural context and those outside it. But, in autoethnography, the insider and outsider is the researcher-writer who has different frames of reference. So, there are multiple versions of the account which can all purport to be ‘true’. In writing about my Father’s death, producing a paper for a conference, and then documenting the event again for this work, I reconstruct the memory to meet the needs of my situation (Savickas, 2011). All my versions are ‘true’ as I have written them from my perspective at a particular time.

My parents had been married for over 50 years when my Father died, so when my Mother collapsed and was hospitalised a few months later, I thought I was going to lose another parent. Subsequently she made a full recovery but the gut-wrenching fear of losing another parent was almost too much to bear and I nearly withdrew from this study. I could not take off the cloak of despair and felt all consuming relief when she returned to us. The effects of trauma can bring you into the present with a loud bang, and you think deeply about what is important in your life. My Mother’s physical health continues to beset her, a legacy of the past, and I continue to be watchful. It is the emotional quality of a narrative which captures the attention of the reader and makes them think with the story. ‘Our interactions tell of our interactions’ (Horsdal, 2012, p23). I have told of these stories to express how an unexpected

event like death can affect our life-careers, changing us, reminding us of our limited mortality so we desire to make the best of life.

Beginnings

Our careers can be chaotic (Bright et al, 2005) and at times we make decisions, not because of our rational planning over a period of time, but based on the situations and the opportunities that arise in our lives. My husband decided to change his career path after more than 40 years in the same profession and my work contract ended. We decided to change our lives and move to a new area to be closer to family. Concurring with Hansen (2001), I felt my work had to fit with my life. Throughout my career, chance or serendipity has played a deciding factor in my decision making. Indeed, Bright et al (2005) note, unexpected occurrences can affect career behaviour. When my Father died, I decided to embrace life's opportunities and took a short-term position after years working for the same organisation. This was not, to my mind, rational thinking, but a spontaneous reaction to what I believed to be the right decision. I followed my inner voice and intuitive thinking (Belenky et al, 1986) and listened to my own 'song'.

However, later when I was not working, I had not factored on the strength of emotional attachment to my professional role. In short, I am a Career Guidance Counsellor and not being one, left me feeling lost, scared and 'worthless'.

It came to me that my feelings of insecurity, of being lost, are because I'm not working and I'm feeling a loss of identity... My working role is important to me; it is who I have become, without it I slip into the habits of the past with no purpose.

'The wires of inadequacy are buried deep in cavernous labyrinths' (Short, 2013, p180) and I returned to questioning if I was 'good enough'. Although I found a career guidance position, my intrinsic values left me struggling to accept the organisation's imperatives. Chance stepped in again and another position was secured which met my needs. In these times of uncertainty, I turned to my childhood teachings of 'ask and you shall receive'. Spirituality is an aspect of my life which cannot be denied offering succour when needed. I now turn to this often contested concept, to explain why it is an intrinsic aspect of my life-career.

The spiritual being

Rogers (1961) developed his own viewpoint from his experiences, and in a similar way I too have grown as a person and a practitioner, by learning from my life experiences, incorporating different elements of my being. In agreement with Hansen (2001), I tentatively challenge the reductionist, traditional career practices which separate work from other aspects of human life. Some people do seek a spiritual connectedness to the world; in essence, they seek 'wholeness' (ibid). It is those intuitive reactions and feelings, along with our thoughts

and words which I have found so enlightening and together with Rogers (1980), I too have found serendipity to have aided me throughout life. It is difficult to express the depth of emotion I am experiencing as I write these words about a subject, which is personal but now public. I feel I will be judged and misunderstood, yet it is who I am, who I was and who I will be. It is writing down the words that makes them tangible and they become a 'message I send in a bottle and cast into the sea' (ibid, p80).

Spirituality? Career calling or something else?

Spirituality is a highly contested concept and can mean many things to different people. I see myself as a spiritual rather than a religious person. I believe there is a higher power walking beside me as I make my way through life but, although christened into the Roman Catholic faith, I do not follow established religious doctrines. That said, there are moments when I pray which surprise and comfort me at the same time. This is an ingrained aspect of my being, derived from enforced religious activity in childhood and although a rational part of me will argue there is little to be gained from the act of praying, being still and opening your mind so you can listen to those voices that come when you allow yourself to be in the moment, is, I find illuminating. 'Peace of mind is both spiritual and psychological' (Peavy, 2004, p55). It may be the voice I hear is that of my inner-self and not a universal being and as such, 'voices are always telling the story of a particular self' (ibid, p66). However, when I think about my worker-self at times of uncertainty, I cannot leave behind my other life roles as my personal life is intertwined with my professional role. Holistically, I construct my life-career and I am the expert on my life (McMahon and Patton, 2006), which includes all those aspects informing my unique perspective on the world. From childhood, I have been indoctrinated with superstition and other worldliness so as a woman I do not see a life without my spiritual beliefs. I am not asking others to follow my inclinations, but for gentle acceptance.

Dik and Duffy (2009) discuss career determinants and in particular that of 'calling' when people feel they have received a transcendent directive towards purposeful work,

'A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation' (p428).

Here I recall the saying 'it is their calling' or 'their vocation' when people do work that may not have monetary gain but has intrinsic rewards from serving others. However, the idea of a calling implies something external to the individual whereas a vocation, according to Dik and Duffy (2009), is how people approach the work they undertake. The purpose could be informed by other values including monetary gain and advancement. Duffy and Dik (2013)

note, 'calling' can also be linked with positive career outcomes such as self-efficacy. It is associated with well-being when people do the work they have been called to, so they feel good about what they do. Park (2010), considers everyone to have an overarching framework of meaning, referring to this as global meaning, which provides an orientation to the world and direction for living. Our lives are structured by our meaning systems which we apply every day to our experiences; this is situated meaning. When aspects of our global meaning are harmonious with our job we attain meaningful work. Some could see their work as congruent with their spiritual beliefs in that they are doing what they have been called to do. As such their spirituality is an integral aspect of their work or as I suggest, their career, which encompasses all of life's roles. My spiritual self informs my professional self and I see my job as a 'calling' providing purpose and meaning.

Being drawn to jobs which support social needs rather than personal gains could be considered as meaningful work. I am particularly drawn to the aspect of 'meaningfulness' which Dik and Duffy (2009) have noted, as it is the aspect of my work I consider to be most pertinent. When I have meaningful work, I experience the congruence with my spirituality that Park has discussed.

So, I suggest in my role of Career Guidance Counsellor, I am fulfilling a calling. There is a stability and a security which helps me to feel 'grounded' and safe when working in a profession with foundations built on shifting, changing sands. Change and separation, according to Bloch (2004), are two sides of the same coin; you simply cannot have one without the other. Yet, I see my spirituality as a connection to my world which provides me with meaning for the work I do and the life I live. This is interesting, as Lips-Wiersma (2002) in her investigation on the effect of spirituality on career behaviour, noted Bloch's (1997) review of traditional career theorists whose work acknowledged processes such as career choice and work-motivation, but failed to adequately question what career means to people. In this, if we take spirituality to bring meaning, purpose and stability to career for some, then the definition of spirituality will depend on the person making the definition (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Further, our definitions can change at different times throughout our lives as we encounter new experiences which make us stop and think about our place in the world.

Of course, there are those who find their lives to have purpose and meaning and do not attribute their feeling of well-being in their career to a spiritual or religious influence external to their world. Duffy and Dik (2013) consider the work of Hall and Chandler (2005), who suggest that some look to work that aligns with their internal passions. Here then, a person's work meets their characteristics to provide satisfaction and fulfilment. Whether it is a spiritual influence or as an individual's intrinsic desires, people are drawn to certain roles for their own

reasons. Our 'internal locus of evaluation' (Rogers, 1961, p119) is how we judge ourselves and if we find ourselves wanting, we deal with our needs in our own ways. My spiritual beliefs help me to become close to my intuitive self, heightening my visceral reactions, making me more aware of my feelings, professionally and personally. In times of uncertainty they provide a tranquil interlude from life's frenetic activity.

However, it should be noted, not all feel or have the opportunity to see their work as a 'calling' or a 'vocation' or for it to be meaningful. For some, the decisions they make are pragmatic and limited to what they believe is available to them. The individual as a self-developing 'project' (Rogers, 1980) does not exist in a vacuum. The structures or forces that surround a person (Roberts, 1977) are influential. Work can just mean work when a job is not something that is chosen, but something that is available to pay the bills.

Summary

I have endeavoured to illustrate my thinking by analysing my story and attempting to discuss the particularities of the view through my 'stained glass window'. The focus of this work is to explore an individual's salient moments, capturing the experience and emotion using a creative practice. Yet, without the background story, the 'why something happened', the narrative is only a brief episode when something occurred. Our actions and re-actions are the result of ingrained values and beliefs which inform how we see the world and how we construct our own careers. We create the world when we think about it (Belenky et al, 1986). My early life was constructed from thinking and doing based on the values I was raised by and 'we are encapsulated by our culture' (Jarvis, 2009, p27).

Learning has played a major role in my life-career and I have grown from someone who believed the life she had was the life she should accept, to someone who questions the fabric of her world. Jarvis (2012) notes, children will naturally ask questions whereas adults adjust their behaviour rather than question a situation, often learning incidentally, through patterns of routine. After years working in roles which did not sustain my yearning for personal growth, I learned to take a risk and engaged with formal education. Indeed, Jarvis (ibid) suggests intuition is a learned phenomenon. Did I gather knowledge over time, through routine practices (Lehrer, 2009) so I recognised when decisive moments arrived? Such a concept is possible. Yet, my emotions, feelings and gut instincts (Gigerenzer, 2007) do influence my actions and my decision-making may appear chaotic (Bright et al, 2005) to family members. Perhaps there is a melding of both rational and non-rational thinking when I make some career decisions as I cannot totally remove the cloak of responsibility and impetus to 'stay safe'.

When my Father died I experienced the ‘disjuncture’ discussed by Jarvis (2006), as his death made me stop and think again. The experience changed how I saw my world and time became a precious commodity, not to be wasted. Serendipitous opportunities were positively embraced. Perhaps, I was in a fortunate position to be able to make changes to my life but, waiting for something to happen generally leads to nothing happening. ‘Good luck seldom happens to those who wait passively for the telephone to ring’ (Krumboltz and Levin, 2004, p89). Intuitively, I knew what to do to make changes (Savickas, 2011) and as I guided my life, I created myself (Peavy, 2004).

Through personal growth, I embraced new ways of knowing which enriched my life, yet those ingrained beliefs prevailed through time, continuing to influence today. In my youth, I fought to distance myself from familial inclinations but in my middling years I accept all that informs my being. My cultural soup has become a smooth culinary creation, which I find most palatable.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the process and capturing of my chosen salient moment using various creative practices. I saw this as an opportunity to play, and I brought objects into the world which had not existed before giving them tangible form, creating my own reality to embody my thoughts and emotions. Through the processes adopted, in my chosen space, I learned to trust myself expressing my thinking in my unique way (Rogers, 1961, 1980), enabling my essence to emerge. In travelling across my biographical landscape (Alheit, 2009) I discovered and re-discovered aspects of my selfhood as I engaged with a multi-layered process.

It will also offer insight into my memory of this time. As Savickas (2011) notes, memories are reconstructed to meet the needs of current situations and as such, my recollections are brought forth for this study, in this time and I cannot recreate the past, only a glimmer of what took place.

My salient moment

As I said earlier, I think a moment that stands out for me is the one when I decided to become a careers adviser. In a strange way, this moment was about personal risk, it was mine to take and although it would affect others, it was my decision. I was working as a Careers Co-ordinator, organising work experience for an entire year cohort. It was a challenging time and I remember feeling under pressure,

I am sitting at a computer staring at the screen feeling frustrated and angry. It is work experience time and so many students (and their parents) want to change their placement. The ‘room’ I am in is a cream stud-wall box which was erected in what used to be a cloakroom area for the Year 10s. There is no natural light and in the summer, it is so hot that

you have to work with the lights off (and the heat brought back the smell of unwashed sports clothing). Actually, I do remember an internal 'window' which looks out onto noisy communal area. It is claustrophobic and my boss tries to spend as little time as possible in here; can't say I blame her but she can escape whereas I'm stuck here.

The Connexions Adviser comes into the room and sits in the chair next to my desk. I turn and smile at her. We have known each other for some time and often have coffee together. We talk about students who she will be seeing later and tells me about what she has coming up.

"I would love to do what you do" I say wistfully.

"Why don't you?" she replied. I laugh dismissively but agree to look at the university webpage on the computer. My heart sinks when I see that it says it's a post-graduate qualification and a feeling of despair comes over me.

"I can't do this. I don't have a degree." (Just thinking about this now is making feel uneasy and a bit queasy. I'm back to the child being asked a question that I can't answer).

"So what? You have loads of experience and you can write a piece of work".

It's as if a bright light has been switched on in my head and I think really, they could let me in? 'Yes, I can do it'. It is as if I am on a roller coaster and my stomach is trying to catch up with me. I am full of hope and anticipation, excitement and fear. 'Oh my God, I really think I am going to do this!' 'Oh no, I won't be accepted. But yes, apply and see what they say'. No.

"I think I will apply". My stomach is now heaving. My body is tensing, tightening and getting ready to run away. Be safe. It's too risky. (I am feeling it again, now as I type the words. I had been brought up to do the 'right' thing. Do not do anything foolish. Always be safe). At the same time, I feel like a naughty child doing something I shouldn't but it feels so right!

This moment is the one that started me on my academic journey; the one that helped me to see that I could study, the moment that helped me find my place in the world. Without the conversation, I do not know if I would have gone on to study the QCG. Things happen for reasons 'que sera sera'.

My creative piece

I knew I would write something about my moment as opposed to a more art-based medium but I am intrigued by the prospect of a 'word art' poetic text and this is something I attempted, to show another dimension to my written 'object'. Bestowing the title of 'the light in the dark' illustrated the darkness I worked in but also the light I came to see when I decided to change my future. Originally, I had included the entire 'disrupted' version of the text in the main body of work but some may see it as just a repetition of the original writing, albeit in a different format. My Supervisor suggested a two-column layout, with the original text on one side and the 'disrupted' poetic prose on the other, akin to Speedy (2008), who displayed her thinking about her brother's death in a 'quietly spoken poem' (ibid, p146) alongside her written work. Although I liked the idea of 'playing' with the text, I found it difficult to extract key phrases and the work, to my mind, lost integrity. Instead, it sits within an appendix

(Appendix 5) in its entirety. From this disruption, I developed ‘word art’ and the ensuing analysis of these depictions.

How I did my creative piece

I recorded the process in my journal, included my reasoning as follows: -

- Took the text and cut it up
- Looked at the words and listened to how they ‘sounded’ in my head
- Added punctuation which changed the ‘voice’
- Added speech marks around “it’s a postgraduate qualification” because the computer screen ‘says’ as if it is speaking
- ‘MY HEAD’ in capitals to show the importance of my realising something for myself and it was creative!
- ‘room’ depicted as fuzzy because it was not really a space to work in but created out of a different space – fuzzy and blurred on purpose
- ‘Actually I do remember’ – fainter font as if it was in the background, thinking and pondering the moment
- ‘But she can escape where as I’m stuck here’ – looks a little smaller to depict an internal thought (as if in my head)
- ‘So what’ – I thought text chosen looked dismissive

These were the thoughts that came to me as I played with the text from my chosen salient moment. I then moved on to consider the layout. First, I created text boxes and placed some at angles to look like ‘post it’ notes but to my orderly mind which likes to compartmentise the chaotic voices that fill my brain, it looked ‘messy’. Of course, this is how research could be seen, messy, unpredictable and changeable (Figure 1).

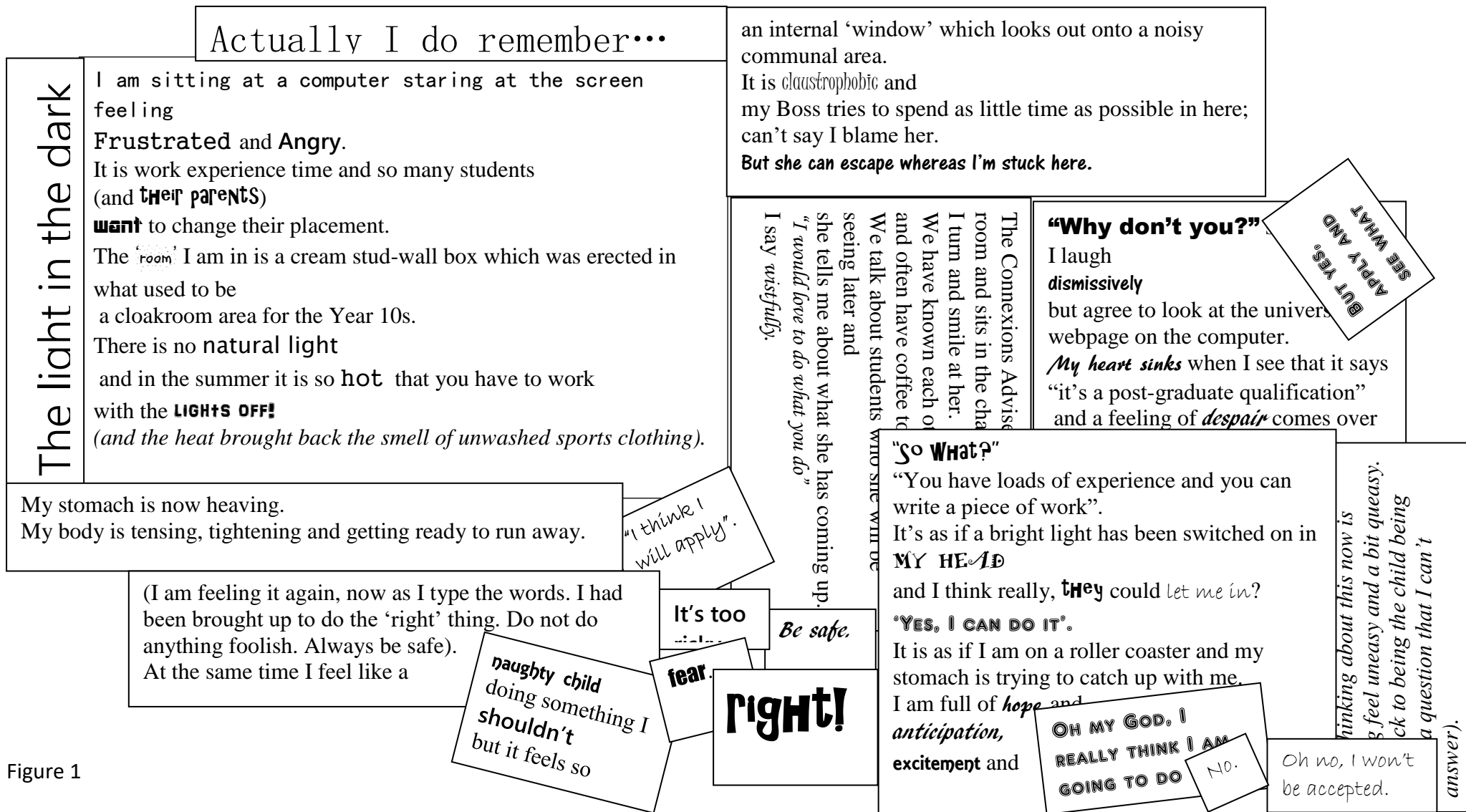


Figure 1

“No”. It would not meet my need for aesthetically, symmetrical pleasing compositions.

I re-positioned the work as I would do if I was writing, revising the words and moving them about on the page. In a way, I started to analyse my moment by allowing the words on the page to speak to me and some shouted out singularly whilst others screamed in groups. What did I see? A myriad of ‘post-its’ in the middle, signifying the jumble of emotions I was experiencing. I decided the ensemble was not pleasing to the eye, so I straightened the boxes. The more I looked at it the more I wanted to cut it up into pieces that stood out for me. I was like a surgeon using my knife to cut into a memory and take out the bits that were important, the ones that stood out, not infected, but like a transplanted organ being placed anew in a different body, because I am different now to who I was then.

I cut up the section on the ‘light bulb in my head’ as it was the pinnacle in my decision making. I became lost in my head and time became irrelevant to me. Hours passed and I moved boxes about across the page. I measured distance and took care to line them up so they touched, maintaining a connection to the source. Compartmentalising each sentence, a word, a phrase, that stood out to me. Objects to be viewed, scrutinised as if in an art gallery. How did they make me think and feel? I felt vulnerable and compelled to make it ‘right’ on the page. Analysing myself from a different time. I could only think how unfulfilled I must have felt. Lost in a sea of indecision (Figure 2).

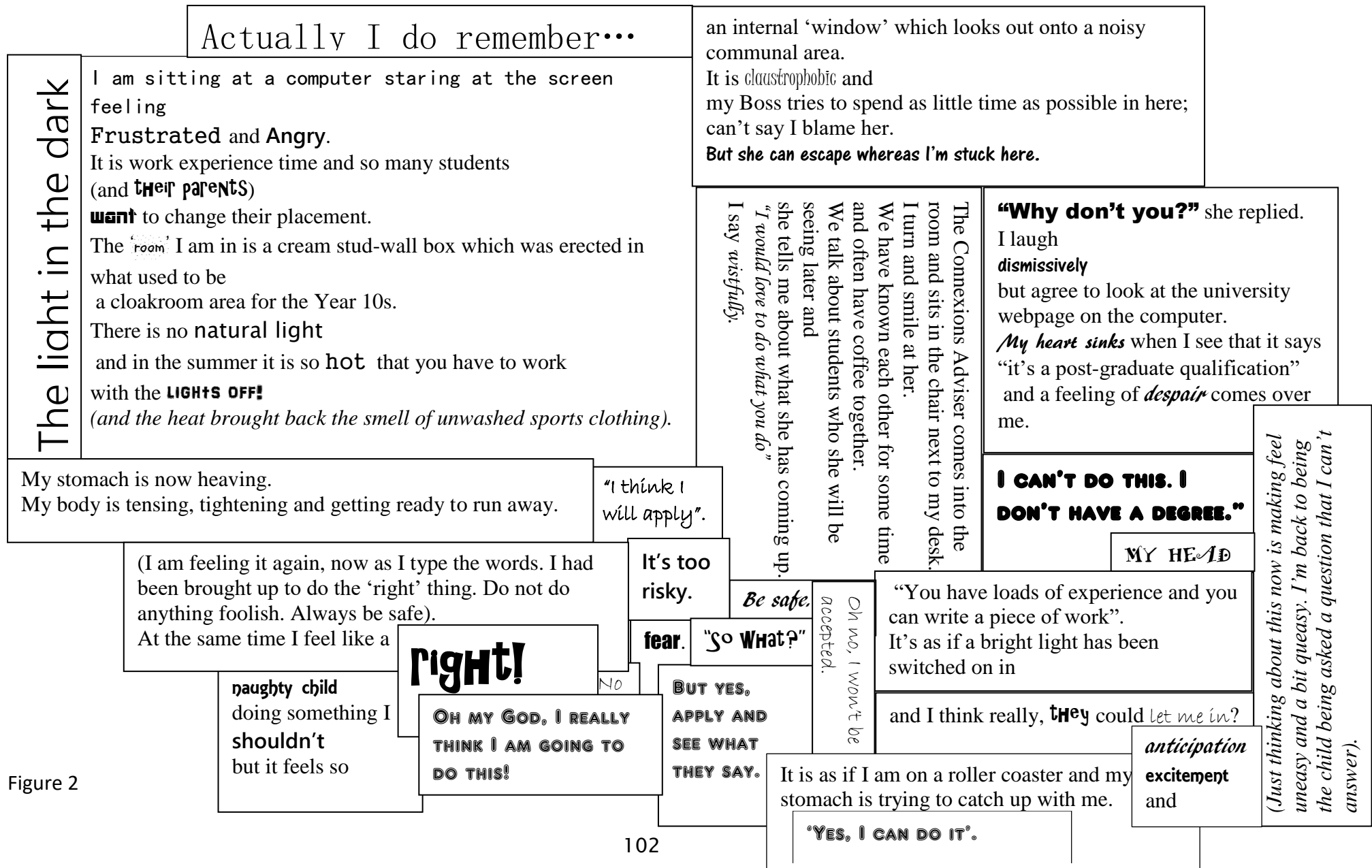
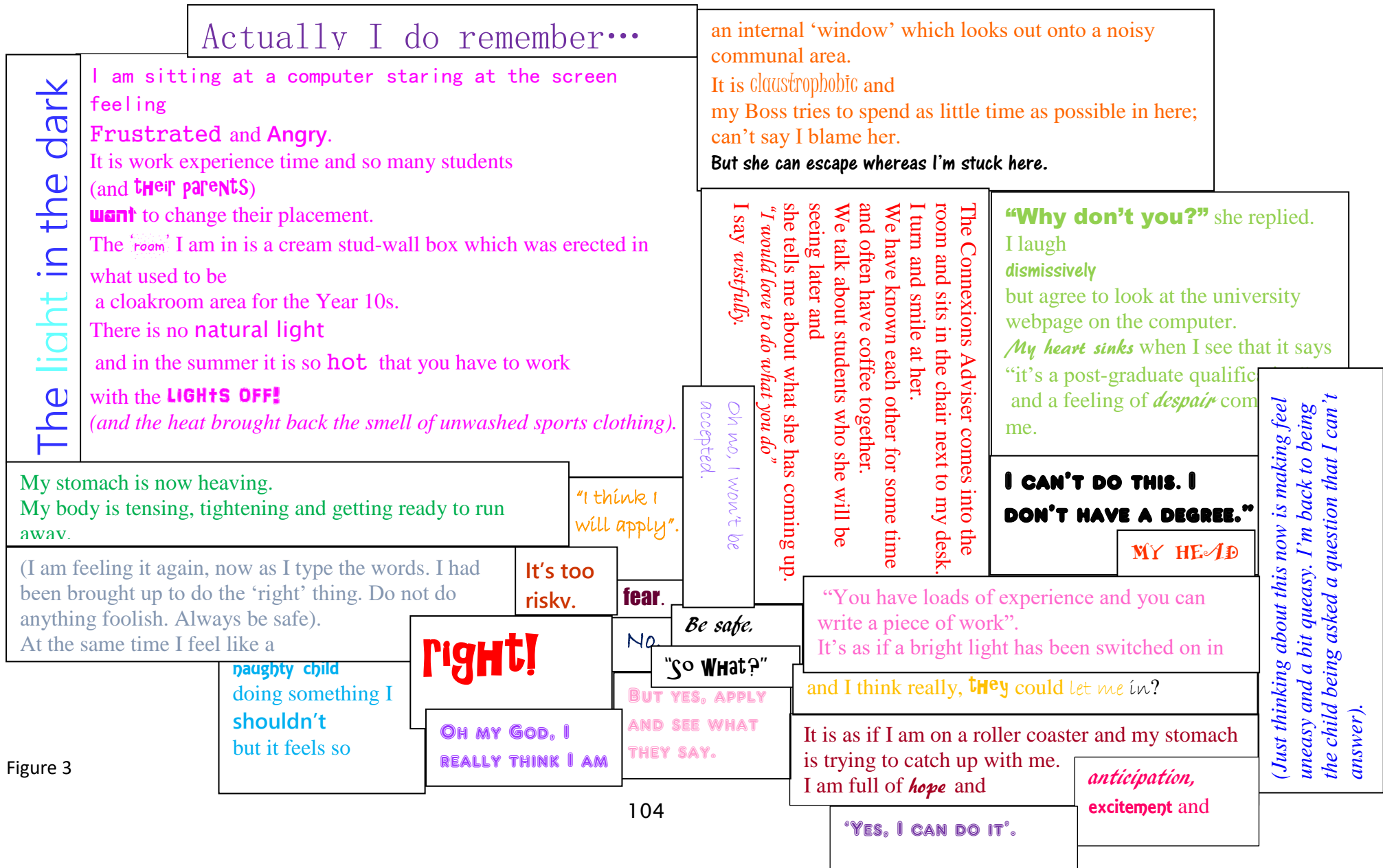


Figure 2

I went back to the piece for a third time and added blocks of colour to satisfy my inner child's desire to play (Figure 3). I felt anticipation and hope. I did leave some blocks in black text as I saw them as negative, for example 'But she can escape' and 'I can't do this'. I tried removing the lines but it made the text lose its direction. It became just words on a page. I put the lines back and I came to see it was the boxing of the text that was important to me. I was capturing the moment. Putting words into special compartments within a bigger box, to be opened out and looked at. The components of my moment. My granddaughter likes to look at a box of costume jewellery I have on my dressing table; to see my 'sparklies'. When I looked at my creative piece I felt I was seeing something special; it was like looking at once precious objects that I did not desire anymore. They were no longer 'me' but had been how I had adorned myself at a moment in time.



Sometime later whilst at work, I was imbued with a need to write another poetic text; the impulse would not leave me; dream thoughts filled my head and had to be acknowledged (St Pierre, 2008). I searched for a scrap of paper and found an old Christmas card envelope in my bag. Quickly, I scratched black markings on the worn covering:

When the Colours Come

Chaotic, spaghetti thinking!
Concentrate.
Closed off to the world and the light.
No colours to adorn the chasms of her mind.

When the colours come,
they infuse her mind, and her body and her soul.
She becomes a rainbow of pulsating light.

It flows like a river through her blood, tingling, electrifying her
Being.
She feels alive, happy, giggling child of her time.
Unravelling thoughts, undulate.

Such feeling, such emotion.
She sings with a choir of unspoken voices.
A universal being, in harmony with her world, herself, her place.
She feels, peace, love, calm.

When the colours come,
She feels me and I know her, because we are
Together in the moment.

I adopted a multi-voiced, multi-layered approach to the depiction of my moment, returning to play with a child-like attitude in my own transitional space (Winnicott, 1971). However, just as I had asked my other participants questions in a follow up interview (as outlined in the Methodology Chapter), I decided to take the position of the ‘other’ and consider my own reactions before, during and after the creative process.

Concluding thoughts: Responding to my ‘other’

Whilst thinking with the story, I floated on a lake of memories, gentle ripples of thought about the moment. I wanted to create something visually with words, similar to the word art I had seen. I also wanted to write in a different form and remembered Muncey’s (2010) ‘cutting up’ technique. Part of me felt I needed to take care too as I did not want this to become a narcissistic exercise.

In the moment of creation, I was lost in the words with sounds echoing through my head. Playing with different font tools enabled me to give the text dimension, raising them up from the page. I began to experience each part, each component as an ‘object’ triggering deeper

thought. Meaning was assigned to each line and words took on a new persona through specific font selection. I was lost in time and did not think of anything other than the task in hand. Total focus; it had to 'look' right. The layout mattered. Putting the text in boxes, compartmenting the words, to me, assigned each section a role in the construction. Each part was important and had a place. In some ways, it reminded me of a collage where each object had a place. Just as an artist might change a composition or paint out an aspect they did not like, I tried different configurations by re-positioning words as I would in writing.

I found I was analysing myself whilst I worked; at first, I was lost not seeing a way to express what was inside my head, the spaghetti thinking. Then, I think, the boxing of words was an attempt to bring order. It was a way to capture the moment. The moment felt real as the composition enabled me to see what I had written and in doing so, I began to see more in the writing (Richardson, 1997). Originally, I had thought I would offer a piece of creative writing but in the moment of creativity, I saw other possibilities and wanted to play! It came to me that I was calling on different creative practices until I could clear my mind of the 'clutter'.

On completing the work, I felt a sense of achievement and peace. I had given my moment 'life', a physical form which was no longer in my head, but 'out there'. Of course, I may have told different versions of this story and each version would be real and of its time. But, by giving this version physical form, I acknowledge my moment to the world and make it real. Variations of the telling may follow in the future, but this version has been assigned a place in time.

The research process has made me think again about aspects of my life and I think in a different way now. New knowledge has been created and the way I think, the process, I believe has changed too. Let me explain. When I write now I begin to feel a sense of dimension. The words are not flat on the page but some stand out, demanding recognition. Some seem to recede whilst others step forward. My words speak to me with different 'voices'. I cannot leave them alone but need to look between the 'cracks' and ask myself "do I mean more than this?" It is as if I have sent myself a coded message that I can only decipher when I change format. Peace comes when I acknowledge all that I can be. There is no turning back from this process. It has changed me.

Finally, how does this chapter connect to my research questions? When I ask myself "how do creative practices help individuals to 're-visit' their salient career moments?" the first thing that comes to mind is the gift of time. By taking time to think about what I wanted to do, I engaged with a reflective process where I reminisced about my chosen moment. I re-imagined that time, gaining a sense of the feelings and emotions experienced. Essentially, there was a layering of thinking as I thought about the creation of the piece whilst simultaneously

thinking about the salient moment. This brings me to the second question “how do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?” I reflexively thought with the creative piece and this provided the possibility for dream-like thoughts to emerge, which then led to further reflection and reflexivity. I was able to consider how I made what I felt were positive life-career decisions, which made me feel I had a sense of personal autonomy. Of course, there were forces around me in the past which would have affected my decisions but I was able, through the creative process, to see how I felt at that time of my life, and in doing so, could re-create a sense of those feelings in the present.

Perhaps, for me the final question “what part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?”, is most pertinent as I feel I have always been aware of my intuitive self. Nonetheless, the impetus to stay safe and avoid risky situations is a value born from early childhood. Yet, I wanted to make a change in that moment and even though I felt the urge to avoid what I felt would be taking a risk, I chose to apply for a course that would change my life. Intuitively, I knew it would be right for me and on that occasion, took a leap of faith. So, I would suggest, when a person has such recognition, they may act in ways which surprise them and possibly others.

The research questions will be discussed further in due course. I now turn to the story of the next participant, Beth.

Chapter 6

Beth's Story

3/5/2014

Sun is bright, illuminating a pale, cloud wispy adorned sky. Green leaf filled trees bask in the warmth of the morning and glisten, shimmering as if lit by a thousand twinkling lights, adding a silvering to their hue ... Hopefully, I'm interviewing Beth today. We were to meet two days earlier but she had been ill and I didn't pick up her text and turned up on her door step. We had a very brief chat to re-arrange and I left feeling guilty that I had disturbed her. Lesson number one: always check your phone for messages on interview days. Returning to the present, I'll get ready in a minute. Let me soak up the peace of the moment. I think about what I might say to her, how I will explain things. Don't forget the recorder! Or the consent form and the information sheet! "Lord, where did I put them?" Mild panic cuts through the peace and my heart pounds... oh there they are on my desk in plain sight. Heart back to normal – da dum... da dum... da dum... I will smile and be the person I am. Not an impersonal cold researcher... I will listen and show that I am listening with those non-verbal nuances that we use without thinking, those nods and hmms. I will look at her and try to really see her... her gestures, the uniqueness of her. I will take in the surroundings and all the things that will help the 'others' (those who will be with me like my Supervisors and my readers) see the same, although I know that's not possible but I want them to have an essence of what I can see and hear.

Introduction

I knew Beth through my past working experiences as a college Careers Guidance Adviser. On these occasions, we would pass pleasantries and discuss topics related to our work. Later, I came to know of her through my involvement with the Women's Institute (WI). We happened to be talking one evening about my study and she became very interested when I said that I wanted to capture emotional experiences using creative practices. I tentatively asked if she would be interested in participating and she readily agreed. I do not feel knowing my participants compromises the study as I only know of them in certain ways and the study is exploring areas which are unknown to me. I acknowledged any biases encountered with deep analysis in a desire to provide a genuine and trustworthy account.

Beth's story

Beth has lived in Kent most of her life. She lives in a town centre, in a house she shares with friends. With a vivacious personality, Beth likes to express her own identity. Although she enjoyed going to her secondary school she was bullied for being what she terms "different or alternative"; not someone who cared about the music, fashion or makeup other girls her age appeared interested in. She feels they could not relate to her and humorously suggests she was "too cool" for them. Two subjects she enjoyed most at school were Art and Textiles as she felt they were more creative than Maths or English.

In Art, Beth particularly enjoyed working with clay and says, “it was [her] sort of thing”. She was lucky because her art teacher encouraged her to work with her medium of choice as she did not enjoy drawing, finding it “boring”. Textiles enabled Beth to express her creativity in a more random way and she created items such as a bean bag cube utilising batik and applique which she says, “was pretty cool”. She enjoyed creating things her way using different elements and through art and textiles she could express her individuality. However, the bullying did not abate so she left that school and moved to another one. This was much larger and the journey involved taking a bus and coupled with the fact that she did not really know anyone led to her decision to stop attending. Her parents were not aware of the situation until the school contacted home. The following year Beth went to college to do A levels, but did not complete these as she contracted Glandular Fever, fell behind in the work and eventually left. Following a period of unemployment Beth secured an office-related temporary contract with the county council which extended to two years. This was not a time of happiness for her as she says she “hated it” “and the boss was mean”, but alongside this position she was doing part-time youth work one or two evenings a week to gain experience. Beth was very interested in this area. When she was at her first secondary school her Head of Year, who was aware of the bullying she was being subjected to, suggested she join a youth forum.

Beth liked this individual, feeling some congruence with her as she felt her peers bullied this teacher with their unkind comments. She was also pleased to be specifically asked by her to join the forum. This was a turning point for Beth as it led to her involvement in the Kent Youth Council, the UK Youth Parliament and to becoming a Young Volunteer and Director for Connexions. The organisation, now ceased, supported young people with career and life issues. She secured a position as a Young Person’s Researcher with the organisation which meant that she could no longer continue with her voluntary positions, but she did continue with her part-time evening youth work. During this time Beth completed a Foundation Degree. Then Beth was made redundant from her position, despite her protestations that she was now more qualified than a lot of the Personal Advisers employed by the organisation. She sees this as a “horrendous” time in her life, having been a part of Connexions since she was fifteen and knew the people well. She felt it was the “ultimate rejection”.

However, during this period she secured a job at a youth café; confirming her desire to work with young people and enable them to run their own projects. Beth can work independently for much of the time, but there have been issues with management and changes can be problematic. Her boss left and she found herself running day to day activities with little support. The premises are located down a side alley off a main shopping street and there is a car park to the rear for local businesses. The area attracts public urinals and “homeless people poo in the car park”. She was having to deal with these matters during her day

alongside her work with young people and considered leaving the organisation. A new boss was appointed and even though people encouraged her to apply, she decided not to as she knew what was involved. Beth liked managing people, not the premises.

Away from work Beth is a member of the Women's Institute (WI). She says as she is with young people all day it is a "nice balance to have adult conversations". She likes to meet other WI women, "almost changing their view of what a WI should be". she wants to "shake things up".

Beth has recently completed a BA (Hons) in Supporting Young People gaining a First, and she is surprised that she has done so well. She found her experience of studying for her Foundation Degree to be "traumatic" because it was designed for Personal Advisers and she did not have that job role. As a result, she tried to "fit the outcomes" to the role she held and found this to be a "nightmare". Whereas the BA was about things she was "doing anyway" so she found she could write what she wanted to and was interested in.

Research is an area Beth is attracted to and she was keen to take part in the study. When asked about her salient career moments she said two stood out for her. One was the moment she was made redundant and in particular dealing with the Job Centre, where she says she was made to feel like a "fraudster". The other moment was being asked by her Head of Year to go to the youth forum. This is one of her strongest memories of school, remembering it "like a picture in [her] head". She was in an IT room when her Head of Year came over to her and in a whisper told her about the forum. She sees this as a positive life changing moment and it was this moment that she decided to capture using the creative medium of collage, which she considers to be a fun thing to do, more interesting for her than a written form, but also a means for her to provide a "realistic" way to show what was clear in her head.

Beth talked to people close to her about the time she wanted to depict in her collage and found reminiscing helped to 'trigger' memories. She looked back to her relationship with her Head of Year, remembering details such as her personality and the clothes she wore. Beth sees this person as someone who understood what she was going through as a result of being bullied, but also this person saw Beth for who she is. Beth thinks this person had a "big impact" on her life and continues to be an inspiration.

The collage shows her moment but also memories from her teenage years such as pictures of clothing she wore and the music she enjoyed. She explained her music tastes were formed during that era and through her music she made friends. Beth embellished the work with drawings, sequins, beads, concert tickets and other creative elements, placed carefully to depict their importance to her at different points in time. Each artefact had personal meaning to Beth. Beth thinks that taking part in the research process has pieced things together into "a

concrete memory”, so by remembering her salient moment she has also remembered other positive times in her life.

She sees the IT room memory as a turning point and placed this moment in the middle of her work to emphasise this. Beth also placed other elements on her piece, such as logos from work and political organisations, her interests and photos of important people in her life. She acknowledges although her collage is about her life, it is ‘more open’ than that as it is also about the people she knows through her experiences. Yet, it was thinking about the moment she was asked to go to the youth forum that sparked the memories of the other events. The forum and other youth-related activities brought Beth into contact with youth workers, cultivating her desire to become one herself. Today she sees herself as a role model for young people often sharing with those who are experiencing bullying that she was bullied at school and that it does get better with time.

When Beth was asked if anything had changed as a consequence of taking part in the research process, she said coming back and thinking about those bits of her life has made her look at them in a different way, in more detail. As a result, she feels more comfortable about that time, as she has been given the time to think. She says something has changed in her but is not sure what yet; she thinks it might be that she feels, “freer”.

The following excerpts from my journal describes the events prior to, during and after the interviews with Beth.

3/5/2014

Beth lives in town so I park my car at the ‘Park and Ride’ and travel by bus. I can hear the voices of the other passengers but look out of the window turning my face to the heat that is intensified by the glass. I could have parked in town but it was Saturday and likely to be busy. I did not want to come to the interview stressed from trying to find a parking space. Getting off the bus I say, “thanks very much” which is said habitually to this and every Park and Ride bus driver I encounter. I walked up the main shopping street, glancing into shop windows full of brightly coloured clothing, which tempted me to take a detour but I resisted ... Turning a corner, I move into a residential street of terraced houses on one side and a block of flats on the other. I’m approaching a little house next to a pub. This is Beth’s house and the front door is directly off the street. I suddenly feel nervous and am momentarily off-balance. I’m an experienced guidance interviewer but this will be my first interview as a researcher. What if I mess things up? “Well they can’t kill you” says the voice in my head. Okay, here goes. I am about to knock on the door when it is opened by one of her housemates. “Hi, come in, Beth is up”. The front door leads directly into the sitting room and I sit down on a worn sofa to wait for Beth. Another housemate is watching snooker on the large television; it dominates the room. A single curtain was pulled across the window, natural light obscured, creating a dimness of colour so that everything seemed subdued, sporadically interrupted by the flickering brightness emitting from the flat screen. Beth came into the room and the housemates moved away. She turned the volume off but kept the television on. Green baize dominated the room for a moment.

She was still wearing her pyjamas. I'm not surprised about this as she had asked me at our last WI if I would mind as she probably would not have been awake long. She asks if I would mind her having a 'rolly' (rolled up cigarette) and I say, "no problem". Now this is interesting for me as an ex-smoker with strong views on smoking, but I want Beth to be comfortable and relaxed, so put my own views aside. I thank her for agreeing to take part and pass her the consent form and participant information sheet. I was mindful that Beth had work in a couple of hours but I ask her if she minded if we went through the sheet together with me reading it out aloud. I did not want her to think that I was patronising her in any way, but I wanted Beth to have the opportunity to ask questions and voice any concerns. She said that that was fine. I could hear the housemates in the adjoining kitchen but they did not come into the room and soon they moved away so that the room quietened. Outside there was a continuous stream of traffic and a car alarm sounded, twice. I put the audio-recorder on the seat next to Beth. I sat on the floor and she immediately asked me if I wanted to sit next to her concerned for my comfort and I reassured her I was fine where I was. "Okay to start?" Beth nodded and I pressed record.

I asked Beth to tell me a bit about herself and so she told me about how she had lived in Kent since she was two years old. I did not ask about her family and she did not offer anything. I asked about her school life and Beth said that she enjoyed school but not being at school. She explained that she was bullied by a group of girls because, as she said she was different. She spoke in soft tones with a smile in her voice but when she talked of bullying Beth looked away and down for a moment and the smile was gone. In the dimness, I could see a darkening of her eyes as she recollected difficult memories. Her smile returned quickly and I could see the professional Youth Worker taking over. Beth could talk about being bullied and uses the experience to help the young people she works with. There is strength in this young woman which has been born out of adversity.

There is noise and movement in the kitchen as the other occupants of the house try to unobtrusively be quiet but failed in their attempt. I see Beth glance up briefly, a quizzical expression on her face, but it does not put her off her stride and she continued with her story. We move on to moments in her working life which resonate with her and Beth says that she can think of two. The first is when her Head of Year introduced her to the Youth Forum. This was a major turning point for Beth as she came to see that what she had to say could make a difference. The second moment was when she was made redundant and for three months had to sign-on with the Job Centre. The Advisers there made her feel worthless and she sees this moment in her life career as a 'horrendous' time. Beth's face is very expressive and emotions are on view so I felt I could truly 'see' what she went through. With her eyes wide Beth drew me into her story so that I felt I was with her in the Job Centre listening in voyeuristically. I could feel my own emotions bubbling up as I listened to Beth's words and my chest tightened with unreleased outrage. Yet, I stayed focused, looking intently at Beth watching the emotions that flitted across her face. I could hear myself making little sounds of encouragement 'hmm' and nodding simultaneously. When relaying something that may have caused her some pain Beth countered by saying something amusing so that she did not stay in a 'dark place'. Her sense of humour appeared often in the interview so I found myself laughing at the way she relayed aspects of her story. Indeed, I wondered if being able to laugh at life was something that Beth had learned to cultivate to help her in troubled times? Perhaps this is a self-strategy to overcome painful situations and memories?

The interview lasted around 30 minutes which was shorter than I expected but being mindful that Beth had other commitments I wanted to make sure it did not go on too long. Also, I felt that there was sufficient material to go on with. I explained to Beth that if she was willing, I would like her to record a moment of her choosing using a creative practice of her choice. I

asked if there was anything that she had in mind that she would like to do and she said that she would need to think about it. I asked if she would like me to offer some suggestions and she said that she would, so I mentioned various creative writing methods such as scripts, stories, newspaper articles, letters or possibly something art based such as a collage or painting or maybe even textile based. Beth said that she would think about it and I said that the one that brought on a 'gut feeling' is probably the best one. I explained that I would transcribe the interview and send her the transcript to read and comment on if she wished. We would then arrange to meet again to discuss her creative piece and how she felt whilst creating it as well as her feelings about her involvement in the research process. We did not set a date for the next meeting as I did not want Beth to feel pressurised but once I had transcribed the interview I would approach her and tentatively raise the subject.

31/7/2014

I'm seeing Beth at 7pm tonight. Finally, the day has arrived! The recorder has been checked and I've got a spare battery. Let's not take chances! Last night I put together some questions because I felt I needed to. There is a strange security in having something tangible to hold onto. I may not use them as I have written them. When I read them, they sound so formal, 'please could you talk me through what you have created?' Who is this person? The essence of what I am seeking to know is there but the way I have written it sounds like someone else. However, I can change the words and the way I say the words depending on the 'moment of inquiry'.

During the day, my mind kept wandering off and I struggled to focus on the task in hand. I was becoming excited about the interview this evening. What would her creative piece be? Butterflies were doing a 'fandango' in my stomach and I had the urge to squeal out loud like an excited child.

Drove into town, traffic lights green urging me on. Signs everywhere. Detour and an arrow showing the direction to travel. No entry and one way. It struck me that they could be like someone's life-career signs. Some may feel they have no option but to go 'one way'. A path may have a 'no entry' sign or perhaps the 'detours' have moved them away from where they thought they were going. Maybe someone wanted a detour, an opportunity to explore along the way? Parked in a short-stay car park, made sure the car was locked and walked a few feet to Beth's house. I saw a white door and knocked. Lord, I had knocked on the wrong door! Quickly I moved away; actually, I felt like a naughty child playing a childhood game of 'knock down ginger' where you knock on doors and run away. I knocked on another door hoping Beth would answer quickly. "Hi Laurie, come on in" she said very invitingly. I entered quickly... just in case! The curtain was drawn and the room brightly lit. Welcoming. The TV was off. It was just Beth and me. She had hoovered "in case you want to sit on the floor" and I laughed. We talked whilst she made coffee. The audio-recorder had been checked before I left. All good to go. Beth sat on the same seat as in the first interview with 'stuff' next to her on the adjoining space. "Please feel free to have a ciggie" I said (I wanted her to feel relaxed). "Are you sure?" She asked. "Yes, no problem". Whilst she smoked I put the recorder down, this time on the floor and I sat next to it. Beth was higher than me. A position of advantage? When she was ready I pressed start.

I used the questions I had drafted because I wanted to make sure we covered the before during and after. It felt a little awkward for me but Beth responded enthusiastically to each one. She was animated, with wide eyes sparkling and hands that waved and danced through the air. She would lean forward to tell me something then back in her seat once satisfied with her response. At one point, she 'struck a pose' when she jokingly talked about an alternative to her creative piece as 'expressive dance'. When I had come into the room I noticed a white

A3 pad on the floor next to a seat. Beth told me that she had turned it around so I couldn't see it straight away. Then she showed me what she had done. My first thought... amazing. She had created a collage of her life at the time of her moment and as a result of it. There was colour, texture, beads, pictures, sequins... so much detail. She talked me through and as I watched her I saw someone who glowed. She was lit up from within. She spoke fast caught up in the moment of telling. Her pride in what she had created was evident and she beamed dazzling smiles as she looked at her work. I felt honoured to be here with her and to share this precious time. It was like an... awakening for both of us. She had captured something for herself and I felt the power of the impact of a burgeoning concept come to life. She was expressing what I had tentatively hoped would be a result of the process. I wanted to dance around the room but sat still on the floor watching as Beth spoke. As the interview drew to a close I asked Beth about her thoughts and feelings on taking part and she said that there was pressure, because she knew me, to do a good piece but that if she hadn't known me she may not have done so much. A double-edged sword. I hadn't thought about this and on the one hand I can see that people may want to please the researcher if they like them, but I also think that people may want to please themselves too. The joy on Beth's face to me is testimony that she really was happy with her achievement. She said, "everyone should do this" which sums it up, don't you think? I thanked Beth and stopped the recording. She asked me where my idea came from and so I told her my story of what I had done for my MA and how certain life-career moments had resonated with me. I explained that there were times that I had made decisions that were out of character; as if something had driven me forward, that I couldn't explain. An awareness of something but not knowing what it was. Beth immediately said "that's what I'm feeling. Something is different, something has changed". I looked at her and slowly said "for me it is a sort of spiritual thing, not religious, but something is guiding you". Beth replied "Yes, you don't know, but there is something..." I told Beth that I would do the transcript and send it to her as before. We hugged and said goodbye and as I walked away I knew something important had taken place that evening. I felt like a researcher. At her door Beth said to me "You're developing a tool". I replied, "I hope so, something to add to the toolbox".

Analysis

Analysis began prior to the first interview and continued throughout the experiences. Whilst pondering, I recollected elements previously missed. For example, I was nervous about the first interview. By re-immersing myself in the memory of the experience, I remembered a slowing of pace as I approached Beth's house, whereas before I had been ambling along feeling quiet calm; a similar feeling to one I have before a guidance interview. A known, comfortable feeling my tacit knowledge will come to the fore when I need it. Yet, on thinking back, I recalled my pace slowed even more. There was a feeling of apprehension rising from my stomach up my chest, entering my throat, sticking so it felt as if something was lodged, making me swallow frantically, to clear it. It passed quickly and I did not register it at the time. I rarely feel nervous about interviewing so what was different about this interview? I contemplated in my snail pace and it came to me this was not the same as a guidance interview. Even though I knew Beth I did not know about her. I only knew what has been revealed through the WI. The face she shows the public, the role she performs (Goffman, 1959). This revelation fascinated me, but there was something else nagging at me, making my

stomach turn over. I had been waiting for this since I started my study. I was very excited that morning but then felt almost cautious as I was new to this research experience. I know how to interview, but in a professional guidance sense, not as a researcher. Perhaps, I had been too confident it would all work out because ‘I knew what I was doing’. The reality was, I did not know at all. I thought because I knew Beth it would be easier, but maybe, she would not want to reveal something because she knew me?

Additionally, I needed to acknowledge in my desire to know more, I could lead my participants to say something they would not have revealed on their own. For example, when Beth said being made redundant was ‘horrendous’ did I subconsciously want her to reveal more about this time which was painful to her. Was it because I thought it would make for a ‘good story’. In career guidance, I would say, ‘that’s interesting, perhaps you could tell me more’. In a research scenario, the participant may think I as the researcher am interested in their story, so they reveal more than they would normally. Such musings were useful to note for future interviews, but they also show the vulnerabilities of a novice researcher navigating unknown paths. These and other aspects were considered as I explored my findings, informed by an analytical narrative proforma, the transcripts and journal excerpts.

The particularities of Beth’s story

Beth had alluded to her interest in creative art forms during the first interview. Her choice of collage as a creative piece may be viewed as a visual mode of inquiry, showing there is more than one way of understanding a world view (Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010). It became a way for her to see the world using objects or artefacts she had assigned meaning to,

“Cause... I wanted to have like a realistic... because it was so clear in my head... the conversation I had with ... was so clear in my mind I wanted to have sort of realistic bit [‘bit’ emphasised] of that moment”.

Using fragments from the past she could re-create a significant moment and new meaning in the present.

Creswell (2009), proposes understanding to be a co-construction in human interactions which is contextually dependent and results in multiple participant meanings. As such a collage has the potential to induce a myriad of thoughts and emotions when viewed by different audiences. The story accompanying the work, provides the creator’s version of their reality. The plot, the temporal sequencing and the spatial setting, bring it to life. When I and others view this creation, we will each create another version of reality by drawing on our own philosophies, and historical and social contexts, to make meaning from what we see. Thereby, we perpetuate a story in continuous motion.

I asked Beth why she chose this method of creative practice and she said it ‘felt right for her’, providing the realism she wanted. Collage enabled her to make her thoughts tangible. If I had not provided the context, she may not have produced the work to bring forth her thoughts and emotions. She has created a new reality of that experience, her version of the event as she now sees it.

Beth’s collage stirred me emotionally, as the experience brought a concept to life. This was a moment to be cherished. An idea had come to life, with the creation of a piece of work by another, as part of a process I had devised. I felt moved by this person’s excitement and joy in showing me her creation. I examined my subjective involvement in the interaction, as it shaped the way I viewed the material (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) and found it was not possible to remain detached and neutral. Rather, I embraced the moment and listened intently as Beth explained how she created her work. She had placed an image of the back of her head centrally on an A3 page and just above it, drawings of her teacher and her teenage self sitting at a computer, to depict the moment her Head of Year had asked her to go to the youth forum. To the left of the image, she had carefully positioned artefacts which held meaning for her. These related to life events occurring on a time continuum with her chosen moment. She assigned importance to her moment, not only by placing it in the middle of her page, but she assigned it a place of historical significance as a unique occurrence.

Ricouer (1980), refers to this phenomenon as ‘within time-ness’ where specific features stand apart from linear time, which continues to flow passively in the background. As such, Beth provided a plot to her story by explaining what was happening alongside the event. She talked about clothing she wore at the time, family interactions and musical influences. As Beth was telling me the story of her creation, an item fell to the floor and she said, “*Oh, don’t break it!*” Even if the piece is not replaced it has left a trace of its existence on the collage (Holbrook and Pouchier, 2014) and consequently, has a place in the context of its creation. Further, Kato and Morita (2010), consider collage as a reflection of the personality of its creator. By including fragments such as music festival tickets, beads and a piece of cloth, Beth has offered the viewer an insight into her character.

To the right of the central images she had included elements from more recent events, some as a result of participating in the youth forum, suggesting her involvement with them stemmed from the original moment. She has surrounded her moment with supplementary moments. By placing her salient moment in the middle of the piece, she is signifying to the viewer its importance to her in the melange of events that were occurring in a similar time frame and the events which followed, bringing her up to the present time. I was struck by the depth of content, the people and events that have touched her life. One memory has evoked a

cornucopia of others and as she explained their inclusion in the piece, her voice undulated in pitch and tone to tell a story of ‘adventure’ and personal discovery. I view her work as a ‘life-collage’; a piece that was more than her significant moment, but one that historically placed a past moment within her present social and cultural context.

Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) suggest, collage offers a way to see the world using objects that are assigned meaning from the way they are positioned. Beth did not just cover the page in a ‘slap dash’ fashion but carefully thought through the process and positioned the artefacts,

“Hmmm... I think because by that point I had thought about it loads so I knew what it was gonna... I had in my head what it would look like and when I sorta sketched it out and sorta measured things a little bit I sorta knew what I expected. But it is better, better than I thought”.

Later in the interview, she told me she was surprised by the finished piece and truthfully, I was surprised too, because of the depth of content to the work and the investment of her time in producing the piece. I am reminded of the importance of fostering a trusting relationship with participants and taking the time to create such an environment may produce positive outcomes for all parties involved. It would be prudent at this stage to include the image of Beth’s work which she entitled ‘A Moment in Time’. The teacher’s name and that of the school have been covered by Beth to preserve anonymity.

cared about or was up to or y'know... and yeah... I think... everyone should do this!... Y'know... yeah, I think I feel something different but I'm not exactly sure what it is... maybe freer... maybe”.

I tried to rephrase the question to help her and this led me to ponder if I had pushed her to say something I may have wanted to hear. Interestingly, after the interview had concluded, Beth asked me how the idea for the study had been derived and I explained how I felt in what I term a ‘spiritual moment’, when I knew a decision I was making was right for me. Did I say too much? I do not believe so as it is through sharing my own thoughts and feelings that Beth was able to express that she was feeling ‘freer’. Together we were able ‘to make visible the invisible’ (Kvale, 1996, p6). I also noted that something had changed in me too, I now felt like a researcher.

The extract discussed earlier, involved Beth thinking about aspects of her life and she acknowledged she now thought about them in a different, more detailed way. Butler-Kisber (2010) on considering collage as a research tool, suggests it can be a technique to make thoughts ‘concrete’ (p103). The word implies setting something into a solid foundation and I was intrigued as Beth had used the same word to describe her thinking. Her participation has also appeared to help re-enforce a sense of personal worth,

“... I think I'm proud of my piece but I'm really proud of myself [said quietly but with conviction]... But it's always nice to actually think about... y'know... and I've achieved loads as well!”

In the first interview, we had discussed how her individuality had not been recognised by her school peers and as a result she had been bullied. This could be deemed a ‘moral injury’ as connoted by Honneth (2001), when the individual recognises something may not be right for them, but also that they are not socially accepted and recognised for their individuality. They seek a way of life where they will be accepted and encouraged as they form their life experiences. Honneth (ibid), considers three patterns of recognition: love, legal order and solidarity. Love is beyond the control of the individual but when received we feel a sense of self-assurance. We receive legal recognition when we are accepted and share commonality with our community, there is a sense of solidarity with others. When people encounter these patterns in their social worlds they can relate to themselves with self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Reference is made to a ‘sense of belonging’ when Beth first joined the youth forum. Here she recognised a congruence with her own viewpoint, *“because I thought this is like something I should be doing”*. Within the field of Career Guidance, theorists such as Holland (1997), propose individuals look for occupations that are compatible with their particular interests. Indeed, Beth recognised the possibility for a future occupation *“... I guess also the people that ran it were like quite... I thought ‘like wow, I might do that job!’”* In short, she felt a sense of solidarity.

Further, the influencing factors that can impinge on an individual's career are considered by McMahon (2011) when discussing the System Theory Framework, a metatheoretical framework which consists of multi-layered content and process influences. With regard to content, the holistic nature of career development is illustrated through three interconnecting systems: individual, social and environmental-social. How individuals see their existence in the world and how they depict their understanding of what they see in their stories, is influenced by their social spheres which include their families, friends, study and work. The environmental-social system consists of the possible wider elements that could influence a person such as socio-economical, geographical, political, historical and globalisation. Process influences include age, personality and ability. Additionally, the stories an individual tells may have an adaptable quality as they can be influenced by chance events, possibly changing over time depending on the process and content influences that inform their world. Therefore, the multi-dimensional nature of these influences can be seen as complex and interactional. Decision-making could be deemed to contain both micro processes as consideration is given to the immediate influencing systems and macro processes which consider the on-going changes an individual will face, influenced by the external factors they may not have control over. This then is reflected in how they adapt to changes in their career pathways over time. Systems Theory Framework does not offer specific details of the influences and McMahon acknowledges this, defending the concept by stating that the detail is not the intention of the framework. Individuals provide details through their personal stories and gain meaning from their career influences.

Beth has through the creation of her collage, been made consciously aware of her achievements and has a heightened sense of self. The change would appear to be both internal and external as she has not only engaged with a different way of thinking but also, through the tangible existence of her collage, has brought her implicit assumptions into the present by piecing together fragments from her past.

In saying she felt 'freer' she could be suggesting she has been released by something or that she has noticed a mental change. Either way she has learnt something that she was not aware of previously; she has moved from being to becoming as she considered her changed state. Jarvis (2006), contemplates this concept and reflects that being and becoming lie at the heart of thinking about learning. 'Learning is the process of being in the world...' (ibid, p6) and according to Jarvis it is not only what is learnt but what the learner is becoming as a result of their doing, thinking and feeling. Therefore, being 'freer' could reflect a way Beth now sees her place in her world. This could result in her taking some action or not, whichever way, she is changed by the experience. It could be inferred that the research process and interview interactions have effected transformative learning in which frames of reference, the structures

of our assumptions through which we understand our experiences, has changed (Mezirow, 2000). Perhaps then for Beth, the research process could be deemed an emotional learning process which has brought about a subjective reframing and a sense of emancipation. Maybe, this is the biographicity Alheit (1992) discusses where new biographical knowledge is incorporated into personal meaning-making to inform self-reconstruction.

Timing and how it can affect the choice of the moment was also considered. Beth said she wanted to choose a moment that would be ‘comfortable’ to record,

“I thought actually that it would be more comfortable and nicer to produce something and think about something lots that was a more positive about a sort of change or moment or whatever rather than something that might be a bit depressing to make”.

I questioned her reasoning, as we had discussed in the first interview the positivity that had emerged because of being made redundant. She responded that the moment she had chosen had been a more distant memory and as such, was easier for her to consider. Therefore, timing could factor in deliberations according to how participants view their significant moments. For some, more recent events could be difficult to record if their memory of the event is still ‘raw’, a word that Beth had used in the interaction. She wanted it to be enjoyable, to record and chose a moment she felt would not be depressing,

“I think maybe if I had maybe done something like being made redundant... that would have been quite horrible to make... to, to sort of sit and put together. So I think that might... that would be something ... you don’t want to go round and upset people...”

What if someone wants to record such a moment? It is their choice, but as a researcher I may feel a sense of responsibility if the outcome is not positive for them and question my trust in my participant to do what they feel is right for themselves. Memory can create a portal to past experiences, but it can also censor those we do not want to recall with clarity (Chang, 2008). As a researcher, I need to be mindful, as I am asking a participant to create a tangible form of a moment in time that holds significance for them, but also, what they create will be their version of the event depicted by the method they choose. My purpose is to provide a credible interpretation of the shared interaction that follows the creative episode. Such thoughts shadowed me throughout this work and needed acknowledgement.

Beth did not want to record a moment she saw as ‘depressing’, choosing instead one she assigned as ‘nicer’ even though it could be deemed a time of unhappiness due to being bullied. However, Beth’s chosen moment, her interaction with her teacher, stood out for her due to the positive significance she gave it. Essentially, she analysed her place in the study by considering the merits of a particular moment. In being more ‘comfortable’, did she mean that

she would feel greater control over her emotions? The moment chosen was more distant on her lifeline than the one she deemed depressing yet, was remembered with clarity. Perhaps the memory evoked a different set of emotions from her viewpoint even though it was associated with being bullied at school. Maybe the salient moment become more so if the circumstances that surround it conflict with a person's desired worldview. Perhaps it is like a path in a forest to guide us when we are feeling lost, as suggested by Formenti (2015).

I consider the moment stood out for Beth because of the trauma she felt at the time and perhaps she saw it as a way forward out of the 'dark'. Beth explained she did not want to focus on the bullying aspect of that time as it would be as if "*you're basically bullying yourself...*" Rather, by recalling this salient moment she has been able to focus on things that happened outside of school and these have become much clearer to her, evoking positive thought and emotion, whilst the bullying is slipping further away.

Interestingly, Beth has not dismissed the possibility of recording the moment she was made redundant, but has assigned it a place in a possible future story "*Yes and I think that maybe in ten years it might be about being made redundant*". Earlier in this work reference was made to Hollway and Jefferson (2000), who suggest memory works biographically and earlier events can be reworked in light of later meanings. Therefore, timing may affect how people choose their salient moment, considering how they choose to remember it.

The importance of 'others'

Significant others in Beth's life were included on the collage produced. She talked about her relationship with her brother and how as a result of taking part in the study she had the opportunity to reminisce with him about the chosen moment,

"Yeah and particularly with Rob because obviously Rob was there so it was nice ... we went to the pub and he stayed round the other night and we had a drink and stuff and we chatted loads ... and it was really nice like having that little 'remembering buddy'. 'Cause you don't... really chat about that normally because we both don't normally... unless something happens you don't... and usually those things are bad..."

She called him her 'remembering buddy'. Reminiscing with him was something that she had not done before so it could be suggested that discussing a shared moment could enable a participant to 'connect' with significant others in a different way. It could also foster a change in relationships and how the 'significant other' views their world as a result. They may now think differently about a point in time and as such undergo an internal change. Reference is also made to the friends who helped her to recollect,

"I think it was just sort of like lots of... reminiscing really and sort of... it made me and Claire talk about stuff [lodger and friend] and Rob [brother]

and stuff... It was interesting to talk to other people about it. Everyone else was ... you know like... not contributed but triggered things in my brain...”

From the above extract, it is interesting to see how Beth engaged with others who helped her to ‘see’ fragments of memory she was then able to make tangible through the collage. These people are members of her community and according to Law’s Community Interaction Theory (1981), the exchanges we have with our community members can influence our life-career decision-making. Indeed, our values and ingrained assumptions are born from interactions with those we consider to be significant in our lives, be they family, friends or others. Of course, as we mature, we may be assimilated into different community groups and take on new concepts and beliefs. Yet, our core values can still have the potential to influence us in our later years. I suggest, in deference to Jarvis (2006), Beth had gained self-knowledge from her interactions with others and as a result elicited change by connecting her inner and outer worlds.

When considering significant others, a ‘role model’ was noted as the teacher who influenced her at the time of her chosen moment,

“she had such a big impact on my life and I hadn’t really thought about her before y’know ... she’s obviously had a big inspiration to me like even now like...”

She has made passing reference to her teacher when talking to young people in her work but by taking part in the research Beth has re-connected with her memories of this individual. As a result, she sees and is able to articulate the continued impact she feels this person has on her life. The process appears to have made her think more deeply about the relationship, giving her the space to reflect and to acknowledge the continuing importance of this individual. One moment in time has continued to influence her life. As such, there is a continuum of the moment. Just as time flows continuously, the moment is trickling quietly alongside life events waiting to be acknowledged, and once this is done, will recede until it is brought forth again. Therein, salient career moments continue to be so until a new moment occurs, then the others will fade further away to be locked into the recesses of our minds.

The teacher’s positioning as a role model was re-enforced as a result of thinking about the collage. Savickas (2011) when considering Career Construction Theory, which views career as a story, notes the importance of role models in our lives. Role models are seen as external influences whereas guides such as our parents, are our inner others. Some may see parents as role models but they are not chosen, whereas individuals do choose their external modelling influences. Savickas suggests individuals are architects of their own characteristics and provide ‘blueprints’ to solve their own problems. We select a role model to provide some solution to our life dilemma. Often these people have characteristics we admire and want to

include in our own self-concepts. We adopt and adapt these characteristics until they become our own. Indeed, according to Savickas, our role models may provide our first career choice because we admire them for particular reasons. It could be possible that a teacher as a role model may encourage a desire to enter an educationally related career. Role models may not be personally known to the individual but the relationship could be 'imagined' as with celebrities. Here, the individual uses their chosen role model's perceived characteristics to make meaning and sense of their own life. Individuals imitate and adapt these traits to fit their own specific purpose and meaning. As such role models, whether physically in our lives or not, may reveal characteristics individuals feel are needed to overcome their life predicament. Beth saw in her teacher characteristics she admired and felt supported by her in a time of need. The research process unlocked distant memories of this person.

Butler-Kisber (2010), discusses a PhD student from the University of Alberta whose work with her three participants led to unlocking '... distant memories and opened up the depth and peripheries of their discussions' (p115). Beth had created a space for herself and others to discuss and reminisce about past events by utilising her position in the research process. Moreover, the knowledge created in shared interactions has the potential to move beyond the spaces we create into the wider world where they potentially can influence the thinking of others.

Although Beth and I had forged a positive interview relationship there was one point that caused some concern and it would be prudent to reflect on this area.

Area to consider

I came to know of Beth through professional interactions and membership of the WI. What I know is what Beth has portrayed to me and I did not know details of her story until I interviewed her. However, our relationship has raised an issue which needs further thought. Beth told me she felt under pressure to create a 'good piece' because she knew me, but also acknowledged that if she had not known me she may not have engaged in the process in the same way,

"... it would have been less stressful if I didn't know you 'cause I was like "I really want Laurie to like...please like.." so I guess if it was just a stranger... but then if it was a stranger I might not have got so... you know... tried so hard".

Initially deflated, I concluded people may want to please a researcher if they like them, as noted by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), but they could also want to please themselves by creating something they can take pride in. Others who participated in the study may know me in various ways and I needed to be mindful of the feelings of all those involved.

By considering my position within the research I turned inward which enabled me to see myself as an 'other' in the process (Foley, 2002). The addition of the researcher's physical and mental being in the work provides verisimilitude and asks that reader(s) respond to the unique voice of the autoethnographer (Chang, 2008).

Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions

To answer the first question 'how do creative practices help individuals to 're-visit' their salient career moments', I needed to look at what happened in Beth's moment of creativity. I went back again and looked at the transcript; I was searching for the particularities. Beth told me the process made her think again about her chosen moment and this was not something she would normally do. She might mention an aspect of her school life to one of her 'young people', but she would not focus so intently on this one aspect of her life. Being asked to capture her moment using a creative method, had in short, made her reckon with time (Ricoeur, 1980) as she thought about aspects of the moment.

She entered a process whereby she moved backward and forward as she talked with others who were in her life at that time and in her life now. She said it, "*triggered things in my brain*". The pendulum motion of her thinking and the way she captured this thinking, she felt did not result in a painful reminiscence but instead, appears to have brought her happiness as she recalled positive aspects of her life-career.

When Beth said she was surprised by the emotions of her memories, I considered the second question 'how do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?' Maybe, the process of creativity heightened her emotional responses to her memories. Items which meant something to her in her past, once again found veneration through the physicality of making a collage and mental recollection. These items put Beth on the page and placed her in a moment in time. The collage therefore captured Beth in a way she wanted to portray her past self in a present moment.

Beth feels her moment of creativity started a thinking process and created a change in her thinking and feeling. What did this mean? My feeling is Beth sensed the beginning of something new in her life-career brought on by reflecting on her creative piece and being reflexive in the moment of her creativity. She talked about how the process made her memory 'concrete' as the pieces were brought together. She was able to explain each aspect of the collage and why it was being included. These were important items in the life of the sixteen-year-old Beth. They had a sacred quality, being placed with reverence. Through the process Beth gained clarity of her own thinking and she may return to thinking about her creativity, when she is feeling uncertain of the future. She could recall her sense of pride in her achievements and if she keeps her work, she will have a tangible reminder of her moment of

creativity. Beth felt her collage was, “*good enough to show the importance of the moment*” and she chose to do a collage as it offered a realism to her moment. The personal pride Beth felt in her collage and her achievements was a self-recognition of her own worth which culminated in a sense of freedom, in feeling ‘freer’ as she saw the past anew through fresh eyes.

However, the third question_‘what part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?’, is I think, more problematic. Beth chose a moment when she was sixteen years old. At this time, she may have considered life-career decisions from a present and not future perspective, as noted by Greenbank (2014), and joined the youth forum to have time off school. Yet, she appears to have recognised congruence with her interests as she had begun to consider the role of Youth Worker as a future career path,

“It’s weird because ... I... sort of decided I want to be a Youth Worker because having worked with youth workers because some of them were really good and some of them were really crap... And so I thought ‘oh, why not do this’ ... so I did I guess”.

She also trusted her teacher so perhaps her perception together with her teacher’s recommendation, led her to taking a chance. As such, Beth’s life-career decision-making during her salient moment, could have been a blending of non-rational and ration thinking. Beth had yet to acquire the skills to be a Youth Worker but the youth forum was to become catalyst for change in her life, enabling her to access future opportunities.

This chapter has reflected on the interactions with the first ‘other’ participant in my study. The experiences brought forth feelings of excitement as I saw an idea that had been in my head for some time, come to fruition. There had also been feelings of fear and trepidation when faced with the possibility that I may have caused another to feel stressed and pressurised. Even though these feelings had been discussed during the interview, they continued to reside in the recesses of my mind. Yet, it may be that a certain amount of gentle stress could aid a creative process and feeling a little pressurised could spur an individual to action. My participant felt her state of flux was partly due to our previous relationship, but then came to suggest if she had not known me she may not have produced the collage she is so proud of. These words make my thoughts tangible and in doing so I show my vulnerability; I share intimate elements of myself that Ellis (2006) considers to be a way of being for an autoethnographer. I had moved into a strange landscape with these first interviews and traversed a road that was both unknown and at times frightening. I did not know what it was to do research, but through the interaction and the ensuing written account, I began to feel something akin to a researcher.

To close, I wanted to capture Beth's personality and the sunny nature she shows the world.
Whilst engaged in mundane household chores the following poem came to me: -

Sunshine Child

Sunshine Child

*You shine bright like the sun
this morning.*

New Day.

*You speak of grey days
when you could have drowned
but you swam against the tide
to the shore.*

*You grew out of the storm
to find a sunny place.*

Sunshine Girl.

Now keep shining.

Chapter 7

Carol's Story

30/10/2014

I'm sitting here trying to focus but struggling. I look out of the study window and see the little tree on the other side of the street. Dwarfed by two tall giants still cloaked in green, the little tree is adorned with flame coloured leaves and bright red berries. With each gust of wind, she sheds her leaves. Soon she will bear the nakedness of winter as will the giants next to her. But winter will eventually end to turn into spring with life anew. I turn back to my diary and pause. I'm thinking of tomorrow and my new participant. She is coming to my home, her choice. How do I feel about this? I step into their lives so why shouldn't she step into mine. Will I play the part of welcoming host and the interviewer? The thing that is on my mind is will I remember that I am the researcher? Can I separate myself into those different roles? I don't think so because one informs the other and is being informed by my surroundings and those who come into them. This is my world, if I let people in it is my choice.

Introduction

I met Carol some years ago, whilst working in a college as a Career Guidance Adviser. Carol was supporting students with their additional learning needs. We had chatted in the refectory about her working situation and I had offered guidance on possible options available to her. My words had stayed with her. Years later, out of the blue, I received a message via a social media platform from someone who I used to work for, asking if I would see her colleague privately for career guidance. The colleague turned out to be Carol. I arranged a meeting in a café near my home. Once I saw Carol, I could put the name to the face and recalled that I had met her before. As our discussion developed I wondered if she would be interested in taking part in the study. When I broached the subject she immediately said yes, as it sounded like something she would be interested in.

In this chapter I attempt to show her story as an expression of written words, but her spoken words were so much richer, imbued with textual tones. I do not want my words to be an unethical violation (Josselson, 1996) of Carol, rather a gentle touch that caresses her. Whilst working, I asked myself “are there any connections to my own story?” and discovered we have fought with demons of self-doubt, share a love for learning and strive for recognition through academic qualifications. A discussion will consider the process adopted for capturing a salient moment using a creative medium of Carol's choice, and her reasoning behind her depiction. Finally, I will return to the research questions and explore if Carol's story can provide any insights.

Carol's story

A woman of middle years, Carol has lived most of her life in the county of Kent. She is the middle child of three, having an older and younger brother. When Carol was five or six her father left home. She always felt responsible for her mother who was a “manic depressive”

and later an alcoholic. From the age of seven, she had memories of not leaving her mother on her own, even though she would then be left on her own when her mother went out. When Carol was sixteen she left to “get out” of her home. She thinks her mother was “probably devastated”, but Carol left because of her. Her mother died over twenty years ago.

Carol did not finish her education or take any exams as she was looking after her mother, but she remembers a subject she did well in at school was Child Care. Though she had issues with the teacher and had missed many sessions, she did sit the mock exam achieving a result of around ninety-six percent. The teacher announced it to the class as “the most disappointing result of all” as she had the top mark. She left school at sixteen and went to the local college a year later, with her mother, to study GCSE Maths and English. However, she became pregnant with her daughter, “dropped the maths” but continued with the English and attained a ‘C’ grade. So, at eighteen Carol was a “stay-at-home mother” and then at twenty, she got pregnant with her eldest son. When she was four or five months pregnant she had to go into hospital and when she came out she discovered that the children’s father was having an affair with her best friend. Although they denied it, she knew. Carol’s mother told her “men do that when your pregnant” and that it would be fine, so Carol waited, but eventually she made her partner leave when her son was a week old. She had “always wanted” what she never had “which was a family for her children”, but part of her would not “pretend” that nothing had happened. She could not “compromise”. Now, with two children she thought her life was over. First, she cried a lot, then she decided that “he was not going to get the better of” her or see her “as being weak”. She told herself that she did not need anyone and kept busy to stop herself thinking. Carol admits that if a health visitor had called on her she would have asked them to take the baby away; “luckily” they never came. Things started to change.

A point came when Carol tried working as a nursery nurse, an early career ambition, but it did not work out. She then signed up to do a college secretarial course which seemed perfect as it had nursery places for her children. However, on contacting the authorities she was told that she would not be available for work if she went to college. She reasoned she was not available for work with two small children under five, and that the course would enable her to gain paid work when they went to school. The system did not support her. Then Carol met Mark, a moment in her life she sees as significant as she had already met someone before him, whom she fell for emotionally, but this person had a partner and a child. Even though she was now with Mark the other man persisted in calling her. She knew she had to make a decision and thought Mark had a good job and seemed to be “stable”, whereas the other man was “for all the reasons” wrong. She ignored the calls and eventually they stopped. Carol remembers her thoughts being practical; she decided with her head not her heart.

Mark drank heavily, like her mother, and over the years the situation deteriorated. Family holidays were painful memories. By now she had her third child, another son, and when he was at school Carol got a job so she could have her own money. Around this time, she gave Mark an ultimatum that if he did not marry her they were finished. She thought if he married her he would change and “be more like a husband should be”. She does not recall having a mum and dad at home so she did not have anything to go by. She believed people should “stand by” what they said, “be united” for the children. When her eldest son was around eleven she and Mark divorced, and a few years later she met and married Stuart. When she was with Mark they had moved to the country in an effort to stem his drinking and when they divorced she kept the house. Stuart moved in with her and they were to be together for twelve years. He had been in the army and to start with things seemed fine. He always drank but it got worse. Eventually they turned to marriage counselling to save the relationship and Stuart would stop drinking for a time but slowly he would go back again. He became “paranoid”, ringing her at work until in the end Carol just said, “I want a divorce” and left. She was at work and she is not sure if she texted him or rang him, but she never went home again. This was hard for her as she had taken on the house after she had separated from Mark. One of her biggest regrets is what her children went through whilst she was with Stuart. Today when she talks about her children Carol’s joy and pride are evident. Carol says they are all very “resilient”.

Throughout her relationships, Carol had continued to develop her professional working life and admits that one of the main arguments she had with Stuart revolved around working and training. In a previous role, she managed a learning support centre which brought her into contact with the head of the local borough, head teachers, parents and others, yet Carol did not feel it was a lot of responsibility at the time and attributes this to having a good line-manager. In her current role in a college, she line-manages a team to ensure that students have the right support to meet their learning needs. She has undergone various courses including Assessor and Teacher Training for Specific Learning Difficulties, a Foundation Degree in Learner Support and a science GCSE in case she decided to become a qualified teacher. She gained a Maths GCSE in her thirties. Carol feels she lacks confidence in her ability, saying she needs a qualification so that she does things “the right way”. She is not happy in her current job, feeling she does not have time for people and finds herself becoming frustrated. She thinks that it might be time for a change, maybe move away from organising and back to interacting with parents. She remembers enjoying work in the past and not being stressed by it. Carol understands “the powers to be” frustrations and can see they often have “many plates spinning” at the same time.

When considering life-career moments two stand out for Carol. The first is the moment she decided “to go with Mark” and the second is more work-based. Her eldest son had learning difficulties and Carol used to volunteer in his class during the day, whilst working nights in a supermarket. She had just got married and she was not sure that she was looking for a job, but one day when she was at home scanning through a free newspaper, she saw a job advertisement for someone to support a child with autism. The closing date was the following day. The advert was “tiny”, not even in the jobs section; she does not know how she saw it, but she thought it looked “good”. She did not even know where the school was, but she found herself driving for an hour to get the application form, taking it home, completing it and then driving back to deliver it the next day. Carol asks herself why she was looking in that part of the paper and says that most of her jobs have happened like that, the ones she has gone for. She has either been asked to do a job or has thought that it looked interesting. Over eighty people went for the position advertised in that paper but she got the job.

That job led to others, again they just seemed to happen but with each position Carol took on more responsibility until she was running one of only two support centres for primary aged students in the country. Her centre was part of a main primary school and due to funding issues and a new Head, she decided to make a change and applied for a position working in a college which eventually led to the position she now holds. She thinks her best moments have been when she was excited about a position but not “fazed” by the application process.

When asked to create a piece to depict a salient moment of her choosing, Carol had originally decided to construct a mind map using a computer, but she became frustrated when that did not work for her. Carol felt she was “no good at writing”; she “hates putting words down on paper”, so this method was not for her either. She left it for a while and started to think about what she wanted to include. She came to see a focal point and that things before that point and things after that point, were key factors in where she is today. In the end, she decided to draw a picture with her “lightbulb” moment placed in the centre and other moments positioned around it.

At each stage in her career, Carol can name the person who helped her; many have become her friends. Carol thinks people “saw something” in her; she always wanted to be part of the planning process showing her interest in what was best for the students she supported, making sure they had access to education. In turn, she feels she gained new skills to help her to support them better. However, Carol struggles to accept that people would want to recommend her, but her self-confidence is slowly growing. In constructing her creative piece, Carol recalled when people said she was good at something, such as when she was a

child and taught her friend's little sister to read. Teaching her friend's sister was a forgotten memory but Carol recalled a "good feeling" that people recognised a talent in her.

She enjoyed teaching and looking after others, but a teaching career was something Carol thought was out of her reach as it would involve university. She was not "a degree student" and university was not something that she could "aim for". Becoming a Nursery Nurse was what she felt was available to her, but this was not to be. Later her desire to learn and help others was tested when her son did not receive the support he needed at school. No one was listening to her, so she started to research his learning needs. Eventually he was referred to a paediatrician who told her that as his mother, Carol should say what she felt was wrong. She was "blown" away because this was the first person to hear her. It had been a lot of work, but someone finally listened. Today she still enjoys passing on her knowledge to others.

When Carol looks back to her "light bulb" moment she does not know why she happened to look in that part of the paper at that time and thinks it might have been "fate". Carol thinks "something happens because something else happens" and "that everything happens for a reason". She thinks "of roads leading off roads" and that "every negative has a positive". She believes "that we have paths and our paths lead us to our destiny".

On finishing her piece Carol's immediate thoughts related to how many positives it contained; positive memories and the recognition of people's belief in her. She also concluded that she wanted to top-up her degree. This mattered to her and she wanted it not for professional reasons, but for herself. It was unfinished business. As a result of taking part in the research process, Carol feels things have changed for her. She is more confident about her strengths and abilities at home and at work. The process has given her time to reflect on certain aspects of her life and to consider the emotions and feelings her reflections have raised. She can re-evaluate things and when she looks at others she now thinks we all have our fears. She does not panic as much as she did before which she attributes to being more confident because she now feels "proud of her achievements", "of where [she is] and the paths [she has] travelled". The creative piece has been a significant factor in how she now feels as it has been like putting together "pieces of a jigsaw". She gave herself time to "stop and reflect", to remember "different parts". Carol felt that the experience had been rewarding for her.

Next, I offer journal excerpts to evidence my thoughts and feelings during my interactions with Carol.

31/10/2014

Today I'm seeing Carol at around 5.30-6.00pm. When I woke up this was my first thought. It's Halloween tonight and I'm wondering how I can stop children knocking on my door whilst we're talking. I decide to put a bowl of sweets on the door mat with a note 'please do not knock as I am busy but you can take a sweet from the bowl. Happy Halloween!'. The

nagging worry at the back of my mind is that she won't find me even though I gave her my postcode for her sat nav. My stomach is churning; I'm already getting nervous ...

Whilst doing housework I've been thinking about this evening. How will I greet her? "Hi, come in" or "Welcome, come on in" or "Hello Carol, come in". It seems silly to consider such a small thing but it will be dreadful to give the wrong impression. "What would be the wrong impression?" says the voice in my head. "The one that makes me sound too formal". "Then be yourself!" comes the quick retort. It's 10.20 and the house is tidy. Check the audio-recorder – clear some recordings – left some recordings. Choose a file – okay ready. Paperwork is ready. For goodness sake relax! The sun is streaming in through the window. It hits a glass object on the window sill and casts a slash of bright colour on the grey carpet. "Grandma there's a rainbow on the floor!" My granddaughter's voice fills my head as I recall the moment she discovered the 'magical' room that is my study. Magical for me because of the peace I feel when the words flow like rivers through my veins to emerge on the laptop screen. Alchemy! Magical for her because this is where rainbows live – purple, blue, green, yellow and orange vivid against the muted carpet. The heat of the day, warm for October, hits my back, spreads across my shoulders to hug me, hold me and tell me 'it will be okay'. I smile now feeling calmer. The magic has worked.

3.30pm. I've done the ironing, all clean and smelling of newness. Shall I light a candle to make her feel at home? Am I trying to seduce her by making her feel warm and cosy so that she will open herself to me? Why am I even having this conversation with myself? There is a constant chatter going on and it's been pecking at me all day. Peck shall I do this peck how about... peck... I'll just... peck... Stop please! Silence... then... peck... peck... I give up. Let it wash over me and I will become subsumed in the noise, I will submerge beneath the waves and surface anew.

Will she come, will she come... I begin to doubt. The phone rings, it's Carol. "Hello Laurie, I'm lost". My body relaxes from the tautness that had invaded it. Quickly I gave her instructions. There is a knock on the door and a mini skeleton, a witch and an incredibly cute dinosaur look up at me when I open the door. These 'trick or treaters' are duly rewarded with lurid packaged sweets. A car stops across the road. Lights are switched off and a person steps out to look around. I move quickly to open the door and wave as I step outside, standing underneath the external house light so I can be seen easily. It works and she waves in return. I say "Hello, come on in". ... I offer coffee and walk into the kitchen, switching the outside light off as I pass the switch to deter little callers, and put the kettle onto boil. Carol follows me in, we talk about her journey and I thank her for coming.

We take our drinks into the lounge (I've always called it a lounge and others may say sitting room. Isn't language funny?) ... Carol sits on the large sofa; I had gently directed that she sit in a particular place and I chose to sit in my usual 'spot'. This was my comfort zone, the place I watch TV from, knit and do other crafts. My spot. The large bay window looks out onto the now quiet road and the soft glow of a street lamp dimly lights the area within its grasp.

The paperwork and audio-recorder had been placed on the coffee table earlier. I had thought about sitting at the dining table at the end of the through lounge but this seemed cosier, more inviting. The candle I had also placed on the coffee table earlier remained unlit, not a necessary accompaniment. I gave her the participant sheet to read, silence fell as she perused the contents. My instinct was to read it as I had done for a previous interview but this time it felt right to pass it over to the participant. When she had read it we both signed the consent sheets. Carol had mentioned that she wasn't creative and I said, "not to worry, it can be what you want it to be" and offered a help sheet. I placed the audio-recorder between us and switched it on. I asked Carol about her background, if she would be willing to share a little of her family details. I wasn't expecting what I heard. I wasn't expecting anything but what she

said immediately made me listen more intently. She talked about how her father left when she was a child and of her mother's depression and addiction to alcohol; of leaving home at sixteen, of being a mother at eighteen and of failed relationships. She spoke with little emotion in her voice, occasionally laughing when she said something disparaging about herself. When she spoke about her background she looked off into the distance, only occasionally glancing at me. It was as if she was giving a statement, 'this happened, then this happened...' As the interview continued I came to see that this was a 'safety mode'. This woman has had to be resilient, she had to survive and she did. I felt myself leaning forward and I wanted to put my hand out to touch her arm, to offer comfort and reassurance, but instead my hands stayed in my lap. I felt there was a well of emotion walled up inside her. If I showed my emerging feelings would it burst the dam? As I looked into her eyes I could see that the answer was 'no'. I sat back in my seat, hugging the corner of the chair.

We moved on to talk about her moment. Carol told me it was when she saw a small ad in a free newspaper to support an autistic child in a primary school. Her son had 'special needs' so it immediately caught her attention. She couldn't remember where she was when she saw the advert, but she could still see it in her mind and her fingers expressed the size of the ad in the paper. Carol rang the school and was told the final day for applications was the next day. She didn't know what possessed her, but she got in her car and drove to the school, it was a heavy traffic time, drove home, filled in the forms and drove back the next day. She could have ignored it but somehow, she knew she had to apply. When the interview had finished and I had talked about the creative piece, Carol and I talked more about her moment. It was to be the catalyst that sparked her career in specific educational needs. As she talked about her work her eyes shone. This was something that she had achieved for herself through hard work and determination. I felt in awe of this woman who kept going despite what had happened in her personal life. We talked about her children and what they were doing and her pride was all too evident in both her tone of voice and her facial expressions. Carol smiled throughout the interview, but I sensed the sadness behind the façade. Inside I cried for her but she wouldn't want my tears. When I had asked about her background she said her life was ordinary. Carol's life is what she knows and from her viewpoint, it is ordinary. Yet from my mind it is extraordinary; telling the story of a woman who has traversed difficult terrain but who keeps moving forward.

She left just before 7.00pm. As I closed the door it was as if a barrier came down. I felt very emotional, almost tearful and there was a dull ache in my head. Words were in my mind. Resilient, woman, child, responsibility, learning in later life, vulnerable, need, love... The ache became stronger. Time to stop. Tiredness seeps through me and I allow it to take over. The transcript will have to wait as there are other things to do for my Supervisors first. I agreed to do the interview tonight because it suited my participant. I have another interview lined up to take place in a couple of days on Sunday morning, again because it suited my participant. I feel the pressure on myself and wonder what I am doing, why put myself in this position? The answer comes back "because you think your participants' needs are greater than your own and they are helping you in the study". I shrug and run a bath.

20/1/2015

Grey January day. Voices outside and the scraping of hard frost from glass as people try to clear car windscreens. Engine fires up to warm the belly of an automotive beast. I sit at my desk and ponder. I look out on the white frosted street and ponder. Carol is coming this evening for her second interview and instead of the nervousness and excitement I have felt before, I just feel tired. Worn like a shoe. But the shoe is comfortable, doesn't pinch so I keep wearing it. Maybe that's research. It fits me well, but wears me out! So much is going on in my personal life... relocating to another part of the country, selling a house, buying a house and all the drama that accompanies such transactions. I'm going to tidy the house and set the scene for the second interview. Check the audio-recorder – good to go. Now I wait the long

wait. The interview will be at my house again; her preference and truthfully, I don't mind. When I think about what she has produced there is a gentle stirring inside me. The beginning of excitement or maybe a warning to keep calm. Yes, don't get too caught up in this – moderate yourself!

I re-listen to the tape. I could read the transcript but I wanted to hear her voice, to listen to the subtle nuances – deeply listen. The room fades and it is just me and Carol's voice. I close my eyes and I can see her face; imagine that she is with me.

Listening again to her story brings on feelings in me that immerse me back in the interaction. I want to take her hand and show her that I am 'hearing' her but I feel she would not want this. Would shows of emotiveness chip away at the strong casing that she has erected? Will a hug shatter the wall? These are my thoughts and possible observations. I smile when she talks about her moment. One small seemingly insignificant occurrence changed her life. For her it became a significant turning point in her career.

I opened the door as she walks down the path and smiling, I invite her in. She is smiling back at me and we pass pleasantries whilst I make coffee. It's dark outside on a cold January evening but the heating pumps gentle warmth through the house and the rooms are cosy. I ask where she would like to sit and she moves towards the same side of the sofa she sat on for the first interview, so I take the other side but turn to face her. I explain again to re-cap from the first meeting, point out the audio-recorder and ask if she is okay with everything. She smiles at me and says, "It's all good". Something is different, she seems more confident. Perhaps it's the way she is holding herself, her body language. I say, "You seem different" and she replies, "do I?" as if she knows something, an inner secret. We start the interview and I feel comfortable using questions as a guide now; it's as if I am at one with my researcher role.

At times, I did think I was veering towards guidance practitioner and remember a fleeting moment of anxiety but it passes quickly. As I listen I am watching her face, her eyes move expressively to re-enforce what she says yet her facial features remain calm lit up by warm smiles. When she explains her creative piece, she is animated, but then says that she could have done it differently to explain it better. She is talking to herself not me. We talk for nearly an hour; the house is silent except for our voices and the barely audible tick tock of the mantle clock. The street seems quiet; I haven't noticed if any cars have moved through the darkness, my focus has been on Carol. When I ask if anything has changed for her she said that she feels more confident, that the process had enabled her to see her achievements and that she was proud of herself. I couldn't help but think about my first participant as she had said she too was proud of her achievements. Carol said that she didn't feel so worried about writing emails, she trusted herself more. In recalling her moment, she saw positives and not the negative aspects of that time. Her demeanour was different in this interview, now she was not apologetic but assured. I could see the change in her. When we finished, I explained I would transcribe the interview and send it to her to change it if she wanted to. At the door, we did hug. This person was not holding herself in check, emotions locked in. This person, it seemed, had let something go and appeared to have moved on. She had also let something in, self-belief.

The particularities of Carol's story

When I listened to Carol telling her story, I was struck by her quest for love and stability, and how she has felt let down by the different people she has loved. In looking after her mother as a child, she became the responsible carer,

"... Always felt responsible. Even when I was 7 or 8 I've got memories of feeling responsible for my Mum and not leaving my Mum indoors on her own

even though she was going out later and so I would have ended up being on my own. A bit bizarre...”

She left home at sixteen which potentially could have prematurely broken familial ties, but she stayed in contact with her family. Later, at twenty with a toddler and a baby on the way, she found out her partner was having an affair. Carol said her mother’s response was, “*men do that when you’re pregnant. It will be fine afterwards*”. Richardson’s (1997) understanding that available discourses can shape lives, would suggest Carol’s acceptance of her mother’s words. But, Carol yearned for a traditional nuclear family saying, “*... For me I always wanted what I never had which was a family for my children...*” and she could not compromise. Crushed, she asked him to leave, vowing, “*...no I’m not going to let him get the better of me or see me as failing or being weak and needing*”. Within her other personal relationships, Carol continued to search for the stability of a family unit, marrying her next partner, hoping he would put family first.

The cultural narrative that Carol and I both experienced, was family unity and monogamous heterosexual marriage would provide security and stability and like Carol, I too sought for what I believed was the ‘right way’ to raise children. This was a belief of my past, born of my ingrained familial values, and I acknowledge there is more than one way to raise a family. Additionally, Carol later exercised a personal moral standard when she would not have relationships with two men at the same time. She decided to follow her head and not her heart by choosing the person she believed was more reliable. Here, her life-career decision-making was more rational than chaotic as she considered the practicalities of her life. However, this and the next relationship did not last.

When she said, “*It is me I don’t need anyone else*”, Carol create her ‘personal myth’ (McAdams, 1993) of a strong woman with a sense of survival. I also thought Carol’s story had a sense of drama, the wronged woman who goes on to become successful despite what life throws at her. The turns in her road were to make her who she is today, ‘if the past, for instance were erased, the present and future would fall into disorientation’ (Cochran, 1997, p5). I felt admiration for this woman who raised her children despite life’s twists and turns. To me, Carol exemplifies ‘resilience’, an aspect Kidd (2007) considers relevant when coping with change, further endorsed by research on adult career decision-making (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). Her capacity for survival is strong, and she is prepared to take responsibility for her own career. She can adapt and appears to exercise some control over her life situations, adjusting to different settings; a concept Savickas et al (2009) consider necessary when proactively designing lives in the frenetic 21st Century. Such adaptability, was needed as she moved from one life episode to another.

Her story could be one of redemption with unhappy situations redeemed by good outcomes (McAdams and Bowman, 2001). For example, when Carol tried to make changes in her life, the system seemed to let her down,

“I think I tried doing nursery nurse stuff... but didn't work out. Then I signed up with college and got nursery places and everything ... Arranged everything and then when I contacted Social Services ... they said 'no you can't go to college 'cause you won't be available for work' and it's like 'I'm not available for work, I've got 2 children under 5 and what I want to do is this now, there's a college crèche, so when they are at school I can go and do some paid work'. Yeah, and no that wasn't acceptable so I had to give that up”.

Roberts (1997) suggests, individuals are subject to the structures that impose on their lives. Carol wanted to gain skills to support future work and provide for her children, ‘people need an education for possible selves in possible futures’ (Law, Meijers and Wijers, 2002, p444). She wanted to learn, but societal-economic systems seemed to block her access to learning. Additionally, Carol’s cultural influences appeared to have affected her perceived historic life-career decisions, such as her belief that university was not accessible to her,

“... because I always wanted to be a Nursery Nurse ... I think now, because I felt that I was never going to uni, you had to go to university to be a teacher and that wasn't me...”

and, *“... I knew I wasn't a degree student and it wasn't something you aimed for”.*

I wondered if Carol had received career guidance; who had advised her? Was it her family and community? If so, the available narratives and the societal, economic structures surrounding her, limited her opportunities and aspirations.

Not all of life’s possibilities are open to us and there are some aspects which we may not experience. However, Carol’s philosophy is to carry on in the face of adversity, *“I think things happen in life ... I learnt that regardless of my life I'd carry on”.* By telling her story, Carol provided a lens through which I could see facets of her life. As I listened, I felt humbled by her tenacious survival instinct as she battled with her surrounding structures, and was reminded by West (2003) of the courage individual’s exhibit when they tell their stories. Indeed, agentic people make things happen and Carol was not going to passively wait for things to unfold. As a child, her eldest son had learning difficulties and Carol helped in his school, gradually gaining skills which were to support her later in life when she applied for a life changing role which enabled her to embark on her formal learning journey.

Learning

It is important to remember Carol left school with no qualifications; something she attributed to having to look after her mother and a teacher she felt did not like her. I sensed a loss here; a

wish for something different and a yearning for recognition from the teacher who taught the one subject she was accomplished in. This person's opinion mattered to Carol. The influence of others seemed to have a long reaching effect on Carol and as noted in my own story, our inadequacies can be deeply embedded. Her love of learning was forged in her childhood and she spoke of furtively bringing her school books home and 'sneaking' them back again the next day, of buying stationery and reading books with birthday money to keep up in class. She said, "... *I never found it easy. I always remember enjoying it*", and my heart hurt for her. Yet, Carol did engage with learning beyond school and even with young children as noted previously, attempted to gain qualifications. In trying to support her young son, she began to research special education needs and store knowledge for future employment. Work opened a door for Carol, to a world of learning hitherto unknown to her and it gave her a chance to achieve what she had not been able to earlier. She began to repair the past. I feel emotional writing these words, sharing affinity with someone who found work to be the catalyst to re-engage with formal learning.

Belenky et al (1986) note women learn in different ways, such as when dealing with relationships, family and community issues; aspects that occur in their lives beyond a school environment. Through her work Carol gained qualifications, using education to transform her life. She embarked on a knowledge gathering quest, which brought tension to her personal life, "... *one of the biggest arguments with me and Stuart was that I was always working and training*". Here, I pondered if Carol had turned to work for the solace lacking in her personal relationships. To compensate, perhaps she sought fulfilment through her job, strengthening the bond with training. People function in multiple contexts. Carol lived in a state of flux as her working life flourished and her personal life fell into disarray.

Work brought Carol respect from people who recognised her worth and who encouraged her to take on more managerial responsibilities. She interacted with an educational community through which she gained a sense of self identity (Law, 1981). Our learning is influenced by the context it occurs in; it is a social phenomenon and not a solely experiential (Kolb, 1984) individualistic experience. Through her work and learning experiences, Carol gained an awareness of her cultural and historical beliefs as she observed how others interacted with the world, becoming transformed by her experiences. Carol said, "*Yeah, it empowers you as well*".

Interestingly, Carol's desire to gain qualifications was due to a perceived lack of confidence in her ability and she felt qualifications showed she was doing things, "*the right way*". Is there a wrong way? It matters to Carol to be 'right' and I wondered if she has set herself a standard that she must achieve. Maybe the only person judging Carol is herself and the right

way is confirmed by having a qualification to back up her idea of who she needs to be, to be successful in her job. Also, perhaps there is a need to be right in one area of life when another is seemingly wrong. Her desire to gain qualifications seemed to me, to equate to gaining self-worth, but perhaps this is because I too 'need' qualifications to show I am 'doing it the right way'. Either way, when I recall her words I feel back in the moment with her.

Perhaps people saw something in Carol which she struggled to believe, but it could also be something to do with her attitude to life. From her first job to where she is today, Carol sees possible negative aspects as opportunities and challenges. She said, "*I mean I've always done things, I've never had to do them. I've been given opportunities and I've taken them*". Carol appears to be 'ironic' minded which Peavy (2004, p7) tells us is when people are open to possibilities, whereas those who are 'factory' (ibid) minded are likely to follow more pre-set criteria.

Chance, intuition and fate

Krumboltz and Levin (2004) suggest people actively create their own life chances and Carol was not afraid to take risks in her life-career. The moment she decided to apply for the job advertised in the free newspaper, will be explored further when I discuss her creative piece, but it is worth considering at this point that she was not drawn to the position out of need, but because she thought it was "interesting". Additionally, she felt it was something she could do based on her past experiences of helping in her son's school. At the time, she was working nights in a supermarket and she could have thought rationally about the impact on her family life, but instead was drawn to a small advert which looked "interesting". An aspect of planned happenstance (ibid) is taking action in the face of uncertain outcomes, and acting on unplanned events may be seen as chaotic behaviour, not based on rational planning (Bright et al, 2005). Returning to her salient moment, the closing date for the position was the next day but Carol got in her car and drove for an hour in traffic to get an application form. I asked her what had made her do it, she replied, "*Dunno, just something...*" Was it her inner voice telling her to act (Belenky et al, 1986)? Perhaps by helping in a school, she subconsciously recognised she had the skills to do the role thus supporting action in a decisive moment (Lehrer, 2009). Carol ruefully said, "*What made me and if I hadn't all this would be different wouldn't it?*" Her gut feeling was it was right for her and she acted on her intuition. Later, she said that she thought it was meant to be, suggesting fate as a factor. She felt a connection to something beyond herself, something that did not scare her but made sense to her.

Carol spoke metaphorically saying, "*I'm a great believer in that we have paths and our paths lead us to our destiny*". She also said that things happen for reasons. Rogers (1980) notes gut feelings are more than intellectual learning, suggesting it is also about intuitive reactions.

However, if she did not possess the ‘ironic mind’ as discussed earlier, that enabled her to be open to new possibilities and the curiosity and ability to take a risk, maybe she would have seen things differently. As someone who sees the world through a spiritual lens, I want to embrace her suggestion that fate stepped in, yet I need to acknowledge a more rational viewpoint which would suggest the gathering of skills and qualities in readiness for such opportunities.

Summary

I found Carol’s story both poignant and inspiring. Perhaps because Carol and I are of a similar age and stage, I saw similarities and differences between our stories. From childhood she wanted to learn, but school was not a conducive environment. I understood how she may have felt, having struggled to find inspiration from such institutions. Our personal lives were different in that I had the familial stability she longed for. Unfulfilling personal relationships led her to become resilient to life’s knocks. Yet, we both found a love for formal learning later in life and thus the academic recognition we had been seeking. Qualifications were not just a mark of academic prowess, but also a personal affirmation of ability to do things the ‘right way’. Where I may have been reluctant to take career risks, Carol may have embraced opportunities. However, as our identities changed over time we learnt to build ourselves from our experiences and the people we encounter along the way. I will now consider Carol’s salient moment, exploring the compilation of her creative piece and the thinking behind the process adopted.

Carol’s salient moment

“I’m no good at being creative”, but as Rogers (1980) advocates, caring fosters creativity via a nurturing environment, something Carol created through her work. This creativity became apparent when she explored different ways to do her piece. First, she tried a mind map on a computer but found she lacked the skills to produce what she wanted. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010), consider ‘concept mapping’ to rationalise analytical thinking in a visual form and perhaps this was Carol’s aim, as she said she saw the creative process as an opportunity to gain a new skill. She was left feeling frustrated,

“Then I left it and tried again and then yeah, me and IT don’t really get on and I couldn’t get the images I wanted and things like that. Erm so again I left it, and just started thinking about it and then there was a focal point and things previous to that point and things after that point were key factors in where I got to today”.

Carol began to think about what she wanted to portray and in allowing herself thinking time, she saw a way forward. She decided to draw a cycle of pictures, with the moment she believes her career started in the middle, and a cycle of events before and after, around the outside. She

actively thought about her moment and as she explained things to me, she narrated the relationship of how one event influenced the next. She did say that on completion she could have done a collage (similarly to Beth in the previous chapter). However, she felt what she had created, captured what she wanted to capture. Carol said she was a visual person and it was pictures, not words, that were in her head. Interestingly, Carol drew her pictures in black and white, explaining that memories are in black and white. Are they? Mine are more sepia and muted.

Carol described her salient moment as,

“...my lightbulb moment ... so when my story starts if you like. Erm yes seeing, that’s an advert in the local paper ... and me thinking ‘that sounds interesting I think I could do that’. Erm me making a phone call ... and erm...- then me ‘cause it was last minute, me having to get the car and get there to do it and that’s sort of ending up with my career ending up there. And that was when I started into my memories of how I ended up there. Erm and just I remembered reading to and looking after my cousins. Erm leaving school with no qualifications and working for a family business, which was pet food. Erm knowing that what I wanted to do was work with children but feeling that y’know nursery nursing was the only thing I could do. Erm then having my children and then through my son having to go to the school on the bus, because special schools you go on the bus. Erm and then him going back into school and me having to research and find out what was wrong with him because although he could now speak he still didn’t go back into mainstream school, he couldn’t cope so that’s me doing all my research ... and that was the school I ended up working back at. That is, that sort of leads back into that school and that was the school he went to when I saw the advertisement that looked interesting”.

I was reminded of Law’s (2008) concept of storyboarding which graphically explores biographical memories; those ‘movies’ we hold in our brains (Damasio, 1999). Storyboarding sequentially considers a turning point, enabling reflective contemplation of the aspects which could influence the event, such as the people involved and the meaning gained by capturing the experience anew in images. I need to acknowledge the similarities to Law’s work but rather than setting parameters to creativity, I wanted my participants to feel they had the autonomy to choose their own method of depiction.

Radley (2011) discusses images, photographs to be specific, suggesting they can hold psychological and social significance. I would add that images of any depiction need the story behind the picture. The plot, temporal sequencing and spatial setting bring it to life providing an insight to the viewer of how the image-taker sees the world. Radley (ibid) notes when someone tells you about the picture, the words take over, as in Carol’s case, her words brought the images to life. Interestingly, Carol said,

“...as I was going round my pictures I realised that I could also capture my emotions and feelings at the same time ... because just by drawing that memory if you like ... reminded me why I’d chosen those things...”

Here Carol expresses her reflective and reflexive thinking in the process. Heppner et al (1994) consider art mediums to help individuals to express life insights. Certainly, it would appear through her drawings Carol gained understanding and created new knowledge about herself as she remembered past events. Images, can ‘trigger’ hidden social contexts as well as personal memories (Chang, 2008). Carol found the motion of putting pencil to paper enabled thoughts to come to her as if in a dream (St. Pierre, 2008), representing this as a thought bubble on her piece. Horsdal (2012), considers reflexivity to be a metacognitive process in which we think about how we think. Carol engaged with a deeply reflexive experience as she immersed herself in the creative process and in doing so, unlocked a hidden memory of herself as a child, teaching another to read and spell. This is depicted as a ‘wise’ older owl teaching a younger owl. She remembered being praised and being told she was good at helping,

“I just vaguely remember people saying, “oh you’re that” and I wonder if it triggers from that. Y’know that gave me a good feeling that people recognised that, so yeah. Don’t know but things that I sorta forgotten”.

She now thinks this could be where her desire to teach began, and the process helped her to discover this hidden memory.

The process brought forth many memories for Carol through the creation of her work. Reavey (2011) notes, participants interpret and create images to represent aspects of their lives, which in turn are interpreted by the researcher as they become immersed in their participants’ mode of engagement. When I read through the transcripts I was reminded of our conversations. As I ‘heard’ her words, I imagined what she was trying to express and played my own movie in my head, using my cultural narrative to interpret her story. As such, I created another version of ‘Carol’ based on the version of the story she told me.

When she had finished her piece, Carol told me her immediate thought was how many positive aspects it contained; as Law (2003) notes, we witness our lives when we tell our stories and in doing so, we construct the present from the past. Even so, Chang (2008) suggests memories can be glorified whilst unpleasant ones can be forgotten. Hollway and Jefferson note individuals may become ‘defended subjects’(p23) if they feel anxious and invest in discourses which provide a sense of protection. Carol chose to depict memories which came to her in a dream-like quality. She did not say if any were unpleasant but some, as when she did not get support for her son and decided to research his condition, were challenging times which she overcame. In this way, Carol expressed her disposition to get things done. As she worked on the piece, Carol immersed her whole being in the process and by thinking and doing, effected change.

Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions

When I think about the first research questions ‘how do creative practices help individuals to ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?’, they appear to provide the space and time for people to reflect on their moment; as Carol said,

“...I think when you’re busy with life you don’t reflect so much on... I don’t know I don’t think I would have reflected on certain aspects of it...”

The process gave her a sense of time-within-time (Ricoeur, 1980), where chronological time appeared to stand still while she reflected. She could recognise that others had believed in her and provided opportunities which she acted on. Carol also came to see she wanted to develop her Foundation Degree to a full Degree saying,

“Erm I think it’s always been in the background that I didn’t finish. And I don’t think I need to finish it ... for my job or anything. But I feel I need to finish it for me.”

Carol has higher level qualifications but possessing a degree for her, is a mark of accomplishment.

The second question ‘how do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?’, was acknowledged by Carol when she said looking back on her memories also helped her to consider her emotions and feelings, which she expressed by drawing a thought bubble on her piece. As noted earlier, it was the thinking about the thinking and the drawing of the images that brought forth more memories to think about, some of which had laid dormant in the recesses of her mind. She also gained personal recognition as a result of the process, *“I think it’s down to the confidence ‘cause I feel proud of my achievements...”*. However, she acknowledged if she had not spent the time on the artwork she may not have thought about her emotions so deeply. So, for Carol the creative practice was crucial to helping her locate her emotions in and around her life-career turning point.

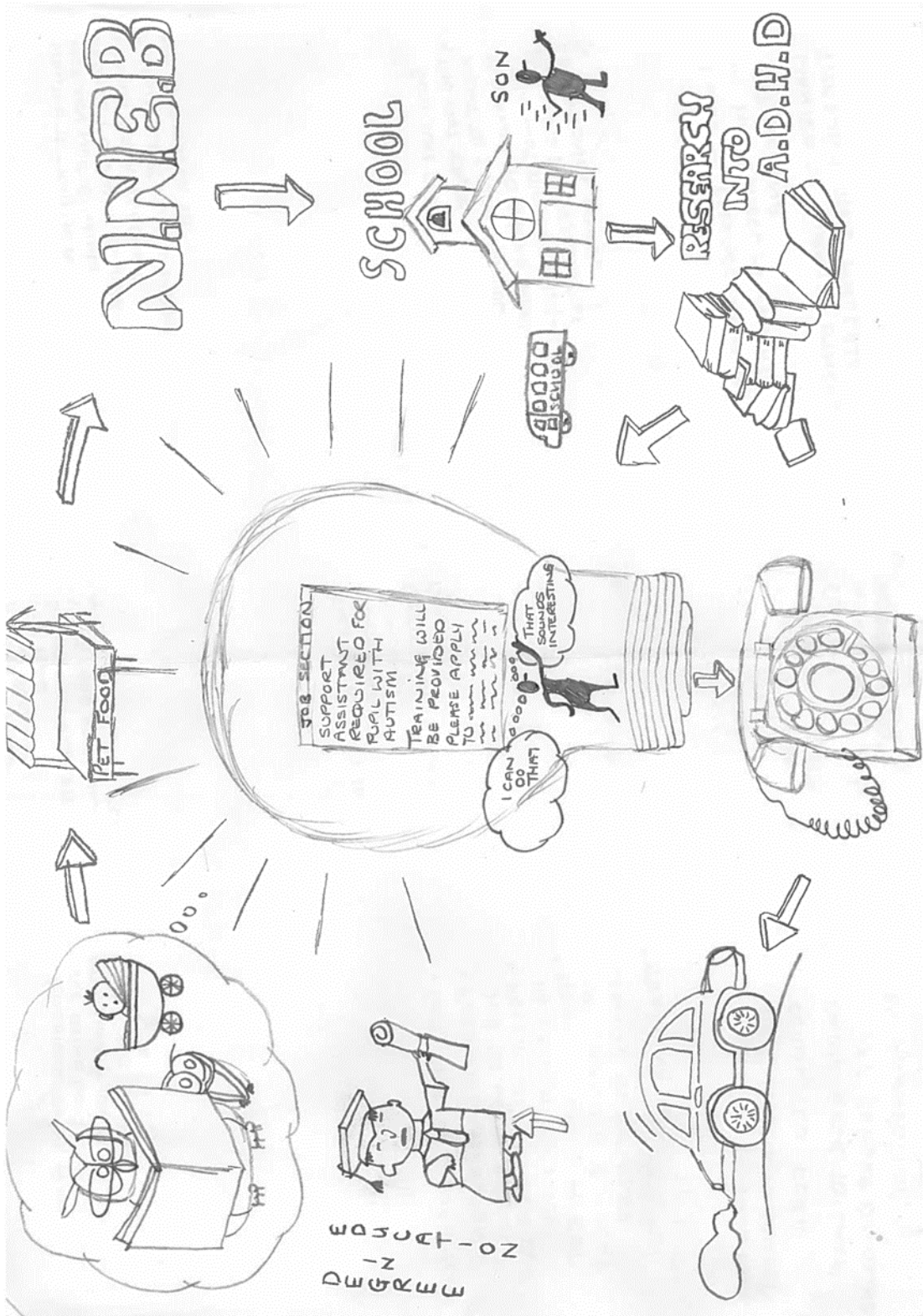
Finally, ‘what part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?’, is for Carol quite pertinent as she appears to have followed her gut feelings. This was seen both in her personal life when she felt relationships were not working for her and in her working life where roles appeared ‘interesting’ and in doing so, she listened to her inner voice. The moment she saw a tiny advertisement she acted, feeling it was something she could do, as opposed to more rationalised thought on how it fitted with her life.

When I asked Carol if anything had changed for her by taking part in the study she said “massively”. She felt more confident about her abilities and strengths, having re-affirmed for

herself, positives in her life. I felt emotional when she thanked me for what she considered to be a rewarding experience. Carol thought of herself as ordinary, but I think she is extraordinary.

In the next chapter, we meet my final participant, Sara.

Figure 5



Chapter 8

Sara's Story

2/11/2014

7.23am Sunday morning. Silence in the street is rudely interrupted by angry bursts of wind that rustles the irritated leaves left on the trees, causing a few to tumble to the ground, joining others now deceased. Thin rain splashes against the window and the grey cloud covered sky groans under the weight of its heavy mantle. Interviewing Sara this morning at 10am. I feel pressure pushing against my chest; like the sky falling on top of me. All aspects of my life are making demands, family, study, work. Breath, let it flow over you and it will pass. A mantra for this moment. I would have preferred to spread the interviews out but this one had been arranged for some time and I didn't want to make this difficult for Sara. Let things be. I have known her as a colleague and a friend. Yet there are things I don't know, things about her life that I hope she will share about her background and ways of thinking. There are different levels of knowing so it would be wrong to say that we really know someone. Nor do I see her very often so there is always a 'catching up' period. As I write I ask myself if I am trying to justify her position as a participant in my study. Why do I feel the need to do this? Is it because I am using (this is an interesting word) people who are known to me? They show the world the selves they want others to see so there are 'hidden selves' too. I want to have a glimpse of these aspects. Will they let me see? Peel back the layers to find the heart.

Introduction

Sara is a Careers Guidance Adviser in a college in Kent and it is through our work that we came to know each other and became friends. We both felt a little nervous about her involvement with the study; me because I would be the researcher and not the friend and she, because she knew me as the friend who would be the researcher. We discussed our feelings which once in the open dispelled our fears. As with the other case studies, I have used the transcripts from the two interviews and attempted to integrate Sara's words and phrases to retain the genuineness of her story.

Yet, as I come to write the story of the last participant in my study, I find myself struggling; to find the words which will express Sara's story the way she told it to me, which in turn will be conveyed to the reader. I do not want to harm Sara or those who are close to her, nor do I want to look back in time and regret my written words, objects placed in a time-capsule marked 'thesis'. Sparkes (2013) reminds me that writing autoethnographically is like gaining a tattoo; an aid to be mindful of how I express the experience of others. So, it is with trepidation, that I begin.

Sara's story

Sara was born in the county once known as Avon, where she lived most of her life until going to university. One of two children, she has an older brother, her parents divorced when she was

about four years old so she grew up accepting a split family arrangement. People would say that it must be hard having divorced parents but she felt “the weird thing was thinking of them together in the first place. It just seems so wrong”. Sara grew up moving between two different homes. Both her parents re-married but her mother’s relationship did not last, resulting in the loss of their home. The family secured a two-bedroom council flat so Sara could continue to live with her mother until she left for university. However, whilst she was away the council reviewed the situation and as Sara says, her mum was told “you’ve got no one living with you so you can move into a one bedroomed flat”. When Sara came home for holidays she stayed with her father and his family, but when she graduated he decided to relocate to another part of the country. She found herself with nowhere to live. Sara says they did not “really give much of a thought” to her. In considering her options Sara thought about getting a flat but she did not have a job or know “the first place to start”. She thought about moving in with her boyfriend who lived in Kent and this was who she “really wanted to be with”. She remembers this was “quite hard” as she wanted her independence; to “give it a go” by herself but she did not have “the means to do it”. Yet, she also thought about how much she wanted to be with her boyfriend and so decided to move to Kent and literally “banged everything in the car”.

On leaving university, Sara had found work in the recruitment department of a large bank, a role she described as “sort of data checking”. When she moved to Kent, she found work in a recruitment agency in Dartford. She liked the idea of helping people to get a job and “having a best fit” but she did not like having to charge a fee for her assistance. The role required a “ruthless” side which she struggled with at the time. The role was too pressurised for her and although it is “nice to earn some money” Sara was not “going to trample over everyone else” and in the end, she became ill as a result of trying to meet the requirements of the role. It was not “a very nice time” for her and she “had to get out of there”. This was her first job in a strange county.

Having moved to be with her boyfriend, Sara often found herself on her own as he, being from Kent, returned to his pre-university activities. At the weekends, Sara found herself having no one to speak to and nothing to do. She was in a new area where she did not know anyone and did not know where to go. She spent most of her time cleaning or shopping and it “just felt rubbish”. Depression took hold and she realised she had to make some changes.

An opportunity arose to work as an Employment Adviser for an organisation supporting people back into work. Sara applied and secured the position which was to “completely change” her life as she felt that she had “joined a family”. She socialised with the people she worked with,

attending lunches and other events. In hindsight, Sara does not know that she was “really good enough for that job”, but she believes her boss saw something in her; her potential. This position helped her as she had to travel across Kent and gradually she began to find her way around and she felt “a bit more at home”. She dealt with local people and the issues they struggled with. If she had not worked at this organisation, Sara questions whether she would have been so “proactive” in finding different places or speaking to different people. It gave her motivation and a “let’s just get on with it type attitude”. She and her boyfriend now socialised with her friends as well as his. When his friends moved away and he found himself at home, she was often out. Sara had plans for her time which was something she felt that he had in the past. She thinks he thought “it was the norm” for her to stay at home “doing the cooking”. Now things were different and it “felt quite nice!” In time, they were to marry and have two children.

Sara decided to carry on working when she had her children and she states that this has been challenging. She is happy to have employment in her life as she finds it gives her “some structure”. Realising that she is “not naturally a person who enjoys playing with children” she did not really engage with baby-related activities. She worried she would be judged by the way her child behaved and found that when she was on maternity leave she questioned everything about herself. She “felt a bit lost”. Sara had a year off work with both her children and although she told herself she should be enjoying this time she found herself “praying that things would be different”. When her eldest child went to nursery, she did not feel the guilt the other mothers appeared to have. She did not share their teary farewells to their children as they waved them goodbye for the day. If her son had been upset she thinks it might have been different, but there were days when he barely said goodbye to her in his rush to begin his day. Sara thinks that she “taught him to be more independent”. She felt more relaxed when she had her second son.

When it comes to child rearing, Sara thinks you also look to your own childhood and your own mother. However, she does not remember much about her childhood and the memories she has are prompted by photographs. Even so, she questions if the photo has created a memory, or if she is thinking “back to how it was”. She wonders if she may have “blanked things out” as she struggles to remember events before her teenage years, when she started to be more independent. Her memories of her mother are of her doing housework and being in a bad mood which Sara now attributes to her not being happy. This escalated when Sara was a teenager and it made her determined to leave home; it made her “a little bit hard” which did not help her relationship with her mother. Sara acknowledges she had little sympathy for her mother, whom she felt was not helping herself out of her situation. Even now when people come to see Sara for help she thinks,

“well, what are you doing?” Sara feels that her situation taught her to take responsibility for herself, to deal with herself so she tries to be as independent as she can. She is a proud person and will not ask for help unless she needs it, is comfortable to ask and is not “compromised” by asking.

When considering a salient moment, Sara found it hard to choose as she said that there were many moments “where something has changed or happened”, when “it’s been out of your control”. The moment Sara chose to depict was when she decided to move to Kent as she thought that this event “had the biggest impact” on her life-career. She thinks this was because she made the decision, considering if it was the “right thing to do” at that time. Sara remembers making a list, “like a sort of pros and cons list”; something that she has done quite a lot in her life. The positives for Sara were about the ‘unknowns’ and she felt it was a question of them finding their way together because they were a couple. She remembers feeling excited and relieved at the same time when she made her decision. She was going to do something, take some action. Sara did not know what was going to happen when she left but she knew more of what her life would be like if she stayed. Sara had taken time over her decision, rationalising her thinking but in the end, she thought “right sod it I’m just gonna do it”. She wanted something new, something different, to “almost start again” where people did not know her. She wanted to be as anonymous as she had been at university. She wanted a “fresh beginning”.

When asked what her thoughts and feelings were when requested to do a creative piece, Sara said she was “intrigued” as to what she might do, excited by the prospect of being creative. Originally, she wanted to take a photograph of important objects that she would gather and display together, but she did not have the items anymore apart from an out of date, torn map of Kent. She had kept the map because it held significance for her. She next thought that she could create a collage of pictures from that time, but was unable to print them out as her printer was not working. Feeling frustrated she decided to draw a picture, an unusual activity for her. She had in mind “visions of a lovely sketch pad” and “a lovely sunny day to create this masterpiece” but realised she did not have the things she wanted around her. Sara, felt she had in fact created something that her “six-year-old has done with his crayons!”

She felt she had a “blank canvas” to work with and thought about what she wanted to include over a couple of days. She made notes and took time to create the work. She thought and then added aspects rather than creating the piece in one session. She was not thinking necessarily about the piece, “it was just happening” almost subconsciously whilst she would “carry on with daily life”. In fact, Sara was getting on with “the boring stuff” such as housework but she

remembers listening to the radio and the presenter was hosting debates which made her think about change, what she wanted and what she felt at the time of her moment. She remembers the strength of her feelings and she wanted to convey that in her drawing, writing specific words as well to “get that message across”. She was able to “zone” everything else out whilst she worked on her piece, to be “a little bit free”. It was like “revisiting the memory” of her moment and she thought “it was a nice feeling really”. Sara did not place herself in an isolated space to create her piece as she thought that would have put her under pressure and she would have become frustrated. Instead, she sat with her husband watching television. Sara, felt she needed “time and the freedom and the space” to be creative.

When asked what her feelings and thoughts were on completing her piece, Sara said whilst she was doing the work she felt an “intense concentration and opportunity to be creative”. Once she had finished, “it almost cemented, re-iterated” how she felt. She came to realise how her life had changed, how she thought about things before and how she does not think like that now. She wants to make some changes as she feels “your life and your future in particular, is in your control”. At the time of her moment, she felt she did not have any responsibilities whereas now her commitments influence the decisions she can make.

Sara enjoyed taking part in the research process, finding doing the creative piece interesting and “cathartic”. In re-visiting her experience, she could “strip everything back and remember what it was like”. It was not an entirely positive experience for her as in looking back she confronted her present. She wonders what she can alter about her current situation and is determined to “implement some change”.

Through the following journal excerpts, I attempt to show my thoughts and feelings which transpired in the research relationship with Sara.

2/11/14

Test the audio-recorder and check the paperwork. It has become instinctive to do this ritual. I'm not feeling the excitement of the first interview. Maybe because this will be the third person (and final participant). Yet, there is a stirring inside me. A gentle quickening in my stomach so I know I'm not complacent. Yes, there is a gentleness, a warming of my insides. Do researchers feel this? Do they learn to reside quietly within themselves? Where is the nervousness I felt in the first interview? The stomach churning disquiet? Maybe because I know my participants it comes like waves breaking on a beach. Some are gentle and lap the shore and others are great crests that smash the ground. Yes, different levels of nervousness and awareness.

Sara is coming to my house, the second participant to request this. She has a young family and felt it would be easier for her to come to me. I want to make things as easy as possible to participate so agreed. My husband works at the weekend so I have the house to myself. The sun is

nowhere to be seen. The world outside is still and the colours are subdued; quietened by the cloud blanket. My mood is pensive and I wonder what will unfold later this morning. I take the recorder and paperwork downstairs but this time I place them on the dining table. I want to let Sara decide where we will sit. I can hear the clock on the corner of the desk ticking and in my stillness, I become aware. Tingles caress my fingers tips. Breath, strong, steady fills my lungs, expanding my ribcage, to subside and repeat. It is loud in my head. Looking down I notice how my thumb strokes my first finger, moving to the second, third and fourth, back and forth. Repetition. Then the right thumb does the same movement with the finger holding the pen. Why have I not noticed this before? It is comforting, soothing, calming. As a child, I could not sleep unless I stroked a piece of silk. This is the same movement. A caressing of thumb against forefinger. A fail safe? In this analysis, I begin to feel nervous as I realise that I'm not feeling as assured as I thought I was. What else do I do? I touch the spot between my eyebrows, pushing the skin upward. These gestures tell so much about the individual. Will Sara pass me such secret messages?

The house feels cold so I turn up the thermostat. Immediately the boiler fires up and soon the warm air permeates the cold. Sara arrives and I make tea. She tells me that she feels nervous and she's not sure if it's because she knows me. Funny, but I'm actually a little nervous too; maybe for a similar reason. We talk a little and the nerves dissipate for me and hopefully for her. We go into the dining room end of the through lounge and I ask her where she would like to sit. She chooses the end of the large sofa in the lounge and I move the paperwork from the table. Quickly I turn on table lamps and the floor lamp next to my side of the sofa to cast a warm glow in the dark room. Leaves swirl outside in the street; the wind is strengthening. Sara reads the participant sheet and then signs the consent form. We begin.

She starts with the 'social niceties' of telling me about her job then moves into past roles. Her words change very subtly and she tells me about a role that made her unhappy, challenged her. Whilst she talks she is looking off into the distance and her left hand is moving to emphasise her words. Here tone is strong and purposeful, almost as if she is on a mission to get these words out. I make little noises of encouragement and nod but try to keep my comments to a minimum. My attention is on her and the room fades away until it is just us in this space.

Sara has things to say so I give her the chance. She talks about how she felt when she moved to Kent and her relationship with her then boyfriend, now her husband. She talks about 'finding her fit' with a job ... She talks about motherhood and how she felt whilst on maternity leave. How she decided to work and not feeling the emotion (or maybe displaying the emotions) other mothers did when they left their children at nursery. She talked of her relationship with her mother and how she came to feel responsible for herself. Sara is an independent woman who acknowledges that her pride rarely enables her to ask others for help. When I asked about a salient moment she struggled at first so I explained more. Sara said it was probably the moment she decided to live with her boyfriend. But she said that it was something she had thought about a lot even making a list, so a rational decision, not taken lightly. Finally, she stopped thinking saying, "I thought sod it, just do it". So, a spur of the moment decision too. I felt she was very brave to take a chance on an unknown future.

Throughout the interview, I noticed changes in tone; passive then strong almost angry, and in facial expressions – fleeting emotions and her eyes held a wistful look. Her humour surfaced at times but mostly she was serious. I was reminded that sometimes we mean to say one thing but another comes out because the opportunity has risen. Perhaps I had given her the chance to say

the things hidden in her subconscious. Afterwards, I explained I would transcribe the tape and send it to her for her comments. I mentioned that it may not be straight away due to other commitments but as soon as I could. She said she might do a story or a letter as a creative piece. I said letters to the self can be very powerful (think Gillie Bolton).

Sara had sat the whole time with one arm on her lap and her legs crossed. I had turned my body towards her with one leg bent up on the seat. We both gave the appearance of being relaxed. Truthfully, I felt like a counsellor at times, listening to a client. Yet I was a researcher too and as she spoke I made mental references to emerging themes such as responsible teenager, maternal instincts vs work identity, relationships. I listened deeply to what was being said and knew I was being given the precious gift of trust. Afterwards she apologised because she didn't think she had said anything of value. Quickly I re-assured her and thanked her for sharing her story with me. She said it had been like 'therapy' which is not the purpose of the interview but if that is how the participant feels so be it.

How do I feel? When I closed the door, I let the tiredness come. Every time I interview it's there, waiting. I have come to see that this is another part of the process. There is some feeling of excitement or at least a tingling of anticipation. But it is as if I hold my breath throughout the interaction, only letting it go when I am no longer with the person. Maybe the tiredness is not just from interviewing but from constantly doing something for the PhD. It is the constant giving and analysing of myself which is exhausting. It would be so easy to say enough! But I know I will regret giving up not trying to find that which I seek – what's in a moment? I smile, either way it's time to stop for now.

14/2/2015

Ella Fitzgerald sings 'My Funny Valentine' on the radio, sharply contrasting with the cold, wet, grey morning. Her warm sultry tones make me feel light and my body sways with the music as I wait for the kettle to boil. Now at my desk in the silence of my womb-like room I think about Sara who is coming to see me for the second interview. I think back to when I started interviewing last year and how nervous I felt. Now there is a calm, excited flutters, but mostly calm. I tell myself not to say, "that's interesting", to really try to show an interest rather than to say the words. I hope I can succeed! It's easier for her to come to me as she can leave her children with her husband. I don't mind. There is much to think about right now with the move (to Cambridgeshire) and finding work, but I need to focus on Sara. I wonder what she has done for her creative piece?

We take our coffee into the lounge and sit in the same places as in the first interview. The room is quite dark but I don't put a light on; we don't seem to notice the dim light. As she talks I watch her face noting that she frowns at times and at others that her eyes dance. Light and shade is what comes to mind. Humour is used in the telling of her story and I laugh on cue. She drew her moment and coloured it in. Bright hues to show the brightness of the day and of her feelings. She feels embarrassed to show me as she says what she's done is "rubbish". I think it's wonderful because it is of her. She had wanted to create something sophisticated "like something in a gallery" but admitted that would have been for me and not her. Her work has a naiveté, a childlike expression. She played with it for two days. She made notes whilst doing everyday activities. She thought about it. At some point, I turned a lamp on and cast a warm golden glow on us whilst the rest of the room remained subdued.

Sara said that the process had been interesting and she was reminded of a time when she had no responsibilities. However, she also said it had re-enforced the idea that she had to make some

changes in her life. No one else could do this for her. She had to take responsibility for herself. She said it was a “sort of negative but not at the same time”.

Each participant has used the time to talk about what they wanted to create. Each person had enjoyed creating their piece. It has left them all thinking about their life and what they want. Sara is the only one who did not say she felt proud of her achievements but there is a determination to do something about her current situation. Her family is important to her but there is now a need for her to be the woman she wants to be. So, she has confirmed what she has been thinking about but not doing anything about. Perhaps the time has come for her to take that action?

I have found the interviews to be so interesting and, I’ve come to see that I am exploring a model for practice. It is exciting!

The particularities of Sara’s Story

When Sara first started to tell me her story it was to list her job roles, as if this is what she thought I needed to know. Then she talked about her life events, those areas of her life from which she has constructed a view of herself (Reid, 2006). For example, Sara believes that she and others, should be responsible for themselves. She attributes this to her relationship with her mother when she was a teenager, a time she believes, “...*taught me about responsibility, about taking responsibility for yourself...*”. She also said she was an independent, proud person who would not ask for help until she was comfortable to do so. In this, I felt she created an ‘ontology of the self’ (McAdams, 1993, p103), an account of how she came to be and how she wants others to see her. From her youth, Sara has adopted this worldview, and actively constructed her life through her own efforts and through her self-building, she has become more resilient, in a similar way to Carol. Consequently, she became the author of her own life (Cochran, 1997) as she wrote the chapters which have led her to where she is today. Goffman (1959) tells us, individuals may present an idealised impression of themselves to others, where they bring forwards certain aspects of their persona whilst screening others. As a friend, I have seen the independent, professional Sara but also her warmth and vulnerability, which makes me wonder if the part she publicly played was an impression she wanted to believe and show the world.

Indeed, this consideration could be upheld by her struggle to meet the requirements of working for a recruitment agency. An inherent sense of social justice came to the fore,

“... I liked the idea of being able to help people to get a job ... but I didn’t like the ruthless side of it ... and I didn’t like the idea of charging people a fee for what I was doing because I felt that I was helping”.

There was a sense of a moral injury, as suggested by Honneth (2001), because she recognised this job role was not right for her. The desire to help others was strong and as she said,

“and even though it’s nice to earn some money, I’m not going to trample over everyone else to do that...”

Sara decided to listen to her own wisdom and changed her job, demonstrating her personal agency. However, it should be noted, some may not have a choice and stay in jobs which are not right for them, to provide the means to support their other life roles.

Sara had found the recruitment position when she moved to Kent to be with her then boyfriend, now husband. Work was not the only area of her life to be unfulfilling at this time. Sara struggled to settle into domesticity saying, *“I think he thought it was the norm that I should stay at home and do the cooking”*. She often found herself staying at home at weekends by herself, whilst her partner seemingly to her, carried on with his life as before he went to university, and as a result, she said she felt *“rubbish”*. Sara had experienced change upon change when she moved to a new area, found work and began living with her boyfriend. Such changes can lead to dis-harmony with our world. She felt isolated and depressed but it was her independent approach to life which propelled her to act yet again.

A touch of chance a pinch of intuition?

Sara found a new position and describes this as,

“an opportunity came along ... and I thought ‘I’m just going to do that. I’m going to apply for that and see how I get on”.

Super (1957) suggests, given enough knowledge, chance does not exist. He notes, exposure to certain experiences could be attributed to chance but that people are exposed to many different experiences and their response to their experiences may be due to their biases. A person could apply themselves more to a situation if something in the situation resonates with them. Super, provides the example of Whistler, who having failed a science exam became an artist. ‘Was it due to a lack of ability, industry or interest?’ (ibid, p278). These factors, according to Super, are known and cannot be attributed to chance. Perhaps Sara saw something in the position which intuitively resonated with her, having amassed information through her previous roles to signal what she was seeking in a job. Or, perhaps it was her readiness to take a risk on something that was unknown (Krumboltz and Levin, 2004). Either way, in making a change in her work role, Sara saw positive changes to her personal life too. Through her work, she found a community to interact with, people who gave her a sense of self; the concept of recognition noted by Honneth (2001) and discussed previously in this work. She acknowledges her gratitude to her then boss, who Sara feels saw something in her and who helped Sara to believe in herself. Those who we see as significant others can have long reaching influence over our life-careers.

Her job helped Sara confidently go to different places and speak to different people; she believed it helped her to engage proactively with her surroundings,

“... I did wonder if I had not had that job whether I would have been as proactive y’know getting out there ... if I hadn’t had that job really, to be honest”.

According to Ibarra and Deshpande (2007), careers are shaped by our networks of relationships. Through them, Sara acquired the skills she needed to become a Career Guidance Adviser, and constructed her career by creating her own reality through shared social experiences. However, when Sara became a mother she once again began to question her sense of being.

Motherhood and work

Sara sees work as an important aspect of her life, providing purpose for herself and her family. In fact, she said *“I need some sort of structure”*, finding herself feeling lost whilst on maternity leave and happy to return to work. It has been suggested that women’s preferences for work can determine their life choices, with some preferring home-centred, work-centred or adaptive lifestyles (Hakim, 2006). Sara’s husband’s job involved long daily commuting, so she had the main responsibility for their children. She moved from a work-centred preference to part-time work, becoming more adaptive to combine family life and work commitments. It could be suggested there was a work to family conflict (Greenhaus and Foley, 2007) as Sara’s family life had an impact on her career outcome. Additionally, Tomlinson (2006) suggests women tend to cluster into a few occupational areas. When I think about Sara, Carol, and myself, I note we all work in educationally-related environments. I choose this area because I could be available for childcare by working part-time; perhaps the others had similar reasons.

Some women have no choice but to work full-time to support a family. My mother had to work when I was young ‘to make ends meet’, as my father financially supported his family in Sri Lanka. Others, may feel pressure to work full-time, fearing they may lose their professional positioning if they went part-time. Hakim’s (2006) understanding of a predilection for a home-centred work approach may suggest women maintain a preference through their lives, but as Super’s (1980) Life-Career Rainbow notes, women do move in and out of different roles. It is possible to begin as a homemaker and become an adaptive worker. Indeed, home could possibly be perceived as the main workplace for many women with young children (Bateson, 1989), who return from their day job for the ‘second shift.’ We create spaces to live and work in, and they are ‘concrete expressions’ (ibid, p120) of ourselves. Motherhood for Sara and others, can be a turning point (Belenky et al, 1986) and life may then be seen in a different way.

Sara's salient moment and another helping of chance

Another example of Sara taking a chance in her life-career was when she decided to relocate to a new area. She chose to record the moment she travelled to Kent, the journey itself, as she sees this move as having a major impact on her life. She felt this was like,

“a little road trip ... and I was off starting a new life. Erm y’know I was going to be doing something good, it was exciting, erm y’know and what was gonna be ahead of me I didn’t really know and that was going to be good because y’know I could choose what was going to happen”.

Adding,

“I didn’t know how easy it was going to be to find a job, I didn’t know how much it was going to cost us to move in together. Erm, yeah it was just a question of we’ll just find our way together and that will be fine because that’s what you do when you’re a couple...”.

However, at first, she rationalised what she could do to stay where she was, but then decided to follow her intuition when she finally made her decision; as such emotion overpowered reason (Murtagh et al, 2011). She did not know how the future would develop but she felt it was the right thing to do. It could be suggested, her decision-making was an expression of her beliefs regarding her future (Gellat, 1989) in that she did not know what the outcome would be, but somehow it would be alright. She saw an unknown future as preferable to her current situation. McAdams et al (2001) consider how lives can change, through the choices made, as a response to events, or an awareness of being in a state of transition. I suggest Sara was subjected to all these possibilities. She wanted to be with her boyfriend and the events in her life led her to making a choice to move and start a new life. She was aware of being at a transitional point, at a ‘turn in the road’. Sara saw a new start as an opportunity to choose what was going to happen; she was positive in her uncertainty (Gellat, 1989).

Furthermore, on making her decision, Sara said,

“I think it was excitement... And I think sort of... a little bit of a relief ... that you’ve made a decision and that you’re gonna go with it, you’re gonna do something. That y’ know, that you’re taking some action ...”

She had found a path through the discontinuities which pervaded her life (Bateson, 1989) and as her life continues to unfold, she will define and redefine herself through the actions she takes.

Summary

I began this chapter by stating I felt nervous to be ‘using’ a friend as a participant and indeed writing Sara’s story has not been an easy task. Why? As I analysed my thinking and emotions, it

came to me that I was trying too hard to see Sara's world as an unattached observer. Perhaps, I needed to allow the story to flow through me. In giving myself permission to be with the story, I began to see a way forward.

Sara's ability to assess her life using rationalised reason and then to take a risk by moving to another part of the country, left me feeling a sense of vulnerability as I tried to see the world through her eyes. How must she have felt? Alone and lacking direction? The move to be with her boyfriend would have provided a sense of security at a time when she felt uncertain. I recognised her desire for a new beginning when she said,

"I wanted something new, I wanted something different, to almost start again where people didn't know me. I didn't want to be bumping into people from school when I went into town and stuff like that. Y'know I wanted to be anonymous really which is what I had been at uni. You make a new start don't you? Erm and I think yeah and I think that was it as well. Just wanted to have a fresh beginning really".

However, the role she found on moving left her feeling a sense of injustice as it did not meet her intrinsic needs. She struggled to meet the requirements of working for a recruitment agency, finding payment for services abhorrent. This matters to Sara, as her relationship with her occupation is important in that she considers work to provide structure to her life and her family. Perhaps this is why at times she feels frustrated when her family and working lives conflict and as the person mainly responsible for childcare, has to adapt her life-career.

Although not discussed, learning was mentioned briefly by Sara, stating that she went to university and then to gain postgraduate qualifications as a Careers Adviser. Of all the participants, Sara was the only one who went from school to university. I wondered if she saw learning as an expectation? She did not say and I did not ask the question as I wanted Sara to tell her story her way. However, I cannot help but ponder if she saw her postgraduate qualification as an investment or as a personal need, as Carol and I felt. I wish in hindsight, I had the courage to ask the question. In the next section I explore the process Sara adopted to record her salient moment.

The creative piece

As mentioned earlier, Sara chose to depict the moment of her journey to Kent. She told me she had initially felt intrigued and excited about the prospect to do something different, to create something. It was almost as if she wanted something to happen that would bring a difference to her life and the chance to do something creative would provide the opportunity. Her original

thought had been to bring objects together and photograph them. The only thing she had from that time was an old map, but it was important to her,

“... it’s all torn and it’s out of date now ... I don’t actually want to throw it away” ... because it has significance for me”.

In considering photographing objects from her past, Sara may have not only wanted to capture their image, but also the hidden social context and the personal memories of that time (Chang, 2008). She said the map was a reminder of past journeys, representing to her a time of change, but also of a simpler way of life when people were not reliant on technology or someone else. Whilst on the one hand, she was in a state of anxiety due to the forces that were driving her to leave, on the other, she was excited about the prospect of change and wanted to take a chance.

Returning to her original thinking, Sara added, she wanted to create *“a display a sort of collage”* and I thought about how all participants had considered this creative method, with Beth making a collage of her moment. In the end, Sara decided to draw a picture and in doing so, as noted by McMahon (2006), created a tangible product which gave her insight into her chosen moment. Importantly, she thought this method allowed her to explore her moment in a way that enabled her to complete the work. She said her original idea was more for my benefit, *“what would Laurie like to see, what would be good?”* I wanted participants to choose their own method, rather than constraining them to a defined outline which Hollway and Jefferson (2000), suggest could lead individuals to tailor their contribution to what they feel the researcher is looking for. The ideas sheet I provided was to help, not define her choice. Before and during her work, Sara engaged with a thinking process which I would like to discuss.

The process Sara adopted

The following excerpt shows Sara’s thinking before starting her creative piece,

“I think it sort of felt as though I had a bit of a blank canvas to do something on. You know I really had to put thought on what I wanted to include and what I wanted to capture. But I did it over a couple of days actually erm... and started it and then y’know went away and came back to it and was making notes on a notepad next to it as I was thinking about it as well. So y’know again I thought I would just do it and get it done but actually I did some on one night you know then I went away and thought you know ‘I don’t want to do anymore leave that for a minute’ and then I came back to it and thought ‘well okay we’ll put that in as well’. Erm see I was... - yeah it took me a while to think about what I would put in there and how I would portray this moment”.

She took time to think about what she wanted, during which she reasoned with herself, almost engaging in personal soliloquies, when she decided to leave it alone, giving herself time to

consider other aspects to include. Law (2008) considers soliloquy to be a relevant way for individuals to communicate with themselves, helping to question and deliberate inner thoughts. Such conversations continued as Sara went about her daily life, as she noted, *“almost in my subconscious really”* and were not ignited by anything in particular, but she also said, *“I think I was thinking about change and erm y’know what I want, what I was feeling at the time as well”*.

Perhaps this thought had been planted during the interview process, informing her thinking and actions as she considered her creative piece. Sara was simultaneously thinking about her feelings at the time of her salient moment as well. So, whilst she was thinking about the moment, she was also recalling her feelings about the moment. Reavey (2011) notes, when individuals look at photographs from their past they may imagine how they felt at that time and create new narratives about the past in the present. Of her childhood, Sara had said,

“I think a lot of what I do remember has been triggered by photos. And I’m then not sure if the photo has created... a memory or whether I am sort of thinking back to how it was. Erm, but I have sort of thought before I don’t know if I have sort of blanked things out...”

It could be that Sara in a similar way, was imagining how she felt about her moment, from her current perspective. Was she thinking about her feelings then, or thinking about then and feeling in the now? I felt Sara was thinking about her feelings then which she confirmed by saying *“... I remember how strong those feelings were”*, implying such feelings have the capacity to reside within us, waiting to be brought forth when provided with the right prompt, in this case the task of capturing the moment.

Whilst in the process of creativity, Sara said she spent time intensely concentrating on the piece,

“... I did realise that I don’t really have time where I can zone out everything else and engross myself in something where I can be just a little bit free to do whatever it is that I was feeling or thinking. But yeah, I did have a vision, and to... maybe not a vision maybe more of a memory, like visiting, revisiting the memory of it, but it felt no, whilst I was doing it I was able to zone out everything else... which was, it was a nice feeling really”.

It is interesting that others in the study have also noted the sense of freedom the creative process gave them; Beth stated she felt freer because of taking part in the study. Moreover, Sara could focus solely on her memory. To me, it seemed she was finding her way in the process by reflecting and concentrating on the work. Just as her image depicted a journey, her engagement with the piece, could be seen in a similar way as she travelled through the process. She was not lost in space or time, but she took time, found time, and in a sense made time to think about the

work, as she immersed herself in the experience. Additionally, Sara used her spatial setting to support her creativity,

“...I have to say I sat in front of the TV, Anthony was watching TV and I sat there over a couple of nights with crayons pens and things. But I felt as though I didn't want to go and sit in a room by myself because I think then I would have felt pressure... to create something... and I would have been frustrated. Whereas to do it in this way felt as it was okay to draw something and make a mistake and rub it out and go back to it. So, it felt almost more informal to do it like that”.

To Sara, this relaxed environment alleviated any pressure and frustration she could have felt to create and complete the work. Another aspect Sara felt was important about the process, was the time she been given,

“... it was the time that I think made a bit more of a difference that almost helped me to just complete it. So, I didn't feel as though I was rushing to get something on paper... for you. This was, the time helped for it to be for me”.

The time also allowed Sara to talk to her husband, a significant other in her life, about the creative piece. As such, Sara embarked on a physical and mental journey as she engaged with the process. The time helped to develop creativity as opposed to rushing to create something during or soon after the interview, and as Sara said, *“I can't be creative to order darling!”*

Sara wanted to show the strength of her feelings in her drawings but where she felt unable to, she wrote specific words. Sometimes words can express so much to the viewer; after all, Sara's feelings were hers alone. Language helps us to make meaning reality (Bruner, 1990) and Sara used the sign of words to express her feelings to others.

Sara chose to portray her moment in a coloured, hand-drawn picture on an A3 size page. She drew things she remembered from her journey such as the car she drove, the music tape she listened to and the road she travelled on,

“Well I've got the M5 Bristol at one end and I've put my final destination as Dover. I wasn't aiming for Dover but I did go to Dover, I wasn't planning to but I just kept on going on the motorway. Erm basically didn't get off when I should have done. So, I went all the way to Dover and had to turn round and come back again [she smiles and we laugh together]. Erm so yeah, I saw a little bit more of Kent than I had hoped, y'know than I needed to that day. So yeah, the motor way was obviously a long journey for me ... erm so I wanted to get the road in there. But also, I wanted to put the open road because I had my map and I had some directions but other than that I didn't really know where I was going. Erm so obviously y'know that day was rather exciting because I didn't really know where I was going but also in terms of my life I didn't have any other plans other than to get there and see how we get on”.

She did not know what lay ahead of her, on her journey or her life. She also included the clothes hanging rail she took with her in her car as it was such a physical barrier to her driving and she found it funny to have a rail sticking out of a small Fiesta. These objects were aspects that Sara remembered about her journey to Kent and she was surprised by the clarity of her memory, *“It’s so strange that I remember it so clearly”*. Turning points in our lives can be remembered vividly and they can be catalysts for change, even if we struggle to express why we have changed (Belenky et al, 1986). The journey was a salient moment in Sara’s life-career and she knew her life would be different in the future, but she did not know how it would be different. By drawing her moment, Sara created a new history in the present, by revisiting a moment out of context, she re-experienced her past (Denzin, 2012).

She wanted to include other objects but could not conceive how to draw them. For example, it was a hot day and Sara depicted this with a thermometer, but she could not draw the clothes she wore to show the temperature. Instead, she showed this using colour. This was used to add vibrancy to the work as, by including the sun in the drawing, Sara wanted to not only illustrate the heat of the day, *“but also the warmth and the sort of the brightness”* of what she felt she was moving towards. She also wanted to show where she had come from and in a corner, wrote the word ‘history’, preferring this to a drawing which could be misinterpreted as *“misery or a bad place or sadness”* and this would not be accurate. Additionally, she reflexively noted, *“so without thinking about it that’s where I was going and this was where I was coming from”*. One word ‘history’ had become a symbolic expression of her narrative (Horsdal, 2012). Other written expressions were also used to express her thinking and feeling.

For her intended destination, she wrote Kent as ‘the Garden of England’, as this was something that she had learnt when her boyfriend sent her a postcard of the county with the words on it. Sara narrated her story through the symbolic expressions of words and drawings and as such, I gained a deeper understanding of what she was trying to express through her work. It was for me, a powerful interpretation of her moment. Her journey was a transitional event, from one place to another, one aspect of herself to another in her process of becoming who she is today.

She wanted to depict that she felt “optimistic” about her future. She saw it as an opportunity. Sara did not want people to think she was moving to just be with her boyfriend. Instead, she wanted to tell them that she did not have anywhere to live and that she and her boyfriend had talked about living together, but he lived some distance away. In her mind, the events of her life had coincided and she also saw it as a *“bit of a sign”* that she was being told something. If things did not work out, she thought she would return or try something else. She wanted to keep an open mind, but

eventually her inner rational arguments gave way to her intuitive self when she said, “right sod it, I’m just gonna do it”.

On reflection, Sara felt drawing her moment and using colour helped her to express what she was thinking and feeling at that time, more than the other techniques she had considered. Creativity came from her unique perspective, the way she interacted with the materials chosen and the creative experience. Interestingly, Sara said once she had finished her piece, she noted how it had “almost cemented” how she had felt at that time. Other participants have also mentioned the ‘cementing’ of their thinking by taking part in the study. As such, re-visiting times in our past when we felt we had made positive life-career decisions, can influence our thinking in the present and possibly, our future actions. This is a key aspect of this work and needs to be acknowledged.

However, Sara also noted that the experience had not been entirely positive for her. She said, taking part had made her think about her life, how it had changed and how she would like it to change. She said,

“... it made me realise how things are very different... and how it would be nice to make some changes as well”.

The future is something that Sara believes is in her control, “*you’re the one who can drive it forward and make decisions about what you’re doing*”. At the time of the moment she depicted in her drawing, Sara did not have the responsibilities she has now. She has considered what she can change but feels there are ‘restrictions’ to what she can do, particularly with her work as she needs to be available for her children. It should be noted that many women may need to be the main carers for their children because of their circumstances; they may feel they have little choice. There exists a gender divide, albeit some men take on the role because of their situations or perhaps if their partners have greater earnings. Work and family life may conflict (Greenhous and Foley, 2007) at times in our lives when we feel at the mercy of structures beyond our control. Yet, Sara is determined to make some changes in her life and said, “... *I have to look for a different solution*”. Kline (1999) suggests people will think for themselves if the conditions are right. I would add, that providing the opportunity for people to choose their own time and setting to engage with a creative guidance process, appears to support deeper thinking processes than perhaps in a more formal environment.

Sara told me she had enjoyed the experience of taking part in the study and found creating her work “*cathartic*”, so there may be a therapeutic aspect to introducing creative practices to career guidance work. She also said that it had been beneficial to,

“strip everything back and remember what it was like and then to think about now and think well, why can't it be more like that”.

She said it had made her think about what she was going to do and *“then it will implement change”*. It seems the process has helped Sara to engage in an activity which brought about personal meaning for her and in doing so, she has strengthened her self-identity (Peavy, 2004).

Bateson (1989), considers the self as composed from raw materials we use to re-imagine our future selves as we re-interpret the past and give meaning to the present. Sara had returned to her past and thought again about a time which held significance for her and in doing so, she could see her life in the present. As a result, she felt a yearning for a simpler time when she did not feel the restrictions of her current situation. This is not to say she is unhappy, but she wants to add an enhancement to her life. In short, Sara appears to want to be able to take some action and in doing so, experience the autonomy of her salient moment.

Concluding thoughts: returning to the research questions

‘How do creative practices help individuals to ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?’ may well in Sara’s case have different answers. On one hand, she found the experience gave her time to think about a period in her life when she was ‘free’ and did not have any expectations. It ‘cemented’ how she felt at a time in her past. She seemed to view change through an optimistic lens, where opportunity had the potential to bring exciting transformations. The creative process appears to have enabled her to ‘strip’ everything back to the time of her salient moment which she felt as a positive. The process also reminded her of commitments and responsibilities in the present, making her want to change something but unsure what she can do, due to the restrictions which impinge on her life. Her agentic disposition however, has made her determined to make an alteration somewhere in her life-career. So, even if she is unable to make an external change, I believe she has been changed internally by the creative process.

Sara said that when she was thinking about her salient moment, she was simultaneously aware of the feelings she experienced at that time; something also noted by Carol in the previous chapter. So, the second question ‘how do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?’, could be answered by suggesting that creativity has the propensity to heighten emotional recollection, when people are immersed in a personally meaningful task, about a time when they felt they had control over an area of their life-career.

The final question ‘what part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?’, appears to be relevant in Sara’s case as when she

has had to make life-career decisions she seems to have engaged in self-deliberation, open-mindedness to chance possibilities (Krumboltz and Levin, 2004) and a sense of otherworldliness, eventually following her gut instincts (Gigerenzer, 2007). When leaving her home-base, she reasoned with herself on why she should go to Kent, seeing this as a time, “*when all these things have just come about at the same time by coincidence*” and “*... a bit of a sign that somebody is trying to tell me something*”, implying a sense of ethereal influence. Additionally, when she decided to leave the employment agency she saw an opportunity and decided “*I’m just gonna do that*”. It would seem then, that intuition did play a relevant part when Sara made career decisions at salient moments in her life.

I found this chapter the hardest to write, struggling to find the words that would justify Sara’s story and perhaps it is because I know her better than my other participants. I did not want to cause her or those who know her harm. In a similar way to my own story, I have omitted aspects of Sara which I feel would have opened doors to the stories of others whose voices are faint echoes in Sara’s narrative. Am I right to think like this? What about what is best for the study? I prefer to think, what is best for my participant. As a researcher, I have been blessed with participants who have freely given me the gift of their stories. What I write will be fixed in print (Josselson, 1996) and I am mindful of my words.

I thought it prudent to email all my participants to find out if anything had changed for them since their participation in the study. Carol did not respond and Beth said a lot had happened but did not elaborate. Sara replied and I would like to share the relevant sentences: -

‘Looking back, I think that the study may have helped me to remember the changes that I had been through and coped with and given me confidence to not be afraid of it now. I started properly looking for new jobs and so did Anthony, but also made changes to my personal life’.

She did not tell me at the time of our second interview of her growth in confidence or that she could move forward now without fear. A year had passed since we sat together in my lounge, but perhaps the study had sown the seeds of self growth and knowledge.

In the next, chapter I attempt to bring the work together.

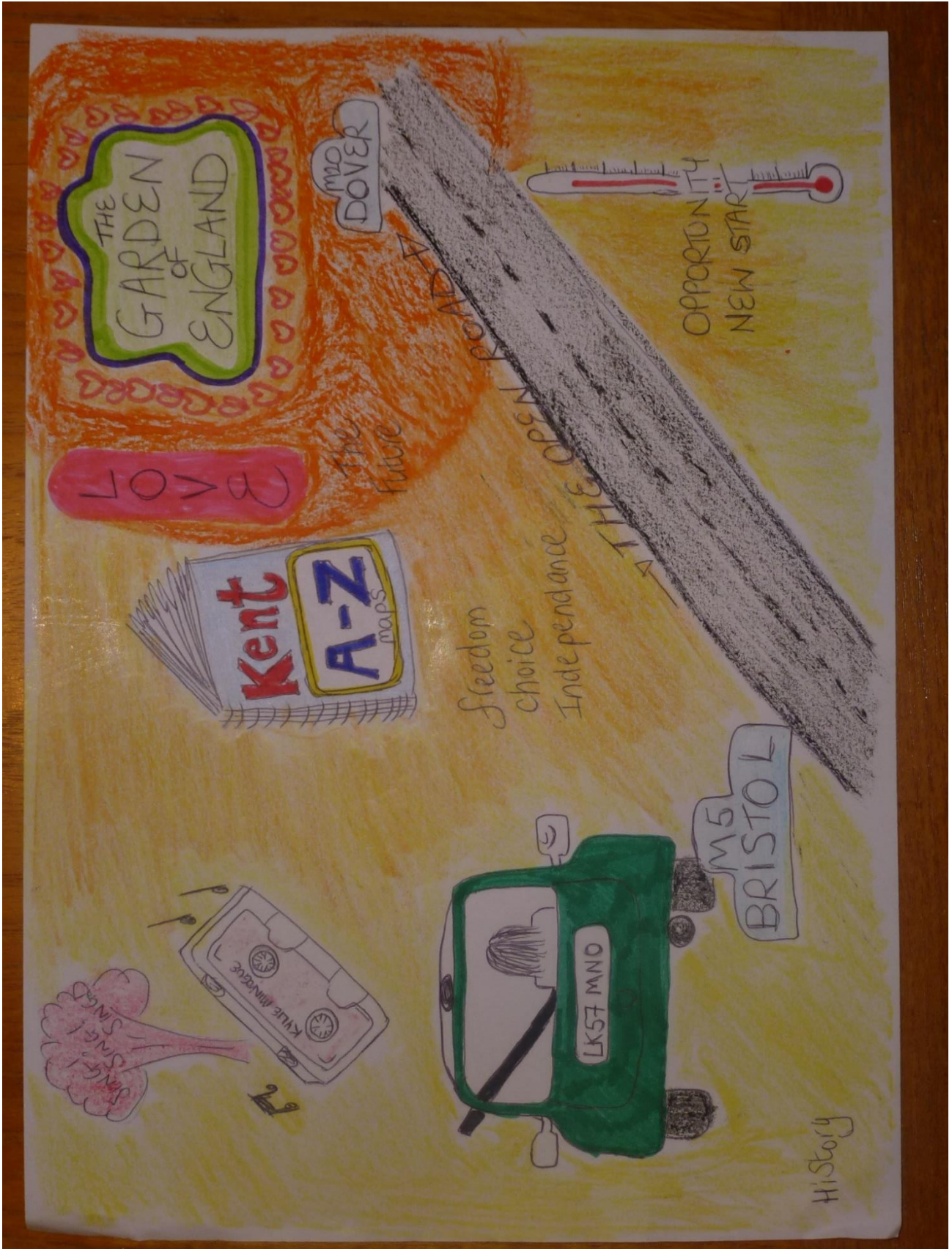


Figure 6

Chapter 9

An Imagined Conversation

26/6/17

My mind is a seething mass of information, invading my body, my sinew, bones and blood. I feel its tentacles reaching out to the furthest extremities and I tingle with anticipation. Sometimes I like this feeling and sometimes I don't. Recently, the world has invaded my space with tragedy upon tragedy, bombarding my senses so I feel emotionally overloaded. Terrorist attacks that murder children, a tower block engulfed in flames. I have wept, I have raged and I have sat in silence watching events unfold on a TV screen, imagining I am there. These experiences are real but it is almost like watching a film such is the 'realness' of the events. It is hard to believe it is happening. I am squeezed dry, wrung out, desensitised by the media. Yet, I cannot stop thinking of how it must feel to lose someone in an instant. How would their lives have been lived? To imagine events like attending a prom, becoming a parent, holding a grandchild. Lives lost in the name of religion and cost cutting measures. I think about the beauty that surrounds me. Horses frolic in the paddock beyond our garden, flowers bloom in a myriad of colour, trees rustle with each languid breeze, big blue Cambridge skies. In my mind, I hear my granddaughter laughing and I imagine her unborn sibling joining her in play. A possible reality. And I am thankful. What is real life? The horrors I can only see via a TV screen or read about, or what I can experience or imagine for myself? It is both the actual and the possible that informs my life.

For this chapter, I wanted to create a possibility, an imagined event which would draw together all the participants for a discussion on the creative processes adopted and what they discovered because of taking part in the study. I remembered reading Clough (2002) when I studied to become a Career Guidance Adviser. He wrote about his life as a teacher, fictionalising experiences and considered aspects, not lived, but imagined as possibilities. Clough suggested, real events may have to be transformed to tell a version of the truth from the researcher's perspective, and from this viewpoint, data may need to be manipulated to suit the purpose.

When I came to consider this chapter, I remembered Clough and fascinated by the prospect, wanted to begin a new possible conversation, which took the participants beyond the confines of transcribed interviews to a new space. I sat in the safety of my study and pondered. Their voices began to fill my head and I imagined Beth, Carol and Sara clustered together so they could look over my shoulder as I typed. They are the people I 'see' in my thesis saturated world. I cannot think like them or for them, so I think and sense how they could be. They become my imagined co-researchers in a similar way to 'Mr Gingey' the imagined childhood friend of Jane Speedy (2008), whose appearance in later years, made her think about 'relationships between truths, make-believe, 'legitimate' research and the impact of the stories we tell ourselves about our lives' (p2). I felt a childlike desire to 'poke a stick' into the possibility of 'troubling' these boundaries (ibid) to see what could transpire through the inquiry of writing. A chance to further explore the rich material gathered, was just too tantalising. However, I wanted to include my participants and

decided, as in the case studies, to call upon their own words to provide a sense of realness in the unreal. To this end, I found myself drawn again to the transcripts so that Beth, Carol and Sara's actual words could be heard. Yes, I manipulated the text, but I tried to maintain their connotations to deliver a trustworthy, believable story. To differentiate their words from mine, I used a bold font. I felt this also made the words stand proud on the page, in recognition of their contribution to this work. Some of this material may have been discussed in the participant chapters but in this context, I attempted to provide a view through another section of the stained-glass window. An analogy I use in my story to express how individuals view their worlds.

It occurred to me to call upon an imagined space where all the participants could gather in the same location, but where? In my head there ensued a somewhat erratic discussion but all the 'voices' decided that as they could not imagine being in Cambridge with me I would need to imagine a setting which would be feasible to all; 'we' decided on a café in Maidstone with the details being left to me to conjure from magical and real-life realms. Would this be asking too much of those who would read this work? Would I be flouting the boundaries of academic expectations for a doctoral study? I hope not, as others have ventured before me, for example Fraser (2013).

The influence of theoretical 'friends' becomes apparent in this work. For example, in the imagined conversations, Savickas (2011) and McMahon and Patton (2006) helped me to see how experiences involve aspects such as relationships, gender and social contexts and that these influence lives. Occurrences may be attributed to chance (Krumboltz and Levin, 2004) and responses influenced by fast thinking intuition (Kahneman, 2011). I hoped to write evocatively, inspired by Ellis (2004) to capture the multiple facets of life, encouraging verisimilitude. Gaining a holistic understanding of the self as suggested by Rogers (1961), aided my understanding of the participants' process of becoming which Jarvis (2006) discusses, and this knowledge supported my thinking, aiding the writing. By using writing as inquiry (Richardson, 2000, 2008) I creatively explored material and discovered meaning as thoughts appeared. Others will also be mentioned as this work unfolds.

I wanted to gather together the material from different positions and was reminded of Richardson's (1997) ethnographic drama 'sea monster' in which she reflected on her position in her work, showing how reflexivity looked and felt, rather than just talking about it. She discusses combining the genres of our stories, reflections, notes and analysis, to gain meaning and depth to our texts. "We can take pleasures in the crafting and recrafting" (p67). Further, I struggled to consider an 'academic' way forward to write this chapter. Again, Richardson (ibid) came to my

rescue when ‘she suggested’ I consider my specific circumstances, how they affected what I wrote and what I had become. I feel I have become a researcher who writes her way and sings her own song composed of all her life experiences.

The aim is to offer a synthesis so you the reader and I the researcher-writer, can see how the work has developed and what was discovered. It is the latter which is most pertinent to me. When I started the work, I could only imagine what might transpire and looking back, I was naïve in my expectations. I did not realise how a doctoral study would consume my life in such a totalistic manner. It has been a drug that had to be administered daily lest I falter. I will return to such musings in the concluding ‘after thought’ chapter. So, let us begin.

Setting the scene

The summer sun rides high in a nonchalant cloudless sky. A barely-there breeze caresses my bare arms as I walk with a lazy but purposeful gait. I have come to Maidstone to meet Beth, Carol and Sara. They had participated in my study on using creative practices to capture career turning points and I thought it would be nice to catch up with them. It is probably unusual to bring people together like this but as long as I keep the conversation on the creative moment, I do not think I would be breaching any ethical implications. Anyway, I wanted to thank them for their contribution by inviting them to tea. Last month, I sent out invitations,

Dear [names added individually],

I would very much like to invite you to join me for afternoon tea at Lucy’s Tea Room, Maidstone on Saturday 25th June at 3pm. I am also inviting the others who took part in my study so that we can chat about our creative moments over clotted cream and jam filled scones!

It would be lovely to catch up and hope to hear from you soon.

Laurie x

I was not sure if I would get any response but they all agreed to come (Sara said she was curious to meet the others, Beth said she loved a cream tea, and Carol said it would be nice to talk again). So, here I was, walking a familiar path down the High Street to the tea room. In the ‘square’ a band played a samba inspired tune which magically transformed the faces of those standing nearby, turning frowns to smiles. People began to laugh and sway their bodies in time with the music. Maidstone to Rio in a few moments. I smile at children holding hands and jumping up and down to emulate the grownups gyrations, and I walk on.

A bell tinkles musically as I open the tea room door. Quintessentially retro English. It is 2.50pm and the frilly-apron bedecked assistant, complete with mop cap, smiles as she shows me to a rose-strewn cloth-covered table, carefully placed under a low beam to provide a conducive tea-room atmosphere. The perfume from a small vase of sweet peas immediately fragrant the air. I gingerly avoid the beam and sit down to face the door. 2.55pm. Will they come? Oh, don’t go there again!

I had these thoughts whilst waiting for Carol and Sara to arrive for their interviews. The doorbell goes. It's a woman and her daughter, burdened with shopping bags. They fall into ladder-backed chairs, bags rustling as they tumble around them. 3.00pm.

The bell toils again, Sara walks in, sees me and comes straight over. "Hi, I'm glad you're here" we hug and I say, "thank you so much for coming, is Anthony having the boys this afternoon?" "Oh, yes, they've all gone swimming at Mote Park". "Great, we're just waiting for the others." And with that, both Beth and Carol walk through the door, smiling at each other the way people do when they don't know the other person but arrive at a destination together. I smile and stand up narrowly avoiding the beam. "Careful!" I laugh "this is going to get me before the afternoon is done!" Everybody sits down and silence falls. Okay here I go. "It's so lovely to see you all again; thanks so much for coming. I thought this might be nicer than sending out an email asking how things are going". I am interrupted by the assistant with the cap asking for our orders. Everyone wants the cream tea and happy to have an easy request, she leaves us to continue. "As I was saying, this could be a lovely way to bring things together so to speak, find out what we all thought. But let me introduce everyone. Sara, this is Beth and Carol." Smiles all round, then Carol looks at Sara "Don't I know you? Have we met before?" "You know, I was thinking the same thing when I saw you" replied Sara. "Do you work at the College?" "Yes, in learning support, I've probably seen you around the building" and they smile knowingly at each other, and the slight ripple of tension leaves the table. I look at Beth "It's likely that you've seen Sara and Carol at some point Beth, maybe on a course or at a conference?" Beth with her smiling eyes looks around the table "Oh I expect so, I meet lots of people all the time but it's really lovely to meet you all today. I love research and it's exciting to actually meet other participants. So, what is it that everyone does?" I watch the other three talking about their work and I see the animation in their bodies as their passions take over. Carol the quieter of the three responds to questions, but falls back to listen to the table chatter. Beth and Sara closer in age, but different in life-stage, chat away about their working lives. I feel a sense of pride when I look around the table, as I have brought these people together. Would they become friends in the future? I think now of Tillman (2015) and how friendship can develop through and from a research activity. My level of friendship with these women varied; I know Sara fairly well, Beth less so and Carol hardly at all. Yes, as the researcher, I employed a friendly demeanour and if I am honest, I think I feel closer to them now because of the research process.

"You're quiet Laurie, what's on your mind?" Beth looks at me quizzically. "Oh, bless you, I was just thinking that I feel close to you all; I feel that I have gone through the process with you". Sara quips "Blimey love, careful or you'll have me in tears!" We all laugh and I realise that I need to lighten up, the research is important to me, but just an interesting interlude in their lives. Our tea arrives, and there is a flurry of activity as cups rattle in matching bone-china saucers, large teapots stand proudly with accompanying pots of re-filling hot water, cake stand with enormous scones, a variety of glistening jams and scrumptious clotted cream sit in cut-glass dishes on the rose-strewn alter. "Okay everyone, tuck in." No one needed a second invitation.

I play 'Mum' and pour the tea whilst the others pass around food. I split the scone and plied one half with thick yellow cream, topping it with a generous spoon of strawberry jam. "I do it the other way round", said Carol. "I think one way is meant to be Devon and the other Cornwall, (everyone is different) but the result always tastes good" I replied, "I just love it either way" and take a large bite. "Okay, I think we should start to talk about the creative process, that okay with everyone?" Nods all round as the munching continued.

Tea with everything: discussing the idea

“Actually Laurie, it’s been a while and I’ve forgotten why you decided on this topic in the first place. Perhaps, you could fill me in again?”, Sara said and turned to me, expectantly. “Well, it began really when I was doing my Masters”. Everyone, stopped eating and looked at me.

“I thought about my decision-making at certain times in my life, you know, those turning points, and it occurred to me that I could remember some things really vividly. I could feel myself back in the past as I re-imagined a particular moment. I was also taken with the idea of capturing those moments using creative practices and originally, thought about using creative writing as the method because that was my preference. “Oh, I’m so glad you didn’t!” exclaimed Beth. “I don’t think I would have wanted to take part if you had”. The other two nodded their agreement. “Yes, I came to realise quite quickly, that I had to remove the boundaries so to speak and let people choose their own way. In hindsight, I’m really glad I did because by providing a ‘blank canvas’ (I looked at Sara who smiled) I think the material was so much richer”. “So, what are you going to do now?” Carol asked. “To be honest, I’m not sure at this stage. I want to provide an alternative narrative to the one that dominates the career guidance industry. I want to show career practitioners that matching people to possible occupations is fine but that actually, we could offer something which engages the person, helps them to think about times when they felt in control of their lives. And as a result, they possibly could take some action, or not, but maybe change their thinking about their current situation. Either way, they feel they are in control again, rather than at the mercy of other factors in their lives”.

Silence, all eyes were on me, have I said too much, made them feel uncomfortable? “You know what Laurie, those computer programmes are okay in small doses, but it would be useful to have another tool in the box wouldn’t it?” Sara’s voice broke the silence. “Since taking part, I’ve been thinking about how I could use creative practices with my young people” added Beth. “I found the process really rewarding and it reminded me of why I do what I do” Carol’s voice joined the others. I felt so humbled by their generous spirit of unity; it was as if they wanted me to feel it had been all worthwhile. “Thank you everyone; I really appreciate the support. I guess we’ll just have to see where it goes. Another cup anyone?”

A gathering of thinking

“Okay, who is happy to talk about their moment first?” “I’m happy to start” and all eyes turned to Carol. I smile at her and think about how she has grown in confidence. “When Laurie asked me to take part I really didn’t know what to expect and **I’m no good at being creative. I did think about what I wanted to do and my initial thought was I would use the opportunity to do a mind map but IT side mind map. I couldn’t do it. Then I left it and tried again and then, me and IT don’t really get on and I couldn’t get the images I wanted and things like that. So again, I left it, and just started thinking about it, and then there was a focal point and things previous to that point and things after that point were key factors in where I got to today. I did start writing a piece but then I decided I was no good at that either. I’m just no good at writing and I hate putting words down on paper. So, I drew, more of a cycle actually, with the moment that my career started in the middle and then the cycle of events round the outside**”. Voices from other tables faded and occasionally the sound of a teaspoon clinking against a cup gently interrupted the thick silence surrounding her voice. “**After I’d finished the piece I thought I could have done a collage because that would have been okay**”. With arms twirling an invisible baton, Beth interrupted “I did a collage!” And then, realising she had stopped

Carol in flow added “sorry, I just couldn’t resist”. Carol laughed and smiling said “No problem. **I thought it captured what I needed it to capture and as I was going round my pictures, I realised that I could also capture my emotions and feelings at the same time because just by drawing that memory if you like, reminded me why I’d chosen those things. Lots of positives actually. Lots of it were memories, what inspired me and made me act and go down a certain route. And the significant people in my life that made things possible for me, directed me. I went to colour it and I thought, ‘no I don’t need to it’s finished’”.**

“Carol, it sounds like taking part has had an impact on you?”

“It’s been good doing it. I never thought I could draw... I think because I tried to think about that moment that changed things and as I thought about that I started thinking about other things that sort of tied in with it”.

“I get that. My experience was a bit similar. Can I go next?” Beth asked. “Sure, it’s great to hear about everyone’s’ experiences,” replied Sara. “Go ahead”.

“To start with I think a part of it was a bit of pressure because I really wanted it to be good for you” She looks at me and starts to laugh. **“It was like ‘Oh m’God, it has to be so good’. I think it’s an interesting thing to do. It’s not the sort of thing someone asks you all the time is it? And it was quite nice actually to like, think about ideas and what I might do, sort of processes and that sort of stuff, so it was good. I think it was just sort of like lots of, reminiscing really. It was interesting to talk to other people about it. Everyone else not contributed but triggered things in my brain. It made me think a lot about a teacher and sort of the influence she’s had, and I kept remembering other little things, like bits about her personality and other things I had totally forgotten until I started to think about it. It’s weird because it’s a lot clearer in my mind now as well, as obviously I’ve been thinking about it lots and stuff. Yes weird, how almost from the idea and telling you about it originally that it’s sort of pieced together into like a concrete memory... But let me tell you what I did!”** Beth’s infectious enthusiasm is hard to resist and we all smile and laugh.

“I thought actually if it was a bit of collage and a bit of a bit of drawing, you know actually it didn’t feel like hard work drawing it because usually I don’t like drawing because I get bored and drawing is so boring, but it was fine. Because I drew a bit and stuck stuff on and drew another bit and, it just seemed to come together in my head and on the paper. I mean I’m still surprised how good it is, it’s surprising that I thought about it loads. I thought of a few things and I was just like, I wouldn’t want to write it because I can speak it and you typed it up, so I think it was the easiest route... I think that’s good because if you had to go and now do a... y’know, that would be really hard. To be able to have done anything, then you have to think about it. I started wanting it to be a bit realistic and then I was like I will be bored with that and I’m not gonna enjoy that so how can I have that bit that I want but actually some fun other bits and other stuff. It came as a natural process actually. Even though I had planned it and thought about it loads, I was really sort of surprised and pleased how it came out. I was like ‘it’s really good okay!’ I thought I can tinker with it and then thought actually I don’t need to”.

“Wow Beth. It sounds like your piece was amazing. And Carol, your drawing sounds so interesting. I did a drawing too and I guess it’s my turn now?” Sara looked at us expectantly and we all nod.

“I was quite intrigued to sort of figure out what I might come up with, ‘cause when people talk about something creative I get quite excited. I think ‘Oo that’s going to be a nice opportunity to do something different and create something’. I was thinking about my moment and what I wanted to do was to gather together things that were important to me in almost a display and photograph them. But when I started thinking about it, I didn’t have any of those things anymore. It was only through the one thing that I had, and it’s a map of Kent, and it’s all torn and it’s out of date now really because there’s been so much development and change but it has significance for me. So, I then thought could I get a picture, almost create a collage? But that proved a little bit of a problem because our printer doesn’t seem to want to print anything! In the end I drew something. I don’t usually draw and I wouldn’t class myself as being very good at it. I then realised that I didn’t have around me the things that I wanted. I had visions of a lovely sketch pad... A lovely nice bright sunny day to create this masterpiece that would obviously give you so much material to write about and it would be really great and in the end, it’s just turned out like something like my six-year-old has done with his crayons!” She laughed loudly and her hand moves mimicking a child drawing quickly and purposefully. We all laugh at her antics. The laughter drifts away and her face adopts a more serious expression. **“You know, I really had to put thought on what I wanted to include and what I wanted to capture. But I did it over a couple of days, started it and then went away and came back to it and was making notes on a notepad next to it as I was thinking about it as well. I thought I would just do it and get it done, but actually I did some on one night, then I went away and thought ‘I don’t want to do anymore leave that for a minute’ and then I came back to it and thought ‘well okay we’ll put that in as well’. It took me a while to think about what I would put in there and how I would portray this moment. I think I was thinking about change and what I want, what I was feeling at the time as well. because I remember how strong those feelings were. I was thinking about how I might be able to get that across in my drawing. But I’m not sure whether I achieved it so in the end, I have to say, I just wrote the word to depict it, ‘cause I’m not very good at drawing. I did it in pencil first then I went over it in pen, and then I put colour in because I wanted to put the sun in to sort of show... the heat of the day but also the warmth and the sort of the brightness of what I felt I was going to.**

I wanted to create something that was quite artistic... almost something that you might see in a gallery. I just had a vision of these objects gathered together in a picture and that keeps it all nice and tidy and contained as well, but practicality meant that I couldn’t do that. It then sort of evolved into this and this allowed me to be a bit more expressive and creative, but I think, as I said, it allowed me to explore it a bit more and to complete it. I think my original idea, I would have perhaps have done that for you and the purpose of your study. You know what does this study need? What would Laurie like to see what would look good? Whereas this is, has perhaps fulfilled me more. Sorry, I didn’t realise I had gone on so much”. Sara sat back in her chair, sipping her tea, content now she had said what was on her mind.

“Thank you Sara, and it sounds as if you put a lot of thought into your piece. In fact, you all put so much into the work. I think it’s only fair, if I tell you a bit about my creative piece”. “Yes, that would be good Laurie. I think we need to hear what you did too” Carol said, smiling at me gently.

“Well, as you know I like to write, which is why I thought I would ask everyone to write something for the study but... I’m so glad that I didn’t because what you all created was of you. So, I wrote a piece and then decided to play around with it. First, I sort of cut it up and changed

the font. Then I created a poem out of it and then I created a sort of 'word art' where I boxed the different cut up sections. First it was in black and white, but then I added colour because I liked the way it looked. But like you Sara, (I turned to face her) I found that I blanked everything out when I was working and really concentrated. Like everyone, I spent a lot of time thinking about the work, and then actually creating the piece. I don't know how much of this I would have done if I was just taking part so to speak, rather than actually doing the study. I think it must have been a lot to ask of you, so thanks again. Actually, can I ask... did knowing me make a difference?"

Beth looked at me and said **"I mean it was a bit stressful, I was like "Oh, what am I going to do" but once I thought about it, it was cool."** But then she added quickly **"Oh no it wasn't like like 'actual' stress. I don't know. I think, it would have been less stressful if I didn't know you 'cause I was like "I really want Laurie to like... so I guess if it was just a stranger, but then if it was a stranger I might not have you know... tried so hard. But... I think it's really interest... I'm really surprised at how I felt, how much I engaged with it and y'know, I think it's really good! Yeah, gonna do it again in ten years!"** I laugh and say "good I'll look you up for the follow up!" What about everyone else?"

"I didn't really know you Laurie, well just a bit from work and then when you saw me at that coffee shop, so I didn't feel stressed by knowing you, but I did feel an initial **Panic!** Then I thought about it and the idea came so I was alright after that" Carol spoke quietly and smiled as she looked round the table.

We looked at Sara who chuckled knowing she was next "I should say that I know Laurie quite well because we have worked together", she looks at me and smiles, "and I was nervous about doing the study to start with, in fact we talked about it because, Laurie, you said you were nervous too!" I nod in agreement. "Like I said earlier, I think my original idea would have been for you and the study whereas what I did was for me. Also, because you gave me time and... space. **I have to say I sat in front of the TV, and I sat there over a couple of nights with crayons pens and things. I felt that I didn't want to go and sit in a room by myself because I think then I would have felt pressure to create something and I would have been frustrated. Whereas to do it in this way felt as it was okay to draw something and make a mistake and rub it out and go back to it. So, it felt almost more informal. I can't be creative on demand darling! It's almost like I couldn't do it just because somebody said, 'do this'. I need time and the freedom and the space to come up with it myself. It was the time that I think made a bit more of a difference that almost helped to just complete it? The time helped for it to be for me.** So, to answer your question, I was nervous to start and didn't want to let you down, but being able to do it in my own time where I wanted to, made the difference".

"Okay, so what everyone is saying is... although there was some pressure, some nervousness, and perhaps some uncertainty that you may not have done so much work if it had been a stranger, you found you engaged with the task?"

"I felt like I spent time concentrating on something and it felt very intense to do that, and I did realise that I don't really have that time where I can zone out everything else and engross myself in something where I can just be a little bit free to do whatever it is that I was feeling or thinking. But I did have a memory, like visiting, revisiting the memory of it. Whilst I was doing it I was able to zone out everything else... it was a nice feeling really. But it's strange that I remember it so clearly".

I looked round the table “Okay, Sara is saying that she really concentrated whilst working on her piece. Did either of you have similar experiences?”

“I think when you’re busy with life you don’t reflect so much on... I don’t know I don’t think I would have reflected on certain aspects of it. I said before, that when I was drawing, I was also able to capture my emotions and feelings because drawing the memory seemed to help me to remember. I’m quite surprised how positive I found it all” said Carol.

Beth, her voice smiling added “It was so clear in my head. Normally you don’t spend that much time concentrating on you know, a bit of time. It’s surprising that I thought about it loads and like cutting stuff out is not usually something that I do of an evening You know going back... So yeah, it took a lot of thinking and took a bit of doing but once I started doing it I was like “Oh quickly, find something else to stick on!”

“Beth, you make me smile”. Her face and voice always animated when she talked. “You know, I still feel really passionate about my topic, even after five years! I thought that there had to be another way... but how did you guys feel about the research, anything surprise you?”

“Well,” started Beth “I began to remember all sorts of things about a favourite teacher because my moment was when I was in school, **it made me think a lot about her and sort of the influence she’s had. I kept remembering other little things, like bits about her personality and about clothes she wore and ... other things like weird stuff, and I had totally forgotten that until I started to think about it. And then also thinking she had such a big impact on my life, and I hadn’t really thought about her before y’know”.**

“Are you saying Beth, little things came to you? If you hadn’t started this process, would you have given that time any thought do you think?”

“No, I don’t think I would. No, I wouldn’t have sat and actually thought about it or things like that”.

“Actually, I remembered things too whilst working on my piece” said Carol. **“I tried to think about that moment that changed things and as I thought about that, I started thinking about other things that sort of tied in with it. I remembered things that have helped me to see why I like to support people with their learning. There’s one... because I always wanted to be a Nursery Nurse, but I left school with no qualifications. I think now, because I think I felt that I was never going to uni, you had to go to university to be a teacher and that wasn’t me. And also, right back to memories... working with my friend’s little sister and teaching her to read and spell and just looking after people. I vaguely remember people saying, ‘oh you’re that’ and I wonder if it triggers from that. When I was doing it and how the memory of being praised for doing that, helping her to learn to read... Y’know, that gave me a good feeling that people recognised that. I don’t think I would have reflected on certain aspects of it and I think that’s why I put it in a memory bubble because it’s an emotion and a feeling that I remembered. Things that I sorta forgotten”.**

Sara pensively said “For me, it was the usual sort of thing y’know you go away and you carry on with your daily life and your daily chores. And all of a sudden you see something or something happens and it pops into your and you think ‘oh I could do that, oh okay’, so I go back and write that little colour down. And I just had that for a couple of days whilst I

was working on it. It was just happening, almost in my subconscious really. Nothing particularly stands out, but like I said, I remembered that time really clearly”.

“I’m a bit like you Sara, I just remember the moment, a bit like a film in my head, I didn’t have a forgotten memory so to speak, just a re-imagining of my moment and it was very clear. When I remembered something, I began to have feelings which I think I had at that time, I actually became quite emotional! I think I have changed as a result of capturing my moment and it’s made me really look at what I can do and I think...I’m prepared to take more risks in my life”.

Sara pipes up with laughter in her voice “Blimey Laurie, you’re always so cautious. Live a little!”

“Alright I will!” and I laugh with the others. “So, has anything changed for you?” I slowly look around the table, my eyes briefly resting on each individual.

Carol looked at me, a beaming smile on her face **“Massively. I feel a lot more confident about my abilities, about my strengths.** I was surprised by **how many positives there were in it. Positive memories and the recognition of the people’s belief in me. And the fact that I want to finish my degree. You know when you keep putting things to one side ‘I don’t need it I don’t need it’. I don’t need it but I want it. I think it puts a different perspective on it when you’re doing it because you want to not because you have to... Yeah, I want it. I’ve worked hard to get to where I’ve got. I don’t think I need to finish it for my job or anything. But I feel I need to finish it for me. I would like to confidently say “yes I have a degree” and I don’t know who I would say that to. I’ve gone on to do postgrad stuff so I don’t know why it matters but I feel it’s unfinished. It’s been a really positive thing. I didn’t really know what I expected to be the outcome, perhaps to look at me and where I wanted to go career wise. Or looking back and seeing where I should have changed things or anything. I don’t think I’ve missed any opportunities, I think I’ve accepted every challenge, taken every opportunity... Yeah just positive, really positive and I feel it’s developed my confidence and made me acknowledge... I think it’s down to the confidence ‘cause I feel proud of my achievements. I feel proud of where I am, the paths I’ve travelled. I like sharing what knowledge I’ve gained. More than anything it’s just looking back and feeling confident, that, ‘yes actually’. For years really, I just batted it off whereas this, has made me stop and think about it. I don’t know without the piece of art work, if you could call it that, I’d have spent that time, ‘cause trying to think about how I would represent, made me think, you know like pieces of a jigsaw, what’s going to go where and why. So, it’s made me stop and reflect...”**

Sara looking quizzically at Carol “it sounds like it was a positive experience for you?”

Carol quickly replied, **“Surprisingly so and I enjoyed it”.**

Sara’s face had a wistful expression and sighing she said **“you know like I said, doing it I did feel this intense concentration and opportunity to be creative and just explore a bit more. And once I’d finished actually it just, it almost cemented, re-iterated how I have felt it brought it to the fore a bit more for me. It did make me realise how much my life has changed, it did get me thinking differently and how nice it was to think in that way before and how I really don’t... do that now. I don’t just see how things go at all... Yeah, it made me realise how things are very different... and how it would be nice to make some changes as well. I think it’s made me realise that your life and your future in particular, is in your control. You’re the one who has to drive it forward and make decisions about where you’re**

going and what you're doing. That's what I was doing at that time and I didn't have any expectation, didn't have any commitment or responsibility. Whereas now those are the things that need to be thought about and they can have an impact then on the decisions that you make or you know, the things that you have to do. The things that are taken out of your hand really. I think... I think if anything it has made me realise that where I work and our child care commitments... I am restricted then on where I can work and that means then what I can do, how I can do it because I'm the one who is local to look after the children. I'm the one, let's not keep making excuses, I'm the one who needs to do something about this. it's... really made me consider what... can be changed. What we can do and what I can't do. At this time, my moment, I said there was no commitment it was fine... But it's made me realise that there are things, I have restrictions... But don't get me wrong, I've really enjoyed it. I found doing the creative piece interesting once I was doing it. I have to be honest before and I thought 'oh it's something else that I've got to do, add it to the list' but once we done the other interview and I started to think about it and I thought 'ooh we could do this and we could do that' and actually it feels quite cathartic to do. And it's good to revisit, because I'm almost able to strip everything back and remember what it was like and then to think about now and think 'well why can't it be more like that? What can we do to change that?' And to have that more optimistic outlook as well I think. So, it's definitely, it's definitely made me think more about what I'm gonna do and hopefully then it will implement some change. But it's quite nice to think about that nice time really”.

Beth had been sitting quietly listening to the others and at first I thought she was not going to say anything but then in a quiet voice she said **“I think... thinking about sort of those bits of your life... I think actually coming back to them, I've sort of looked at them in a different way and but I've thought about it in more detail... I dunno I guess I'm more... comfortable about that sort of time because it's given me time to think about what I liked and what I was doing and not cared about what anyone else cared about or was up to. It was real hands on and about me, it was different, I guess. But yeah, I think... I think everyone should do it! I feel something is different, there has been a change but I'm not exactly sure yet... what it is... I mean I think I feel something different... maybe freer... maybe. I think I'm proud of my piece but I'm really proud of myself, but I've always been proud of myself to be fair! But it's always nice to actually think about... y'know... and I've achieved loads as well!”** With that she starts to laugh and then everyone is laughing so much that the assistant turns to see what the commotion is about. She smiles and asks if anyone wants a re-fill. Tea all round.

The afternoon unfolded and customers came and went but still we sat chatting about our lives and the creative pieces we had made. We told each other about our moments, which I had not expected but I suppose was inevitable. I had thought to just ask about the creative piece but it seemed the others wanted to find out about each other's moments; what had made them act the way they had.

“All I know is” began Carol, **“actually seeing that advert and I do think, I could have picked it up and gone 'closing date is tomorrow, oh well never mind'. Whereas I didn't. I rung, drove over there drove back again, drove over there ... why did I do all that? Why? Such a small advert. So why did I see it? Because you know I wasn't looking for a job... why did that jump out at me. Why did I ring up, I saw the closing date, tomorrow. I'm sure most times I would go 'oh never mind' but, something was there. Meant to be, fate? I'll never know why I did it”.**

Sara quickly followed Carol **“I do remember making a sort of list, you know, like a sort of pros and cons list. And it’s something that I have done quite a lot in my life. The pros were about the unknowns. Because I didn’t know how easy it was going to be to find a job, I didn’t know how much it was going to cost us to move in together. It was just a question of we’ll just find our way together and that will be fine because that’s what you do when you’re a couple... But then I said, “right sod it I’m just gonna do it!”**”

Beth still laughing at Sara’s comical expression said “it just seemed a good idea. My favourite teacher asked me. **I think at the time I was really chuffed that she’d asked me! that was why I said “yes” because I thought ‘she’s got two hundred students in her year group and she’s asked me, she wants me to go!’ A lot of other people went just for the free pizza. I do like pizza... but that was never my motivation for being there, ‘cause even when I was there I knew that this was gonna lead on to whatever. I think ‘cause I got there and it was our first meeting and I instantly... y’know, going through the agenda and having the meeting and stuff and I thought ‘this is really good! I’m having fun, it looks really good on my CV!’ I guess also the people that ran it were quite... I thought ‘like wow, I might do that job’. I thought there was almost like a sense of belonging or maybe because I thought this is something I should be doing.** What about you Laurie?”

“I think I’m more like Carol and a bit like Sara to be honest. Something just clicked and it felt right to apply for the course. I just knew, I had to apply” and I shrug my shoulders emphasising my inability to explain how I knew.

Sara was the first to say her goodbyes as she rushed to collect her family from the leisure centre. Beth said she was meeting friends at a local pub. She gave me a hug and waved to Carol. Carol smiled and said it had been good to meet up and she wished me luck with the study. The doorbell announced her departure. I paid the bill to our smiling assistant and walked out into the late sunlit afternoon. My pace was unhurried unlike the people around me, rushing to catch buses home after busy days in offices. Shoppers laden with bags joined the melee and I smiled as they jostled for the prime seats. I was walking to join the Park and Ride bus queue and as I walked I thought about the afternoon conversations.

Concluding thoughts: a conversation with myself

A window seat is free and I gratefully sit down. Tired, I unenthusiastically acknowledge the two-hour car journey yet to come. It was wonderful to see them again and to hear their stories told the way only they could tell them. What I have found interesting is the variety of ways they have used to create their work. I wanted to find a different way to practice, a less linear approach because life is not a one-way street, it is unpredictable, often messy, sometimes surprising. We need to have different ways of working, one expected way is not going to meet all needs; sometimes the cream comes first, sometimes after the jam, both ways taste good. I smile at my scone analogy. The bus stops. “Thanks very much”, my acknowledgement to all bus drivers and I step out into the sunlight. The car interior is hot but the air conditioning soon pumps cool air around me. I slowly join local and eventually motorway traffic. Carefully I wind through the

snarled throng of cars, and when sometime later the traffic becomes less congested, I begin to relax. The radio is providing gentle background music so my mind returns to its musings.

It seemed the process allowed them time to find out something about themselves for themselves. They came to see an aspect of their life in a new light, acknowledging different elements of a particular time in their lives; the people, the surroundings and the events. These are the social, cultural and historical aspects which influence who we are and who we become. These aspects become known again to the participants as they re-imagined their salient moments. My mind becomes full of names. McMahon and Patten's (2006) Systems Theory Framework considers how these aspects influence lives, as does Alheit (1992), Bruner (1990) and Savickas (2011). Our whole lives, all our experiences influence our ways of being. Time is a precious commodity but the thinking time appears to be an important part of the process. It allows for illumination of thought as noted by Kline (1990), and as Hansen and Amundson (2009) have suggested, all participants seem to have 'resided in wonder' as we thought about our moments, entering a state of deep reflection and reflexivity.

I change lanes to overtake a lumbering lorry, and then settle back, progressing at a comfortable pace. My mind returns to the study. McMahon (2006) understands that creativity is not about gimmicks and people need to feel comfortable with the techniques used. By not stating one particular method of creativity or asking for creative work at the interview, my study participants were able to find their own way, in their own time and space. This seemed especially important as everyone found, like Rogers (1980), being creative to order would have been difficult. It was time that allowed us to be creative and when we were in the moment of creativity, we entered our own spaces; essentially, we create a time within time and a space within space.

I can feel myself frowning as the voice in my head calls out "what about the real world? Who will care?" I will care! But, I do wonder if in practice others will see a possible alternative to the matching imperative that continues to dominate my profession. Whilst others, including Kidd (2006), Law, (2003), McMahon (2006), Moustakas (2001), Peavy (2004) and Rogers (1980) acknowledge creativity, methods may be dictated by practitioners or the organisations they work for. This is not to say they are not valuable. On the contrary, guided imagery for example, can be useful if it is right for the client, but therein lies the crux of the matter. The technique adopted should meet the needs of the client and not just be a fall-back tool of the practitioner. I think back to my training and Rogers (1980) conditions for counselling practice: congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard. Without these, how do we build trustworthy practices? What future is there for the career guidance profession if we continue to adhere to past practices without

consideration of the growing rhetoric for a holistic way of life in the twenty-first century? The objective, linear matching approach to career guidance surely, cannot survive when people need to quickly adapt to ever changing markets.

We must adapt and find different ways to help individuals' through the maze of career decision-making. McMahon (2006), enters my 'mind conversations' and I remember her discussing Willis (2003) who suggests creative arts can help clients to access unconscious decision-making. Again, I think about how doing the actual piece, appears to have 'cemented' thought for my participants. It appears to have brought forth aspects which they have not thought about before, hidden thoughts which once remembered, seem to have re-enforced a more positive mindset. However, in Sara's case, it re-iterated her current situation, in which she felt she had little room for manoeuvre. Yet, it also gave her renewed desire to make a change in her life. So, there was a learning aspect to the process. Mezirow (2000), discusses the way people are transformed through learning as they become more aware of themselves in the world they inhabit, and Jarvis (2006) considers the moment of disjuncture when people stop and question their assumptions. I nod in agreement with them and my pondering continued.

I can hear Carol saying how she has taken opportunities because they looked interesting and Sara who rationalised first and then said, 'sod it' before intuitively making her decision. Only Beth, seemed to follow the advice of another, but then, she also recognised something in the opportunity to join the youth forum; an intrinsic recognition that this could be good for her. Perhaps Sara and Beth adopted Kahneman's (2011) slower rationalised thinking but then followed their intuitive faster reactions. Carol and I, seemingly, followed our intuition. Beth chose to depict a moment when she was still at school and her experiences might have been limited at this point in her life. Her teacher was an influential role-model in her life and her belief in Beth mattered, so when she said Beth should take the opportunity, Beth felt confident in her decision. We all had people who believed in us, whose encouragement helped us to grow in self-worth. Becoming a risk-taker was not easy for me but the others seemed ready to take opportunities. As Krumboltz and Levin (2004) suggested, they seemed prepared to embrace their life chances and positively moved forward in their uncertainty. Mulling over these thoughts, I wondered if it was that Carol and I being older than the others and possibly having more life experiences to draw on, knew when something was right for us because of our amassed knowledge (Lehrer, 2009). In which case, will my idea for creative practices work with young people and adults?

Well, anything which promotes self-awareness is important for people of all ages as understanding who we are and what we may want, is helpful to then making realistic life-career decisions. Of course, (and I sigh) curriculum imperatives mean there is little time or indeed space, in educational institutions so perhaps it is a tool for private practitioners. Yes, they can suggest people create something in their own time and space but, these individuals are paying for services. Does this mean that creative career guidance counselling is only for a privileged few? Lord, I hope not. Maybe, as a practitioner I should create time and space where none appears to exist. Maybe offer workshops at lunchtimes, after school and to community groups. I could work with local colleges and universities. I can find a way to make it work. Determination sets my features as I turn off the motorway and follow the signs to my village. I guess I will need to take some chances, just as Bright et al (2005) suggest others may need to do if they are to make the most of their opportunities. Turning into my drive all the voices in my head are shouting at me to let go and say what I really want to say. Okay.

If I get the chance, if I find a way to practice my way, then I will have to take a risk. I have learnt so much from Beth, Carol and Sara, but the most important thing has to be if I do not take a chance, nothing will change.

Chapter 10

Uniting the ‘Whole’

19/11/17

The words are falling off the page. They lie scattered on the desk and the floor. I try to pick them up but they dissolve as I touch them. My heart is pumping hard, vibrating in my chest and staccato breaths struggle to escape my body. I rouse from my imagined scene, once more back in front of the laptop, staring at the blank screen. I need to write the penultimate chapter but the words just won't behave. They dance mischievously, goading me to fix the inky shapes to the white background. Then I 'hear' my Supervisor's voice, "Just write it Laurie", and I know I'm not alone.

Introduction

At this point in the writing, the words do not come easily. So, I have decided to just write as the dream-like thoughts come to me and trust myself to explain the knowledge gained from the research. In giving myself 'permission' to write my way, I can say I want to return to the research questions and discuss the main themes that have developed from the analysis. In previous chapters, I mention theoretical 'friends' whose writings have influenced my thinking. Returning to the supporting literature will show how my conceptual framework has evolved and possibly changed since the study began. The methodology adopted and the limitations of the participant group will also be considered. I believe this work offers an alternative narrative to the objective matching models that continue to dominate career guidance practices and thereby, suggests a contribution to knowledge.

Returning to the research problem and questions

This study sought to discover how creative practices could help individuals to recall salient moments. I wanted to explore an aspect of life-career, a career turning point in an individual's life. A time when they felt they made what they saw as a spontaneous, autonomous salient decision which helped them to proceed to another stage of their life. My thinking is, if a person is struggling with a career decision in the present, and has in their past been able to make an important life-career decision seemingly for themselves, recollecting the emotions felt in that decision-making moment may help them move on with their lives. This work has been influenced by the experiences of those who have come to me for career guidance counselling. Some struggled to find the words to tell their stories, some wanted me to tell their stories for them, by piecing together the patches of their life experiences. What stood out from the fragments, were the moments where they made important decisions, seemingly for themselves. These were the

moments which stood apart from their everyday lives, but the individuals appeared to me, to have forgotten how they felt when they made their salient decisions. Apparently, they did not think about their feelings in the process or if there were possible positives in their lives at that time. Rather, it was almost forgotten, stored in the back of a mental wardrobe. They wanted to talk about their current situation and how they could move forward. Yet, it was in returning to the past, that they came to re-see aspects previously hidden from their consciousness. Then, there was the possibility to contemplate future pathways hitherto not considered. Such musings inspired this study and the research questions to which I will now respond, in light of the knowledge gained from participant experiences.

How do creative practices help individuals to ‘re-visit’ their salient career moments?

A key aspect of this work, is that those who participated felt the creative process gave them time to think and for creativity to develop. Muncey (2010), explains the flow of time is expressed through the narratives of our experiences and that in our current situations, we are aware of what happened previously and what we want to happen in the future. Our implicit understandings of our world draw on our past actions. Engaging with creative practices enables the individual to take time to think about a career turning point where they had made an autonomous salient decision. This contemplating period, is also considered important by Kline (1990), as a way to help people think for themselves. By re-visiting a specific moment, participants could think again in-depth, about that time, which they may not normally do in their daily existence, as noted by Beth and Carol.

Individuals move backwards and forwards through time as they ponder their chosen moment, considering events and salient others, who may have informed their decision-making. Richardson (1997), Cochran (1997) and Krumboltz and Levin (2004), note the connection between events is how people make meaning of their experiences as what we learn from one event can inform another. The knowledge we gain is then a continuous flow of sub-conscious and conscious thought. How we interpret such knowledge is dependent on the narratives which enlighten our daily existence, as these fuel our biases and assumptions. If the perception is that narratives are limited, then lives may also be said to be limited as people may not know what else could be available to them. I believe that if someone is feeling trapped by their current life situation, utilising a creative practice to tell a story about a past salient moment, differently, will help them to create an alternative narrative in the present. The telling of this new story could help the individual to imagine a desired future. Meaningful career narratives can then be constructed as suggested by Cochran (1997).

Like Krumboltz and Levin (2004), Cochran notes, those with an agentic disposition tend to make things happen. I viewed participants as the main characters in their personal life-plays who, in accordance with Cochran (ibid), created richer stories using their creative pieces, which provided practical wisdom to support their future decision-making. This has resonance with Savickas's (2011) suggestion that individuals have the capacity to build themselves using their own inherent knowledge. Further supported by Alheit's (1992) notion of biographicity discussed previously in this work. As such, creative practices can help people to re-engage with personal knowledge by providing them with the opportunity to take time to think deeply about an aspect of their life-careers.

In addition to time, the space participants chose to inhabit whilst contemplating how their chosen creative practice could capture their salient moment, also appeared to be of relevance. We chose to work in spaces which provided a sense of comfort, enabling thoughts to appear in a dream-like quality. I worked in my study which to me has the sacred connotation espoused by Richardson (1990); it has personal meaning and is where I felt safe to experiment with the writing. Others, chose to work in spatial settings where they felt calm and at peace. This mattered, as it enabled them to think in different, layered ways. On one level, they could think about their moment, on another their creative practice, on yet another the influencing aspects on their decision-making process, and further still, the story of their participation. As such, there is a propensity for a story in continuous motion.

Within arts-based research the space between the creator and the artefact is often described as 'liminal'. It is the creative space between the creator and the audience and lies on the brink of the unknown (Speedy, 2008). We appeared to have stepped into a liminal space, the crack between, as the creative process absorbed us and soothed us; it became a transitional holding space in which we could play (Winnicott, 1971) and in doing so, we discovered aspects of ourselves. Within this space, we could listen to ourselves and feel our feelings, accepting our imperfections and understanding that we cannot always be the way we want to be.

In telling stories, individuals do not necessarily acknowledge chronological time, which as Jarvis (2006) notes, can quietly trickle by until something happens to make the person stop and think again about their place in their space. The length of time for a critical moment can be ignored because when a person stops, it is as if time slows down as they cogitate this new occurrence in their lives. In this, a moment can appear to be something more than a fleeting event; it can be seen as a time within time (Ricoeur, 1980). Perhaps successful outcomes are remembered whilst any difficulties fade. I struggle to recall the incidents that began the dissatisfaction with my role in a

school, only the collating episode mentioned in my story. I cannot remember the occasions when I said I wanted to be a career adviser. I only remember feeling envious of others who had the role. The duration of the passage of time is something I cannot recall, but I remember with clarity the moment I made my decision, and as I have this role now, I can deem it a desired outcome. Is it because the outcome was desired that I can remember the moment and would it be so clear if I had not been successful? Moments of adversity may be recollected as salient to the individual. They may or may not have taken action, but the memory of the time still resonates. It is not a simplistic notion of everyone remembering successful times, but, for some, creative practices may support their decision-making when they are feeling uncertain.

When I and the other participants discussed our creative work, we noted it was being able to think about a time which seemed to be the catalyst for further changes in our lives, and this was something we had not really thought about before our participation. Having the time and the space to consider a salient life-career moment appeared to encourage the development of creativity and reflexivity as the person begins to view a moment in time with a fresh perspective.

How do creative practices help locate the emotions felt when individuals are considering personal agency?

In the literature review, I discussed Damasio's (1999) understanding of how a conscious mind can intensify feelings. Whilst we were all amidst creating our pieces, our consciousness was amplified as we were also thinking about our significant moment. We did this by drawing on our extended consciousness, as discussed by Damasio (ibid), to not only creatively express our moments, but also, to give ourselves a sense of our pasts. We looked inward to our autobiographical selves and using our memories like objects, could place our recollections on the page. As we worked, we thought about what we were creating. The creation of a new object, in the present, made us consider again our existing knowledge about a past event. In doing so, we created new knowledge and came to see the world differently. Additionally, how we felt in the present about our past salient moments, is not necessarily a re-creation of our feelings from the past, but is a sense of our past feelings in the present. As such, we began to understand ourselves better, ignited new ways of thinking about our future life-careers.

Interestingly, we all chose positive life-career moments, when we had felt a sense of autonomy in our decision-making. Our heightened sense of awareness brought on by the creative piece, I would suggest, caused us to change and in this I agree with Damasio, who argues that consciousness must be present for feelings to influence the person beyond the present. When we

relate to something, we form relationships and we change because of our involvement. We became involved with our creative pieces and were changed in the process. In thinking about our moment, we re-constructed a memory of our engagement with that time and the emotions we perceived we felt were involved.

However, I also note, this may not lead to an external change in lives, but by changing internal perceptions, individuals could be more open to future opportunities, an aspect of career Savickas et al (2009) consider necessary when designing a life. Indeed, this could also support my thinking on how intuition is influential when making salient life-career decisions, which I will discuss in due course.

I would like to return for a moment to the notion of time and suggest that the creative piece also provided an opportunity to appreciate silence as we thought about how we wanted to depict a specific time in our lives and, as noted by Sara, simultaneously think about our moments. It is difficult to be silent in a career interview, indeed it is a brave practitioner who sits quietly whilst their client looks in desperation for them to say something. Yet, if the person is in their own setting, silently pondering their life moment, such discomfort is minimised. I recognised the voices in my head needed to be quietened and the purposeful act of creativity enticed them to deep slumber.

Savickas (2011), tells us people need experiences to reflect upon in order to help them to make their lives work for them. The creative process I and the others engaged with, not only provided us with time to reflect on a chosen moment, but also gave us a new experience to entice further reflection. If in the future, we draw on this experience, we create more opportunities to think about our creative engagement and the experience which sparked our thinking. Of course, other events may enter our lives and replace our creative moments, but the engagement with the study is likely to be remembered. This may become a situational cue igniting recognition of positive feelings, which can aid our future career decision-making. In this, Savickas's (ibid) understanding of micro-narratives comes to mind, when we talk about the incidents in our lives involving life-defining moments. Our macro-narrative integrates these smaller stories into our wider social spheres, helping us explain ourselves to ourselves and how we then explain ourselves to others. I am further reminded of McMahon and Patten (2006), whose System Theory Framework also acknowledges the different micro self-defining and macro externally influencing aspects which inform a person's life-career. These include societal influences such as significant others and wider environmental aspects such as location and work. The creative piece provided a context for those moments which stood apart from other moments in our lives, the career turning points. It

provided the context for meaning to gain clarity, which is not assigned to historical or social facts, but is brought into the present time through the process of making an object.

Coherence and continuity according to Savickas (2011), maintain meaning. The creative work supported a deeper understanding of a personally salient moment and the act of creation provided continuity of stories by drawing on the different strands that informed lives. This could be recognising the aspects which influence our internal perceptions such as our folk-myths as discussed by Bruner (1990), or it could be external factors such as the actions taken by the individual. Either way, the creative pieces adopted, helped participants to see how they have evolved over time and it is this recognition of personal growth, which has the propensity to propel the person forward when they are feeling uncertain about their place in the world. I consider they also have the opportunity to listen to themselves for the stories they have not been hearing, as the prominent narratives they tell themselves are of fear and uncertainty. There is then, a subjective reframing of their world as they come to see and hear their own heroic tales. As noted previously when acknowledging Jarvis (2006), in the moment, a person can recognise their place in an experience. In the case of Evans (2011), it was a moment of personal loss, of a miscarriage and the recognition that she would not become a gymnast. McAdams et al (2001), also discussed moments of loss and tragedy but consider them as insight leading to personal growth. If my study participants had chosen to depict such moments, would they have gained such knowledge or would the emotions incurred have led them to feelings of worthlessness? I suggest, supporting their autonomy to create work of their own choosing in their own time and setting, led them to consider their current situation in a new light. If like Sara, individuals are unable to see a way forward immediately, they can re-affirm a desire to do something which may bring change to their lives. It is not about doing something for the sake of doing something. It is noting, and again I return to Jarvis (*ibid*), that in the moment of discovering something about ourselves, we change.

Law's (2008) theory of storyboarding enables the individual to see a career turning point depicted in pictures and to acknowledge the feelings experienced in that moment. However, I would suggest the moment of creation is equally important as it provides the chance for the person to experience feelings in the present moment whilst sensing those of the past. How do they feel in the now? What emotions are evoked? When I recall depicting my moment, I can sense the arousal anew in my body, evoking again feelings of excitement but also, happiness and comfort. I do not think I would be able to express the depth of emotion experienced if asked in a formal interview setting, rather, I may elude to a fragment of the experience. Savickas (2011) considers self-expression to be an important aspect of self construction. So, how then do individuals express

their innermost thoughts and feelings? Creative practices may support a person's ability for self-expression when they are unable to tell the story they want heard. Creative practices create objects which according to Damasio (1999), have the impetus to interact with memories and create change in individuals. The study would uphold this as all who participated appear to have thought differently about their life-careers in light of their creative pieces.

What part might intuition play in influencing individuals when they make career decisions at certain times in their lives?

When Rogers (1961, 1980) talked about becoming a person, I wonder if he envisaged the depth of frenetic activity some experience in the world today. To trust ourselves to know intuitively what to do, is not a simplistic notion which can be dismissed as an inherent quality possessed by all. Some struggle to see intuition as an aspect of their lives worthy of note, choosing instead to rationalise their important decision-making because they want the perceived surety of facts. However, the study showed that participants did turn to their intuition when faced with a career turning point. How then does intuition influence our important decision-making?

Kahneman (2011) recognises that intuition plays a major contribution to our decision-making, acknowledging our use of everyday intuition when we note differences in our daily lives. We intuitively know when something feels right. Then, we draw on our fast thinking processes which includes our biases, perceptions and our memories. Deliberate slow thinking may inform our fast thinking, as when Sara rationalised her thoughts and then decided to 'do it' anyway. In making decisions that feel right to us in the moment, we feel at ease, as if there is a familiarity to the experience. Conversely, when we have a new belief of the world it can be hard to recall how things were before we changed our ways of thinking. Essentially, we assigned value to our life-career moments and those of the past can have a new worth in the present when we re-consider them in a different way.

It could also be argued that if we make a fast decision based on our intuition, we have already imagined a possible future and when an opportunity arises, we see a way to access our preferred lives so we act quickly. However, I suggest that our perceived intuition may be informed by more rational processes where information has been gathered over our life courses to provide a personal knowledge bank, from which we can make withdrawals as required. This is not an easy thought for me, having been raised to consider intuitive practices and 'gut' feelings as more effective ways of being. However, having read Lehrer (2009), I have come to see that emotion is necessary to rational decision-making. As such, when we bring forth something from our memory

banks there is an emotional arousal which could be seen as an unconscious ‘gut’ feeling, noted by Gigerenzer (2009), or an intuitive reaction to a career turning point moment. Carol and I both felt something was right about our salient moments. We both recognised situational cues from the information we were given; Carol in the advertisement she saw and I, in being able to write a piece in lieu of a degree. Somewhere along our life courses we could have gathered this knowledge but in seeing and hearing a cue we felt an emotional arousal which for me, was my intuition telling me the opportunity was right for me. Sara and Beth may also have felt similar emotions. Beth recognised that the youth forum could provide information about youth working, which she had mentally noted as being a suitable occupation. Sara, of all the participants, expressed how she had rationalised her thinking prior to making her decision. Yet, she had known her boyfriend for some time, so when her rationalising faltered, she followed her intuition and made the journey to Kent. She said aspects of her life had come together as if by coincidence, expressing this as a sign that it was meant to be. Some may intuitively know what to do to bridge their life transitions, as noted by Savickas (2011). By listening to personal wisdom, it may be possible to feel a sense of autonomy in decision-making. The creative process can help them to listen to their inner voices, by engaging in a personally enlightening activity. The process provided space for the other participants to originally discuss a time when they seemingly made a decision easily. Yet, in our follow-up discussion it appeared that re-visiting their chosen moment brought about deep thinking which appears to have informed more rationalised thought processes about the present and the future. The study suggests that intuition informs career turning points, and the creative process by providing the time and space to explore salient moments, also enabled the rationalisation of aspects informing original decision-making. In doing so, participants came to see features hidden in the recesses of their minds, which were re-acknowledged and which may be utilised to support future life-career decisions.

From the analysis and exploration of the research questions, pertinent themes have been recognised and need to be acknowledged.

Main themes to emerge from the study

- Utilising creative practices appeared to help participants to learn something about themselves; they gained personal insight by engaging with the reflective and reflexive process. Such knowledge could be used to inform their future career decision-making when they are feeling uncertain. As such, creative practices could help individuals think again with a new perspective.

- The creative piece ‘cemented’ participants’ thinking and re-visiting times from the past when they felt they had made positive life-career decisions, could influence their thinking in the present and possibly, their future actions. It also provided a physicality to the chosen moment, making it a tangible object, not something placed in memory but out in the world. Moreover, it has further significance by being brought into the person’s present time to act as a physical reminder of the past.
- Providing the opportunity for people to choose their own time and setting to engage with a creative guidance process, appears to support deeper thinking processes than in a more formal environment.
- Returning to the past to think again about a time which holds significance for the individual, enables a re-interpreting of the past to give meaning in the present. A re-imagining of the future becomes a possibility as the individual considers how they want to be in the world.
- How individuals respond to life events will determine if they see them as serendipitous occurrences or an aspect of their own career planning. The blending of conscious knowledge gathering and non-conscious intuitive thinking appears to support the latter consideration.
- Work and personal life are woven together and continually evolve as individuals organise and re-organise themselves to reach a state of harmony. An openness to possibilities may help the person to recognise events which can aid personal development and autonomy as they feel ready to take risks in their life-careers.

These themes were discovered as the work progressed and through my dream-like thoughts such musings manifested. I should say the way I chose to work, enabled the emergence of aspects which I doubt, for me, would have been possible another way. It was through autoethnography that I came to see how both the study and I have developed.

Why did I choose this methodology?

Life experiences inform who I am and what I do and it is personal not factual information, which enriched this study. These elements bring the accounts to life for both the writer and the reader. I wanted to describe what I had discovered through the study, not just to explain the facts. In my interpretation of the world, I consider how the forces surrounding me and my interactions with others, are personally and socially constructed. McMahon and Patton (2006) in their Systems Theory Framework acknowledge the influence of family, work, community and education. It is

these and other elements which I and the other participants have considered through our creative practices. Autoethnography enabled me to bring the narratives to this academic table, capturing my thinking of and with the stories.

I could not work with figures and charts, it is just not in me to do so. I need to be caught in a subjective net; I need to be 'in' the experience to spread my gaze across the study, moving backward and forward across the different time spectrums of the here and then. Additionally, I wanted to hear the stories of others, whilst experiencing their versions of their salient moments, with them, in a potentially new moment and utilised an auto/biographical approach for the other participants' chapters.

Yet, autoethnography enabled my thoughts to become visible by placing myself in the text. I have attempted to show different layers of consciousness, which Ellis (2004) extols as necessary for this methodology and in doing so, I have become aware of aspects which I had not previously considered. For example, I have come to realise that my career turning point was not just the result of a quick, spur of the moment decision, as I had previously thought. Rather, I acknowledge the possibility of a culmination of information which came together when it was needed. This personal discovery has made me view life differently. When talking to clients now, I listen and observe, but also listen to and observe myself. Such reflexivity has become normal practice, penetrating deeper than Schon's (1991) reflective practitioner, who informed my former professional self.

I found myself telling myself stories throughout the study, inspiration coming from participants and the different spaces I inhabited. As I write this section, I am at work, where I should be interviewing, but my client is unwell. The impetus to write is strong because this has come to me in the now, rather than waiting to write later in my study. The roles of the career practitioner and the researcher have collided and I cannot separate the strands.

By making visible my thinking, I hope to show human experience gathered throughout the work as well as the deep thinking that occurred within and alongside these experiences. I follow Ellis (2004) and consider the evocative quality of autoethnography, expressing my emotion as phenomena emerged. I did not consciously think about analysing, which Anderson (2006) states should be uppermost in the minds of researchers, but found it occurred naturally with the story. Nor, did I battle with the familiarity which concerns Delamont (2007); I did not seek generalisations. The narrative of the research has evolved over the past five years and other stories too have changed. Nothing stays the same so why would I write about sameness when the

unique possibilities of a lived life are so interesting. Denzin (2014), in expressing that narrative truth is judged by how the story is used, understood, and responded to, made me think about the depictions of the storied truths. In choosing their own creative practice to depict their moment, they expressed personal lived experiences. My version of the research event, hopefully helped readers to see the genuineness of the account, offering multiple versions in emulation of crystallisation (Richardson, 2008). Autoethnography enabled me to show readers, I hope, believable representations of events by allowing me to be present, inside and outside the occurrence. Equally, I wanted the work to speak to readers, to engage their emotions and in doing so, validate the work as I displayed the writing process, not just the result.

Writing as inquiry enabled me to be playful and creative in a way I could not envisage with a more formal approach. Illustrating aspects as they emerged enriched the writing and hopefully, reading experience. At times, I felt enthused by my way of working. At times, I wondered if I could maintain an openness of mind throughout the study if I adopted a fact-finding approach. My mind struggles to comprehend such an idea and I feel a tightening in my chest, as if the thought alone is stress inducing. To paraphrase Richardson (2000), I see myself as a container, holding knowledge, waiting for it to be poured out onto the waiting page. The stories I have written have been possible because of the reflective and reflexive nature of the work. They are not just my stories but an amalgamation of all the stories encountered along the way. Utilising writing as inquiry, enabled me to use transcript material again in a unique way, as in the previous chapter. I took pleasure in the crafting and recrafting of the work because I did it in a way that felt right to me, rather than trying to mimic what I thought academic writing should be. In using an autoethnographic approach and writing as inquiry, I was comfortable with my ways of working. However, in the safety of my comfort, there was an aspect which I feel may appear to have limited findings, namely, women only participants.

Did I limit the study findings?

I chose to work with women from the world of educational guidance as I felt there would be shared understanding of experiences from our working lives. Also, as women, we could share aspects of our personal lives, the similarities and differences. Prior to starting my study, I had approached a male colleague to gauge if he would be interested in the work. He told me he did not really talk about personal aspects of his life. I did not ask any other men, and perhaps if I am honest, I did not try to attract male participants. I felt it was easier to talk to women in my uncertainty of what it would be like to undertake a doctoral study. I felt they would be less judgemental if I made mistakes. Whereas, I think I would have tried to justify myself to feel

‘good enough’ to male participants. Such neurosis takes me back in time to my childhood where I stand in front of my father who asks me if I had ‘done my best’. Five years ago, I did not think men would open themselves to me in an interview setting. Nevertheless, Merrill (2009) discovered otherwise in her study of working-class men whose narratives included personal issues. Maybe I deemed my colleague a middle-class professional, with multiple qualifications and I was in awe of his professional and academic status. At that moment in time, I still sought qualifications as testimony of my ability to ‘get it right’ and I felt he would think that I was not ‘good enough’. Of course, this is all in my mental musings, manifesting as I write, but nonetheless, that is how I believed I felt.

However, this study focussed on the experiences of four women in guidance settings, and as an autoethnographical exploration, my aim was not to represent all who worked in such environments. Additionally, although the accounts are gendered, I am aware of wider issues concerning women’s careers, but this was not the main focus of my thesis. So, I do not feel the study has been limited by a lack of male representation or discussions on wider concerns.

I knew the women I asked to participate in the study. They willingly wanted to take part and I do not feel I coerced them. Yet, they could have felt some pressure to agree to my request because they knew me. I wonder if creative practices would lead to personal knowledge acquisition if individuals felt ‘press ganged’ (Merrill and West, 2009, p107), to participate in compulsory learning experiences. To look beyond the study, I have discussed the possibility of working with students at a local college. My contact excitedly discussed capturing data on learning experiences, through creative practices. Such considerations were not in my mind when I began this work but having experienced personal growth and seen how participants have gained a heightened sense of self, I indulge in a bath of optimism to the possibilities of future contributions to career guidance and counselling.

How does the study contribute to career guidance knowledge?

Earlier in the thesis, I discussed how the career guidance imperative of matching a person’s traits and factors to possible occupations, not only dominated the last, but appears to continue to be a mainstay of practice in this century. Such allegiances could be maintained because it is a failsafe option for practitioners who may feel uncertain in their work or under pressure to meet their employer’s desires for specific outcomes. Matching someone to an available job provides a destination outcome which can be measured, whereas reaching heightened personal insight, is more difficult to explain to those who hold the purse strings. Yet, it is the latter which once

recognised by the individual, has the propensity to greater autonomy in decision-making and resilience to perceived life-career barriers. Perhaps, rather than telling someone what may suit them, provide them with the tools to make discoveries for themselves. As Peavy (2004) extols, practitioners should work together with clients, combining creativity and experience to support what they value. When faced with organisational constraints, how does the career practitioner give their clients the chance to explain things for themselves? By suggesting they create an object which re-acknowledges a salient moment, the practitioner is recognising their client's autonomy in the interaction. It is not a case of 'passing the buck' but showing them that they are trusted to know what to do to bridge their transitions. In this, there is the possibility for creativity to become a potentially liberating process.

The interview following the creative work, was I felt, more meaningful to the individual because they had invested their time and effort to create an object which reminded them of a life-career turning point. New knowledge was shared by both parties, enriching our individual and joint experiences. There is then, an opportunity for practitioners to also gain new understandings from their working lives, which perhaps an adherence to certain practices may not provide.

Through the medium of creative practices, the individual has the opportunity to consider how they have constructed an important moment in their life. Utilising the knowledge gained, they can consider how they wish to move on, further building their subjective career. They acknowledge the importance of their emotions in their experiences as well as the aspects which led to their seemingly intuitive decision-making. These include the social and environmental circumstances, memories and feelings which informed the individual at a certain time in their lives. As such, there is an inclination to recognise that life and work are intertwined and should not be seen as separate strands.

In a similar way to that considered by Hanson and Amundson (2009) in a holistic inspired career interview, the creative process may offer a chance for individuals to be still and gain cognitive awareness of themselves in a personally engaging experience. All participants chose a time which they felt gave them feelings of certainty and assurance; a positive life episode. It may be that the person wants to consider a redemption story, as discussed by McAdams and Bowman (2001), where negative life events have positive conclusions. As they focused on a specific point in time, they recalled how they acted in the past, to experience anew their self-belief to manage a situation. They came to re-recognise aspects of their being which fed an intrinsic need. Reflectively and reflexively, they gained insight and began to undo self-binding ties.

From their study on career guidance work, Bimrose et al (2004) discovered that, amongst other aspects, adults seek constructive change as well as opportunities for reflection and discussion. Creative practices in this study, brought about a transformation in attitudes and thinking. The work dealt with the unknown in career guidance and counselling practice. Hidden elements which for some had been forgotten, but when re-discovered through their work, led to personal insight. Individuals took possession of their life-career moment as they went into themselves to find out more about who they are, who they were and why they did what they did. To return to a quote cited in the Introductory Chapter people, 'take possession of their lives by connecting who they are to what they do' (Savickas, 2011, p13).

The aims of this study, as outlined in the Introductory Chapter, noted that meaningful dialogue, personal reflection coupled with the deep thinking of reflexivity, and the creation of a creative piece, was a powerful prospect for career guidance and counselling work. I have found this to be the case. The work encourages a person to actively think about an aspect of their life whilst physically re-creating that moment. Simultaneously cogitating and doing may help them to re-see their present lives, helping them to move forward in their world. I believe this work offers a tool for the practitioner's tool box, to be placed alongside the use of others including career narratives and storyboarding. The career practitioner has much to choose from and I hope some will consider a more creative outlook in their work.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

I find myself in a 'hall of mirrors' (Speedy, 2008 p187) as I try to make sense of my world. Using Richardson's (2008) analytical crystal, I have viewed the interactions of the past five years from a variety of different perspectives, looking for replies to the research questions I posed. Although I have gained knowledge, as I write, I am not sure where I will go next and again, like Speedy (2008), I wonder if I am at the edge of something which will develop. Or will it glow like a sparkler and then 'fizzle' out. Continually I trust, thought will come in the writing.

Aims and discoveries

For the purpose of this study, I sought personal narratives about significant moments in everyday life and I wanted to capture those moments using creative practices. I wanted to explore the possibility of creative work within the field of career practice, as an alternative dialogue to the one which advocates a more traditional, objective, matching approach. As I listened and then wrote the stories, there seemed to be universalities and it was as if we all conversed with each other, even though I was the only one who had spoken to each individual. For example, Carol and I 'talked' about our desire for qualifications, Sara and I 'discussed' our feelings about motherhood and moving to new areas, whereas Beth and I 'conversed' about finding our place in education and work. Such thinking was uppermost in my mind when I wrote Chapter Nine; I wanted to bring us together to share what we had discovered about ourselves through taking part in the research.

Working with Beth, Carol and Sara, has helped me to see there is indeed a place for more creative work within the career guidance and counselling profession. In the Introductory Chapter, I acknowledged the established work of others who have championed creative practices, such as storyboarding (Law, 2008) and the use of metaphor (Inkson, 2007). Yet, these tools require the hand of the practitioner to direct the individual who is seeking guidance and who often desires a 'diagnosis' of their troubling ailment. I am respectfully suggesting that if the person is given time and space to reflect on a moment which had personal significance, they have the proclivity to become researchers and self-healers, as they reflect on their lives. They can talk about their particular moment with others and using their own tools, they create work which provides a fresh insight to their world. Such insights, are not always prevalent in their minds prior to their creative work, but reside quietly waiting for the right cues to bring them out into the open. These prompts come from an engagement with deep thought while focussing on a chosen moment. Reflexivity,

the thinking about thinking in a psychosocial space, infuses the spaces we create when we enter such mindscapes, and it is as if time stops whilst we cogitate.

All the participants discovered aspects about themselves within the creative space and I think what is interesting here, is we all structured our experiences. Beth thought “loads” about her collage choosing the elements carefully. Carol ‘saw’ how her other life-career experiences influenced or were influenced by her ‘lightbulb’ moment. Sara’s ‘moment’ was more of a period of time which unfolded through a car journey and she included aspects which she saw as pertinent, framing the ‘whole’ as one moment. My significant moment was structured in diverse ways to show the different ways of my thinking in the moments of creation. We were living in the moment and making discoveries in the experience, which we acknowledged through the creative pieces created, and the ensuing discussions. ‘It involves discovering the structure of the experience in the process of living the experience’ (Rogers, 1961, p189).

There exists a therapeutic quality to this work, indeed, Sara described the process as ‘cathartic’. The entering of a deeply reflective and reflexive state, could be akin to meditation or indeed mindfulness where a focussed attention is consciously activated (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Such a state of mind encourages a playful attitude and can help the person to see different views of their world. It can also encourage someone to gain control of situations which feed feelings of uncertainty. The importance of ‘wandering’ time (Cochran, 1997), allowing a person time to consider the different facets of their life when making career related decisions, is often difficult to include in time-bound career interactions. So, there is an additional beneficial quality to this work which is not possible to explore within the limitations of this thesis, but would be worthy of future exploration.

I am not suggesting that career practitioners should just send their clients away to ‘play’. The time spent in meaningful dialogue before and after the creative interlude, is vital to forging trusting relationships. Indeed, all study participants felt the interviews to be valuable experiences which allowed the person to find their ‘voice’ to express aspects such as personal pride or acknowledge a desire for change. Additionally, the process may be more useful for those who are feeling uncertain about their next step as opposed to those who are seeking specific support with for example, employment documents or pertinent industry information. I did not commence this work with an intention to produce a model for practice but it seemed to evolve. When Beth said on her doorstep “*you’re developing a tool*”, I replied “*I hope so, something to add to the toolbox*”. Giving ‘something’ a title made it real and the ‘Creative Interactive Career Process’ was born.

The Creative Interactive Career Process: a developing idea

Moustakas (2001) proposes that heuristic research is about self-discovery. The research question derives from the researcher's inner awareness, meaning-making and inspiration. There is a personal involvement, or as Moustakas (*ibid*) suggests, an autobiographical immersion. In the Creative Interactive Career Process, the individual becomes a researcher who explores a salient life-career moment to discover something about themselves for themselves. Similarly to Moustakas (*ibid*), I propose knowledge is illuminated through descriptions and creative outlets. They provide moments of reflection and reflexivity which help individuals to consider their social and cultural contexts. This knowledge can then support their biographical development. I am asking participants to become heuristic researchers who devise and respond to their own research questions through a creative process. In developing this model, I have drawn on Rogers' (1961, 1980) understanding of therapeutic relationships, also supported by Moustakas (2001), Alheit's (1992) notion of biographicity and a constructivist perspective as espoused by McMahon and (2006) and Savickas (2011). There are three aspects to the process which I will now discuss.

Initial career conversation – the life-career practitioner enables the participant to tell their story their way and listens to the story told and not told. They draw on their guidance and counselling skills to gently challenge assumptions but, importantly, help the person to acknowledge their strengths and so begin to build a trusting relationship. When the person has reached a point where they feel unable to continue with a dialogue, the practitioner asks them to focus on a salient career turning point; a time they felt they made an autonomous decision. The practitioner asks them to create a piece of work using a creative medium of their choosing and can offer suggestions if they are unsure of what to do, stressing although it must be their work, they are on hand to help so the person does not feel abandoned. The time to complete the work is set by the individual and can be extended so any feelings of pressure are minimalised. The career practitioner can always contact the individual if they feel the time-period is excessive. However, I recognise that for some, booking the next appointment not too far ahead might be useful, especially with young people who may not return.

The creative piece – this is up to the individual, but the practitioner can offer a 'help sheet' of ideas. I would suggest the practitioner and the participant discuss methods of working as the creative interplay, as noted by McMahon (2006), can produce imaginative dialogue to spark inventive ideas. The participant enters an actively enquiring process which involves searching deeply within themselves and as a result, they gain new knowledge about themselves. The process embraces aspects such as dreams and thoughts in the moment and they can playfully

consider their discoveries with childlike openness. It is important for the participant to show their curiosity and respond to thoughts that come from their descriptive creative practice. They re-create their experience from their frame of reference and in doing so, have the propensity to provide meaningful responses to their own inner questions. On completion of their creative piece, they can return to the life-career practitioner to discuss what they have discovered.

The ‘illuminating’ discussion – The practitioner provides the opportunity for the person to describe their creation. Thought may come to them as they speak, elucidating their thinking which the practitioner should explore further. Set questions can be used to offer an interview framework, but deviations can be useful. Allow time for silences to aid thinking and importantly, ask the individual how they have felt throughout the process and what they will do as a result of taking part. The reintegration of new knowledge to inform how a person then makes meaning of their world, is an act of creative discovery, involving intuition and tacit understanding. Moustakas (2001), suggests that the researcher ask questions of the participant which may include enquiring about their thoughts and feelings, as well as the events and people who were connected to the experience described. By doing this, the practitioner and the participant are both engaged with the process. I too, asked similar questions of my participants, so there is some congruence with my model and Moustakas’s understanding of heuristic research design.

Moustakas (ibid) proposes a ‘process of illumination’ where the researcher, in this case the participant, seeks to discover essential qualities and themes. These are then explained until a depiction of the meaning of the experience investigated can be constructed. This is not unlike the process of the Interactive Creative Career Process that I have proposed. In my model, participants’ creative pieces are the individual depictions. Moustakas suggests, constructions could include artwork, poetry or narratives; they are compound depictions of the experience providing an alternative position from which to view and synthesise the event. As such, there is illumination of the experience.

To say this would be a follow-up career conversation, seems to imply a formality which infers there has to be an outcome or a solution which, is not necessarily the case. It could be that the person, as in Sara’s case, finds their creative piece reiterates their current feeling of being ‘trapped’ in a situation. This could then be a discussion on acknowledgement rather than change. The creative piece is a way to ‘see’ a time they felt they took positive action. The point is, the person has recognised something and is changed by that recognition. This process is likely to develop as I consider the way forward.

As a researcher I have sought to illuminate the process by offering creative synthesis of the events which occurred throughout the research. I have tried to show different versions of the same experience through creatively working with transcripts to develop participant case studies or stories and an imagined chapter. I have attempted to maintain the 'realness' of each individual through these composite depictions. My intuitive responses to the work led me to these descriptions and I wanted to play. The other participants also found they were able to let their thoughts and feelings come to the fore through their creative depictions and intuitively they created work which enabled these aspects to be captured. Even though I knew my participants, it was important to create an atmosphere of trust and openness to encourage self-disclosure. We found that knowing each other, did not necessarily make the process easier and we needed to feel relaxed and safe. I hope they could see my trust in them to complete their task and even though they may have initially felt something akin to pressure, they all immersed themselves in the creative pieces which led them to self-discovery and knowledge acquisition which they can use in the future when they are feeling uncertain.

Autoethnography: methodology of my heart

There are such feelings inside me as I come to the final stages of this work. It is not a race to the finish but more of a reluctant walk, where leaden steps threaten progress. Endings dim the light in the forest and it is hard to see the pathway to the future. Etherington (2004) suggests, when we use autoethnographic tools we should think about the potential benefit to others. Throughout this work, I did not want to appear self-indulgent. Rather, I wanted to entice the reader into my world and wrap them, hold them, in a cloak of words. I had my self-doubts but over the years, I have come to see there is a possibility that my work can be of benefit to others and like Meekums (2008), I embarked on a creative journey. I did not know what would happen along the way, what would be purposeful action or chance opportunities. Yet, autoethnography has enabled me to discuss aspects of this doctoral life-career moment which I truly do not think I would have been able to any other way. In agreement with Pelias (2004), it is my methodology of the heart, as my desire to write comes from my heart, allowing creative thought to unfold on the page.

Hunt and Sampson (2006) acknowledge that creativity cannot be forced, an opinion also voiced by Sara. There have been times when I sat staring at a blank computer screen and others when the words dried up in mid-flow, leaving me frightened, wondering if I would be able to complete my task. In critically examining myself, I turned the gaze inwards and outwards, simultaneously. Often, I would feel disorientated, befuddled and lost. I would stop, letting a stillness in and chaos out. Then, I just write and allow the thoughts to come in the moment, and, fears subside as the

writing takes me where it will. However, I have been plagued by the thought of ‘hostile readers’ (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p79) which fuelled my neurosis of ‘not being good enough’. I confronted my feelings in the writing and through being in the moment, I made discoveries in the writing as I learned, gradually, to trust myself.

Along the way, I have found myself in new situations which I thought would demand an academic demeanour and I tried to comply in a way I thought others would want to see me. Of course, this only led to more feelings of inadequacy and I learned people want to hear my story the way only I can tell it. So, when faced with a sea of faces at conferences or talking to my European peers at the Padova Doctoral School, I told the story my way and nobody said I was wrong. The academic mouth did not open in outrage and swallow me whole. People listened and some asked challenging questions and I came through the experiences, having gained deeper insights.

Doing this doctorate was a personal risk and has challenged much of my thinking, changing my perceptions. Where before I envisaged capacious, murky, churning waters, I now see a wide expansive lake of possibilities for the future. I hope this thesis will be read by others who are on the edge of ‘something’, enticing them to think with the writing and make their own discoveries about their worlds. I want others in the career guidance profession to see there are alternative ways of working; I want them to open themselves to the possibility of a way of working which I understand is not for everyone. Some will feel creative practices will not work with individuals whose cultural predilections for an objective diagnosis, demand to be acknowledged. Others may feel that it would be difficult to gain a measured outcome to meet their organisation’s demands. I recognise it will not be easy, but we need to trust others, give them the time and space to ‘hear’ themselves in the creative moment. We need to encourage ‘self-creation’ from personal resources (Peavy, 2004) as perspectives guide actions and lives are made up of experiences.

As a practising career guidance counsellor, I will need to find such time and space to disseminate my research and this will be challenging whilst working full-time in educational institutions where such commodities are luxuries. That said, I will endeavour to network with others working in my field. My intention is to continue to write and I hope future works will be desired by academic journals and industry publications. Not working in academia could make sharing my ideas more difficult as access to conferences and other public meetings would impinge on my daily working life. However, I will find a way as this work matters to me.

Speedy (2013) explains that when she writes, it is often for herself in the first instance, then shaped for publication. This comforts me and the idea of writing for external bodies gains strength. I do not apologise for the nature of my work and like Richardson (2000) suggest, the meaning is in the entire text and therefore, needs to be read. There are complex tensions claiming the writing space, as noted by Speedy (2013), and the different roles I play overlap – researcher-writer, mother, daughter, wife, grandmother, career counsellor. They can demand acknowledgement at the most inconvenient times. My worry has been wanting to show the verisimilitude of this doctorate. I have attempted to show the space between the experience and the writing. Analysing my thoughts and activities has brought about a physicality to my theorizing (St Pierre, 2011) as I made visible the layering of my thinking. I often turned to my journal to take readers into my private cultural world. They are now in my experience, in this moment of writing, and I will be in their experience, in the moment of their reading. The difference is, I can tell them things but their thoughts are theirs alone until they share them. My journal has been my companion throughout the study and once again, I turned to my ‘friend’ to express my thoughts and feelings at this final stage.

15/8/17

Dear Journal,

It is hard to believe that nearly five years have passed since I started this study, and actually, more time since I began writing in your earlier volumes. So much has changed and I wanted to pause as I reach the end of this study and reflect back on the experience. As I write, I look out of the window of this room which is my study; my academic worldview. From this space, I create an atmosphere which helps me to work. This room, unlike the one before in our old home, is yet to have a clear identity but my desk dominates, so everyone knows it as my study. I think it is a liminal space because I enter a different world when I enter this space. The study has enabled me and others to find such spaces through the creation of our creative practices. We enter spaces within spaces, time within time. Yes, I think we can create moments within moments. But I don't want to forget the other moments which have so influenced the study and me.

What did I know when I started in 2013? Well, not very much to be honest. I knew I wanted to explore an aspect of myself but also something which ‘troubled the waters’. I wanted to offer an alternative or addition, to the established career guidance discourse. I wanted to see if an idea could develop into a practical tool. When I started, I thought it would be fairly simple to interview people because that's what I do every day. How wrong could I be! I had not banked on the personal involvement, but then that is what I wanted to include, so there was a continuous tension between me the practitioner, me the researcher and me the participant. I felt worn out and worn down by the process. But, at the same time, I was intrigued, enthused and invigorated. So many emotions and feelings came to the fore; it was almost as if I was split into different personas that entered the spaces between the interviews and the ‘real’ world. Yes, that's how I came to see these times - like times out of time in parallel worlds where activities could be viewed from ‘inter’ spaces.

When we are 'inter' these spaces, our view is from the inside looking out, but I also felt I was the observer, from the outside looking in. How much I have learnt from these interventions, and such thinking has influenced the way I interview in practice too. I now try to see the interaction from different angles, to help the individual see their lives from different viewpoints. A bit like crystallisation.

Oh, how things have changed. My personal life has invaded my academic quest and has been acknowledged because this is my study and I am the subject. I did not imagine what would happen along the way. In five years there have been many endings, the most poignant for me was the death of my Father. I had not banked on the continued presence of the 'hole' in the fabric of my life. When Dad died, it appeared almost simultaneously, this small dark space of seeming emptiness. I thought, it would fade but no, it's still there. I thought I needed to mention moments of loss as they do impact on our work-related roles. I now see the importance of time and making every minute count. Our relationships matter, and we are changed by our relationships with others.

When I think of Carol, I can't help but think about her personal relationships, but she also seemed to grow in her working relationships. As one door began to close, others began to open. Maybe she sought comfort and gained encouragement through her work? Beth was in a place of sadness because of the bullying she endured, but was then offered an opportunity which brought her into contact with like-minded people who welcomed her into their community, fuelling her desire to become a Youth Worker. Sara was also changed by her relationships with others. Her move to a different part of the country to be with her boyfriend was positive because she was with the person she loved. But, it also brought tensions to her working life until someone saw something in her and offered her a role which 'fitted' with her intrinsic needs. So, perhaps out of the tensions which at first may constrict us so we don't see a way out, when we feel trapped, we change our view of the world and become ready to take chances? We have to stop and think about our place in our space. There needs to be a readiness in people to make changes and they need to recognise the time is right for them to do so. Hmm, interesting thought.

I look out of the window again and the world is still. Everything has been washed by the overnight rain and there is a freshness to the abundant greenery beyond my study space. I stand to get a better view. Soft breezes ruffle billowing grasses, planted last year alongside flowers and shrubs. We created a garden from a blank grass canvas. How different our home was two years ago? The spaces have changed, they occupy the same parameters but internally, they are different. We created a new space and everyone can see the changes. Of course, the emotional upheaval of re-locating to a new county can only be felt by us. Tensions in our close relationships can be heightened by the trauma of moving but they have faded to distant memories. New beginnings can take us to new spaces.

At first, I thought my job role would falter when we moved as I found work which unfortunately, was not for me. I think of Sara who had a similar experience. The recruitment centre she worked for and the adult guidance organisation I was employed by, both had ways of working which did not sit well with either of us. Our unease led to seeking alternative positions which proved more conducive to our needs. Sara met someone who believed in her and that gave her the 'impetus' to explore her new world, helping her to grow in confidence. I did not feel such growth; more of a comfortable fit. My role does not challenge me but it does make me feel at 'one' with the world.

When I last spoke to Beth via email she said things had changed for her, but she didn't say what had changed. I have heard through social media that she has changed her job and is studying again. Carol and I haven't had contact since the interviews. This is okay because she is getting on with her life and maybe she doesn't want to stay in touch. Recently, I found out that Sara has also changed her job. I feel I can't bring this information into the main part of the study because it has

not been given to me as the researcher and I'm not sure if it would be ethical as it is only 'hearsay' material. But, it is information out there in the world so I feel it is okay to mention it here as thoughts in passing.

I should talk again about the research questions.

Creative practices seemed to help my participants to locate their autonomy when they recollected times when they made salient life-career decisions. The time and place of the creation of their respective pieces, were important as they felt relaxed and calm. In a career interview, there may be a feeling of tension both in the interviewee and the interviewer. One, may feel unable to tell the story they want to tell and the other may feel unable to provide the most appropriate method to help them to do so. There may be restrictions to practice which tie the practitioner to traditional career guidance methods. The gift of time is a precious commodity that many cash-strapped organisations can't provide. However, asking someone to go away and take time to create something is a risk. I remember someone coming to see me when I worked in a college and I suggested that she write a letter to herself (I talked about this in the article I wrote for the Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling in 2011) which she did. Perhaps then, as I said before, the person should recognise a need for change in order for them to actually do so. I don't know if there is a place for an alternative discourse in career guidance and counselling, but I was talking to someone at a local college here in Cambridge about my research. They seemed willing to let me work with some of their students. I'm not sure how I would manage, but when I have finished this thesis, I need to find a way to take creative practices in career guidance further. I need to get the message out to the careers community. I'm thinking about writing papers and if possible, I will attend conferences. Of course, this is what I want but I have to work and it is not easy to juggle these different balls. Also, academia is expensive if you are not in the club and once I complete, I will be back on the outside. Perhaps I will have to start with those who offer guidance in my locality and then venture further afield. I must face an uncertain future again. I digress, back to the questions.

The question about feelings and emotions was pertinent to all participants. By providing the time and space for creative practices, people connected with their feelings by recollecting a perception of their emotions. I think being asked to consider a salient moment in time from a present perspective can support people who may feel lost in their indecision. They can look back to the time they made a particular decision and hopefully feel that positivity, or sense of achievement. What matters is the sense of accomplishment that is re-experienced. The creative process appears to have supported all of us to gain a sense of peace, which came from deep engagement with the creative interaction. Just being able to focus on an aspect of our lives is akin to mindfulness, a currently popular technique to reduce the stresses of modern life. So perhaps there is a therapeutic quality to this work too.

*If I think about the place of intuition, well it certainly seems to have been prevalent in each participant's story. Is this because we are women? Do we naturally turn inward looking to ourselves and listen to our inner voices? Surely, men do this too? Maybe they hear something but then try to rationalise their thinking. That said, I know men **and** women who do this. I was brought up to do the safe thing. To be secure but at the same time, my family followed their hearts, believing in their keen sense of faith to find answers in troubled times. None of my participants seemed to follow such thinking but they all acknowledged the etheric. Perhaps it is their willingness to be open to opportunities that enables them to trust themselves enough to take risks on the unknown. As I mentioned earlier, Beth trusted her teacher, but she also recognised something in the opportunity which could be good for her. Sara was open to change and although she reasoned with herself, decided in the end to just do it. Carol could not say how she knew the opportunity was right for her but thought it looked interesting and decide to apply regardless of*

the limited time. Something clicked inside me when I heard I could write a piece in lieu of having a degree. Something made me move forward and take a risk. Something. Maybe Carol, Sara and myself had gathered our skills in readiness of such opportunities. Maybe Beth sensed a way to gain the knowledge she needed for her desired job role. Yes, I think intuition has played a part in our salient career turning points and decision-making.

This study has made me think about the way I think, challenging my assumptions and biases. I didn't set out to prove that my view of the world was the only one, but I did discover others had similar ways of knowing. Our stories so different, yet on closer look, there were areas we came together. Like Sara I wanted a new start when I moved to Shropshire. Like Carol, I yearned to gain qualifications to prove I could do it right. She and I also struggled to learn at school, finding such establishments uninspiring. Possibly Beth felt the same as she struggled to find what she was searching for until her moment arrived. We have travelled different paths but the decision to help others continues to inspire our work-selves and influence our other roles. Which brings me back to my life-career, the roles other than researcher and how one impacts on the other.

I have said research is selfish because it invaded my family life. When I started, I didn't comprehend the ways in which I would segregate myself from my significant others. Days out, visits to family, time with friends, all had to be considered in light of my study needs. I wasn't studying full-time but had to fit it around my everyday activities. All of which meant tensions developed in my personal relationships. I want to say these things because others who are considering undertaking part-time study need to be aware of the monsters lurking in the background. You will put the study first, you will become so engrossed in what you do that chronological time will become meaningless. You will barely acknowledge others who bring you endless cups of tea and copious glasses of wine – all to show you they care. Yes, you may well be selfish. But if you know this, you can make changes.

Moving and trying to retain contact with my university became difficult, but proved to be the best thing for my family and as a result, I spent less time working on the study and more time with them. Moving helped me to see things in a different light. In other ways too. For example, placing ornaments and pictures in new spaces meant they achieved new significance as I was able to see them again, differently. Through creating creative pieces, participants found salient moments came to have significance again. We created historical artefacts. It gave us the chance to reminisce about our feelings and emotions, which I also re-experienced when I placed objects in new surroundings. So, moving brought about a new life perspective and made me 're-see' all of my roles, and assign worth from my new perspective.

Since we moved, we have been blessed with another grandchild, so things do work out for the best, don't they? What will I do when I don't have the study in my life anymore? Spend time with my significant others and enjoy life. But, I don't think I will ever stop being curious.

After thought

The 'crisis of imagination' according to Amundson (2006, p85) is experienced by individuals when they struggle to make life-career decisions. He suggests career counsellors need to use their own creativity to support the formation of new stories; stories of hope not hopelessness. They become self-creating (ibid). Creative practises can help people to create 'concrete' expressions of lived experience (Ellis and Bochner, 2014) and it is this very word 'concrete' which was expressed by participants in this study. It solidified their experiences and provided a framework to

support their thinking, creating possibilities for the future. Reid (2016) notes, it is difficult to say where careers work will go in the future 'we do not know what we will know in the future, we can only imagine' (p259). This work has shown how creative practices opened the minds of participants to imaginative play, bringing about fresh perspectives on important life defining moments. They examined their past lives in the present and what they found out, informed how they may want to live in the future.

I do not know where I am going, nor what I will find when I get there, but my view through my window is a many coloured splendour beckoning me on.

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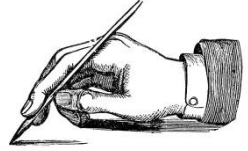
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Appendix 1

Questions to ask participants in follow-up interview (likely to be altered in the interview)

1. What were your thoughts and feelings when I asked you to do a creative piece?
2. What were your thoughts and feelings before you actually started your piece?
3. What were your thoughts and feelings whilst you were creating your piece (even those dream-like thoughts).
4. Please could you talk me through what you have created?
5. Why did you choose this particular creative practice?
6. Did you have an idea of what you might like to do when I asked you to create something?
7. Did your original idea change? If so, why?
8. What were your immediate thoughts and feelings once the piece was completed?
9. As a result of taking part, has anything changed for/in you?
10. What are your thoughts and feelings about the research process that you have participated in?

Thank you for agreeing to do a creative piece to record your chosen important life/career moment your way. If you are not sure of what you would like to do here are just a few ideas which you may like to think about: -



If you would like to write something you could: -

Write a paragraph, a story, a poem, a newspaper article, a letter, an email, a script of a conversation, a postcard... anything you feel inspired to do.



If you would like to do something art-based you could: -

Paint or draw a picture, do a sculpture or a model, do a poster, make a collage...



If you would like to do something else you could: -

Do something with textiles or crafts, photography, film, music, dance...

I hope these ideas will help you to consider how you would like to record your moment your way. Many thanks again for agreeing to participate in this study.

Best wishes

Laurie



Appendix 3

Interview Proforma

Participant's Name: Carol (pseudonym)

Name of interviewer: Laurie Simpson

Interview 1: Friday 31st October 2014, 5.45pm – researcher's home

Pen portrait: Carol is in her late forties and has lived in Kent the majority of her life. She has three children and the eldest is 30 years old. She has a strong sense of social justice, having fought for her middle child to receive the learning support he required at school and is currently working at a college as an Area Lead for Additional Learners Support.

Since childhood she has seen her place in the world as that of supporting others and has a strong sense of responsibility to her family and the students she works with. Her personal life has had its difficulties as her relationships with men have not provided the security she desired and the relationships have not had the longevity that she had hoped for.

Having left school with no qualifications, Carol has successfully studied in her adult years and gained professional qualifications but still feels that she is somehow lacking educationally. She does not feel confident in her ability and has started to question her work role. She wants something to change but is not sure what that should be. Carol presents herself as a capable professional woman but her perceived lack of self-worth contrasts with this persona causing tensions. She is seeking something but is not sure what that might be.

Possible themes

Adult learning

Carol: Yeah, yeah. All the while just been training and one of the biggest arguments with me and Stuart was that I was always working and training.

Carol: Yeah [yeah] yeah when I was.. When I first met Stuart I started being a Learning Support Centre Manager. So first of all I done my Learning Mentor training and then I done dyslexia training, then I went on to do, can't remember which way round it was, think I done my specialist assessor and teacher training for specific learning difficulties dyslexia training, that was one evening a week but obviously lots of work round that. Then I did my Foundation Degree in Learner Support and my science, because I always needed science at that point if I carried on to qualified teacher status. Which I chose not to do.

... afterwards I done my Maths GCSE about forty.. sixteen years ago [okay]. Yeah and just through work I done my learning mentor training and different trainings around my job. I have a.. dunno.. a lack of confidence I suppose as some would say. Erm people say 'you don't need the qualification' but I do so that I know that I'm doing it in the right way so...

Carol: Yeah 'I'm qualified to do this y'know'.

The desire for recognition through learning is evident in these excerpts and gaining qualifications appears to equate gaining recognition of worth. Carol seems to feel that if she has the qualification she will be 'doing it the right way'. This matters to her. But what is the 'wrong way'? Has she set a standard that she has to achieve in her work? Maybe the only person judging Carol is herself and the right way is confirmed by having a qualification to back up her ideal of who she needs to be to be successful in her job role?

Resilience and learning from adversity

Carol: But then I thought 'no' I'm not going to let him get the better of me or see me as failing or being weak and needing.

Carol: Then when I was with the children I tried to do a computer one that went wrong. I tried to do a nursery nurse one and that went wrong. I think things happened in life, you know it's like 'I can't do that as well' but afterwards I learnt that regardless of my life I'd carry on.

She has a strong sense of 'survival' and wants to be seen as a strong capable woman. The face she shows the world? Crushed by her failed relationship she 'vows' that she will not let her ex-partner see her as 'being weak and needing'. There is a sense of drama here. The plot of a woman wronged, who goes on to become successful despite what life throws at her.

Carol: 'Bad things happen but what you do as a result of them is down to you' – (strap-line don't know why this has come to me but may be there's something in it! - think Savickas's Career Construction Theory and headline for an article)

Structures that impinge

Carol: Then I signed up with college and got nursery places and everything. I think to do secretarial down in Islington [yeah]. Arranged everything and then when I contacted Social Services they said, not Social Services, whoever pays your money when you're not working, and erm they said 'no you can't go to college 'cause you won't be available for work' and it's like 'I'm not available for work, I've got 2 children under 5 and what I want to do is this now, there's

a college crèche, so when they are at school I can go and do some paid work'. Yeah, and no that wasn't acceptable so I had to give that up.

Social structures got in the way of her studying whilst her children were pre-school age. Here, there is a sense of being trapped – wanting to make life changes but being stopped by the social systems of the day. Timewise, this would have been the late eighties.

Chance and serendipity – chance event that she looked at the free paper at the ad

Carol: And just looking through the paper I saw a job for someone to support a child with autism over in Eltham. And the closing date was the day after.

Carol: Yeah because it wasn't on a, it wasn't on a job advert page. It was just this little advert, tiny, tiny...

One thing led to another

Carol: Yeah. I've been asked to do it or it's been 'oh that looks interesting'. So, I went for the one in Eltham and the only experience I had was Danny and working this day in school. So, I went along to chat to the Head, I think it was the summer holidays, and the Head Teacher was in the office and somebody else. Chatted to them. So, gave my form in, got that job. Apparently, there was like eighty-five people who went for the job but got that job, done that year. Then because of that job, it was only a year because the student was going on to an autistic school, but then somebody who worked there, sister worked at the children's school at over the road and in the interim, I got a job in the sweet shop down the road, I had three jobs actually, the sweet job... I can't remember what they were now but yeah three different jobs, and she came in and said "there's a position going at our place. We've got a new student that needs support. Would you come for an interview?" So, I went along for a very informal interview and the Head gave me the job there and then and asked me to do lunch time duty as well. Quickly got rid of that job! [we laugh]. And even there, I followed [...] for two years there and the teacher was leaving said about the special school she was going to and how I would like that and would be good at that. I went for an interview there and got that one. Erm that was Inclusion Manager and that was a bit bizarre. I set up my own SENCO project there because that wasn't enough for me 'cause I got bored [said in a whisper]. Then I got asked to run the learning support centre because they couldn't employ anyone [okay]. Erm and when I left there, it was coming to an end the funding was coming to an end. We had a change of Head, I kept my head down for a little while because he was one of these power heads that comes in and changes everything, and then I just went to

him and said “I want a frank discussion with you, how do you see the centre. I know it’s not everyone’s cup of tea, not every head wants a centre in their school”. Because we were one of two centres for primary age children in England. And he said the funding is coming to an end, and he said some stuff which I knew wasn’t true but anyway it gave me the heads up that he wasn’t keen to keep it. Erm and I just saw the job for [...] in the paper and just thought ‘that sounds interesting. I need some experience of interviewing because I hadn’t interviewed for years’. And I got the job! [we laugh]. Erm yeah and then went to [...] because I needed more money or felt that I might need more money. So yeah...

Carol has told her story as a time-line where one thing led to another. She built the plot bringing it up to date. Within the main story there are little stories that could stand on their own for example the story of the sweet shop, the story of the interview, the story of the SENCO project and so on. Together all the stories form this ‘grand narrative’.

Intuition

Carol: I rang up and it’s like the closing date is tomorrow and I literally had to drive over there, get the application, take home fill it and drive it back the next day. So, for me that was like ‘oh yeah that looks good’. It was like a tiny little and for me it was how did I see it? Why was I looking at the jobs there and most of my jobs have been like that, the ones I’ve gone for.

Carol: Yeah and the closing date was the day after and I could have gone ‘oh I’m never gonna apply’ but I didn’t. I drove all the way over there, I didn’t even know where it was, I drove over there with the kids, got the application form, took it home, filled it out and drove it back the next day...

Me: So what was it do you think that made you go ‘oh, I’m going to get in the car, gonna drive over there’.

Carol: Dunno, just something. Yeah don’t know. There are so many things like you say, could have gone ‘closing date is tomorrow I’m not gonna make it’ [yeah] but run up they said come over and even this, it was probably a good hour’s drive.

Why did she get in her car and drive, knowing that the traffic could be bad, to get the application? What was it that acted as a trigger? Did she have a gut feeling?

Relationships – how have they affected her identity as an adult woman?

Search for love and normality (whatever that is)

Carol: Erm, had Jess stay at home mum then got pregnant with erm Luke think I was around four or five months pregnant and had to go into hospital because I had an asthma attack... When I came out it was quite apparent that Will, who was their dad, was erm having an affair with my best friend. They both told me that I was paranoid and nutty and God knows what else... Erm he eventually left erm when Luke was about a week old. Erm...

Carol: I made him go. He wanted to stay and felt that he could do both things and I didn't see it like that. Even my Mum was like 'men do that when you're pregnant. I will be fine afterwards' etcetera. Which is why I waited I think. But I didn't see it like that. Erm, and I was devastated at the time. I thought my life was over I think I was twenty... I don't even think I was even twenty-one. Erm no one will ever want me... For me I always wanted what I never had which was a family for my children but part of me wouldn't compromise because I wouldn't pretend nothing was happening [hmm]. No, couldn't do that bit [laughs]. Erm, yeah so yeah for a little while I remember doing lots of crying. But then I thought 'no' I'm not going to let him get the better of me or see me as failing or being weak and needing.

She had an expectation from this relationship which was not corroborated by her mother. Her community understandings and the understandings of the individual come into conflict as her mother believes that 'this is what men do'. She said she 'always wanted what she never had'; a family but not on any terms. Carol shows resilience in the face of adversity and does not accept the situation.

Seeking security in a relationship

Carol: Erm, I think I met Mark... erm when Jess was 3 or 4, about 3 I think, [then very quietly] maybe 4 I can't remember. Yeah, that's when I met him and that was one of my resonating moments because I'd met someone before him that I found out still had a not a wife, I don't know if it was a wife or a partner, but with a child so finished with him and met Mark but he kept hanging around and I remember having this moment where you know you have this, you know when it's like 'shall I go and see...' and I wouldn't do both obviously. Erm and it was which one do I need to see, because the other one kept ringing me. You know 'he's got a good job and he's a stable person, the other one is for all the reasons is wrong' and I remember 'no I'm going with Mark'. So, the other guy I kept ignoring him and eventually he went away [she laughs]

Me: So the guy you chose at that point then, was the guy you felt would give you some stability.

Carol: Yeah, yeah it was a very practical, yeah, I just remember my thoughts being practical not... well, emotional against practical because the other guy was lovely and everything but he wasn't true in anything he said and that would have been with my heart. I was using my head [said very quietly in a whisper].

She made a rational decision based on the information she had at that time, both about the other man but also possibly about her family needs. Conscious vs unconscious – head vs heart.

Carol: I think that I thought that when he married me he would change and be more like a husband should be.

Carol has an 'ideal' husband in her head. What has informed this perception?

Relationship with mother

Carol: Yeah, yeah, I think so. Always felt responsible. Even when I was 7 or 8 I've got memories of feeling responsible for my Mum and not leaving my Mum indoors on her own even though she was going out later and so I would have ended up being on my own. A bit bizarre but yeah so ...

A strong sense of responsibility from childhood appears to have continued into adulthood, from caring for her children to the students she feels responsible for in her job. These students have specific needs, they may be vulnerable. Does she feel that she has to fight for them so they can be heard? Does she hide behind her fight for others? Does she put a mask on to play a role?

Process: Started to record my thoughts at the beginning of the day. I noted what I could see from my study window and that the sun was trying to break through a blanket of cloud. My mood today is more pensive than optimistic. I worry that the participant will not find my house. I worry about the 'trick or treaters' interrupting the interview and plan a strategy to deal with the possibility. I check the tape recorder and print off the paperwork. I note how life in the street is beginning to stir. As I do housework I think about how I will greet her. Back in the study I note how a rainbow appears on the carpet as the light catches a glass object on the window sill. A good omen? There are niggles in my mind that 'peck' away at ease. I don't feel very relaxed and I hope this passes as it's important that my participant feels at ease. I ponder whether to light a candle to 'set' the mood for the interview.

Face to face interview – She moved to sit on a sofa at the far end of the room and I gently directed her to the sofa by the coffee table. This was where most people sit when they come to my house, where they feel comfortable. Also, it was where I felt comfortable. Should I have let her sit where she wanted to? I asked if she would be more comfortable on the other sofa and she said she did not mind. During the interview, she gave the impression from her body language that she was relaxed but I noticed that she held her coffee cup but did not drink from it. Was she using it as a prop to keep her hands busy? To hide her nerves at times? There were times when she laughed after she said something disparaging about herself. Why? Was she laughing at herself or was it because she was embarrassed by what she recollected? By sitting on the sofa, we were on the same level but I had chosen where to sit so I held the balance of power. The tape recorder was on the seat between us facing the participant and I had asked if that would be okay with her. Loose structure to the interview enabled the participant to tell her story rather than respond to questions. Participant seemed to hold her emotions in check and her facial expressions gave little away. She smiled throughout the interview but at times this seemed almost apologetically. Interview lasted around 45 minutes.

Participant was worried about creative piece as she felt that she was not a creative person. Yet when I gave her a help-sheet she said that she might do a mind-map of her moment, so there is creativity but perhaps she does not acknowledge this. I suggested that often our first thoughts tell us what to do. I felt the urge at times in the interview to be the ‘careers counsellor’ and wanted to help her find a way forward. Would this have been wrong? As a researcher, I also bring my other roles into an interaction and they all make me who I am. There was an honesty to this account which I felt deeply and left me wanting to do something to help her. Her story touched me.

After the interview – I wrote up my thoughts the next day as I was feeling tired and did not want to rush things. Was this a mistake? I did not think so as once my pen stroked the pages of my journal the words gushed forth, filling the pages with my thoughts and recollections of the event. Of course, I acknowledge that this is a version of the events, but if I had written them straight after the interview it would also have been an account and not a replication. We write what we feel at the time of writing thereby capturing that moment, that interpretation of an event, and no other. Something is running around inside my mind: it is a collection of words which I have noted in the ‘themes’ section but I have an urge to display them in some way – something like a picture. I will think on this and if I go ahead I will use the transcript for inspiration.

Ethnographics – 5.45pm on 31st October – Halloween. It is dark and the street lamps are on. Location is my house, on a housing estate in Kent. The house has been cleaned and tidied, cushions plumped up ready for a visitor. Large bay window with curtains left open looking out onto the street. Coffee table with craft magazines piled up next to catalogues for a high street store. Urn on fireplace filled with long silk orchid stems provide a blaze of colour which is picked up by cushions on the 2 large sofas. The room is colour coordinated, pleasant, comfortable. A safe space? I hope so. Next to one end of a sofa are bags filled with craft projects, hidden until noticed. A television is on, colour flickering. It does not dominate because the room is large enough to make it seem smaller. Family photos are on every surface; parental pride. On each wall hangs at least one painting, nearly all providing sea views. This is my view of my home and I have tried to be honest in what I see. Would the participant see something else? Would it seem too tidy to her, contrived? The participant and the interviewer are alone in the house. Outside, occasionally a child's laughter can be heard. Once or twice car headlights cast a glancing blow on the window to quickly be moved along. The street lamps barely touch the cloak of blackness. Inside the room is lit by table lamps enveloping the occupants with their warm, soft light. The participant has come from work and is wearing dark trousers and a colourful top. I am wearing blue jeans and a zipped through blue striped fleece which helps me to feel relaxed and I hope conveys the message of informality.

Gestalt

What was the impression I gained of the participant from this interview? I saw a woman who had learnt to be resilient and autonomous but was looking for something. What? Self-realisation, identity, meaning? She looked for stability with her partners and wanted acknowledgement and recognition for gaining qualifications.

Any other issues

None

Appendix 4

Transcript of Interview 1 with Carol (pseudonym)

(Date and time of interview: 31/10/2014 at 6pm)

Key to Transcript

[] Additions to the words spoken – can be from the other person e.g. Hmm, yeah.

.. second person speaks before the first person finishes

... pause in speech

...- longer pause in speech

[...] text removed to preserve anonymity

Me: [smiling] Okay, so Carol, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research today. Erm, as you know, we've already discussed before I started the tape, explained to you a little bit about the process, what's going to happen, looked at the participation sheet and you've signed the consent form. So thank you for doing the paperwork for me.

Carol: No problem [laughs].

Me: Erm okay and as I said it's really informal as well. So if you're okay can we just start talking a little bit about you and maybe you know, your background, where you're from, perhaps your family... Er, if there is anything that you'd rather not talk about just say..

Carol: No that's fine [she laughs].

Me: [smiling] So whereabouts are you from then?

Carol: Erm I'm from [...] [okay] originally. I have an older brother and a younger brother. My Dad left home when we were about well when I was about 5 or 6, erm so I was always with my Mum... erm... secondary school erm...- I left home when I was 16 [oh okay]. Erm, had my daughter when I was about 18 and a half. Erm I left home to move in with someone I left home to get out of home. [always with Mum – absent father – teenage mum who left home at 16 to get out of home by moving in with someone else – relationships – what was she seeking?]

Me: How did your Mum, you said you were always with your Mum when you were growing up, so how was Mum about your leaving home?

Carol: Probably devastated. Erm but she was my reason for going [okay] erm manic depressive, years later an alcoholic, died about 22, 23 years ago [okay]. Yeah, I was looking after Mum so I didn't finish my education. Erm... yeah. Whether it's an excuse or not I didn't take any exams or just missed a few sessions and then the teacher didn't like me or it felt like that. Erm so I didn't

go back to her lessons and things like that. [I sense a loss here – a wish for something different – recognition from the teacher? Looking after her mother meant she was unable to engage with education and she felt the teacher didn't like her]

Me: It's horrible when you feel you haven't got a relationship with that person [yeah] you think well..

Carol: Yeah, yeah, it was the one thing that I was good at as well. [Why did she feel she wasn't good at anything else? Low self-worth]

Me: So what was that subject?

Carol: Child Care [she laughs].

Me: Okay, so you really, it's like the nurturing side of you..

Carol: Yeah. I think for me it's a common sense thing. Even though I had missed quite a few sessions I remember getting 96 or 98 percent in my mock exam... erm and my teacher hated it, absolutely the most disappointing... I think she announced it to the class 'the most disappointing result of all' and I'd got the top mark. I'd not been there but to me all the questions were common sense questions. So erm... you know... erm... about 2 children living in a high-rise flat what things should you think about blah blah blah... Erm, but yeah so... yeah I left with no GCSEs erm and went straight to college the year after. With my Mum [laughs and I smile]. I took GCSE Maths and English but I dropped the Maths erm because I got pregnant with Jess then. So I done the English and got 'C'. [Carol wanted to learn. Getting the top mark and being told it was a disappointment – the influence of others in our lives can be long reaching]

Me: Teenage mum.

Carol: [laughing as she speaks] Didn't feel like it then I felt so old! [feeling old at 18. Carol had already experienced so much]

Me: You obviously had quite a lot of responsibility from quite a young age?

Carol: Yeah, yeah I think so. Always felt responsible. Even when I was 7 or 8 I've got memories of feeling responsible for my Mum and not leaving my Mum indoors on her own even though she was going out later and so I would have ended up being on my own. A bit bizarre but yeah so ... [I can understand this feeling of being responsible from an early age as I had to look after my siblings whilst my parents went out to work. But, I wasn't looking after my mother, how would that have made me feel? The child becomes the parent?]

Me: So you left at 16 then and had Jess at 18 and then what happened after that?

Carol: Erm, had Jess stay at home mum then got pregnant with erm Luke think I was around four or five months pregnant and had to go into hospital because I had an asthma attack... When I came out it was quite apparent that Will, who was their dad, was erm having an affair with my best friend. They both told me that I was paranoid and nutty and God knows what else... Erm he eventually left erm when Luke was about a week old. Erm...

Me: How did you feel when he left?

Carol: I made him go. He wanted to stay and felt that he could do both things and I didn't see it like that. Even my Mum was like 'men do that when you're pregnant. I will be fine afterwards' etcetera. [a cultural narrative – family belief] Which is why I waited I think. But I didn't see it like that. Erm, and I was devastated at the time. I thought my life was over I think I was twenty... I don't even think I was even twenty-one. [feeling your life was over at 21] Erm no one will ever want me... For me I always wanted what I never had which was a family for my children [a desire for security and a family unit] but part of me wouldn't compromise because I wouldn't pretend nothing was happening [hmm]. No, couldn't do that bit [laughs]. Erm, yeah so yeah for a little while I remember doing lots of crying. But then I thought 'no' I'm not going to let him get the better of me or see me as failing or being weak and needing. [Carol sought stability and security and hoped she could provide her children with something she didn't have as a child. She believed a nuclear family was the way to provide the safety she sought. Mother and father – it was what I too was brought up to see as important – cultural narratives of their time. However, her inner strength would not allow her to be seen as a weak female unable to do things "I'm not going to let him get the better of me..."]

Me: So what was it that kinda kicked in if you like?

Carol: I don't know erm... I think... I remember him saying 'it's okay, I'll stay because I need to do this and I need to do that'. Practical things. "No I don't need you to do them" so I learnt to decorate, paint doors. The first one looked lovely in the night and then in the morning there was a great big run! [we both laugh]. It is me I don't need anyone else [she laughs]. [In saying I don't need anyone else was Carol trying to convince herself in her time of need? It is me – is this how she sees herself now?]

Me: From the sounds of it you've taught yourself to be resourceful?

Carol: Yeah, just wasn't prepared to... yeah don't know just went into overdrive and everything was immaculate [okay]. I kept busy [hmm] to stop myself thinking I think [okay]. And yeah it was fine.

Me: And you had the two little ones.

Carol: Yeah. If I'm honest now I know if a health visitor came, which they didn't, erm I'd ask them to take Luke away. Luckily they never came by! [laughs and I join in]. But he was a good baby as well that helped.

Me: So you had that as well and two babies, you're about twenty one [yup] and you're doing all this for yourself... So then what happened? What did you do then with two little ones?

Carol: Erm, my brother came to live with me for a little while. My Mum lost her... my brothers were living with my Mum and she lost her job and her house. Erm so my brother come to live with me for a while... Erm yeah then I got, I can't remember at which point but I started doing some work and then slowly I think I started doing... I think I tried doing nursery nurse stuff... but didn't work out. Then I signed up with college and got nursery places and everything. I think to do secretarial down in Islington [yeah]. Arranged everything and then when I contacted Social Services they said, not Social Services, whoever pays your money when you're not working, and erm they said 'no you can't go to college 'cause you won't be available for work' and it's like 'I'm not available for work, I've got 2 children under 5 and what I want to do is this now, there's a college crèche, so when they are at school I can go and do some paid work'. Yeah, and no that wasn't acceptable so I had to give that up. [the system let her down – she wanted to learn but she had to be available for work. I would have felt disappointed and frustrated – she didn't say but her tone of voice implied this]

Me: Oh the systems.

Carol: I know, to me it didn't make sense. They could go to the crèche, I could do my course and I'll be qualified by the time they go to school and I can go back to work. But no, that wasn't to be. [showing her frustration now] Erm, I think I met Mark... erm when Jess was 3 or 4, about 3 I think, [then very quietly] maybe 4 I can't remember. Yeah, that's when I met him and that was one of my resonating moments because I'd met someone before him that I found out still had a not a wife, I don't know if it was a wife or a partner, but with a child so finished with him and met Mark but he kept hanging around and I remember having this moment where you know you have this, you know when it's like 'shall I go and see...' and I wouldn't do both obviously. [own moral standard – won't have relationships with both men] Erm and it was which one do I need to see, because the other one kept ringing me. You know 'he's got a good job and he's a stable person, the other one is for all the reasons is wrong' and I remember 'no I'm going with Mark'. So, the other guy I kept ignoring him and eventually he went away [she laughs].

Me: So the guy you chose at that point then, was the guy you felt would give you some stability.

Carol: Yeah, yeah it was a very practical, yeah I just remember my thoughts being practical not... well, emotional against practical because the other guy was lovely and everything but he wasn't true in anything he said and that would have been with my heart. I was using my head [said very quietly in a whisper]. [using her head – made decisions based on desire for security and stability – wanting what she didn't have as a child]

Me: Well you know from what you said a few minutes ago, you'd obviously got to that point where you said 'I'm gonna make sure I'm okay'.

Carol: Yeah yeah, possibly. That sounds very hum clinical don't it?

Me: Hum, not really, you had 2 small children [yeah] and the decisions you were making at that point were not just necessarily just about you.

Carol: Hmm yeah suppose so yeah...- I eventually married him.

Me: Okay, [I laugh as she is shaking her head] you're shaking your head..

Carol: For all the wrong reasons. He had his own house, he moved in with me eventually. We had Chris... Erm he liked to drink, just like me Mum. [she recognised the signs from the past] And over the years he got worse and worse. Luke was 11 and I just asked for a divorce because things had got, yeah, to a point where I thought I can't do this anymore [hmm]. So yeah, out of the blue I just went 'want a divorce' and I think he thought I would change my mind and I didn't [she laughs].

Me: And that came out of the blue for you did it?

Carol: ... I don't think it came out of the blue... I don't know... I kept saying to him 'you know you know this needs to change, that needs to change' and warning him but he never changed, [she kept warning him – did she want him to change or did she want to be away from the situation? Like when she left home at 16] never stopped drinking [okay] erm... yeah, and I knew it got... I just knew... every time we went on holiday would come back and 'I'm never going on holiday with him again, I'm gonna save up and I will have enough money so I won't need him' if you like. So as soon as Chris went to school I went and got a job. Erm that's when we got married, Chris went to school and I got a job. Erm.. don't know... and he wouldn't marry me 'No I'll never marry you'. So I said 'okay well leave we finish'. I think that I thought that when he married me he would change and be more like a husband should be. [Marriage = stability?]

Me: How do you feel a husband should be?

Carol: Well he was very, even holidays were booked around football. Erm Sundays were pub day. First he would come back for dinner and then slowly he would stagger back and then every Sunday was a fear day [what would happen? She didn't say but these words send a chill through me] because if he was smiling how long would it be for and you know that sort of... Erm and I thought I don't know, I thought I hid it from the kids, I know now I didn't. Obviously they're older and you talk to them. Erm about 6 months after he left erm my daughter come in and went 'I still keep waiting for the door to go'[said in a whisper] and I thought that was just my feeling you know when the door and you go 'oh no he doesn't live here anymore' [she laughs] [oh, hmm]. Erm and I used to do the whole thing in the morning and pretend nothing had happened. So yeah... very stupid [said in a whisper]. So yeah... one of my biggest regrets is putting them through...[okay] yeah.

Me: That's so understandable [said quietly].

Carol: Yeah, where I have learnt so much from my work I truly believe that I felt was doing the right thing. I never had a Mum and Dad at home that I can recall so I had nothing to go by. I always believed that I should stand by what he said and you know, be united for the kids, in front of the children and all that stuff. Erm so yeah... [a united front – the institution of marriage – the woman standing by her man who would provide for her and the children – this model was very much what we were taught was the ‘right way’ – it is a relic of the past which works for some but not all]

Me: So so you got your divorce then?

Carol: Yeah got my divorce. My Nan disowned me because of the divorce [she laughs]. Only for a couple of weeks then she sent me a bunch of flowers and said she’s sorry [Arr]. Yeah, ‘don’t come round again, don’t want to see you or the children!’

Me: Just when you needed everybody around you..

Carol: They put up with everything didn’t they so yeah.. [what went on behind closed doors stayed behind closed doors]

Me: It was a different life then.

Carol: Yeah... and course you don’t tell everyone else what’s going on so they perceive that you have this great relationship and you don’t erm... Then I met Stuart a couple of years after that...

Me: So you were working at this time were you?

Carol: Yeah, I was working in a school doing outreach service, so special needs, yeah around the kids school etcetera. So yeah.

Me: And then you met Stuart.

Carol: Yep met Stuart. I think we were seeing each other for about a year and a half then he left the army and just moved in. ‘Cause I let it happen [said in a resigned way and I laugh]. [Maybe this is what she thought she wanted? In saying she let it happen there is an implication that she weakened in her resolve to be strong] I was saying to him ‘they should give you a flat shouldn’t they? Are you going to your mum’s?’ and then suddenly he was leaving the army and he was coming to me. So I let that happen but I was determined not to let happen what had happened with Mark. So we got married... big mistake [said in a whisper and we laugh]. Erm yeah things were, I don’t know if they were ever fine. But erm... he got a slipped disc and ended up drin... I think he was always a drinker because he was in the army so think he used to use this excuse ‘I’ve never been able to do this in the army, I wasn’t allowed to drink wasn’t allowed to do this’ I think he probably did all of it and again slowly it got wor.. We moved out to the country and the idea was that he wouldn’t drink indoors that we would go out for a drink together in a country pub. Do lots of different things but it didn’t end up like that. It carried on and got worse and

worse... got paranoid and again in the end I just went 'I want a divorce' [okay] and left. I went to work, I can't remember if I text him or rung him, but I went to work and never went home again basically... [laughing she says] I do have my moments! [she laughs and I smile]. [She laughs but there is regret and sadness in her voice. Perhaps Carol is drawn to a certain type of person, someone who becomes dependent on drink? Seeing something in someone which for some reason she found attractive? Then over time they don't live up to the ideal husband she desires and she ends the relationship – she has ended all the relationships]

Me: So when you say you never went home again, that was you leaving that home was it?

Carol: Yeah [okay] yeah.

Me: Did you feel that was a wrench..

Carol: Oh yeah, that was my biggest.. He would never have left though [hmm] he would never have left. Erm and it wore me down so I didn't have the energy to.. [okay]. We did do marriage counselling etcetera... but over the years you know ... I think both relationships were about twelve years long. Erm but again you know he would stop drinking and then go back and then stop drinking and slowly go back again. But yeah, in the end he was like paranoid and would ring me at work, he was always ringing me at work, but more so and... so yeah.

Me: So that was enough for you.

Carol: Yeah. Yeah just left.

Me: Were you still working in the school at this time?

Carol: Er I was at [...] then [okay]. It was one of the reasons I changed my job. My initial hope was, in the back of my head, that I would be able to keep the house and buy him off. Erm because when he moved in with me, when I split up with Mark, I took on the house [okay]. Erm so yeah, fairly I should have had the predominant part, most of the house but... yeah so...-

Me: So that's all the relationships and sort of like the time-line if you like..

Carol: Yeah, yeah. All the while just been training and one of the biggest arguments with me and Stuart was that I was always working and training. [Wanting to learn and to gain self-worth through her work – seeking what she couldn't find elsewhere?]

Me: Okay, so you've brought in about work now and you've said about being at the college and so what is it that you're doing at the college?

Carol: Er Area Lead for Additional Learners Support. I make sure all the students have got the right support in place. Erm, line manage people doing that job [okay] erm and yeah I do safe guarding as well.

Me: And you said that you had this constantly working and training.

Carol: Yeah [yeah] yeah when I was.. When I first met Stuart I started being a Learning Support Centre Manager. So first of all I done my Learning Mentor training and then I done dyslexia training, then I went on to do, can't remember which way round it was, think I done my specialist assessor and teacher training for specific learning difficulties dyslexia training, that was one evening a week but obviously lots of work round that. Then I did my Foundation Degree in Learner Support and my science, because I always needed science at that point if I carried on to qualified teacher status. Which I chose not to do.[this is said in a whisper whilst smiling and I laugh]. [embraced learning about her work – congruence with this field]

Me: Okay, how old were you, if you don't mind me asking, when you started to do all this training?

Carol: Ermmm... dunno... 2006 was when I done... about forty I suppose when I started all the like qualification stuff. [I was in my late 30s when I started to study again so I do understand the desire to gain knowledge. I was 46 when I started learning about career guidance]

Me: I see so up until then you had been getting experience and sort of working in the background?

Carol: Yeah. I done my English when I left school. Then when I was with the children I tried to do a computer one that went wrong. I tried to do a nursery nurse one and that went wrong. I think things happened in life, you know it's like 'I can't do that as well' but afterwards I learnt that regardless of my life I'd carry on. Er that was one of my.. And afterwards I done my Maths GCSE about forty.. sixteen years ago [okay]. Yeah and just through work I done my learning mentor training and different trainings around my job. I have a.. dunno.. a lack of confidence I suppose as some would say. Erm people say 'you don't need the qualification' but I do so that I know that I'm doing it in the right way so... [having the qualification to show you've done it the right way. I understand this – it is a mark of recognition. Qualifications matter when you want to show the world you have something of worth to share. They say "I have reached this standard". It is part of the performance you enact when you step out on the stage. They are your symbols of interaction and your daily working props]

Me: I can totally understand that [then with laughter in my voice] I really do understand that! There's erm... a sense of security in having that isn't..

Carol: Yeah 'I'm qualified to do this y'know'. When I done my Maths I felt no more able at maths after I got my maths than before. I think I've lost the same information that I lost previously from y'know studying it at school. Part of me believed I would be so much better at it but... [she laughs].

Me: I know, I did mine when I was thirty nine [yeah] and again once I got it I thought ‘that’s it I don’t have to do this anymore.’[we both laugh].

Carol: [smiling] I won’t go back to revisit or anything.

Me: You obviously, you deal a lot with different people in your work as well [hmm]. You say that you line manage too.

Carol: I line manage and when I was running the centre it would be anyone from the head of the borough, all the heads from schools, LSFs, teachers, parents, outside agencies, everyone...

Me: A lot of responsibility.

Carol: That didn’t feel like a lot of responsibility at the time [she laughs] [okay]. Yeah no you know ‘cause we took in students from right across the borough it was a sort of wide range... But yeah I had a good line manager myself [okay] and that takes a lot away from it. You’ve always got someone there to [then whispering] fall back on if you like. [recognising the importance of a significant other. Perhaps the role didn’t feel like a lot of responsibility because she was happy in her work and she felt at ease in the environment?]

Me: And talk to, [Yeah, yeah] that listening ear [yeah, yeah]

Carol: If there was any problems or anything. We had regular meetings.

Me: What about your current situation now then, tell me a bit about that..

Carol: Erm...- I don’t like it [she laughs].

Me: Okay.

Carol: I do like it and I don’t like it. I don’t feel I’m doing it well. When I don’t have time for people I find myself getting frustrated with people which I don’t like. Erm...- I do my best in everything in everything I do so it’s not that I feel that I’ve given up on anything...- I don’t know [hmm]... I suppose it’s going through a change [hmm]. Erm... but yeah a big part of me, like we said before, feels like I need to get out of education now [hmm] but I wouldn’t know what to do. Still looking at other opportunities and if my job come up again I wouldn’t go for it. So...-

Me: Why wouldn’t you go for it?

Carol: ...- I think I would be scared to be honest I think I would be scared of going for my own job [she laughs]. Yeah, if it was advertised somewhere else “would I do that again?” No. And I am sort of like that, done that. [scared of going for her own job – wanting to do her best but feeling she can’t – feeling insecure and thinking things are going through a change – disjuncture]

Me: You've said it, you've done it. So you're looking for something different now?

Carol: Yeah.

Me: And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Carol: No. No. I see there's new initiatives starting up and there was one the other day. Erm it's like 'I would really love to do that' but a part of me wants to go back and do the interaction bit with the parents etcetera which is half the pay or something.. Yeah a big part of me wants to go back to doing rather than organising and so...

Me: Is that the bit you enjoyed?

Carol: I think so I remember going to work and enjoying it not being stressed by it. Yeah... yeah...-
[we laugh].

Me: I know.

Carol: Just going and doing and enjoying not feeling stressed by the powers to be. Now I've done all these jobs I understand their frustration if that makes sense [yeah, yeah] because when I was at [...] it was 'why doesn't that person do this and why doesn't that person do...'. Now I know why not, do you know what I mean? But it's sort of you know...

Me: Sometimes we have to as you say, go through something [yeah] in order to get a bigger picture.

Carol: Yeah absolutely yeah because you all you see is the wondering round and sitting down and don't realise how many plates their spinning if you like [we laugh]. 'Cause it's usually like that. But yeah so I don't know..-

Me: So your children are grown up now?

Carol: Yeah Jess's 30 on Monday, scary. Yeah she's a Fraud Investigator, she got 'Fraud Investigator of the Year' this year.

Me: Wow.

Carol: Yeah that's good.

Me: Proud Mum.

Carol: Yes, very proud mum and she left school with no qualifications too! So yeah. Luke's 28, he's a dad. He's got George who's 3 and a partner. He's a Service Engineer in Central London

and Chris... what's Chris? Erm... I don't know what Chris is! Chris's view on life is 'I'll do as little as possible and earn what I earn to get through life'. But he's the one with the 14 GCSEs at grade A and A*. But his outlook on life is to do as little as possible [she laughs and smiles when talking about her Chris].

Me: Well, you know it's hard isn't it... you've got.. Everyone's got different characters and it's timing, it's all about timing..

Carol: Yeah, not long ago he disappeared off to Greece. Gave up his flat gave up his job and decided to do promotion stuff out there [okay]. He's just come back and 2 weeks back and he's got a job again. So yeah... bless him. Part of me is envious how can you just go away and not go home again! [she laughs]. But yeah when he rung me I just said "well okay have you thought about this have you thought about that. You won't get sick pay" and he said "Mum I've never had a day sick before". "Okay as long as you've thought about these things and you make sure you stay safe, go for it. Okay". [she laughs].

Me: Well they all seem to have turned out very well [she laughs], so you've obviously done a good job there.

Carol: [smiling with laughter in her voice] I don't know about that. They're all very resilient I think is the right word. [raised her children to be resilient – like herself?]

Me: You're their Mum.

Carol: Yeah.

Me: Okay so thank you for that because you know when people say, "tell me a little bit about yourself" it's hard you know sometimes [yeah] to share. So, thank you very much for sharing of yourself and you know for giving me the picture. So, you say, just for my own mind, you say you were born in [...] [hmhm] and you say you, have you always lived in Kent?

Carol: Yeah, [...] which is London Borough of [...] but that was on the borders of Kent. So yeah yeah always this area yeah [oh okay]. Yeah, I would like to live in the middle of nowhere.

Me: I would like to live in the middle of nowhere too [we laugh].

Carol: No phone, no one coming to the door..

Me: But then what would I do without my internet access? [we laugh].

Carol: Oh I could do lots! Back to good old books!

Me: Oh well. Okay, so the second part of our chat if you like is to look at those moments, because obviously that's what my study is based on. The moments when we make what we call really

important career decisions. And that is career as in life decisions or career as in work, one informs the other [yeah]. So erm are there any particular moments that stand out for you?

Carol: I think the one where I decided to go with Mark rather than the other guy is a moment. A work based one I think is erm... I used to go into class for Luke because Luke had learning difficulties and I used to go and support in class because his teacher, bless her, yeah just felt I did it. And just looking through the paper I saw a job for someone to support a child with autism over in [...] And the closing date was the day after. I rang up and it's like the closing date is tomorrow and I literally had to drive over there, get the application, take home fill it and drive it back the next day. So, for me that was like 'oh yeah that looks good'. It was like a tiny little and for me it was how did I see it? Why was I looking at the jobs there and most of my jobs have been like that, the ones I've gone for.

Me: okay, that's interesting. So you say most of the jobs you've found have been those 'just come upon them'?

Carol: Yeah. I've been asked to do it or it's been 'oh that looks interesting'. So, I went for the one in [...] and the only experience I had was Luke and working this day in school. So, I went along to chat to the Head, I think it was the summer holidays, and the Head Teacher was in the office and somebody else. Chatted to them. So, gave my form in, got that job. Apparently, there was like eighty -five people who went for the job but got that job, done that year. Then because of that job, it was only a year because the student was going on to an autistic school, but then somebody who worked there, sister worked at the children's school at over the road and in the interim, I got a job in the sweet shop down the road, I had three jobs actually, the sweet job... I can't remember what they were now but yeah three different jobs, and she came in and said "there's a position going at our place. We've got a new student that needs support. Would you come for an interview?" So, I went along for a very informal interview and the Head gave me the job there and then and asked me to do lunch time duty as well. Quickly got rid of that job! [we laugh]. And even there, I followed Lucy for two years there and the teacher was leaving said about the special school she was going to and how I would like that and would be good at that. I went for an interview there and got that one. Erm that was Inclusion Manager and that was a bit bizarre. I set up my own SENCO project there because that wasn't enough for me 'cause I got bored [said in a whisper]. Then I got asked to run the learning support centre because they couldn't employ anyone [okay]. Erm and when I left there, it was coming to an end the funding was coming to an end. We had a change of Head, I kept my head down for a little while because he was one of these power heads that comes in and changes everything, and then I just went to him and said "I want a frank discussion with you, how do you see the centre. I know it's not everyone's cup of tea, not every head wants a centre in their school". Because we were one of two centres for primary age children in England. And he said the funding is coming to an end, and he said some stuff which I knew wasn't true but anyway it gave me the heads up that he wasn't keen to keep it. Erm and I just saw the job for [...] in the paper and just thought 'that sounds interesting. I need some experience of interviewing because I hadn't interviewed for years'. And I got the job! [we laugh]. Erm yeah and then went to [...] because I needed more money or felt that I might need more money. So yeah...

Me: And this has all stemmed from that one moment from seeing a little thing [Yeah] in a paper [yeah]. So can I just take you back to that moment? [Yeah]. Okay so you say it was in a paper so what were you doing at that moment?

Carol: Erm I was working nights at Safeways [okay] just stacking shelves. Erm I'd just got married... was I looking for a job? I don't even know if I was looking for a job. But it was just...

Me: Were you at home when you saw this paper?

Carol: Yeah, yeah.

Me: So you were at home, were you in your kitchen, in your lounge..

Carol: I can't remember that bit, can't remember that bit [okay].

Me: The paper stands out for you?

Carol: Yeah because it wasn't on a, it wasn't on a job advert page. It was just this little advert, tiny, tiny...

Me: You're showing me this little..

Carol: Yeah, it was like what's.. I had never worked with an ASD child..

Me: And it just happened to.. Had you bought the paper, had it come through the door?

Carol: Come through the door. We used to get freebies and we'd just look through [oh okay].

Me: You were just scanning?

Carol: Yeah and the closing date was the day after and I could have gone 'oh I'm never gonna apply' but I didn't. I drove all the way over there, I didn't even know where it was, I drove over there with the kids, got the application form, took it home, filled it out and drove it back the next day...

Me: It's interesting that you say 'I saw this little ad and then I got in the car and I drove all the way over there'.

Carol: I could have easily gone 'aw it's tomorrow the closing date I'm never gonna..'

Me: So, what was it do you think that made you go 'oh, I'm going to get in the car, gonna drive over there'.

Carol: Dunno, just something. Yeah don't know. There are so many things like you say, could have gone 'closing date is tomorrow I'm not gonna make it' [yeah] but run up they said come over and even this, it was probably a good hour's drive.

Me: How did you.. If you could cast your mind back to that, how were you feeling when you actually thought 'I'm gonna drive over now'.

Carol: I think it's like 'why am I doing this what am I...' I don't think I thought through though because again it's school time, there was that drive from there to there, Chris had just started school, or was just starting school, he would have been just starting school so it was literally child out the door, mother's out the door [said with laughter]. Erm yeah, just excited I can do this, yeah and it didn't matter if I didn't get it. I think there the best moments, like when I went for the [...] job I wasn't fazed or bothered about the interview because I didn't need it. I didn't need that job I just went along. I learnt a lot from Luke and I remember having a conversation about phonics and how many words you can sound out etcetera. They were clearing out the reception office [okay] and erm yeah had a conversation with her. Went back the next day handed it in... yeah...went back for an interview. I can't remember being offered the job, strange init? But yeah...-

Me: But that one little advert in the paper [Yeah] is still in your mind [yup]. [a tiny advert in a freebie paper changed Carol's life and set her on a learning path. From stacking shelves in a supermarket to running a learning centre and line-managing staff in a college. What made her drive over to the school to collect an application form and then drive back the next day to deliver it? She said she felt excited because she knew she could do it. How did she know? Had she been storing up learnt experiences from working alongside her son so that she could now bring them out into the work to inform a new experience?]

Carol: Oh yeah absolutely, yeah.

Me: I find that really interesting actually.

Carol: No information, because how much information do you get in something that size? [the size of the advert didn't matter to her- she recognised something and acted on it]

Me: Little tiny advert.

Carol: Yeah, never heard of the school before. Didn't really know of [...]

Me: But you got in the car anyway.

Carol: Yeah! Just found it and... bizarre.

Me: But that one little advert has set you on this journey.

Carol: Yeah, of work.. yeah...- And I totally enjoyed it. Yeah, totally enjoyed it and so.. Lost touch with the student which is upsetting because I would love to know how he is getting on. For years his mum used to send me Christmas cards and I would send them Christmas cards and birthday cards.

Me: Could you get in touch do you think?

Carol: I don't know how to now. I think it's a case of moving and moving phone books that I lost their address. I did try to look because they moved it was card that never got put in my book when I was clearing out.

Me: It's interesting isn't it when you hear of people getting in touch over social media [yeah] is that something that you'd want to do do you think or is that something..

Carol: He wouldn't be able to [no, no]. I mean his autism was so bad that even when he went to [...] School he would only give them a trial there [okay] because he was so severely autistic. So yeah I wouldn't imagine.. Mum was lovely, she was lovely.

Me: Maybe mum then?

Carol: Yeah, don't know if she would be the sort of person to go on Facebook to be honest or something like that but I have tried to look in phone books and things. The name I wouldn't imagine is that... that common. But yeah, they were lovely.

Me: Well they are obviously still in your memory, still there.

Carol: Yeah, Liam I will always remember; bless him. I would either get a kiss or a bite! [we laugh].

Me: well you know one's as close as the other! Well look Carol thank you so much for sharing and for you know, bringing up about your moment as well because obviously what I'm going to ask you to do next really is try and capture that the emotion and experience [yeah]. And I say creative practice and I can certainly give you some hints and tips if you like which might be able to help you with that [yeah]. Okay great so thank you very much for now. What we'll do now is I will transcribe this information, it might be a little while before I get to that point..

Carol: That's fine.

Me: I will get to that point and then I will send you the transcript so that you can look at it and you know adjust..

Carol: Cringe! [she laughs]

Me: Not at all not at all, I hope not but if you wanted to adjust anything you could do and that would be absolutely fine. And then once you're happy with that and you've done your creative piece we'll get together again for another interview. Again it will be informal but this time I will probably ask a few questions [yeah] about.. Up to 10 questions which are based on the creative piece and your thinking about it. Is that okay?

Carol: Yeah, yeah that's fine.

Me: Fantastic, thank you so much.

Interview ended: 43 minutes and 18 seconds.

Appendix 5

This poetic text is my attempt to ‘disrupt’ the original version which sits in the main body of work.

The light in the dark

I am sitting at a computer staring at the screen feeling
Frustrated and Angry.
It is work experience time and so many students
(and their parents)
want to change their placement.
The ‘room’ I am in is a cream stud-wall box which was erected in what used to be
a cloakroom area for the Year 10s.
There is no natural light
and in the summer it is so hot that you have to work
with the lights off!

(and the heat brought back the smell of unwashed sports clothing).
Actually I do remember...
an internal ‘window’ which looks out onto a noisy communal area.
It is claustrophobic and
my Boss tries to spend as little time as possible in here;
can’t say I blame her.
But she can escape whereas I’m stuck here.

The Connexions Adviser comes into the room and sits in the chair next to my desk.
I turn and smile at her.
We have known each other for some time and often have coffee together.
We talk about students who she will be seeing later and
she tells me about what she has coming up.
“I would love to do what you do”
I say wistfully.

“Why don’t you?” she replied.
I laugh
dismissively
but agree to look at the university webpage on the computer.
My heart sinks when I see that it says
“it’s a post-graduate qualification”
and a feeling of despair comes over me.
“I can’t do this. I don’t have a degree.”

*(Just thinking about this now is making feel uneasy and a bit queasy. I’m back to being the child
being asked a question that I can’t answer).*

“So what?”
“You have loads of experience and you can write a piece of work”.
It’s as if a bright light has been switched on in
MY HEAD
and I think really, they could let me in?

‘Yes, I can do it’.

It is as if I am on a roller coaster and my stomach is trying to catch up with me.

I am full of hope and
anticipation,
excitement and
fear.

Oh my God, I really think I am going to do this!

Oh no, I won’t be accepted.

But yes, apply and see what they say.

No.

“I think I will apply”.

My stomach is now heaving.

My body is tensing, tightening and getting ready to run away.

Be safe.

It’s too risky.

(I am feeling it again, now as I type the words. I had been brought up to do the ‘right’ thing. Do not do anything foolish. Always be safe).

At the same time I feel like a
naughty child
doing something I shouldn’t
but it feels so

right!



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: What’s in a Moment? Using Creative Writing Practices to Capture Experience and Emotion in Career Turning Points. An Autoethnographical Study.

Name of Researcher: Laurie Simpson

Contact details:

Address: The Graduate School, Erasmus Building, Canterbury Campus, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Tel:

Email: Ls511@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial

box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential
4. I agree to take part in the above study.
5. I agree to an interview being recorded and I understand that a transcript will be available to me.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Person taking consent

Date

Signature

(if different from researcher)

Researcher

Date

Signature

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher

Title of Research Project

What's in a moment? Using Creative Practices to Capture Experience and Emotion in Career Turning Points. An Autoethnographical Study.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Laurie Simpson.

Background

Whilst writing my MA dissertation I re-visited moments in time that were important to me. The written word became a way to document experience and emotion in a very personal way which in turn enabled me to 'see' my process of 'becoming' the person I am today. The turning points in a person's career may be seen as transitions, with an emphasis on decision making and career identity. Yet, there are feelings in these critical moments when individuals can experience many emotions. I want to enable someone to document their personal experiences and emotions through a creative practice of their choice. I believe that it could aide personal understanding about who they are. If we are able to locate the emotions that may once have given us personal agency, we can re-acknowledge them by writing about them in our own words in our own way. My intention is also to document my own emotions and experiences throughout the research process. A personal and therefore unique approach to enhance collaboration between the researcher and participants.

What will you be required to do?

I would like to invite you to participate in an informal interview to talk about what you feel are your important life/career moments. I will then ask you to record a moment in time that resonated with you, something that really stands out for you, using a creative practice of your choice. You will also be asked to talk about how you felt about participating in the research.

To participate in this research you must:

- Be willing to participate in an in-depth interview about your life.

- Be willing to provide a creative piece, using a method of your choosing, about a moment in time that resonates with you.
- Be willing to review and comment on a transcript of our interview.
- Be willing to reply to questions about your feelings and thoughts about the research following your interview and written piece.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in an informal interview, at a location of mutual convenience, and then to record a significant life/career moment, a turning point. This will be using a method of your own choosing.

Feedback

An audio tape recorder will be used to record the informal interview. I will then personally transcribe the interview recording and send the transcript to you for your approval and comments. We will meet again to discuss the transcript and your thoughts and feelings about the research process.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by Laurie Simpson. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

Dissemination of results

At this time I am unable to advise on how the research will be disseminated.

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Any questions?

Please contact Laurie Simpson on: ls511@canterbury.ac.uk