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## A Pedagogy of Process: Using Arts Based Research With Community Development Co-Researchers to Explore Campus Community Dialogue

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**‘A pedagogy of process’: Using arts based research with community development co-researchers to explore campus community dialogue.**

**A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of  
Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of Masters (M.A.) in Third Level  
Learning and Teaching**

**By**

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**July 2009**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of **Masters (M.A.) in Third Level Learning and Teaching** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above

Signature of candidate.....

Date.....

## Abstract

This thesis will outline how I employed an arts informed participatory research process with four women members of the Southend family resource centre in Wexford town. The primary context for this research was the introduction of a module in community based learning on the BA (hons) in Art at the Wexford Campus of I.T. Carlow combined with a desire to participate more actively in the community sector outside the campus. The choice of an arts based methodology was to capture knowledge in a multifaceted way, to give depth to the many meanings of individual experiences and finally to suggest a living form of enquiry. In chapter 2, I survey what I see as the primary theoretical foundations of literature on arts based research and build a conceptual bridge between critical pedagogy, dialogical aesthetics and post-structuralist hermeneutics. Chapter 3 looks in detail at recent scholarship related to arts based research as a tool for educational research. A focus for this study has been to try and gather as much knowledge about visual arts based collaborative/participatory approaches in action research based educational practices and community development practices. In chapter 4 I show how I have considered, navigated, analysed and reported on the research artifacts and conversations with my co participants from the Southend Family Resource Centre. In this study, I found that making images with the team was a very good way of allowing all of us operate at the same level of the research process. Chapter 5 concludes the study with observations on arts based research and the presentation of an action plan for future collaboration and conversations. Overall I found this arts based research process was collaborative and creative as opposed to inquisitive, pressurised, and univocal. I believe the evidence presented recommends that this process can develop as an interpretative and qualitative approach for educational research beyond the confines of the campus.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Brian Hand

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## Chapter 1

### Background context to the research

I am currently programme chair of a new four year honours degree course in art at the Wexford Campus School of Art and Design based in Wexford Town. This programme commenced in 2003, initially offering diplomas in fine art, but such has been its success that in 2009 we will be commencing an MA by research in Contemporary Art. In 2008/09 we had 82 students enrolled over 4 years, along with 13 full and part-time staff, a technician and a team of cleaners. The course is, so far, the only course that has originated from within the Wexford Campus of IT Carlow. It was originally located in the town of Gorey on the campus of a large community school that was providing an excellent PLC course in art and design. After difficulties over the provision of suitable accommodation for the growing course, the course moved to Wexford town and now occupies the former VEC school in the town since 2007. The move offered the opportunity to develop the course to an honours degree level and a new and improved ab-initio course document was created. Part of the course philosophy is to integrate theory and practice and to engage with contexts and audiences. As students progress through the years, greater emphasis is placed on seeking their reflection on their creative development in the context of contemporary social issues. In addition to studio practice with electives in painting and sculpture, students on the course also take modules in cultural studies and professional practices. I believe that as a new course in the historic town of Wexford, it needs to forge meaningful links with its neighbours and the local community context. Student work on projects around the town put on exhibitions and most recently have started to rent studios.

Third year students in 2008/09 commenced a new two semester module in community based service learning that I devised and deliver with a colleague Caroline French. The need for this new change to the course stemmed from my belief that greater effort needed to be made to provide a learning context for art students to do justice to the NQAI level 8



programme learning outcomes such as team working, team leadership, learning to cope with unfamiliar contexts, learning to demonstrate empathy and solidarity with others. My Masters research has informed and helped to develop this module as well as tackle the perceived gaps between the new art school and its community context and role. The research process serves as a tangible practical plan to develop a real and sustainable engagement between the course and the community development sector.

Community based service learning is a relatively recent academic approach and teaching method in third level education in Ireland and while there is a Service Learning Academy here, there is still considerable discussion yet to be had about what exactly service learning actually is. It almost seems ironic that the fashion for service learning in Irish higher education comes at a time when community or community needs are increasingly difficult definitions/concepts to pin down. Engaging in service learning or community based learning presents a challenge to examine many of the blurred relations and identities that fall under the heading of community. Zlotkowski (2007) and others mainly from the United States have defined it as academic driven education in a social environment outside of the learning institution in partnership with community organizations, service providers or groups. The difference between service based learning and internships, placements, field work and volunteering is that it is aimed at promoting and delivering civic participation, cross cultural awareness, social responsibility, leadership skills, listening skills and critical reflection (Taylor 2002). The outcome of service based learning is not necessarily problem solving or the application of discipline specific skills or the linking of theory to practice, all of which are welcomed if they occur but fundamentally service learning distinguishes itself as what Zlotkowski calls a '*pedagogy of process*' (Zlotkowski 2007).

Boyer argues that service based learning is a recognition by universities and colleges that there are real pressing needs within the communities they exist with, and alongside and that greater joint ventures should be encouraged with the not-for-profit community agencies (Zlotkowski, 2007). Service learning is designed to be flexible and to embrace mutual reciprocity between the community agency and university including direct

benefits to both parties. "The needs to be met must be defined by the community, not the campus" (Zlotkowski, 2007). For small scale grass roots organizations working with large wealthy educational institution hosting their often privileged students must be challenging, but certain benefits must accrue from such a partnership especially if reciprocity is to be at the core of service or community based learning.

Butin argues that, beyond the technical level, service learning as pedagogy or pedagogies is a "culturally saturated, socially consequential, politically contested, and existentially defining experience" (Butin, 2005, p. x). From his perspective, service learning is not a traditional bounded academic discipline, like French or Genetics. Rather it is cluster or bundle of subjects, methodologies, and pedagogies, not unlike Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, and Peace Studies etc. In a technical sense, service learning practice follows three distinct stages which Birge outlines as

preparing students for community-based work, developing partnerships with community based agencies where students will perform appropriate work, and designing reflection activities that connect reflection and academic learning (Birge, 2005, p. 200).

My emphasis for this research is the second stage outlined by Birge, the partnership process with the local community. As I am not a native of Wexford and have no experience of community development in the Wexford region, the reconnaissance phase entailed attending forums, seeking out contacts and making introductions. From such engagements I wanted to find a context and research approach that would bring me to participate with the work of a community development organisation and generate a process to make links for a possible future collaboration that would have reciprocal benefits and empowering outcomes all round. Hence I am expanding this second stage so that the focus is not just on a space where largely privileged students might perform class work. Instead I am aiming for something closer to what Kemmis identifies in critical or emancipatory action research where "it aims to connect the personal and the political in collaborative research and action aimed at transforming situations to overcome felt dissatisfactions, alienation, ideological distortion, and the injustices of oppression and domination (Kemmis, 2006, p.92). In the solving of this research problem it will be inevitable that questions of power, domination and hegemony will surface because of the

recognised lack of engagement that exists between community organisations and the art school.

According to Boland and McIlrath (2007). at the first Service Learning Academy in Ireland during 2006, many participating academics were uncomfortable with the terms 'service' and 'community' and so Boland and McIlrath argue for a suspension of any definitive term or label and adopt the difficult rubric; 'Pedagogies for Civic Engagement' as a temporary mutated solution. For the foreseeable future it looks as though the terminology will continue to stay fluid and strategic, as a work-in-progress, because the expansion of service learning is bound to particular local, national, and institutional demands, funding, research and fashions. As Eyler and Giles (cited in Butin 2005). note, service learning advocates are only now beginning to talk the academic talk in order to gain footholds and legitimacy. In this sense, Barker (2004). argues that service learning has subtly shifted into a disciplinary subject defined by Ernest Boyer in 1996 as 'the scholarship of engagement'. As Schön argues, "if this new scholarship is to mean anything, it must imply a kind of action research with norms of its own, which will conflict with the norms of technical rationality--the prevailing epistemology built into the research universities (Schön, 1995, p. 27).

Academic scholarship may be defined as "the systematic pursuit of the not yet known (Appadurai, 2001, p.10). Traditional scholarly research is thus linked to the discovery of new knowledge, but not just any form of new knowledge, it must be knowledge that meets certain criteria, for example, objective, systematic, value free, quantifiable, meta-analysable, peer reviewable, credible, etc. The rules of current Western academic research are not unanimously agreed and different research movements do battle (in the paradigm wars) to receive funding, establish careers, influence policy, and garner public attention. In other words, research is a form of knowledge production that is culturally specific and economically driven. We need, as Appadurai (2001) reminds us, to study the forms of research within specific institutional, professional, cultural, historical and social parameters. This insistence also links with a Williams' type Marxist sociology of research culture that sees institutional practices as part of a greater whole of capitalist

society (Williams 1977). I wish to invoke Williams because I want to be attentive in this study of community campus dialogue in the context of the scholarship of engagement, to the interconnectedness of research methods, institutional agendas, the division of labour, economic imperatives and historical specificity. By working in the 'field' outside the institution I hope to gain insights into, for example, why art practices are linked to community education and development? How the terms community and education are understood within the community development sector? Why there is a lack of engagement between the Wexford Campus and the local community? How power and privilege are dispersed and exercised in third level education? And how the divisions between researchers and researched are often unquestioned and undemocratic.

### **Research problem**

The problem addressed in this research is: In what ways, if any, might a collaborative arts based inquiry process facilitate a third level art and design college and a grassroots community development organisation to engage in reciprocal exchanges and a process of critical reflection on possible future relationships? There are six research sub questions in this study:

- 1. How to identify and or devise appropriate visual research methodologies to answer the research question?*
- 2. What does reciprocity and critical reflection mean in this process?*
- 3. How to overcome the barriers between the researcher and the researched?*
- 4. What are the ethical practices in community based participatory action research?*
- 5. How is arts based research located in, and a product of, particular material, social and historical circumstances?*
- 6. What is a collective voice? And how to address my own voice and positionality within the research?*

The choice of a community centred collaborative arts based research approach comes from my own background and skills as well from information gained during the reconnaissance phase of the research. I feel this qualitative and interpretative approach is

an appropriate response to the challenge of putting community needs at the centre of community based learning programmes. The collaborative arts based focus of this research aims to foster a dialogue based on respect, build bridges and share experiences that could empower and change the conditions of the lives of the research team and over the longer term, the lives of those on the margins of society. In addition, although there is a local focus to this research question, the thesis hopes to add knowledge to the field of community based learning, participatory research, visual art research methodologies and the pedagogy of process in Ireland.

### **Key assumptions of the research,**

If education represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations [then] education becomes a central terrain where power and politics operate (Giroux 1992 p. 12).

My approach here is to follow a sequence outlined in Crotty (1998) and briefly set out my epistemological and philosophical assumptions, followed by my theoretical perspective concluding with my methodology and methods. "The human intellect", Nietzsche wrote, "cannot avoid seeing itself from its own perspective forms and only in these. We cannot look around our own corner" (Nietzsche cited in Blau 1990, p.197). This is what in philosophy is called the limit question or the limit problem and it has direct relevance in attempts to define and conceptualise my research approach. Another way of putting this would be to say that the enquirer turns out to be part of the problem. In considering social science research, Law and Urry articulate that reality is a relational effect and quote Heisenberg as observing a similar problem in physics "what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our questioning" (Heisenberg cited in Law and Urry, 2004, p. 5).

Positivism in its more benign forms has come to accept and accommodate this on its own terms, but only as a final clause, an addendum of self-reflexivity. Critiques of positivism i.e. post-positivist, non-positivist or anti-positivist philosophy take it as one of their points of departure. In a collective challenge to enlightenment discourse they argue that

science is not pure, detached or universal because “objectivity is false consciousness” (Nietzsche cited in Blau, 1990, p.57). The metaphysical and masculinist belief in one world with one truth about one reality is now shattered (Bordo, 1987). For positivists this abandoning of foundational ground rules has precipitated a free for all or a freefall into a kind of radical feminised relativism. The perceived absence of any kind of consensual criteria and methodology in critiques of positivistic philosophy are a major target for critical venom. It is true that many contemporary post-positivist practitioners (for example Derrida, Cixous, Irigaray) especially in the realms of the arts and linguistics dislike “the whole idea of method and prefer to work by glimmers and hunches, intuitions and sudden perceptions. It is perhaps fortunate” continues Eagleton, “that this way of proceeding has not yet infiltrated medicine or aeronautical engineering” (Eagleton, 1983, p.198). As Urry and Law comment these soft disciplines (cultural studies, women’s studies, etc) are treated simultaneously as a joke and a danger, their audacity to foreground the social as a site of “ambivalence and that which cannot be properly technicised”(Law and Urry, 2004, p.2) sees these disciplines cast as subversive and “epistemologically dangerous” (Butin, 2005). “It is almost as if such approaches were the Other of scientific understanding” (Law and Urry, 2004, p. 2).

What I seek to know in relation to creating meaningful engagement between the art school and a local community development organisation and in attempting to understand the perspective of the participating community organisation within the context of service learning provision, cannot be determined strictly scientifically. The knowledge gained from this enquiry cannot be represented as objective, neutral truth, because it is knowledge produced (and reproduced) through social exchange, negotiation, reflection and collaboration. The philosophical assumptions of this research lie within social constructionism where things in the world are neither wholly self-evident things in themselves or locked within individual thoughts and intentions. Instead we construct meanings in the world in equal measure to the world of meaning constructing us. Put simply, things make sense only in relation to one another, either directly or indirectly. The research process entails engaged acts of perception, face-to-face conversation and shared meaning making. The ‘reading into’ of language, representation, symbolic

practices, context and intersubjectivity are key to social constructionism. There is not just a single world but multiple, eclectic, contiguous worlds “produced in diverse contested social and material relations” (Law and Urry, 2004, p.6).

The process of reading and researching in this study utilises and is guided by 5 main theoretical traditions; semiotics as developed by Pierce, Dewey, and Barthes, the power-knowledge critique advanced by Foucault against value neutrality and foundationalism, critical pedagogy aligned with critical theory stemming from Freire, Habermasian sociology, and feminism stemming from Scott and Grosz. This bundle of theories, (I acknowledge that some directly conflict with each other) has helped me ground, interpret and focus on what are essentially emancipatory interests in this research project. As Freire has asserted

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation in to the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 1970, p. 16).

Leading from this I also make the assumption that state funded higher educational institutions and state funded community development centres are not politically neutral. I can understand (and sympathise with) the revolutionary dimension to Freire’s work but I am conscious of Foucault’s critique of the empowerment of ‘transforming one’s world’. For as Foucault (1977) writes about the interdependent concept of power-knowledge almost as a force outside of the control of willed subjects where power produces or exploits all knowledge not just selective knowledge. As Kesby summarises:

Power is not concentrated; nor is it a commodity to be held, seized, divided, or distributed by individuals. It is a much more decentered and ubiquitous force acting everywhere because it comes from everywhere...neither is power inherently negative, limiting, or repressive; rather it is inherently productive of actions, effects, and subjects, even when most oppressive (Kesby cited in Reid and Frisby, 2007, p. 98).

Indeed Foucault would reject any Enlightenment presumption that knowledge and freedom went hand-in-hand. This is an important antidote against overblown claims of emancipatory knowledge.

A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence - even, and perhaps above all, in those aspects of it that are most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and to our everyday behaviour (Foucault, 1988, p. 30).

This research also stresses how gender is a fundamental category for understanding the taken-for-granted and everyday ways that difference, inequity, and privilege operate. I also recognize that gender overlaps with categories of, class, educational attainment, and citizenship, and that all of these patterns of power influence my position and that of my co-researchers. Community development and education is an arena in which women have played an important role in Ireland. Feminist discourses of subjectivity and embodiment are referenced but on a deeper level there is a need to see a real alternative to power-knowledge in critical action. It is, as Spivak (1988) warns, a meaningless piety to simply claim self reflexive positionality or to call the place of the researcher into question, such strategies can often mask an avoidance of real responsibility and engagement with power-knowledge. Feminism is an important guiding discourse because it is as much based in action through advocating real social change as it is in theory. Foucault's writing has been adopted by many postmodernists to down play acts of resistance or collective consciousness, so there are pitfalls in balancing these different tensions. This thesis contains a significant element of theorising but its value lies in real-life practice. It is not content with theorising and critiquing 'how things are' but rather aligns itself to a research process "that works with the knowledge and change processes towards 'how things might alternatively be'" (Wadsworth, 2005, p.270). Spivak's warning, to researchers is that we also need to consider a little harder than usual about where we are coming from.

I am coming from a male, straight, middle class perspective; I have stayed within the institution of education nearly all my life from school to college to employment. When I started out working as an educator in art colleges, I received no training in learning and



teaching. Like many things in life I learned on the job or in action. When I started studying at DIT three years ago I would not have predicted that I would be writing a thesis about working outside of college with community development workers using arts based research. I found arts based educational research to be an interesting challenge because it was experimental research outside my comfort zone of the college studios and its familiar routine. It was asking me to do something that I had started lecturing my students on the pilot community based module to do. From the perspective of my co-researchers I can relay that they too found working in a new research methodology to be initially uncomfortable or at least a step in a new direction of researching themes that were quite familiar to them.

What makes service learning an interesting area for me to research within is that it is a field of education (with distinct disciplinary practices like experiential learning, group work and reflection) that channels a number of currents that have become relevant to my teaching practice, my student perspective and my other professional career as an artist. Service learning is also an opportunity for art education to focus more keenly on the relationship between the arts and society. Dewey's influence was pervasive in the development of art education, which since the days of the Vkhutemas in Moscow and the Bauhaus in Dessau have adopted Dewey's philosophy of 'learning by doing'. Deweyan philosophy in the 30s also proposed there should be no sharp distinction between the fine arts and the arts of use or design, that aesthetic experience was ordinary not exceptional, and that the organic relationship between culture, social environment and democracy be stressed (Hemingway, 2002). Dewey however is not known as a communist but rather as a pragmatist and as Taylor argues his "idea that education should be linked to life and living provides a basis for service-learning's goal of connecting theory to practice" (Taylor, 2002, p. 128).

Turning theory into practice and valuing practice led reflection have earned Dewey a special place in arguments for the promotion of the arts or creativity as a necessary and vital part of every citizens experience. The avant-gardist aim of linking art to life affords Dewey to assert two related themes in his work firstly that in a democracy a "social

return should be demanded from all and that an opportunity for development and distinctive capacities be afforded all (Taylor, 2002, p.128). Secondly that art is an example of a rigorous mode of thought and the artist a rigorous thinker because she has to see a connection between doing in relation to a whole that she desires to produce from “scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences” (Singerman, 1999, p. 116). Anyone with sufficient interest can do this occupation argued Dewey; there is no mysterious gene, pathology or genius talent from birth.

Community based service learning is being critiqued as it is being constructed here in Ireland. It is an area within the Irish education sphere that is under researched or theorised in my opinion, particularly in relation to research addressing how to link, collaborate, or dialogue with community organisations. In response to this absence of ‘off the shelf’ models to apply to my specific context I have created an action research cycle that involves members of a grassroots community organisation, to test whether an arts based research approach might create a meaningful process of engagement based on visibility, trust, equality, and sharing. Wisker (2001) identifies action research as an alternative form to traditional research and that it is:

- Practical
- Participative
- Emancipatory
- Interpretative
- Critical

Action research or participatory action research or participatory research, often terms used interchangeably, describes related real world activities with common roots. I feel an action research approach is ideally suited to the practical task of creating a reciprocal campus and community exchange in the specific context of my research problem. Its knowing-in-action (to borrow from Schön) principles invoke a shared purpose, honesty, voluntary participation and respect for difference. It seeks knowledge from complex and unpredictable social relations through multiple and diverse positions rather than from a singular perspective in time-space. Action research is also suited to working with a concept of new practices or future change, in other words something new is being

proposed in my action plan, new to me, new to the Southend family resource centre, and new to the students at the Wexford Campus.

### **Methodology/Inquiry process**

I do not conclude from this that one may say just anything within the order of theory, but, on the contrary, that a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is...(Foucault cited in McNeill, 1993, p.147).

This thesis will outline how I employed an arts informed participatory research process with four women members of the Southend family resource centre in Wexford town. The centre officially opened in 2008, it employs 3 co-ordinators who work with different age groups in the local community, many of the board members and other volunteers also work alongside the co-ordinators in various projects. This thesis project has brought me into contact with the centre and current and former students have become involved in some of its arts related activities. During the research process two students from the college were working with a co-ordinator on a graffiti art project with teenagers. As Liamputtong and Rumbold (2007) argue, the arts are a particularly effective means of eliciting responses from groups, including marginalised groups who do not necessarily concede to or appreciate the dominance of the written word. The four community development activists, who became co-researchers with me, were involved in establishing the centre, they are already experts in the discourses around community needs and by coincidence, two of them were familiar with arts based inquiry methods used in a community development context.

The collaborative nature of this inquiry into the possible relationships between the family resource centre and the art school set out to develop a process of action and reflection. The arts based inquiry examined here is very much at the initial stage of first steps in this new relationship and the research outcomes will occur only if there is an extended engagement over time. An action plan was produced for a nine month period starting in

September 2009. A further round of arts based research sessions has also been proposed and with funding support from the Campus or elsewhere this too is expected to happen

The choice of an arts based methodology was to capture knowledge in a multifaceted way, to give depth to the many meanings of individual experiences and finally to suggest a living form of enquiry. In chapter 2, I will survey the theoretical foundation of literature on arts based research and build a bridge between critical pedagogy, dialogical aesthetics and post-structuralist hermeneutics. Much of the anxiety around visual media in research perhaps stems from the difficulties in attempting to fix meaning in visual codes, or to bring the visual into language. Denzin and Lincoln believe:

We are now in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.26).

Yorks and Kasl in their review of collaborative inquiries stress the role of presentational knowing in creating counter narratives distinct from traditional academic analytical forms of knowing (cited in Heron and Reason 2008, p.372; Heron 1996). Pyrch (2007) sees research through the arts overcoming some of the difficulties of with the gaps between the dominant mechanical paradigm and the realities of practice.

Campus community dialogue exchange and partnership within the context of community based education is a broad subject. I am restricting my study to a recently established small scale school of art and a recently established family resource centre in Wexford town. In terms of delimitations and recognizing that action research is naturally open ended I have tried to keep the focus on the core issues of tackling the separateness between the campus and the community and seeking new possible strands for common concern and development.

The scope of the study was limited to financial considerations and the timetable for my MA submission. However I will be working at the school and in the town for many years to come, so I aim to be as attentive as possible to the social relationships developing

within the research group. The focus of the project is on the active involvement of all co-researchers towards tangible activities that can lead to meaningful change through addressing the research question. Having undertaken reconnaissance and interviews I am satisfied that the research question is something pertinent to the community organisation and members of its board. Throughout the cycle of research I attempted to ensure that reciprocity was and is a guiding principle in the research relationship. I have chosen visual arts based research methodologies because I want to test an experimental method of research. As a method I feel it has an affinity with the community education work already in train in the centre and my own practice as an artist and art educator. I hope this thesis can foster locally useful research tools that last with the research group and feedback into the work of the centre.

The study will not seek to import or parachute in, community partnership solutions from elsewhere; it will aim for something organic and specific to the contexts of Wexford town and the Wexford Campus School of art and design. The study aims to support the continuing development of the community based learning module in year 3 and perhaps its introduction to other stages. There is also the possibility of new course development within the school in the medium term and again this research will aim to be pertinent to the new curricula. There may also be a further stage of building on this research into a doctoral thesis.

### **Overview of the thesis**

This chapter outlines the research context and question as well as introducing commentary on the positionality of the researcher and the power relations inherent in any research approach. A sensitivity to power borne out of studying the theory and practice of participatory action research lead me to see issues of power seep into every section of this research journey. As Unger points out “when we talk about power, we rarely recognise that we are talking about many little moments” (cited in Brydon-Miller et al, 2004, p.180). In Chapter 2, I present different theoretical constructions for overcoming or keeping at bay this power imbalance. Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy, Kester’s

dialogical aesthetics and Barthes post-structuralist hermeneutics became congruent in looking at the motivation to produce coded images, at the value of community collaboration and strategies of interpretation that open up meaning rather closing it down. All three theoretical perspectives are not without critics or detractors and while engaging with such criticism I feel the theories remain robust and pertinent to arts based participatory research. Chapter 3 covers methodological approaches and presents a narrative about the specific action research cycle of this inquiry. Making art works with a group is not solely research to create an action plan; it is action in and of itself. This is not an art for art's sake argument rather the process of engaging and sharing our creative efforts had a value in stimulating and catalyzing debate. Chapter 4 examines the range of work made in detail using the lens of semiotics and Barthes' theories of the dialectic of connotative and denotative readings of the sign. Chapter 5 offers conclusions based on the research questions and then presents recommendations for future work. There are two attached appendices; appendix 1 presents the images made over the four sessions and appendix 2 is the agreed action plan devised from the conversations and arts based material.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter laid the foundations for the thesis. It introduced the research problem and research issues. Then the research was justified and the interconnectedness of the philosophical assumptions, theoretical perspective and research methodology was briefly outlined. Also, the methodology was briefly described and justified, the thesis structure was outlined, and the limitations were given. On these foundations, the thesis can proceed with a detailed description of the research.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

The theoretical framework for this thesis looks to explore theories associated with constructionism and the assumptions that meaning is constructed in context and engagement. Constructionism acknowledges both the collective nature of the learning generated in service learning and arts based collaborative research. In the constructionism paradigm we enter a culture, it precedes us and we interpret and critique social constructions (be they language, technology, economic exchange values, class, gender, race, etc) only from within. There is no outside to these related symbolic systems of knowledge, language and power. Language, representation, symbolic practices, context and intersubjectivity are key to the concerns of constructionism. Language whether it is visual, verbal or mathematical is not simply a mirror or reflection of something in the world, nor is it a personal tool of unique individuals to express the world as they see it through a private sign system rather, it is relative to the public, social, material, historical, systems in which we participate. Constructionism spans both the social and linguistic construction of reality. Hence in a broad sense its theoretical and philosophical offspring, include Marxism, the sociology of knowledge, hermeneutics and semiotics.

As observed in the previous chapter, what I seek to know in relation to creating meaningful contexts and methodologies for campus community exchange cannot be determined scientifically. The concept of campus community dialogue is multi-dimensional, multi-perspectival, indeterminate, relational and often ambiguous. The methods of arts based research I have chosen to examine in relation to campus community dialogue requires engagement, conversations and a reflexive exploratory relationship between the co-researchers and the research question. There is uncertainty attached to both shared discussions and interpretations of the art work generated in the research sessions. To this end the research sessions were problem posing exercises aimed at creatively exploring and interpreting the researchers identity, world view, ways of seeing in addition to the current state of campus community relations in Wexford.

The critical purpose of this study is to adopt arts based research as a means to understand and reflect on power-knowledge, it aims to find and test new ways to enable myself and the community based activists to “think otherwise in order to act otherwise” (Giroux, 2000, p. 345). In this chapter, I want to critically analyse arts based research through looking across the theory of critical pedagogy and the strategies it uses to engender change, the theory of dialogical aesthetics and its importance for rethinking the complex discursive inter relationships in collaborative community art and finally, Barthes’ post-structuralist celebration of the role of the reader in deciding the meaning of a given cultural text. All three theoretical strands are centrally relevant to the research question because they each try to return agency to passive people and disempowered audiences within culture and education. The work of Freire, Kester and Barthes are powerful forms of theoretical critique that seek to minimise the well-worn stance of negation. They each in turn offer hope of change despite identifying the scale of the opposition to change. They give a guide to the high stakes nature of disrupting the accepted hierarchies of power and domination in culture and education. However as a choice of rigorous intellectual emancipatory discourses for supporting a new form of participatory educational research I accept that this is very much a selective framework.

### **The work of Freire**

In addressing this research subject my reading has been informed by assignments I have submitted while studying for my Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma in Third Level Learning and Teaching. I see this MA thesis as the culmination of strands that developed while attending these courses. It was on these programmes that I first encountered Freire and Schön’s writings and also attended a seminar on service learning by Edward Zlotkowski. In this seminar Zlotkowski referred to Freire’s work in giving a context for the movement for addressing the estrangement between the public and the academy within higher education in the United States. Zlotkowski seminar paper quotes from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* using Freire to testify about the link between educational and civic passivity. Furthermore, Zlotkowski (2007) cites Palmer’s argument that traditional



epistemological academic conventions of disengaged, disinterested, research operates to construct an individuated, depersonalised, alienated, view of society that in essence, Palmer, argues destroys community. This is classic Marcusean doctrine and yet Zlotkowski does not wish to see himself as a Marxist or a radical.

There was and is a paradox here in claiming Freire for the argument. Service learning is a reform identified by Zlotkowski and others as originating from the top down board rooms of university presidents, provosts and deans for the common good. There is much rhetoric as Butin (2007) argues but often little effect in the powerful research faculties within the campuses. Too often service learning and what Butin sees as genuine community engagements rests with the most marginalised faculties and those in 'soft' fields such as education and social work. In this study I want to link Freire to my research but I am aware of certain contradictions or tensions. Williams (1983) in his definition of community offers the dialectic of solidarity and service, (working with people or voluntary work sometimes paid) and sees this dialectic on a philosophical level as operating between idealism and sentimentality. For Williams solidarity equals positive change whereas service equals the status quo (Nightingale, 1996, p.14).

Butin (2007) gives a good overview of the different models of service learning practices and establishes a table that presents four key models of community engagement: technical, cultural, political and anti-foundational. Freire's ideas for integrating with the existing common culture of the marginalised and oppressed, their language and beliefs and working from the bottom up in a process of conscientisation and revolution actually spans all four areas. Partly this is because Freire has developed a very holistic practice that integrates theory, philosophy and method and partly because Freire was not concerned with reforming middle class higher education or working within the dominant institutional structure to reform its individualist and positivist centre, his work is not called the pedagogy of the privileged. However Reason and Bradbury (2007) believe such a strategy/ inquiry process is necessary and vital to change the mind set of those in power to shift the powerful to a mindset of power with others rather than power over others.

*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is an extraordinary book where Freire takes his erudite learning in European philosophy and psychology (Marx, Lukacs, Fromm, Marcuse, Debray, Sartre, Fanon) and heads off into the countryside and slums. Freire's critical pedagogy is rigorous and coherent in terms of epistemology, theoretical scope and practical application. A primary target of the publication is the state classroom based standardised free education defined as the 'banking' method of pedagogy, where empty passive vessels are filled with abstract reified knowledge. Freire contrasts this traditional authoritarian approach with a problem based critical pedagogy that fosters not merely political emancipation but human emancipation through action and reflection in the specific local context of the home, fields, community hall or factory. He stresses the mutuality of the endeavour or journey of co-investigation with his students and adopts the open and indeterminate term teacher/student, student/teacher. The persuasive argument revolves around the importance of linking education to development, reflection to action, and dialogue to experience.

Freire's revolution is not violent or limited to fixed concepts of class primarily because in South America he was working with peasants who would not traditionally figure in orthodox Marxism definitions of class struggle. In world history over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century peasants have suffered near mass extinction in Marxist led totalitarian states. In the Bolshevik epistemology for example, peasants were an exotic, unruly species, they created atavistic fears and summoned an ethic of stern imperial stoicism in the face of their suffering. The cries of anguish and distress, as they paid the price for their centuries long perceived passive support and apathy towards despotism, fell on deaf ears of the new active agents of change.

Freire's dialectical approach is utopian yet methodical; he seeks to establish problem-posing codifications based on listening and observing the peasant community's habitus. Typically this approach involves making visual artefacts around specific and relevant themes through drawing, photography, collage or film. "Banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power; problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of

reality" (Freire, 1996, p. 62). As Peckham argues: "Freire understands change: in situations, in others, in himself. His theory in fact is rooted in change; it depends on the possibility of transformation and of continuously rejecting what one has announced" (Peckham, 2003, p.229). McLaren and Tadeu da Silva argue that

Freire's work can enable teachers to acquire a greater purchase on forms of critical practice that might serve to interrogate, destabilise, and disorganise dominant strategies of power and power/knowledge relations and in doing so envisage a means of enlisting pedagogy into the construction of a contestatory space where a radical and plural democracy might begin to take root (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p. 48-49).

Freire's South American based research practice is broadly aligned with the practices of participatory action research. Yet it is not unique or isolated and Pyrch (2007) charts some of the similar movements in the fields of liberatory adult education in North America and Europe mostly commencing in the 1920's. Lloyd and Thomas (1998) trace an even longer history of emancipatory education back to the emerging socialist ideology in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century epitomized by Marx but also William Morris. Morris challenged the idea that education is a value in and of itself and asked why the state curriculum was not aimed at changing or discovering new world views or even making children more self aware. In Britain and Ireland, Lloyd and Thomas(1998) argue that we need to recover the historical challenges like Morris' to the emergence of state and religious educational institutions as a site of order, discipline, neutrality, autonomy and objectivity operating at a distance from the real world, distinguished by the pursuit of (impersonal, universal, disinterested) knowledge for knowledge's sake.

Today, students in the traditional university system are individualised and learn to adapt to lecture driven assessments which in essence makes them "dependent on the teacher or the examiners to make decisions about what they know and they do not effectively learn to be able to do this for themselves" (Boud cited in Yorke and Knight, 2004, p. 95). Freire laments the huge loss of potential in a system that asks enquiring minds to "patiently receive, memorise, and repeat" (Freire 1970 p. 53). Pyrch reflects on how

Freire moved from a concern with oppression to an engagement with the pedagogy of hope as he neared death. For Freire,

Moral learning does not involve the use of reason in its limited scientific sense, but does involve achieving a complete and passionate consciousness, and the continual making of radical choices. It takes courage to make these choices. It takes courage to teach defiance (Newman cited in Pynch, 2007 p. 212).

Barone reaffirms hooks' call for an outlaw culture that promotes "engagements with ... practices and ... icons that are defined as on the edge, as pushing the limits, disturbing the conventional, acceptable politics of representation" (Barone 2006, p.219). To understand interpretive arts based research as a counter practice and a disaffirmation of the current political-economic orthodoxy, can put strain on the idea that the practice of art is a vehicle for resistance and defiance. The positioning of artists and art as a revolutionary and oppositional activity is long standing. I accept that many artists have paid dearly with their lives or spent long periods in prison because of their work. PEN is an international organisation that campaigns but also generates statistics just in relation to writers and journalists persecuted or killed for their work and the figures are shocking. While Sartre viewed the primary aim of art to challenge the established interests within society (Barone 2006), the traditional enlightenment view, as established by Kant and Schiller, was that while art could envision new progressive, or humane alternatives to the ills of society, it must never step beyond the aesthetic into the domain of direct action or praxis. Like education the aesthetic has a value only for its own sake. Art, in the traditional Cartesian view, was a valve for releasing the pressures of capitalism's 'natural' expansion. As Kester writes, art and the aesthetic must "remain highly elastic and unregulated precisely because it is being called on to absorb a potentially infinite range of divisive social effects" (Kester 1999, p.3).

### **Dialogical aesthetics**

Kester (2004) charts the history of ideas associated with the aesthetic as a zone of indeterminacy and while I want to address these insights in relation to the interpretation of art based research, it is important to give an overview of Kester's speculative

understanding that intersubjective dialogue might become an aesthetic experience. Kester calls this practice dialogical aesthetics, an approach that separates itself from both the traditional non communicative, mute and hermetic abstract art and the more strident innovative heterogeneous forms of shock based avant garde work designed to jolt the hapless alienated viewer into a new awareness. Kester (1999) argues that both anti-discursive traditions hold in common is a suspicion about shared community values and that 'art for the people' suggests an assault on artistic freedom or even worse the spectre of fascism and Stalinism. While such fears are grounded in history, in many peaceful and settled democracies not under immediate threats from extreme ideology, the tradition of anti-discursivity, isolation and negation still dominates in aesthetic practices. Kester's work tries to give legitimacy and a sound theoretical grounding to the alternative practices of community arts, recognising them as new forms of cultural production which could potentially threaten the status quo relationship of dominant and subordinate groups in our society.

In a neo liberal bourgeois dominated society, community arts are typically directed at working class and marginal communities. As Bourdieu has argued we live in a cultural economy where the tastes and creative activities of dominant and subordinate groups are aligned to greater and lesser values. The bourgeoisie typically see themselves as the producers of culture and capital, relegating all subordinate classes as consumers and labourers. A weakness in state supported community based arts activities, besides inadequate funding, has often been the top down approach of sponsoring agencies with artists parachuted in and out and little attention given to long term engagement. Another blind spot is how rarely we speak of business executives, or members of exclusive golf clubs as communities with community art needs despite their often uniform shared taste. In our age of consumer orientated individualism, community, as Bhabha (1994) reminds us, is something you develop out of. The Arts Council of Ireland has abandoned the once popular term 'community arts' for the more neutral 'participatory arts'. Indeed, while the definition of community resists empirical study and interpretation there is something similar in the resistance to profit in the community artwork which because of multiple

authorship/ownership remains unexchangeable and therefore economically unviable within the traditional art market and auction houses.

To paraphrase Kester's nuanced arguments is to recognise that there is way forward through the impasse of the art, alienation and society. His aim, borrowed from Freire, is to "replace the 'banking' style of art in which the artist deposits an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer, with a process of dialogue and collaboration" (Kester, 2004, p.10). The argument seeks guidance from a social constructionist epistemology because it posits that the category 'art' can be seen from more than one perspective. There is a specific and important discursive system that while it constructs art

as a repository for values (creative labour, noninstrumentality, nondiscursive forms of knowledge, etc.) actively suppressed within the dominant culture. There is nothing inherent in a given work of art that allows it to play this role; rather, particular formal arrangements take on meaning only in relationship to specific cultural moments, institutional frames, and preceding art works (Kester, 2004, p. 90).

So while the challenge art poses to fixed categorical systems and instrumentalising modes of thought is important it is not necessarily simply located in the art work itself as a discreet, bounded, formally innovative object. Rather Kester argues that

the tendency to locate this principle of indeterminacy solely in the physical condition or form of the work of art prevents us from grasping an important act of performative, collaborative art practice. An alternative approach would require us to locate the moment of indeterminateness, of open-ended and liberatory possibility, not in the perpetually changing form of the artwork qua object, but in the very process of communication that the artwork catalyzes (Kester, 2004, p. 90).

This perspective aligns itself with the work of Eco's 1965 critique of McLuhan's medium is the message theory. Eco argued that context and specificity, what he called our individual code, are a key component for interpretation of the same media message. Eco outlined the communication chain as

The Receiver transforms the Signal into Message, but the message is still the empty form to which the Addressee can attribute various meaning depending on the Code he/she applies to it (Eco, 1987, p.139).

In a similar way Iser's reception theory has argued that the text is empty pre encounter with the reader (Holub, 1992). This 'variability of interpretation' is not just about discreet works of art rather it refers to our engagement with a media landscape. As Eco observed, the advertising of first world luxury goods in impoverished depressed countries can function as an unintended revolutionary message. However Eco warned 50 years ago that the freedom to interpret according to one's individual code, to control or modify the message and its multiple meanings, would come under strategic assault by the powerful and totalising force of the communications industry who well understand the challenges of indeterminacy and variability.

Kester has developed his new relational theory of dialogical aesthetics (the word dialogical is borrowed from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin) from artists such as, UK based, Stephen Willats who makes collaborative works with residents of public housing tower blocks, around concerns in their lives. Willats has been working in this way since the late '70s. These collaborative artworks are presented in the resident's living space and in the experience of their daily lives and routines. A starting point for a new work is usually a simple question devised by Willats and a given group of participants and could be as direct as: "What do you think are the everyday pressures on family life by moving into a house on this estate?" As Kester writes:

By trying to describe their life experience to Willats (and to themselves and other residents) by bringing it into discursive form via statements, images and so on, the residents establish a distance from this experience and situate it in a parallel world in which reflexive examination is more easily facilitated (Kester, 2004, p. 94).

When considering a work of art or a work of participatory arts based research as a relational encounter and not as an isolated object in itself, we are (as Kester admits) offered the condition of theatre where "the audience-text relation operates along a continuum from impersonation to improvisation, where people find ways to enact the

themes and discourses of the stories they experience within the problematics of their lived everyday experience” (Nightingale, 1996, p. x). The indeterminate plural values span across the habitus of the creators, the arts based research work as objects in themselves, the variability interpretation and classification of the work, and finally the open-ended action plan.

The context of having an open ended dialogue/interaction that aims to uncover the root causes of particular problems through codifications is very pertinent to progressive contemporary art, educational research, and art education today. Kester presents “the work of art to be viewed as a kind of conversation- a locus of different meanings, interpretations, and points of view” (Kester 2004, p.10). Bourriaud (2002) has coined the term “relational aesthetics” to describe art practices that aim to create community based dialogue and exchange, and others including Bhabha (1998) have used the phrase ‘conversational art’ to describe community arts projects. Community, Bhabha (1994) outlines, is synonymous with the territory of the minority and the discourses of community are themselves ‘minority’ discourses incommensurable with the discourse of civil society. Community is the antagonist supplement of modernity. It becomes the border problem of the diasporic, the migrant, and the refugee. Community in this sense almost has an atavistic resonance because it pre dates capitalism and modern society and leads a “subterranean, potentially subversive life within [civil society] because it refuses to go away” (Chatterjee cited in Bhabha 1994, p. 230). In this sense community is at once a togetherness and paradoxically an estrangement from or antagonism to the public sphere and regulated bourgeois civil society, the establishment.

Ireland’s post colonial legacy affords a rich genealogy of the struggle of ‘native’ discourses and the discourses of enlightened metropolitan London. The ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) of the British Isles and Empire struggled and actively suppressed oppositional collective identities, and the benefits of the Enlightenment did not extend to indigenous or dispossessed cultures and communities. There is to follow Bhabha (1994), Nancy (1991) and Pontbriand (2000) a contemporary value in the noun



community because of the conceptual aporia or groundless ground of any communal foundations. As Douglas observes

In 'community' the personal relations of men and women appear in a special light. They form part of the ongoing process which is only partly organised in the wider social 'structure'. Whereas 'structure' is differentiated and channels authority through the system, in the context of 'community', roles are ambiguous, lacking hierarchy, disorganised. 'Community' in this sense has positive values associated with it; good fellowship, spontaneity, warm contact. . . Laughter and jokes, since they attack classification and hierarchy, are obviously apt symbols for expressing community in this sense of unhierarchised, undifferentiated social relations (Douglas, 1991, p 303).

Dews (1987) explains how Habermas' work also resists fetishising the collective experience as something essential and bonded and emphasises its mutability, contingency, and possibilities. Yet as Kester observes, the careful distinction in Habermas' work between what he called 'instrumental' and 'communicative' rationality is typically collapsed in postmodern critiques of Habermas by Nancy (1991), Kwon (2002) and Lyotard (1984).

### **Post-structuralist hermeneutics**

Nightingale (1996) observes that for any research based in the community there are considerable problems addressing the 'knowability' of one's community partner. Nightingale outlines how British cultural studies have adopted a hermeneutical stance towards research in the public interest. In contrast, she argues, to the more consumer orientated models of U.S. based social research. Hermeneutics implies an activity of close reading, interpretation and self understanding; its roots are in the German reception theory tradition of Gadamer and also the phenomenology of Husserl and Ingarden (Eagleton, 1983). Hermeneutics changes in definition and spans a spectrum of interpretative approaches; teleological and non teleological within a social constructionist paradigm. Hermeneutics is not typically to be seen as a reductive activity, in search of one true meaning, it is broad and exploratory not only in interpreting the research text but

also the multiple and eclectic interpretative conventions or frames that configure around any text. As Blumenfeld –Jones argues “hermeneutics recognises the constant uncertainty of truth-finding” (Blumenfeld –Jones, 2006 p. 238). In this sense hermeneutics can be cumbersome and difficult to pursue because the researcher has to focus not only on the specificity of the material form of the text, but also on the extra-textual, i.e. the competing discourses in struggle, discourse formations of power-knowledge and ideologies at play. In disappointing all certainties, hermeneutics recognises that meanings advanced are partial, invented, but also shared. The text, as Barthes and other post-structuralist writers advance, is not an object but a “methodological field of energy...absorbing writer and reader together” (Stam et al, 1995, p.192). Eagleton is more suspect of this hermenutical sharing and dialogue because

history is as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless, or that if it is indeed a ‘dialogue’ then the partners – men and women, for example – hardly occupy equal positions. It refuses to recognise that discourse is always caught up with power which may be by no means benign; and the discourse in which it most signally fails to recognise this fact is its own (Eagleton, 1983, p. 73).

According to Stam et al Barthes hijacks the traditional exegetical tradition of hermeneutics to produce a subversive theory of reading that pursues blind alleys, chance relations, enigmas, puzzlements and functions “to delay revelation, to dodge the moment of truth by setting up obstacles, stoppages, deviations” (Stam et al, 1995, p.192). For Barthes, playing with the text is a method of resistance and transformation; of opening up the constructed rule bound conventions of knowledge, turning the consumer into an active producer, empowering the reader to assume the responsibility of co-authorship. In other words the reader is no longer a passive spectator who produces nothing, through the sleight of hand of the hermeneutic code they become a co-collaborator and improvisator responsive to the plurality and circularity of meaning/identity, force fields of energy, presences and absences and intersections of contradictions within the given text. As de Freitas (2008) outlines, “this revisioning of hermeneutics is a strategy for recognising and nurturing a radically different space of learning, where distinct horizons are not fused, and where the unanticipated is invited, and indeed demanded” (de Freitas, 2008, p.472).

Barthes' hermeneutics echoes with Freire's dialectical thought that "it is not possible to create without serious intellectual discipline; likewise it is not possible to create within a system of fixed, rigid, or imposed rules" (Freire cited in Van Halen-Faber and Diamond, 2008, p. 582).

Barthes methodology and exploration of the plurality of a given text is nowhere better exemplified than his extraordinary book *S/Z*, where a short story by Balzac becomes dramatically extended into the vehicle for a circuitous theory of literature and the indeterminate role of reader. Barthes work has been adopted by many postmodernists who, as Jameson has concluded, seem to find resistance to oppression and the status quo in the infinite play of signification, inter-textuality, and deferred meaning (Jameson, 1995). Barthes comes from a bourgeois background of privilege, his espousal of pleasure and *jouissance* in the reading of texts and in semiology has drawn criticism from the left, with Eagleton (1983) criticising his work less as a 'hermeneutics' than an 'erotics'. As with his criticisms of Iser, Eagleton is unconvinced that a genuine oppositional practice can come from hermeneutics and he argues that the only reader open to transformation would have to be a liberal. He writes that

in order to undergo transformation at the hands of the text, we must only hold our beliefs fairly provisionally in the first place...the act of reading produces a kind of human subject which it also presupposes. This is also paradoxical in another way: for if we only hold our convictions rather lightly in the first place, having them interrogated and subverted by the text is not really very significant. Nothing much in other words will have actually happened. The reader is not so much radically upbraided as simply returned to himself or herself as a more thoroughly liberal subject (Eagleton 1983, p. 79).

Eagleton does concede that Barthes is not espousing an 'anything goes' approach when it comes to the multiple interpretations of a text. Barthes does come from the structuralist tradition and Eagleton gives him credit for re appraising the structuralist systematic approach from a modernist and left wing perspective. He recognises that Barthes "seeks to restore a sense of the 'unnaturalness' of the signs by which men and women live, and so open up a radical awareness of their historical mutability" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 141).

The sense of fragmentation in Barthes' hermeneutics moves outward from the text to challenge all forms of systematic thought, like with Foucault and other disillusioned left wing intellectuals post '68 "the only forms now felt to be acceptable were of a local, diffused strategic kind: work with prisoners and other marginalised social groups, particularly projects in culture and education" (Eagleton, 1983, p.142). Second wave feminism, Eagleton concedes, was correct to reject much of classical Marxist thought, a tradition that was incapable of explaining women's oppression or the means to end it. Barthes theory and practice offered new avenues for reading the patriarchal text against the grain, for foregrounding the personal, the libidinal, the experiential, and the spontaneous in a male dominated media saturated society. The decentring of the text mirrored the decentring of empire, power, pedagogy and fixed identities. Barthes work asks the researcher to interfere with codes and media images as much as with words and for research and interpretation to be a vertiginous creative act.

McLaren and Lankshear, both exponents of critical pedagogy, argue that Freire can be reclaimed within a post-structuralist critique of language and power and assert that "Freire's position on language, culture and power is as perceptive as that of Foucault" (McLaren, 1994, p. 213). Freire's belief was clearly that while language works to reproduce dominant power structures it also carries the resources for immanent critique and the potential for the deconstruction or refusal of the representational regimes within the dominant social order. McLaren and Tadeu da Silva advance that

Freire has made it clear that an important correlation exists between advancing and deepening the democratic socialist project and our access to discourse that encourage self reflexivity about the literalness and otherwise unrecognised and passively accepted meanings of our own reality and those of our fellow human beings (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p. 53).

What is being presented here is the stridency of a revolutionary agenda tempered with discourse analysis. As Giroux laments in a post September 11<sup>th</sup> society, "we are missing a language and a movement that does not equate democracy with consumerism and market relations" (cited in Miskovic and Hoop. 2006, p.276).

## **Conclusion**

Freire argued that “consciousness of and action upon reality are therefore inseparable constituents of the transforming act by which people become beings in relation” (Freire cited in McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, 1993, p. 54). I hope I have shown how there is a congruence running through the theories of Freire, Kester and Barthes and how arts based participatory action research unveils the intersections of subjectivities, aesthetic objects and social practices within specific antinomies of power. While the textual moves in which Freire and Barthes construct meaning are dissimilar, they share an epistemology of producing rather than discovering meaning. Traditional orthodox research “strives to underestimate the potential potency of the researcher’s conceptual interventions, even to avoid recognition of them at all” (Ferguson, 1993, p. 89). Only researchers comfortable with being neutral in the face of the devastating and debilitating effects of capitalist exploitation can progress in such a narrow context.

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on arts based collaborative action research methodologies and provides for an overview of this relatively new interpretative research approach within the field of education. It aims to critically engage, question and appraise the methodology as well as provide in depth knowledge of specific research procedures adopted in this study. This chapter will also outline the ethical concerns of collaborative research enquiry. Prosser (1998) provides a good overview on the arguments for and against adopting image based research methodologies. He highlights a consistent prejudice against working with images within the social science and anthropology academic communities. Some of the worries he identifies are that:

1. the theoretical basis for analyzing images is too complex or too unorthodox
2. images are by their nature ambiguous, indeterminate and difficult to fix in terms of their meanings.
3. the creating and framing of images particularly photographic based work alters the object in the frame and weakens the neutrality of the researcher or inhibits the participant's everyday behaviour and activities (Prosser, 1998, pp. 97-112)

Prosser concludes that implications for conventional research, even though most researchers are sighted and research depends for many on observation, are that images should only play a minor supplementary role or very occasionally a supporting role. He also notes that the anxieties presented by image based research are rarely challenged and that "there is little attempt to point to solutions to these issues or identify parallel problems within word based research" (Prosser, 1998, p.99). He records the frustrations of Harper; "sociology we believed ought to include a new kind of epistemology, based on knowledge represented in imagery rather than word" (Prosser, 1998, p. 100).

Arts based research is a matter of fact definition for a set of practices adopted by educational researchers or social-science based researchers that seek to use general art making techniques with participants in a research study. General art making would refer

to diverse activities such as writing poems, creating images, making music or devising and performing interpretative works in dance or theatre. Cahnmann Taylor (2008) argues that through the arts, educational researchers can be challenged into thinking creatively and reflexively about what constitutes empirical fieldwork research activities in addition to allowing for more penetrating and accessible ways for the reception of a work of research. Gosse (2008) observes that a core goal of arts based enquiry is to contribute to a much needed bridge between the academy and the public. "The arts have much to offer researchers as a means to make our thinking clearer, fresher and more public in rendering the richness and complexity of the observed world" (Cahnmann Taylor, 2008, p.13). However Cahnmann Taylor perceptively argues that "arts based researcher do no service to themselves in defining their methods in opposition to more traditional approaches to inquiry" (Cahnmann Taylor, 2008, p.4) and that "there are still more researchers writing about arts based criteria than those producing examples of what it looks like in each area of the literary, visual and performing arts" (Cahnmann Taylor, 2008, p.12).

An immediate set of questions arise in defining standard terms for arts based research in relation to other forms of research methodologies and the work of Eisner 2008, 1991, Finley 2005, Irwin and de Cosson, 2004, and Barone 2000, 2001 covers much of this ground in an intelligent, utilitarian and epistemologically humble way. It is easy to see how arts based approaches to data collection are different to questionnaires, focus groups or interviews and that obvious concerns about the academic rigor, professionalism or scholarship of such techniques might need to be addressed. In respect of this MA thesis my research is not just a concern of an academic enquiry/exercise, it is grounded both in the desire to achieve a greater level of community dialogue and involvement in my role as an educator and artist and the practice of my devising and teaching of a year 3 module in Community based learning at the Wexford Campus of IT Carlow. As an artist, educator and student at DIT, I am intrigued with using visual art within the social science orientated discipline of third level educational research. A focus for this study has been to try and gather as much knowledge about visual arts based collaborative/participatory approaches in action research based educational practices and community development practices. In this study I want to show how I have considered, devised, navigated,

analysed and reported on a research journey with my co participants from the Southend family resource centre.,

### **Justification for the methodology**

‘Reflexivity in research is meant to trace the presence of the researcher onto the research context, marking their interference, their participation, their desire’ (Creswell, 2003).

Academies and universities are places of knowledge and as Foucault (1975) showed, also institutions of power, indeed, the more power the more knowledge that is produced leading Foucault to join the words forever as ‘power-knowledge’. For Foucault power-knowledge is not an ahistorical concept and the modes of acquiring and dispersing knowledge continue to be formed through history. As such Foucault in quite a subversive way does not distinguish between rational progressive or irrational repressive power-knowledge in the human sciences, as he writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, “discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject but on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined” (cited in Holub 1992, p 60). There is, as Holbert argues, “no power relation without the constitution of a field of knowledge, and no knowledge that does not presuppose power relations” (Holbert, 2008, p. 1).

In focussing on power, Foucault’s work has been embraced by post-structuralist feminism (Butler, 1990, McNay, 1992) but it has generated important criticisms. Primarily it is the sense of a suffocating totality to power-knowledge that provokes the most hostility from Foucault’s critics especially Habermas who essentially believes that there is a horizon to strive towards or a directional vector for an escape from the vortex that Foucault has exposed with the concept of power-knowledge. Without such a direction, Habermas argues that, “within the all pervasive world of power that he (Foucault) postulates, there is no compelling reason for resistance” (cited in Holub 1992, p. 64). Drefus and Rabinow offer prescient criticism of the conclusion to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as they remark that,



Freeing one's self from the bureaucrats and the discursive police is surely exhilarating, but until one finds a new position from which to speak, and a new seriousness for one's words, there is no place in archaeology for a discourse with social significance, no reason anyone should listen, and, in spite of Foucault's playful posturing, no reason anyone should write (cited in Holub 1992, p. 68).

This study sees the value of Habermas' criticism but recognises that it does not invalidate Foucault's epistemology completely because a theory of power-knowledge is essential in negotiating the interchange of power, knowledge and interest inherent in any judgement across any discipline. Although Foucault understood truth as a relative concept, he advanced what he called alternative truths or disqualified knowledges constructed by marginalised groups as the counterpower to power-knowledge. As McNay explains, for Foucault

oppositional truths articulated from below have no greater claim to 'reality' than official truths, but they have a resistant or progressive function in so far as they hinder the 'domination of truth' by those who govern. In other words, the exercise of free speech is not oppositional *per se*, but has a strategically resistant value (McNay, 1992, p. 137).

The instrumentalisation of research stemming from the dominant scientific/positivist model of the pursuit of objectivity aligned with a pro corporate commerce ethos remain the core of academic enquiry. The demands that research findings be abstractable, that samples are defined in narrow terms and that the people who are focus of a particular study are carefully controlled, randomised and kept a safe distance are the traditional hallmarks of Western academic protocols. Accepting this fact does not necessarily imply submission or surrender to these faiths and many qualitative and participatory action research activities represent sites of defiance, contestation, negotiation or hope for a better future. However as emphasized in Chapter 1, Foucault teaches us to be vigilant in recognizing that emancipatory discourses within the academy are formed through the very same structures of power-knowledge that subjugates. A possible solution embraced by Foucault near his death was investing in rainbow groups and micropolitics to challenge the narrow specialization of academic research and open up academic enquiry to a broader lay audience of participants and readers. Participative action research as a social process fulfills some of this desire, because it activates an approach to societal

problems within the local community. As Pырch argues “inquiry into societal transformation based in local communities created the community development concept” (Pырch, 2007, p.208).

Swantz et al (2006) outlines a good overview of participatory action research for her work in Tanzania where she draws on some other key exponents of this methodology like Mosser and Hall. From Mosser she writes that we learn to respect that the participant researchers in any co-investigation should be able to claim that they know the situation better than the outside observer/ researcher. From Hall, a criteria to add to this would be that the subject of the research originates in the community itself. Bradbury et al (2007) outline the legacy of Lewin’s work in developing action research principles in the workplace and they focus on the affective, embodied and emotional dimension to participating in a group and making decisions through journeys of self knowing. They stress the grounding of change in a cycle of self reflection followed by often uncomfortable unlearning, the loss of ego identity, and then a process of rebuilding with a greater common purpose and mutual respect. Outlining the theories of Damasio and Bowlby, Bradbury et al (2007) consider the somatic and embodied forms of self reflection; they also draw on the Neilsen’s theory of appreciative enquiry in relation to focusing on the importance of positive, supportive dialogue and pleasure in the formation of groups. While not explicitly addressing arts based participatory action research, their conclusions do apply to this area. Reid and Frisby (2007) identify a key feature of contemporary feminist participatory action research is to find new and more creative counter practices in research that can involve women and men in co-producing new knowledge meaningful to themselves.

Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998, pp.23-24) adopt five key features of participatory action research:

1. Participatory action research is a social process whereby actors in an educational and social setting learn how they are connected to social structures.
2. Research is practical and not theoretical engaging all involved in active inquiry working towards social change.

3. Participatory action research is a process of collaborative active engagement
4. Participatory action research is emancipatory and critical as individuals examine and challenge the role of larger social, political, economical and cultural conditions that shape them.
5. Participatory action research adopts reflective practices that help the co-researchers examine their own role in research.

Finally participatory research is highly contextual and specific to real problems; research is done *with* the community not *to* it (Nyden et al cited in Miskovic and Hoop. 2006, p. 270). Schön presents an instructive story by Vygotsky that demonstrates both the epistemology of the university researcher and the social construction of abstract knowledge.

Vygotsky, who worked after the Russian revolution, worked with peasants, some of whom had been to the collective schools and some of whom had not. And he gave them little tests. And the basic pattern of the test was 'Put together the things that go together.' So he showed this peasant a hammer, saw, a hatchet and a log of wood, and he said 'Put together the things that go together.' And the peasant said, 'Well clearly, what goes together is the log of wood and the hatchet and the saw because you use the hatchet and the saw to cut wood for firewood.' And Vygotsky said – and this was his regular stratagem – 'I have a friend who says that the saw, the hammer and the hatchet go together because they are tools.' And the peasant answered, 'Then your friend must have a lot of firewood' (Schön 1987, p.2).

Liamputtong and Rumbold outline how the health and social sciences are dominated by propositional ("conceptual" and "abstract") knowing and that "because propositional knowing is so dominant other ways to knowing that access experience more immediately and richly or that translate it into action and practice tend to receive less attention" (Liamputtong and Rumbold, 2008, p. 2). In recent years there has been what Denzin (2003) calls a reflexive turn in interpretive research and similarly Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008) argue that presentational knowing, an epistemology that represents experience in expressive forms, has opened up specifically in the areas of education, anthropology and sociology. Presentational knowing spans to include self and first person

narratives as a qualitative research method along with autoethnography, and visual and performative based models of research practice. Because arts based research emerges from this field of presentational knowing it shares concepts and criteria with kindred forms, there are however some significant differences.

Moran argues that in comparison with other forms of qualitative enquiry arts based enquiry “remains virgin territory: broad, largely undefined, and uncharted” (Moran, 2008 p.495). She warns that those evaluating the outcomes of such research must be competent evaluators in terms of art and social science. As a process, arts based enquiry is relatively straight forward, its activities as Barone (2001) outlines, are open ended and exploratory. However the products of such research are certainly more difficult to evaluate. Eisner (2008) is supportive of the multi-perspectival and often ambiguous puzzling questions that arts based research throws up but he is clear and frank that the arts based work is a tool of enquiry and not an end in itself. He writes “research is an instrument, whether arts based or not, that is supposed to contribute to the quality of education students receive and that arts based research must ultimately be appraised on the extent to which that claim is realized” (Eisner, 2008, p23). Art works, especially poetic, symbolic visual images are difficult to fix with a precise transparent meaning and to critically evaluate their values and limits for participants and onlookers.

In the 1960s Freire argued that “before learning how to read words, one should learn how to read the world” (cited in Camnitzer 2008, p. 3). As introduced in Chapter 2, Freire’s work is of central importance to arts based research in a service learning context. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire proposes quite a structured path in terms of an emancipatory practice for marginalised communities. Stage one would be the investigation and recording of the current realities ( domestic, economic, national, sexual, familial, etc). and the perception of these realities, stage two the selection of key themes abstracted from the various realities, stage three, the codification of the themes into layered visual texts, stage four, an active critical engagement with the coded images (experts are included in this decoding process to provide feedback and reflection), and lastly stage five, an action plan and intervention to transform reality/daily life or tackle

the root causes of a problem. The overall name for the process he gives is 'conscientization' or critical consciousness and the tangible action taken in the community represents the pinnacle of this. All through the staged process a dialogue should develop between the educator and the community based participants.

The knowledge contained in a codification has to be necessarily incomplete and indeterminate to engage an audience in the act of decoding. In terms of content, Freire suggests a possible solution here is to use imagery drawn from the lives of one's co-investigators. These codifications can contain symbolic words depending on the literacy levels of the community from which they are drawn; they can be oral narratives as well. Crucially the act of problem posing is for the image to be decoded collectively and in this process to empower the group to enter a dialogue and see their specific situation in a different light. Disappointingly there are no illustrations of what exactly makes a good codification. From the insights gained in the decoding process, the final stage in conscientisation is reached and that is the action plan and the practical steps set out to transform reality or tackle the newly discovered root causes of a problem.

Conscientisation is demonstrated in the final analysis by practical change, but to reach this stage an emphasis on listening seems integral to the process, Freire calls the work of the researchers a listening survey. The methodology of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* links listening to cultural activities and the creation of visualizations and codifications. Although it must be noted that Freire rejected his approach as a method and stressed the specificity of each participatory action research situation. On a visit to Tanzania in 1971, Freire spoke of the importance in "challenging the people to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and their music" (Freire 1971 cited in Reason and Bradbury 2008 p. 51). Two illustrated handbooks derived from Freire's approach arising from action research in Scotland and Kenya (Kirkwood, 1990 and Hope and Timmel, 1985) are explicit about the role of drawing, photography and collage in the making of these images. These texts also encourage researchers working in the field of community change and emancipation to use poetry, mime, drama, and film as problem posing materials and activities. Both

handbooks are works of arts based research before the term was popularized as such. They apply Freire's direction that the research images must not be mere illustrations but must be coded images or dialogical images. Hope and Timmel (1985) argue that the research images must stimulate and engage their audience by:

1. Dealing with relevant themes about which the community has strong animated feelings
2. Being reasonably recognisable in terms of scenes located in everyday life or the surroundings of the community
3. Using strong contrasts to raise questioning responses
4. Focusing on one theme at a time and avoid unnecessary visual distraction so that discussion can go deeply into this problem area
5. Touch the hearts as well as the minds of the group.

Freire's work is an invocation to challenge and disrupt the status quo and the official discourses in the current spheres of education and community development, his writing is important for this study in that it is relevant to service learning participatory action research (Hall 1993, Reinhartz, 1988) and arts based enquiry. Freire's work comes to mind when Toma (2006, p.406) refers to Altheide and Johnson's defence of qualitative methods that substitute usefulness for objectivity and their belief that constructivist based interpretative enquiries should

1. tell a story so richly that the reader can feel it,
2. include multiple voices and tacit knowledge
3. develop a self critical approach in the researcher to his or her relationship to the situation being studied.

Arts based research can, I believe build on these objectives and deliver a reflective process for the research team that builds dialogue through making participants aware of their filtering and judgments in relation to the research question. This arts based approach aims to connect with Bradbury et al's belief "that by observing the observer and listening to your listening, self awareness of thoughts, feelings and experiences, past and present seep gently into consciousness" (Bradbury et al, 2008, p. 82.).

## **Research procedures**

There are five distinct phases to this research cycle, phase 1; reconnaissance, early development and the selection of the research team, phase 2; the social encounter as an initial meeting with the group, phase 3; group formation, the four group meetings with their specific activities, and finally phase 4; the re-uniting of the group for discussion on the research outcomes, evaluations and action plans.

In developing this collaborative methodology a key contact in the phase 1 was the community organization coordinator, it was my relationship with him and a series of meetings conducted with him that helped forge the research plan. This person was an insider to the organization and was able to reflect back some of the possible concerns the co-researchers might have with the proposal to work through visual arts methods. We had already worked together in relation to an art student volunteering at the community centre and the coordinator felt that for the members of the centre to see a student already working with them would demonstrate some of the potential of service learning. Fortunately some clients and founders of the centre had worked through drawing, drama and art therapy in the past. What became even better news was that a pre existing group of four local women with an interest in something creative was already formed and was regularly working in the area of art therapy on a Saturday morning. As this project was coming to an end the co-coordinator and I decided to approach this group to be the co researchers. The prospective researchers were told that the focus of the project was on the active participation of all collaborators towards an open ended inquiry into campus and community exchange. I also discussed with the coordinator the subject of fees for each member of the research team and he was a little unsure of this approach but agreed with my argument that the value of the time and effort would be significant and that researchers cost money. The next stage in the process we agreed would be an evening meal for the research team to introduce and discuss the project informally and for each member to get to know each other and share their thoughts on my plan.

An awareness that came from this first phase was that approaching a community

organization can be daunting especially if one's research idea is fluid and in formation and where the confidence of a seasoned participatory action researcher or arts based researcher is absent. As Yoshihama and Carr argue, "communities are not static places where researchers conduct research, but social arenas that are negotiated and may be defined differently depending on who one speaks to in the community" (cited in Maiter et al, 2008, 312). I was also concerned that in relation to the principles or criteria of community based participatory research as outlined by Hall 1997 (cited in Rahman, 2008 p. 51), I might be overstepping the mark in that I would be taking the initiative to forming the group, as well as suggesting a research method and research agenda and that finally I would be paying the group from a college fund. I was a little reassured by Maiter et al who argued that "researchers who have their own needs, skills, and interests, should not be fearful of introducing topics for study for a community" (Maiter et al, 2008, p.313). While Minkler notes, "that even if a topic originates from outside the community, involvement of community members can result in a sense of ownership and development of emergent projects by community members" (Minkler cited in Maiter et al, 2008, p. 313).

What is striking now is that looking back on the formation of the group; I naively underestimated their skills and talents. This group of four women was close to the nucleus of the community organization, they were the founders and drivers of the centre, and they gave willingly of their time in all manner of aspects to improve the well being of fellow community members. They were, and continue to be, very supportive of each other. They were in touch with each other on a significant number of levels not just through their Saturday morning classes. They chose a restaurant in Wexford Town for the initial meeting and were clearly comfortable in this location being known to the staff. Over a Chinese meal, they listened to my pitch for the research plan and the arts based methodology but I could sense that they needed some convincing or rather that they were unsure what if anything might come out of making images and collages. I tried to speak as honestly as I could about my lack of experience in this field of research but how I could see the merits of such an approach to stimulate a good level interaction between the participants. Equally I tried to allay some of their fears that the quality of the art work



might not be of sufficient aesthetic standard. I pointed out that process was to be as important and that the art works should at best stimulate some discussion on possible themes for future collaboration. I also explained my feelings about paying each member of the team for their time. We all agreed at this meeting that there was plenty of scope for collaboration between the art school and their organization and on that positive note we set a timetable to commence the research.

Throughout the first meeting and the subsequent sessions I was mindful of my reading on arts based participatory action research, (Spaniol, 2005, Mislovic and Hoop. 2006, Wadsworth, 2005). I knew that dialogue would need to develop to break down barriers and develop trust within the group. I very much felt and remained the outsider to this group although I believe the process of working through arts based research did soften the divide. This did not disappoint me as I was not expecting or wanting to become an insider, if anything my expectations were tempered by the modest hopes that the success of a new research process and methodology would be judged by its ability to reduce imbalances of power and allow participants to “(a) listen without judgment to the experiences and values of others, (b) explore and reflect on their own perceptions and belief systems, and (c) arrive at new, shared visions of future possibilities” (Bluebird cited in Spaniol, 2005).

The four group meetings happened in the Southend family resource centre, the centre is a converted two bed apartment above a bookmakers and local supermarket. The complex was recently built. The Southend is in an area of Wexford town called the Faythe, wedged between the sea, terraced houses and an expanse of public parkland called the Rocks. We used the largest room which had tables and chairs and images of past activities on the wall. The arrangement in the room allowed us to sit in a non hierarchical setting and helped with maintaining eye contact. I brought specific materials each Saturday and the sessions lasted for 2-3 hours. For the first meeting I again outlined how the process of the sessions might unfold and that I was hypothesizing that this model of working might be a safe and supportive frame work to develop in dialogue an action plan to precipitate a foundation for a new journey in possible distinctive collaborations

techniques were more familiar. However one researcher had participated in a workshop on building trust and listening and spoke of an interesting technique whereby two people work together to make an object in clay with the modeler blindfolded.

During the period of the Saturday meetings I invited the four women to come to the art school for a coffee break and meet the students on the community based module and encounter other students working in their studio spaces. One of the researchers had as a child been a student in the building when it was used by the VEC. The visit was successful on several levels in that I felt the community development activists from the Faythe got to see what happens in the school, what facilities are like and the variety of work that is made by the students. This was the first time a group of local people from the town had been given a tour by me or any other member of the staff team. The third year students were warned in advance of their arrival and made the women welcome with tea in their studio. The women conversed with this cohort, talked about where they were from, what they share in terms of community led values and asked some direct questions. A student who was working with a group of teenager clients of the Southend centre, as part of her volunteering, spoke about the graffiti project that the centre was undertaking. It had struck me at the time that there was a clear divide between the students and the researchers once everyone sat down for a break. A possible explanation for this might be that the atmosphere was stilted because such a group event does not usually happen in the studio and secondly the students were aware of my presence in the room as a figure of authority. It might have been better for me to have slipped out and then let the students speak more freely. Or indeed they could have made some form of arts based work around the theme of community in advance that morning and invited the women to come in and respond to their work.

The final session in this cycle was the report and action plan drafted by myself and discussed between members of the group. The action plan report is attached as appendix 2 of this thesis. The feedback was very positive in terms of tone; we all read the action plan and discussed different aspects of each proposal. There had been a long gap in terms of the scheduling of this meeting due to a number of events in my life. When I arrived at

the meeting the group of researchers was working on visual scrapbooks and was discussing an old family portrait of one the group. The picture told a tragic story and as we discussed it I sensed how visual material can bring groups to connect and share thoughts and observations. One aspect of the interpretation of the research was the dominance of women in the images, men seemed to be absent from community development. I wondered also how men would take to arts based research and to my surprise, all of the group felt it would work. Previously I had mentioned it to the coordinator and his perception was that such an approach would be too radical and would scare the men. Perhaps most positive of all about this feedback session was my reflection back to the group that the Southend centre is really a special place of education and in light of this we discussed a new part time degree in community development and leadership that has just started at the Wexford Campus. This new course and the development plans of the centre could really work well together in the future. Finally I asked the group would they consider doing a second round of research later in the year, after all the problems of processing their payments within the college system this question might have produced a negative response, instead we laughed about the interminable delay and made a new condition on which to commence future research, fees in advance please!

### **Ethical considerations**

In terms of ethical considerations I was influenced by Winter (1996), Conrad and Campbell (2008) and Maiter et al (2008) and a prime concern in this study was to break down the barriers between the researcher and research. As Mellor suggests "the structure of [participatory research] project draws us much closer to our participants than do traditional research models" (Mellor cited in Conrad and Campbell, 2008, p. 256). I found that making images with the team was a very good way of seeing all of us operate at the same level of the research process. In the feedback session this aspect of the research was discussed and it was agreed that conducting focus groups, interviews or surveys would have been markedly different. It was also agreed that the arts based

research process encouraged group introspection and yet was overall pleasurable and creative as opposed to inquisitive and pressurised.

The research group was formed in a transparent manner. At the initial meeting in the restaurant I explained the full context of both the module in service learning at the campus and my own MA study needs. I made an ethical decision on offering to pay each of the women for participating in this research because I felt so much of the expectation around the subject of community is considered outside of financial recompense. I had been successful in securing a small fund from the Teaching and Learning innovation fund of IT Carlow to conduct research into the pilot community based learning module. As Conrad and Campbell argue, "it behoves the PR practitioner to use the power that comes with a university or agency position to benefit research participants" (Conrad and Campbell, 2008, p. 256).

The first meeting was simply just a proposal and the group of women were under no obligation to participate. Indeed all the way through if any member wanted to drop out that would have been fine. On the last session one member of the group was not able to make it and in another session a group member arrived late into the session. I also discussed recording the meetings with the group but I sensed hesitancy and so we let documentation remain just written notes. At the end of the four sessions I took all the work that was made away. This body of work was kept safe in my office during the period of writing the thesis and was returned to the group at the outcome stage. All reproduction permission of the images in this thesis was with the agreement of the group. While most of the dialogue was specific to the issues relating to campus community dialogue there were some personal contributions particularly in session 1 that will remain confidential as agreed in advance of the research sessions. In addition the names of the women will remain confidential within the thesis as I aware that there are risks of misinterpretation and misrepresentation in terms of my interpretation of open, polysemic, visual material.

On reflection there was an ethical issue that arose in session 3 where the group worked with mind maps and a difficulty arose for a member of the group in terms of mild

dyslexia or literacy. It was at this point that I realised how much safer the purely visual methods were and that possible difficulties with regard to writing or reading words even in a visual form like mind maps should have been anticipated for this research process. Thankfully the mind maps were made in pairs and the issue was identified, sensitively addressed and I believe there was not too stressful a situation. The mind maps were really a vehicle for focused dialogue and information sharing. No one person was isolated in this process and the participant group have very high levels of trust with each other.

Several times in the sessions different members of the group would say about the artwork we were making 'is this what you want?' or 'I hope you are getting what you need from this exercise'. In response I tried to reiterate that there was not a specific template in terms of the objects or images that we created and that this method of working was as new for me as a co researcher as it was for them. I would put the question back out to the group 'well is it working for you?' so that I believe members of the group could express a frank assessment of the arts based research activities if they felt uncomfortable or threatened in any way.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research procedures in this study; it expanded on theoretical concerns of chapter 2 when addressing the question of why chose arts based research and looked again at issues relating to the values of participatory action research. The chapter linked the methodology of participatory arts based research with the theoretical concerns advanced in chapter 2 through the discussion of Foucault's post-structuralist perspective on power-knowledge. The reader was given an overview of both the methodologies of arts based and participatory action research before the phased approach and the specific elements of the four research sessions were outlined in detail. Arts based research seems to be genuinely inclusive and allows each participant the freedom to make their own creative response to the research question. Ethical issues were discussed and possible difficulties outlined but overall there was a positive atmosphere of interchange, affirmation and sharing in these research sessions. This does not mean that the 'feel

good' factor was an end in itself and chapter 4 examines some of the critical aspects to the interpretation of the material produced during this research process.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

“The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.”

Martin Heidegger

Putting the sense of images into words is a difficult and at times awkward activity, the knowledge contained within visual material is often not clear cut, certain or immediately accessible. As Berger (1972) argues the relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled. Weber believes that “for most people, the integration of the visual in daily life is a taken-for-granted unexamined part of living and not a subject of systematic inquiry or an articulated part of scholarly methods” (Weber, 2008, pp. 41-42). Semiotics has developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a scholarly study into the meaning and multi dimensional plural nature of images and signs. Semiotics invites the reader of images to analyse and decode the image in order to unlock the polysemic levels of meaning and significance related to its creation, its material and formal qualities, its relations to other signs, and its reception and circulation by audiences. Barthes (1977, 1990) writing amounts to an intense semiotic engagement with texts, images (primarily photographic), objects, fashion, food and toys. He distinguishes two main levels for the consideration of signs, the denotative and the connotative. The denotative relates to the dominant cultural approach to meaning in Western society, it is literal, dictionary orientated, objective, and the locus of the norm. Barthes asserts that the forces of centralisation, of science, of the law, of official discourse, seek to bind “all the meanings of a text in circle around the hearth of denotation” (Barthes, 1990, p. 7).

In other essays, Barthes identifies an even simpler way of understanding this distinction in that “the literal image is *denoted* and the symbolic image *connoted*” (Barthes, 1998, p. 73). What Barthes, writing in the post '68 ideological atmosphere of France, was more interested in mining was the connotative dimension to texts, images and signs, here we see a re-emergence of counter enlightenment sentiments that seek to give value to the

plurality of meaning contained in images, chance meanings, alternative knowledges, occluded voices, everything outside of the dictionary. "Connotation corrupts the purity of communication [it is] in short a countercommunication" (Barthes, 1990, p.9). This countercommunication explicitly links with the concept of counterpower in Foucault's work as outlined in the previous chapter.

Prosser summarises the widespread belief that working with images in social or educational research was no more than "a pleasant distraction to real (i.e. word orientated) work that constituted 'proper' research" (Prosser, 1998, p. 98). As presented in chapter 3 when discussing Prosser, there are difficult issues when approaching visual based research material. For example, if we are to have a full exegesis of the images how will we ever encompass the span of their meaning? How does meaning get into the image? If the image is the retelling of a narrative/testimony what is the structure of the narrative/conversation? Do images have beginnings and endings? Do they have rules like rhetoric and grammar? Do they have ways in and ways outs? Why is there a general vague conception that the image is resistant to meaning? Why is there a worry that we might be reading too much into an image, excessively projecting too much meaning? All of these concerns flow from an anxiety about the inadequacies of the denotative level in approaching images and their insubmissive qualities. Barthes proposes a solution to keep the pressures of denotation in check and that is to approach the hermeneutic task almost in slow motion, in a step by step pace focusing "neither wholly on the image nor wholly analysis; it is, finally in the very writing of the commentary, a systematic use of digression and thereby a way of observing the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven" (Barthes, 1990, p. 13). Barthes was not new in this desire and exponents of post-structuralist thought in France looked back to texts like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Finnegans Wake and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, novels built "on a systematic use of digression" and the desire to capture the untidy dispersion of living thoughts. As Eagleton unsympathetically remarks,

In writing, the tyranny of structural meaning could be momentarily ruptured and dislocated by a free play of language; and the writing/reading subject could be released from the straitjacket of a single identity into an ecstatically diffused self.



results were often tentative and provisional, a stage in a process rather than an end result. There is, to borrow from Aumont (cited in Gibbons 2009) a fragile objective basis and a large degree of projection involved in interpreting the work made. As research data they will always remain uncertain, open, even puzzling, what Barthes calls “an agglutination of symbols” (Barthes, 1998, p.70). Interpretation of the data rests on object analysis, aesthetic evaluation, projection and veridical speculation, inter-textuality and the memory of social engagements/encounters. As Barthes asserts,

the present task (in science, linguistics economics, and sociology) is less to be sure of the main principles than to be able to describe imbrications, relays, returns, additions, exceptions, paradoxes, ruses: a task which very quickly becomes a combative one, since it comes to grips with a henceforth reactionary force: reduction (Barthes, 1985, p. 102).

In terms of all of the above approaches, the visual material created invites serious interpretation on both denotative and connotative levels around the research questions of campus community interaction. The fruits of this arts based inquiry awakens and stimulates visual curiosity and are visually satisfying in that they were created by people with creative art skills. Like Freirean codifications, they draw out generative themes from the participants / spectators. Furthermore, the images can capture latent contradictions, an immediate reaction, reveal an unexpected affinity, or present an accidental revelation. The visual record of these memorable meetings in the Southend family resource centre are thinking and doing simultaneously. Each of the activities was an immersive activity of concentration that stimulated a different sense of awareness of one’s environment and the people who were sharing the environment. The body language of arts based research is completely different to formal interviewing, surveying or focus groups. If we understand reflection as a noun primarily associated with an image thrown back from a non-absorbing surface, then these coded works created over four weeks are reflections on the research question about campus community dialogue and the road map of the possible new collaborative journeys between the art school and the community organisation. I will be analysing the visual material on many levels in this chapter but primarily I want to reflect on campus community exchange and seek the basis for an action plan for the academic year of 2009/10

The text, Barthes announces, 'is [...] that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political father.' (Eagleton, 1983, p.141).

In a challenge to academia, Barthes proposes a writerly dissertation that avoids structuring the text excessively. Writing may have the appearance of a stable and well-defined structure but I would argue that transcripts of interviews and other forms of textual recordings of qualitative research are not bounded entities with clear deliverable content; they can be just as full of discontinuity as the image. The prejudice against images rests on something deeper and remains outside of the scope of this thesis. Historically, observation may once have been the foundation of empirical Western science but now observation is recognised (by a maths orientated science at least) to be at best partial and always subject to the vagaries of physiology and the distortions of psychology. In addition where the eye could not see, culturally determined visual metaphors stepped in. As Lévi-Strauss argues when dealing with observation,

we are dealing with a shifting reality, perpetually exposed to the attacks of the past that destroys it and of a future that changes it. For every instance recorded in written form, there are obviously many others unknown to us; and we are only too pleased with the samples and scraps at our disposal (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 3).

For the semiotician Peirce, partiality was something of a principle and he caused controversy by proposing guessing as tool to find the truth, he wrote, "we often derive from observation strong intimations of the truth, without being able to specify what were the circumstances we had observed which conveyed those intimations" (Peirce cited in Sebok and Sebok, 1988, p.18). In the context of education research, the inquiry paradigm has traditionally privileged not only the positivist approach but also a written research text that is individualist and verifiable. As James argues, the reliance on writing above

or in addition to, all other forms is a corollary of the target driven, highly accountable climate of higher education in the UK, which insists of tangible evidence that proves reflection has happened and is explicitly captured (James, 2007, p. 16).

The techniques employed in this arts based research study of drawing, collage, clay modelling, and mind maps are unsophisticated and humble forms of creating images. The

While I do not want to underplay the social and discursive nature of the encounter between myself and my co researchers while engaged in making the arts based work, I want to in this chapter test whether the visual material in itself has a function or usefulness value in creating (new) insights about the research question. Traditionally within modernism, art was valorised precisely because of its uselessness, through its anti consumable qualities like hermetic meaning and abstract silences it distinguished itself from propaganda and advertising. But these sessions never set out to make art with a capital A, instead, each of the participants knew that we were trying to use creative skills to start a process of exchange and dialogue. As Cole and Knowles remark, “the central purpose of art-informed research is knowledge advancement through research, not the production of fine art works. Art is a medium through which research purposes are achieved” (Cole and Knowles, 2008, p.66). We know the images created in this research are formed *a priori* by the research questions, and that the signification of the images have a large degree of intentionality. I would argue that the work produced delivers in terms of what was attempted, but that will come later in the chapter 5.

### **Analysing the drawings from Session 1**

Rose (2007) presents a useful set of questions for analysing visual images in a research process such as was conducted the Family Resource Centre. Rose identifies three stages for the analysis of visual material:

1. The production of the image
2. The image itself
3. The reception of the image

In a structured way Rose drawing on semiotics, psychoanalysis and discourse theory, identifies specific questions for each site, she provides a long, eclectic yet comprehensive set of questions aimed at engaging in researchers a sense of visual literacy and sharpening their analysis skills. Crucially Rose adopts tenets of British cultural studies theory in that the greatest number of questions relate to audiencing. While some of her terminology about concepts like the genre of an image, or genre characteristics, seem naive and undefined. I think the overall spread of the questions are a good introduction to visual analysis. Rose is not avoiding the more post-structuralist and semiotic approaches in

terms of, power and disempowerment, what is visible as well as invisible, said and unsaid and her questions try to embrace the uncertain, contradictory, polysemic, and unstable qualities of images.

The research data analysis is divided into 4 sections corresponding with the four mornings where the group met and created images or objects. However, I will be cross-referencing between the sessions when provoked by the work. The first session was a very simple exercise in that each member of the group was asked to speak about an aspect of their life that has led them to this meeting. As the person spoke the rest of the group drew images to correspond to the narrative. After each of the five participants spoke we looked at all the images and briefly discussed some recurrent themes. The exercise was a good icebreaker but there were some deeper aspects to the activity that both raise problems for interpretation and stimulate reflection. The drawings were made on A3 or A2 white cartridge paper with oil pastel. These loose sketches are quite an interesting documentation of some of what was said. Collectively they addressed the main objective of the meeting which was to introduce each member of the group and address the research query about the relationship between the campus and community organisations like the Southend. In my opinion the drawings also reveal the value system of this group of activists based in the family resource centre. The narratives of their move from isolation to solidarity within the group become apparent and are embodied in the drawings. As a participant and researcher I can re-hear what was said almost like a synaesthesia effect.

The drawings are also tangible in terms of touch and the somatic energy of one's hands. They draw attention to what Irwin and Springgay describe as the "sensory experiences and knowledge that is interconnected with our bodies and with others" (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. 107). In essence education/community based research has to be a living-enquiry process, ongoing and open ended, Carson and Sumara discuss action research as a living practice (as cited in Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. 109). However as Irwin and Springgay point out just because an object was made by hand does not necessarily mean it contains embodied knowledge and that it is "dangerous to suggest

that the arts are more suited to embodied forms of learning and research” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. 108). Whereas I, as a participant in the group, can feel a presence and reconstruct memory from the images, to those outside the group this may all be either too slight or too exclusive.

Many of the 22 drawings made in the first session show the four women as a group of gendered stick figures; in a hieroglyphic sense we can see their journey as they embarked on establishing the Southend Centre. The figures appear grouped together on the page sometimes in groups of 2, 3 and 4. The multiplicity of stick figures and people in these drawings (they appear 110 times) emphasises, in my opinion the people centred mission and relational activities of the community centre. As B said in the dialogue, to be a participant in community development you have to be a people person, and have good people skills. Other common motifs on a denotative level across these drawings are buildings (43 times), doors or thresholds (32 times), steps or stairs (13 times, both the art school and the community centre have steps leading to their front doors), question marks (13 times), trees and plants (10 times), arrows ascending (12 times), roads or paths (9), and the sun without clouds (8 times). Less common but still a repeated presence were images of buildings with flat roofs (8 times), boats (7 times), arrows descending (6 times), water (6 times), chain links (5 times), bridges (4 times), footsteps (4 times), sun with clouds (3 times) and the combined symbol of the community centre building and the sun’s rays (2 times). Text is also an element in three of the participant’s drawings (A, B and E) with words like ‘community’ appearing 13 times and ‘college’ 4 times. Empowering words also appear like ‘voice’, ‘talk’, ‘share’, ‘links’, ‘achieve’, ‘welcome’, ‘caring’, ‘goal’, ‘growth’, ‘unity’, ‘learn’, ‘new’, and ‘dream’ as well as phrases like ‘brain storming is good’ and ‘small steps but good’. The women activists individually spoke of the empowerment they feel from the successful establishment and ongoing growth of the new centre and how they have embarked on a journey to give back to their community a better image of itself and a focus for positive change and development.

There was a divergence from positive feelings also displayed in the testimony and some more downbeat or negative symbols are visualised in the images. I recognise the trials of

both individuals and the debilitating forces to be overcome in order to achieve any change in our own lives or in the life of our communities in images like the closed door, or buildings with no door, flat roofed buildings, a castellated fortified building with the word 'college' on it, the isolated figure from a group, the sun partially covered by cloud, choppy water, a figure lying in bed with empty thought or speech bubbles above their head, and arrows pointing in two directions. Many of the images also present strong diagonals sometimes repeated across the page from bottom left to top right and correspond to the cultural codes of reading from left to right. Only one of the drawings employs something close to perspective.

Formally, many of the drawings have large and small symbols but unlike the language of advertising, scale does not necessarily correspond to importance, for example, human figures are presented in reduced scale to the buildings that surround them and footprints appear contradictorily larger than stick people. When members of the group spoke about the future plans to build a new bigger community centre with greater facilities it appears in B's drawings as a multi storied tower like building although still with a pitched roof. The sense that buildings occupy space, value and power and that bricks and mortar are signs of success comes clearly from these drawings. The property obsession and building boom of the recent decade in Ireland may be an influencing factor here. When drawings were made in response to my narrative B made a drawing of the college with no door or entrance and wrote the words 'no door' under the words 'active education'.

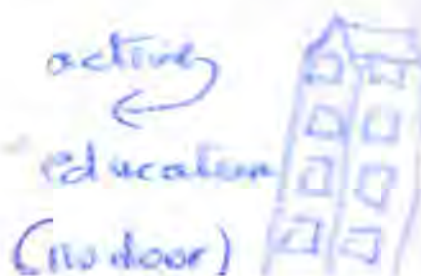


Fig.1 Detail of B's Drawing in response to testimony by E

As an exercise with students on the community based learning module, I asked the class to draw a community centre and to just visualise the first image that comes into their

head. The clear majority of students including myself drew a building with a flat roof. The significance we thought at the time was that often community centres are confused with state buildings, and perhaps were extensions or temporary. It revealed a lot to the class about how little we knew about community centres. For example until I visited the Southend family resource centre I had never stepped into a grass roots community centre and I would never have visualised a modern apartment as the centre.

Of the seven features that Eisner and Barone (1997) identify in arts based educational research one feature stands out in relation to this session and that is: the personal signature of the researcher. I found that my first day on the job as an educational researcher was to step out of my own personal shell, engage in intersubjective listening and largely non-verbal dialogue with a group of strangers. It was to see research as a process in which to visualise an other's experience and at the same time have the other's gaze returned. It was a challenging starting point in the sense of trying something new, the activity itself was enjoyable and brought the transient, inchoate yet personal signatures of the researchers together. Arts based research facilitated trust and comfort into the group because we were all participating and the dichotomy between analyst and analysand was weakened. We connected through creative ways of knowing that I feel empowers each of the participants. For example one particular drawing by C (fig. 2) was made as she spoke and it is an intriguing visual image as the line freely flows in a rhythm to speech. Reading it from left to right the stages of the story are marked in circular marks, the lines almost like nascent stick figures whose lives connect while flowing in unconscious curves and trails.

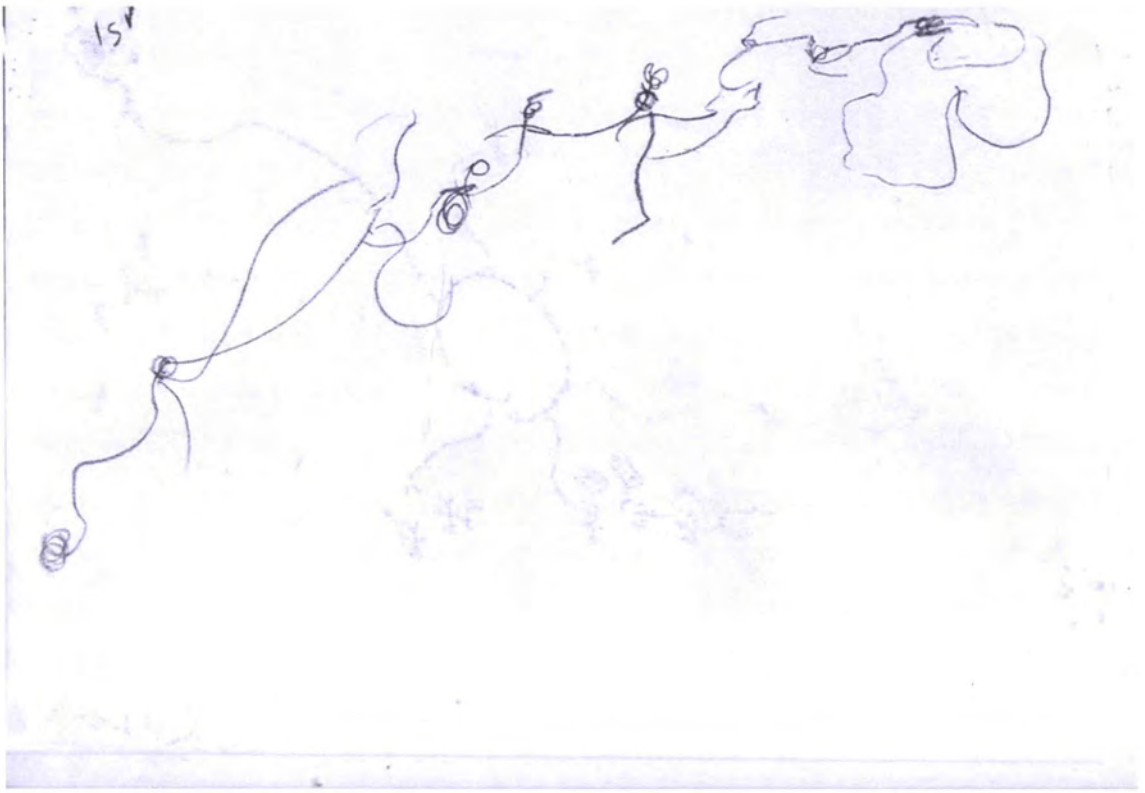


Fig.2 C's Journey reflection by C



## Evaluating the collages from Session 2

Collage can afford a greater vocabulary than other mediums because it made from fragments, it starts as something disassembled and is laid down on the page like a constellation. Heuristically it can establish interrelationships between heterogeneous images in an efficient manner. As a strategy for arts based educational research Butler-Kisber asserts its value as: “the ambiguity that remains present in collage provides a way of expressing the said and the unsaid, and allows for multiple avenues of interpretation” (Butler-Kisber, 2008, p. 268). For the second session I asked the group to create a metaphorical 2-D visual bridge between the community centre and the art school through collage, I also asked them to consider what the bridge was spanning. The images to make the collage were from a collection of illustrated magazines from the Guardian newspaper’s Saturday glossy magazine edition. There were approximately 100 illustrated pages. I also included some coloured paper and explained that there were no hard and fast rules so that writing and drawing could be included if they seemed appropriate. Again like with the drawings from the previous week, the images can be read from left to right and there is a strong diagonal structure in all of the women activist’s work. The collage by E is quite different from the others in that it places the art school on the left hand side reflecting the perspective that I was coming from. This image is also on a white background whereas the other participant’s use strong primary colours as a background. The collages by A, B and D all have the sun on the upper left hand side. The images with the strongest diagonals by A, B and C have fused a progress narrative onto the bridge where the journey is literally about ascending upwards across the page to the college on the top right hand side. In a sense the theme of a journey spilled over from the progress narratives of the previous week.

The campus is depicted as a sky light above a snow bound cosy home beside the acrostic style word ‘welcome’ and a cut out goal in A, a futuristic building with revolving floors overlapped by a nurturing set of hands beside the words ‘I’m free’ and a business man in suit in B, and an oyster, igloo and mirror in C. This latter juxtaposition could be a compound metaphor for opportunity, self-reflection and travel associated with higher

education. If cross referenced with the snowy porch of A and the cupped hands sheltering the chicks, the metonym of shelter and security in further education becomes apparent. Higher education could be seen as an imagined elevated utopian destination. Intertextually this does contradict some of the more negative and quite specific images of the Wexford Campus in the drawings of session 1. The campus as a site is positioned away from the bridge in D's collage and the bridge spans 2 quite similar spaces in terms of the depiction of a woman in distress. In D's work there is a confusing juxtaposition of a passive cheetah above a buckled bridge about to collapse. This image provokes a sense of detached critical observation, college may not be all that it seems from the other more 'positive' collages. In our discussion at the end of the session, I do not remember D making a specific contribution on this point in explaining her image, however I do remember that B identified the man in the suit at the entrance to her state of the art campus as a controlling authority figure: the man with the money. To paraphrase B's observation; there is always a man with the money who says what can and cannot be done. Financial considerations were identified in the discussion as a major barrier to higher education. Money appears in the collages of C and D. It is very dominant in C with the piggy banks and money box, the pigs eyes look at the viewer and are echoed in the eyes of the young man in the mirror, there are 2 pigs and 2 men, the mirror on high can also crack. The child's piggy banks and the nostalgic image of children playing hula hoop are grounded while directly above them flying in the top left of the image is a drawn bird dropping valuable 'love bombs'. Money appears hidden, bad to handle and associated with light bulbs in D. This light bulb image contrasts with the more joyful positive tone of the bulb in B's collage.

An awareness that came to me participating with the group and pooling our ideas about education was that the Southend family resource centre was already a centre of education. It was place of education where the distinction and disjunction between teacher and student was blurred and where learning or change is not standardised or measured quantitatively. Community development and community education are of course dynamically interlinked. Consider the legacy of Freire and how education can possess the possibility of transformative value when it owned by the participants and their self-

motivation to overcome oppression. My co researchers were confident in speaking about learning through doing, active learning and participatory learning. With this knowledge I can understand that the imagined images of education are part and parcel of their ambition and dream to develop their own space (of freedom) even further. In other words what was visualised was not a neutral higher education campus it was their campus. This does not settle all the contradictions of these images.

Smith-Shank (2007) outlines the concept of *Umwelten* as a way of engaging with new pedagogic forms of semiotic based epistemology. *Umwelten* refers to a relational understanding of one's environment not as something separate from, or outside of, living people. Smith-Shank quotes Deely's 1993 definition as "the environment selectively reconstituted and organized according to the specific needs and interests of the individual organism constitutes an Umwelt" (Deely cited in Smith-Shank, 2007, p. 229). For the semiotician working with images, education departs from the transmission model to "an activity in which teachers actively help students become aware of the ways in which cultures code knowledge" (Smith-Shank, 2007, p. 230). I find the concept of *Umwelten* pertinent to the de-coding of these collages and the complex changing environment that they represent. Bridges might be traditionally viewed as permanent structures joining two sides of an expanse, but the bridges of these collages are dense and fluid, teeming with arbitrary, intricate, and specific images and signs. In our discussion after this session what emerged was a strong sense of grounded community based knowledge built up by women who although knowing many of the pitfalls were not afraid to dream or share their dreams. Take for example the clear reference in the collage by B that there are followers and leaders in the specific community context, a reference that could be uncomfortable to the participatory ethic of community activism. Like the drawings of session 1 the surfeit of meaning pours out of these works and when coupled with the shared discussions, the research artefacts make tangible the emancipatory and transformative concept of 'I am a student of life'. For Smith-Shank "unlimited semiosis is the process of lifelong learning" (Smith-Shank 2007, p. 226).

Gosse (2008, p. 184) takes up an argument of Barone (1995) and Cole and Knowles

(2001) that a core goal of arts based and arts informed educational research is to contribute to a much need bridge between the academy and the public. D's collage (fig. 3) focuses my attention in this regard because it is less orthodox and less conventional in that it does not provide an easy two sided, binary story. There was no real campus community exchange up to the point I contacted the centre to conduct some research and into this absence D's collage proposes no beginning, middle or end. The collage is not a story and nor is it nonsense, the bridge structure is there, the water flows fiercely beneath, tears and a single shoe are also in the water. While there are many levels to look at this image, consider the use and symbolism of colour, deep red and pale blue co-exist and possibly balance each other. The small but dominant amounts of yellow make a strong sense of contrast to the blue bridge structure, yellow is strength (the sun) but also weakness and fear (the female figure in yellow covering her face). If the place of yellow and blue are reversed I think a different a reading would come through. Blue suggests a sense of positive energy and expanse (mixed with the unknown; *into* and *out of* the blue, the blue planet), it reaches over our heads and flows in rivers and currents. There is no blue in the images of sadness, depression and distress in the collage, blue and purple are the spectrum of change, the blue ladder a form of ascent. This blue has also UN references with the canoeist's helmet and the cut out elements of the bridge look like figures, maybe soldiers in a line. I feel it can be argued that there is a redemptive value in the use of colour in this collage and that this image reinforces the positive testimony of the change the community centre has brought about in the lives of the women, new links with the centre seem to offer potential for more progressive change.



Fig.3 D's Bridge Collage

### **Mind mapping in Session 3**

The process of doing an arts based inquiry provided the group with the opportunity to discuss the images made, the research question, but also to digress on to other related avenues and themes generated from their own personal lives and work at the centre. Although I felt close to Freirean/Bartean framework I did not fully anticipate that these discussions could be so rich a source of knowledge. In the initial meeting of the team, I suggested (and it was assented to by the group) that maybe we could record the discussions and each week I brought audio-visual equipment. Having had experiences in the past where the atmosphere of emerging interpersonal trust changes with the presence of recording devices, my intuition told me not to use this option in this first steps level inquiry, it is though something to maybe consider for future co-investigation sessions, although with caution. The point of this arts based inquiry was not to write a Masters thesis (where I, as privileged researcher, extract and represent the knowledge gained as data) rather, it was to seek new links, interactions, and understandings within the group and outwards between the community organisation and the campus. After each meeting I wrote notes and tried to clarify some paths for progress to an action plan. My notes looked something like a mind map as I laid out the various thoughts and memories sparked by the fast pace of the participant's contributions.

By week three I felt we should try to balance a tangible, more explicit approach rather than more implicit or subjective aspects to the research inquiry. While Eisner and Barone (1997) identified the presence of ambiguity as another of the seven features of arts based research, Eisner(2008) later becomes more mindful about the tensions created by research that feels comfortable with ludic play on the connotative plane. He wonders whether "the images made through arts-based research possess a sufficient degree of referential clarity to engender a common understanding of the situation being addressed, or is a common understanding of the situation through arts-based research an inappropriate expectation?" (Eisner, 2008, p. 19-20). Coming to terms with such dilemmas and reflecting on some of the theoretical concerns around post-structuralist thought within an interpretivist paradigm, I decided to use mind maps made collaboratively by the group to be the

creative activity to reach a stage from which problem posing scenarios could be clarified and practical plans to address these could be made. Mind maps are a visual arrangement of words that often radiate out from a central conceptual concern through arrows, boxes, bubbles and lines. The webs produced represent a kind of orality with words in speech bubbles. Mind maps, as word pictures, can also show the evolution of an idea or practice, its history and mind mapping is more generative than reductive. Mind maps can also probe the group to co-produce more spontaneous ideas or creative concepts.

My initial plan for the session was to spend time at the start focusing on language, how it can be distorted and abused before making the word maps. I had hoped that word play or a nuanced approach to multiple interpretations of words might come through the mind mapping activity. Partly, on my mind were the distortions taking place in the media in relation to the banking crisis of late 2008. I brought to the session two full page advertisements in the Irish Times (16/2/09, p. 5 and p. 7) one from AIB thanking the readers for the state guarantee and bail out with the heading 'You've made a commitment to us. We're making a commitment to you.' and one from ICTU with the heading 'There is a better, fairer way.' The two ads simply contradicted each other and as such, could be seen as a textual problem posing codification in Freirean terms or as an exercise in the language and discourse of power. This approach was, I have to admit quite unsuccessful, and the banking crisis was too overwhelming just to look at in terms of the use of text. So I abandoned the analysis of language and proceeded with a simpler method of clarifying and brainstorm ideas with mind mapping.

Three mind maps were completed, two relate to the plans by the centre to develop an area of public ground into a sensory garden and to use a long concrete wall as space for murals made by a cross section of the community. The third mind map focuses on art education classes that the team of women provide to the local primary school. This local school is of pivotal importance to the community and the adult education classes held there provided the context for the development of the Southend Family Resource Centre. The focus of the maps came to ground common ideas as to how art students on the Community based learning module could fit with the needs and plans of the centre. The

discussion around the maps allowed me to clarify that my third year students lack quite a lot of skills in terms of community involvement, people skills, as well as technical skills. The majority would not be able to take a leadership role in relation to the work of the centre and also could not work unsupervised. This was common sense to me but I felt the group had higher expectations as to what a third year degree student can do.

Looking back on the research I feel the mind maps were something of a short cut that closed off the more imaginative avenues of the other sessions. The process is a little too rational and utilitarian although it did serve to record some of the issues associated with the real world of possible collaboration and exchange. The drawing of a woman and 2 children that is positioned in the centre of mind map 1 (fig. 4 ) seems to visually represent the origin of all of the ideas and words and somehow its isolation seems to reflect back to the riches of the original drawing project of session 1. Mothers and children are at the heart of the community centre but their presence is not at heart of the more traditional note-taking educational model of the mind map which implies students, assignments and teachers. In essence it depends on the group of co-researchers one is collaborating with, our group managed well with the task and the 3 maps were a good resource for the action plan. Although functional and productive, part of me regretted using the technique both on an aesthetic level and in relation to issues to do with literacy as mentioned in chapter 3. Looking at an alternative method or seeking ways to adapt the form could be a useful future inquiry. The session also taught me that problem posing codifications need to be chosen with more care.





Fig.4 Detail of Mind Map 1 relating to Community Wall project

#### Working with clay modelling in Session 4

Coming from a sculptural background (although rarely working with clay modelling), I felt that clay modelling could have potential as a versatile arts based inquiry material/method. One of the women in the group had experience of working with clay in community workshops on trust and listening. The group had also spoke of working with a local artist who used clay found in the Southend area to make a relief wall of hands with clients of the centre. In my research I had encountered the use of clay in the arts based work of Bingham and Walsh (2005). I also felt that clay might open different eidetic images, intuitive ideas, or physical emotions because the technique is about transforming form, it is unavoidably tactile, object orientated and can be meditative. Unlike drawing and painting, sculpture invites both the creator and viewer to consider the work 'in the round', from many perspectives. Wittgenstein (1988) made famous the differentiation of *seeing* and *seeing as* or the displacement at the heart of our perception (as modes of experience under constant erasure). In three-dimensional terms does the same precluding happen with *touching* and *touching as*?

Clay responds to touch and touch is trigger for empathy, empathy as Arendt (1968 cited in Siegesmund and Cahnmann-Taylor 2008, p. 40) observed, constructs communities based on caring and aesthetics. Moulding form also has, at best, an ambiguous educational connotation where young minds are trained in the traditional classroom. A more progressive use of sculpture is found in the work of Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed which utilises a method of sculpture theatre for working with groups where participants sculpt their bodies and the bodies of others (Boal 2002). Again like in the previous sessions I asked the group to reflect on the relationship between the art school/ Wexford Campus and the community. Again, there were no rules in how to work with the clay, I provided a glass plate for each participant to build the work on, modelling tools, and coloured lollipop sticks to strengthen the constructions.

Again the images of the door/threshold, the journey and the bridge all figure in the clay work. The metaphor of the door clearly addresses in my opinion the lack of contact or

engagement between the art school and community groups/centres such as the Southend. The door becomes a metaphor for a lack of contact or engagement. In two of the clay sculptures, B and E, there is a representation of a key, in the discussion at the end of the session, B spoke about the lack of trust and the issue of trust in any new relationship. The key represented an opportunity but an opportunity that might threaten the successful model of development that had emerged organically from the ground up in the Southend centre. From my perspective as E, I included the key and the door but through the prism of Alice in Wonderland, in that the door was getting smaller the key larger. It echoed the concerns of B in that I felt the expectations of the transformation through education might not be realised in the current pedagogical climate of higher education. The ethos of the centre is embodied in the social, in family, it is child and people centred, it cares and educates senior citizens and other marginal groups in a close knit location of Wexford town, this ethos is in marked contrast to the individualist ethos of higher education and it's ever increasing pressures of commercialisation. In the binary metaphors that emerge in these sculptures the word 'community' appears in A's sculpture on the opposite side of the divide with the word 'college'. The divide looks like a compound image of a bridge, and a barrier. D's work on the other hand includes the names of the different spaces but chooses to accentuate the word 'home'. B sets college and the community centre apart and reflects that the community centre is being built block by block whereas the college looks ramshackle, held together with ropes.

Williams (1988) in his definition of the word community borrows from Tonnies and his distinction between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to reflect on how complex an interpretation of the term now is. The interaction and confusion between *gemeinschaft* (familial, personal bonds, collective identity) and *gesellschaft* (civil, institutional, individualist and competitive) is according to Williams a feature of contemporary community. Both the Southend and the Wexford campus are funded by the state, a plaque outside the Southend acknowledges the official opening of the centre in 2008 by a government minister. The creation of family resource centres is state policy under the National Development Plan. The word family has particular connotations in state discourses and bureaucracy, how those discourses are brought to bear on the centre could

be a fruitful area to reflect on in future arts based inquiry. The clay sculptures attest to both clarity and confusion in approaching the relationships between the campus and the community.

An important element of A, B and D's sculptures was the inclusion of boats and elements of the local landscape, rocks and trees. The boats are quite static in A and B's work but particularly intriguing in D's where she imagines the boatmen or boat women with hands like oars and hats on their heads see fig 5 . The reference is to the local environment by the sea and a rowing club in the Southend. The boat and its rowers are coming into the story passing alongside a building marked 'school' and possibly heading for the waving or excited figures on an island in front of the imposing façade of the college. There is a strong link represented between the local school and the centre and the history of this connection was outlined during the mind mapping of session 3.



Fig. 5 Detail of D's clay sculpture



Fig.6 Detail of rowers



Fig.7 Detail of figures on the island

An inference can be drawn from both the spatial positioning and the body language of both couples. The rowers are possibly treading water while the castaways are signalling for attention in front of their new horizon, higher education.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I hope the reader can appreciate the process of interpreting fledgling arts based educational research. I accept that I placed myself in the privileged position of being the principal interpreter but I hope I conveyed how these interpretations are linked to the real and tangible discussions within the group. In other words this chapter tried to echo the reflections in action as the sessions were unfolding as well as reflections on action which were more deliberative and removed. Out of this research I fabricated an action plan for the coming year and the plan is attached to this thesis as an appendix. The plan contains some interpretation of the material produced. While I will discuss the plan in more detail in the subsequent chapter, I feel it is worth repeating from chapter 3 that during discussions relating to the plan with the group I proposed that we should try more arts based research sessions in the coming year, the response was favourable and supportive.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

To conclude this thesis it is important to look at the intent of the central research question. In what ways, if any, might a collaborative arts based inquiry process facilitate a third level art and design college and a grassroots community development organisation to engage in reciprocal exchanges and a process of critical reflection on possible future relationships? This thesis looked at the outcomes of a preliminary meeting, four creative sessions, a visit to the college by the co-researchers and a feedback meeting focusing on an action plan (see Appendix 2). Considering that a detailed action plan was created indicates that a process of further exchange and dialogue is set to come about. This action plan will provide several students on the community based learning module with a very strong learning environment for practicing their citizenship skills. The reciprocal exchanges that took place allowed for an honest engagement and I felt privileged to have been accepted into the group and to have shared ideas about making education more relevant to society. For the specific issues relating to the Wexford Campus School of Art and Design and its building of bridges with the community development sector, I believe there is a lot of untapped potential in this methodology.

The visual research methodologies I chose, drawing, collage, mind maps, and clay modelling were influenced by research conducted in Canada by Walsh (2007). The methodologies were to help the research team follow a set plan and also to be a catalyst for productive discussions on possible overlaps and partnership ideas. As repeatedly observed in this thesis traditional higher education has never cared to understand image based knowledge in any particular detail, with any sort of specificity. Images join a list of many elements excluded from the narrow epistemology of the university. Like the arts they are nonessential and peripheral to the technical rationality of professional knowledge. This position of image based research is slowly changing but I would not be expecting a significant paradigm shift into the future. For now the principal conclusion of this study would be that arts based research is a valuable methodology for engaging with

organisations such as the Southend family resource centre. My co-investigators and collaborators at the centre also felt that it would be useful with other similar organisations. Within the field of service or community based learning this approach is novel and I was unable to find a similar research study.

I am however more than satisfied with the visual art based research material that was produced. For a first time research cycle I think they are of a high standard and I invite the reader to examine the complete range of work in appendix 1. I accept however that the mind maps in Session 3 were not as successful as the other methodologies. Making art works encourages ownership of the creative process, ownership of being spontaneous, of allowing thinking and doing to work together. It is a particularly effective way of sharing and exploring knowledge by trying to do the same tasks. The group of women from the Southend family resource centre were comfortable working through arts based techniques (even though the process was unpredictable) because it was something familiar to them and they had previous empowering encounters in working creatively. There was no prerequisite training required for these arts based research sessions. In short, art was something they enjoyed and these emotions are clearly seen in the art material produced. Through out the sessions there was an increasing sense of confidence as repeated symbols re-emerged and as meaning became more focused.

The sense of the positive experiences of active community work is very strong in the material created, the role of the team, of trust and friendship come across in nearly all the work. The success of the centre and the many aspects of its 'caring and sharing' work are clearly and proudly visible. The Southend is really a centre of learning without the traditional roles of students and teachers. The welcoming and sunny ethos of the centre is clearly stated. The ambition of creating the new centre also becomes clearly represented. The new centre looks big with several floors in some of the images. All the way through, the work created presents itself as a process and part of a journey, there is no real beginning or end to this story and I like the way the images reflect that. The images also reflect place and the immediate local environment of the sea, terraced housing and the



Rocks. Men were curiously absent from most of the images and this perhaps reflects their traditional lack of involvement in grass roots community education.

The work generated in the four sessions and reproduced in appendix 1 of this thesis testifies to a process of critical reflection. In particular chapter four makes a close reading of the many images that reveal subtle and easily overlooked elements relating to the divide between the campus and the community organisation, the dream of higher education as an imagined place of freedom, and the reality of the financial pressures in attending full time education. The theoretical framework for this research question is based on the theories and ethos of participatory action research, Freirean critical pedagogy, Kester's dialogical aesthetics and post-structuralist hermeneutics. In other words I take a constructivist stance and assume that individuals and groups are positioned at the intersections of socially constructed and often agonistic discourses and representations. I also assume that institutions are not politically neutral and stress the importance of Foucault's critique of power/knowledge. A critical reflection that came out in this study was the realisation that like the art college the family resource centre is state funded and linked to state policy for the Wexford area. Following a poststructuralist position I assume that the text is also not neutral and that it structures subjectivity in significant ways. Collaborative arts based research is conceived as a way of working through some of these theoretical concerns. It is however only a start and with luck and more funding I hope to revisit in a subsequent round of arts based research sessions with the research team.

A key dimension to positive conclusions about arts based research is that involves the outside researcher to actively create along with the research participants. Collins suggests that in adult learning though

an understanding of theoretical constructions is important to any serious vocational endeavour, it is more efficacious to think in terms of engaging thoughtfully with theory and, then, putting *ourselves* into practice rather than putting theory into practice (cited in Foley, 2004, p.68).

By putting myself into practice I felt that I was interrupting the standard existing power relations of educational research. As Schön argues,

There are splits between teaching and doing which makes it true for most of us who are teachers that what we teach is not what we do, and what we do is not what we teach. There are splits between research and practice, which means that the thing we call 'research' is divorced from, and even divergent from, the actual practice in which we engage (Schön, 1987, p.5).

However I am still mindful of how power can seduce into believing that campus community dialogue is essentially a good thing. While the benefits of further education were clearly symbolised in the visual research, an important conclusion from this study came with the realisation that my co-researchers were all community educators and leaders and that the foundations of their knowledge was so well grounded and people centred, that they articulated a nervousness at becoming engaged with the Wexford Campus built on the standard liberal values of higher education. In other words they knew they had a successful model of living inquiry, social capital and strategies for development in the centre. I hoped their visit to our studios showed that there was still some room left for creativity and informal debate in higher education. And yet I recognise from the researchers visit that many of the art students have weak social skills especially in terms of community-mindedness and dealing with social difference. There is a huge responsibility to honesty in participatory research and many things were said that has not been recounted in this thesis because of an ethical agreement around confidentiality.

## **Recommendations**

There is no one linear path for pursuing the objective of greater sharing and exchange between the Wexford Campus School of art and design and the Southend Family Resource Centre. This thesis and the work that it records is no more than a starting point. Future research will be derived from this action research cycle and will hopefully in turn be followed by further cycles of questioning, imagining and theorising. In terms of this initial cycle the first action plan focuses on five key ideas that came from the research and these were

1. A new collaboration with the centre in relation to students volunteering to work with the research team teaching art to primary school children.
2. A new collaboration with the centre to have students work with the team on the creation of new wall murals in the park and in the local primary school.
3. A new journey for myself as a volunteer to the centre to work as an assistant on various projects over the year.
4. A new round of arts based research sessions to deepen the collaboration, mutual learning and identify new ideas for the development of the centre.
5. A new effort to improve the campus community exchange in relation to the art school to encourage more people from the community to visit, hold public events in the building above and beyond the annual degree shows. This coming year 2 events are planned so far Culture Night and Snakes and Ladders, a lot more could be done in this area

Over the coming year I expect there to be significant advances in working through and sharing ideas, so that students and the research team tackle new horizons on the local level. Hopefully it will contribute to a greater sense of a language of collective citizenship. In terms of educational research this thesis may sit somewhat isolated from the conventional assumptions about social research. However, new publications like the Sage Handbook of the arts in qualitative research (2008) have provided me with a greater sense of confidence in adopting arts-based conversations to improve campus community dialogue. I feel motivated to take this research approach further and in a sense this is another action that the thesis has started. The experience of research has been rich, memorable and provoked new ideas while the writing of the thesis has clarified different elements that contribute to arts based research. I hope this is evident to the reader.

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## Appendix 1

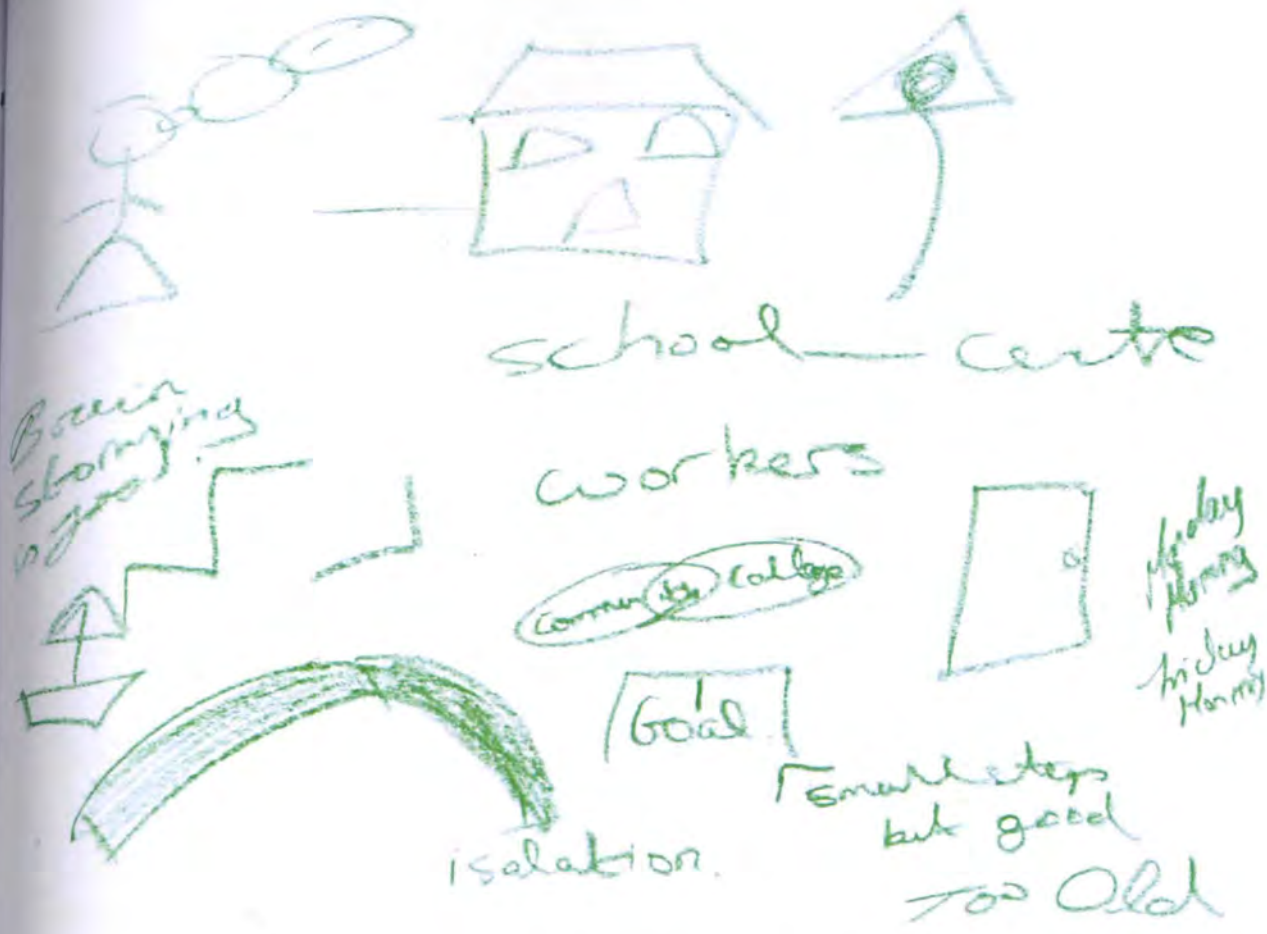
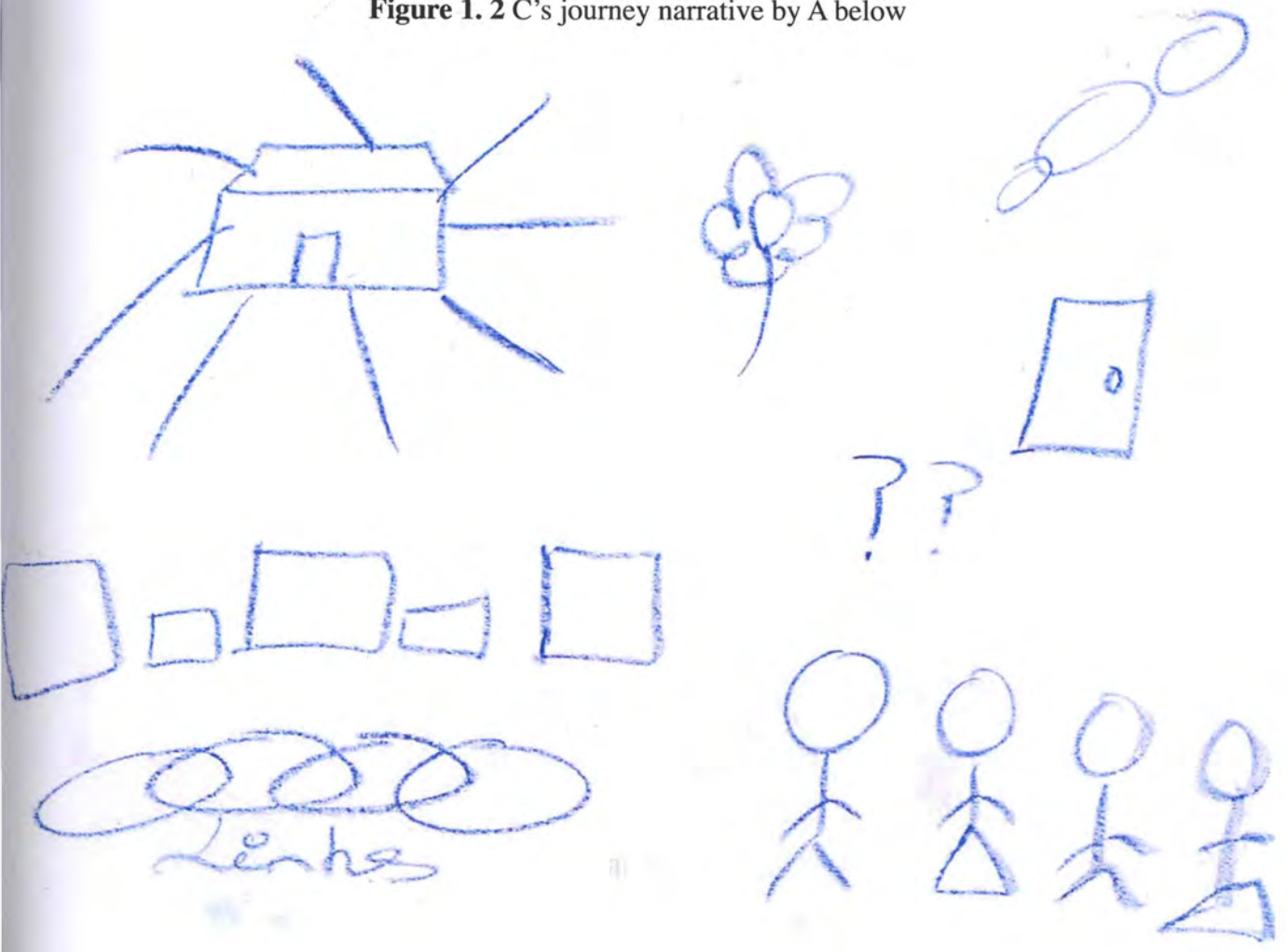


Figure 1.1 B's journey narrative by A above  
 Figure 1. 2 C's journey narrative by A below



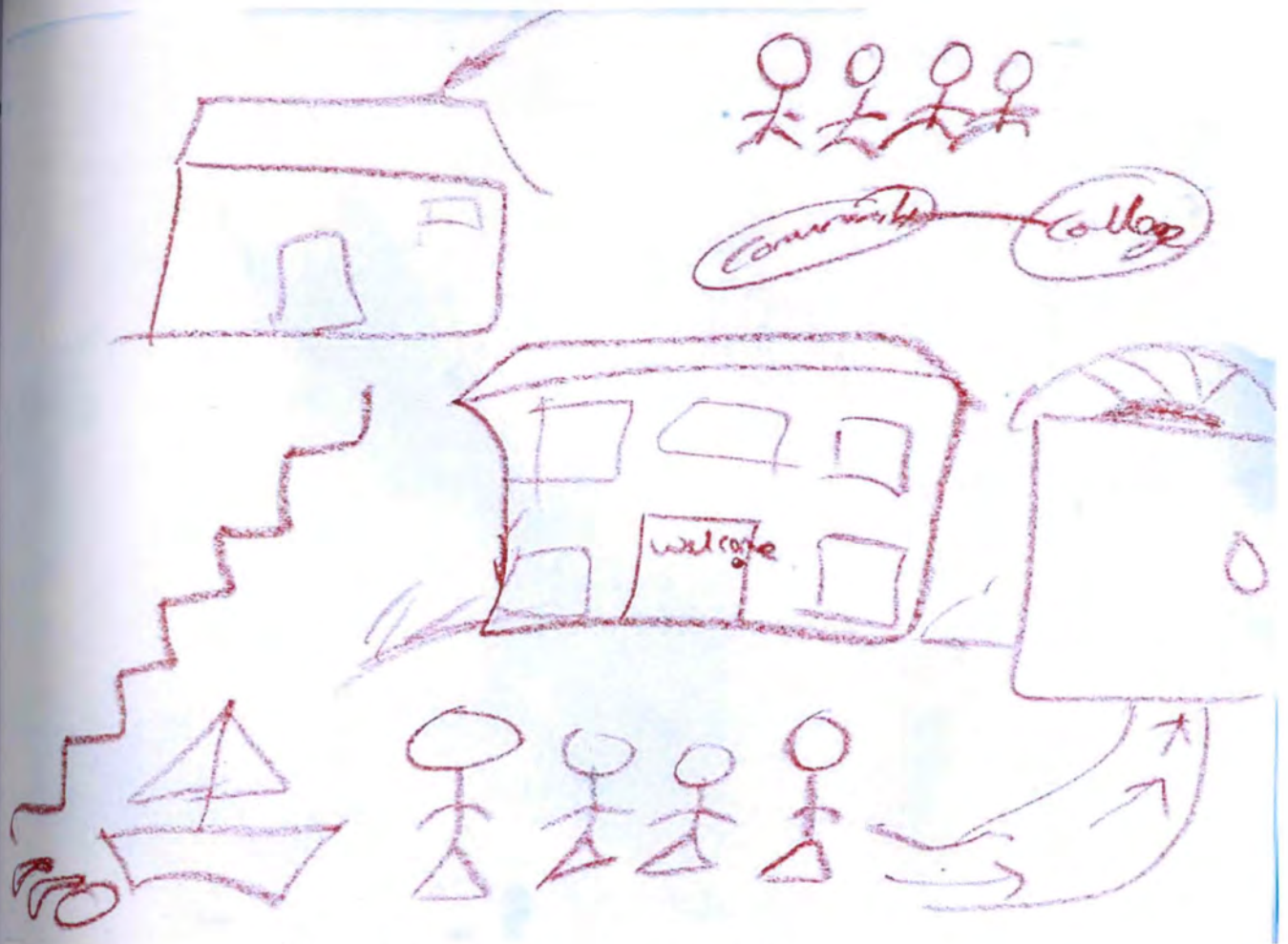
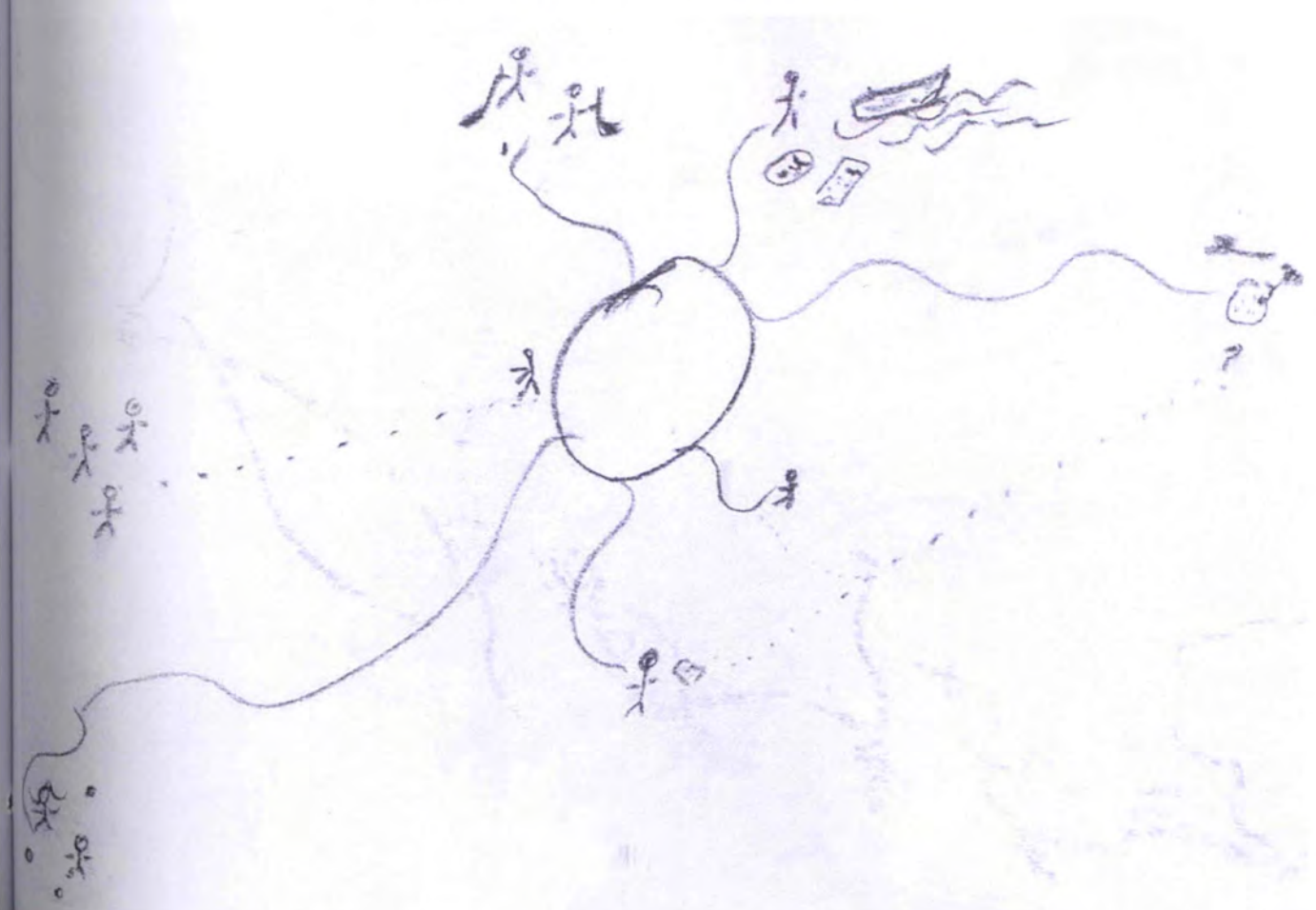


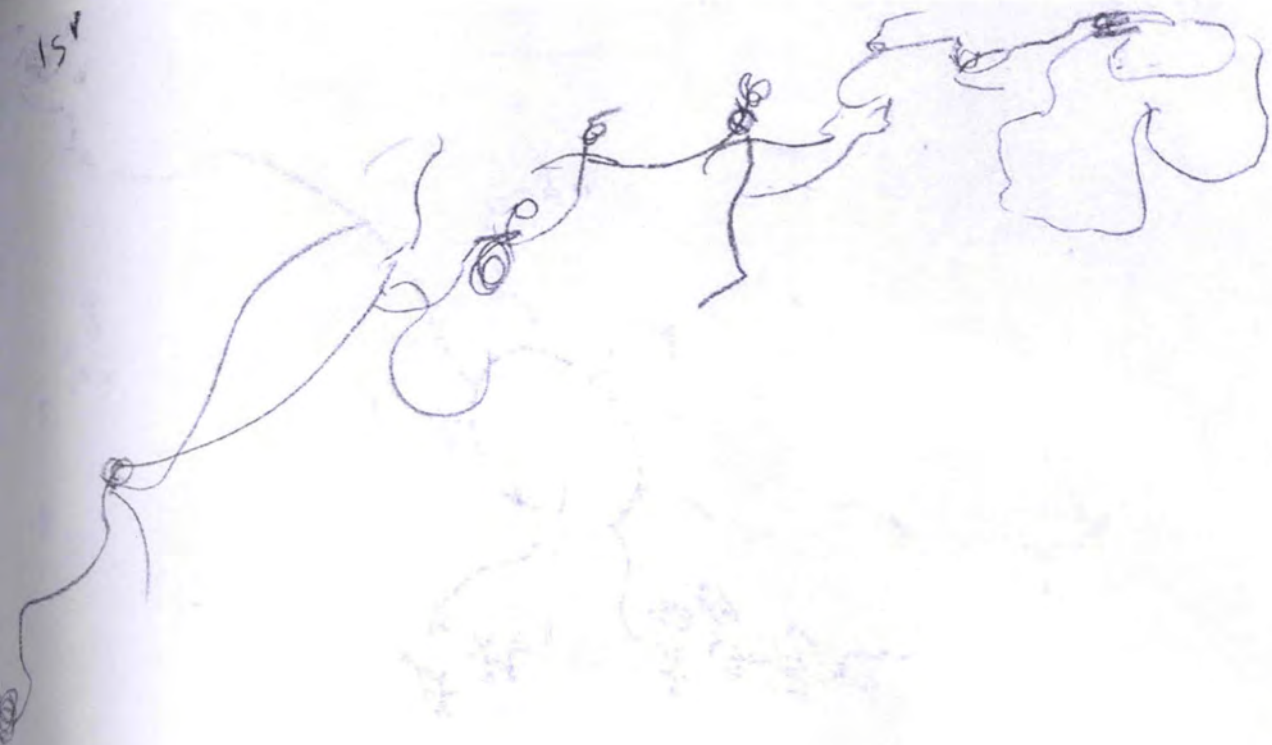
Figure 1.3 D's journey narrative by A above  
 Figure 1.4 E's journey narrative by A below





**Figure 1.5** A's journey narrative by C above  
**Figure 1.6** B's journey narrative by C below





**Figure 1.7** C's own journey narrative by C above  
**Figure 1.8** D's journey narrative by C below

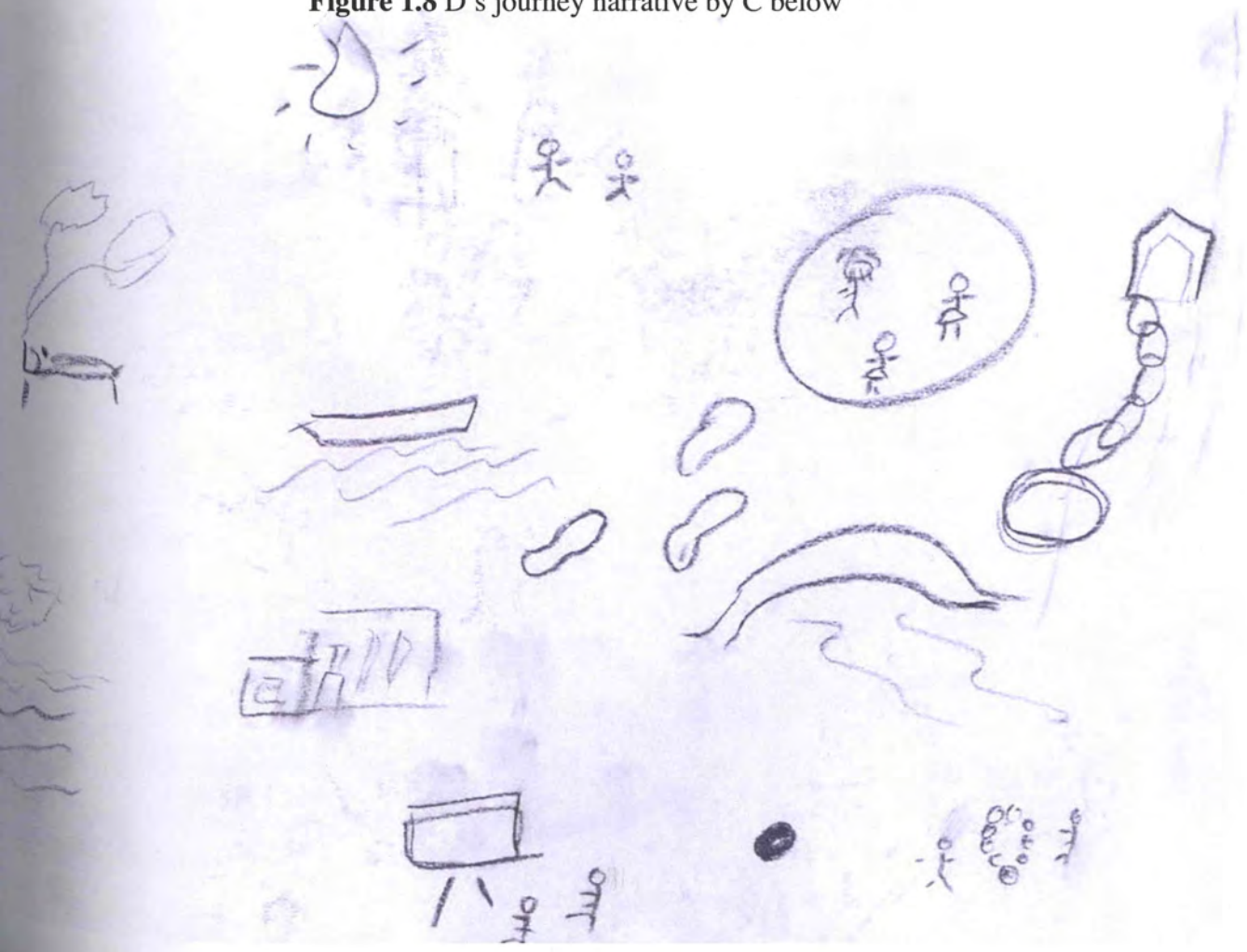
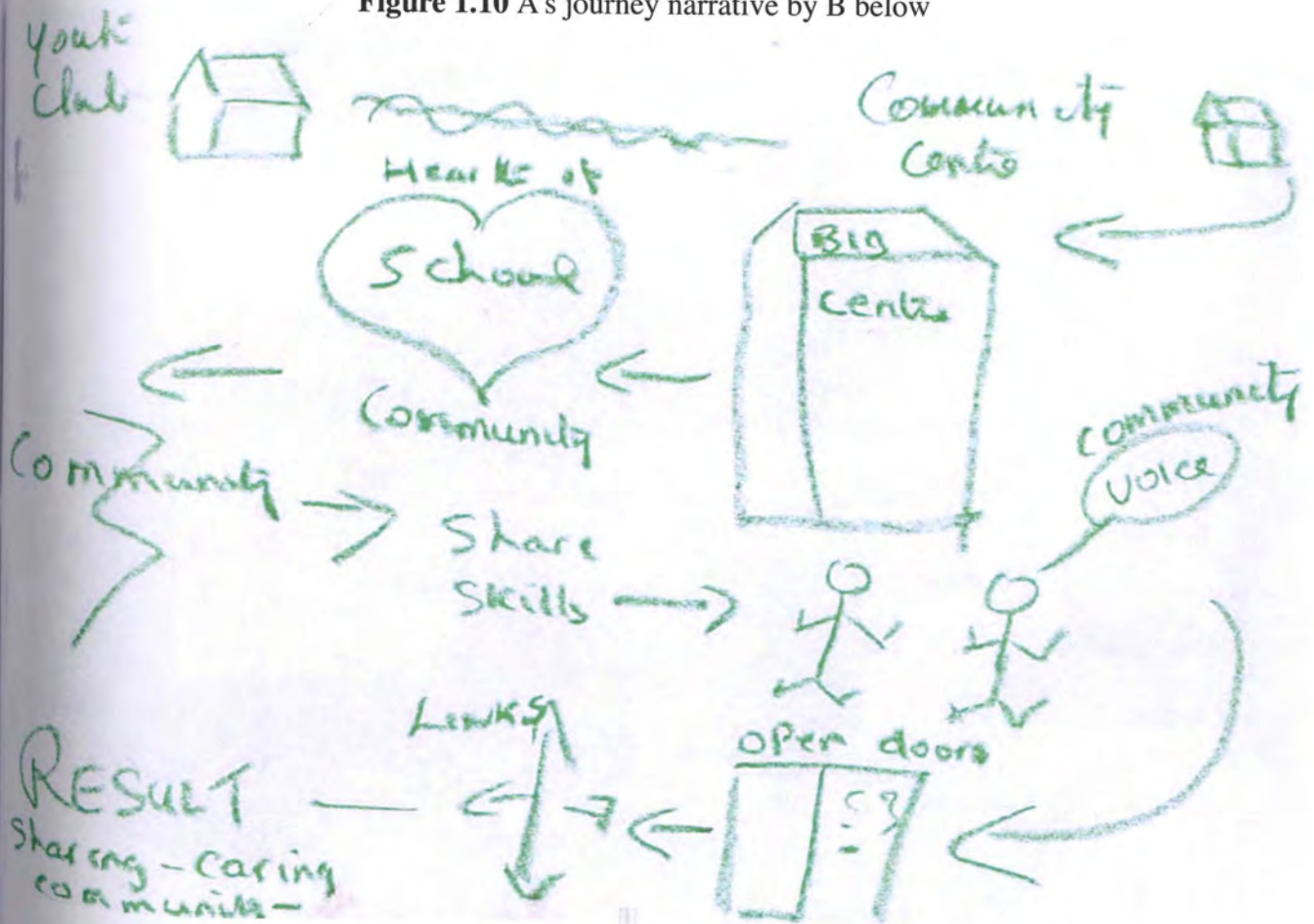




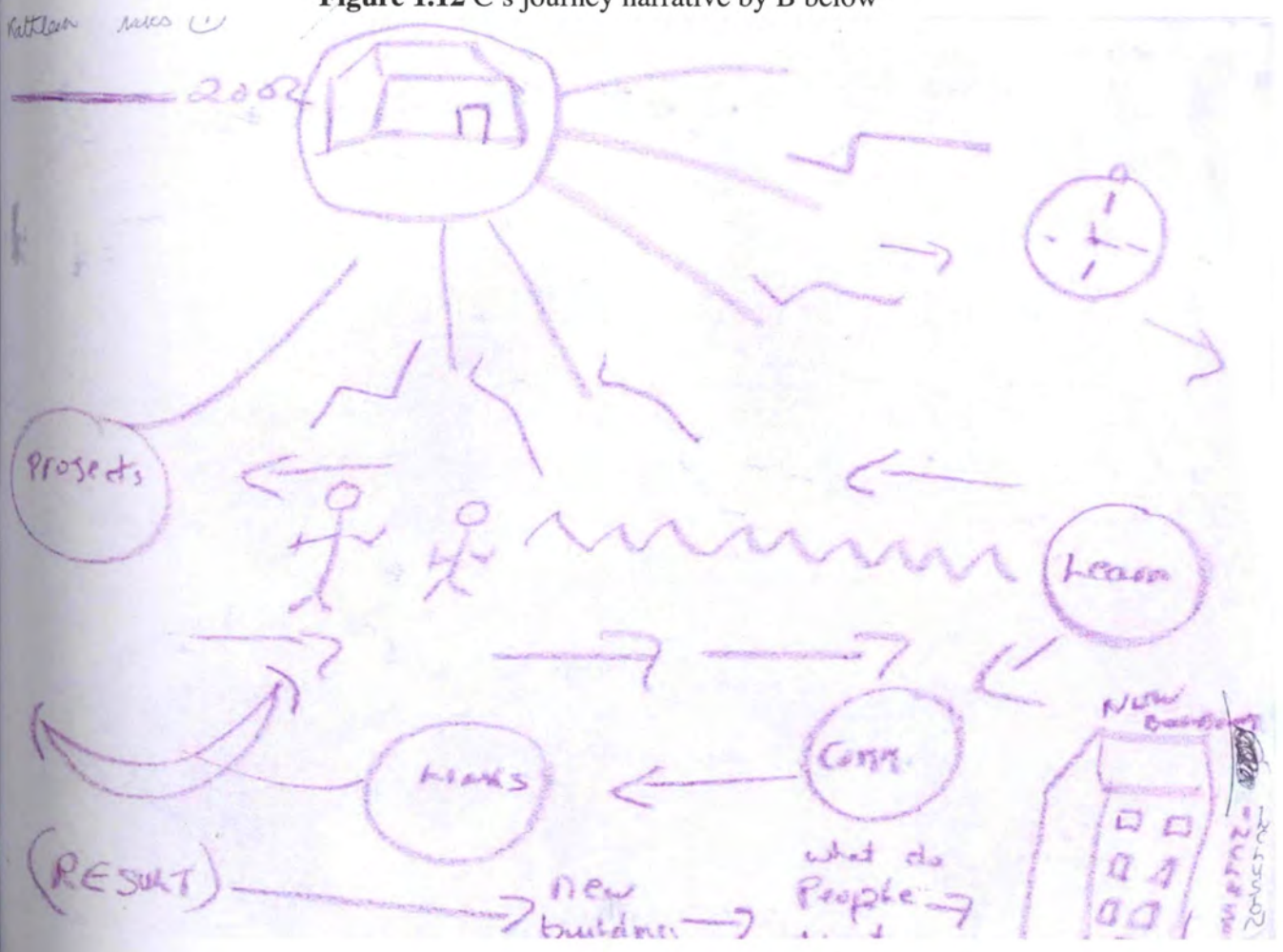


Figure 1.9 E's journey narrative by C above  
 Figure 1.10 A's journey narrative by B below





**Figure 1.11** B's own journey narrative by B above  
**Figure 1.12** C's journey narrative by B below



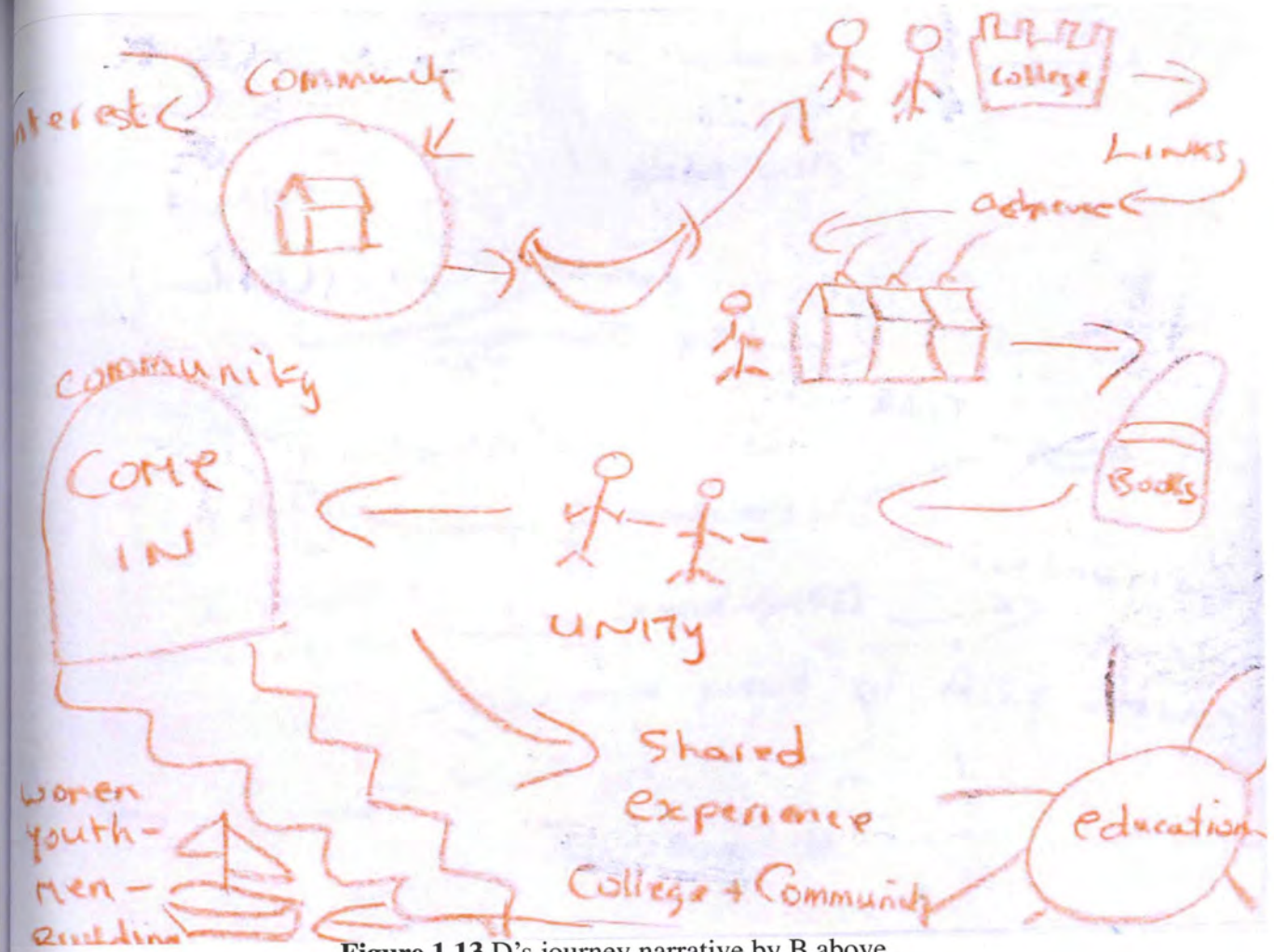
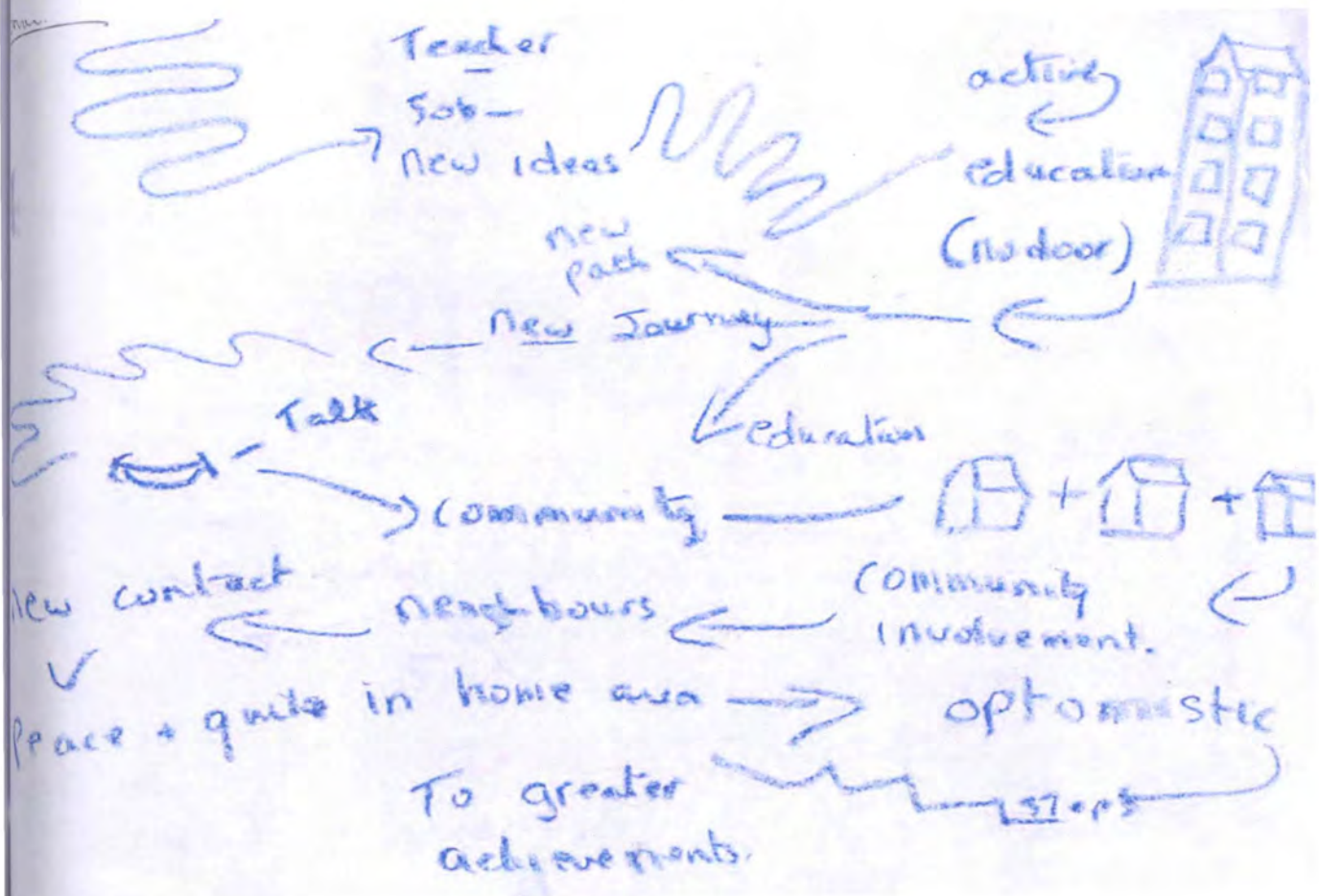


Figure 1.13 D's journey narrative by B above  
 Figure 1.6 E's journey narrative by B below



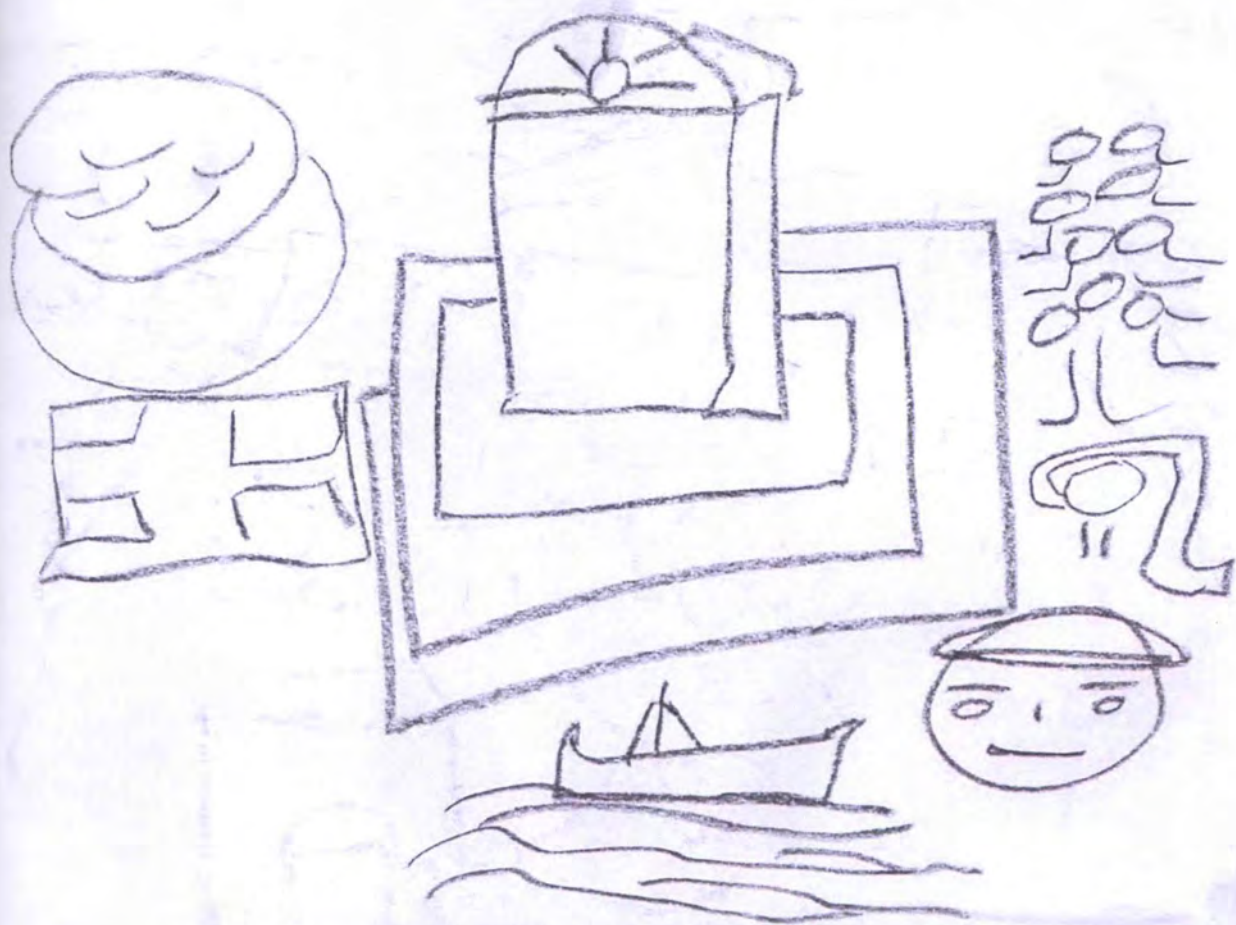
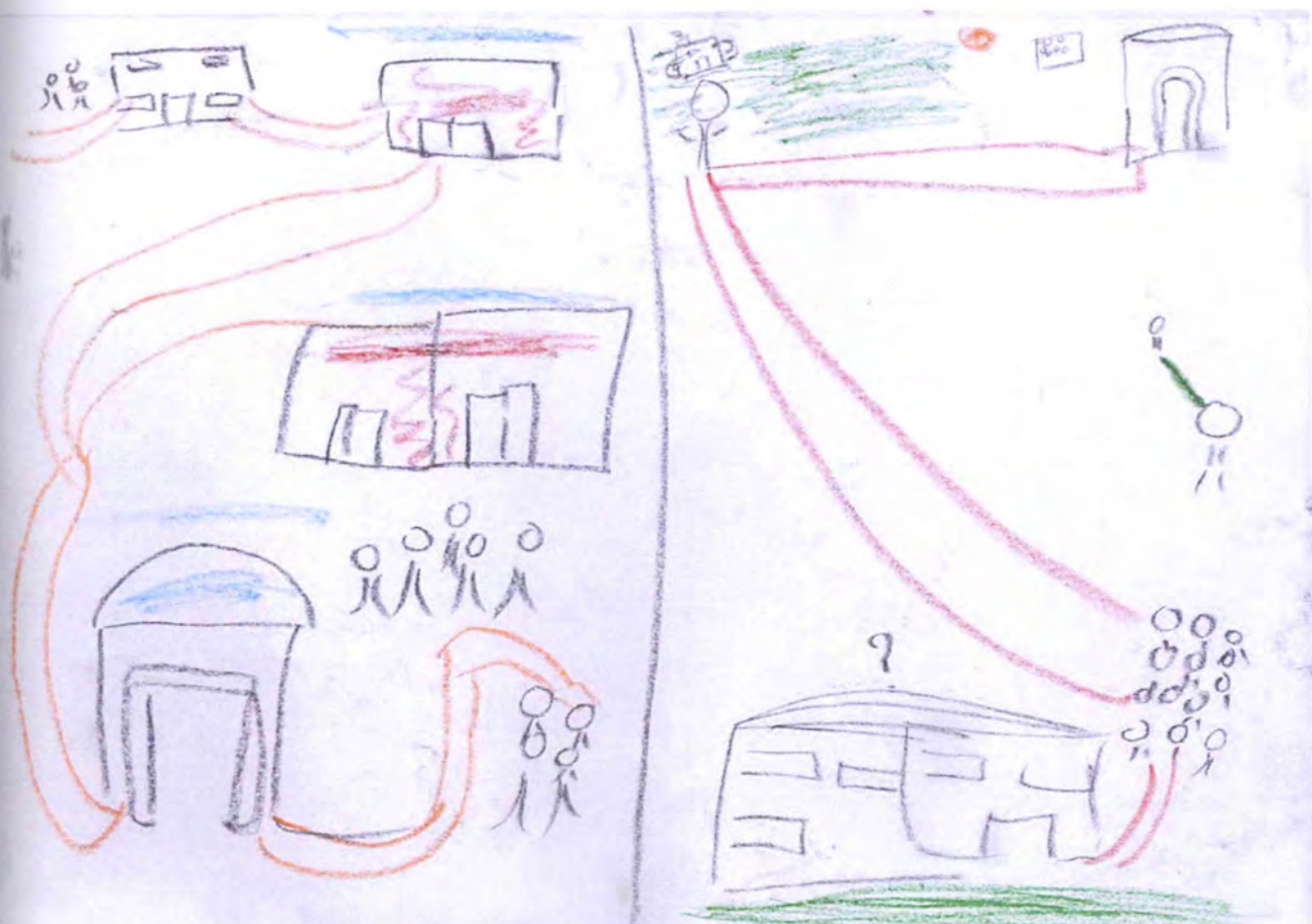


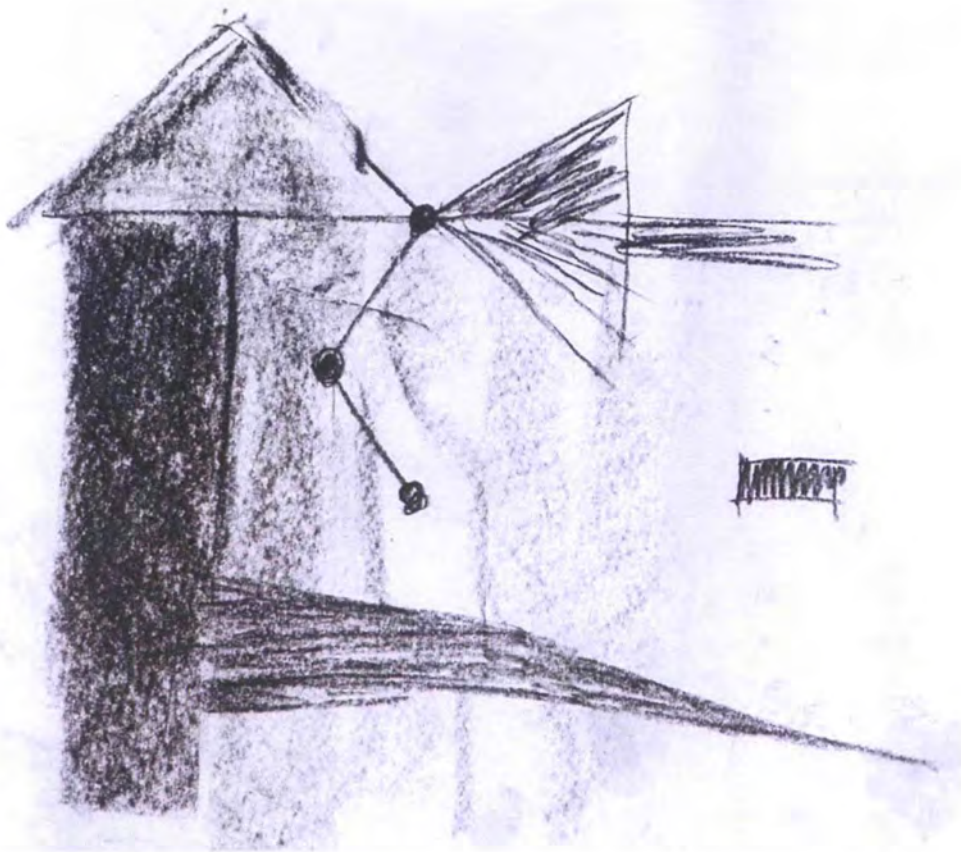
Figure 1.15 A's journey narrative by D above  
 Figure 1.16 B's journey narrative by D below



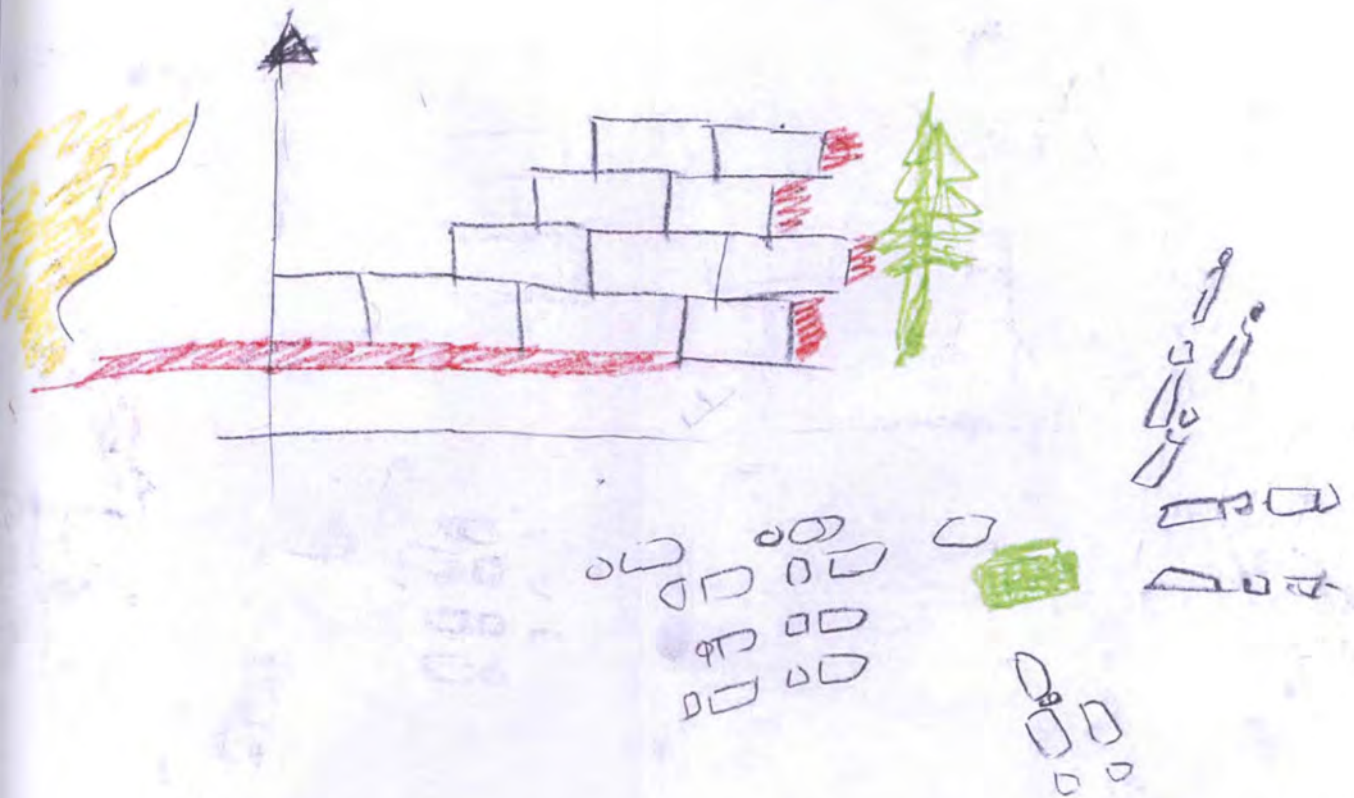


**Figure 1.18** C's journey narrative by D above  
**Figure 1.19** E's journey narrative by D below





**Figure 1.20** A's journey narrative by E above  
**Figure 1.21** B's journey narrative by E below



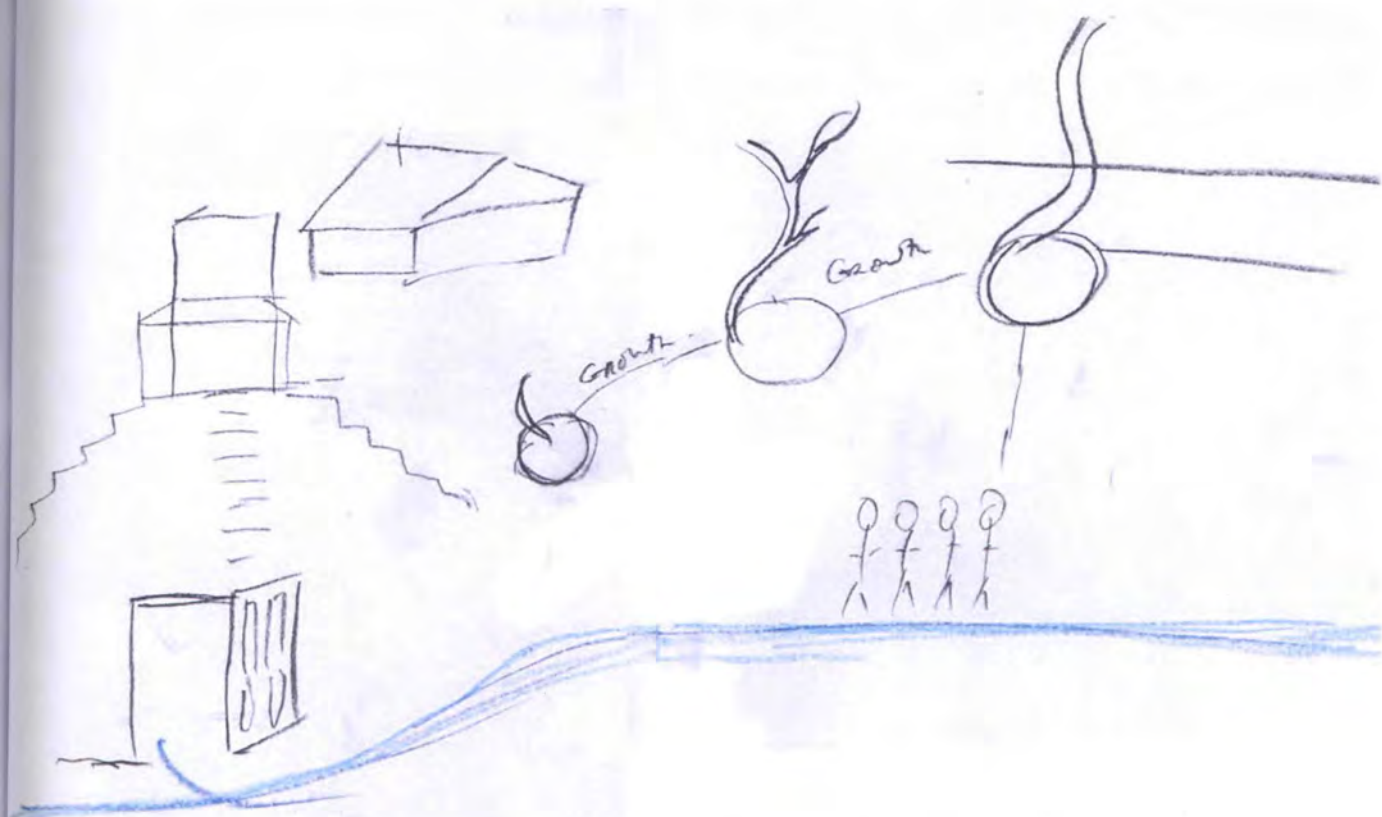


Figure 1.21 C's journey narrative by E above  
 Figure 1.22 D's journey narrative by E below





Figure 1.23 A's bridge collage above  
Figure 1.24 B's bridge collage below

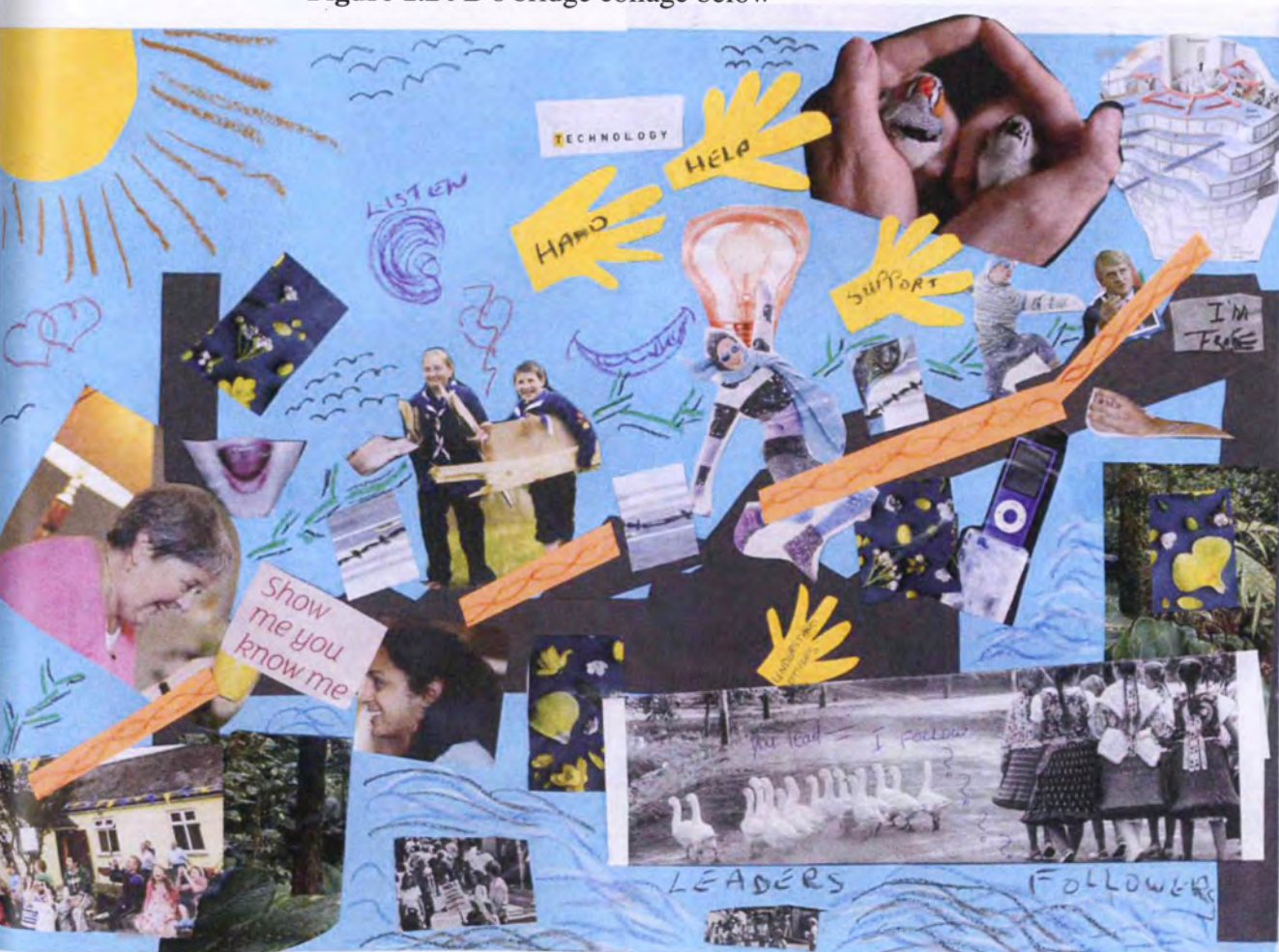








Figure 1.28 E's bridge collage above

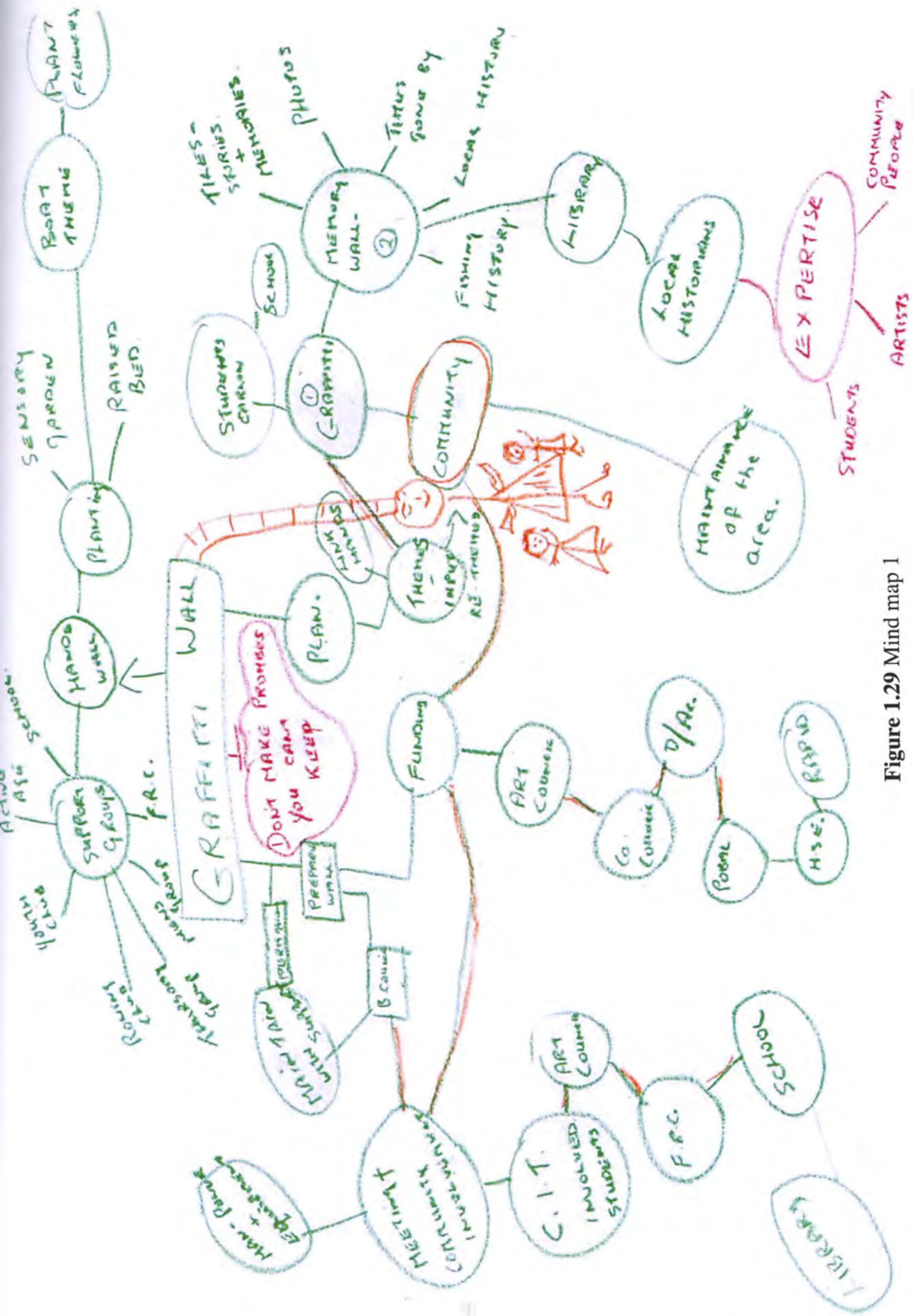


Figure 1.29 Mind map 1

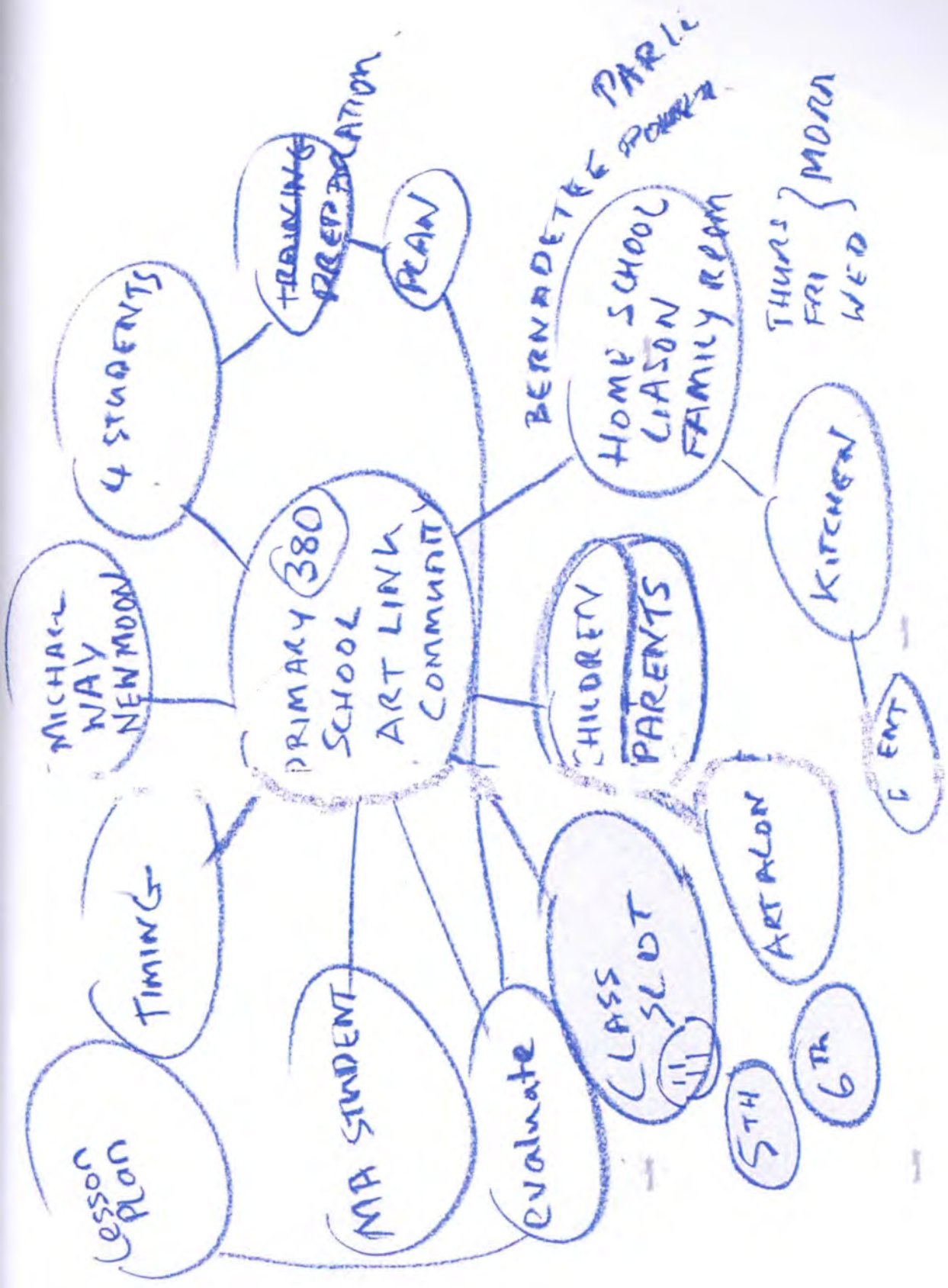


Figure 1.30 Mind map 2

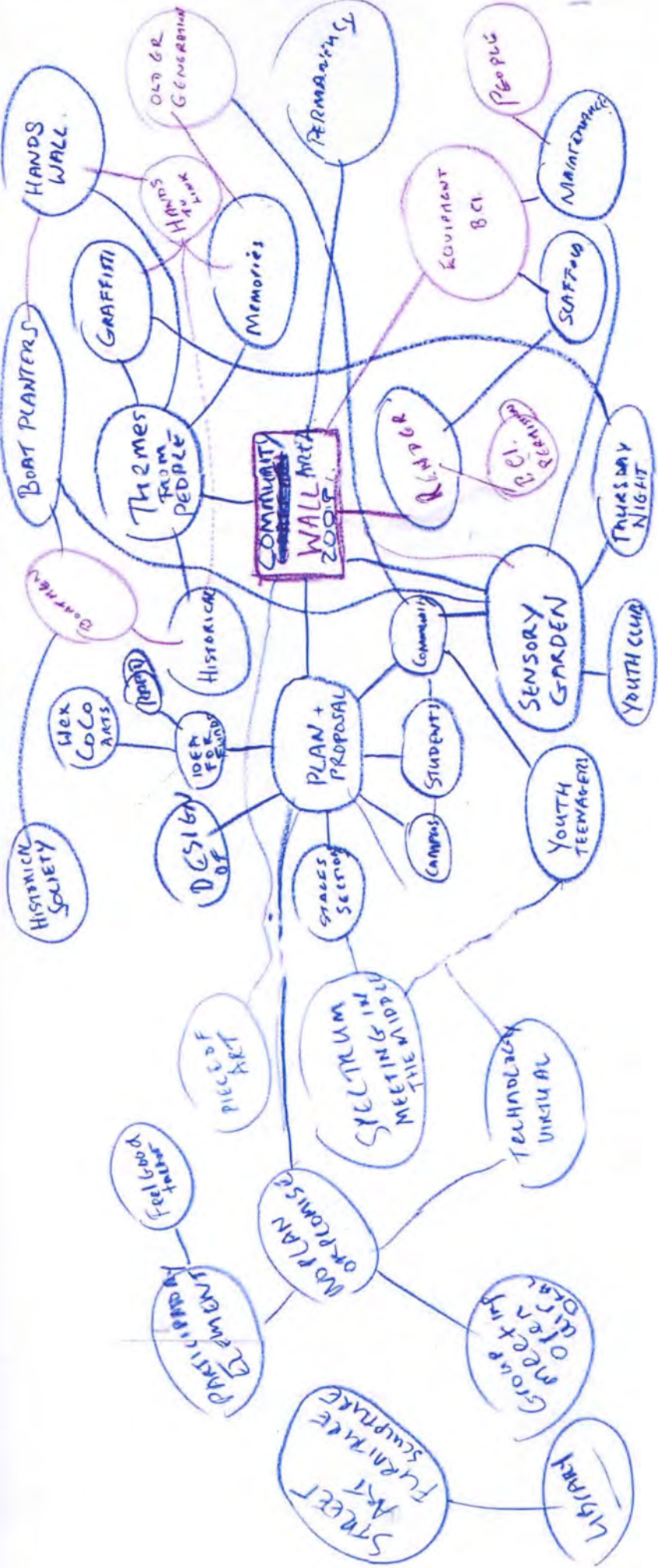
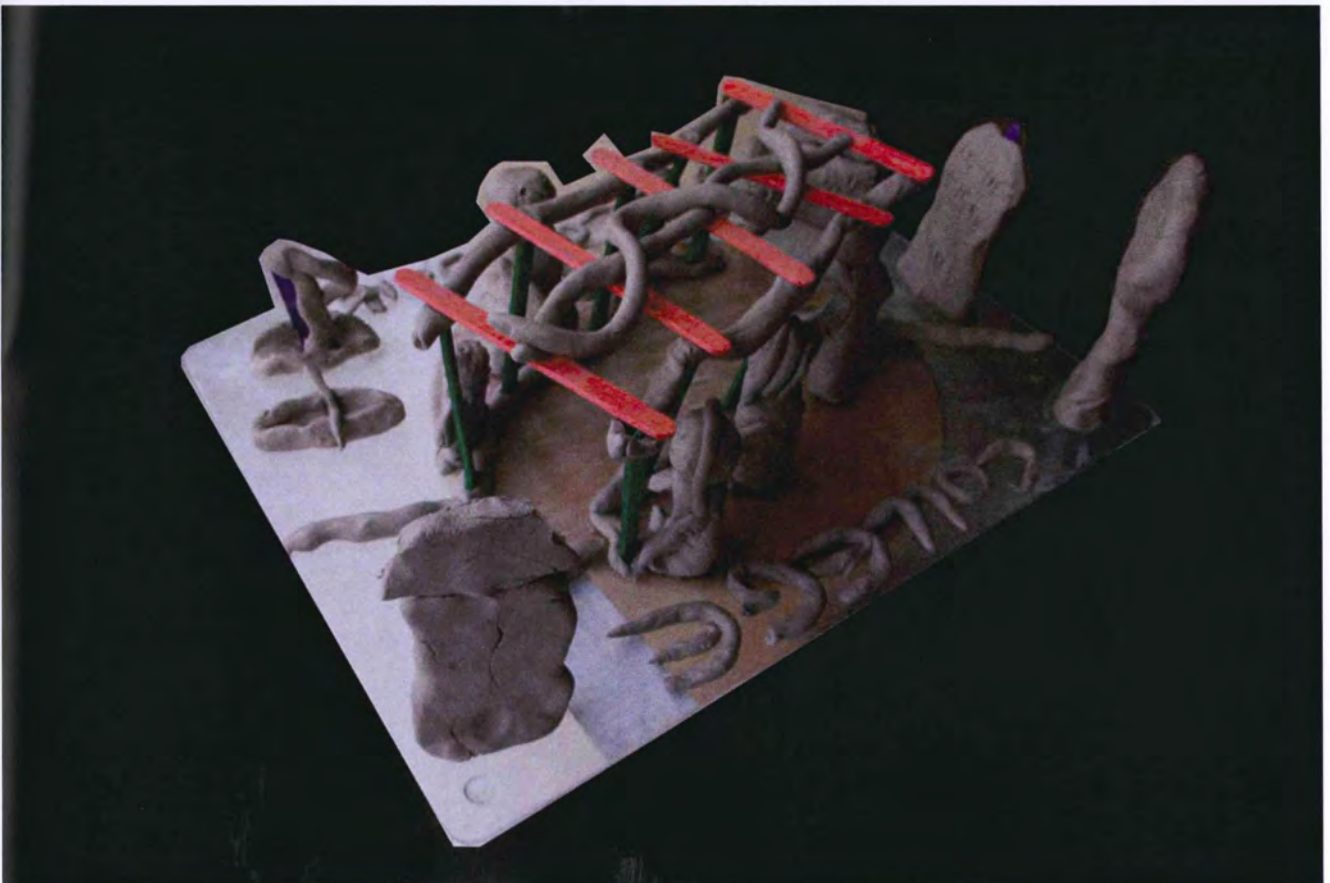


Figure 1.31 Mind map 3



**Figure 1.31** A's clay model above  
**Figure 1.32** A's clay model below





**Figure 1.33** A's clay model above  
**Figure 1.34** B's clay model below

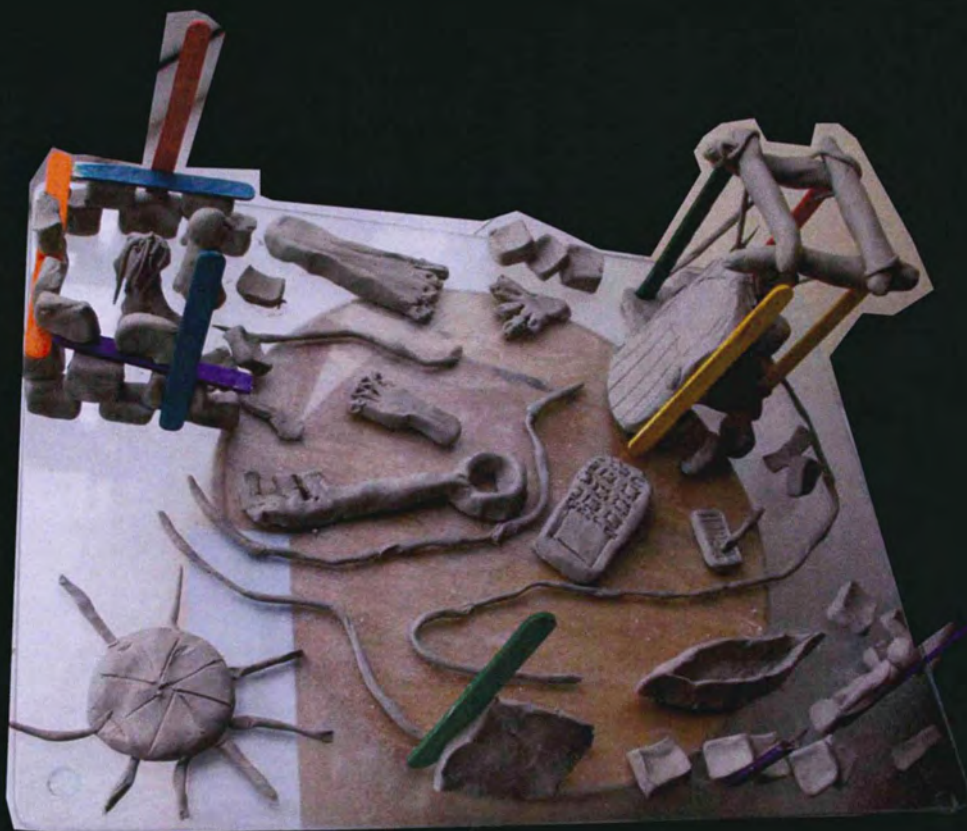
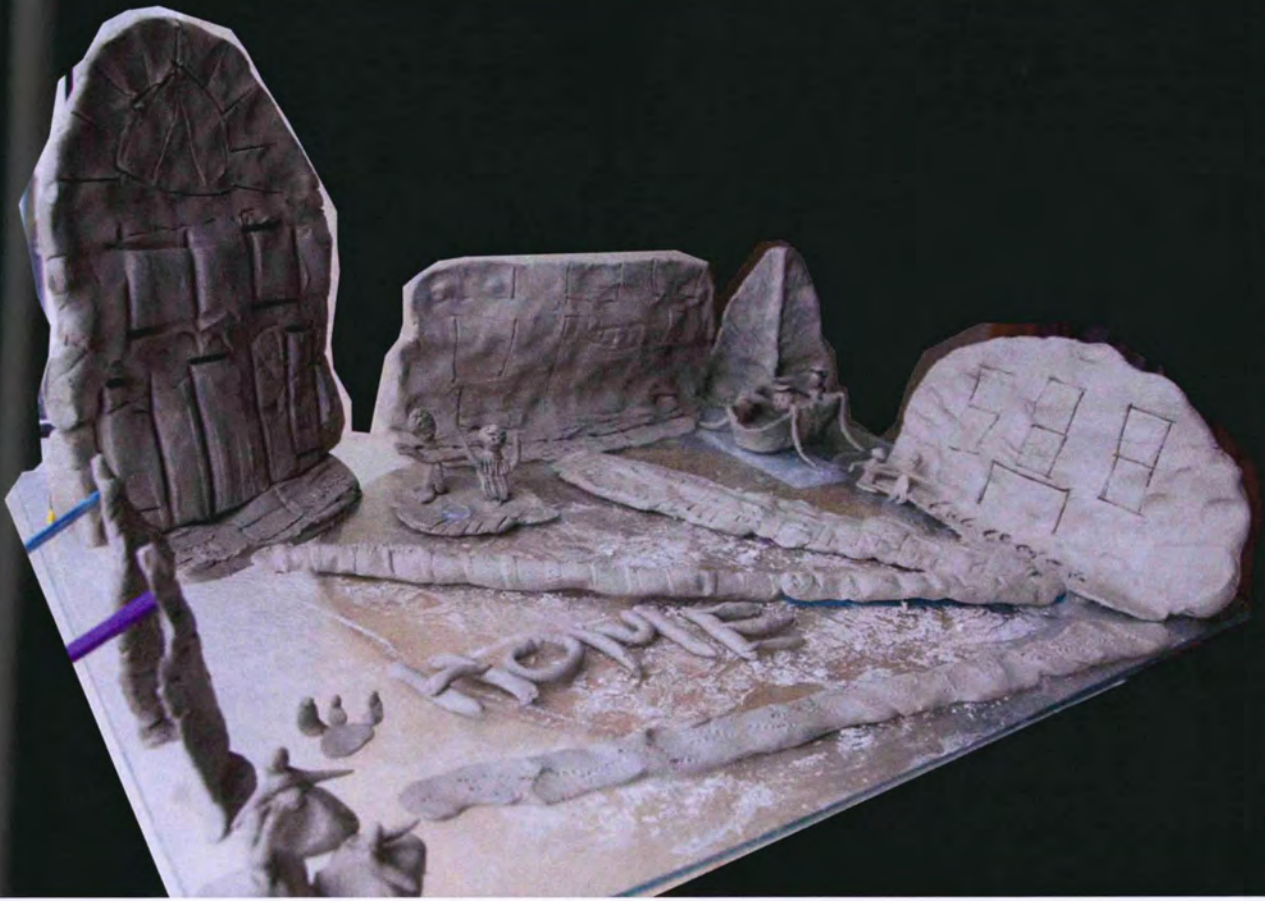




Figure 1.35 B's clay model above  
Figure 1.36 C's clay model below







**Figure 1.37** C's clay model above  
**Figure 1.38** E's clay model below

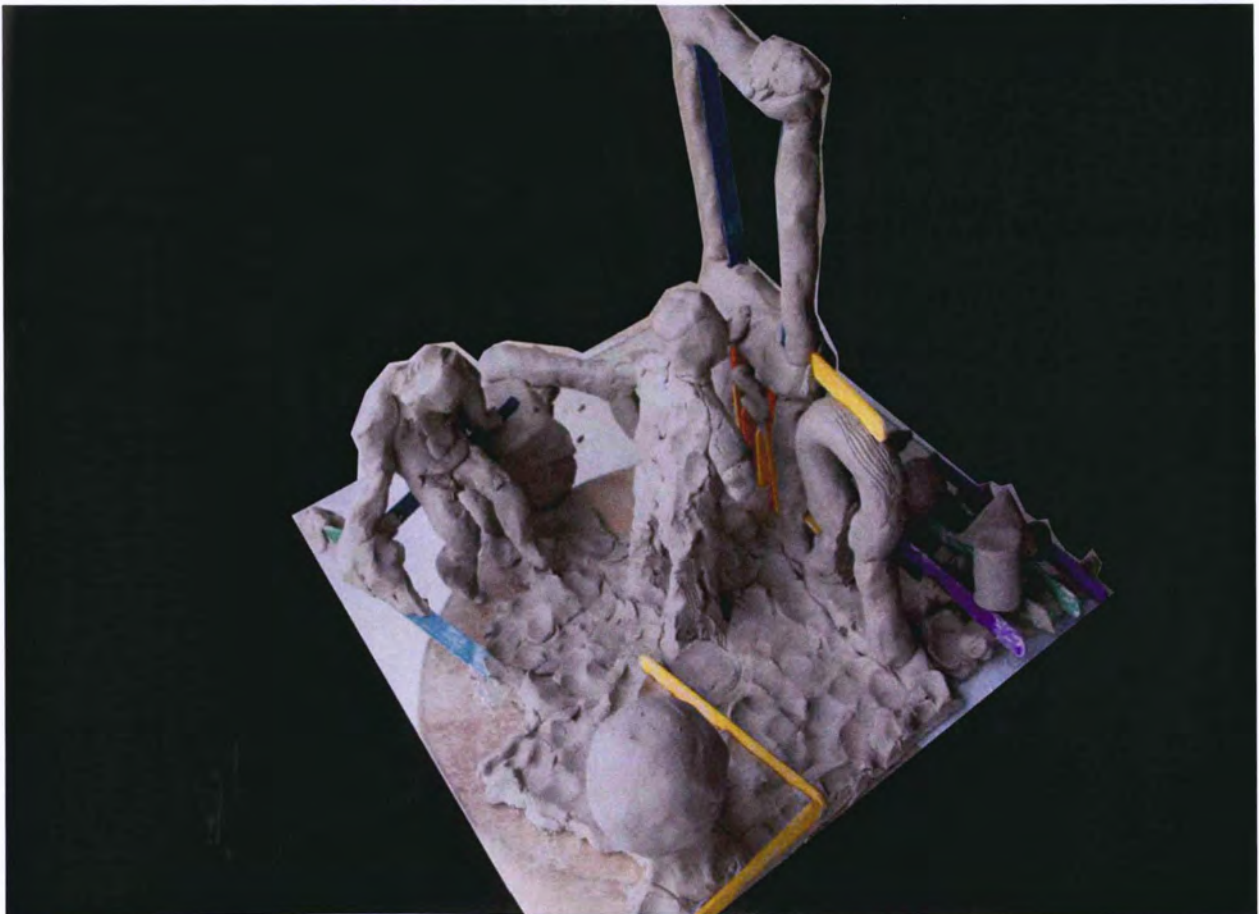




Figure 1.39 E's clay model

## Appendix 2

Action plan as an outcome of arts based research at Southend Family Resource Centre

July 2009

Dear .....,

Once again can I say thanks for working with me over the four arts based research sessions. I found the process very enlightening. It seems like a long gap back to March and quite a bit has happened in my life. In June I started to look over the work we made and I have tried to present some kind of conclusions and plans. In this short document I want to address some of these. The overall research question was examining the relationship past, present and future between the Wexford Campus and the community and specifically the role of the new art school. We touched on lots of issues to do with education and community both in the actual visual material we made and the short discussions we had after each session.

The sense of the positive experiences of active community work is very strong in the material created, the role of the team, of trust and friendship come across in nearly all the work. The success of the centre and the many aspects of its 'caring and sharing' work is clearly and proudly visible. The Southend is really a centre of learning without the traditional roles of students and teachers. The welcoming and sunny ethos of the centre is clearly stated. The ambition of creating the new centre also becomes clearly represented. The new centre looks big with several floors in some of the images. All the way through, the work created presents itself as a process and part of a journey, there is no real beginning or end to this story and I like the way the images reflect that. The images also reflect place and the immediate local environment of the sea, terraced housing and the Rocks. Men were curiously absent from most of the images and this perhaps reflects their traditional lack of involvement in grass roots community education. Will this position change in the next generation?

In terms of being open for collaboration and future exchange the images speak very positively about such a possibility. This bodes well for the students on the course I teach and I feel the team underestimated how expert they are in terms of community development and active education methods like learning by doing and participatory learning. I know that I learnt a lot and that the students will do likewise. I find the proposal to help the students to gain an insight into working in the local primary school art classroom to be a very generous offer.

While I felt that overall the place of education was held in high esteem, and education was clearly linked to community development, certain barriers to higher education were symbolised. A recurrent image in the work was that of a doorway or threshold and some of the issues related to the absence of a more human sense of warmth and welcome. Higher education institutions tend to be anonymous and official looking. In Wexford, IT Carlow is newish to the town yet it occupies buildings with a long history of associations, it would seem a lot more could be done to brighten up the access areas of the campus. The door can also be a

visual metaphor for a lack of community involvement on the behalf of the college and this is a deeper issue, one which my course is trying to address. Another barrier was more subliminal and that was to do with money and the cost of education. An image emerged that while we can all dream of improvement there are faceless people who hold power over us in terms of allowing us to proceed on our journeys, so there will always be a struggle to get what we deserve, nothing comes for free. The fact that the college took so long in paying you as researchers was another manifestation of this and once again I am sorry about how drawn out this became. I learnt a lot in this respect as well.

Specifically in terms of the Wexford Campus it was observed that the part time course in Community Arts Management was not genuinely community focused. I believe the new course: BA in Leadership and Community Development now offered at the Wexford Campus could be a course that develops connections with the Southend centre either as lecturers/facilitators or as students. Again, I recognise from the images that more links need to be made (or even begun) between Wexford Campus and the grass roots community organisations. I believe in the future there will be more courses related to community development and citizenship for example this year Carlow College are offering an honours degree in Citizenship and Community Studies this course has a community arts focus. WIT has a higher cert in Community Education and Community Development which has an element of community arts. Combining education provision into the new Southend centre could be a future sustainable path?

Action plan for 2009/2010

#### Part 1 Primary school Art Classes

Team proposed to help guide and evaluate teaching support role for up to four 3<sup>rd</sup> year art student volunteers. Students will accompany team when teaching at St John of Gods primary school. They will present a lesson plan to the team and get guidance on how to work in the role of art teacher/facilitator for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class students. Students will not be left in charge of any class and will occupy a support role only. The aim would be that the students contribute to the community with their time, support the work of the Southend centre and the primary school and learn skills in working with people. To run over 30 weeks

Contact was made with Bernadette Parle and she is fine with proposal.

Students will write a letter of introduction asking to volunteer and participate and the decision of the team will be final. Students will be writing a reflective journal of their experiences. If a student volunteer does not work out in the role another student can join the group.

#### Part 2 Community Murals

Students will volunteer to assist in the making of new murals or other creative work in relation to the plot of ground owned by the centre. The graffiti project started by Joanne in 2009 will continue with 2 student volunteers helping out, participants can again use the college facilities to make the graffiti panels. I had a discussion with Colm about the wall and some of the logistics of structuring student involvement. The wall was to represent a cross section of the community not just graffiti and an overall design maybe needed so that it does not become too fragmented in terms of an overall backdrop to the sensory garden. Art students

would not be able to take a major role in terms of responsibility for this project, again they would be volunteering and supporting more qualified and experienced community activists.

Again students participating should learn about how a community project comes about and about the participatory and democratic elements in any such undertaking.

An off shoot of this project could also use volunteers (up to 4) to work with the proposed plan to make murals in the playground of the St John of Gods School. This was an idea introduced by Bernadette the acting principal.

Students will be writing a reflective journal of their experiences. If a student volunteer does not work out in the role another student can join the group.

#### Part 3 My personal involvement

It struck me as I was teaching the module in community based learning that I need to engage more actively with grassroots community development. I am available to work with the centre over the coming year for 1 session every 3 weeks from September to June. This participation could be art related or project related, I have discussed with Colm this idea and he mentioned a possible project to get involved in might be the working with older men and trying to build up an oral history account of life on and by the sea. I mentioned whether they might be interested in art related projects and he thought no. I am open to other ideas if the team has them?

#### Part 4 Further funded research opportunities

As a researcher, I would like to work with the team in the future to undertake more arts based research. I would seek funding from grant sources to do another 4 sessions on a new set of issues related to community education. I really enjoyed the first 4 sessions and found that a lot of ideas were generated and discussed. I believe we could succeed with securing another grant to proceed further with this type of research approach during 09/10.

#### Part 5 The Wexford Campus

Improve the visible presence of the art school within the community, encourage more people from the community to visit, hold public events in the building above and beyond the annual degree shows. This coming year 2 events are planned so far Culture Night and Snakes and ladders, a lot more could be done in this area

Seek to establish the BA in community development and leadership in the medium term.

Programme a conference in the area of community based education in the medium term.

Many thanks for your honest and open commitment to the research

Brian Hand

Course Director BA (Hons) in Art.