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Maximising impact: connecting creativity, participation and wellbeing in the qualitative evaluation of creative community projects

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Maximising impact: connecting creativity, participation and wellbeing in the qualitative evaluation of creative community projects

By

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September 2014



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Doctor of Philosophy*



ABSTRACT

The evaluation of creative participatory community projects remains a controversial issue in politics, policy and the arts, its focus sharpened by the reality or rhetoric of austerity. Despite the recent plethora of policy documents and reviews there is little consensus about how projects should be evaluated or what constitutes good evidence about the impact on individual and collective wellbeing of 'being creative'.

This research set out to develop and trial feasible and effective evaluations for small to medium sized projects in the West Midlands of the UK based on field research into how impact is produced. Through mainly qualitative research in diverse contexts it was able to identify a range of conditions in projects reflecting the interrelationship of creativity and participation in which positive impact could be maximised.

The research sought to theorise the impact of these conditions using elements of Actor Network Theory and Freire's concept of praxis, concluding that impact is likely to be incremental, partial and non-linear. Central to this theorisation was the synthesis of evidence about the impact of creativity and embodied making on thinking, affect and a sense of agency, with ideas about how people change, producing a new evidence-based theory of change. In a practice-led approach, new creative methods were trialled in which data produced by participants had aesthetic as well as communicative value and the evaluation process itself contributed to positive impact.

While it was possible to evaluate aspects of this impact through episodic interventions, field trials showed that it was more effective to develop a systemic evaluation strategy. Such a strategy needed to be participatory and integrated into project planning, in order to respond to the stochastic systems creativity inevitably provokes. This proved to offer two advantages: the potential to engage many stakeholders, not just as respondents but also as agents actively defining and measuring evaluation outcomes; and the potential for reflection about impact as process rather than outcome.

These findings were then implemented in a number of projects, including trials of the Arts Council UK's developmental Children and Young People's Quality Principles. The method has been identified as 'improving the conversation' amongst partners, stakeholders and artists who can re-position themselves as active agents of evaluation rather than mere respondents, using the tropes, practices and materials of their own professional practices.

Keywords

Practice-led research Human Geography arts-related methods evaluation creativity Actor Network Theory wellbeing embodiment quality principles participatory arts community

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Chapter 1 The aims and scope of the research

Introduction

This research sets out to examine critically the possible beneficial impacts of creativity in community projects on individual and social wellbeing, and to develop new ways of evaluating these impacts. This chapter introduces the aims and context of the research and explains how the rest of the thesis is organised in order to address them.

The first section introduces the choices made about the scope and objects of the study. The second section goes on to argue that the evaluation of creative participatory community projects has been, and remains, a controversial issue in politics, policy and the arts. It argues that there is little consensus about how creativity in community projects should be evaluated or what constitutes good evidence. The key aspects of a project which contribute towards maximising the impact of creativity also remain to be fully identified. Particularly, there is little clear evidence about what makes the experience of creativity in community projects different from other experiences of the arts, for example as audience member or isolated maker; or what differentiates it from other impacts of participation in community projects. Chapter 2 expands on these themes and identifies the gaps in existing writing on the subject which led to this research. Meanwhile, the following sections of this chapter go on to outline how the aims and objectives of the research contribute to that ongoing debate and what conceptual and pragmatic innovations it led to. Sections six and seven introduce the structure of the research and how this thesis is organised. The chapter ends with a brief introduction to a key context for the development of the research, the collaboration between Coventry University and public and community arts company Imagineer Productions.

1.1 The objects of the study

The objects of this study are small to medium sized creative community projects¹, which, as a sector, have been identified as experiencing difficulty with effective evaluation of the impact of their activity, either through limited resources, engagement or expertise (Matarasso 2009, Mowlah 2014). The projects studied were described by their organisers in various ways, for example, as 'arts projects', or 'environmental', 'community' or 'consultation' projects, but what they have in common is the participation

¹ Using the definition of 'small to medium' developed in 2011 in a sector-led study, as organisations with turnover of up to £1m and operating on a not-for-profit basis (Thelwell 2011).

of non-professionals in creative activity led by either an artist or another professional. This participation was of varying intensity and duration, and although its specific nature is an important issue in the thesis which follows, for simplicity, they are all referred to as 'creative participatory community projects'. By siting the research in the West Midlands of the UK, an area of great social and economic diversity, and by studying a range of types of projects, the research aimed to produce rich and authentic data which might be useful in the wider context. The field of study was restricted to projects with 'active creativity' because of a body of research which suggests there are quite specific impacts of being actively creative, rather than watching or looking at creative performances or products as an audience member (Csikszentmihalyi 2002, Eisner 2008, Sennet 2008, Charny 2011, Gauntlett 2011). Therefore the scope of this research encompassed projects in which participants were invited to manipulate materials, spaces, or equipment/tools in order to create something new. This might be to make an individual or collective artwork or to play an active part in a new social symbolic interaction, such as poetry slam or interactive storytelling, or to contribute to a collective performance. They ranged from making simple clay tiles in a two-hour classroom activity to learning complex choral music for performance over nearly a year.

1.2 Controversies about aesthetic value, social impact and the need for better evaluation

This section introduces some of the competing discourses which revolve around creative participatory community projects in the UK at present (particularly regarding aesthetic value, social impact and evaluation) and shows how they helped shape the research aims which are then listed and discussed.

The connection between aesthetic value, social impact and evaluation of creative participatory community projects remains unresolved in public debate and the literature, tinged as it has been over many decades with discourses about the ineffable and therefore immeasurable qualities of art (O'Brien 2010, 2014). The issue reflects a longstanding uneasy relationship between 'high art' and 'community art'. During a period such as the past six years, in which public funding policy is shifting, any vision of creative community projects must also be related to political choice, not only about public spending, but also around the "relative and socially constructed nature" of aesthetic value (Freeman 2008:12, O'Brien 2010). The term 'excellence', so common in the documents reviewed in this thesis, refers variously to the quality of aesthetic input (artists and their practices) or to the experience of participants (which arguably derives from aesthetic, contingent and organisational factors) or to the quality of aesthetic output. The

current shift in policy is from an emphasis on the excellence of experience of participation *in* creative community projects to the production of aesthetic excellence *through* community arts².

Meanwhile, aesthetic value is related by key arts philosophers and researchers to class and the power of hegemonic discourse (Bourdieu 1984, Bourriard 1998, Belfiore and Bennett 2007, Bennett et al. 2009). Much of the 'grey' literature reviewed here is written by government funded researchers or policymakers which facilitates a hegemonic discourse about aesthetic value and its role in producing social change. Ideas about where the power to define aesthetic excellence is sited are important for the light they shed on how aesthetic value is 'produced' within a project. This in turn is related to the balance between desired 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' project outcomes, which influences the form and content of creative projects.

At the same time, as culture has become a kind of capital, and so a player in economic regeneration to be measured and regulated through public funding regimes, it also retains its association with a "rejection of bureaucracy and management" (O'Brien 2014:7), no more deeply than in the attitudes of participatory arts practitioners. The historical origins of participatory arts, in the UK, in community development and activism, may reinforce this sense that it is a bulwark against commodification or it may be association with what Chiapello has called the 'artist critique' of capitalism, now "fallen into unprecedented crisis" (Chiapello 2004:585) but still with lingering influence. This is one root of the deep mistrust and even antipathy towards evaluation in the field, which Matarasso found to be the most powerful determinant of its success or failure (Matarasso 2009)³. For many in the arts and culture sector, a focus on instrumental benefit carries the threat of undermining its 'true' or purely aesthetic power (Belfiore 2004, Knell and Taylor 2011:8). From a radical perspective, 'community arts' has the potential to represent a stand against the individualisation and consumerism which characterises advanced capitalism (Bauman 2007), and even could be "the ultimate focus of resistance" (Meade and Shaw 2007: 415). Community arts' unique combination of democratic participation and aesthetic practices, can be perceived as a challenge to existing power relations (McGuigan 1996) in a world where creativity, spirit and imagination have become commodified (Mirza 2006). This is the basis upon which my research sought to explore the potential of creative activity in the role of catalyst to transformatory change. Nicholson (2013:8) sums it up: "Participatory arts have a long and radical history, where visions of utopia are balanced with a practical and pragmatic understanding of how to work successfully in complex environments".

² As a comparison of Arts Council strategies between 2008 and 2013 demonstrates.

³ Another being a discourse among artists about the fragile coherence of the ineffable nature of art, potentially shattered by positivist practices of evaluation.

However, comment by artists about participatory community practice and its evaluation is much less evident than that of policymakers; and unmediated comment from participants about this issue even less so.

However, it is possible that the politicalisation of community arts funding has contributed not only to inflated expectations about the impact of creative projects, but to their incorporation in the very process Mirza laments. The 'turn to community' in the context of publically funded arts projects can be framed not as increasing democracy but as a means of government, and creative exploration in them as a containment of the search for identity in uncertain times (Mulligan and Smith 2010). If this is so, the potential of creativity in projects to contribute to personal or community transformation might be very limited. Critiques of the UK National Lottery arts funding in the late 1990s would seem to illustrate this point.

Lottery funding represented a key policy shift towards 'instrumental' arts funding, led by the 1997 Labour government. Central to this was a notional distinction⁴ between the 'intrinsic' impacts of arts and culture – the worth of the cultural sector “on its own terms” (O'Brien 2010:8) - and the 'instrumental' impact of arts on social and economic indicators, such as regeneration and community wellbeing. Perhaps partly because “the money came from the pockets of the general public and disproportionately from its poorer members” (Matarasso 2009:6), the government planned to use Lottery arts funding to mitigate the effects of poverty on its donors. It also invested 'arts and culture' with the ability to effect personal growth and wide-ranging powers of social transformation through the notion of 'transferable skills' and community 'capacity building':

Can the arts be more than just frivolous, trivial, irrelevant? ... I am in no doubt that the arts can contribute to improving healthcare outcomes... better employability and employment... the position of disadvantaged groups... there's increasing evidence that the arts can play a role in both crime prevention and reducing re-offending...

(Minister of the Arts Tessa Blackstone 2001, in Fox (2010:4)

This suggests that, in the UK, the concept of community arts projects has become a container for a range of political ideas and popular emotions, which makes their evaluation more difficult and more significant. So, the issue of evaluating creativity in

⁴ I call this a notional distinction because it is rarely described in detail. It is associated with supposed differences between activities directed at producing individual or collective changes connected to a range of positive qualities, and activities directed at producing high quality aesthetic outcomes – which may also lead to positive individual or collective change.

community projects is not only 'live', but also contentious, because both creativity⁵ and community are such richly layered terms. For example, seen as a catalyst for encouraging a sense of community, creativity in projects is also often part of a pervasive cultural and political nostalgia for variously imagined, desirable and elusive pasts (Smith 2001), in which 'fellowship' made life more bearable. In the context of the kinds of projects in this study, the term community can mean something as *relatively* simple as a geographically rooted place, or a set of shared interests or characteristics, claimed or assumed, used as a way to define the types of participants the project aims to work with⁶. But the term also carries the weight of a 'value', such as mutuality (Frazer 1999), and so also serves to symbolise relationships. As such, 'community', either pre-existing the project or created by it, can refer to, and symbolise the construction of, a sense of identity and belonging (Cohen 1985). Creative community projects are also framed by a wider, unresolved, discussion about the value and impact of the arts, made more intense at the moment of writing by the political pitting of government arts funding against other public sector spending during a period of 'economic recession'⁷.

The review of existing literature which follows in Chapter 2 demonstrates a continuing fascination with the impact and funding of arts and culture, and a growing interest in "robust evidence-based arguments" for policymaking generally over the past few years (O'Donnell 2014:10). The Arts Council, although a longstanding funder and champion of the arts and their social impact, dismisses the majority of existing evaluations as inadequate in similar terms: "Most of the studies reviewed cannot establish causality between arts and culture and the wider societal impacts" (Mowlah et al 2014:39). This, says the Arts Council, is not because there is no causal relationship, rather, it reflects the lack of adequate evaluation methodologies, the challenges of working in such 'messy' settings as schools and communities, and the under-theorisation of the impact of arts projects on society

Coventry-based public and community arts company Imagineer, partially sponsored this research, promoted by "an increasing demand from funders for better evaluation" and "unsatisfied curiosity" about their own practice⁸. Imagineer Director Jane Hytch became a member of the Research Team. Imagineer works with fluctuating contexts: scale, location, artistic genre and participants may vary from project to project. For example, although typically community arts projects are targeted at people living in areas of

⁵ In the sense here of 'the arts', rather than innovation.

⁶ It is a commonplace in community project practice to refer to 'target' groups of participants. Since this term positions participants as recipients of project activity, the term might be seen as an indicator of the 'deficit' model of community development discussed later in the thesis.

⁷ I mark this phrase only to demonstrate my awareness of how politically and emotionally loaded it is; without commenting on it as a description of the state of the economy.

⁸ Jane Hytch, Imagineer Productions CEO, informal interview, 2011.

deprivation⁹, during the research period Imagineer worked with a much wider range of adults, children and young people, in highly differentiated contexts, and in projects which lasted from a few weeks to several years. In the Godiva Awakes! project, the company worked for three months with pupils in three inner city primary schools and local engineers, for two years with hundreds of teenagers in a dance and performance project across several urban centres, for a year with a range of adults in urban and village choirs, and on a large-scale engineering project with local companies. These projects led to a public spectacle and performance in towns and cities across the Midlands, culminating in a procession in London as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympics¹⁰. Initial discussions with Jane Hytch focussed on the difficulty of evaluation in such a range of projects, and the need to engage stakeholders, participants and other 'interested parties', making evaluation meaningful for them, but at the same time meet funders' needs and not exceed budgets which typically allowed very little for evaluation. Evaluation was also needed to formalise or improve the intuitive reflection that staff and artists were assumed to carry out in process, but there was also a need to overcome their reluctance to see evaluation as part of their work or skilset. A key problem she identified for long term evaluation was the short term and uncertain nature of funding. As a medium sized arts organisation, it was hard to find funding for ongoing evaluation spanning several short term projects. These discussions helped formulate three research aims as identified below

1.3 The aims of the research

This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate about whether and how the impact of such an ineffable process as creativity can be not only recorded, but measured and evaluated. It doesn't reject the idea of instrumental impact, but in some ways aims to implement a call from the RSA Chief Executive Matthew Taylor to develop "a robust instrumental case for arts funding but in terms that recognise what is different and special about artistic participation" (Knell and Taylor 2011:8), focussing specifically on creative community projects. Therefore, the first step in the research was to theorise the

⁹ There are a number of government and charitable definitions of 'deprivation'. The UK Government's *English Indices of Deprivation 2010* comprise seven indicators, "Income Deprivation, Employment Deprivation, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education Skills and Training Deprivation, Barriers to Housing and Services, Living Environment Deprivation, and Crime" (2010:10) which are associated with geographical areas. Department of Communities and Local Government *English Indices of Deprivation 2010* (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf accessed 19.9.14)

¹⁰ Godiva Awakes! involved designing and making a three metre high animatronic figure of Coventry's iconic historical saviour, Lady Godiva, 'waking' her with massed drummers, dancers and choirs for a night time performance outside the City's Cathedral, involving hundreds of volunteers, dancers, singers and aerialists. Lady Godiva was then pushed to London via local pageants by 50 participants who had been trained as cyclists. This project was funded by a mix of local government, Arts Council, charitable and private sponsorship, much 'in kind', that is, represented by donations of time, skills, venues and equipment.

impact of creativity in projects in a new way, whilst the second was to develop new ways of evaluating impact in the light of this. These steps are reflected in the first two research aims:

1. to assess critically and theorise the contribution of participation in creative community projects to individual and/or social wellbeing
2. to develop (and trial) evidence-based evaluation techniques which can 'measure' this contribution in ways that will be useful to project funders and commissioners

The third aim was connected with assessing the value of the research beyond this particular study:

3. to consider the implications of the above analyses for successfully connecting creativity, participation and impact in a range of projects and settings

1.4 Research Objectives

In order to address these aims, the following research milestone objectives were set:

- 1.4.1. to critically review existing academic and professional literature concerned with creativity and participation and their impact on wellbeing
- 1.4.2. to critically examine theories about how people change through their experiences and how knowledge is produced in the context of creative community projects
- 1.4.3. to carry out field research which will indicate the nature of this impact and the contexts which might serve to (re)produce it in a range of projects
- 1.4.4. to explore the purpose of and possibilities for evaluation in a range of projects
- 1.4.5. to develop and implement evaluation methodologies and strategies which are framed by the above new theoretical and research-based ideas and which have the potential to produce new evidence or evidence in more effective ways
- 1.4.6. to critically review these methods and strategies in field research in a range of projects and the current contexts in which they operate

1.5 The proposed contribution to knowledge

In meeting the above aims and objectives, the research sought to make an innovative contribution to knowledge in a number of key respects. First, a novel conceptual approach developed in this research was to situate impact in creative community projects within the context of two previously unrelated theories of change. Ideas about the generation of different kinds of knowledges, particularly embodied knowledges, gained through the physical process of creative making (Gauntlett 2011, Sennet 2008, Eisner 2008, Charny 2011), those arising from the experience of absorption in a creative skill in a symbolic domain (Csikszentmihalyi 2002), and the impact produced by interacting with the non-human world - in this case, materials and technologies (Haraway1991, Latour 2004, Thrift 2008) - were brought together with Freire's ideas about individual and collective change through praxis (1970). Both these sets of ideas are based on research about how people can change when their experience enables them to understand the world differently and to re-position themselves in discourses about their own agency. For Freire this is brought about by a combination of new learning and active, politicised validation of people's own experience, which he called 'dialogical pedagogy' (Freire 1970). For the writers on creativity, the potential for personal or collective change is integral to the process of becoming absorbed in intense creative 'flow', which enables one to step outside everyday interpretations of reality. Again, this leads to a greater sense of agency. Both creativity and praxis involve action in the world, and it is this which is ultimately transformatory for individuals and groups. The research set out to explore the extent to which creative flow could play a part in transformatory praxis, which would help develop an understanding of how change might happen in projects.

Because praxis and creativity in these theories are essentially collective and socially situated processes, the research subject was both creative activities and types of participation in projects, and their relationship. The second novel conceptual approach in the research was to examine critically the extent to which the relationship between creativity and participation always determines impact and how this is related to the issue of its evaluation. This approach framed an enquiry into how impact is and could be evaluated, but also what evaluation is able to recognise as important.

Thirdly, the research developed a new approach to evaluation using creative processes, based on the ideas about embodied knowledges (Eisner 2008, Sennet 2008, Charny 2011, Gauntlett 2011) and the impact produced by interacting with the non-human world (Haraway1991, Latour 2004, Thrift 2008). It applied these to new ways of producing

knowledges in evaluation using the tropes and practices of the arts-based professionals involved in projects.

Finally, the research generated and critically explored its own empirical research findings about the interaction of creativity and participation in the context of systemic approaches to evaluation in networks or organisations. Systemic approaches are based around reflexive, integrated and participatory practice, key characteristics ascribed to creative practice as yet under-utilised in their evaluation processes. This led to the core research findings about whether a new approach to evaluating the impact of creativity in participatory creative community projects could be developed which is systemic, participatory and creative.

1.6 The structure of the research

The research plan through which these aims were addressed had two main strands: a review of evidence about, and a reconceptualization of, the impact of creativity in projects (both desk and field research); and the development of field trials of particular evaluation techniques. The purposes and methods of research and evaluation overlap as much as they differ, and in practice these two enquiries were not linear, they overlapped and fed into each other throughout the project. For example, initial research contacts were made, especially with CASE partners Imagineer, while the literature review was under way at the start of the research. This was in the interests of establishing as long a period of research contact as possible, in response to a key issue which emerged through early literature reviews and initial research contact – the problem of short term contact with participants which inhibited conclusions being drawn about longer term impact of participation. Theories developed from the research about creativity and participation informed theories about evaluation later in the research period.

Broadly, the research proceeded from initial contact and research using established participatory, qualitative methods into the impact of creativity and participation in a range of projects. Trials of evaluation methods were begun towards the end of the first year of research and continued throughout. The research aimed to develop evaluation strategies which would meet as wide a range of project needs as possible. The diversity of the West Midlands region was ideally suited to selecting a wide a range of projects to suit this purpose, since it contains sparsely populated rural areas (such as South Shropshire), large urban conurbations (such as Coventry, and Britain's second most populous city, Birmingham) and a correspondingly wide range of types of projects and funding.

As planned, the research focus shifted during the first two years (Scoping Phase and Phases 1 and 2) from an investigation of the impact of creativity in projects to an exploration of evaluation methods within the reach of projects which might uncover that impact. However, as the thesis shows, these initial findings suggested that the impacts of creativity flourished in particular conditions and through particular types of experiences. Evaluation could begin in a project planning stage to identify these activities and hence its potential for impact. Moreover, the relationship between cause and effect in this process was seldom linear or easy to identify. Evaluation needed to take a holistic view in order to recognise and record changes. Therefore, in its final year (Phase 3) the research focus shifted in an unexpected direction, to the development of whole-project, systemic evaluation approach. As Chapters 7 and 8 discuss, trialling this potentially disruptive approach, together with its resource implications, presented a greater challenge to participating projects than discrete trials of individual methods. The nature of this challenge and its implications for wider implementation also became a focus of the research.

1.7 The structure of the thesis

The thesis which follows is structured so that its first half describes a review of literature in the field published up until Spring 2014, (Chapter 2) and then the development of the theoretical frameworks which informed the research (Chapter 3) and how these were operationalised in practice through the use of particular methods and techniques (Chapter 4). The second half of the thesis goes on to describe and analyse the key data generated, firstly about interpreting data produced by new creative methods (Chapter 5) and then about creativity and participation (Chapter 6). The research findings can be viewed both as evidence about impact and as a test of methods. Chapter 7 describes the development of evaluation techniques and strategies using a participatory systemic approach, and the difficulties which this produced in practice. Chapter 8 draws conclusions about the research so far (this thesis needs to be viewed as part of an evolving research agenda), and goes on to review further research opportunities which emerged from the study, particularly into the barriers and benefits to the evaluation approach developed in the thesis, and the further questions and implications these raise.

1.8 The research partnership

A key context for this research was the partnership which managed it. The research described in this thesis was funded by the European Social Research Council (ESRC) as a CASE-Collaborative project. CASE funding is intended to facilitate collaborations between academic institutions and private companies or public organisations to support investigations with a pragmatic focus beyond the academy¹¹. The collaboration which supported the current research involved Coventry University and Coventry-based, medium sized arts company, Imagineer Productions (henceforth IP). IP provided financial sponsorship and expertise on the Supervisory Team. Most significantly, IP Chief Executive Jane Hytch offered insights from many years experience of participatory creative community and public arts projects from the perspective of a practitioner, and facilitated access to research subjects (see Figure 1, below). In addition, the research was an academic interdisciplinary project, between the University's Department of Geography, Environment and Disaster Management (where it was based) and the School of Art and Design, encompassing the already hybrid discourses of practising academic-geographers (Dr Phil Dunham and Dr Moya Kneasfsey) and a practising art historian (Dr Imogen Racz). Cross-disciplinary, CASE collaborative research is associated with open-ended, problem-solving challenges, often where a technical problem has social impact, as is the case with this study. It implies a measure of "disciplinary capability and interdisciplinary conversance" on the part of the researcher (van Hartesveldt and Giordan 2009:2), The first of these was already potentially available to the researcher as a post-graduate of both social sciences and fine art, and the second was developed within the research itself.

This chapter has summarised the aims of the research and introduced the context of public debate about the value of creativity in community projects. Chapter 2 gives a much more detailed overview of that debate, both in policy and academic research. It highlights key ideas about participation and creativity and identifies gaps in evidence-based accounts which make the causal link between these and impact on wellbeing so elusive, and this research so timely.

¹¹ To "encourage and develop collaboration and partnerships between organisations (public, private and voluntary sector) and university departments by providing doctoral students with the opportunity to gain experience of work outside an academic environment. An academic supervisor and a supervisor in the partner organisation support students" ESRC website, <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/postgraduates/dtc/student-collaboration/developing/collaboration-examples.aspx> accessed 24.5.14.

Chapter 2 Evaluating qualitative impact: that elusive causal link

Introduction

This chapter uses a review of recent literature to demonstrate that the current research is both relevant to evaluation practice in the field and has the potential to add useful evidence-based insights where unanswered questions remain. It suggests that the production of positive qualitative impact in creative community projects is connected with the way being creative and participation in creative projects interact, particularly in a collective experience. It argues that existing studies tend to simplify or mystify this complex and fluid relationship which will often change over the life of a project. This lack of clarity is an important source of the widespread sense (described in the literature) that evaluations of impact of these activities are inadequate. This analysis led to the formulation of the aims for this research, and the investigations into the specific conditions of the relationship between creativity and participation which lie at its core.

This chapter has six main sections. It begins with an overview of the place of participatory creative community projects in social policy and discourses about the value of 'the arts' in supporting social change. This discussion reveals evaluation to be highly problematised in the field. The next section relates this to a historical shift of emphasis from community arts to participatory arts and the impact of this on the age-old debate about intrinsic versus extrinsic value. The middle three sections go on to consider how the literature has framed three key concepts: wellbeing (the main extrinsic or instrumental goal of participatory creative community project funding (O'Brien 2014, Mowlah et al 2014)), participation, and creativity itself. This overview concludes that two factors have inhibited theorisation of the impact of participation in creative community projects and hence the theorisation of its evaluation. These factors are connected with inflated expectations of impact on the part of policy-makers, and the fact that creative participatory community project practice in the UK (despite its long and varied history) is still regarded as a new professional field in terms of its evaluation (Knell and Taylor 2011). This latter factor means that practitioners and commentators tend to look to other professional fields for explanatory paradigms. The chapter goes on to explore literature about creativity and participation, finding that, although both are extensively researched, the impact of their interaction in the field is less so. It concludes that further research might utilise some of the tropes and practices of artist-led creative activities to produce new knowledges reflecting their embodied, challenging and social elements.

The body of literature reviewed here refers to a “spectrum of practices that attempt to bridge ‘community’ – as a diverse set of contexts, settings and interests – and ‘arts’ (Artworks 2013:8). It describes projects which to a greater or lesser extent include “creative activities undertaken with people in community or institutional settings, and often with those deemed ‘marginalised’ in some way” (Nicholson 2013:1). Appendix A describes in more detail the scope of the works reviewed and rationale for their selection.

2.1 Evaluation as the problem

In Spring 2014, three major literature reviews concerned with measuring impact were published by influential bodies. These were *The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society: an evidence review* (Mowlah et al., Arts Council England, March 2014), *Quantifying the Social Impacts of Culture and Sport* (Fujiwara et al, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, April 2014) and *Wellbeing and Policy* (O'Donnell et al., The Legatum Institute, March 2014). Meanwhile, in February 2014, the high-profile Warwick Commission was launched, starting a two-year “comprehensive and holistic investigation into the future of cultural value”¹². What the first two reports and the Warwick Commission have in common is an attachment to the idea that contact with arts and culture can have a significant beneficial impact on individuals and society. Most texts in this review of existing literature, like these, are premised on the view that ‘arts and culture’ is a ‘good thing’: the Warwick report goes as far as to say that it is “what defines us as a people” (Neelands et al 2015: Warwick Commission Report on the Future of Cultural Value¹³). The Legatum report doesn’t mention arts and culture per se, but nevertheless explores highly relevant definitions of wellbeing, linking eudaimonic wellbeing¹⁴ strongly to community and social trust (O'Donnell et al., 2014:48). These first two reports are evidence of a continuing fascination with the impact and funding of arts and culture, but all of them are part of a growing interest in “robust evidence-based arguments” for policymaking over the recent decades (O'Donnell et al., 2014:10), and an uneasy sense that this has not been present in arts spending (Mowlah et al. 2014:39). The latter is by no means a universal view, however, as several public rebuttals of the ACE report from the field demonstrated when it appeared, arguing particularly that robust evidence of a causal link between arts and good health and wellbeing does exist¹⁵.

¹² University of Warwick’s Warwick Commission website home page (<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/>) accessed 19.5.14

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Wellbeing has been differentiated into two (clearly related) ideal types, eudaimonic and hedonic. The first is associated with sense of control, autonomy and community, and the latter with pleasure and relaxation. This distinction, supported by current health and policy sector discourses (such as the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment Tool Kit described later in this chapter) is used in this thesis, even where, as is common practice, projects’ own outcomes do not make this distinction. Eudaimonic wellbeing is associated with socially situated experience which produces a sense of belonging or community.

¹⁵ For example, by a group of senior UK arts and health researchers, some from the multidisciplinary *Arts, Health and Wellbeing Research* programme, funded by the ESRC

BOX 1 *Because we're worth it*: the need for practitioners to become experts in the evaluation of their own practice

A national conference at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 2012, set up by participatory community arts practitioner-led organisations Connected Culture and Mailout, reflected practitioners' growing call for greater professional recognition. '*Because We're Worth It*' speakers included practitioners, (artists and project staff), policy-makers and academics. In an opening address, the Chief Executive of the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce), Matthew Taylor, spoke about the tension still at the heart of the Arts Council UK's policies on participatory community arts. He characterised this as a dilemma between values and instrumental purposes (Knell and Taylor 2011), which only practitioners could resolve. This was an opportunity for evidence-based evaluation to come into its own, not least because an attachment to the ineffable and hence immeasurable qualities of creativity has done practitioners no financial favours: "creative workers are seen as paid hobbyists rather than as professionals with valuable labour power" (O'Brien 2013a). The focus of the day was on establishing a quality framework for practice in the field, primarily through peer review. But rather than a theorised statement about practice and impact, the conference concluded by agreeing a 'framework of values' which delegates felt defined participatory arts practice. It both illuminates attitudes of practitioners and the unbridged distance still to be travelled from values to organisational practice:

Creativity: happiness, challenge, celebration, honesty, desire, wellbeing, passion
Equal voices: support, accessibility, openness, diversity, inclusion, language
Social change: emotional resonance, human rights, empowerment, compassion, dialogue, developmental

(Connectedculture.co.uk, 2012)

Missing from the statement is a theory of change indicating how creativity supports these values. The practices of the *Because We're Worth It* conference attendees, (and the subject of this thesis), are to do with the experience of being actively creative in a project, rather than the experience of creativity through being in an audience or viewing artworks. Creativity in this sense is shared by all participatory community arts projects, across genre, time and place. Yet its particular impact is not described in the conference statement.

The impact of being creative is more easily inferred from a range of other more well-established academic and professional fields and disciplines than its own. Socio-psychology (Holloway 2009), 'arts and health' (O'Donnell et al, 2014), pedagogy (Cropley 2001; McClellan et al 2012) and art therapy (McNiff 1998) are all more focussed on *how* creativity leads to change than community arts reporting (however incomplete those understandings might be) despite being fields where the extrinsic impacts of creative projects are foremost. Attempts to theorise the impact of creativity come from researchers like Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the arts and crafts (Sennet 2007; Gauntlett 2011) and artists like Julia Dault (2011) or arts-based researchers like Eisner and Barone (2012). This makes it difficult for the relationship between creative impact and the organisation of practice to be theorised by projects and participatory creative community project practitioners themselves.

<http://www.artsandhealthresearch.ac.uk/artshealthandwellbeing/index.aspx> accessed 1.6.14), in an open letter from Prof Stephen Cliff, who criticises the ACE methodology and accuses it of ignoring significant research in the field of arts and health in the UK and elsewhere. (Liz Hill, Arts Professional 04-04-2011 <http://www.artspromotional.co.uk/news/ace-impact-report-firing-line> accessed 1.6.14)

Largely missing from this highly public debate is discussion driven mainly by artists and participants in projects, who often feel alienated and even betrayed by evaluations which impose criteria for success from above or fail to reflect the richness of their experience (Clements 2007, Matarasso 2009). However, as the spectre of economic recession and deficit reduction features more and more prominently in UK government and neo-liberal discourses, it is clear that participatory arts practitioners as well as their public funding brokers feel an increasing need to establish its value through reviews of evidence. This literature review will show that, although there are serious challenges to the view that there is no robust evidence of impact, evidence may not always be specific enough to be considered useful by funders. It may not satisfy practitioners or participants, and its development is hampered by widespread lack of explicit theorisation of the sought after changes.

As argued above, funders tend to have general or vague expectations about evaluation practices, focussing more intently on activity monitoring. For example, the UK Government's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills asks for evaluation of its projects funded under the *Community Challenge Grant Scheme 2014-15*:

Include how you have measured its impact and evidence (e.g. observation, questionnaire, interview etc)

Such a list of traditional types of method disconnected from specific research purpose or context is open to interpretation as a description of appropriate and sufficient methodology, leading to the production of superficial or limited data. It closes any potential search for appropriate and contingent or exploratory methods. Even from 'leadership' bodies, evaluation guidelines are sketchy at best. For example, the Scottish Arts Council evaluation guide suggests a series of questions for partners which include whether the project had been

Very successful / successful / not very successful / not successful

Partners Evaluation Tool Kit (February 2010) Section 4 Scottish Arts Council

Without accompanying suggestions for how these criteria might be arrived at and why, projects without in-house evaluation expertise (and as argued above, that is most of them) may be misled into over-estimating the value of consequent data as reflections on the effectiveness of their work. Both these shortcomings relate to the lack of a 'theory of change', that is, evidence-based theorisation of *how* people and communities change, in what circumstances and through which kind of experiences. Crucially, there is often no developed evidence about the role of creativity in this process. Such theory is an essential part of developing criteria both for measuring impact and for assessing how effective a project's processes are as it unfolds. In other words, it can support evaluation for both 'proving and improving'.

There is little guidance in toolkits about how data might be analysed, for example, how themes are to be drawn from interview transcripts. In addition, toolkits often suggest or list positive outcome indicators as a framework for analysis of data, with the consequent danger that inexperienced evaluators or determined advocates might record or interpret only data which reflects these. These usually depend on extensive self-reporting, with little critical reflection on the meanings produced. This is the main source of Merli's critique of Matarasso's influential empirical work *Use or Ornament: Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (1997), a national study which "played an important role in establishing a near-consensus in Britain among cultural policy-makers' linking participatory arts with positive social impact (Merli 2002:107). Matarasso's study, argues Merli, has no internal validity, because the methods (mainly self-report through pre-determined questionnaire) do not produce data which can answer the (often abstract) research questions. This is particularly so when self reports of personal wellbeing are extrapolated to claims about impact on communities. Matarasso's methods did not include control groups or longitudinal research. In mitigation, the literature review in Chapter 2 of this thesis has not uncovered many evaluation requirements (from funders/commissioners) or 'toolkits' from leaders in the field which suggest either of these or similar methods, and, as argued above, project funding regimes consistently fail to allow for either the development of expertise or necessary time for these more in-depth research techniques beyond the life of a single project.

Some of the most useful accounts of participatory practice are those like McLellan et al. (2012) which try to address this complexity. These remind us that participants, artists, projects and communities are not homogenous groups. Their 'social circumstances' and a range of other factors connected with people's experience outside the physical and temporal boundaries of a single project interact with their experiences in it (McLellan et al. 2012:59). This interaction with other areas of people's lives is extremely difficult to recognise in a typical evaluation process. However, typically, 'best practice' toolkits (such as *Partnerships for Learning a guide to evaluating arts education projects*, Arts Council England, Department for Culture Media and Sport, Woolf F, 2004) continue to offer task-orientated processes which treat relationships between people and activities as stable, based on simple relationships between cause and effect. In these models participants are treated as homogenous groups. For example, the influential Charities Evaluation Service (representing key voluntary sector bodies) has for many years offered a range of free toolkits and 'how to' guides to best practice for small to medium voluntary sector groups, funded projects or charities which explain key terms and recommend participatory, self-evaluation through a number of universal steps. These models of 'best practice toolkits' remain locked into a relatively simple 'cause and effect' framework. They are therefore likely to fail to engage with the complexities of projects involving creativity and militate against developing an understanding of relationships and

processes which are central to the production of impact. Belfiore has called oversimplification in cultural policy and evaluation 'bullshit' (Belfiore 2008:24)¹⁶.

Nevertheless, there is a 'top-down' shift in thinking about evaluation underway, driven by funders' need for more robust evidence described at the start of this Chapter¹⁷. Both the Arts Council and CES have in the past few years developed materials advocating that project evaluation is based on theories of change. For example, the Arts Council England's current (2014-15) consultation and piloting of Children and Young People's Quality Principles advocates a theory of change based approach as developed by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) and the independent research group Shared Intelligence¹⁸ and the CES now recommends this approach (Ellis et al, 2011). However, there is little discussion about the quality of evidence underpinning theories and, crucially, no commitment in the processes described to using evidence about the impact of creativity itself in order to plan activities and evaluate them (as distinguished from other aspects of project activity). Without an understanding of the conditions in which the potential of creative experience to facilitate personal or collective change can be most successfully fulfilled, projects can neither plan nor evaluate effectively.

In summary, evaluation models and practices which have not emerged from evidence-based theories about how creativity is implicated in the generation of impact and which consequently lack adequate conceptual or methodological frameworks, are likely to be perceived as unconvincing for policymakers (although they may satisfy funders in the short term) and may find it difficult to produce analyses of data which account for the complexities of collective creative engagement or critiques of projects' own practice which are essential to improve effectiveness.

The projects in this research have these things in common: participation by non-professionals, in (usually) collective creative activity, (usually) led by artists (or sometimes by other professionals), in a time-limited project activity. Understanding the specificities of the relationship of projects to their particular 'cultural field' (Froggett et al. 2011:91) is important in order to understand how impact is produced and how it might be measured. However, types of participants, genres of artistic practice, and ways of

¹⁶ "...any impact evaluation toolkit that promises to evaluate the transformative power of any form of aesthetic experience in 'ten easy replicable steps', thus bypassing or refusing to address [its] complexity, is likely to be – let us be honest –bullshit". (Belfiore 2008:346)

¹⁷ For example, as this thesis went to publication, the Arts Council England announced a call-out for a three-year research funding stream into the social impact of participatory arts, *Research Grants Programme 2015-18*, specifically favours in its selection criteria what it (rightly) calls 'under-used' methods: "Larger quantitative and/or qualitative and longitudinal studies to look at population(s) at scale and over time to assess the extent and duration of the impact of being involved in arts and culture; Experimental or quasi-experimental studies, including Randomised Control Trials" and mixed methods (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-funding/apply-for-funding/research-grants-programme-2015-18/> Accessed 8.2.15)

¹⁸ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/children-and-young-people/quality/> Accessed 2.2.15

organising project processes are highly diverse. In this context academic evaluations which might be expected to theorise findings still tend to shy away from generalisations. For example, a University of Surrey evaluation of a prison dance project concluded that it was “highly life enhancing” for participants (Brown et al., 2004:59) but that this was due to the specific skills and practices of the dance company and the “giftedness” of the lead facilitator. The evaluators could not draw the more general conclusions about the impact of dance projects in prisons which the policymakers above are calling for.

An approach to evaluation which might connect creativity, participation and impact in a range of projects needs to work *with* these differences between projects and participants, and the contexts of their contingencies of time and place, rather than try to either flatten them, or to (unfeasibly) individualise methods. It implies a move away from ‘best practice’, the traditional recommendation of the many evaluation ‘toolkits’¹⁹ available to projects, which remain locked into a relatively simple ‘cause and effect’ framework. Existing best practice approaches are therefore likely to fail to engage with the complexities of projects involving creativity and militate against developing an understanding of relationships and processes which are central to the production of impact²⁰.

Some of the most useful accounts of participatory practice are those like McLellan et al. (2012) which try to address this complexity. These remind us that participants, artists, projects and communities are not homogenous groups. Their ‘social circumstances’ and a range of other factors connected with people’s experience outside the physical and temporal boundaries of a single project interact with their experiences in it (McLellan et al. 2012:59). This interaction with other areas of people’s lives may be difficult to recognise. Whereas the literature is generally certain that participation in arts has a positive impact on self-reported wellbeing²¹, it is less certain about how this works, its longitudinal impact or the transition from individual to social change (Fujiwara et al. 2014; Mowlah et al. 2014, O’Brien 2010). A pressing problem for evaluation is that, whereas projects tend to be time-bound, discrete and geographically fixed, impact may be none of these. For Mowlah, although he does speak of ‘intangible’ aspects of participation²², this

¹⁹ For example, the Charities Evaluation Service offers a range of free toolkits and ‘how to’ guides to best practice for small to medium voluntary sector groups, funded projects or charities which explain key terms and recommend participatory, self-evaluation through a number of universal steps. (<http://www.ces-vol.org.uk/tools-and-resources>).

²⁰ For example, guides recommended by the Arts Council England in its own ‘best practice’ evaluation guide (Self-Evaluation Information Sheet 2004), such as *Partners Evaluation Tool Kit* (February 2010) www.scottisharts.org.uk Woolf F (2004) *Partnerships for Learning a guide to evaluating arts education projects*, London, Arts Council England, offer simple task-orientated processes which treat relationships between people and activities as stable and are based on simple relationships between cause and effect. In these models participants are treated as homogenous groups.

²¹ Including when controlled for other factors “such as age, background and socio-economic circumstances” (Mowlah et al. 2014:39).

²² Although without explaining what these might comprise.

is largely a methodological problem unrelated to qualities inherent in the specific experience of creativity (Mowlah et al. 2014:39) which is the subject of this thesis. This aspect, and the issue of 'long term' evaluation in short term funding settings, remains to be explored. Evaluations of creativity which rely on self-reporting must also account for issues of affect – the immediate flow of emotions which are often difficult to describe or remember (Lorimer 2008, Thrift 2008). These may be central to the experience of becoming absorbed in creative 'flow' and may be heightened only briefly at key points. In creative projects which lead towards making, performing or showing work, these highpoints are likely to be towards the end of activity, the traditional time for self-reported evaluations. The implications of the need to distinguish between the process of experiencing life and that of thinking about it (Kahneman and Riis, 2005) are a challenge for project evaluation which it may not ever overcome, but which it needs to acknowledge.

Chapters 3 and 4 show how responding to these two problems prompted a development of research methodology through expanding the repertoire of ways of reflecting, and through clarifying methodologies to support longer term comparisons (beyond the limited life of a single project). It also suggests two areas to explore further which are discussed below, the specific impact of being creative in a project, and the impact of different ways of participating in projects which include creativity. The following section argues that understandings about impact and participation are further complicated by the relationship of participatory creative community projects to publically evolving and political discourses and funding strategies about the arts and community. These contribute to informing the attitudes of everyone involved.

2.2 From 'community' to 'participatory': the contested relationship between aesthetic and extrinsic project aims

In the UK²³ the term 'community arts' has increasingly been replaced in professional and policy discourses by the term 'participatory arts', linked to a political shift towards the

²³ This is not necessarily the case in Europe or Australia, where the term community arts is still used, but possibly with specific local meanings, such as projects which are 'intercultural'. This researcher's reading of the literature suggests that in the US a distinction is made between *participative* art projects (in which the fact of democratic participation is the driving motive and defining feature), and *participatory* arts, where artists use the participation of non artists to make artwork (Roux 2007). In the UK the term participatory arts refers broadly to both community arts projects with varying types of participation (funded to produce social impact) and the practice of artists who engage with non-artists in making their own work. For example, the UK artist Antony Gormley's work *Field* (1989 – 2003), during which thousands of volunteers made tiny clay figures and

individualisation of public and cultural life since the 1960s and 1970s (Battersby 1981, Meade and Shaw 2007, MacRobbie 2008, Matarasso 2013). In this perhaps idealistic reading, community arts projects in the 1970s UK were associated with participant-led projects, originating from needs articulated by an existing community of place or interest, and managed by the community itself (Clements 2007, Matarasso 2013). In this climate, a more collaborative and reflective evaluation of impact was possible (Clements 2007:327). In contrast, today's participatory projects are characterised as having top-down origins, instigated by governments or charities. These funding bodies define temporary communities using their own priorities, rather than working with existing groups. A 'sense of community' may be engendered by such a project, but it is likely to be specific to its activities and duration. For example, all the projects in the field research described later in this thesis were instigated from outside the communities of the participants. In some cases, participants were unaware of the 'community' specified by the project aims. Two projects respectively specified target communities of the 'hard to reach' or those 'living in areas of multiple deprivation', but there was no evidence in the research contact that participants defined themselves this way. Matarasso argues that participation in such projects is likely to be more superficial than democratic. Projects instigated in this manner, especially those funded by government, are part of the instruments of governance, they become "an agent or adjunct of state policy" (Meade and Shaw 2007:415). Their non-negotiable evaluation is "steeped in a methodology of control" (Clements 2007:326).

Moreover, the preponderance for community arts of *non-arts* funding (such as Lottery funding) since the 1990s, which disassociated the work from the rest of the arts, has fuelled criticism that participatory community art is 'sociology by other means' (McDonagle 2007:426 quoting the *Irish Times*). This in turn may be expressed in projects themselves as an ambivalent and vacillating attitude on the part of participatory community arts workers to the issue of who directs the processes of creating and who 'owns' the work²⁴ or a juggling with roles from teacher to colleague (O'Brien 2004, 2014). For some practitioners the use of art in projects as an agent of social change undervalues and undermines the 'natural' impacts of creativity, replacing them with a "synthetic instrumentality" (Clements 2007:327). Hope (2011) argues that the shift has been from socially engaged artists' practice, which can offer "complex, self-directed

helped the artist install them in buildings in five countries. The work was clearly 'owned' or authored by the artist, who directed the creative and organisational aspects of the process, but the participation of other people was central in his mind to its conception: "I wanted to work with people and to make a work about our collective future and our responsibility for it" Gormley on his website <http://www.antonygormley.com/sculpture/item-view/id/245> (accessed 19.9.14). That the term participative is rarely used in the UK may not necessarily mean that the distinction is lost, but rather that the boundaries between the two types of practice remain fluid and contested in practice.

²⁴ 'Owns' is marked here to reflect both the complexity of authorship post Barthes' *Death of the Author* (1967) and the literal issue of who keeps, exhibits and is paid for actual artworks made in community projects.

interruptions and contest predefined parameters and frameworks” towards a far less radical preoccupation with making existing culture more widely accessible (Hope 2011:9). Whatever its overt intentions, this latter confirms rather than disrupts existing social relations.

Arguably, a more comfortable framing for policymakers is that the shift to ‘participatory arts’ (both in name and practice) represents a genuine extension of democratic practices arising from the influence of growing identity politics. This re-naming represents a new ‘turn to the arts’ in public policy, which some commentators are arguing has followed the ‘turn to community’ (Mulligan and Smith 2010, Brady and Brown 2013). In this reading, community projects could be associated with the ‘participatory arts’ practice of socially engaged artists such as Deller, Collins, and Torres (Bishop 2006), in which participation is usually determined and led by the artist rather than commissioned by policymakers²⁵. Nicholson suggests that there is more recently a further blurring of the distinction between participatory arts as an arts practice and as a community practice, in this period when ‘community’ is becoming less important than ‘participation’:

Participation is no longer confined to ‘marginalised’ communities or institutional settings; contemporary arts practices are re-defining the ‘participant’, breaking down distinctions between art forms and opening new forms of interactivity and engagement with different audiences, publics and communities.

(Nicholson 2013:2)

At the same time as a political distancing from the more radical associations held in the concept of community described by Matarasso (2013), ‘the arts’ are expected to contribute to curing many social ills previously seen as the responsibility of government or communities themselves (Clements 2007). In this latter discourse, as Chapter 1 suggested, participatory creative community projects are key players. So, although creative activities in projects have the potential to be valued by their funders, managers and participants for the intrinsic worth of aesthetic creation, in publically funded projects the aims are usually connected with extrinsic impact - even if this is increasingly explicitly linked to achieving normative standards of aesthetic excellence in project artwork (Clements 2007)²⁶. Artists must negotiate “the complex dynamic between place, cultural participation and social engagement” (Nicholson 2013:2) and their own relationship to the production of aesthetic excellence. In community projects this negotiation is specifically constrained by the demands of funders, organisers, communities and participants, places, and genre of arts activity. Roles may be contested, and any of these

²⁵ Although possibly not by the artists themselves.

²⁶ Reflected in shifting priorities for Arts Council England (ACE) the major UK government arts funding body over the past ten years from a focus on ‘new audiences’ to ‘excellence’ (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/> accessed 25.7.14)

demands might become sites of tension throughout a project, and even afterwards, particularly if physical artworks are produced²⁷. Nevertheless, it is unusual for existing evaluations or even research to define 'what artists do', how their practice differs from community workers, or how their role is delineated in practice. These became key questions for the field research which follows.

Rather than engage with a "false and sterile dichotomy" (Belfiore 2007:148), it is more useful and practical within the framework of small-scale evaluation to regard impact as holding a continuum of values between instrumental and intrinsic (Thelwell 2011:11), and to focus more closely on *how* impact is produced. Artists' accounts of their own participatory community practice reinforce this insight but suggest that this continuum is a subject to continual tension. For example, the artists involved in the Whitechapel Gallery schools *engage* projects (2004-8)²⁸ reflected on the tensions inherent in their role and insights into the particular 'offer' artists can make: "artists focused on experimentation and process over product. Instead of telling young people what to do, artists have presented different possibilities and ways of thinking" (Whitechapel Gallery 2008). This statement begins to theorise the production of impact, locating it in aesthetic process rather than aesthetic outcome and a 'different' pedagogy, rooted in opening up possibilities and new thinking²⁹. Haywood and Ingleson's review of their own Salford youth arts regeneration project describes how they as artists defined their role, specifying that they tried to "maintain their role as artists and [were] committed to that professional identity" (Haywood and Ingleson 2008:18). This was part of a desire rooted in their prime identity as artists (rather than participatory community artists), to "resist function" as a driver for art-making in favour of the realisation of a purely aesthetic intention. Nevertheless, the artists found their roles continually contested in a partnership project also driven by pedagogy and 'enterprise' (Haywood and Ingleson 2008). Both accounts position the artist as in a state of highly productive reflective tension during the project and as offering something 'other', framed by aesthetic intent and linked to the production of impact. Developing an understanding about what is lost from the integrity of their artists' practice and what is gained aesthetically by working with participants is arguably an important skill for successful participatory creative community project artists' practice. Sennett describes a preoccupation relevant to this tension, saying that motivation in craft processes resides

²⁷ This researcher is not unusual in storing participants' artwork sometimes for years after a project, cf 17 or so 'storyboxes', produced in a community project four years ago, because participants and various curators and spaces have committed to exhibiting them but failed to follow-through; and some huge images produced by participants in a more recent project which had promised them an exhibition but failed to secure it; and so on. Meanwhile, a sculptor colleague continues to regularly repair a neglected 'community bench', long after her paid employment has ceased, partly from commitment to the participants and partly to 'protect her reputation' (unpublished conversation 2013).

²⁸ *Inspiring education in galleries: An evaluation of the impacts and legacies of Enquire and Watch this Space*. London, Engage http://www.engage.org/downloads/Enquire_Advocacy.pdf (accessed 25.7.14)

²⁹ The distinction and relationship between "between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity" (Jeffrey, Craft 2004:1).

not with the “finished end” but the doing itself, the enjoyment of unending work implicit in the term vocation (Sennett 2008:263). Similarly, the Creative Partnership programme in UK schools linked increased impact to a shift in teachers valuing process over outcome (McLellan et al., 2012). However, artists’ accounts also suggest that impact is related to a fluctuating interaction between process and product, with the imaginative, aesthetic context of the work as crucial. Bishop (2006) argues that artistic integrity must be retained in participatory projects in order to produce artwork with critical aesthetic value. This enables the ‘disruptive specificity’ which gives creativity its particular role in such projects.

The evolving discourses described in the literature above are part of the context in which participants and project staff navigate their experience of creativity and participation, and in which the evaluation of projects needs to function. What is not present in the literature, and what this thesis proposes, is a more critical exploration of the implications of this complex context on the design of evaluation strategies. The next section looks at some of the issues surrounding the notion of wellbeing, a key extrinsic, or social aim of the projects in this study. It describes how ideas about wellbeing are changing, and how this contributes to it being sometimes poorly defined in project planning and evaluation.

2.3 How the notion of wellbeing is problematic for project evaluation

It is clear that parallels between therapeutic processes and participation in creative interventions are implicit in discourses about instrumental impact. This study focuses on creative projects in community settings aiming to improve individual and social wellbeing. Over the past decade there has been a global (albeit uneven) shift in public policy understandings of what is meant by wellbeing (Berry 2014³⁰). Previously regarded by economists as too nebulous to consider, qualities of social interaction, such as sense of community and sense of autonomy, once basic food and security needs are met, become more important to a sense of wellbeing than increased income. In this discourse, individual wellbeing is inextricably linked to collective wellbeing³¹. Improving wellbeing, either in the sense of good physical or mental health, or in the sense of positive

³⁰ Berry, C (2014) New Economics Foundation Blog 22.5.2014 *Well-being is about more than lollipops and birdsong* (No page nos) <http://www.neweconomics.org/blog/entry/well-being-is-about-more-than-lollipops-and-birdsong> (accessed 7.6.14)

³¹ For example, the US Social Progress Index recognises “the importance of inclusive growth and shared prosperity... wellbeing is assessed by access to both basic knowledge and to information and communications, health and wellness, ecosystem sustainability. Finally, opportunity is divided into personal rights, personal freedom and choice, tolerance and inclusion, and access to advanced education”. Abdurazokzoda, F (2014) *Economic Growth and Wellbeing “Not Equal”, Study Finds* (No page nos) IPS News 4.4.1204 <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/04/economic-growth-wellbeing-equal-study-finds/> (accessed 7.6.14)

relationships within communities and wider society, is a common aim, perhaps the most common, which participatory creative community projects are given by their funders and commissioners (O'Brien 2010).

These ideas about wellbeing became part of UK policy debate during the 1990s with the publication of the government's Acheson Report into inequalities in health (1998) which related health inequalities to social capital. The implication was that health problems have complex, sometimes social, causes and therefore need complex interventions. Issues such as "trust, reciprocity, local democracy, citizenship, civic engagement, social relationships, social support" have become recognised factors in the production of both individual and community wellbeing (Health Development Agency, 2000:4). During this period 'arts and health' projects have developed a particular relationship with the UK National Health Service and are often managed by health-based professionals. Parallels between therapeutic processes and participation in creative interventions are implicit in discourses about instrumental impact. However, there are perhaps some differences between 'community' arts and 'arts and health' projects which make them sufficiently distinct as to constitute separate fields. These differences may be more connected to how projects are framed than type of participant or arts genre. For example, as the next section discusses, funded participatory creative community projects with instrumental aims are often based on an inexplicit 'deficit model', with participants constituted as a group in need of support by the project, rather than self-identified. This may apply equally to health promotion projects, where participants are identified as 'at risk' by the project, or mental health projects where diagnoses are challenged, but for many participants in 'arts and health' projects it is likely that they self-identify as a group recovering or suffering from ill health. Directly therapeutic interventions, such as Art Therapy aimed at healing mental wellbeing, are guided by therapists towards interpretation and expression (McNiff 2004). This is not the focus of publically funded creative community interventions led by artists, where self expression is seldom the prime aim of the activity (although it may be a significant factor in creating impact such as social cohesion or improved wellbeing). Moreover, although this thesis draws on relevant findings from 'arts and health' research, evaluations in this sector may be aimed at specialist health service audiences which shape their approaches (Putland 2008) in ways sufficiently different from community projects to warrant separate attention. For this reason, and although these two things are clearly interconnected, the current study focuses on projects with a wellbeing rather than health aim.

Comment [I1]: Have you defined this elsewhere?

As a project aim, how 'improving wellbeing' is defined – implicitly or explicitly – might be expected to have a defining impact on the structure of the project itself and the evaluation of its success in meeting that aim.

For example, McDonnell found that, in creative schools projects, how wellbeing was defined determined the shape of the project activities and the strategies chosen for implementation (McDonnell et al. 2012:72)³² – although McDonnell’s research implied an evidence-based, aims-driven planning process, which is not always available to projects. Whether held explicitly or implicitly within a project and its social environment, the way wellbeing as an aim is defined may influence not only what processes, activities, feelings, objects and changes are recognised, measured and reported on, but even perhaps what can be *felt* in the first place (Thrift 2008).

Increasingly, the literature values eudaimonic wellbeing as most significant in contributing to lasting individual and social wellbeing³³. The influential Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA³⁴) uses the following processes as promoters of social wellbeing:

- “Enhancing control;
 - Increasing resilience and community assets;
 - Facilitating participation and promoting inclusion”
- (Cooke et al, 2011:8).

MWAI points out that these eudaimonic wellbeing indicators are also in keeping with current UK government policy in the field of mental health (Cooke et al. 2011:9). Social relations and core values, such as equity and social justice, are regarded as key factors in producing eudaimonic wellbeing (Cooke et al. 2011) and linked to social cohesion and resilience (Knell and Taylor 2011). Moreover, research suggests that hedonic self-reported wellbeing indicators, which don’t necessarily relate to positive functioning in the world, are more short-lived than specifically eudaimonic indicators (White 2014). This is a complex matter for project evaluation, since wellbeing is increasingly regarded in the literature as not only eudaimonic but also as a ‘dynamic state’: “in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to their community” (The Foresight Review 2008:10). The tendency to regard individual wellbeing as a dynamic process situated in a social context has implications for understanding how individual wellbeing and wider

³² Arguably, community arts projects initiated by artist-led companies are just as likely to plan a creative project and then seek funding, ‘tweaking’ project design to fit funders’ aims, as to build a project around its aims. This issue became part of my research, particularly for its implication for implementing evaluation strategies, described in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

³³ Wellbeing has been differentiated by more recent commentators into two (clearly related) ideal types, eudaimonic and hedonic. The first is associated with sense of control, autonomy and community, and the latter with pleasure and relaxation. This distinction is supported by current health and policy sector discourses (such as the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment Tool Kit).

³⁴ The National MWIA Collaborative (England), which includes Liverpool University, local government, charity and National Health Service organisations, developed broad indicators for measuring the impact of a new initiative or intervention on a community’s mental wellbeing using a range of factors, and produced a ‘Toolkit for well-being’ for implementation in May 2011, widely used in the field.

social impact is produced and evaluated in projects. It suggests that a 'snapshot' of activity or feelings will be inadequate and that both this thesis research and the evaluation methods it proposes need to be integrated and reflexive. A dynamic, social definition of wellbeing presents a challenge to the extensive self-reporting by participants immediately after project activity, which is a prime feature of current evaluations in the field (Merli 2002) and an indicator of the need to go beyond existing literature and policymakers' exhortations to secure long term feedback. Clearly, if wellbeing is associated with empowerment, the participatory premise and practices of a project are likely to be of paramount importance – unless the experience of creativity itself can be shown to contribute these impacts.

The next section begins an exploration of how the nature and impact of participation in projects is represented in existing literature, as a first step to identifying how creativity and participation interrelate.

2.4 Participations, power and collective impact

The often competing and sometimes rather broad discourses about the impact of participation current in the field contribute paradigms of the achievable and the desirable for project participants, staff and artists. As with definitions of wellbeing, they help shape a project's organisation and ambition and frame what is the subject for the evaluation of its impact. In existing literature debates about the role of participation in producing impact in projects remain unresolved. Despite cogent critiques of participation per se (for example Cooke and Kothari 2001), claims for the impact of participatory arts projects are frequently wide-ranging and ambitious. They usually elide the impact of participation and creativity without explaining the relationship³⁵. For example, this position statement from the respected and research-driven UK 'Arts and Health' group connects democratic participation and political action ('solidarity') to wellbeing and 'flourishing', without explicitly referencing creativity – although its research is predicated on the idea that creativity and the arts have positive impacts not available through other kinds of participatory activity:

this is about well-being
this is about democracy
this is about human flourishing
this is about new ways of understanding impact and value
this is about solidarity

(Arts and Health Manifesto, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2013)

³⁵ For example, Lowe's taxonomy of "co-produced participatory art, artist-authored participatory art, and talent/skills development" (Lowe, 2011:5) is descriptive rather than explanatory.

Democratic participation in project organisation is largely valued for producing positive impact *of itself* (Matarasso 1997, Webster and Buglass 2011:); with little discussion about the potential role of different types of participation as intensifiers or moderators of the impact of creativity. Participation is sometimes characterised as incompatible with a preoccupation with aesthetic excellence (McGrath 1996). In discussions about 'freedom and structure' in relation to creative activities, creativity is seen both as a constrained and an unpredictable, open-ended process (Webster and Buglass 2011, Crehan 2011), more or less amenable to control through democratic participation. For example, Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) definition of creativity (discussed more fully below) implies that excessive *participant* control over aesthetic processes and decisions may inhibit creativity. The interaction between the artist as expert arbiter of success or failure (within the contested domain of aesthetic excellence), and the form or extent of participation in a project, are key constituents of the specific nature of each project.

However much participatory creative community projects intend to foster democratic participation, they may implicitly share a 'deficit model' of individual change³⁶ and have "regulatory potential" (Ryan 2001:20, Clements 2007), because the power of defining 'need' resides almost exclusively with funders. Artists (seldom local community members, often separated from participants by class or circumstances) are charged with 'rescuing' the participant, "defined a priori as in need of empowerment or access to creative/expressive skills" (Kester 2004:137). As the preceding section suggests, parallels between therapeutic processes and participation in creative interventions are implicit in discourses about instrumental impact. For example, an arts project to improve community wellbeing is often predicated on the assumption that the expertise to define need and deliver change is held within the project, not the community. Cooke and Kothari (2001), in a challenge to participatory research practice (which espouses practices, and uses a language of empowerment and process, similar to that heard in participatory community project discourses) makes the point that participation in a project *of itself* may not be empowering. It may even undermine existing community democratic processes, and seldom changes disempowering material or structural conditions.

In contrast, democratically originated and managed projects are often seen as a counter to a patronising 'benevolent' (Merli 2002) policy. They are seen as 'developmental' rather

³⁶ The term 'deficit model' comes from pedagogy. It implies the conceptualisation of participants as recipients of interventions aimed at remedying a lack sited in the participants themselves or their communities (for example, literacy, confidence, social cohesion). In this model, participants have not necessarily identified the lack themselves and are not in control of the 'offer', that is, the means or form of the intervention. The deficit model has been resoundingly challenged by community development research which asserts that community resilience can only be built on community assets and positive features (for example, Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) yet remains the fundamental principle of much participatory creative community project funding.

than 'remedial' (Matarasso 2007) and artists' practice in them is sometimes called 'socially engaged' or 'socially committed' (Meade, Shaw 2007) to imply a political rejection of externally imposed aims and practices. Nevertheless, as Mulligan and Smith argue convincingly in their review of creative participatory community projects, in the 'turn to community' of the C21st, governments can use community engagement itself as a means of control: "community is not simply the territory of government but a means of government" (Rose, N quoted in Mulligan and Smith 2010:9).

Individual participation in this process is presumed to lead to social change, although there is little theoretical explanation or published evidence to explain how impacts on individuals translates to 'macro' indicators such as community wellbeing (Putland 2008: 268). However, the close association between participation in creative community projects and collective activity, a key feature which distinguishes them from other community interventions such as individualised skill learning, sheds a light on this process (Matarasso 2009, McAteer and Dewhurst 2010, Sefton-Green 2007, Webster and Buglass 2011). Social learning, which recognises collective knowledges and 'truths' emerging from collaborative learning processes, was a key part of the Creative Partnerships programme in schools, linked not only to learning but also to how people change or develop their identities, sense of self-worth, and agency (Lave and Wenger 1999). Individual 'transformation' in projects depends on collective activity and social context (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). In terms of wellbeing impact, psychosocial explanations of the positive impact of collective activities are based on the thesis that mental ill health is related to social relations rather than individual dysfunction (Smail 1993). We need our inner world to be recognised publically as part of the social: "a life is given meaning and value not by being 'enjoyed' in private, but by being lived and appreciated in public" (Smail 2005:41). For this reason projects which set out to change communities through *collaborative* activities, which enable people to restore their "sense of [themselves] as social agents" are more likely to be successful (Smail 2005:41). The extent to which this process is fostered by the conscious activity of socially engaged artists' practice (Wilson 2008), that is by the ability to create processes in the project to produce "new, shared forms for the expression of individual and collective feeling, while sustaining a critical consciousness" (Froggett et al 2011:8), or rests on the inherent sociability of community projects, is part of this research enquiry.

Notwithstanding these understandings that participatory creative community projects are associated with both individual and social change, the implication that *types* of participation within projects express types of power is largely absent in writing about participatory creative community projects, even though, "*Sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power*" (White1996:6 Author's italics). It is however

to be found in community development and youth work research. For example, Gaventa's 'space of power' analysis of (non-arts based) community development projects, recognises different forms and levels of participant power (Gaventa 2006). Treseder's (1997) 'circle of nodes' of participation in youth work reflects on complex relationships to participation and power. However, these do not particularly help us understand the significance of power in relation to *types* of participation in creative activities – for example, power to make aesthetic decisions or to manipulate creative materials compared with power to determine organisational issues. Nor does it help assign weight to different kinds of participation in creating impact. Crucially, understandings about the particular impact of creativity need to be integrated into a new model of participation, in order that the claims of creative practitioners and project evaluators be substantiated or refuted.

Moreover, this new model needs to be able to describe not only participation by 'participants', but how power is exercised or negotiated by *everyone* in the project in different circumstances and over time. In this model, for example, early stages of a project may show the balance of power lies with funders and project managers, to determine the geographical, budgetary, aims, timescale etc. At a later stage, artists may have greater influence over the form and content of artworks, in negotiation with managers and participants. Participants may have greater power in determining meeting times or take greater aesthetic control later in the project in negotiation with artist and each other; and so on. The term 'participations' can be used in this model as a marker to emphasise the existence of different kinds of participations and these fluctuating processes.

To be useful, an analysis must theorise the power and agency associated with creative experiences coming into being in projects. If it could be shown that the experience of being creative, or consequent changes in thinking or behaviours (Cropley 2001; Csikszentmihalyi 2002), were positive outcomes in themselves, the function of creativity in projects might expand from enabler of other outcomes (such as wellbeing) to become an end in itself. With this in mind, I looked at three aspects of creativity in this review: the personal impact of being creative; creativity and learning; and creativity and social change

2.5 What's so special about being creative?

There has been, over the past two decades, a seemingly inexorable valorisation of creativity in all aspects of social life, and a linking of creative innovation in industry and science with artistic creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). The 'slippery' nature of the concept

of creativity certainly makes it difficult to challenge as a common sense good. O'Brien comments wryly, it's "hard to be against" (O'Brien 2014:6), signalling that any research needs to be alert to possible negative impacts as well as beneficial ones. Cropley, influential in the development of UK creative pedagogies, even ascribes to creativity the quality of positive "ethicality" (Cropley 2001:6). Evidence that creativity can be used 'unethically' to instrumental ends, for example in research (and by implication evaluation) is beginning to emerge from reflective research practice (Field et al 2009, Brady and Brown 2013). Nevertheless, this lack of definition means that creativity acts as a metaphorical container for a range of ideas and the value of specific creative activities must be constantly argued for. This section considers the treatment of therapeutic and cognitive impacts of being creative in existing literature in relation to the idea of creative flow and the attempt it represents to 'unpick' what can be a powerful experience.

Evidence-based research tends to describes two personal impacts when we look at or create 'art': therapeutic and cognitive. Significant projects such as the Manchester Metropolitan University *Arts For Health* project³⁷, have established links between more aesthetically pleasing environments (being in an audience for arts, participation in creative activities), and measurably improved health outcomes (such as fewer medications, shorter recovery times). 'Arts and Health' research³⁸ has tended to develop much more precise definitions for its evaluations than have participatory creative community projects, undoubtedly because of its roots in scientific enquiry and perhaps also because of the need to justify spend in competition with medical interventions. For example, the definitions described earlier in this chapter, of two types of wellbeing, 'eudaimonic' and 'hedonic', emerged from this area of research (Ryff et al. 2004:1359).

Like the MWIA³⁹ (also described above), MMU *Arts for Health* associates lasting wellbeing with autonomy and agency. However, within these studies the detail of how the impact happens through creativity remains less well explored, and this has led to some criticism, possibly reflecting longstanding cultural and social divides between the arts and sciences. Putland refers to deep problems of definition, springing from the "elastic array of philosophies and political commitments" which underpin arts and health project funding and evaluation strategies (Putland 2008:268). For example, Kilroy et al (2008), in another MMU *Arts for Health* report, describe the process of individual change through being creative:

³⁷ artsforhealth@mmu.ac.uk

³⁸ 'Arts and Health' is a term for work across the two fields aimed using the arts and creativity to improve health and wellbeing, often linked to public health or medical provision (cf the current ESRC funded Arts, Health and Wellbeing Programme). There is ambivalence towards the evaluation of such activities from both fields. For example, in its Prospectus for Arts and Health (2007) the Arts Council UK praises "rigorous scientific studies" for confirming beneficial impact but fails to give similar weight to studies using arts-based research paradigms.

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/phpOUyKfF.pdf>

³⁹ MWIA can be found at <http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=70495>

Engaging in culture, creativity and the arts significantly improves health and well being by engaging people in challenging activities and giving them the opportunity to be creative and experimental. This in turn gives people the confidence and capacity to see and do things differently. This leads to raised expectations, and a greater inspiration and motivation for learning and personal growth, which were felt to be central to promoting feelings of wellbeing

(Kilroy et al, 2008:4).

This is more descriptive than explanatory. More precisely, it advocates a convincing process of change in 'challenging activities' but leaves 'engaging in ... creativity' and 'the opportunity to be creative' both unexplained and untheorised.

Similarly, Swindell et al 2013 et al. list four steps towards change in creative projects: purposeful work, cognitive and creative challenge, autonomous self-expression and heightened concentration (Swindell et al. 2013)⁴⁰. But key to understanding what differentiates these experiences from others in participatory community projects is a better understanding of the nature of a 'creative challenge'. We need to know, as the following section proposes, what difference it makes (in terms of how and what impact is produced) that these experiences are situated within an imaginative aesthetic framework and led by artists.

2.6 Creative flow, social relations and skills

In the key area of 'how' being creative affects people, Csikszentmihalyi's research identified the concept of 'flow', intense absorption in creative activity or engagement which 'takes you out of yourself' and can lead to life changing or momentary insights (Csikszentmihalyi 2002). He calls this moment of impact 'optimal experience', produced by exercising skills effectively or at moments of heightened emotion. For Csikszentmihalyi, structured or ritualized activity is a vital condition of producing creative 'flow', because creativity demands a degree of control, of ordered mindfulness. Central to this influential definition of creativity is that it involves new ideas and products or ways of working within or across particular knowledges and skill sets. The two relevant characteristics of creative flow for this research are firstly that creativity is a social relation, and second that it is expressed through an understanding of the symbolic structure of a particular cultural or skills domain.

⁴⁰ A study based on MMU's *Invest to Save Arts in Health* programme (2004-07)

However, the idea of 'flow' is often present discussions about impact with its meaning limited to 'intensity' uncoupled from skill or control⁴¹. Csikszentmihalyi's concept of skills development clearly has enormous implications for community projects, tending as they are to be both short-lived and to involve people new to a skillset and without time or intention to develop skills to any great extent. There are very few developed references to this as a problem in existing research on participatory creative community projects⁴². For the most part the challenge to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow as related to skills development is from community arts practitioner and participant accounts (Matarasso 1997, Webster and Buglass 2011, Crehan 2012). These describe the transformatory impact of quite brief or low-skill experiences of flow. Arguably, this challenge can be linked to a wider post-structural challenge to the authority of the expert and authorship, and the radical re-situating of 'expertise' by Marxists such as Gramsci, as a social construction⁴³ and Barthes 'death of the author' (1967) which has led to what is sometimes called the 'social turn' in arts and culture (Bishop 2006, Jackson 2011)⁴⁴. In participatory creative community projects this ambivalence about expertise may be experienced as a blurring of roles and a site of negotiation:

the boundaries between artists, curators and publics are transgressed and the locus of artistic control can shift between any of those involved. Authorship is often contested and negotiated

(Froggett et al 2011:8).

However, the idea of creativity as a social relation has been warmly embraced by participatory creative community project practitioners, who emphasise the connection between creativity and participation. Galloway and Dunlop (2007) suggest that it is helpful to identify a specifically cultural creativity through its association with the production or communication of symbolic meanings. This connection can also be inferred from both Csikszentmihalyi's earlier (1996) review of creative individuals and Kaufman and Sternberg's review of creativity across the world (2006), which both situates creativity within social and cultural milieu. These allow for a range of definitions with a greater or lesser focus on potential and processes, or on products. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) says that creativity arises from the synergy of a range of sources, rather than from the mind of one person. This fits well with the 'collective endeavour' ethos of participatory community arts, sometimes defined by this as "groups of people doing creative things together" (Webster and Buglass 2011:2). It is a reminder that the practice has roots in a

⁴¹ Brown and Novak's (2007) research into audience reactions, created indices of impact related to aesthetic engagement which are barely theorised. 'Flow' underpins their index "captivation" but limited to the sense of heightened concentration.

⁴² Kilroy (2008:4) is a tentative exception: "There was some suggestion that benefits were inhibited where there were not clear progression routes available for individual development within single arts forms"

⁴³ Cf Gramsci's 1971 *Prison Notebooks*

⁴⁴ This approach is borne out by another aspect of Brown and Novak's 2007 study of audience engagement during arts performances which identifies socially constructed meanings ('readiness to receive'), coupled with emotional and intellectual engagement, as powerful indices of impact.

radical rejection of the popular heroic individual model of creativity which dominated European High Art from the C18th to the 1960's, when it was challenged by a number of ideas of cultural philosophy, such as Bourriard's 'relational aesthetics' (1998), leading to the 'social turn' in art referred to above⁴⁵.

Reviews of the Creative Partnerships programme in UK schools often draw attention to a difference between transmission modes of teaching and artists' practice, the latter modelling a balance between skills development and the development of imagination and autonomy (McLellan et al. 2012). Nevertheless, there remains a tension between the 'have a go', short term, open access nature of community arts projects and their aspirations or relationship to the concept of creative flow in the fullest sense. The extent to which the concentration and absorption inherent in flow is related to or characterised as an aspiration to achieve aesthetic excellence in projects, or the extent to which it is expressed in other ways (for example, as effort or 'striving'), became part of the research described in this thesis. A possible link between creativity, effort and new ways of thinking is explored next.

2.7 Creativity, challenge and new ways of thinking

The association of creativity with new ways of thinking is at the foundation of the creative pedagogy movement, characterised in the UK by the government-funded Creative Partnerships programme (2002-2011) which brought artists into schools to promote a range of learning. A key theorist and researcher informing this movement, Anna Craft, called thinking through creativity 'possibility thinking', that is, open-ended, non-linear and divergent (Craft, 2002, Cropley 2001). She associated this with artists and arts-training. In creative pedagogies, arts-based learning is valued for the (often collective) open-ended and risk taking thinking and behaviour associated with artists' practice and training (McNaughton 2003).

More recently, the late C20th movement to rehabilitate craft skills has been associated with a cultural shift from 'a sit-back-and-be-told' culture to a 'making-and-doing' culture linked to easily accessed, cheap and powerful digital technology and the Internet (Brown et.al. 2011:3, Sennett 2008, Dormer 1997, Charny 2011). Strong arguments are made for an intensity of experience related to *all* creative making activities (not just the highly skilled). These rest on the idea that creativity is in itself a different kind of thinking and form of expression: "one of the strongest of human impulses and one of the most

⁴⁵ This is different from the 'turn to community' (Mulligan and Smith 2010) which refers to a change in the relationship between governance and community.

significant means of human expression" (Charny, 2011:7)⁴⁶. So, although, on the whole, contributors to Charny's influential '*Power of Making*' exhibition and text are arguing for the impact of creativity *within* the skilful of craft domains (only present in longer term participatory projects where skills development is central), there is a clear post-modern thread in their arguments about the value of less traditional, less formal making (such as is common in the projects in this study): "We can hone a skill to take pride in making things, and revel in work that has no clear boundaries from the world of play" (Miller 2011:17 in Charny). Sennett (in his influential book *The Craftsman*, a paean to making) also links craft to play, specifically to playing with materials and experimentation (Sennett 2008). In an earlier critique of capitalist cultural formations, he describes a process by which creativity has impact on individuals by widening the discourses available to them with which to interpret their experiences and the world, through the construction of new imaginative narratives (Sennett 2006). Mulligan and Smith point out that a key feature of Sennett's ideas about narratives in creativity is the ability of new stories to resonate and interact with other people's stories (2010:44), thus making the link between individual creativity and collective impact. Mulligan and Smith (2010:44) link this to Deleuze's ideas about the power of creative expression to take people from the particular to the universal and back again⁴⁷.

Cropley also associates creativity in learning with improved and desirable types of thinking and problem solving (Cropley 2001), which are not always 'easy' processes. Creativity is often linked to the creation of wellbeing or happiness but not necessarily to easy or immediately enjoyable experiences (Smail 1984, Froggett et al. 2011). On the contrary, in various ways creativity is often linked to effort: "the best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi 2002:3). However, it can also be linked to the impact of a challenge inherent in art, what in 'high' art is called

⁴⁶ In policy terms, this movement was reflected in a 2005 UK government White Paper following the Tomlinson Report (2004) identifying and lamenting the lack of 'more practical' learning in schools which has led to a number of education initiatives, including vocational training and others based on the hands-on 'problem-solving' skills associated with arts-based learning. Although the Tomlinson Report focuses on functional (employment orientated) learning, its identification of core skills which include 'social learning' and 'to think and use their skills creatively' (Tomlinson 2004:34), gave further impetus to the idea that creativity was an essential part of effective learning and valuable in its own right. 14-19 *Education and Skills White Paper* (2005) Dept for Education and Skills, Feb 2005 www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/docs/Whitepaper.doc

14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: final report of the working group on 14-19 reform (2004) Chair Tomlinson, M, Dept for Education and Skills (Oct 2004),

⁴⁷ In Deleuze, G (1968) *Différence et Répétition*. This description resonated strongly with the researcher's experience (throughout the research period but not part of it), of delivering banner-making workshops for women campaigning against domestic abuse. Rather than thinking about universal themes, participants were encouraged to become absorbed in purely personal, creative making responses to their own experience. The researcher observed in these workshops how this individual process within a group setting was very often followed by a new understanding about the wider context of personal experience (as women shared their artworks), and a return to personal reflection. These experiences fed into observations in the field research during this study.

the production of feelings of discomfort or dis-ease, *unheimlich*, an essential path to personal change in the interplay of new ideas and actions that make up praxis (Mulvey 1991:139). This can be connected to the psychological concept of 'positioning', described by psycho-sociologist Holloway as individuals experiencing (consciously or not) multiple 'identities'/positions over time and space in response to challenging experiences (Holloway 2009). Writing about young people's participation in civic society, Jans and de Backer propose that young people need to see challenge, capacity, and connection in order to participate. That is, they need to be engaged by a relevant challenge and feel that they have the capacity to 'make a difference'. To continue to participate they need to be able to build on successful interventions (Jans and de Backer 2002). Woods identifies teaching *for* creativity as producing the conditions for 'innovation, ownership, control and relevance' (Woods1990). But it is vital that teachers must themselves be creative and bring their own creativity into the process and that learners are involved in directing pedagogic processes - unusual in school settings (Jeffrey and Craft 2004). Implicit in this is the idea that artists and teachers as well as students need to reflect on their own learning, something which is rarely institutionalised in education or community arts processes, however much it is expected of participants (Haywood and Ingleson 2008). Identifying the differences in practice between teachers and artists will help define more closely what participatory community artists specifically bring to creativity in projects.

The extent to which the two aspects of creativity described above – its potential to disrupt existing discourses through new ways of thinking and to have 'real world' impact – are related to the maximising of personal change in projects remains underdeveloped in existing literature on participatory creative community projects . They suggest a link not only to Craft (2002) and the Creative Partnerships programmes, but also to Freire's 1970s theory of transformation through 'dialogical pedagogy' (Freire 1970). Dialogical pedagogy is a radical learning strategy comprising a set of processes and relationships which give permission and support for participants to develop new views of the world (Freire 1970). It is based on making space for participants to 'look again' and to 'make strange' the taken-for-granted world through validation of their own experience, and to go on to change it using their new understanding. Until recently 'making strange' the given world was a key aim of the UK ACE's participatory arts programmes (Arts Council England 2011)⁴⁸. The potential of creativity in projects to play a transformatory role within Freire's theorisation of personal and collective change, and the extent to which this may be connected with new imagined narratives or real world impact, is explored in Chapter

⁴⁸ The term 'making strange' through art is associated with theorist Laura Mulvey's seminal essay *phantasmagoria of the female body: the work of Cindy Sherman* *New Left Review* 1/188, July-August 1991

3. The concept of embodied learning offers an explanation of how this might be experienced by participants.

2.8 The potential of embodied knowledges⁴⁹

There is further field-based evidence that creativity is linked to improved reflection, learning and different types of knowing through embodied practices (Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010, Gauntlett 2011, Challis and Trowsdale 2014). Experiential or tacit knowledges are gained through interacting with the material world. Eisner, in a seminal text about the impact of creativity and embodied ways of knowing, sums it up: “not only does knowledge come in different forms, the forms of its creation differ” (Eisner 2008: 5). This is echoed by Sennett’s reflection on craft making, “touch furnishes the brain a different kind of sensate information than the eye” (Sennett 2008:152). Significantly - for short-term, participatory community projects - Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) give evidence that unskilled making, such as collage and concept mapping, can be central to high order ‘experiential research’, based on neuroscientific ideas about how the brain works. This is what Holloway, writing about the psychology of personal change, calls generating meaning “in an embodied fashion ... beyond words” (Holloway 2009:3).

Creative activities emphasise the manipulation of space and materials in connection with imagination: “all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices ... technical understanding develops through the powers of imagination” (Sennett 2008:10). Research into creative learning in schools finds that the creative process makes a link between cognition and emotions, wherein students engage imagination as well as thought to produce new understandings (Jeffrey 2001). This is achieved through the physical processes of making, which engages “not only aspects of their mental processes, but their bodies, their emotions and their social skills. This is sometimes called ‘embodied cognition’ (Spencer et al. 2012).

2.9 A partial resolution: the role of the ‘aesthetic third’

Creative Partnerships in schools identified learning through creativity as “flexing the imaginative muscles” (Sefton-Green 2007:7), which developed children’s imaginations, language and thinking skills. Building on this idea, Froggett claims that relationships “generated in the imagination” are key to personal change (Froggett et al. 2011:62).

⁴⁹ Chapter 3 situates these ideas and visual, arts-informed or creative research techniques in a constructivist epistemology which allows for multiple knowledges (Creswell, 2003).

Froggett's psychosocial research⁵⁰ attempts a detailed analysis of the role of creativity and its relationship to participation and impact. Froggett identifies an "aesthetic third" which functions rather like Haywood and Ingleson's 'resistant artist' role described above (Section 2.2). This ethnographical research found that the artistic or aesthetic product and processes in the projects studied did not function as "subordinate" to extrinsic social goals, but acted as "an essential third object or point of dialogue" between the arts organisation, artists, curators, participants and the "social domain" where impact was sought. To act as a "third point of attention" and open up new ideas, ways of seeing the world, new discourses and positionings of the self, creativity in a project must "retain aesthetic integrity and hence vitality" (Froggett et al. 2011:93).

Moreover, the 'aesthetic third' allows things in participants' imaginations to be shared and for individual's relationships with the social to take a cultural form. 'Creative illusion'⁵¹ generated through art and creative practices is central to this process:

...we need to imagine things differently in order to break the established order and to allow the possibility of new connections and ideas...

(Froggett et al 2011:62).

The connections which this process facilitates, between individuals and the world, can lead to a sense of wellbeing because the process produces "not only a cultural object or process outside of the self, but an object of wonder, curiosity or delight, [it] can only enhance the pleasure of the link" (Froggett et al. 2011:98). It suggests that the much debated supposed tensions in a project between extrinsic value (production of personal and social change) and intrinsic value (aesthetic excellence of artworks produced) become less important when aspirations to aesthetic excellence are realised, because during the creative process itself extrinsic outcomes are maximised. This positive association of creativity with wellbeing in social relationships provides a link to the ideas of both Freire explored further in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7) and Deleuze discussed above. (Section 2.7). Mulligan and Smith argue that even a regulatory use of creativity in community projects⁵², must recognise that "good practice in community art involves considerable skill and a deep understanding of artistic processes" (Mulligan and Smith 2010:8). However, the complexities of this relationship remain to be described.

⁵⁰ Psychosocial research is predicated on the idea that individuals cannot be separated from their social milieu, "intra-psychic, interpersonal, institutional and societal relations" are "mutually constitutive", although this is not without tensions (Froggett 2002; 2012). Repositioning identities is linked not only to discourses but to emotions.

⁵¹ A concept drawn from the work of Winnicott, D.W.(1972) *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge /Tavistock

⁵² Epitomised in this researcher's experience by the 2008 UK government's *Preventing Violent Extremism: Community Leadership Fund* which aimed to use culture, sport and arts to engage communities deemed by the government to be susceptible to the influence of extremism. It funded some high quality creative projects but came in for public criticism for targeting mainly Muslim communities.

2.9.1 Conclusions and the direction of further research

In conclusion, the contested space which this thesis seeks to occupy is that *between* instrumentalism and aesthetics. It seeks to synthesise evidence about how people change and under what circumstances, with evidence about the nature of the experience of art, specifically of being creative in a creative project. This is in order to produce new understandings about how projects might optimise their impact. Through field trialling these new understandings as part of evaluation processes the thesis seeks to offer artists, projects, participants and funders feasible ways of producing convincing evidence. Distinguishing the specific impacts of being creative from other impacts of participation in this evidence-producing process will offer future projects the potential to argue more convincingly for public funds.

This chapter has shown that the evaluation of participatory creative community projects has been, and remains, a controversial issue, in politics, policy and the arts. It also shows that there is little consensus about how these projects should be evaluated or what constitutes good evidence.

The key aspects of a project which contribute towards maximising the impact of creativity remain to be fully identified. Particularly, there is little clear evidence about what makes the experience of creativity in community projects different from other experiences of the arts, for example as audience member or isolated maker; or what differentiates it from other impacts of participation in community projects. This gap fuels the debate about the relative cost-effectiveness of creative projects compared with other participatory or skills-based projects.

Despite the emergence of a professional participatory community arts practice, it has not produced a theorisation of how and in what conditions creativity leads to individual or collective change.

Moreover, although there is broad agreement that creativity and wellbeing are linked, there still remains a need to assess critically and to theorise the contribution of participation in creative community projects to individual and social wellbeing. Existing research which draws on artists' experience implies that aesthetic integrity is part of maximising positive impact in participatory creative community arts⁵³. It makes a link

⁵³ For example, Copley (2001), Craft (2002), Sefton-Green (2007), Haywood and Ingleson (2007), McLellan et al (2012)

between the community development elements of a project (when democratic participation leads to increased wellbeing) and the deployment or development of aesthetic skills. It sometimes suggests too that participatory creative community projects may always be a site of tension between democratic and aesthetic participation – which may of course be a source of their impact.

However, the relationship between creativity and participation in the production of impact remains under-explored and often oversimplified in existing literature. This is particularly true of literature about the evaluation of creativity in projects, and especially in evaluation reports and recommendations for practice. For example, the phrase 'participatory project', is used quite loosely in the literature, implying either democratic or aesthetic participation, or both. There is little attempt to distinguish between the impact of democratic participation (which may range from developing or managing a project to choosing refreshments) and aesthetic participation (which includes making, or using materials and equipment in creative processes, or performing), or to develop ideas about a third form of participation, control over aesthetic content or form⁵⁴. Moreover, decisions about time-scales, budgets, genre of arts activities and so on, which might be taken as part of democratic participation, impact on aesthetic possibilities – and vice versa. Aesthetic participation may be more or less democratic, depending on genre, practice and aims. For example, learning to sing published music or perform a pre-existing script, may be amenable to a high degree of democratic and aesthetic participation but less aesthetic control, compared, say, with a performance developed by participants or an open-ended project to make a film or piece of art⁵⁵.

The power to determine these processes is exercised or negotiated by *everyone* in the project in different circumstances and differently over time. Understandings about the complexities of the power relationships in projects are under-represented in existing literature, yet are essential both for project planning to maximise impact and for critical evaluations.

There is growing awareness that evaluation strategies which can utilise meaningful, evidence-based theories about how people change in creative projects are vital to support continued funding. Evaluations of participatory creative community projects are on the whole commissioned by funders and policymakers, and it is realistic to assume

⁵⁴ The term 'participatory creative community project', coined for this research, is used to suggest a project where the impacts of participation and creativity are *both* valued, and which is rooted in or sharing elements of the idea of community.

⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there is little convincing evidence in the literature to support participatory community theatre founder John McGrath's argument, based on his commitment to developing content and form of performances with community participants, that some artforms are inherently and always more democratic than others (McGrath 1981:83 quoted in Matarasso 2013), but clearly there are different possibilities for different kinds of participation.

that these will continue to be the main consumers of evaluation. As this Chapter demonstrated, evaluation models and practices which have not emerged from evidence-based theories about the impact of creativity and lack adequate conceptual or methodological frameworks are not well placed to produce analyses of data which account for the complexities of collective creative engagement or critiques projects' own practices to improve effectiveness. This thesis meets that need for a theorised and evidence-based evaluation strategy, better placed to challenge both the deficit model which tends to frame funding and a self-defeating drive to advocacy on the part of practitioners. As the McMasters report suggested as long ago as 2008, it explores ways of researching and trialling new ways to integrate and validate participant and artist evaluations into project processes (McMasters, 2008), based on its own evidence about the impact of creativity.

Evidence from existing studies about 'making' and creativity, creative pedagogy and socio-psychology suggest that, at the very least, the impact of creativity is connected with the disruptive force of new ways of thinking, its embodied nature, and its potential to offer challenge and with social relationships. This thesis will show that research and evaluation that produces embodied knowledges, and that is itself part of a process of challenge and development, and which has a collective element, may be key to developing the new understandings the current research seeks. Such research might utilise some of the tropes and practices of artist-led creative activities to produce new knowledges reflecting their embodied, challenging and social elements. These methods might offer greater insight into the emotional dimensions of wellbeing and impact and the multiplicity of ways they can be recognised or constructed. They have the added value of being closely aligned to practices within creative projects themselves. The thesis tries through these approaches to respond to the critique of current poor practice in evaluation which presents as disconnected, disengaging and mechanistic with consequent impact (as Matarasso's 2009 study confirms) on willingness to take part and authenticity of voice.

The next chapter explores theoretical perspectives which might support an understanding of how power and knowledges in projects are expressed and constructed in networks of people and things. It explores ways of understanding and researching the dynamic and changing experience of participation in projects, when experiences and relationships may continue to resonate beyond the obvious moment of observation or evaluation. Because projects, participants, and contingent contexts are so diverse, the argument will be made that evaluation methods need to be developed to reflect particular contexts and moments. The challenge is to produce a theory of change which is robust

enough to support these diverse contexts and still connect creativity, participation and impact in a range of projects and settings in a meaningful way.

Chapter 3 New theorisations of the way impact is produced in creative projects

Introduction

Chapter 2 revealed that existing research and reporting tends to oversimplify the relationship between creativity and participation in participatory creative community projects and the ways they impact on individual and collective wellbeing. This under theorisation arguably undermines the effectiveness of project evaluation strategies and tends to produce descriptive rather than explanatory evaluations. This chapter explores theories about knowledge and how people change which supported the development of a new theorisation of creativity and participation which could be operationalised in the wide range of practices, contexts and contingencies in the field trials which followed. It argues that the specific nature of creativity in projects demands a research – and evaluation – approach that ‘resists closure’, recognising that the relationship between participation and creativity and impact not only varies between projects but also during and even after the life of a project. Understanding that these differences are not mere variables in projects but expressions of relationships of power between people and things, is central to the thesis developing here.

The chapter is in two parts. The first five sections outline the broad philosophical and epistemological positions which framed the research. The final four sections explore theories about how people change and how that might be evaluated in the complexities of a creative project. These represent the main features of the new theorisation developed in this research.

The chapter begins by explaining why Action Research (AR) seemed an appropriate aspiration for a study of the open-ended process described in Chapter 2. AR offers researchers a way of continually exploring the relationship between theory, values and practice. Its participatory and reflexive character are determined by two ontologies. Firstly, that where there is no distinction between researcher and researched the process can be empowering. Second, that when practice and theory refresh and guide each other throughout but are always interrogated in terms of values, learning takes place with potential for immediate implementation in the world (McNiff 2013)⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ There are a range of emphases in Action Research in practice which share these ontologies.

The two sections which follow this outline an epistemology reflecting the socially constructed nature of creativity in projects described in the literature. It accepts the fallible, partial and socially constructed nature of knowledges, arguing that they are multiple and contingent and that research methods must reflect this. These sections suggest that knowledges are more akin to processes than things acquired, using elements of Actor Network Theory (ANT) to frame key concepts. ANT offers two useful frameworks: a way of analysing how key ideas become hegemonic in projects and a way of enrolling non-human entities into the construction of meanings in research. This latter 'principle of generalised symmetry' (Latour 1993) enabled the research to connect participant accounts about the significance of encounters with materials and technologies in producing positive impact to subsequent observations in the field.

Within projects there is a multiplicity of ways that impact can be constructed or captured. In a field where self-reporting is currently paramount, the analysis also needed to theorise the emotional dimension of being creative, implied by the concept of creative flow and the experience of embodied impact outlined in Chapter 2. The final section of the first part of this chapter argues that the embodied, affective nature of creative experience can usefully be analysed through aspects of Non-Representational Theory (NRT). It proposes the use of new, creative research methods which have the potential to reveal a wider range of representational possibilities than more conventional qualitative approaches.

The second half of this chapter builds on the argument made in Chapter 2 that existing evaluations often lack an explicit theory of how people change. In addressing this issue, these next sections link research about creativity in learning and ideas about how artists work to Freire's theory of transformatory praxis through dialogical pedagogy. Dialogical pedagogy is a process of enquiry which uses participants' own understandings of the world to open a space for the development of critical knowledges which can lead to a greater sense of personal agency and hence wellbeing. The chapter argues that Freire's thesis is particularly useful in theorising the potential for creativity in projects to produce collective change but offers a critical re-working for the current context, exploring the idea that creativity itself, in certain conditions, might play a role in developing a 'change-related' praxis, albeit more incremental than transformatory.

Finally, the chapter shows how creativity in projects introduces boundary-less and unpredictable impacts which give all such projects characteristics of complex systems demanding integrated and contingent evaluations. Therefore it concludes that a prescriptive 'best practice' approach to evaluation is not as effective for creative community projects as a holistic or systemic⁵⁷ strategy developed in particular contexts.

⁵⁷ 'Systemic' in the sense that creative evaluation becomes a part of everyday practice rather than is enacted according to a 'one size fits all' plan: this idea is developed throughout the research: "Systematic means

3. 1 Action Research and the uneasy relationship between theory, values and practice

This theoretical exploration started from the idea that the 'practice' of research can be critiqued in order for its own assumptions (and their implications for methodology) to be exposed and reviewed, so that its findings can be claimed as authentic and valid. This goes beyond a simple questioning of accuracy in method: rather it is carried out "in a manner critical of its own objectives, achievements and limitations" (Cloke 2004:3). A similar critique of evaluation could begin to develop an 'evaluation of resistance', perhaps based on alternatives to the 'stakeholder' paradigm. This approach repudiates the sometimes implicit narrative that reflexivity can of itself sufficiently disrupt the potentially regulatory function of research to make it beneficial to its subjects:

Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively, does not help people to improve their current conditions

(Smith 1999:3)

If the purpose of a community project is to 'help people to improve their current condition' (which it usually is), then that too must be the aim of the evaluation methods it utilises. However, although there is an emerging body of professional discussion which regards evaluation as a set of 'professional practices', self-reflection is not endemic in the field, and is often completely absent⁵⁸. In most cases, theoretical perspectives must be inferred from practice. Chapter 2 showed that evaluation is a perceived problem for practitioners as well as funders. This current research response, implemented as it is by a practitioner, therefore shares some characteristics of Action Research (AR), which sets out to work together with actors in the field to resolve issues framed by them as problems (McNiff 1993, 2002, Stringer 2007). AR was an attractive framework for research about evaluation for two reasons. It is based on continual reflection and self-reflection about the researcher's own practice, which makes it relevant to evaluation's concern with improving

something is well organized or arranged according to a set of plans and or is grouped into systems...
[]...systemic means something matters to the entire system".

<http://www.differencebetween.net/language/difference-between-systemic-and-systematic/> accessed 10.6.13

⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the claim that the major epistemological crises in research theory (essentially the challenges of post colonialism and post modernism, which led to the development of concepts such as multiple and partial knowledges (see below) have not touched evaluation (Mathison 2008) is dubious. Arguments about the value of 'case studies' and 'local knowledge', and about the difficulty of generalisations and predictions are not uncommon. This might not be a reflection of academic debates, of course: the demands of feasibility and practicability might also lead to a valorisation of local, contingent knowledges produced by cheaper research methods; and a shift towards participatory projects driven by other cultural changes may focus attention on the participant (rather than expert) voice. However, evaluation is by no means a practice which could be defined by its overt relationship to theory, as is research (Bryman 2008).

practice as well as proving impact, and it privileges a preoccupation with values identified above as not a given in reflexive practice. AR is concerned with development and process rather than summative 'findings'. This helped determine a research schedule which leapt into fieldwork enquiry from the start, while theoretical and methodological ideas were still in, what turned out to be continual, development⁵⁹. Moreover, AR "resists closure" (McNiff 2002), a quality regarded by many theorists as a mark of 'aesthetic excellence' in artworks – a contested yet central issue in the research. The "open-endedness" associated with AR is a quality also attached to creativity by many theorists (among others, Csikszentmihalyi 2002, Eisner 2008, Charny 2011).

It became clear early in the research that whereas a large body of theory exists for similar practices, such as 'youth and community work', including Higher Education qualifications, there is much less formal training available to creative community practitioners (artists and project developers). So practice appears to be (and is described by practitioners as) 'intuitive', based on values and experience, rather than theorised (Goddard 2006)⁶⁰. Stringer characterises the AR relationship as "democratic, equitable, liberating, and life-enhancing" (Stringer 2007:9-10)⁶¹. Although the rest of these values clearly reference discourses about ethical research practice, AR's insistence on 'democratic processes' is not part of mainstream research ethics. The idea of democracy (often elided with participation as the discussion in Chapter 2 suggested) is a contested concept in creative community projects, related more or less to intensifying impact (such as increased confidence and skills) on individuals and communities. The primacy of values in the AR framework helps researchers recognise that ontology has a direct bearing on methodology. AR's "person centred" approach and insistence on the "open-ended nature of living systems" (McNiff 2002), mirrors the commitment to "democratic processes" held dear by many community arts practitioners and the values of respect and care embedded in much of the practice observed in the research. It derives from an ontological view that it is possible change the world for the better and that positive experiences change people too. What remains is the need to discover exactly which experiences can do so, how effectively they can be structured and what are their realistic limitations.

AR implies that research themes should arise from within the (democratic) research processes. So initial theoretical considerations in the current research were focused on conceptualising key objects (Sayer 2010), rather than 'testing' a single theoretical hypothesis. The research process itself can lead to changes in theoretical stances and

⁵⁹ Chapter 4 describes this timeline in more detail

⁶⁰ Goddard is aware of the dangers of 'fixing' practice rigidly, but argues for an 'armature' of guiding principles, values and practices (Goddard 2006).

⁶¹ These are typical Action Research principles, McNiff refers to "democratic practices, care and respect for the individual, and the need for disciplined enquiry" (McNiff 2002).

these in turn can influence methodologies, in a reflexive loop in which the researcher is an agent amongst others, bringing theoretical perspectives to any situation. 'Upfronting' the researcher's ontological stance is a fundamental starting point for reflexive research practice. However, it is not sufficient to identify ontologies, as early feminist research philosophy may have seemed to suggest (Roberts 1990, Stanley and Wise 1993) and Smith (1999) points out above. There is also a need to examine their construction in terms of the power relations they may embody. Actor Network Theory is a useful 'way in' to this examination and this is introduced in the next section.

Nevertheless, before then a brief caveat: this aspiration to AR was a continual source of tension in practice. Such an open ended position is not an easy one to sustain in research committed to producing guidelines for action for community organisations that must (usually) produce an evaluation report for funders within a short period of project activity. As evaluation researcher Matarasso declares, "judgements must be made" (Matarasso 2009:2). As Chapter 2 showed, the 'problem' of evaluation is usually framed by funders and managers and it may be important to participants and practitioners only in as much as they are pressured into carrying it out⁶². So, although the current research did sit within a broadly AR framework, it is also an expression of a tension between theory, values and practice characteristic of qualitative enquiry.

3.2 Actor Network Theory: how knowledges in projects are constructed

In a typical Action Research loop, at the start of my research process, the literature review (Chapter 2) and early field research findings helped develop theory. For example, 'texts' (transcriptions, sound and video recordings) produced by interview were treated within an interpretivist framework as part of a process of the social construction of meanings. They were analysed using thematic coding combined with a semiotic deconstruction (thinking about the implications of, for example 'binary oppositions' such as, 'excellence/Blue Peter'⁶³). During these interviews, the significance of encounters with technologies and materials began to emerge⁶⁴. Actor Network Theory (ANT) was then explored as a way of enrolling non-human actors as research subjects. ANT did not frame

⁶² The response of one participant in the field trials, to the question 'What was the worst thing about the session?', was, 'The evaluation'. When asked for clarification, she explained that, although it had been a tongue in cheek response, she did find reflection difficult and uncomfortable and would prefer not to do it. The 'problem of evaluation' for her was not efficiency or effectiveness, but that she was expected to do it in addition to the creative activity she had, in her view, 'signed up' for.

⁶³ Blue Peter refers to the cheap, scrap materials traditionally used by community projects. These terms were used as part of an explanation of 'excellence' by a practitioner who likened these to craft materials used by a popular UK children's television programme, contrasting them by implication to the 'professional' materials required to produce 'aesthetic excellence'.

⁶⁴ A detailed account of this process is in Chapter 4

the whole research approach, but was useful particularly for two things: its conceptualisation of the production of meaning in networks and the role of non-human entities as 'actants' alongside people (Latour, 2004)⁶⁵.

Latour's ideas about the production of meanings were used to re-visit the implications of terms such as 'community art' and 'excellence', in terms of the relationship of language to conceptualisation and perception, and in terms of the power relations implicated in 'gatekeeping' meaning in a social network. An immediate consequence of this was to extend research methods to include more collaborative activities, such as Focus Groups and collaborative feedback (like expressive timelines) which offered the opportunity to observe interactions, analysing observation notes and transcripts from this new perspective. These interventions had the potential to disrupt established dominant discourses as new conjunctions of meaning were formed. Chapter 2 described how current public discourses problematise evaluation. ANT offers the chance to explore how evaluation was constructed as problematic in the first place and what impact this history, and the effects of power mobilised in this process within projects, has on the possibilities for, and limits of, any recommendations for future practice.

Theories about how knowledges are produced have a direct impact on choices of research methodologies, and, since evaluation is directly concerned with producing knowledge, on evaluation techniques and strategies too. But although research strategy benefits from discussing its epistemologies, in practice, evaluation epistemologies are more usually implicit than explicit, and may differ between and within projects and groups of people and over time, leading to uneven and contradictory approaches and commitment to evaluations (Matarasso 2009). It does not seem useful, therefore, for research about evaluation to privilege any single viewpoint, but to embrace the post-structuralist idea that knowledge is several, constructed, contextualised and situated in time and place. The research is free then to focus on the impact of different epistemologies on practice. ANT has its origins in ethnographical research, but is essentially an epistemological commentary⁶⁶ concerned with how knowledge is produced. As ANT philosopher Latour says, "What is called knowledge cannot be defined without understanding what *gaining* knowledge means" (Latour 1987:220).

ANT offers a way into understanding this process and how key concepts such as 'transformation', 'the problem of evaluation', aesthetic 'excellence', and 'participation' have been constructed. Clarke's (2008) ANT study of adult education provision in the UK

⁶⁵ 'Actants' in the sense of active instigators within a network where meanings are produced, rather than mere variables.

⁶⁶ It would be more accurate to say, 'commentaries', as ANT challenges the collective voice. My understanding of it is from reading Latour (2005; 2004; 1997; 1987; 1986), Law (1991), Callon (1986) and Clarke (2008); there are no doubt other interpretations, but ANT philosophers are comfortable with complexity.

describes a process of 'translations', wherein whoever defines the 'problem' (in that case, as 'adult (il)lteracy') gains control over the meaning in relevant networks. That meaning becomes an "obligatory passage point" through which all the actors in the network concerned must pass. So for example, in the current research, participants in a creative community project, technologies, funding, artists, and whole 'communities', had to pass through an "obligatory passage point" we could call "the deficit model"⁶⁷, constructed by government policy. This model describes participants as in some way lacking ("least engaged", "hard to reach", "new audience", "living in a postcode area of multiple deprivation") and the experience of creative projects as having the potential to produce positive benefit ("wellbeing", "social cohesion", "economic regeneration")⁶⁸. A process of "enrolment" takes place when all these actors in a network embrace a discourse (in this case, perhaps, the 'deficit model') as their own and, consequently, the set of relationships it implies. By this means, the powerful idea that some people/communities need to change, and some other people know how, is mobilised to the point where it becomes common-sense. Those defined as in need of change (the participants) are the 'marked'⁶⁹. That is, they did not have the resources to mobilise the idea and define the problem⁷⁰.

ANT ethnographers are particularly attracted to contested situations "where boundaries are uncertain" (Latour 2005:11). Creative community projects, and especially the need to evaluate them in terms of the mobilisation described above, remain sites of disruption and dissent. Evaluation reports have become one of the means through which dissenting voices or 'facts' that don't 'fit' are displaced or suppressed (Gebhardt 1982:405). For participants however, 'enrolment' in this dominant network may be the only feasible route to access creative activities, and for artists and voluntary sector organisations, to gain employment or funding. Chapter 2 described how artists and community workers have expressed resentment of evaluation in the terms of this mobilisation; and the debate about the 'instrumental' employment of creativity continues (Ó Fathaigh: 2004, Belfiore

⁶⁷ 'The deficit model' is a term borrowed from critical pedagogy. It is a critique of the representation of young people from "economically poor and non-white" backgrounds as doing less well academically because of "personal failing" and lack, rather than structural inequalities inside and outside the education system. Kincheloe (2009) calls it a "regressive pedagogic personalisation of failure" characterised by "kid-fixing" and "recovery movement" methods.

⁶⁸ These terms are drawn from the Chapter 2 literature review which spanned texts from over the past decade, including Arts Council England, Big Lottery, and Heritage Lottery. This accumulated body of writing represents an ever-changing discourse which nevertheless remains mainly within the 'deficit model' paradigm. The process by which alliances are formed and fixed, between community 'leaders', voluntary sector organisations, statutory bodies and funders like the Arts Council England, The Big Lottery Fund, artists, community workers, and participants is called "interressement" in ANT (Callon 1986).

⁶⁹ Latour credits feminist philosophers for identifying the politically charged nature of the 'marked/unmarked' concept.

⁷⁰ It's important to note that the 'deficit model' described here is not the only possible model or network observed in this research, and that different networks may lie alongside each other and overlap (share entities). It is used in this chapter as an example.

and Bennett: 2007, Clements: 2007). Projects that get funded are projects which have the skill to 'translate' their intentions into the prevailing discourse and, in the final stage of "translation", utilise the now manageable entities of the networks (communities, participants, artists, venues, equipment) into arguments for future funding through evaluation reports⁷¹.

In order to identify projects or networks which challenge the deficit model and a consequent narrow focus on 'instrumental' changes in evaluation, it will be necessary to keep these principles in mind:

- the heterogeneity of knowledge production;
- acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in a reflexive practice;
- favouring methods which use the ANT principle of 'generalised symmetry' (see below) in closely attentive observation and description, that continue to acknowledge the role of "narrative construction" in research.

3.3 The heterogeneity of knowledge production

The epistemological position that knowledge is never value-free carries with it the implication that it is a "social practice", a process rather than a thing (Sayer 2010:4). In this way all knowledges can be treated by the research as equally provisional and all methods of producing knowledge regarded as partial and contextualised (Haraway 1988). This approach, loosely referred to as 'interpretivism', draws on semiotics and post-structuralist theorists, placing language at the centre of the production of meanings as "something which constitutes the social world and subjectivity" (Ryan 2001:5). Meanings are susceptible to analysis through methods such as conversation and discourse analysis; for example, an exploration of the impact of competing discourses about key concepts in the development of evaluation strategies could examine policy documents, interview transcripts and observation notes⁷².

⁷¹ Organisations which are non-compliant in the mobilisation of the deficit model disrupt it in ways which expose how it works. An example of this is an urban craft group encountered in the scoping phase at the start of the research (described more fully in Chapter 7), whose attitude towards evaluation suggested that "enrolment" in the deficit model may perhaps sometimes be the 'price' of access (to creative activities, resources, employment).

⁷² The concept 'discourse' is used beyond its original sense in linguistics, of complex language events, or in semiotics of coherent sets of related utterances, but as a concept related to the production of meaning and power derived mainly from Foucault. Discourse describes an "historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, categories and beliefs, habits and practices" (Ryan 2001:32). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) Foucault described discourse not as language but "as practice" (ibid 46), or rather, the set of discursive practices which create "the conditions of existence for other discursive practices" (Gutting 1994:29). Discourses interpret reality for us and construct it, are reflexive and have "constitutive force" (Ryan 2007:35), but are not totally determining; they contain the

This is a rejection of modernist, humanist philosophies (which characterise meaning as arising from the 'real' world and language as being a reflection of it), but not a rejection of the existence of material experience. Indeed, it is the existence of an indifferent world which explains the partial and "fallible" nature of knowledge (Sayer 2010 viii). Meanings are made performatively, through a "process of re-presentation, or construction of experience" (Holloway 2009:12) and partially, in "limited locations", as "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988). Haraway, as a feminist scientist writing in the long-running philosophical debate about objectivity, describes the need for,

reliable accounts of things not reducible to power moves and
agonistic, high status games of rhetoric or to scientific,
positivist arrogance

(Haraway 1988:580).

She proposes that *vision*, human and technological (a specific embodiment, not metaphorical), and the "partial perspective" it produces, is the key to useful understandings about the real world. In this framework, AR and ANT challenge the idea that research can be 'theory-neutral' (Bryman 2008) and are quite different from 'grounded theory', which claims to generate theory out of data produced by research. Grounded theory implies that research can reveal a social reality external to participants' actions, unframed by theory. However, we are "answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway 1988:583).

Haraway is particularly useful to the reflexive research project because of her insistence that there are no 'innocent' viewpoints; nevertheless, the experience of the 'subjugated'⁷³

possibility of resistance to themselves and of alternatives. Meanings have only "local intelligibility" (Gutting 1994:108) and the key question about them is not their relationship to 'truth' but in what circumstances particular meanings and discursive practices emerge. Power is dispersed through society (not held by people) and is "always a mediated relationship [which] cannot exist without the signifying systems that constitute it" (Hodge and Kress 1979:158). The concept is used in this study to support a discussion of the production of and competition between contested meanings; the interpretation of data about communities and organisations, particularly with regard to human subjectivity and agency; and as an epistemological context for recognising that theory itself is part of historically specific discourses (rather than an explanation of them). So, for example, as a way of understanding the production of personal change in community arts activities we might suggest that an individual's subjectivity is not only related to structural or experiential factors, but to the available discourses with which she can interpret the world. This understanding was the starting point for my exploration of alternative research methods and the 'dialogical pedagogy' described later in this chapter.

⁷³ Project participants might be framed this way if they live in geographical areas scoring high on the UK government's 'English Indices of Multiple Deprivation' produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government, based on levels of Income, employment, health, education, housing, crime and 'living environment', because of the link between poverty and barriers to social participation, in democracy, culture

is to be preferred, because of its potential to reveal counter-hegemonic realities, but is still subject to critical re-examination and interpretation. In a critique of relativism (which she regards as the binary opposition to totalising ontologies), asserting that morality and politics provide an interpretive framework for vision, she argues for “partial, locatable, critical knowledge” which is above all accountable (Haraway1988). This argument is amply borne out by Matarasso’s ground-breaking research into the theories, emotions and feelings attached to the evaluation process by commissioners, evaluators and community arts practitioners, which explores “the impact of evaluation on those who have to carry it out and their impact on how it is done” (Matarasso 2009:13). This makes it imperative to examine the ‘non-representational’ aspects of research and to understand the role of the embodied nature of creativity in producing knowledges and affect. These next two sections do this.

3.4 The principle of ‘generalised symmetry’

In this respect, a key characteristic of ANT is detailed ethnographic research, using the discourses of actors in a network to determine lines of enquiry, and developing the principal of “generalised symmetry” wherein the same “registers” and explanatory paradigms describe all phenomena. Differences between human and non-human entities, ‘natural’ or manufactured; living or dead, are eradicated. Spaces, buildings, plants, animals, geologies, environments, technologies are all treated as equal ‘actors’ in the processes of mobilisation and translation in a network as described above⁷⁴. The relevance of generalised symmetry for creative project research and evaluation emerged from initial interviews in this current research, when respondents implicated encounters with ‘new’ technologies and materials in the production of ‘lasting and significant’ personal change. Projects involve making things, manipulating equipment or materials, creating ‘new’ spaces or working at ‘new’ times of day. Generalised symmetry suggests that these non-human entities are treated not as mere variables, but as actors whose meanings, roles and impact rests as much in the network relationships as do those of humans, and who are also mobilised and translated in the dominant discourse. So, for example, a Carnival Costume-making Course in this research was situated in the ‘deficit model’ problematisation. When ‘new’ textiles unavailable domestically were introduced, they were treated as precious by staff, endowed with ‘magical’ properties of strength and flexibility, and simultaneously experienced as new fabrics, as part of the narrative of one-way knowledge transfer, and become part of a collective discourse about aesthetic excellence which helps mobilise the meanings of the deficit model. As Latour says:

and economic life. Many community projects are targeted on these areas by their funding.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation> (accessed 12.6.14)

⁷⁴ So, for example, in Callon’s ANT marine biology study (1986), scientists, fishermen, scallops and tides became actors in a network, only partially successfully mobilised by the scientists through the obligatory passage point of a ‘problem of scallop attachment’ to growing beds.

everything is “simultaneously real, like nature, narrated like discourse, and collective, like society” (Latour 1993: 6)⁷⁵.

However, although his emphasis is on the local, the immediate observable network (Latour 2011:7), Latour also argues that networks are embedded in wider social practices,

..one must appeal to other elements, other times, other places and other actors in order to grasp an interaction...

(Latour 1996:234).

That said, arguably ANT raises questions about the relationship of agency and structure rather than answers them. Its focus on ethnographic description can expose how some entities in the local network are assumed to be ‘given’ or natural, and others open to question. So, for example, through observation and questioning we can identify the *process* by which it becomes a ‘given’ that projects produce no disbenefits or that individual change leads to social benefit, but this will not directly tell us about relationships outside the network. This is because what happens in interactions is not a distillation of social structures constructed ‘elsewhere’, or independent of them, but a process both of adjustments to the wider social world and construction of it (Latour 1996:230). However, because it points out the processes that enable ideas about the world to become dominant in a network, it allows us to recognise them as benefitting particular structural relationships of power.

In ‘Politics of Nature’ Latour describes how the very conceptualisation of ‘science’ and ‘nature’ as different worlds, rather than “a seamless cloth”, places scientists in a position of power, as they (and no one else) can “shuttle back and forth between the two” (Latour 2004:18). A more useful conceptualisation, he says, would be to “compose” humans and non-humans in a collective where both can be social actors. So, in participatory creative community projects this understanding can be used to explore the impact of ideas about the differences between ‘art’ and ‘community art’ which allow ‘artists’ to “shuttle back and forth”, carrying the power to make judgements about quality and value. For example, in an artist-led project, artists used the concept of ‘aesthetic excellence’ to direct project activity. This powerful concept remained unexplicated throughout⁷⁶: the artists ‘embodied’ it in their identities and behaviours; and therefore it became difficult to challenge.

⁷⁵ It’s important to note here that Latour is not simply making the point that non-human entities simply ‘hold’ their history of past social relations (although of course they do), in the way, for example, Walter Benjamin talks of objects in whose “dark prism social relations lay congealed and in fragments” (Benjamin1996:69). In ANT, non-human entities (and human ones) are constituted by and within relationships in the network, in an ongoing process, and have no “inherent” qualities. Their power is as actors in this ongoing process.

⁷⁶ Sometimes referred to as ‘the wow factor’ or other local names implying something magical and special.

3.5 The role of affect in research and creativity

It seems commonplace and yet is rare in the literature to say, as Matarasso does, “How people feel and think influences what they do and how they do it” (Matarasso 2009:13). As part of a wider critique of qualitative methodology, Holloway points out that the approach can be rendered less reductive by taking ‘psycho-social’ relations (emotions) into account. She calls this the “intersubjective action of emotions” and argues that, since text – spoken or written – is “always intersubjective”, an account of the relationship between the researcher and researched will always be important (Holloway 2009:3). The next chapter describes how research methodologies tried to incorporate this understanding through an exploration of Non Representational Theories (NRT) (Massumi, 2002; Thrift 2008; 2004).

NRT attempts to theorise phenomena in a network which cannot be seen or heard but felt. Thrift warns that representing the emotions that affect produces, for example, in a research process, always involves the construction of narratives from participants’ own interpretations of their own emotions. Moreover, although there are some shared emotions across cultures, how they are communicated is highly mediated by culture, a critique of the notion that powerful feelings (in this case provoked or apparently expressed through creativity) are “an index of credibility” or necessarily more authentic than text and talk (Thrift 2008:184)⁷⁷.

In a field where self-reported feelings about experiences are so important, the issue of whether affect itself is knowledge and how to deal with it as such is crucial, although possibly irresolvable in the pragmatic context of this study⁷⁸: NRT has implications for the reflexive researcher and offers another way to interpret the process critically in practice. For example, an early research encounter with a participant-led arts group who, after much democratic debate, chose not to take part. This was a group of people with experience of the mental health system who put particular premium on democratic control over how they are interpreted by ‘outsiders’. The surprise this provoked in the researcher caused her to reflect on the extent to which she had been mobilised, in ANT terms, by the network of the ‘deficit model’, which enables project participants to function as objects of research under the guardianship of project managers (the main type of contacts up to this point). NRT helped her recognise the extent to which affect drove the negotiations to set up research relationships and constantly re-negotiate them. This issue ricocheted between the academic, pragmatic and personal throughout the research and is discussed further in the Conclusions. Without theoretical perspectives, this

⁷⁷ This is an implicit critique of Haraway’s idea (above) of participants as potentially being able to reveal counter-hegemonic realities. It reinforces the idea of Freire’s process of dialogical pedagogy (discussed later in this chapter), which is precisely based on the need to challenge ‘intuitive’ discourses.

⁷⁸ Chapter 4 explores this idea further.

incident may have been dismissed as a purely practical problem. In the context of a reflexive study, the everyday experience of researcher and research subjects, in its “richness and practical versatility”, and the processes which people use to deem some things as important (Sayer 2010 ix), may be as valid a source of knowledge as more formally produced data. However, how people experience their ‘reality’ is part of the historical and continuously changing discourses in which they exist, and their accounts of experience must always be problematised – as must the more formal research account itself.

Through its attention to non-representational forces, in the context of embodied interactions as people move through the material world: “a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct as an outer lining” (Thrift 2004: 60), NRT provides an (albeit disruptive) connection between the ideas about the embodied nature of creativity discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 2, and how people represent their feelings. The value of theories of affect for understanding creativity lies in the attention paid to these embodied interactions. These interactions are experienced or recognised by us as the physical effects of emotions⁷⁹. As with ANT, non-human actants, and connectivities beyond the (human) social can be recognised (Latour, 2004; Thrift 2008; 2004). Moreover, affect, however explicitly unreflective, is a form of thinking and type of intelligence (Thrift 2008:175) in a similar way as making and doing.

This approach offers the opportunity to theorise people’s feelings about their creative experiences and understand why the encounter with new materials and technologies plays such an important role in change. It enables the argument to be made for feelings to be valued as evidence of impact, not as representing another impact but as meaningful in themselves. However, there are two challenges for creative research or evaluation methods in all this.

Firstly, there is the problem of representation referred to above, and second, there is the issue of perceived authenticity. These are two sides of the same coin, for feelings are simultaneously regarded as less meaningful (less rational) and more real (deeper) than knowledges mediated by language. Any attempt to decontextualise or represent affect, to ‘explain’ it using language and separated from the particular encounter which produced it might be seen as self-defeating (Thrift 2008:176). Meanwhile, however ‘authentic’ knowledges produced in creative processes may seem, they remain what Thrift (2008) calls ‘power-knowledges’. That is, they are part of ontological narratives, shaped by the availability of explanatory discourses, and influenced by power-struggles.

⁷⁹ “...the knowing proceeds in parallel with the body’s physical encounters, out of interaction” (Thrift 2008:178)

NRT also offers a connection to Actor Network's theory of generalised symmetry, discussed above, as "affect is distributed between, and can happen outside, bodies which are not exclusively human, and might incorporate technologies, things, non-human living matter, discourses or even, say, a swathe of noise or a swarm of creatures" (Lorimer 2008: 552).

3.6 Creative evaluation methods and praxis

To an extent the subject matter of enquiry determines the method (McNiff, S 1998). The connection between creativity and affect established in Chapter 2 suggested that creativity itself might be valuable in the research and evaluation of creativity⁸⁰. Just as visual methods such as photo elicitation might help research subjects 'articulate submerged realities' (Pink et al. 2004:1), creative methods can support people to communicate meanings "accessible only by non-verbal means" (MacDougall 1997). Creative activity not only improves our ability to reflect (Charny 2011), but also opens other kinds of reflection inaccessible to language alone. Creative research and evaluation methods may produce different kinds of knowledge, inaccessible because of barriers to textual expression such as language or literacy issues, or because of their immanence to the artwork, or because they are expressions of previously impossible to articulate ideas or feelings.

Clearly creative methods present some challenges to research and evaluation, which are discussed more fully in Chapters 4 and Chapter 5, which explores the interpretation of creative data in the field research. Not the least of these is that of interpretation, and although well established visual research methods such as semiotics or discourse analysis can be applied to creative 'products' or processes, the participatory nature of these processes suggests that participant-led interpretation will be the most effective in producing authentic data⁸¹. There is also the problem of non-artist researchers or

⁸⁰ The term 'creative methods' differentiates established visual research methods (such as photography and video), from activities in which participants actively make something new as a means of expressing unarticulated feelings or improving 'text and talk', and which are likely to be framed as a search for meanings which are new to participants, producing alternative or counter-hegemonic understandings. These methods (described more fully in the next chapter) include 'expressive mark making', 'expressive mapping', collage, sound and performance and are themselves creative activities, 'open ended' projects with no prescribed outcome, non judgemental, and experimental. Chapter 5 links these processes with the professional practices of artists.

⁸¹ Other pitfalls have been pointed out: Rachel Pain (presentation at the Higher Education Academy postgraduate training event *Engaging with Communities: Arts - and performance - based collaborative training* Durham University May2-3 2013) points to the danger of 'methodism' – social sciences embracing new methods to seek attention or demonstrate collaboration; 'the arts' looking for academic credibility. Sarah Williamson (2012) has pointed out that there is always a danger that the style or 'look' of a visual expression in research may become more important to the producer than the content or meaning expressed.

evaluators implementing creative activities with insufficient expertise⁸². There are new ethical issues too: since taking part in research may have unpredictable impacts for participants long after the initial intervention (Ryan 2001; Butler-Kisber 2010; Brady and Brown 2013). Methods which may uncover 'deeper' feelings must be treated with circumspection. Nevertheless, the potential for evaluation processes *themselves* to create the conditions for 'flow' and to offer the positive benefits associated with collectivity is seductive – especially given the ambivalent feelings which evaluation usually provokes.

Any attempt to produce a 'new' voice for participants of course raises the spectre of not only reproducing existing hierarchies and power relations but creating new ones. Cultural and social capital, confidence, prior skill and talent are all factors which should suggest that creative methods practitioners must pay as much attention to power within networks as in any research relationship. Artists' ability and willingness not to position themselves as 'experts' but as co-producers and collaborators is of course crucial, but the extent to which existing hierarchies of expertise, skill, class, gender, race can genuinely be dissolved in such a fleeting and partial collaboration is debateable. NRT offers a framework for viewing creative evaluations as part of the production of power-knowledges. It suggests that, rather than dissolving cultural narratives they are situated in them. Nevertheless, the possibility that creative methods might produce situated knowledges beyond conventional qualitative methods, using practices congruent with project activities, is a valuable proposal for further research, notwithstanding the fact that they cannot be assumed to express a greater authenticity. It is important too to explore the possibility that especially collective, creative evaluation activity in a project might be a contributor to change-related praxis which both promotes reflection and supports repositioning.

3.7 Theorising how people and communities change

Theoretical transparency helps us make judgements about evaluative interpretations. Yet, as Chapter 2 suggested, the two key issues for creative community project evaluation, how to produce and reproduce the conditions for positive personal change and how this translates to community change, are seldom theorised. This section proposes ways in which Freire's concept of 'transformational praxis' might offer useful insights in understanding how individual change happens and how it might 'translate' to social change.

⁸² This could be technical expertise in the sense of skills with materials or technologies, or 'arts-based' skills such as setting an open-ended and experimental brief.

In project documents, including evaluation reports, the causal link between experience in a project, individual change and community change is more often than not simply presumed, usually in a sketchy or sweeping manner, implicitly connected with the aggregation of individual changes (Matarasso 2007; Paranjape 2007)⁸³. Moreover, within the genre of 'community development' is the idea that change might happen through "challenge and resistance as much as by consent" (Meade and Shaw 2007:413), and this tends not to be part of this analysis. 'Challenge and resistance' are central to the concept 'transformatory praxis', which has its origins in community development, especially the liberation pedagogies developed by 1970s Brazilian activist Paulo Freire. It is of interest to this research because it describes processes of individual and collective change at a psycho-social level, *and* links them to structural power. Its ontological assumption is that the world is not a static entity to which people must adapt, but "a problem to be worked on and solved" (Shaul 2005).

Freire argued that by validating the experience of members of excluded and poor communities, and by linking new learning to action for positive social or individual change, which in turn offers potential new ways of seeing the world, participants can experience profound changes in the way they position themselves in the world and experience a sense of agency. Collective, community learning can be transformatory for individuals and their communities (Freire 1970). This reflexive relationship between validation of self, new learning, exposure to new discourses, and action for change, leading to transformation, was termed *praxis* by the post-structural theorists who drew on Freire: "Knowledge is praxis, a constant interplay between theory, ideas and actions that derive from them and in turn influence their development" (Maher 1987:94 in Ryan 2001:68). So, community arts practices which validate participants' own experience, consciously create space for new ways of seeing the world, and involve action for individual or social change in the real world, could be described as sites with the potential for transformatory praxis.

In transformatory praxis an individual's subjectivity is not only related to structural factors, but to the available discourses with which she can interpret the world⁸⁴. People's own experience is the only material for understanding this process, and this understanding is developed, says Freire, in a "dialogical practice" where that experience and identity is presented as part of the problematising of power, agency and history (Macedo 2000:14). In other words, a key part of 'praxis' is the theorisation of experience and feelings.

⁸³ This seems to me to be rather like the claims for Transcendental Meditation that, "where the proportion of people in any community practising Transcendental Meditation reached a particular threshold (about 1% of the population) changes started to occur in social trends. Crime, road accidents and hospital admissions started to decrease" (<http://www.t-m.org.uk/whatistm.shtml> accessed 21.5.13)

⁸⁴ Althusser (1971:163) refers to the process of 'interpellation', when hegemonic ideologies address us so convincingly as particular beings that we come to see ourselves that way too (Althusser, L (1971) *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* quoted in Meade and Shaw 2007).

In this process language is a key component of discourse⁸⁵. People cannot liberate themselves in a process which positions them as “unfortunates” (Freire 1970 :54). For this reason the ‘deficit model’ of community engagement described above, which speaks of ‘disadvantaged communities’, could never create the necessary conditions for profound personal or community change. This is a major problem for projects predicated on externally determined ‘need’. As Cruikshank argues, “the will to empower contains the twin possibilities of domination and freedom” (Cruikshank 1999:2). Even apparently participant-led processes may be limited by structural inequalities inherent in artist/participant relationships, and “treat the symptoms” only (Ellsworth 1989:307).

In projects change is often limited by discourses about the ability to position oneself differently, perhaps through the experience of being positioned differently by others, within *existing* discourses about the world. For example, a discourse might be about who has the ability to make (externally defined) ‘high quality’ artwork or other products⁸⁶. Rather than ‘action for *social* change’, a project may offer personal development training or individualised learning of ‘transferable skills’ such as literacy, employability. Whether a creative community project *can* be a site for transformatory praxis, and what are the conditions necessary to make that happen, especially how collective change in communities of place or interest is achieved, is at the core of this study.

In Freire’s ‘transformatory praxis’ the link between individual change and community change is made during the process because learning and reflecting must always be *collective* activities. In community projects collective participation is linked causally to two outcomes: intensity of impact and development of personal autonomy. This is based on the idea that the ‘transferable’ skills needed to participate fully in democratic processes, are gained by participating in a democratically structured project. Recently, there have been significant challenges to this idea, both on the basis of flawed practice (claims to be democratic not fulfilled), and in terms of the lack of evidence for the impact of participation on individual or collective change⁸⁷.

Contemporary ‘indicators of wellbeing’ widely accepted in the UK as evaluation yardsticks (as Chapter 2 outlined) are part of a tradition, including Freire and feminism,

⁸⁵ Freire uses the example of the difference between ‘oppressed’ and ‘disenfranchised’, but a more relevant example for this research might be the difference between ‘oppressed’ and ‘disengaged’ (one of the Arts Council England target categories of participant at time of writing): oppressed carries the implication of the existence of an oppressor; disengaged is a more passive concept located in the subject - although there are arguments for disengagement as an active choice.

⁸⁶ The debate about whether this is an historical shift from a more socially committed community arts practice is referred to in Chapter 2: there is general agreement that projects in the UK tend now to be more focussed on personal and local change, rather than structural changes (Matarasso 2011; Clements 2007.)

⁸⁷ Particularly the critique by Cooke and Kothari (*Participation the new tyranny?* (2001)

which connects wellbeing with becoming an autonomous subject⁸⁸. However, although wellbeing indicators may list factors which 'add up' to autonomy, they do not describe the processes which lead to them. There are problems too with linking wellbeing to autonomy, not the least that it can be a "tricky" position to be in: "though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations" (Steyerl 2012:50). Smail's engaging psycho-social treatises on anxiety and unhappiness, describes becoming an autonomous subject as being in a lonely and painful place, and 'wellbeing' often as an expression of maintained illusion (Smail 1984;1993). And for Freire, 'transformatory praxis' was merely the essential precursor to (no doubt painful) revolutionary struggle.

'Transformatory praxis' is a useful concept for the current research because it emphasises the role of reflection and theory in the process of change and links collective experience to collective change. A significant difficulty with the concept is its implication of radical and total change. This presents two problems for the current research: firstly, because projects have more or less limited impact on people or communities, but are part of other major and perhaps more determining factors, structural, cultural, historical. Second, despite the emphasis on valuing people for their existing selves, Freire's transformation implies a rejection of these prior qualities and gaining new, revolutionary attitudes, behaviours and ways of seeing the world; it's a Marxist 'clean slate' viewpoint. Feminist critiques of Freire in particular have reminded us that it is neither likely that or desirable for people to reject their entire experience in this way⁸⁹. 'Change-related praxis' may be a more accurate term to describe the partial and uneven changes people are likely to experience.

Additionally, it may be that resistance and challenge are significant factors in producing profound personal change⁹⁰ and these are not always part of creative participatory community projects. The following section suggests that intense experience associated with creativity may have the potential to create a sense of resistance and challenge, which can contribute to change within the conditions of praxis described above.

⁸⁸ For example, the 2012 New Economics Foundation *National Accounts of Wellbeing* across 22 European countries describe "the positive functioning indicator is a component of [personal well-being](#). It measures how far people are 'doing well' in terms of functioning well in the world. It is comprised of four subcomponents: [autonomy](#), [competence](#), [engagement](#) and [meaning and purpose](#)". See Chapter 2 for further discussion of the MWIA. <http://www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org/explore/indicators/zfunctionings> accessed 21.6.13

⁸⁹ Clarke (2003) reminds us that Freire is rather hoist by his own petard when he uses the term 'domestication', carrying such a gendered weight which rejects a whole sphere of human activity.

⁹⁰ For example, the UK based charity, University of the First Age, which works with children and young people, promotes a 'Challenge Framework' for learning based on problem based or experience based pedagogy when a 'real world' challenge is the focus of learning: this "supports young people in developing the qualities of being reflective, relational and resourceful. It also provides a structure that motivates and maintains engagement". However, although it is central to this that the problems set should be 'real' and there is always an imperative to "produce the final product, present, perform, display" to relevant audiences, the problem does not necessarily have to be set by participants: the extent or nature of democratic participation therefore varies.

3.8 The potential of creativity itself as a force in praxis

Chapter 2 described two aspects to creativity which give it the potential to play a role in change-related praxis. Firstly, the specific kinds of open-ended collaborative processes experienced in collective creativity are linked to resistance, empowerment and the development of autonomy. Second, the experience of absorption in a creative activity, sometimes called 'flow' or being 'in the zone', which takes people 'out of themselves' and the everyday world, and is linked to re-positioning in discourses about self or the world. Arguably, all meanings in art resist closure and this, even in the 'relentless individualisation' of contemporary cultural activity, offers the possibility of resistance and change (McRobbie 2003). Although many contemporary creative community projects would sit uneasily in the field of community development, having no overt aim "for extending, strengthening or cultivating democracy" (Meade, Shaw, 2007:414) the claim has been made that, in art processes, the two aspects above combine to

provide a site where political and pedagogical roles and relations
can be re-negotiated and re-imagined

(Meade and Shaw 2007:414)

The ontological premise of these views of collective creative experience is that people are inherently creative and that art can help them access and enact this creativity. Even when projects cannot be described as "socially engaged practice", that is, concerned with challenging fundamental relations between government, commerce and citizens (rather than, for example, ameliorating social distress), creativity is empowering:

[it can] "enhance people's potential for agency by helping to
release or resource their capacity to be active and creative"

(Meade and Shaw 2007:414)

Taking first claims for participation and collectivity, it can be seen that these immediately become issues of political commitment (Webster and Buglass 2011, Bishop 2006). This argument is linked to the idea that art processes, although not inherently radical, are inherently associated with a number of qualities which lay "the foundations of empowerment" (Matarasso 2007: 457). They are (ideally) 'open ended' projects with no prescribed outcome, non-judgemental, experimental. Artists position themselves as co-producers and collaborators and existing hierarchies of expertise, skill, class, gender, and race are dissolved in the collaboration. Bishop, in her review of participation in art practices, calls this an "aesthetic of participation" (Bishop 2006:12), aimed at

a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning

(Bishop 2006:12)

The collective nature of creative community projects may offer an increasingly rare yet vital contribution to social cohesion and personal wellbeing, that is, activity in the public sphere. Sometimes literally, when public art, exhibition or performance are officially or not involved in the creation of "independent and uncommodified spaces" (Meade and Shaw 2007:416). The 'challenge' of open-ended collective creative projects can "interrupt conventional *ways of seeing*" and create a new public "creative action space" (Percy-Smith and Carney 2011:23). To a greater or lesser extent, public 'art' spaces can be 'facilitators' of community development such as sense of belonging and social interaction between communities (Grodach 2010).

Amongst the many critiques of this rather idealistic (but not for that reason rejected) approach, Kothari's is perhaps most pertinent. Using Foucault's description of hegemonic power being reproduced through "infinitesimal" every day practices (Foucault 1980:99), Kothari points out that participatory activity, although it may produce previously unvoiced local knowledges about the world, does not necessarily support the development of understanding about the processes which led to current conditions or how the local knowledges themselves might in time become incorporated into hegemonic discourse (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Nor, as Smith reminds us, is this new articulation necessarily enough to change material conditions (Smith 1999:3). These critiques most clearly indicate the need for an ethnographic research technique such as ANT and the overt reflective theorisation of personal experience advocated in Freire's notion of transformatory praxis through dialogical pedagogy.

The second key aspect of creativity is epitomised in the concept of 'flow' and the association of creativity and authenticity discussed in Chapter 2. There is evidence that absorption in creative activity of itself facilitates a deeper reflection and the development of new ideas (Hickman 2008, Sennet 2008, Deaver and McAnliffe 2009, Treadaway 2009, Gauntlett 2011). Creative activities may then be the catalyst for the reflective 'theorisation' of experience which is an essential part of praxis and change⁹¹. Both the collective and the reflective aspects of creativity may play a role in praxis.

Freire was clear that transformatory praxis was based on theorising experience. A celebratory primacy of focus on experience alone, without theoretical framework, is reductionist: it "leaves identity and experience removed from the problematics of power,

⁹¹ This is the premise of art therapy.

agency, and history” (Macedo 2000:10 referring to Giroux⁹²). The dialogical process is not an end in itself but a means to better understand the ‘object of knowledge’: “dialogue must require an ever-present curiosity about the object of knowledge” (Macedo 2000:19). The contention of this chapter is that the striving for aesthetic excellence characteristic of artists’ practice can drive that ever-present curiosity’ beyond participants’ immediate experience and therefore produce the conditions for change-related praxis. The potential of arts-led projects to provide this theorisation in a collective context involving action in the world is suggested by ideas about the characteristics of artists’ practice and the nature of project activity.

3.9 Evaluating for and in complexity

Projects which position creativity as central to transformative change (because of the liminal, open-ended and unpredictable context it can foster⁹³) are ‘complex’ systems, where cause and effect is not obvious except perhaps in review. In these projects outcomes are likely to be unpredictable, contingent and difficult to observe. The Medical Research Council (MRC) guidelines for evaluating complex interventions⁹⁴, identifies a need for “sensitivity to features of the local context, the organisational and logistical difficulty of applying experimental methods to service or policy change, and the length and complexity of the causal chains linking intervention with outcome” (Craig et al 2008:6). In complex systems evaluation needs to take a much more open-ended and probing approach as patterns emerge, using for example, “democratic, interactive, multidirectional discussion” (Snowden, Boone 2007), and drawing on ideas and methods proposed by people within the project rather than imposing ‘best practice’ methods (Craig et al, 2008). ‘Complexity awareness monitoring’ offers a pragmatic framework for the interpretivist epistemology which underpins the current research, and also opens space for analyses of dynamic power relations which determine dominant discourses (Latour 2004). It offers an approach to evaluation designed for ‘complex’, dynamic systems where cause and effect are not necessarily linear and is particularly useful for its insistence that participants in a network may have different perceptions of project aims, outcomes and boundaries, and may view and value relationships and structures differently (Britt 2013).

⁹² Preface to the 2005 edition of Freire’s 1970 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

⁹³ Atkinson and Robson (2012)

⁹⁴ There is widespread acceptance in ‘arts and health’ literature that ‘art therapy’ interventions (as opposed to ‘art as psychotherapy’) are complex interventions; this reading of the Medical Research Council guidelines (Craig 2008), and Crawford and Patterson (2007) and Huet et al (2014) suggests that this is based on those aspects of art therapy characteristics which strongly overlap characteristics of creative interventions in community projects.

The implications of complexity awareness approaches⁹⁵ are that evaluation systems for complexity need to be responsive to the pace of change in the project and iterative (adjusted to project activity in real time, in a loop, of enquiry – feedback – action); and inclusive. The power to evaluate (to determine measurement indicators, review practice, recommend and report) must be shared by participants and staff within a project and by interested stakeholders outside it. Tasks “are distributed among stakeholders to allow for variety in content, analysis, interpretation, and uses of data to achieve outcomes” (Britt 2013:6). Complexity awareness monitoring suggests that evaluators can identify ‘leading’ or ‘sentinel’ indicators⁹⁶, things which happen in advance of project completion which are reliable indicators of likely impact.

Evaluation is essentially a business planning tool, designed to monitor activity as well as evaluate practice and record impact. It involves setting baselines and comparing them with end results, often related to targets set from outside the project, usually by funders. However, the aim of the current research is to propose and trial evaluation strategies which also set out to understand *how* change occurs, as well as what changes can be identified. Evaluation in the context of the complexity engendered by creativity, although it might include setting baselines, also needs to be far more flexible and responsive, able to recognise unexpected outcomes and indirect relationships between cause and effect. The Cynefin Framework⁹⁷ for evaluation recognises different relationships between cause and effect in different processes, and at different times in the same project (Kurtz and Snowden 2003; Snowden and Boone 2007). Intention, expressed in project planning and related to implicit or explicit theories of change (discussed below), positions creative processes in ways which give it different potentialities to create impact. In the Cynefin Framework, creativity would be part of a ‘simple’ system only when its use is restricted to a tool for engaging participants’ attention, and its impact would be limited by the limited way in which it is used. When creativity is positioned in projects for its potential to create liminal space, with the aspiration to create the conditions for producing creative flow, its

⁹⁵ ‘Complexity awareness’ uses the Cynefin definitions of complexity, described below. As Chapter 1 describes, the term ‘impact’ tends to be used for long term effects rather than immediate outcomes. For example, *outcomes* of the Carnival Costume Making Course in the current research included that a number of community-led workshops were held for children and participation in the parade was increased by a certain percentage from the previous year. An impact of the Course may be that social cohesion in certain communities was improved. This would be related to increased self-confidence, sense of wellbeing and community organisational skills in participants in the Course, increased wellbeing in workshop and parade participants, leading to a greater sense of pride and confidence to take action in the community. A longer term impact might be a rise in volunteering in the community, which in turn will have other beneficial impacts.

⁹⁶ A concept drawn from environmental science.

⁹⁷ The term Cynefin is Welsh for ‘place of your multiple belongings’, and is used to reflect the multiplicity of human identities which resonate within a network or system. The Cynefin Framework is used as a decision making tool in management of organisations. Although it draws on some aspects of systems theory, it essentially refers to symbolic systems not as fixed entities, but discursive fields subject to contingent power struggles. In the complex systems Cynefin describes, meaning is in flux and resists closure. In this resistance lies the possibility for change; but because of the complexities of relationships in the system, cause and effect are separated and difficult to identify (Snowden and Boone 2007).

processes are more likely to be 'complicated' in Cynefin terms, or 'complex', and therefore require different evaluation approaches. In 'complicated' systems, although there may be a clear relationship between cause and effect (for example, that participation in collective creative activities improves participants' sense of wellbeing and confidence), it may not be easy to identify or the link between them might be separated by time or place (Mowlah 2014:40). Cause and effect separated by time or place (people may not recognise change until long after project end, or may move away as a result of participation⁹⁸), or resulting from aggregation or accumulation of impact⁹⁹, might require 'meta' analysis outside the scope of individual, time-limited project evaluation¹⁰⁰. A single project might contain different routes to the same outcomes, and so provide different activities and which (ideally) suggest different kinds of evaluation. Consequently, there might be several 'right' ways to evaluate 'complicated' projects

3.10 Conclusions: a new theorisation for impact

This Chapter explored some key ideas about evaluation and research and established a reflexive approach in which research methods and theoretical frameworks inform and influence each other throughout. Because evaluation is linked to change and action, Actor Network Theory (ANT), with its emphasis on close ethnographic observation and attention to how knowledges and meanings become dominant, was used as a way of examining power for all 'actors' in a project network, human and non-human. At the same time, research and evaluation are never 'innocent', always implicated in oppressive conceptualisations related to structural factors such as class, race and gender.

Recognising the heterogeneity and process-based nature of knowledge production and the significance of the researcher role in producing it, the research framework uses ANT and Non Representational Theory (NRT) to look for the ontological and epistemological

⁹⁸ Interview with Michelle Bould, Leaps and Bounds Dance Company (2.3.2011) who made the point that several young people, 'graduating' from an intensive dance and personal development programme, felt empowered to leave their (disadvantaged) communities and find work or higher education elsewhere.

⁹⁹ Matarasso (2013:6) asks: "Why should [...] writing a play be expected to improve a person's housing situation? There are several answers to this question, but unless they are being considered in the conception and planning of a project, there is no way of testing the quality or value of any proposed activities".

¹⁰⁰ This research focussed on qualitative impacts, issues such as individual subjective wellbeing and related behaviours, and social issues such as community connectedness, social cohesion and inclusivity. It didn't explore economic impact or educational achievement, except as a corollary to these. Measurement of economic impact is much more difficult for small projects or very brief projects. Larger-scale surveys tend to be based on analyses of data collected for more general purposes (for example, the government Household Surveys) and can conclude with greater validity that there is a causal link between participation in the arts and economic impact, because they can factor out a range of relevant variables such as income, age, gender. There are sometimes ways that smaller projects can combine to collect quantitative data within project budgets. For example, audience questionnaires used to evaluate Imagineer's *Godiva Awakes!* public spectacle in Coventry 2012, as part of this research, included questions contributing to a regional data collection organised by the (now defunct) West Midlands Cultural Observatory. This meant that relatively small samples (365, in this case) could be combined with several thousand over the region to produce more statistically significant information. This was possible only for a brief time as part of the 2012 national Cultural Olympics initiative and is not often available to smaller projects. This piece of research is described further in Chapter 5.

narratives which come and go in the research and which may be expressions of the affect produced as human and non-human entities interact with the material world. Accepting that knowledges will always be partial and local, and that emotions can never be fully represented but may themselves be regarded as a type of knowledge, this framework offers a challenge to evaluation practitioners charged as they are with producing evidence for outcomes determined by funders attached to generalisable data. Problematising the purpose of evaluation is crucial to the research.

Using Freire's 'transformatory praxis' as a starting point, the chapter produces a modified theory of change which allows for incremental, partial and non-linear change: change-related praxis. Change remains a product of dialogical pedagogy (based entirely on participants' experience), wherein new knowledge and understandings are coupled with social action to form a praxis underpinned by new theoretical perspectives. The ability to reflect on change cannot be presumed, though participants need to learn skills of reflection alongside creative skills. It is the collective nature of this praxis which leads to changes in qualities of communities. However, in the more individualised context of current practice, creative community projects however open-ended and experimental cannot be assumed to include the dynamics of challenge and resistance which is the crucible of Freire's revolutionary transformation.

It may be however, that creativity itself can contribute to this process. Research suggests that it has the potential to take people 'out of themselves' in creative 'flow', creating more complex and more collective identities, allowing participants to see the world and themselves in it quite differently, as creative agents. Moreover, it may be possible to deliberately develop an 'evaluation of resistance' within projects, which identifies and challenges dominant discourses.

The chapter also argues that the boundary-less and unpredictable nature of creative activities means that all projects with creative elements also share some elements of complex systems, where the connection between cause and effect is not obvious. Consequently, evaluation strategies need to be highly open-ended, responsive and integrated.

The research was framed by the key idea, that change-related praxis in projects can create the conditions for individual and collective change. The rest of this research is an exploration of the nature of these conditions and their interaction, utilising four key conditions which the theoretical frameworks described here suggest will lead to change:

- active participation in either democratic or creative processes
- experience of intense absorption in creative activity
- collective experience and real world action (outside the project)
- a reflective framework for the experience

Since change is likely to be complex, uneven and partial over time, possibly not recognised or felt until after the project, the research went on to explore the extent to which evaluation would need to be highly integrated and responsive and whether this was feasible in practice:

- using the tropes and practices of creativity in the project
- responsive to quotidian practices and brief events
- integral to all project practice, systemic
- explicit in methodology to enable comparisons beyond a single project

Chapter 4 shows how these ideas were operationalised as practical methodologies and how choices were made about scope and type of research intervention through the prism of these theoretical perspectives and the contingent contexts in the field.

Chapter 4 Research design and method in the empirical study.

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods explored in the current research as ways of meeting the challenges of the theories and epistemologies described in the previous chapter. It outlines the rationale that underpinned the selection of projects and the research geographical region. In order to maximise trials of feasible evaluation strategies, a plan was formulated early in the research to restrict field research methods to be within the potential range of small to medium sized projects – that is, not demanding too high a level of specialist skill or too costly. This was of particular benefit in the second Phase to the research when evaluation methods were trialled in projects. This pragmatic focus fitted with the research aspirations to Action Research. This was further supported by the iterative research process described in 4.1 below in which theory and research continually refreshed one another.

The research's epistemological framework, of socially constructed multiple knowledges, determined that qualitative methods predominated but also that a range of methods were used to capture different viewpoints and kinds of knowledges. For example, within an ANT framework, described in Chapter 3, it is important to observe and question the processes by which meanings become hegemonic in a network. This was carried out through observations, participant observations, informal and formal interviews, focus groups and even questionnaires and surveys about the same or related phenomena. Although there is no specific methodology related to NRT, its insights prompted the use of creative methods designed to reflect feelings in their embodied states. The research epistemology was ultimately underpinned by the following key methods:

- participatory methods which widen the number of viewpoints represented and allow for a number of theories of change to develop in a project, recognising that there is no single 'right' explanation of what is happening
- mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) which help capture as wide a range of viewpoints and different types of knowledges as possible. This is particularly important when there are diverse audiences for evaluation with different and often inexplicit theories of change and criteria for what counts as 'evidence'.

In addition, the research's theoretical understanding of the processes of creativity and making as embodied practices producing their own types of thinking, reflection and feelings led to:

- practice-led research and evaluation techniques which can recognise the impacts of creativity using the discourses and practices of creative arts.

The presence of creativity in projects produces complex systems which include non-linear connections between cause and effect. This led to the following methodological choices:

- integrated, systemic strategies of research and evaluation which were designed to observe processes rather than take snapshots of moments or outcomes. This means that data gathering was more or less continual and shared between researcher and participants and others such as staff and volunteers
- overt methodological descriptions which support future re-visiting baselines or data collection beyond the life of a single project in order to capture long term impacts or impacts not recognisable except over time

The chapter is organised in two parts. The first part describes the Phases of the research which broadly correspond to the research aims. It goes on to describe the rationale for sampling, connected with the research aim to develop and field trial an evaluation approach for a diverse range of contexts. The next sections briefly describe the projects and their characteristics and the research timeline and duration of contact

Part two of this chapter is concerned with each Phase in more detail. It starts with an analysis of initial interviews in the Scoping Phase which produced several important themes for the research. The following sections describe the qualitative methods used in the Phase 1 field research investigating how creativity and participation interact to produce impact, and then the mixed methods used in Phase 2 to trial evaluations. This is followed by an introduction to the new creative methods developed in Phases 1 and 2 which are discussed in much more detail in Chapter 5. Finally, the last section describes attempts to implement findings from the field trials in the shape of systemic evaluation strategies (rather than episodic methods).

4.1 Phases of the research

The research was carried out over 42 months. In keeping with its aspiration to become Action Research (AR) the research process was reflexive and fluid, and did not proceed in a linear way. Nevertheless, as Table 1, below, shows, there were three broad phases corresponding to the research aims, preceded by a Scoping Phase. The Scoping Phase was needed to identify the range of genres and contexts of projects available and secure as wide a range of sites for the research as possible, with Aim 3 in mind. During scoping, early research (desk and field) was used to develop initial themes which informed key research questions in Phase 1. The typical AR loop of theory – research – action – theory (McNiff 2002) influenced the research process throughout, meaning that data, theories and research partners were often revisited in the light of new findings. Phase 1, focussing on Aim 1, examined existing literature on the qualitative impact of creative projects and carried out field research with project staff, participants and commissioners, about the specific ways participation and creativity interact in projects to improve wellbeing. This Phase concluded with suggestions about the conditions necessary to maximise that positive impact. Phase 2, focussing on Aim 2, used these findings to develop and trial evaluation methods, from individual techniques to strategic approaches. Finally, Phase 3 followed the dissemination of findings from trials and proposed an evaluation approach. This approach was taken up as an evaluation pilot with three Arts Council funded arts projects brokered by Arts Connect West Midlands and as a 'live' evaluation for a Shropshire Libraries project with the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Table 1 Phases of the research

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>2011 PHASE SCOPING developing research themes and definitions</p> | <p>Understanding the field and securing potential research project partners</p> | <p>Developing theories through literature reviews and initial interviews with projects, participants and commissioners</p> |
| <p>2012 PHASE 1 Aim 1 'to assess critically and theorise the contribution of participation in creative community projects to individual and/or social wellbeing'</p> | <p>Desk and field research into the impact of creativity in a range of projects; further developing theories in the light of this</p> | <p>Further interviews with, and feedback to, projects, participants and commissioners/funders</p> |
| <p>2013 PHASE 2 Aim 2 'to develop and trial evidence-based evaluation techniques which can 'measure' this contribution in ways which will be useful to project funders and commissioners'</p> | <p>Trials of evaluation techniques in the field; further develop theories in the light of these; incorporation of wider range of projects into research</p> | <p>Feedback to and from projects, participants and commissioners/funders</p> |
| <p>2014 PHASE 3 Aim 3 'to consider the implications of the above analyses for successfully connecting creativity, participation and impact in a range of projects'</p> | <p>Pilots of this research findings about evaluation strategies with Arts Connect projects; and Library projects</p> | <p>Writing up and disseminating; feedback to and from practitioners and commissioners</p> |

4.2 Sampling

The decision was taken to spread the research over as broad a range of projects as was feasible rather than to focus more closely on a single organisation. This was for two reasons. Firstly, as a safeguard against advocacy (for the positive impact of creative community projects) on the part of this practitioner-led enquiry, which as Chapter 2 discussed has become a barrier to the development of credibility in the sector (Belfiore and Bennett 2007; O'Brien 2010; Mowlah 2014). The second reason was connected with a problem identified in Chapter 2 about the difficulty of meeting demands for a theorisation which can be utilised across a broad and diverse range of projects. Academic evaluations which might be expected to theorise findings tend to particularise them in in-depth studies because of a reluctance to generalise from highly contextual data. There is no suggestion in this research that the projects *represent* types of creative participatory community projects, but rather they indicate their diversity. The need to use research methods and to develop evaluation techniques which might reflect this diversity, rather than flatten it, became clear early in the Scoping Phase of the research and suggested that a focus on processes and relationships might be a way forward. It also suggested the possibility that the richness produced by diversity contributes to the elusive nature of creative participatory community projects and the continuing controversy around their value and impact. The breadth of projects available across the West Midlands, and the diversity of contexts available, made this broad scope possible. Box 2 (below) describes this geographical area in more detail. Box 3 (below) describes the activity of research partner Imagineer Productions during the research period, as an illustration of the range of contexts in which a medium sized project in the region might be expected to work

In this highly differentiated sector, the research was not necessarily about generalisability, but about the 'why' and 'how' of impact, as much as the 'what'. This reflected research Objective 1.1 to investigate 'how people change' and Objective 1.3 to investigate the nature of impact in 'a range of projects'. Therefore, selecting research subjects and projects to work with was not about identifying characteristics in order to randomise a sample, particularly since relevant variables remained to be identified (and with such a small-scale enquiry, randomisation would have been statistically meaningless). It was much more about looking for rich sources of data. Purposive sampling selected projects with key variables (urban, rural, with/without overt personal development input) which are strategically relevant to the research question

A flexible, iterative approach to sampling, collecting, analysing and interpreting data (Marshall 1996) was adopted. This meant that, although the initial sample of interviewees (see below section 4.8) was both a 'judgement sample' (based on understanding of the literature and the researcher's own experience) and a 'convenience sample' (based on

existing networks of contacts and 'snowballing' from interviewees), it was possible to recruit new research participants as new themes emerged. For example, as ideas about the specific impact of artists' practice emerged from interviews, the decision was taken to enrol an additional artist-led company into the research (Chapter 7 describes this). It was possible to select examples of diverse contexts (urban, rural, community, school, long term, short term) and participants with different characteristics (adult, teen, children, male, female), projects targeted at people with different experiences (for example, from areas of multiple deprivation, from refugees, from economically mixed catchments). The sample also included projects designed around creative activities and those which included only small creative elements. It was not possible to sample projects across all artforms (although *interviews* did discuss most artforms), nor to represent a range of all other possible 'variables'. For example, it was not possible to follow up initial contact with a community choir made in the scoping phase, leaving the research without focus on a collective music project (although a digital project included some music making and the overall project in which the choir performed – Godiva Awakes! - was part of the research). The remaining projects selected were mainly concerned with visual, craft, digital and performance arts.

Altogether there were 84 face to face participants in the research up to Phase 3. That was mainly people engaged sufficiently to receive a Participant Information Sheet and complete a Consent Form (both in Appendix B). Most of these took part in informal and formal interviews and a range of other methods described later in this chapter. In Phase 3 research contact with project participants was mainly through observation and analyses of completed feedback. Table 2 below shows numbers in face to face and other forms of research contact. It divides research subjects into project participants and staff. The term participants means people actively engaged in a project, not all of whom were part of the research. It also includes volunteers, whose roles were often indistinguishable from enrolled participants or overlapped during the contact period. The term staff includes people involved in project delivery, usually artists and managers, and reflects the fact that these roles are often indistinguishable from each other or overlapped during the project. More specific comments about these roles follow later in this and the data chapters.

This Table shows three types of contact up to Phase 3: face to face (which includes interviews, discussion and focus groups, creative and visual methods, and observations), Observations only, and questionnaires (large scale online and paper surveys). There were 65 face to face contacts (ranging from over a year to a few hours), 45 with participants and 20 with staff. Face to face contact with participants tended to be of a longer duration and involve a wider range of methods (staff were mainly interviews). 50 participants in observations only. In the face to face, 55 were female and 10 male; staff were 15 female and 5 male; in the observations numbers were roughly even overall.

Table 2 Numbers of research participants

| Project name / research activity | Total participants in project (people engaging in project activity as unpaid participants or audience members) | Research subjects (includes project participants, staff, artists, partners such as engineers, teachers, parents, volunteers and audience members) |
|---|--|---|
| Initial interviews | n/a | 5 |
| Funders/ commissioners interviewed | n/a | 5 |
| Urban Refuge #1 | 47 | 14 |
| Urban Refuge #2 | 8 | 10 |
| Childrens Centre | 10 | 12 |
| Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC) | 17 | 21 |
| Rural Youth Arts Project , Film Club (RYA) | 10 | 13 |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing (UFW) | 100 | 101 |
| Godiva Awakes! 2012 And Godiva's Homecoming 2011 | 4,400 | 448 |
| Not Yet Invented | 75 | 85 |
| Lively Libraries | 224 | 224 |
| TOTALS | 4,891 | 938 |

Table 2 shows that up to Phase 3 there were a total of 115 research respondents, over of half of whom were face to face contacts and mainly project participants. Of staff in face to face contact (20), ten defined themselves as artists, others as project officers, residential care staff, or managers. In addition, there were 428 respondents to paper and online surveys of audiences and participants in two public arts events. Phase 3 research (trials of evaluation strategies) were rather different. Most of the face to face contact was in the project planning stage with staff and artists, with observations and analysis of feedback from participants, parents, audiences and others through interview transcripts, emails, online surveys, and feedback postcards, visual and creative methods. This is discussed at length in Chapter 7. Box 2 and 3 which follow describe the geographical region and the range of activities in Imaginer Productions portfolio during the research period.

Box 2 The geographical region

The West Midlands is a central region of the UK with a very mixed demography. As such it offered the opportunity to include a wider range of social contexts for the research than a more homogenous region might have done. For example, it includes UK's 'second city', Birmingham¹ and the major conurbations of Wolverhampton and 'the Black Country' once centres of UK manufacturing, now including some of the poorest communities in Britain with the lowest employment rates. But it also includes the free-standing city of Coventry and much less well populated and predominantly agricultural rural areas such as Shropshire and Herefordshire, where high earners rub shoulders with pockets of rural poverty and under-employment². Ethnic diversity and ages are also highly differentiated across the region, with predominantly white and older populations tending to be in rural areas, but again, pockets of ethnicity and age concentrated in small areas side by side³. There is another reason for siting this study in the West Midlands: although the region has slower economic growth than the UK average, recent growth in turnover in creative industries has been "significantly higher" than in creative industries nationally, and for all sectors in the region⁴. This suggests that the creative sector – which includes the work of community arts companies, artists and relevant community organisations which are the subject of this research - is of growing value economically to the West Midlands, and may make the West Midlands' nationally important in this field. Moreover, the creative sector's significance is not a solely urban feature: between 1998 and 2008, although urban Coventry and Warwickshire had the greatest proportion of creative sector employees, the rural areas of the West Midlands (Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin) saw a faster growth in the sector (+18%)⁴.

In the current research the Arts Council England's (ACE) geographical definition was employed to delineate the West Midlands and thus the geographical context for the study⁵. This reflects the fact that ACE is the source of most of the funding for creative participatory community projects (Thelwell 2011), and hence a common denominator for most of their evaluation requirements. This definition is also congruent with the UK Big Lottery boundaries (another significant funder in the sector). In consequence, the study potentially included Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Solihull, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Sandwell and Worcestershire. In practice, significant research activity developed with urban projects in Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry, and Wolverhampton, and rural and small-town Shropshire and Worcestershire⁶.

Box 2 Footnotes

¹ The second most populous after London with a population of over 1 million.

² For example, employment rates within the region vary widely: for the year ending December 2012 ranged from 57.0% in Birmingham (one of the lowest in England) to 82.2% in both Rugby in Warwickshire and Redditch in Worcestershire. Within the region, the unemployment rate ranged from 14.3% in Birmingham to 3.8% in Stratford-on-Avon for the year ending December 2012. Gross disposable household income of West Midlands' residents was one of the lowest among the English regions, at £14,400 per head in 2011. It ranged from £12,470 per head in Stoke-on-Trent to £17,360 per head in Solihull. The region suffered particularly slow growth during 1989-2008, when employment grew at 2% compared with 19% nationally. Figures from the Government Office of National Statistics <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/regional-trends/region-and-country-profiles/economy--june-2013/economy--west-midlands--june-2013.html> accessed 30.5.14) and the West Midlands Regional Observatory (WMRO), which provided intelligence and evidence relating to the social and economic role played by culture in the West Midlands as a joint initiative between the [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) (DCMS) [Advantage West Midlands](#). In October 2011 it was dissolved and became part of Marketing Birmingham <http://www.marketingbirmingham.com/>, a public-private sector joint company.

³ For example, Birmingham estimated 33.3% 'non-white' population (London 30.4%); Shropshire 98.0% 'White'. Government Office of National Statistics <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=3&b=276800&c=birmingham&d=13&e=13&g=373272&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1401448162099&enc=1&dsFamilyId=1812&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nss> (accessed 30.5.14)

⁴ WMRO 2009a

⁵ Other policy taxonomies include: Advantage West Midlands divides the region in sub-sections such as 'The Black Country' (an historically established local area based on traditional industries and identities; and clumps predominantly rural counties together (Advantage West Midlands (2007) *Connecting to Success: West Midlands Economic Strategy*, p28) ; a strategic planning "City Region" (Birmingham, Coventry & Black Country and Telford) has been mooted to represent shared areas where people live, work, study, shop, etc (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=7773100>).

⁶ For example, Imagineer Production's *Godiva Awakes!* project worked in inner city Coventry and Birmingham, and rural villages and small towns in Worcestershire and elsewhere

Box 3 Diverse activity: Imagineer Productions

As part of the Research Team, Coventry-based public and community arts company, Imagineer Productions (IP) was initially motivated to sponsor the research by “an increasing demand from funders for better evaluation”¹. IP has a management team of four, three of whom are artists. In this sense it is an ‘artist-led’ company, although many projects require the employment of other artists, often from a pool the company has worked with over at least a decade. IP works in fluctuating contexts: scale, location, artistic genre and participants may vary from project to project. For example, although typically community arts projects are targeted at people living in areas of deprivation, during the research period the company worked with a much wider range of adults, children and young people, in highly differentiated contexts, and in projects which lasted from a few weeks to several years. In the Godiva Awakes! project, the company worked for three months with pupils in three inner city primary schools and engineers, for two years with hundreds of teenagers in a dance and performance project across several urban centres, for a year with a range of adults in urban and village choirs. For several months in this project IP also worked on a large-scale engineering project with local companies which led to a public spectacle and performance in towns and cities across the Midlands culminating in a procession in London as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympics. Most of these projects had discrete, time-limited funding sources². Initial discussions with IP Director, Jane Hytch, focussed on the difficulty of evaluation in such a range of projects, and the need to engage stakeholders, participants and other ‘interested parties’, making evaluation meaningful for them, but at the same time to meet funders’ needs and not exceed budgets which typically allowed very little for evaluation. Evaluation was also needed to formalise or improve the intuitive reflection that staff and artists were assumed to carry out in process. But there was a need to overcome artists’ reluctance to see evaluation as part of their work or skilset. A key problem she identified for long term evaluation was the short term and uncertain nature of funding. As a medium sized arts organisation, it was hard to find funding for ongoing evaluation spanning several short term projects¹.

¹ Jane Hytch, Imagineer Productions CEO, informal interview, 2011

² Godiva Awakes! involved designing and making a three metre high animatronic figure of Coventry’s iconic historical saviour, Lady Godiva, ‘waking’ her with massed drummers, dancers and choirs for a night time performance outside the City’s Cathedral, involving hundreds of volunteers, dancers, singers and aerialists. Lady Godiva was then pushed to London via local pageants by 50 participants who had been trained as cyclists. This project was funded by a mix of local government, Arts Council, charitable and private sponsorship, much ‘in kind’, that is, represented by donations of time, skills, venues and equipment. The 2012 Cultural Olympics were government supported cultural events all over the country over the four years leading up to the 2012 sports Olympics.

4.3 The impact of partnership on research development

The CASE collaboration which supported the current research involved Coventry University and a Coventry-based, medium sized arts company, Imagineer Productions (IP)¹⁰¹. IP provided financial sponsorship and expertise on the Supervisory Team. IP Chief Executive Jane Hytch offered insights from many years experience of participatory creative community and public arts projects from the perspective of a practitioner, and facilitated access to research subjects. For example, while the literature review was under way at the start of the research initial research contacts were made with participants from Imagineer's multi-faceted arts project *Godiva Awakes!*, which involved engineering and design companies in a huge design and build project, community choirs, aerialists (high-wire dancers) and Carnival performance. This was in order to establish as long a period of research contact as possible, in response to a key issue which emerged through early literature reviews and initial research contact – the problem that short term contact with participants would inhibit conclusions being drawn about longer term impact of participation.

The sometimes apparently ad hoc practices this kind of Action Research can generate, in which the development of theory and method and research interact (as Chapter 3 describes), led to some tensions. This early access to participants produced the richest data in the project led by Jane herself, referred to here as the Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC). As this and the following chapters describe, research contact lasted over a year and included regular observations and interviews, creative methods and a focus group. Fifteen-minute slots were set aside during activity sessions every two weeks. This enabled observations to be followed up, checked with participants and a range of methods led by the researcher to be deployed and reflected on. This early-research contact posed some difficulties as well as advantages, in this and other parts of IP's project. For example, IP facilitated contact with a rural community choir at the very start of the research. After observing and chatting informally to participants and the choir leader it was felt that, because the research theoretical framework, and perhaps at this early point, researcher skills were insufficiently developed, the research was not in a position to generate or analyse meaningful data. The Action Research approach is predicated on researchers being involved from the start of a project and research aims and methods being integrated into activities, which was not available in this context. Similarly, the evaluation processes developed in the course of this research need time and space in project planning and delivery of activities, which was unavailable in an already tightly scheduled rehearsal programme. In other parts of the *Godiva Awakes!* project, when the Chief Executive was not directly delivering, the sense (well-described in the literature in Chapter 2) that research or evaluation were 'extra' and even extraneous to project activities was sometimes

¹⁰¹ CASE funding is intended to facilitate collaborations between academic institutions and private companies or public organisations to support investigations with a pragmatic focus beyond the academy. Imagineer Productions website is: <http://www.imagineerproductions.co.uk/>

unavoidable and contact was brief. Researcher's Notes in this early stage record some frustration: "Evaluation and research are 'championed' by Jane but within a culture of urgency which pits time for reflection against time for delivery" (Researcher's Notes, April 2012). This tension was useful in shaping the thesis final recommendations: it confirmed that rich and meaningful evaluation 'owned' by stakeholders needed to be integrated into planning and delivery. An additional source of tension may also have been, as Chapter 2 argued, that the boundaries between research and evaluation are often blurred. This was further complicated in this research by the partnership of a research sponsor so committed an advocate for the positive impact of its work¹⁰². From the start, the research also produced data IP used in evaluation reports, even when analysis was (in the researcher's view) a little underdeveloped.

One reason why contact with the CCMC was so productive was that dedicated research time – framed as evaluation – was written into the project schedule for the funder (by the researcher). This was highly useful to the research process, and supported the development of an understanding of the reporting demands on and capabilities of medium sized arts companies. It enabled a deeper understanding of the feasibility of methods. However, since it was framed as evaluation, it also led to the researcher designing, implementing and analysing quantitative research techniques (for example, large scale audience questionnaires) which were used to evaluate impact (see Chapter 4). This proved to be a distraction from a deeper engagement with the research process for both the researcher and perhaps IP staff. This may have been why, as the research moved (in Phase 3) towards trialling a whole-project, systemic evaluation approach integrated into planning and delivery, IP was slow to respond. This again was in one sense helpful: it highlighted how radical and challenging changes to established and hitherto successful practices might appear to busy staff following the next funding application or project start; and it helped the researcher and IP focus on a more incremental approach to changing practice which has continued to develop since the research ended.

A key aim of the PhD was to develop evaluation strategies which would meet as wide a range of project needs as possible, so it was important to extend beyond the opportunities offered by *Godiva Awakes!*. The diversity of the West Midlands region was ideally suited to selecting a wide a range of projects to suit this purpose, since it contains sparsely populated rural areas (such as South Shropshire), large urban conurbations (such as Coventry, and Britain's second most populous city, Birmingham) and a correspondingly wide range of types of projects and funding. The next section describes these research sites in detail.

¹⁰² Chapter 2 discussed the disadvantages for evaluation of over determined advocacy in the sector (Belfiore and Bennett 2007; O'Brien 2010; Mowlah 2014).

4.4 The research projects: introduction

This section outlines some of the characteristics of the participatory creative community projects in the research. Most creative community projects in the UK have been initiated and funded by public or charitable money¹⁰³. The intention of this funding is to effect positive change in communities of place or common interest by inviting people from those communities to participate in activities. All the projects studied in this research had among their aims a commitment to improve individual and/or social wellbeing. This commitment was used as one of the criteria for project selection. Although it is perfectly possible that further research might reveal that projects without this overt aim also improve wellbeing, they were not part of this study.

Characteristically, the term 'project' refers to activities of restricted duration, with particular aims, ring-fenced funding, and targeted outputs, often linked to specified aims and outcomes. Ideally, "the work takes place over a timescale that is appropriate to the capabilities of the participants and the requirements of the partner organisations" (509 Arts 2010:21). Nevertheless, participants 'in' projects may not experience them this way. For example, they might take part for only a short time in a longer project, or in one place of a geographically spread project; or take part in a number of projects over a long period of time, which, perhaps because they are delivered by the same company (or community organisation), or hosted by the same venue (such as a community centre), they experience as a single, continuous 'project'. Moreover, project *outcomes* (immediate effects on individuals resulting from project activity or outputs) may be different from project *impacts*, in that these may involve people beyond participants, and communities and organisations not directly involved in the events, or might be observable only after the project funding has finished. An example of community impact might be a reduction in vandalism in a neighbourhood where the project took place or from which participants were drawn:

Whereas an outcome is the change occurring as a direct result of project outputs, impact is the effect of a project at a higher or broader level in the longer term [...] it is much more difficult to assess this level of change within the lifetime and resources of a small, time-limited project.

(Culpitt and Ellis: 2011:11)

Notwithstanding all this, evaluation as required by funders and as carried out by small to medium sized organisations is almost always tied by time and place to a discretely

¹⁰³ Between 2010 and 2015, ACE, the main UK funding body for participatory community arts, will spend £1.9billion in government and National Lottery funds. Most of this goes to major galleries and projects. (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/> accessed 30.5.14). About 18% goes to small to medium-sized community arts projects for which it is the major provider (Thelwell 2011). In this study, only Imagineer Productions had raised significant private 'in-kind' and financial income alongside its public and charitable grants.

funded activity. For this reason, the term 'project' in this thesis is used to refer to discretely funded and time-limited activities with specific aims and outcomes related to them, whilst acknowledging that this does not necessarily describe the participant experience or wider impacts. In this sense, descriptions of projects are provisional.

4.4.1 Characteristics of the projects

Although all the projects in the research have been described as creative participatory community projects, these three concepts are part of contested discourses, and the various meanings ascribed to them emerge from the research discussions. Working definitions and taxonomies of these projects are most usefully regarded as subjects for the research process themselves. However, it is necessary to give a broad picture of the projects. This section lists the main projects¹⁰⁴ in this study distinguished by place, type of funding, by type of project management, gender/age of participants, funding sources, and types of activities; but other taxonomies are possible¹⁰⁵. For the Refuges and Children's Centre, the creative projects were a small scale and brief part of long term service provision funded by a mix of statutory, charitable and grants, and were funded from this internal budget. For the Upland Farmers Wellbeing project the creative activities were small-scale, brief interventions as part of a wider, non-creative project. The others were funded primarily as arts projects, with both intrinsic (aesthetic) and extrinsic (social) aims. It was important early on in the research to identify a range of project characteristics which might be variables in the conditions for maximising positive impact and which might affect how that should be evaluated. This section summarises some of the key characteristics which might have affected project outcomes¹⁰⁶. It reflects ideas discussed in Chapter 3 about the social construction of meaning and the significance of available discourses in framing what is possible and what can be recognised as meaningful. For example, creative activities managed by non-arts management (such as a craft activity in a project organised by an environmental charity) might produce different impacts from creative activities run by artist-led organisations perhaps because of the different practices, values and discourses associated with them. Describing the projects in this way as they were recruited offers a 'skeleton' framework for initial comparisons, upon which to build a more complex picture:

¹⁰⁴ There are a number of other projects which informed the research but where contact was less intense or more fleeting, for example, Urban Youth Dance project. These are referred to in the body of the thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Chapter 7 discusses alternative taxonomy which relates to levels of participation, intentions, type of evaluation etc

¹⁰⁶ It doesn't include the Initial Interviews, which ranged over too many types and contexts of projects to be summarised in this way. These are discussed later in this chapter.

Summaries of the main projects in the research

The Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC)

Funding: mixed (arts and regeneration grant and sponsorship)

Management: artist-led by arts company

Aims: social cohesion and community wellbeing; individual wellbeing

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of agency will be increased through skills acquisition, creation of aesthetic excellence and successful public performance and this will contribute to social cohesion in neighbourhoods

Participants: 12-17 women aged 16-60 from urban communities in areas of multiple deprivations in Coventry

Duration of project: nine months. Duration of research contact: 18 months

Creative activity in research: making and decorating carnival costumes, devising and performing in parades

Other activities included: learning how to manage a community arts workshop, being paid for delivering six costume making workshops

Phase of research: Scoping and Phases 1\2 (2011-2013)

This was a project within the larger Godiva Awakes! festival which ran in diverse forms over three years. The CCMC was a free, three-month, three-hour, weekly training course to teach a group of 12-15 women aged 16-60 to design and make carnival Mas costumes for performance in the Summer 2012 Godiva parade. The course ran from February to April 2012 in IP's venue, a disused industrial warehouse in central Coventry and was led by an artist supported by volunteers. The course also aimed to equip participants with the skills and understandings needed to run free workshops for young children and adults in their communities in order to make costumes. This extended the project into the summer, with pairs of women running between six and eight two-hour workshops in May and June for up to 30 children each and organising participation in the parades in July/August. Local community workers (including a local Housing Association outreach worker) recruited participants from disadvantaged communities, several of whom had been involved with IP's artist-led community carnival parade workshops in the past, and supported them in their community workshops. IP Director Jane Hytch also helped the women deliver workshops: this was an unplanned additional input in response to concerns about the participants' readiness to safely and effectively deliver. CCMC participants led their community groups in the local parade in July and a London borough carnival as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Research contact began at planning stage and was fortnightly throughout the course, with visits to the workshops and parades, followed by a specially convened Focus Group and review day three months later and further contact with IP.

Urban Refuge #1

Funding: mixed (charitable and public grants and donations)

Management: artist-led creative activity in non-artist-led setting

Aims: raise public awareness about domestic abuse and the work of the women's aid charity

Theory of change (implicit): public understanding of domestic abuse will be increased by seeing powerful, authentic artworks

Participants: approx 47 women aged 16-55 who have experienced domestic abuse and consequently live temporarily in one of five women's refuges in Birmingham and Solihull

Duration of project: two months. Duration of research contact: six months

Creative activity in research: expressing feelings, stories and critiques of services provided by the refuges using colour, mark-making and text to produce about 35 larger-than life laminated freestanding figures which were exhibited in public venues such as Birmingham City Football Club.

Other activities included: visiting the exhibition

Phase of research: Scoping and Phase 1 (2011)

This was a short, artist-led creative project commissioned by the charity Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid in 2011 in five of its residential refuges. Participants were shown how to use chalk pastels to express feelings about their own experiences and critical ideas about services provided by the refuge within outlines of their own bodies. Two two-hour sessions were run by a pair of artists at each venue, using the floors of meeting rooms and corridors for the large-scale artworks. Refuge staff attended to support the activity or women who may have felt disturbed by it. Research contact began at planning stage, during sessions at two of the venues, and the researcher had limited contact with a small number of participants at the opening of the public exhibition and discussions with staff following. The exhibition was well-received regarded by the charity Director in a subsequent interview as an effective awareness-raising tool with a beneficial impact on participants. The artworks have been used in several exhibitions since.

Urban Refuge #2

Funding: mixed (charitable and public grants and donations)

Management: artist-led creative activity in non-artist-led setting

Aims: to use creative methods to find out why young women living in the charity's refuges do not attend House Meetings

Theory of change (implicit): creative methods may help younger women express their feelings and views where other more direct methods have failed because they by-pass text and talk and lack of confidence

Participants: eight women aged 17-21 who have experienced domestic abuse and consequently live temporarily in one of three women's refuges in Birmingham and Solihull

Duration of project: two months. Duration of research contact: four months

Creative activity in research: expressing feelings and critiques of services provided by the refuges using colour, mark-making to produce non-textual 'maps' of the refuge to provoke discussion about barriers to House Meeting attendance and explore feelings about facilities and processes

Other activities included: one participant went on to present her map to a House Meeting and organised a session for other residents to make a collaborative wall 'map' to explore feelings about facilities and processes

Phase of research: Phases 1 & 2 (2012)

This was a short, artist-led creative project commissioned by the charity Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid in 2012 in three of its residential refuges. Participants were shown how to use chalk pastels to express feelings about their own experiences and made A3 sized 'maps' of the physical space of the refuge and its immediate environs, using colour and mark to indicate how they felt about each place or the activities there. Two two-hour sessions were run by the artist-researcher in three refuges, and three sessions followed by a House Meeting in another, meeting in social spaces, meeting rooms or the crèche. Refuge staff were available to support the women who may have felt disturbed by the activity. Research contact began at planning stage, during sessions and with one of the women at a subsequent House Meeting attended by about 10 residents and three staff. Follow-up discussions were held with staff.

Childrens Centre

Funding: public grants

Management: artist-led creative activity in non-artist-led setting

Aims: raise awareness about the experience of domestic abuse from the perspective of women who have experienced it for an audience of professionals delivering support and legal services

Theory of change (implicit): public understanding of domestic abuse will be increased by seeing powerful, authentic artworks and hearing first-hand reflective accounts from women

Participants: 8-10 women aged 19-45 who had experienced domestic abuse and completed the 'Freedom Programme' course of abuse awareness; all with connections to an urban Children's Centre in Wolverhampton situated in an area of extreme multiple deprivations.

Duration of project: two months. Duration of research contact: five months

Creative activity in research: expressing feelings, stories and critiques of services provided by the professionals such as police, social workers, health service and education staff using colour, markmaking and text to produce large-scale artworks and exhibit them at a subsequent conference of 60 professionals.

Other activities included: artist recorded interviews with participants which were played as part of the conference presentation; four participants attended the conference and three spoke about their experiences and led a short creative activity for delegates

Phase of research: Phases 1 & 2 (2012)

This was a short, artist-led creative project commissioned by the Children's Centre in the Summer of 2012. Participants were shown how to use chalk pastels to express feelings about their own experiences and critical ideas about services within outlines of their own bodies which, together with collaborative artwork about service themes, were exhibited at a conference for professionals in the field that Autumn. Six two-hour, free sessions over three days were run by a pair of artists in a Children's Centre meeting room. Crèche places were taken up by half the participants. Crèche workers occasionally brought small children into the session to be comforted by their mothers. Staff were available to support women who may have felt disturbed by the activity but did not attend. Research contact began at planning stage and the researcher worked with participants to design the exhibition and presentation at the conference. The large-scale artworks were mounted around the conference hall and interviews broadcast over a slideshow of the artworks in process. Three participants volunteered to speak at the conference. A Focus Group was convened by the researcher three months later attended by four participants and follow up discussions held with staff.

The Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club)

Funding: mixed (arts grants and local authority)

Management: artist-led, managed by youth arts officer in leisure centre programme

Aims: social cohesion and community wellbeing; individual wellbeing and raised aspirations

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of agency will be increased through skills acquisition, experience of creativity, exposure to high quality arts and this will contribute to social cohesion in small rural town and raised aspirations in young participants

Participants: 4-10 boys aged 12-19 from rurally isolated community

Duration of project: 11 months (within a wider youth arts programme of three years).

Duration of research contact: 20 months

Creative activity in research: learning to make digital sound and visual art, film and edit video, VJ

Other activities included: learning basic principles of evaluation and carrying out evaluation of the wider project through a number of methods such as video and sound interviews; public performance of Video Jockey

Phase of research: Scoping and Phases 1\2 (2011-2013)

This was a project within a larger youth arts project which ran in diverse forms over three years. Film Club was a free, four-hour, approximately fortnightly training course which ran over a school year to teach creative digital media skills and video making. The wider project included young people selecting and presenting a programme of arts events, films, shows etc and Film Club participants carried out evaluations using sound and video and questionnaires with audience members and other young participants at weekends. The course was led by two digital media artists, supported by the artist-researcher. It ran from September 2011 to July 2012 in the 'green room' of the arts and leisure centre venue, situated in the grounds of a community secondary school. An

unplanned outcome was that participants made two public performances of VJ-ing using their new skills at a 'local bands' night. Participants also learnt the skills and understandings needed to run simple evaluations of arts events and carried out several for the wider project's website and funders' report. Research contact began at planning stage and was regular throughout the course, followed by a Focus Group three months later and further contact with the arts project manager and the artists.

Upland Farmers Wellbeing Project

Funding: mixed (rural regeneration grant and local authority)

Management: environmental project manager

Aims: improved individual mental wellbeing leading to a more robust upland farming sector

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of wellbeing will be increased through access to information and support (economic and emotional) and through an increase in social engagement in their local communities; greater understanding of upland farming in those communities will increase farmers sense of self worth and mental wellbeing

Participants: Over 400 in wider project; in this research approx 100

Duration of project: two days Duration of research contact: nine months

Creative activity in research: simple craft activities and storytelling at a rural venue open day;

Other activities included: group farm visit followed by quiz

Phase of research: Phases 1\2\3 (2012-2013)

This research was carried out at the start of the second year of a three year wider project with diverse activities run by an environmental agency in rural South Shropshire. Although the aim was to improve the mental wellbeing of isolated upland farmers, identified as at risk for depression, the project worked with many groups, including schools, village halls, Women's Institutes, youth and farmers' groups as well as the local public, in order to raise awareness of the role of upland farmers in the local economy, ecology, culture and history. This included creative craft activities, walks, farm visits and information giving. The research contact was twofold: extended discussions with the project manager about overall evaluation strategies; and observations at two events in the Summer of 2012. These were craft and storytelling run by the project at a local rural event, which involved about 70 participants of all ages; and a farm visit followed by quiz games on the subject of upland farming with a Women's Institute group (men and women) of about 30 people aged from 40-70 in a village hall. Research contact with participants was limited to these two occasions, with follow up discussions with the project manager.

Godiva Awakes! 2012 and Godiva's Homecoming 2013

Funding: mixed (arts and regeneration grants, local authority and sponsorship)

Management: artist-led by arts company

Aims: social cohesion and community wellbeing; individual wellbeing; raised profile of engineering in Coventry;

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of agency will be increased through skills acquisition, creation of aesthetic excellence and successful public performance and this will contribute to social cohesion in neighbourhoods; the design, creation and presentation of spectacular engineering and arts collaborative artworks will create an appetite for engineering in Coventry

Participants: over 400 participants in a range of creative projects from the Coventry and West Midlands area, with a not exclusive focus on young people and participants from areas of disadvantage; over 4000 in audiences for public events from Coventry and the West Midlands and London

Duration of project: four years. Duration of research contact: three years

Creative activity in research: community choir and youth dance project; public spectacle, parade and large scale puppetry, music, aerialist dance and performance events

Other activities included: wide range of design and make skills; engineering skills; event management and performance skills; cycling training

Phase of research: Scoping and Phases 1\2\3 (2011-2014)

These two large scale and diverse IP projects involved hundreds of participants (sometimes called volunteers) of all ages in projects from aerial dance to cycle training. Engineers and artists collaborated to design a 3m animatronic figure of Lady Godiva (Coventry's symbolic heroine) which was pushed by 50 cyclists through Coventry in the Summer of 2012, accompanied by performers and choirs, to perform a symbolic play about redemption based on input from hundreds of young people in a West Midlands-wide youth dance and music project. Godiva then travelled by cycle power to London, to take part in the Cultural Olympiad festival in Walthamstow and present the young people's aspirations to the Prime Minister. The following Summer Godiva was welcomed to Coventry for another parade and performance event, Godiva's Homecoming. Research contact with the community choir and youth dance project in the Scoping Phase was restricted to brief observations. Large scale audience and some participant questionnaires were developed by the researcher disseminated for both the events and online Discussions with IP staff continued throughout the period and into 2014.

Not Yet Invented (NYI)

Funding: mixed (arts grant, local authority)

Management: artist-led by arts company in partnership with schools

Aims: raise the aspirations, achievement and awareness of school pupils about Science, Engineering, Maths and Technology (STEM) subjects through creative activities

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of agency will be increased through skills acquisition, teamwork, the successful design and creation of aesthetically exciting engineering builds and successful public performance

Participants: 75 school pupils aged 9-10 from three Coventry schools in disadvantaged areas

Duration of project: eight months Duration of research contact: one year

Creative activity in research: learning properties of a range of materials; designing models for kinetic structures for engineers to build; learning carnival dance performance moves to accompany structures on public parade; some children participated in final build and performance

Other activities included: learning how to pitch a design idea; learn key physics and engineering concepts using their own bodies in dance and materials in model builds

Phase of research: Phase 3 (2013-2014)

This was one of three pilot projects in the 'trials' of research methods and strategies supported by Arts Connect West Midlands and using the developing Arts Council's Children and Young People's Quality Principles as an evaluation framework. The project was co-designed with teachers, artists and engineers and an education research consultant. Artists dressed in flying helmets and boots created an imaginative framework to engage pupils in the making and recording of the design and model making process in their own classrooms and in IP's industrial warehouse venue in central Coventry during the Spring term. Pupils were encouraged to record their ideas and feelings in individual design journals and take the role of 'paparazzi', recording key moments of learning or difficulty on ipads. Engineers contributed key STEM concepts and learning throughout, for example, pointing out the levers in tools, dance movements and the model making. After the 'pitch' activity, pupils voted for three final designs which were built full size (about 3m high) during the Summer term by engineers and artists, and performed with some of the pupils at Coventry's Festival of Engineers in August. Research contact with the project team was from the planning stage, when an evaluation framework was agreed. The researcher made frequent observational visits throughout the project, talking with pupils, teachers, engineers and artists, and continued discussions with IP staff and the consultant after project end. This included a Focus Group review meeting a month after the Spring term sessions, attended by all these groups.

Lively Libraries

Funding: mixed (arts grant, local authority)

Management: Library Service project manager in partnership with arts company

Aims: raise the skills and aspirations of rural library staff in running, commissioning and supporting creative activities in libraries; demonstrate aesthetic excellence in participatory creative projects; raise public awareness of the creative role or potential role of libraries; increase library footfall and participation in the Summer Reading Challenge and awareness of the Shropshire Young Poet Laureate

Theory of change (implicit): participants' confidence and sense of agency will be increased through skills acquisition and experience of high quality participatory arts activities and this will lead to more and better activities delivered in rural libraries and a greater demand for projects from the public particularly parents and young people

Participants: mainly from rural South Shropshire: 52 4-11 year olds in ballet workshops and performance; 22 library staff in training session and involved in supporting arts activities; 150 public audience (mainly relatives of participants)

Duration of project: six months Duration of research contact: ten months

Creative activity in research: a range of creative workshops for children including storytelling, craft making, creative writing and textiles; a week-long dance training with public performance

Other activities included: marketing activities

Phase of research: Phase 3 (2013-2014)

This Arts Council funded project took place over the Summer of 2014 in four rural libraries in sparsely populated South Shropshire. Sixteen creative workshops for groups of between four and 30 children and parents were delivered by three participatory artists and a children's book author in libraries with library staff support. The Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB), in its first visit to Shropshire, mounted displays of costumes in libraries following performances at Theatre Severn. The BRB ran a week of full day dance training for 52 young people most of whom had no prior dance experience in a local community centre, culminating in two public performances in another arts and leisure centre. Research contact with the project manager was from the planning stage, when an evaluation framework was agreed. The researcher made frequent observational visits throughout the project, talking with participants, parents, library staff, dancers and artists and review meetings after the project with library managers and the arts company partner, Arts Alive. The research data analysis included production of reports for funders and partners and the public.

Comment [I2]: These seem fine to me

4.4.2 Aims of the projects

In ANT terms the projects studied formed networks of people and things. ANT suggests that there is a possibly observable process by which some ideas become hegemonic in networks. As a starting point for this exploration, the researcher asked project managers to identify key statements from written texts (project outlines, funding documents and mission statements) as expressive of explicit project aims and summarise them in their own words (see Table 3 below). The aims of the creative activities in the projects summarised in the third column were constructed by the researcher from discussions with project staff and agreed with them as summary statements, since these were not always expressed in written documents. These summaries, which were taken as representing significant but not exclusive narratives in the projects, became starting points for exploring the extent to which explicit aims affected practice as activities and behaviours. Placing them side by side also helped the researcher identify possible theories of change implicit in project activity. For example, in Urban Refuge#1, the creative activity which enables 'women to express themselves' suggests a theory of change in which women expressing themselves contributes towards the overall aim to 'protect women and children from violence' (that is, women have an active role in

protecting themselves). Similarly, the creative activity aim 'to raise public awareness by exhibiting powerful, authentic artworks' suggests a theory of change in which artworks can influence people's feelings and ideas and that part of their power to do so is derived from their authenticity (that is, they are capable of expressing women's voices). As pointed out in Chapter 2, this analysis may represent a more explicit and hegemonic approach to planning than actually exists in the fluid and diverse networks of projects, where both shared and plural theories are likely to co-exist. Nevertheless, it is a useful starting point for framing fieldwork and for raising the issue of the possible differences between stated intent and outcome, potential and actual reach.

Table 3 Project aims and activity aims

| Project name | Key Aims of whole project (identified by project managers) | Key aims of creative activities (identified by researcher) |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Urban Refuge #1 | To protect women and children from violence To raise public awareness and change policy on domestic abuse | For women to express themselves To raise public awareness by exhibiting powerful, authentic artworks |
| Urban Refuge #2 | To protect women and children from violence To raise public awareness and change policy on domestic abuse | For young women to express themselves For young women to participate more fully in refuge democracy |
| Children's Centre | To support families and children to have better, safer, richer lives | For survivors of domestic abuse to express their ideas about services to service providers |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | To produce aesthetic excellence in public and community arts To raise the skills, confidence and wellbeing of participants through engagement in the arts | For local women to develop arts and craft skills For local women to learn how to and to deliver arts workshops in their own communities To make costumes and perform in carnival |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | To bring high quality arts events and activities to a rural area To raise the mental wellbeing of local people through contact with or participation in aesthetic excellence To improve relationships between the generations | For participants to gain digital art and media skills and increased confidence For participants to understand and carry out evaluations of the impact of the overall project |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | To improve the resilience and mental wellbeing of isolated upland farmers | To engage the attention of local adults and children, and increase their understanding of local farming, through creative activities |
| Godiva Awakes & Homecoming | To produce 'world class' aesthetic excellence in public and community arts To raise the skills, confidence and wellbeing of participants throughout the region through engagement in the arts | To design and build large scale public art using local engineering and community participants To produce public arts spectacle and tour to London To develop participant skills in aerialist dance, performance, singing, carnival, cycling, etc |
| Not Yet Invented | To improve children's STEM skills Raise STEM aspirations To consolidate partnerships between engineering, & arts companies and schools To raise funding | For children & teachers to understand more about engineering and arts as professions To teach key STEM concepts using arts To raise confidence and aspirations For children to gain ownership of a design and make project from concept to build |
| Lively Libraries | To increase library membership and use (footfall) | To engage children and parents in creative activity To encourage deeper use of libraries To provoke demand for arts |

4.5 The scoping phase: the role of researcher ontologies

The primacy of values in the AR framework helps researchers recognise that ontology has a direct bearing on methodology. Early research enquiry was informed by the understanding that 'themes' arising might emerge as much from unarticulated prior theorisations as from the interview data themselves. The researcher's experience as a community and participatory arts practitioner, and before that a community project manager, predisposed her to uphold the value of such projects as catalysts of positive individual change. Having worked extensively in teaching, she was also predisposed to find evidence that an arts-based creative project would position participants differently from an educational project. However, she was aware from the start of the research that her belief in the impact of being creative, although based on personal experience, remained just that, a belief. The need to repudiate un-evidenced advocacy was a major motivator for undertaking the research. In AR, research themes should arise from within research processes. This process can itself lead to changes in theoretical stances and these in turn can influence methodologies, in a reflexive loop in which the researcher is an agent amongst others recognised as bringing theoretical perspectives to any situation. Implied in this is the need to revisit and question data and method, which became a regular part of the research process (see Appendix D). The research supervision team acted as part of the necessary checks and balances in this process, as did discussions with colleagues.

4.6 The research contact timeline

Table 5 (below) indicates the duration of research contact and where it fitted into the research programme. These were periods where research was carried out with relevant people (staff, participants, volunteers, related agencies, audiences, the public). Other contact with project staff and participants usually preceded and followed these periods. It shows that during the Scoping Phase, as well as in-depth initial interviews (described below) which were used to develop further research themes, some brief field research activities were completed to explore the nature of the impact of participation (research Objective 1.3). These early activities were also an exploration of research methods. In the Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC), where research contact was very early, by 2012 (Phase 1) the research had moved on to field trials of evaluation methods (Phase 2). Insights from different projects helped identify variables and refine methods. For example, creative methods explored in the Urban Refuge projects were later trialled again in the CCMC, and an 'expressive timeline' technique used successfully in the Rural Youth Arts Project was later used with the CCMC.

Table 4 Duration of research contact

| Project name in current research | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------|------------|
| Initial Interviews | ██████████ | | | |
| Urban Refuge #1 | ████ | | | |
| Urban Refuge #2 | | ████ | | |
| Children's Centre | | ██████████ | | |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | | ████████████████████ | | |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | | ██████████████████ | | |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | | ██████████ | | |
| Godiva Awakes! & Homecoming | ████████████████████ | | | |
| Not Yet Invented | | | | ██████ |
| Lively Libraries | | | | ██████████ |

4.7 Developing research themes from initial interviews

Reflexive practice was designed to keep the researcher and Supervisory Team alert to the distorting lens of their own discourses. Methods which support this, such as iterative interviewing, successive comparisons and feedback loops were part of the research process from the start. As Chapter 3 described, AR privileges development and process over summative 'findings'. Early analyses of interviews and observations were regarded as formative, part of the process of generating research questions from data. With this in mind, a series of semi-formal, structured interviews with people who could reflect back on experiences of creativity in projects over as long as up to 15 years was initiated in the first few months of the research. This section explains how they were carried out and how initial research themes were developed from them in order to inform the research. Appendix B contains the interview schedules, Participant Information Sheets and ethical submissions which accompanied this first piece of field research.

Using a 'judgement sample' (based on understanding of the literature and the researcher's own experience) and a 'convenience sample' (based on existing networks of contacts) and 'snowballing'¹⁰⁷ from interviewees, obtained through email invitation and word of mouth, respondents were sought who had experienced creative community projects in the West Midlands as participants in the past and were prepared to discuss this. Interviewees were selected who had experienced participation at least two years previously, as this was deemed significant time to allow for reflection. In retrospect, this time limit was revealed in interviews as arbitrary, since some respondents reported that their reflection on participation changed over various periods of time. This understanding indicated a major difficulty with participant self-reporting at project end (a common evaluation strategy) which informed although was not entirely resolved in the trials of evaluation methods in Phase 2 of the research .

Five respondents were selected on the grounds that they were sufficiently diverse in characteristics and experience as participants to offer indicative data and were prepared to go through the lengthy iterative process. Two respondents were interviewed but were not available for follow-up meetings ('incomplete') and are not included in the data analysis. Those included were:

Interview Long#1 36 year old South Asian woman in inner-city

¹⁰⁷ Snowballing sampling is a process by which the researchers identifies a relevant interviewee and asks them to identify others, and so on. It does not imply a 'natural' accumulation of subjects, since the researcher "must actively and deliberately develop and control the sample's initiation, progress and termination" (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981:143), but is useful when the identifying qualities of respondents might emerge from the research or when respondents are reluctant to come forward (not the case here).

Interview Long#2 20 year old mixed race man in West Midlands town

Interview Long#3 35 year old white British woman in rural area

Interview Long#4 55 year old white British woman in inner-city

Interview Long#5 38 year old white British man in small rural town

Appendix B gives a brief summary of the experience of each interviewee. Two of these interviewees and one of the 'incomplete', were known to the researcher in her previous role as creative project lead artist nearly seven years previously. This was discussed as a potential problem at the start of these interviews.

4.7.1 The initial interviews schedule

Appendix B has a detailed rationale and schedule for the initial interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to identify key concepts and themes about the impact of participation and the nature of the activities and delivering organizations. For this reason, the questions were mainly open and functioned as prompts to informal discussion. There were two sets of interviews, with participants and with project delivers /artists/animateurs.

The format of the participant interviews was as follows. The interviews were informal but based on a structured series of questions used as prompts. The interviews began with closed questions asking respondents to identify outcomes associated with eudaimonic wellbeing discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 (NEF 2012), which are similar to conventional evaluation questions and designed as a less personal introduction to the subject.

Questions were based around a series of broad topics which had been agreed in my ethical submission to the University (see Appendix B). It comprised a series of questions about the participant's experience of participating in creative community projects in the past, and their feelings or ideas about it. If participants reported an impact from the experience of creativity, the researcher went on to ask them what specific things led to it, and whether the impact related to personal change, distinguishing between 'changes in yourself' and 'changes in your life path'. The researcher asked at what point the participant consciously recognised any impact, for example, immediately or when days, weeks, months or years had passed. The closing sections of the interviews asked about negative impact and problems in participation, and invited open ended comments. .

Because the boundaries of impact and the experiences which produce it are not congruent, interviewees were reflecting back sometimes on many years of 'dipping in and out'¹⁰⁸ of creative activity; or on the experience of a single event.

¹⁰⁸ As described by interviewee Long#5

Each interviewee was asked if she or he had a 'special story' about their participation. This was in keeping with the constructivist approach outlined in Chapter 3, which recognises that participants make selections from many available discourses. It regards the story told as indicative of people's choices about what is significant to them and what they wish to convey about themselves or the world, rather than an ethnographic record. How the story is told can help the researcher understand how respondents frame the impact of projects (Gill 2000). This is a way in which research subjects can be seen to be constructing explanatory narratives. This helps us recognise the power of narrative in consolidating change, which can be linked to the process of accessing new discourses and dialogic reflection in Freire's process of transformatory praxis.

4.7.2 Analysis of the initial interviews

Transcripts were made of audio recordings of the interviews (between one and two hours). The first interview was carried out in April 2011 and lasted two and a half hours. The interviewee was shown the transcript a week or so after the interview and asked to 'make any corrections', which were identified in the subsequent transcript document. A second informal interview (one hour) was carried out two months later, when additional questions related to themes drawn from the transcript were asked. A second transcript was emailed to the respondent for any further comment and 'signing off' as an acceptable record. This was the pattern for all the interviews. Although each was of varying length, none were under one hour and all went through the same cycle. The interviews were conducted at venues nominated by the interviewee and included at home (1)¹⁰⁹, in cafes (2), and at work (2).

The analysis of these data continued for at least another six months, and continued to inform the direction of the research. Researcher reflections before (and immediately after) each interview, which were also treated as data¹¹⁰. The researcher made brief notes before each of the interviews about her own feelings and expectations, later reviewing these notes and commenting on the impact of expectations and the selection of the research subjects. By way of example, the notes to Interview Long#1 are reproduced in full in Appendix B as they represent an attempt to generate researcher reflexivity which continued to a greater or lesser extent throughout the research, depending on context and time constraints. Box 4 uses an extract from the first interview

¹⁰⁹ With six month old baby!

¹¹⁰ These reflections and reviews continued to a greater or lesser extent, determined by context and pragmatic constraints, to reflect 'before and after' most major research encounters throughout the research period. Appendices D and E give further examples.

(transcript in Appendix B) as an example of this method, developed as a way of attempting to meet the challenges described in the introduction to this chapter.

The researcher returned to all the transcripts a year later, looking for themes relating specifically to 'creativity', 'aesthetic excellence' and 'real world action' These were themes which were emerging from other areas of research, such as observations and interviews. In some cases she went on to re-categorise the interviewees' references. The benefit of keeping the data analysis on-going was that changing interpretations could be recorded and linked not only to developing understandings, but also to a reflective critique of that understanding.

Box 4 Example from initial interview

This interviewee is a 38 year old British Asian woman who described her experience in, and following, a year-long creative project in 2006 devised by its participants in order to 'tell their story'. The group (ten women, inexperienced in art, who had met on a UK Home Office-funded 'Active Citizenship' course) co-wrote a bid with an artist¹, and received £22,000 from ACE and 'in-kind' from Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The project aims were connected with producing 'excellent art' involving 'hard to reach' participants; and with raising confidence and improving wellbeing. The participants managed finances and met regularly to review and direct activity. The project (coordinated by the artist) invited a range of artists to run 'making workshops'. It also, organised 'art history' sessions and a weekend trip to London for gallery visits. Participants kept sketchbooks and received 1:1 tutorials as they developed their own artwork for a professionally curated exhibition. The exhibition attracted hundreds of visitors and received high praise from a range of audiences, including artists and ACE. Works included video installations, animated sculpture, printwork, photography, collage and sound. Interviewee Long#1, at the time an unemployed single parent, made a surreal and powerful video about her own forced marriage (viewable as Hyperlink 3 Chapter 6).

Subsequent to the project (as she describes in her interview) she was invited to show and discuss this film with community members and then wider groups, eventually setting up arts workshops in a local school. She has now completed a BA and works as a Business and Community Liaison Manager for a large college, regularly flying all over the world as ambassador for her institution.

Extract from researcher field notes made at the time of the interview:

"The themes produced through analysis of this interview transcripts and my notes suggested that this respondent that is, connects the theme 'participation' with 'democratic participation' and personal development through 'taking ownership' of the project. 'Intensity of experience', in this account, relates both to personal feelings and to intense experiences of creativity. In the second interview, the interviewee agreed that these two themes highlighted the most significant experiences in the project which had the most impact on her. These were highly interwoven with the high standards of aesthetic excellence and aspirations which characterised the project:" it wasn't just a small community organisation putting some art together for a community centre. Having those people gave us the feeling that we were going to be working to a high status, not just a community project, something bigger. It was an *Arts Council* [emphasis] project, there was expertise, it all fed into what we wanted to achieve and we got that knowledge from all these experts. It felt serious, professional, a professional standard" (Appendix D).

Box cont/

Box 4 cont/

“In this case, there had been many other things (than our discussion) which had led the participant to this conclusion. Consequent on the exhibition of her film, over a period of about two years, she had been invited to give presentations on its subject (forced marriage) to ever-widening groups, from her immediate neighbourhood to regional events. During this process her own confidence as a speaker and more generally increased. She described resolving personal, emotional issues through the film and developing a sense of becoming a useful member of society. She identified these skills and feelings – and hence making the film – as causal factors leading to her going to university and securing well-paid employment. Her comments about intensity relate not so much to the intensity of making the film (although as co-worker on it I remember her being in a state of intense concentration and determination), but the intensity of interactions in the group and feelings provoked by the highly positive feedback and approval from exhibition visitors. Because of my own observations during the filmmaking, I checked this understanding, which she confirmed, although she did add in the second interview: “When I chose my subject I knew I could make a good piece of art about it, I was already working on my piece, in my head, I knew exactly how it would be; it was close to my heart and my story...” (Appendix D). I contrasted this articulation of impact with another initial interviewee, Long#4 (described in Appendix D), who ascribed positive, long-lasting impact from a mixture of social approval and her pride in feeling that she now was “an artist” .

Themes were produced using a manual analysis and the 'text search' facility on the NVIVO qualitative data analysis software which enables frequency of key terms to be recorded¹¹¹. The researcher was looking for causal explanations, narratives indicative of ontologies, beliefs or values which could be related to research Aim 1. Several themes relating to impact appeared in more than one interview. These related to negative impact as well as positive, but negative impact was only ever mentioned as something experienced by 'other people' in the project (this is open to various interpretations of course, relating to the power of researcher/interviewees' ontologies and expectations). These themes are listed in Table 5 (below) as a way of categorizing recurring motifs (Ritchie et al 2003:219 in Bryman 2008:555) and a check on intuitive response to the texts. The themes in the table were mentioned more than three times in a single interview. This distinction was devised because it was difficult to decide what constituted a single 'mention'. For example, "the whole project was about taking ownership" (Interview Long #1) was counted as one mention of 'high level of democratic participation'; "[the artist] wasn't holding our hands through it...he did show stuff, show us what you could do with it and left us, he was excited about the things that went well...him being excited was really important, because it was a real thing and the deadline was imminent" (Interview Long #4) counted as three mentions of 'teaching style of artists' and one of 'real world action'). This process was subjective, so other evidence was sought to corroborate the researcher's interpretations and understandings. These are the second interviews and written questionnaires for these interviewees described above and in Appendix B; and data which emerged through the other research methods over time. Where these checking methods suggested incorrect or alternative meanings, the transcripts analysis was revisited and sometimes revised.

¹¹¹ A description of this kind of thematic content analysis can be found in Burnard et al (2008).

Table 5 Themes from all initial interviews

| Themes associated with producing positive impacts | Descriptions (examples from interviews of this theme) | No of Interviews with this theme 3 times or more | Also linked to negative impact (all speculative, i.e. about 'other people') |
|--|---|---|--|
| High level of democratic participation | Intense, challenging, engaging, a new experience, genuine responsibility for process management or outcomes, | 3 | Stress, disengagement |
| High level of control over artistic processes | Choosing themes, content, materials, forms, a new experience | 3 | Lack of confidence, disengagement |
| Collective achievement | Outcomes achieved to satisfaction of group, care for group members, sense that outcome could not be produced alone | 3 | |
| Encountering new materials Acquiring new skills; | Encountering materials, technologies for first time, mastery of tools, equipment; especially females in male dominated area of expertise, new skills however simple, | 4 | |
| Aesthetic excellence | Powerful message or affect produced, striving, perseverance needed, satisfaction with product, approval from others/public/artists, 'knowing' it was good | 4 | 'other people' in project may not have felt this |
| Deep engagement with creative process | Intensity of absorption, personal themes, commitment, ideas, materials and processes driving actions, hard work/effort | 5 | |
| Real world action Repositioning as 'expert' | Public performance, exhibition, event; helping others; passing on skills (feeling skilled), work seen by significant others outside project e.g. artists, family, family, community | 5 | |
| Treated with respect Valued | Respect for self/culture, as young person/woman; respect for ideas for management of project; respect for aesthetic ideas, judgements; | 5 | |
| Teaching style of artists | Specific style to do with open-endedness, risk, non-judgemental, non directive, 'not like school', informal, highly committed to aesthetic process; 'as equals' in aesthetic decisions & personal relationships, peer to peer | 5 | |

4.7. 3 Conclusions about the process of producing themes from initial interviews

These themes were used to prompt further research, and to signal awareness of differences related to participants and contexts. For example, that 'being treated with respect' was cited by everyone talking about themselves 'as young people' (3/5 interviews). But all the adult women, (3/5 interviews), mentioned respect for themselves 'as women' (the men didn't mention gender). This was the same for all interviewees using digital technologies, who cited 'mastery of new techniques' as central to their experience. It was not considered to be representative of all creative project participants, but part of the AR spiral at the start of a much longer process. Reflections on the reliability of this process led to the following conclusions:

1. The iterative interviewing gave interviewees confidence that they retained some control in the process. This increases a sense of control over the production of meaning, which is useful when looking for 'authentic' testimony in the sense of better understanding 'what people want you to believe'.
2. It may be that this kind of 'looking back' has limited value as reflection on feelings or activities at the time they occurred, but is more useful as an indication of the way participants have subsequently framed their experience. This may reflect ways of incorporating new experiences into existing ontologies or reframing life histories in more transformational responses to new experiences.

The fact that gender was not mentioned by men in the interviews, coupled with the paucity of 'negative impact' comments, prompted me to add a third conclusion:

3. This iterative method signalled the importance of what was not said or observed. For example, it prompted a focus in observations and questioning on gender in two subsequent projects, The Carnival Costume Making Course (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) and the Rural Youth Arts Project (Chapter 5).

This process has been described in detail because it helped to shape the approach to the qualitative research throughout the research. This iterative approach was integral to subsequent interviews and informed observations (for example, by checking understandings with participants).

These findings emerged gradually over the first 18 months of the research as interviews were concluded and the data revisited several times. Their contribution to the findings helped identify the impact of creativity and suggested the need to incorporate reflexivity into evaluation processes. They also signalled how difficult this would be in the contingencies of real projects, particularly since significant contingent forces (such as gender) didn't emerge until later in the process. They indicated the significance of a detailed analysis (how and what and who and when) and pointed to the poor value of generalisations. They emphasised the importance of intention, discourse and narrative not only in how experience and change is perceived, but in creating the conditions in which change can occur.

The initial interview analyses also influenced choice of theory. The interviews suggested that interaction with new technologies and materials and different kinds of power relations between participants and artists were important factors in creating impact. This is why Actor Network Theory, for its re-positioning of non-human entities (Latour 2004), and Non-Representational Theory, for its 'knowing in interaction' conception of affect as movement through the material world (Thrift 2008:178), became to be regarded as intriguing avenues for the theorisation of arts-informed research (as described in Chapter 3). Materials, tools, technologies are not simply instruments the maker uses, but actively contribute to the production of tacit knowledge (Bolt 2006). Two things follow from this process: firstly, that the starting point and the boundaries of a piece of work, may be less well-defined, or even more difficult to contain, for the artist, than for the researcher. Second, that the 'selection of materials' may be a more complex process than a practical choice about content and form. The research was subsequently informed by the principle of 'generalised symmetry' resulting in close attention being paid in observations and interviews to the active role of the material world in networks (Latour 2004). As explained in Chapter 3, the ANT concept of 'gatekeeping' of the production of hegemonic meaning in networks of people and things (Latour 2004) led directly to the incorporation of more collective research methods where interactions could be more readily observed, for example Focus Groups and the collective creative methods described below.

4.8 Phase 1: field research to investigate creativity and participation and their impact on creativity (Research Aim 1)

The reflective methodology described above was partly designed in response to the argument made in Chapter 3 that all text – spoken or written – is intersubjective, making an account of the relationship between the researcher and researched always important.

Holloway points out that the approach can be rendered less reductive by taking ‘psycho-social’ relations (emotions) into account (2009:3)¹¹². This section describes how the research moved on from conventional qualitative and quantitative methods towards creative methods using the tropes and practices of the artists or artist-researcher in each project in order to capture embodied affect and emotions associated with being creative in the literature (Csikszentmihalyi 2002).

Although it is presented here as a separate section, many of the approaches used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 overlap – partly because of the commitment to ‘trailing’ methods which could feasibly be used in evaluation mentioned above, and there was sometimes no clear distinction made during the research. The issues this raised are discussed further in Chapter 5. Table 6 (below) summarises the research methods used in each project.

Table 6 Summary of the research methods used in each project

| Project name¹¹³ | Research methods used |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Urban Refuge #1 | Participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods |
| Urban Refuge #2 | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods |
| Childrens Centre | Participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods; Focus Group discussion |
| Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; participant journals, creative methods; small scale questionnaires |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods; visual methods, |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing (UFW) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; |
| Godiva Awakes! & Homecoming | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews |

As part of the research’s AR approach, participatory methods were preferred. Participatory methods were also indicated as a response to the stochastic nature of projects involving creativity. As argued in Chapter 3 ideas and methods proposed by people within the project should be utilised (Snowden and Boone 2007). Complexity awareness widens the scope of those contributing their views and observations, acknowledging that there are multiple truths and diverse knowledges to which people

¹¹² Although not necessarily sufficient to make the process of research (or evaluation) automatically beneficial to its subjects (Smith 1993; Haraway 1998)

¹¹³ This table does not include the Lively Libraries or Not Yet Invented projects as they were purely evaluation.

have different access. So, for example, when participant observations were carried out by the researcher, this was sometimes preceded and often followed by discussion with participants about possible meanings of observations, understandings and interpretations. In practice, the extent to which methods were genuinely participatory was often influenced by contingencies of time and place. For example, in the very brief creative activities observed in the Upland Farmers Wellbeing (UFW) project which were organised on a drop-in basis, it would have been difficult and inappropriate to develop participatory methods because they would have disturbed the project activity. However, in the CCMC, where research contact was regular over a period of months, and IP had allocated time to it in the activity programme, it was possible to engage participants in extended discussions about the purpose, structure and protocols of the research. Participants contributed research questions and interpretations of data and were regularly asked to give feedback either written (post-it notes and questionnaires) or verbal (informal interviews) about the research or evaluation itself. Similarly, research in the Rural Youth Arts (RYA) project was a substantive part of participant activities (the official name for the activities studied was Evaluation Club, but the teenage participants changed this to Film Club because the filmmaking aspect was of more interest to them). In this project participants contributed research questions, methods and prompts for observations. The RYA work was an example of research and trial of evaluation methods running simultaneously and sometimes with blurred boundaries. This blurring of roles or activities, which happened from time to time throughout the project, is discussed in Chapter 3. It led to the two activities becoming marked in settings where they would perhaps have gone unremarked. This was expressed by participants and researcher as difficulty in deciding who the data should be shared with – or rather, who had the power to make that decision. Appendix D lays out the protocols for participatory research and evaluation methods as submitted through the University's ethics submission process. As research proceeded, working with a greater range of participants, many less willing or able to articulate their experiences as my initial interviewees, the need to explore alternatives to 'text and talk' methods became imperative. The visual methods used were limited to video diaries, which offer different possibilities of interpretation, for example, of embodied responses through gesture and speech. The creative methods used are discussed in Section 4.7.2 and further below.

4.8.1 Phase 2: field trials of evaluation methods to capture impact (Aim 2)

Phase 2 of the research saw the findings of Phase 1 used to frame both the evaluation questions and its methods in a series of 'trials' of evaluations in the research projects. These field trials ranged in duration from a few hours to several months. During Phase 2 ideas about evaluation strategies (approaches for whole project evaluation) began to evolve. These were implemented more completely in Phase 3. The same AR iterative, participatory approach described above was used. Although because the project aims were connected with qualitative impact mainly qualitative methods were used, there were two indications from the theoretical analyses which suggested that mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) should be used in evaluation. These were connected to ideas raised in Chapter 3. Firstly, that evaluation has different audiences than research does, reflecting different configurations of power in the two systems. Second, as argued in Chapter 3, projects with even a small amount of creativity are to some extent stochastic, and this demands as many different approaches to finding out what is happening in them as is appropriate (Snowden and Boone 2007; Craig et al, 2008).

Mixed method approaches (using quantitative and qualitative methods) are well established in the evaluation of creative projects because of the need to satisfy disparate project 'partners', such as health or housing providers, educational organisations, industry sponsors and arts organisations (Houston and McGill 2012; Mowlah et al, 2014; O'Donnell et al, 2014). That these partners may operate within different research paradigms has been documented as a source of tension in practice (Putland, 2008). Part of the current research was to explore evaluation methods which could reflect differences rather than flatten them and hence be effective in a range of projects and settings (Aim 3). Methods discussed in Chapter 3 for complex or stochastic systems also offered a way of operationalising the research's interpretivist epistemology, because they are based on 'multi-directional' enquiry involving as wide a range of participants as possible. Table 7, below, shows which methods were used in the Phase 2 trials of evaluation methods, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. Those used for the first time in Phase 2 are italicised.

Table 7 Mixed methods used in the trial of evaluation methods: methods used for the first time in this Phase (2) are shown in italic)

| Project name ¹¹⁴ | Evaluation methods used |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Urban Refuge #1 | Participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods |
| Urban Refuge #2 | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods |
| Childrens Centre | Participant observation; informal interviews; creative methods; Focus Group discussion; <i>participant feedback survey, audience feedback survey</i> |
| Carnival Costume Making Course (CCMC) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; participant journals, creative methods; small scale questionnaires; <i>baseline surveys; participant feedback surveys;</i> |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; creative & visual methods; <i>audience and participant questionnaires; audience feedback forms; video diaries; audience video interviews</i> |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing (UFW) | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; <i>semi-structured interview; questionnaire</i> |
| Godiva Awakes whole project | Observation; participant observation; informal interviews; <i>structured interviews; feedback surveys; audience and participant questionnaires (large and small scale); online surveys</i> |

Quantitative methods are less associated with the participatory approach of AR. For this reason, where possible, participants were involved in questionnaire and survey design. For example, in the CCMC participants were invited to help design a 'baseline survey' to measure the impact of their own participation in the creative project. In the RYA project participants designed audience questionnaires and video interview questions.

As Bryman (2008:592) points out, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is not rigid. It is commonplace for quantitative questionnaires for example to include questions about motivations or feelings. In the current research, questionnaires and feedback surveys were used in two ways concerned with the construction of meanings and feelings:

To ask participants to identify feelings about the impact of creative or other participatory activities in order to be able to compare over time in the same project and between projects easily (e.g. the CCMC and the RYA)

¹¹⁴ This table does not include the Lively Libraries or Not Yet Invented projects as they were trials of whole project strategies which are discussed fully in Chapter 7

To ask large scale audiences to identify feelings in response to watching creative events where numbers were too large and contact too fleeting for individual interviews

An example where a large scale questionnaire was used to measure feelings of absorption and intensity of feeling is given in Appendix B. This was distributed by volunteers and the researcher at a two day Godiva Awakes! public art performance in Coventry in 2012 involving hundreds of participants and large crowds in the audience. The questionnaire was completed on the street using complimentary pencils. The 365 completed questionnaires were analysed using SSPS software which presented the findings as numerical data, allowing for cross referencing against variables such as postcode, gender, age and responses.

Although most of this questionnaire was straightforward 'feedback' (for example, "Community activities like this are important to me, Yes/No"), there was an attempt to dig deeper into the aesthetic value of the event, measuring intensity of imaginative engagement by asking "Did these artistic events tell a story or an idea to you? If yes, please explain briefly what you think it was about." and the question "The event: Inspired me [] Held my interest [] Made me think []". A positive response to these questions was deemed to signify a degree of aesthetic engagement. This was based on the ideas about creativity explored in Chapter 2, particularly those about creative and thinking (Craft, 2002; Gauntlett, 2007; Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010) and aesthetic imagination (Froggett et al 2011; Craft et al 2014). Clearly, the 'tensions' between research paradigms Putland refers to (above) are evident here, since aesthetic engagement is widely seen as a complex and elusive phenomenon. However, IP - the 'commissioners' of the questionnaire - felt that the *quantity* of positive responses (over 78% of respondents) could be interpreted as indicating that the aesthetic element of the event had a specific impact on engagement, imagination and thinking.

The questionnaire also asked questions relating to wellbeing impact, such as "Made me feel proud of myself / family [] Made me feel cheerful / excited [] Made me feel proud of my community [] Confused me [] Disappointed me []" where again a large quantity of positive responses was seen as indicating (however fleeting) improved wellbeing.

Measurement of economic impact is much more difficult for small projects or very brief projects. Larger-scale surveys tend to be based on analyses of data collected for more general purposes (for example, the government Household Surveys) and can conclude with greater validity that there is a causal link between participation in the arts and

economic impact, because they can factor out a range of relevant variables such as income, age, gender. There are sometimes ways that smaller projects can combine to collect quantitative data within project budgets. The audience questionnaire included questions contributing to a regional data collection organised by the(now defunct) West Midlands Cultural Observatory. This meant that relatively small samples could be combined with several thousand over the region to produce more statistically significant information. This was possible only for a brief time as part of the 2012 national Cultural Olympics initiative and is not often available to smaller projects. In 2013 a version of this questionnaire (with additional questions from a new project partner about cycling behaviours) collected 65 responses at the Godiva Homecoming event.

4.8.2 Phases 1 and 2: creative methods for research and evaluation

Creative methods were developed during Phase 1 and Phase 2 , that is, for research and for trials of evaluation methods, and used to a limited extent in Phase 3 in evaluations.

To an extent the subject matter of enquiry determines the method (McNiff, S 1998) and there are several reasons why creative methods might be useful to research or evaluate creative activities. Creative methods were developed in order to meet the challenge of two theoretical ideas described in Chapter 3. The first is the ability of being creative to function as a different kind of thinking or way of knowing which produces new meanings (Eisner ,2008; Hickman 2008; Sennet 2008; Deaver and McAnliffe 2009; Treadaway 2009; Gauntlett 2011).The second is the role of creative experience in enabling a radical re-positioning in discourses about self ; (Mulvey 1991 ; Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Charny 2011) and the potential role it may play in transformatory praxis . These different ways of knowing are connected by the impact of emotions, which, like discourses, both construct and are constructed by our worlds and ourselves¹¹⁵. They can usefully be linked to the concept of 'affect', particularly as defined by Massumi , as a synesthetic process, during which the senses such as touch or vision merge, and the effects of one are transformed into another (Massumi, 2002:35), as, for example, in the physical process of painting in creative flow . These emergent knowledges arise through the combination of 'handling' materials (Bolt 2004:14) and dialogic reflection with the artist-researcher. Bolt calls this 'practice-led' research.

¹¹⁵ And although not necessarily articulated, are "not therefore without grip" (Thrift 2008:16)

This section describes the different types of creative research methods and data analyses, in field trials of evaluation methods and research. Creative research methods sit within a range of methods loosely called 'arts-based or arts-informed which are currently looking for definition and status'¹¹⁶. In this research creative methods are distinguished from visual in two ways:

1. The process of producing the data itself is such that it is capable of producing creative flow – in other words, the method offers intense concentration in a creative activity, however brief, or acquisition and application of creative skills however limited – so it has the potential to produce new understandings unavailable in other ways
2. In the process participants themselves produce new artwork which has the potential to have aesthetic value – so it has the potential to engage participants in a new way and to offer another kind of meaning

Arguably, data produced by creative methods, made in response to participants' own or a research question requires the use of artist-led processes and artist-quality materials in order to create the conditions for creative flow (Froggett et al, 2011), see Figure 1 (below).. This assertion was questioned in the research and discussed further in Chapter 5. Aesthetic value derives from artwork which offers thematic coherence, a non-linear and satisfying whole (Barone, Eisner 2012), with potential to become an important aspect for interpretation of the meaning of the artwork and of the process of making it. Ideally, it means that the data produced has the potential to be recognised by participants for its aesthetic as well as communicative value. This satisfaction is perhaps a less obvious source of a creative method's ability to engage research participants - alongside its association with play and by-passing of text and talk. Interpretation of creative research data is a contentious issue. Some of this is connected with the perceived ability of creative data to express emotions which can then be explained by participants or researchers in words. Katz and Chard sum this up:" If there is anything distinctive about emotions, it is that, even if they commonly occur in the course of speaking, they are not talk! " (Katz and Chard 2000:4).

¹¹⁶ Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2014) make this point

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Figure 1 (left)

'There is an intimate connection between technology and expressivity' (Barone, Eisner, 2012:5). The use of artist-led processes and artist-quality materials help to create the conditions for creative flow and produce data with greater potential for aesthetic value. Heavyweight card and artists' quality chalk pastels used in the Childrens Centre research August 2012

Figure 2 (below) using creative methods to elicit feelings about the legal system, in which aesthetic value was interpreted as playing a significant role in producing impact (*The solicitor and me*: 2013; participant artwork, pastels, heavy card, 1.5m x 2.5m)

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Research almost invariably analyses how people describe their feelings or treats visual images as 'representations' of emotion. Chapter 5 describes in greater detail how this issue evolved in the current research and evaluation trials and the key role aesthetic value played in this evolving approach. The implication was of a commitment to artists' processes implies using artist quality materials too: "there is an intimate connection between technology and expressivity" (Barone, Eisner, 2012:5), and this became a tenet of the method. Figure 1 (above) shows large-scale, heavyweight card in use during a body mapping activity in the Children's Centre research, 2012. Figure 2 (above) is an example of participant artwork made by a participant in parallel refuge project (Challis,S and Ohana-Eavry,N : 2014) using creative methods to elicit feelings about the legal system, in which aesthetic value was interpreted as playing a significant role in producing impact¹¹⁷.

The following list gives brief descriptions of the creative methods used in the research and field trials.

- a. Meditative expressive markmaking¹¹⁸: Individual works on paper. Participants invited to visualise themselves and represent themselves without representational drawing. For example, to represent using colour and marks their 'inner strength'; then, using the 'forgiving' qualities of chalk pastels which can be smudged, wiped away and blended, visualise what attacks that; growing the strength again through colour and markmaking. In other words, participants enact feelings, in this example, visually reflecting on their own self-esteem
- b. Expressive markmaking to represent feelings over time: This is a way of reflecting on and perhaps constructing narratives about experiences, or in group activities a prompt for reflection or collective learning . Individual works on paper . For example, answering question prompts such as: how I feel/felt before the activity; how I feel /felt after the activity. Also a collective timeline on card expressing through colour and markmaking responses to questions such as ' how I felt at different points of the project including now'.
- c. Expressive mapping : Individual works on paper to create a non-representational 'map' of a physical space which expresses feelings about spaces and processes or relationships associated with them through colour and marks. This can also be a

¹¹⁷ A parallel research event carried out by the author in September 2012, *Women and the Law* was a project in a London refuge directed by Natalie Ohana-Eavry, Lead Artist Sue Challis Sept 2013, funded by London School of Economics Faculty of Laws.and as yet not written up. In 2015 the project won the UCL award *Engager of the Year* for Natalie with full acknowledgement of Sue Challis's input.

¹¹⁸ The term 'markmaking' means the use of lines, strokes, marks and colours to express feelings visually without representational drawing.

collective activity. Individual or collective body mapping on card (drawing around own body and working on to it). Question prompt, how I feel / felt in different parts of my body in a specific situation. Usually this visually locates sites of distress or pleasure associated with past experiences through colour and mark¹¹⁹

d. Expressive drawing : Individual works on paper using non-representational marks and colour to express feelings in a specific situation or feelings over time. For example, a drawing of an imaginary carnival costume which expresses personal change; a drawing expressing the relationships between people, places or things using colour and marks¹²⁰.

e. Collage (problem-solving and as aid to learning): This is a process of enacting ideas and feelings by selecting and discarding and making new connections with random, 'found' materials. Individual works on paper made in response to a specific question or problem set by participant. Individual work on paper with random materials made during a presentation of new learning as an aid to understanding or in response to a specific question from the researcher or participant. Work made 'idly', that is, without specific intent, as a way of allowing ideas to surface.

f. Expressive video: short films made using images, colour, graphics and sound but no words or text, to express feelings about an experience now or over time. Work undertaken in pairs using 'flip' video cameras or mobile phones to make short films in response to a specific research or evaluation question using colour and sound to represent mood.

Table 8 (following) shows in which projects methods were used and the aim of using them. It includes two brief research activities involving collage which are described in detail in Chapter 5 (section 5.1.2) and Appendix C and are described here to show how similar activities might have different aims. Table 8 shows that creative methods are versatile in terms of purpose and context.

¹¹⁹ Participants often add words or drawings to this activity which is discussed in Chapter 7.

¹²⁰ The term 'expressive drawing' is used to refer to drawings which may or may not be representational but whose primary purpose is to communicate (rather than simply express) feelings using colour and markmaking. This implies a greater focus on the outcome (the drawing) rather than the process, compared with, for example, the meditative markmaking activity which has a greater focus on process. Chapter 5 and 6 describe the process in more detail.

Table 8 Creative methods by purpose and project

| Activity | Aims | Project |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Meditative markmaking | To express feelings | Urban Refuges; Childrens Centre |
| Markmaking over time [before / after] | To express & compare feelings at different points in time | Carnival Costume Course; Urban Refuges #1&2; |
| Markmaking over time [timeline] | To express & reflect on feelings at different points in time | Rural Youth Art Project; Carnival Costume Course |
| Mapping [place] | To express feeling about a place or processes in a place | Urban Refuge #2 |
| Mapping [body] | To express embodied feelings about specific situations or events | Urban Refuge#1; Childrens Centre; |
| Expressive drawing | To express feelings about a process or situation | Carnival Costume Course; |
| Collage [understanding] | To extend thinking time and express feelings and ideas | University Lectures |
| Collage [problem solving] | To extend thinking time and problem-solving | Adult Volunteers |
| Expressive video | To express feelings about a process or situation now or over time | Rural Youth Art Project |

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4.8.3 Phase 3: A whole project evaluation strategy for diversity

In Phase 3 of the research attention was turned towards developing whole project evaluation strategies building on the findings of the earlier phases. These were based on findings in Phase 1 and 2 about the contribution of participation in creative community projects to individual and social wellbeing and focussed on effective or new ways to measure that impact. The methods used within these whole project evaluation approaches were based entirely on the methods trialled in Phase 2 of the research and operated within the modified AR framework described above. In other words, there was a mixed methods approach, highly participatory and including creative methods. During Phase 2 early attempts at implementing a whole project strategy were more or less successful. A key finding from Phase 1 and 2 was that things happen very fast in projects, and opportunities for ongoing reflection are few because of time constraints – particularly where team members (artists, teachers, staff) are contracted for activity sessions only. Therefore, trialling evaluation strategies was dependent on a high level of commitment not only from project management but also from other members of the team. This became an

important, perhaps determining, issue for the successful adoption of the proposed approach in Phase 3.

Ideas about creativity producing complex systems, and the field research itself which revealed great diversity of context and provision, produced three challenges:

- Cause and effect are likely to be separated by time or place or at least not obvious
- There is no 'right' view on what is happening
- A 'best practice' approach is inappropriate

The strategy to be trialled during Phase 3 therefore was framed not as a prescription for particular behaviours, but as a set of attitudes and behaviours which would permeate practice from the planning stage, that is, a systemic approach. The format of the evaluation would be quite different in each project. Central to this was the need to develop ways to engage all stakeholders – commissioners, managers, deliverers, artists, participants, volunteers and staff – in developing and delivering evaluations. In other words, participants in the process could make overt their own theory of how people change through creativity, develop their own criteria for measuring change and deliver evaluation within paradigms of their own practice, using their available skills. These diverse findings would contribute towards a richer picture of both process and outcome. Moreover, using an ANT approach, these theories of change themselves could be reflected upon as indications of explanatory ontologies which inform diverse practices within any one project. Therefore, the field trials included collective discussion and continual reflection wherever possible – although this was highly dependent on context. Evaluations of creativity which rely on self-reporting must account for issues of affect – the immediate flow of emotions which are often difficult to describe or remember. These may be central to the experience of becoming absorbed in creative 'flow' and may be heightened only briefly at key points. The continual reflection in diverse ways proposed might both capture these moments and enable reflection on their longer term significance in improving wellbeing. In order that projects might try to capture more long-term impacts, it was important that both theories of change and the evaluation methods used should be documented, giving them the potential to be reproduced in subsequent projects and therefore subject to comparisons over time. Findings in Phase 1 produced a set of conditions in projects that could maximise positive impact on wellbeing. Using the interpretivist framework described in Chapter 3, the trials proposed that these conditions could be observed and recorded as part of evaluation, through analyses of the language and conceptual frameworks of project documents, artists'

portfolios, protocols and practices, as well as observations of activities and participant reports.

Table 9, below, outlines how the research trialled whole project evaluation and to what effect. Table 9 shows that 'successful' implementation developed only slowly in the research. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Table 9 Field trials attempts at whole project evaluation approaches

| Project | Point in research | Type of approach | Outcome |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Godiva Awakes! | Phase 2 (after start of project) | Systemic, participatory | Not Implemented |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Phase 1 (after start of project) | Episodic, participatory | Implemented |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | Phase 1 (after start of project) | Episodic, partly participatory | Partially implemented |
| Not Yet Invented Schools project | Phase 3 | Systemic, participatory | Implemented |
| Lively Libraries | Phase 3 | Systemic, participatory | Implemented |

4.8 New methods, new ethical considerations

Different methods give rise to different ethical issues. For example, Pain points to the danger of 'methodism' – social sciences embracing new methods to seek attention or demonstrate collaboration; and to the expediency of 'the arts' looking for academic credibility¹²¹. Since taking part in research may have unpredictable impact for participants long after the initial intervention (Butler-Kisber 2010; Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010,; Ryan 2001), methods which may uncover intense feelings must be treated with caution. If creative processes are somehow pre-lapsarian and potentially transformative, they may provoke difficult feelings, so participants may need further professional support. If people disclose more than is usual, the ethical imperative, especially for confidentiality and participant control over data, becomes more acute than ever. Thrift (2008:189) points out that the manipulation by governments, funders and institutions of affect as a way of shaping people's attitudes and behaviours may have "enormous emotional costs" as well as benefits. If affect arises through participation in creativity, and, if as the

¹²¹ Pain, R (2013) Presentation at the Higher Education Academy postgraduate training event *Engaging with Communities: Arts - and performance - based collaborative training* Durham University May 2-3 2013)

literature suggests (see Chapter 2), funding creative projects has for some time had an overt 'instrumental' function for governments, research and evaluation needs to be able to recognise possible disbenefits of intense emotional engagement (Brady and Brown 2013). At a pragmatic level, there may be problems if non-artist researchers or evaluators are implementing creative activities with insufficient expertise¹²².

For these reasons, participation in creative methods was always presented as optional, with several 'opt-out' points where participants' wellbeing was checked verbally. Considerable attention was given in planning to offer playful creative activity as well as more intense moments. The open-ended nature of the artworks produced was reiterated throughout the sessions verbally. There was no pressure on participants to share artwork when it was made (in fact, on many occasions participants took it away with them). During the research in domestic abuse refuges and the Childrens Centre, when difficult emotions might be exposed, a member of the refuge staff was always on hand to offer follow-up attention.

Nevertheless, ethical protocols need to evolve for new methods. One unresolved issue which exercised the researcher continually was how to frame the invitation to take part in creative research or evaluation. Many people associate creative activities with pleasure, yet creative methods, although eventually often highly satisfying to participants, contain some of Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'effort' and an element of striving or challenge which Chapter 3 describes. Moreover, if creativity (even in evaluation or research) has the capacity to act as a catalyst for change in praxis, as Chapter 3 proposes, then it may of necessity include challenge and difficulty.

4.9 Developing methodologies: some conclusions

This chapter has described how projects were selected in an attempt to reflect the great diversity of context and practice which Chapters 2 and 3 described exists in the field. It shows how research methods were sought which could reflect rather than flatten the differences between projects and participants. It outlines the ways in which the research methodologies enacted the modified AR approach described in Chapter 3, focussing on participatory practices wherever possible although not always engaging participants in setting the research questions or achieving the action which should follow. The chapter began with a detailed description of the initial interviews partly in order to describe an iterative and participatory framework for the research practice overall. It also indicates

¹²² This could be technical expertise in the sense of skills with materials or technologies, but my research suggested that lack of 'arts-based' skills such as setting an open-ended and experimental brief might be equally unfortunate.

that the very contingencies of these diverse deliveries often operated to reduce that commitment.

However, these findings about the complex interaction between participation and creativity in complex and diverse systems led to the development of highly responsive evaluation methodologies in Phase 2. These were characterised by the researcher in conversations with project participants and staff as ‘light and often’ rather than deep, yet this continually reflective, multi-directional and mixed method approach produced rich, deep and authentic evidence, as the following chapters will show.

In a highly simplified formulation, it is possible to suggest that theoretical challenges were resolved through choice of methods as Table 10 (below) suggests. In practice of course this challenge is never ‘resolved’ as practice continually evolves in context. The AR framework recognises and embraces this continual tension.

Table 10 Meeting theoretical challenges

| Theoretical challenge | Methodological ‘resolution’ |
|---|--|
| Epistemological: interpretivist view that knowledges are constructed, multiple and heterogeneously produced | Participatory, mixed method, new methods developed in the field, reflexive, iterative (checking understanding) |
| ANT: that ideas become hegemonic in networks | Ethnographic (observations, participatory observations), collective |
| ANT: that non-human entities are actants in networks | Principle of generalised symmetry treating materials, technologies, spaces as active, interrogating through observation, focussing on these in interviews, creative methods explore embodied interaction with world |
| Freire: that transformation occurs through praxis and dialogical pedagogy | Qualitative methods, collective methods which recognise social learning, mixed methods record changes in behaviours, exploring artists’ practice (idea that it is dialogic, challenging, real world etc) |
| That creativity can play a role in transformatory praxis | Practice –led research recognises and interprets the aesthetic dimension, creative methods engage participants, creative evaluation methods can contribute to creative flow; creative methods both prompt and reflect role of affect in change |

The need to grasp the theoretical challenges implicit in the table above, particularly to scrutinise the social construction of meanings and the impact of affect led to a search for non-textual, non-verbal methods. As evidence about the impact of being creative emerged during the research in Phase 1 it seemed clear that new creative methods might offer a way in to understanding these complex processes *and* produce a benefit – an important principle of AR. Chapter 5 describes the development, interpretation and impact of these new methods

Chapter 5 The interpretation and impact of creative methods

Introduction

This chapter explores how creative methods were developed in order to meet the challenge of theoretical ideas described in Chapter 3 and the findings as they emerged in the early stages of Phases 1 and Phase 2 of the research. Since this research was simultaneously about identifying evidence of impact and an evaluation of methods, the development of these new methods wove in and out of these Phases continually. They are presented at this stage of the thesis in order to give the reader a deeper understanding of the evidence presented in the next chapter.

In summary, these methods were developed in response to two aspects of the evidence discussed in Chapter 2 about creativity. Firstly, that being creative can function as a different kind of thinking or way of knowing which produces new meanings¹²³. Second, that creative experience can contribute to a radical re-positioning in discourses about self¹²⁴. These suggested that creativity had a potential role to play in change-related praxis. Phase 1 field research findings (discussed at length in the next chapter) suggested that emergent knowledges produced through creativity arose through the combination of 'handling' materials (Bolt 2004:14) and dialogic reflection with the artist-researcher. This chapter also argues that, in particular conditions, the positive impact on participant wellbeing associated with being creative can also be produced through taking part in creative research or evaluation. Moreover – and this is no small thing - the potential of creativity to engage and produce positive change also gives it great potential for evaluation, explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

This chapter argues that 'practice-led' research methods have a particular value in the context of creative projects (Bolt 2004), but that they require new thinking about meaning and impact. Issues of validity, authenticity and trustworthiness remain live throughout any research, but these are particularly controversial areas for arts-based research, which remains a contested discipline (Bryman 2008; Barone and Eisner 2012). Critical arts-based researcher Schiesser identifies a source of this controversy in artistic research generally as a failure to make epistemologies explicit (Schiesser 2012). As Chapter 6 will

¹²³ Eisner, 2008; Hickman 2008; Sennet 2008; Deaver and McAnliffe 2009; Treadaway 2009; Gauntlett 2011.

¹²⁴ Mulvey 1991; Csikszentmihalyi 1996,2002; Charny 2011

argue, the research showed that methods were inextricably linked to intentions, to what we want to find and how we think about knowledge (Leavy 2009; Eisner 1997)¹²⁵.

Creative methods were used throughout the research, firstly to explore the contribution of participation in creative projects on participant wellbeing (research Aim 1), and then to produce evidence for evaluations which could measure that contribution (research Aim 2). They often ran alongside other methods in the same project which meant that interpretations of the data they produced could be compared critically. However, the methods themselves discussed here were highly responsive and context-specific, being adapted and modified in each event. Nevertheless, whilst they meet Barone and Eisner's criteria of 'generativity' : "the work enables one to see or act upon a phenomenon even though it represents a kind of case study with a *n* of only 1" (2012:152), the argument is made here that some interpretations might produce more 'generalisable' findings too. Consequently, although the artworks produced by creative methods can be seen as the data, rather than as representing the data (Leavy 2009:227), the research continued to explore this tension, looking for ways of interpreting them in terms which might be of value in evaluation.

In principle a practice-led research approach to evaluation would aim to draw on existing skills of artists in the project. This research utilised creative video and digital technologies, as well as chalk pastel work, which were informed by the researcher's visual and digital arts practice, habits, attitudes and discourses¹²⁶. These are connected not only with her familiarity with art-based materials and techniques, but also with a commitment to open-ended and non-judgmental, reflective practices associated with arts training and practice (Bolt 2004).

This chapter has two main parts. The first sections describe how creative methods were implemented in a range of projects and discusses the productive tensions of a contradictory discourse of 'serious fun'. It raises the issue and role of resistance to taking part in creative methods, especially those like collage associated with childishness. It introduces the importance of the materiality and embodiment of the processes involved.

The second half is a detailed account of interpretation of a key method used widely in the research, expressive markmaking, through two Case Studies, one of time based expressive markmaking about feelings of change, and the other about expressive mapping of a building. These findings are then evaluated as the building blocks for the subsequent research in Phases 1 and 2.

¹²⁵ This of course implies that the value of creative methods in evaluation depends on the epistemologies of its audience. Chapter 7 goes on to tackle this difficult issue.

¹²⁶ A detailed account of this experience is in Chapter 6

5.1 Implementing creative methods in the research

Creative methods were used for both research and evaluation. In the Scoping and Phase 1 period, in the Urban Refuges and Childrens Centre projects creative research methods were used to help participants evaluate their experiences of professional services in the refuge system and across a range of services respectively. In these three projects the creative activity *of the research* was the main activity. In the Urban Refuge #1¹²⁷ artwork was made over two whole days with a group of 12 women. The activity was meditative markmaking followed by body mapping. Expressive body mapping worked as an imaginative framework for the creative activity. The importance of scale in body mapping was confirmed in group interviews in all the projects using the technique. The activity required participants to move over their own body outline, on card on the floor, using colour and marks to express feelings about different part of their bodies during key experiences. Participants confirmed that the impact of matching, for example, their hands with the hand outline, made their memories more vivid and the body mapping activity a more intense, imaginative experience¹²⁸. The larger-than-life figures were mounted on stands and were exhibited filling a room at the Birmingham City Football Club (see Figure 3, below), during which time the researcher met a number of participants for a second time in the venue and was able to ask them informally about the impact of taking part. In the Urban Refuge#2 research, three refuges were involved and from a transient population of approximately 23 young women (17-21 year olds) groups of three, one and four were convened and met twice. The group of four met the researcher again at a refuge meeting described in more detail in the case study below. The activities were meditative markmaking followed by expressive mapping of the refuge. In the Childrens Centre, following meditative markmaking, participants made larger than life figures by body mapping and exhibited them at a conference of professionals. This is described in detail in the next chapter.

Later in Phase 1 and Phase 2, the RYA project used creative methods with a fluctuating group of between four to ten 12-18 year olds. These were used as research into Aim 1 to explore the impact of participating in the creative activities in Film Club. Research contact was extended over 16 months, with the researcher attending almost all Film Club sessions for a school year, then meeting participants twice afterwards.

¹²⁷ There were five refuges involved in this project, but the researcher was able to attend and therefore to comment on only one.

¹²⁸ Chapter 4, Figure 5, shows related research with eight women in a refuge, the scale of markmaking was also important, as participants, for example, 'blanked out' large areas of card (over 1m²), representing their lack of confidence in their solicitor, with sweeping and repetitious movements. *Women and the Law* was a project in a London refuge directed by Natalie Ohana-Eavry, Lead Artist Sue Challis Sept 2013, funded by London School of Economics Faculty of Laws.

Figure 3 Participant artwork from Refuge#1 exhibited in Birmingham City Football in 2011 (approx 2m x 1.5m laminated heavy card on stand). The importance of scale in body mapping was confirmed in group interviews in all the projects using the technique. The 'like for like' scale of the outline intensified participants' identification with the imaginative framework of the markmaking. Meanwhile, the imposing size of the finished artworks re-presented the women themselves as powerfully 'larger than life'.

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A large-scale collective expressive timeline at the Film Club final Focus Group (November 2012) proved highly engaging to the four participants still available¹²⁹. This large-scale (1.5m x 4m) artwork was introduced to participants as a way of remembering important events, relationships and feelings over the year-long project and framing them imaginatively as colour and marks. The timeline was marked in white with months. They were asked to use colour and markmaking rather than drawings or words to express their

¹²⁹ The Focus Group was held in an adjacent community centre during school hours. One 'homeschooled', three post-16 and two others were unable to attend.

feelings (although all featured). This had been a group of extremely shy and reticent 12-14 year old boys, but by this point in the project they had developed more confidence.

Hyperlink 1 is to an excerpt of a video recording of the session. It shows the boys fully engaged in mark making (on the floor in a kitchen) and talking about what they are doing, sometimes prompted by the researcher and sometime unprompted, to the group or themselves.

[Film Club expressive timeline](#)

Hyperlink 1 right click over link while online

There is no doubt that the expressive timeline activity provoked thoughtfulness (“extended thinking time” Butler-Kisber 2010). It provided a ‘non-school’ place and space of time when conversation could be apparently casually carried on around the activity. The video clip soundtrack is underpinned by the sound of pastel strokes throughout as the boys concentrate on their markmaking. Figure 4 (below) shows the intensity of marks made by one participant under the word ‘friends’. In his absorption he has broken the pastels by pressing so hard, expressing a high level of distress around friendships at the start of the creative project. At the start of his engagement with the creative project, Film Club, this particular participant had the following exchange with the researcher:

Participant: Everyone in this school hates me.

Researcher: You can’t possibly know that...

Participant: Yes I do, they’ve all told me.

Film Club informal interview Participant #4 November 2011

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Figure 4 (below) Intensity in markmaking: broken pastels on the Film Club expressive timeline mark friendships as difficult. The materialities of the process (the feel of the pastels, their fragile and 'forgiving' qualities, the sound produced by markmaking and so on) was central to the process of expressing feelings.

The video clip in Hyperlink 1 shows this participant making further drawings related to friendships and the self-confidence which he reported to have developed during Film Club. The discussion during the expressive timeline was remarkable for this participant in that the collective creative activity (which he said he "enjoyed very much" and was "totally getting into") seemed to unlock his ability to share self reflection for the first time in that group. In the Focus Group later he went on to say that the Film Club artists' attitudes ("friendly and cool") and the experience of having to work together on collective creative projects had transformed his relationships and enabled him to make sound friendships: "it totally changed me" ... "I met some fine people" (from Researcher Notes, Film Club Focus Group November 2012).

The video clip also shows another participant making strong black, apparently angry, marks under the word 'friends'. When he is first asked about this by the researcher he describes them as "angry", but during discussion deflects from this interpretation by saying the marks "looks like a flower...you get black flowers like that in China don't you?" (Timeline discussion, Participant 2, November 2012). This participant was generally reluctant to disclose personal feelings and often deflected discussion of them with humour. Arguably, the angry black marks allowed the expression of meanings not accessible verbally, at least in this context (MacDougall 1997), or even "submerged realities" (Pink et al 2004:1).

In the CCMC creative methods were tried in Phases 1 and 2 and towards Aims 1 and 2. Because of the regular research contact the researcher was able to try methods more freely and participants were involved in a reflective and iterative process of critiquing the methods as well as the findings. The researcher worked with this group during their course at least fortnightly for 16 weeks, then once at each of four participant-led community workshops which followed the making course, for half a day in London on a carnival parade and finally at a specially convened all day Focus Group at the end of almost two years¹³⁰. During the costume making course, a wide range of mixed methods were used, including questionnaires, baseline surveys and interviews. The creative methods were far more engaging and welcomed by participants, who frequently kept their artworks. A detailed discussion of 'before and after' markmaking is in the case study which follows. During discussions a number of participants (6/16) declared that they found written questionnaire intimidating and four cited dyslexia as a reason for this. Possibly because of this reluctance to write, few written responses conveyed the excitement often expressed in the markmaking.

¹³⁰ This Focus Group is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

At the penultimate session of the course participants were invited to use their newly acquired skills in designing carnival costumes to express a theme to design a costume 'which would show the personal changes you feel because of the course' (Researcher's introduction to the activity). Participants were invited to especially think about their wellbeing, which had also been the subject of a written questionnaire on a previous occasion. Figures 8-11 are examples of the designs. This activity was initially difficult to understand, but within a few minutes all participants became absorbed in this highly imaginative task in near silence (except for four people who chose to work in pairs) for about 15 minutes. The conventions of carnival costume design such as 'expansive gesture' (fabric shapes extending the body's shape and size) and 'positivity' (bright colours and swirling shapes which actually move as the body moves) were utilised in these designs. Participants then took the final designs and stuck them up on the wall, encouraging each other to do so and discussing them. These drawings were valued by participants and project staff for their aesthetic content and because, especially when presented together in a wall-mounted display, they 'told a story' which was regarded as accurate and useful for evaluation and used skills 'of the project'. Some of these designs clearly had the potential to be have aesthetic value, offering thematic coherence, a non-linear and satisfying whole (Barone and Eisner 2012) as discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.6) and this was reflected in the participants' comments.

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Figure 5

Figures 5-8 (left and on following pages)

Using skills 'of the project' in an imaginative framework to express personal development during the Carnival Costume Making Course. Participants designed a carnival costume to express the theme of their perceived personal change using the design skills in the course. These and other drawings were exhibited at participants' insistence in the course venue.

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Figure 6

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Figure 7

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Figure 8

From Researcher Notes of participant discussion when looking at the display of costume designs (May 2012):

I wish I could wear this [in the Carnival parade] and walk down the road swirling it about

I'd like to make this next year. I'd like to show people what I've done... I know I could make this

This bit shows how fed up I was before [points to brown colours at bottom of costume] it will just drag on the street, and then it bursts up in the air above me like wings

When you see them all together it does show what we have all achieved

In the researcher's observations, in every one of these projects, markmaking activities led to absorption and extended thinking time. However, participants also often associated the process with an increased sense of agency (control over the material world). This was linked to the production of aesthetic value – in other words, their sense of mastery of the art materials and the fact that they produced artwork which they valued aesthetically led to feelings of eudaimonic wellbeing. This is not a new finding about creativity, it reflects Froggett's comments on the impact of the 'aesthetic third' (Froggett et al, 2011:93). However, it is less common as an impact of participating in evaluation.

5.1.1 The importance of framing: 'serious fun'

Creative methods were verbally introduced to participants by the researcher as a search for meanings which would be new, producing alternative or counter-hegemonic understandings. For example, in the Children's Centre project, meditative markmaking was introduced as a new way of feeling (not thinking) about oneself, and body mapping as a way of ordering thoughts and feelings about professional services in a new and powerful way which might 'make a difference' to practice. 'Before and after' markmaking in the CCMC was presented as a new way of expressing feelings about a recent creative activity which could not be put into words. At the same time, the researcher countered initial reluctance to participate (expressed to a greater or lesser extent by about third of each group where creative methods were used, and discussed further in the next

section) by urging that there was 'no right way' of doing the activity, that it was a 'light-hearted' exercise, that it would be 'fun'. For example:

Participant: "No I was rubbish at art, I was rubbish at art at school... I can't draw to save my life...I'll just watch..."

Researcher: "It's not about drawing or being good at art. Just have a go... you can't get it wrong, it's not drawing just making marks and shapes...I think you'll enjoy it if you have a go, just muck about with the pastels if you like..."

Participant:"No I'll just watch..."

Researcher: "Well you don't have to, you can just watch... but I'll give you the paper and the pastels anyway and you can just doodle if you want..."

(Childrens Centre First session March 2012, excerpt from Researcher's Notes made during session)

Arguably, this contradictory researcher narrative (it's seriously valuable / it's light-hearted fun)¹³¹ reflects theories about the impact of creativity and ideas about creativity as 'play' discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.52). It raises ethical considerations which remained unresolved throughout the research, possibly because creative activities, as Miller suggests (2011:17), are often both serious and playful simultaneously. The ethical issue was paramount in the projects where participants were invited to think about domestic abuse experiences¹³², which was sometimes painful. Research about the challenging aspect of being creative discussed in Chapter 2¹³³ suggests that this tension may also be a source of impact. In this current research, observations and interviews suggested that the engaging elements of creative activity are not solely connected with its playful, 'fun' character. Participants occasionally referred to the effort they were making or to the difficult feelings which arose, they almost always showed concentration and absorption in the activity at some point, and almost without exception referred to the creative activity as a pleasurable experience.

5.1.2 Resistance is fertile: collage

Willingness to participate in creative activity is not a given. Almost all participants had to be convinced that these were not representational drawing or other skills based activities. All the adult and young women, and teenage boys, in projects throughout the research, agreed to take part (with varying levels of confidence). The issue of how valid

¹³¹ For example, using 'just' as a modifier suggesting unimportance yet through urging suggesting value and importance

¹³² Childrens Centre and Urban Refuge#1 and #2

¹³³ Smail 1984; Froggett et al 2011

these methods might be in producing evidence was not raised by these particular participants. These participants included a range of ethnicities and ages, but tended to be living in areas of rural or urban deprivation. As part of this exploration of method but also of the potential power of the position of being 'in a project', an identity not necessarily recognised by participants, two brief research activities outside community projects were undertaken using collage. This section describes these two research interventions in the context of their findings about creative methods as well as the issue of resistance to them. It raises the issue of whether willingness to engage with creative activity and its impact is determined by prior experiences and self-narratives, and whether this relates to the expression of power, for example in community project networks which contain 'experts' and 'beneficiaries'. They are described here not for their conclusive evidence but as indicative of the need for further research. Nevertheless, the experience of carrying out the research was used to inform the development of evaluation strategies in Phases 2 and 3. The following extract from Researchers Notes made at the time explain how this research came about:

I became interested in the potential for collage to become part of formative or summative evaluations following attendance at a Higher Education Academy workshop on collage, *Exploring Layers of Meaning*, University of Chester (26 March 2012), when I experienced collage first-hand as a problem-solving technique. [*The collage I made on that occasion is shown in Appendix C*]. This developed through continuing contact with Alke Wegener-Groepel through the Tactile Academia blog, which explores the value of creativity as an aid to academic writing and thinking. During the field trials I became interested in collage as a technique for thinking about issues which were difficult to express or understand, as an aid to problem-solving (Butler-Kisber 2010, Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010, Charny (2011)). I was interested in whether the technique could be used as part of ongoing or interim evaluations designed to review and modify activity, particularly when problems had been identified. I also wanted to explore the value of open-ended, exploratory activities, associated with arts practice, outside a constructed evaluation /research setting (that is, as an activity carried out with minimal professional guidance), commonly a context of small-scale evaluations, and with different negotiations about power.

Researcher Notes December 2012

There were two interventions: the first was a highly informal but structured project involving a convenience sample of six adults selected through email and face to face meetings. They were selected according to four criteria: they were not arts professionals, not in any professional relationship with the researcher, they were not living in an area of deprivation, and they were willing to take part. The invitation to take part was formal and the same in each case (see Appendix C). Four other people were approached but declined the invitation. The researcher gave or posted them bags of very similar and random materials (images, text, textiles, stationery) to work on in their own time. For some participants, the task seemed very daunting and slightly odd. Two people returned the bag, both saying that they felt, 'too un-artistic' to attempt it by

themselves. Four people made collages. They were asked to tell or write a short account of the process, commenting on how they felt when doing it and what impact it had on their thinking or problem-solving. Figures 9 and 10 are examples of two collages: their makers' comments follow.

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Figure 9 Participant 1 Collage (scraps on A4 paper): 'problem solving collage' which, despite the participant's initial scepticism, helped her 'feel more analytic' about the a difficult issue at work.

Participant 1 account (email):

"Subject: Re: Collage"

"The collage was about the assessment of the mental health of a teenager who is extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation. She has been groomed/ lured by a paedophile ring and given drugs. She takes many drugs. She frequently threatens suicide. She is very verbally abusive to those who try to care for her because of her abuse in her own family of origin. The collage also deals with the response of organisations surrounding the girl and the difficulties in their relationships with each other. The hanged figure represents both the girl and another worker caught up on the turmoil surrounding her. The orange jagged line represents the panic. The Arabic script triangles/ shards represent the impossibility of putting our concern/ her situation/ our situation into meaningful language. The heads represent workers minds making different sense of her experience and our response to her experience. The blank spaces in the heads represent divided minds and the unknown of our own minds hidden from ourselves and from each other.

"Doing the collage helped me stand back from the situation and look at it differently. I had felt overwhelmed by the situation and by my

feelings. The collage helped me feel more analytic. It also helped me see parallels between the girl and the worker, both of whom stir up my pity and also my frustration.

“As you know, I hung onto the collage bag for a long time before I felt I had a problem or could see how the collage might help. I was so challenged by this incident at work, which seemed impossible to resolve, that I thought I might as well do it, with no expectation of it working! The pictures and text which had meant nothing before I started to think about the issue seemed to become very relevant when I began to use them for the collage.

PS you know I can bullshit at length !”.

Extract from personal email from participant (8.8.2013: 22:23)

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Figure 10 Participant 2 Collage (scraps on A4 paper). A problem solving activity which led to insight into ‘the process of how I solve problems’, as the ‘discard’ pile (bottom right) grew but was not discarded.

),

Participant 2, adult, male Extract from transcript of interview with researcher:

Researcher (R): How did you feel about the collage before you started it ?

Participant (P): I was reluctant to do this – I was ready to email you and say I wasn’t going to do it, then your reminder came...I don’t really have any problems to solve...I felt that it was a waste of time. I didn’t like the blank page of it, the open-endedness of it...I’m a non-arty person. I am not a person who does collage.

R: But you did do it in the end ?

P: Yes, the only way I could do it was, I put on some choral music which I like, I do listen to music sometimes but most of the time I am

doing something purposeful...I had to have something else in my head to get going on it or it would seem like a waste of half an hour.

[...]

R: Can you describe your collage?

P: I chose the maps because I like maps and I made a river there, and the string follows the route because that's how I measure my route on a map anyway..., the dots and maps had a meaning for me, I made the dots into arrows and each arrow gets bigger – that's me deciding on a line, choosing a direction to go in life and discarding the things that didn't have meaning for me...

[...]

R: What interested you most about doing the collage?

P: Well... as I was, as I was trying to do it I found myself interested in the way I was selecting things, how I discard some things, like, I am someone who tries, and I try to persuade other people to do this too, to move on, to select a way forward and put the other possibilities, which we have decided not to do, onto one side, to discard them and move on. ...So when I started this I realised that it was more about the process of how I solve problems than a particular problem, I discard the irrelevant stuff more than other people I think, then I don't worry about it. It was like acting out something about myself. I had to decide, select what side of the paper I would keep and which bit discard or hide, it was all about selection...This became pleasurable when I had some idea of where I was going with it...

R: What are these two piles?

P: Well I , these are the things I didn't want – the discard piles – I stuck them there, it's only stuff I didn't want, it might be important to someone else...As I was getting into it...I did start to enjoy doing it... I was thinking about myself, about getting somewhere, solving problems. I saw the solving problem part was about discarding what you don't need and assembling a way forward, only in the abstract, honing down and selecting to get somewhere. I feel strong, it's something that works for me... so I was mirroring what I do. When I got the idea of the map or journey I really did enjoy it.

R: Most people throw away the discards. You have stuck them on the collage. Was there a reason for that ?

P: Well, it's...I suppose it's because it's not foolproof...the process of deciding to keep the discards... they are worth keeping, that's my readiness to admit I'm wrong or go back and look at things again, other options. I think I'm visualising something, the process of keeping the discard, something about myself I hadn't put into words really before...

Extracts from researcher's transcript of audio recording of informal interview 17.11.13

The second collage activity was with 65 undergraduate, final-year Geography students, and 15 Youth and Community Work students, at Coventry University November 2012, and November 2013. These students were invited to participate using the research Consent and PIS forms and a verbal introduction. There is a full account of this activity in Appendix C. Figures 11 and 12 (below) are examples of student work. The following extract is taken from Researchers Notes made at the time:

At the start of two, two-hour lectures entitled 'Visual and creative research methodologies' I gave each Geography student an envelope containing a similar range of collage materials (text, images, fabric,

paper, scissors, glue) and explained that the intention was to explore the idea that concentrating on making a collage whilst listening to complex new ideas would support understanding (Butler-Kisber 2010). This activity was drawn from my own experience at the HEA workshop described above. While they worked in silence on their individual collage books (folded paper) I gave a lecture about a range of visual and creative methods, using digital slides, occasionally asking them to 'look up now'. At the end of the session we discussed their experience and at the start of the second session (a week later) had a brief group discussion reflecting on its impact. I made notes from this discussion but there was no further follow-up as it was the last session of term in each case. This was by no means a satisfactory research exercise, having no means to measure changes in concentration or learning, except through self-reporting. However, as an activity suggestive of further research, I have included it here for its relevance to issues of resistance to and acceptance of creative methods, rather than the light it sheds on collage as an aid to thinking. Further research might include a questionnaire reflecting on self-reported change and feedback from other lecturers, and some longer term contact.

For Youth and Community Work students I was restricted to one two-hour session which was less formal (for example, sitting in a circle rather than in a lecture theatre). I introduced the session as above, but invited students to select collage material from a wide range laid out on a table. Students made collage books while I gave a presentation about visual and creative methodologies. The making was followed by a group discussion and some people shared their books.

Extracts from Researcher's notes made in November 2013

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Figure 11 (above) Participant Collage, Geography Students November 2012, made with selections from 'found' materials during a lecture on arts-related research methods showing reference to key ideas and further reflection on some.

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Figure 12: (above) Participant Collage, Geography Students November 2012, made with selections from 'found' materials during a lecture on arts-related research methods: "I was feeling strong feelings while I was listening, it was quite upsetting really. I wasn't really thinking about the drawing".

From Researcher Notes:

"Some students made work clearly referring to the lecture content (Figure 11 above); these sometimes used text or phrases from the lecture or commented on it. For example, one male student made an image of his children learning arts as well as sciences, saying, "I want them to have both, to be whole people, not like me I just did sciences", rather wistfully adding, "I haven't got any children yet" (my notes from group discussion). Others made collages clearly relating to feelings. A male student made a page of overdrawn, confused lines and smudges, (Figure 12 above), with fierce concentration while listening to a video clip of a woman describing her experience of domestic violence. He commented: "I was feeling strong feelings while I was listening, it was quite upsetting really. I wasn't really thinking about the drawing". My interpretation of the drawing was that it reflected his turbulent feelings through colour and markmaking, and intensity through strength of physical gesture (pressure on page and over drawing). As such, it might offer a useful prompt to further discussion or thinking. In each class one student stapled his finished book together and said that it was 'private'. This could suggest that personal feelings had been expressed (although these may simply have been critical of the process or 'rude').

"These were mixed gender groups (marginally more female). In each group all but three students participated (total five male, one female). There were varying degrees of willingness to take part. In the final discussions several

students (about 5/35) said they found the process “useless”, “a distraction” or “pointless”; a similar number said it was “interesting”, “enjoyable” and they could “see the point”. In each session five people were willing to ‘share’, that is, show and talk about, their own collage, usually describing what it represented to them and how they felt making it. The people who shared made broadly positive comments about the activity (for example, that they ‘enjoyed’ it). Six students (three in each group) said they felt that the activity had improved their concentration. In both groups several students said that they had been repeatedly told off in school for persistently doodling during lessons. They related doodling to a way of improving their concentration and ‘enjoyed’ the collage activity.

“There was no way of telling if this activity did improve concentration, although the self-report of a small number of students might suggest so in some cases. However, as a ‘pilot’ for the method with a large group, including many adult males (missing from most of my previous research which was mainly with teenage boys and adult women) it was suggestive. My informal observations suggested that more female students found it easier to attempt and to enjoy the activity, but I cannot be sure this was true without further research. More male students voiced their reluctance, but there could be many reasons for this. Resistance to participation was linked in discussion either to lack of commitment to qualitative methods (many of the students were using exclusively quantitative methods in their own research and had not used qualitative methods before) or to reluctance to do an arts-based activity because of lack of skill or experience. “Where there was reluctance, I did not feel that it was the ‘open-endedness’ per se which was a barrier, rather a lack of belief in the usefulness of the method generally, or for themselves in particular.

“The Youth and Community Work students (also mixed gender, mainly female) were generally more receptive to the collage making, and many of them in discussion could relate it to activities they might carry out in their own professional practice and qualitative research. They saw it much more as a prompt for discussion than an aid to concentration, than did the Geography students. Several did relate it to doodling as means of concentrating, and most said they ‘enjoyed’ the activity. The most obvious difference between the two sorts of students, was that all in this group shared their collage in the discussion: one student who had stapled his closed, explained this as an expression of specific feelings relating to self-disclosure rather than the activity. Several students in this group made collages about personal feelings unrelated to the lecture (see example in Appendix C, Figure C2, page xxxiii). On the whole, I felt that there was less resistance to the activity in this group; but again, this informal interpretation suggests a number of more specific lines of enquiry, about prior experience, current skills, gender, age, ethnicity and so on.

In the first problem-solving collage activity with six adults, participants expressed reluctance to participate connected with not regarding themselves as artistic or being convinced about the method. Arguably, self-consciousness about participating in a ‘soft’, reflective activity underlies the comment, *‘I can bullshit at length’*. In all cases, the extent to which participants identify themselves as ‘arty’ impacts on willingness to engage (*‘I am not a person who does collage’*) - as does prior experience of or commitment to qualitative research methods (Gauntlett 2011). There are perhaps a whole raft of other contingent and structural factors related both to personalities and context. However, in the examples shown here, where there *has* been an engagement with

the process, the following impacts could be inferred from discussion and examination of the collages as possible pathways for further research:

- Contribution to understanding of self or problem solving not available by other means
- Expression of feelings in a different (not verbalised) way
- This can be related to the physical process of selecting and discarding, combining and juxtaposing, in other words, to the embodied enactment of thinking.
- The tension between the serious/fun, or adult/childish nature of collage may of itself contribute to its value in producing new embodied knowledges: resistance itself may be fertile
- Figure 14 also suggests that collage is not necessarily a distraction from new learning.

These highly informal explorations, taken with the more formal research interventions describe in the earlier sections of this chapter suggested three caveats for researchers and evaluators: firstly, that creative methods require expertise to 'deliver', specifically, to engage participants; and second, that some people or some groups of people may experience more 'resistance' to them than others. Thirdly, some methods – perhaps those which do not utilise artist quality or 'new' materials, or like collage may have associations with childish play – are more likely to be resisted than others. It also raises questions about compliance in a community project setting which is explored further in the next chapter in the context of discourses of deficit.

The findings described so far in this chapter were produced through participant observation (taking field notes where possible or writing them up as soon as possible), informal small group or individual discussions (audio recorded or notes taken) and notes taken at three Focus Group discussions (Children's Centre, RYA and CCMC). It was possible to recheck findings about the impact and interpretation of creative data with participants in the Urban Refuge#1 and #2, CCMC and Children's Centre. These discussion-based assessments of creative methods tended to produce similar findings. However, there were some differences between these and the researcher's observations, which are discussed below. The accounts in this chapter were supported by a range of qualitative methods and field notes made shortly after each event and reflective notes (Appendix D gives examples of this iterative process).

For example, Researchers Note on the RYA project A proposal to make 'creative responses' to the experience of taking part in Film Club at the RYA project, in sound and colour using newly acquired video and music making skills, was turned down by the group in January 2012. In discussion some weeks later, participants showed considerable bewilderment at the idea of a 'non-narrative' film. There was also

reluctance on the part of the digital artists in the project to support the activity with technical and aesthetic input. During Film Club however, particularly during two VJ sessions¹³⁴, participants developed a better understanding of the idea of abstract sound and colour, digital collaged images and so on as a response to music, and may have been more receptive at that stage to creative video making as a means of evaluation. This, and the more positive experience in the CCMC described above of using 'of the project' skills and materials and the imaginative framework this provided, suggested that methods drawn from project practice also need

1. to be congruent with participant skills and understandings
2. may need commitment of time and resources from project artists.

The next sections explore the impact of a key theme which arose from the initial interviews of the Scoping Phase described in Chapter 4, the impact of materials, technologies and embodied practices.

5.2 Understanding the processes: the impact of materiality

Chapter 4 described how understandings about the role of materials and technologies in creativity from the literature review were confirmed by the research Scoping Phase initial interviews. Four out of five of these cited encountering materials and/or technologies for the first time, mastery of tools, equipment and acquisition of new skills, however simple, as significant contributors to positive impact. The selection of materials, equipment, venues/spaces, as well as the appropriate creative process, for creative research (or evaluation) was therefore as important as it is for any creative activity. This is why, for example, the mark making activities¹³⁵ were carried out using artist quality chalk pastels, renowned for their vivid colours and 'forgiving' quality¹³⁶. Combined with good quality black paper or card, these enabled participants to produce unexpectedly attractive or powerful images with minimal skill, and were almost invariably a 'new' material. Although not particularly cheap, these materials are easy to use, store and transport, which makes them a feasible tool for participant evaluations. The larger scale markmaking, such as collective timelines and body mapping, required more expensive black card (for example, 1.5m wide x 2m per person). The research findings supported a case for budgeting for this quality of materials, linked to maximizing impact¹³⁷. In all the individual markmaking

¹³⁴ Video Jockeying – making real time visual responses to music and projecting it to the audience.

¹³⁵ Expressive markmaking, meditative markmaking, body mapping, expressive mapping.

¹³⁶ That is, the ease with which they can be blended, erased and over drawn

¹³⁷ Budgeting, storage etc being an important issue in developing feasible evaluation methods which can be used by small to medium sized projects.

activities participants expressed pleasure in using the materials and in all these events at least half the participants said when asked that they 'liked' or 'loved' their artwork and several on each occasion asked to take it away. Although many participants started the event expressing very negative emotions about their ability to make artwork (especially to draw) there was only one occasion when a participant expressed active dislike of her artwork at the end and threw it away. Over a third of every group did not want to take their artwork away, except in the Children's Centre and Urban Refuge#1 body mapping and place mapping activities, when *all* participants wanted to keep their work (and did).

For these reasons too, where digital technologies were used (RYA project), care was taken to use high quality equipment – in this case, four Flip HD hand held video cameras, Canon HD video camera, Apple MAC Book Pro and FCP editing software, and to employ two artists (additional to the researcher) who were highly skilled in digital sound and image production¹³⁸. This enabled the artists to be relaxed about experimentation and to enable participants to realise quite sophisticated ideas with relatively little skills acquisition but an understanding of the concepts involved. In prompted video diaries, interviews and discussions, participants spoke often about the equipment and software and their satisfaction at being able to develop a casual proficiency very quickly¹³⁹. The impact of mastering this new technology was to increase participant's self esteem and engagement¹⁴⁰. In the expressive timeline discussions at the final Focus Group, specific unprompted mention was made about the working style of the two artists in the context of their relationship with technology. For example:

Chris he's so cool, he just laughs a lot... when we were talking about donkeys he just started drawing one on the screen..." [] "I'm gonna download that software ..[inaudible] ...that free software, you can draw really cool things...

(Participant 2; excerpt from audio recording RYA Focus Group November 2012).

The ANT principle of generalised symmetry framed observations of these aspects of creative methods in practice. For example, in the Urban Refuge#2 project, working with young women, the venue was a children's playroom, with low chairs and nursery-age art materials. This had the potential to undermine the value of the activity. As the Case

¹³⁸ This unusual concentration of resources was because part of the evaluation strategy proposal made by the researcher as part of Phase 2 field trials was to develop a group of participants skilled in evaluation techniques involving video, interviewing, questionnaires and creative methods. As a creative workshop in itself, this fitted the project aims and became part of the project activity funding rather than the evaluation budget. This is significant, because budgets for evaluation tend to be very low in project applications and funding.

¹³⁹ And breaking the researcher's expensive Canon video camera irrevocably in an attempt to make it out-perform its capabilities whilst carried away in a moment of creative flow.

¹⁴⁰ This is discussed in more detail below and in Appendix D and can be seen in the excerpt from edited participant video diaries below.

Study below shows in more detail, bringing artists' quality paper and pastels into this environment resulted in a perceptible increase in engagement. Observation field notes suggested that these materials played the role of 'adult' and 'professional artist', turning simple markmaking strokes into vivid splashes of colour, enabling participants to value themselves and the activity more highly, which they expressed by a willingness to take part, to share ideas and to work on with concentration. The importance of the materials was confirmed in discussions after the sessions.

These comments may be familiar as part of the wider discussion about materials explored in Chapters 2 (sections 2.53 and 2.54) and Chapter 6 in relation to striving for aesthetic excellence in community projects and the importance of embodiment. Arguably however, there is far less discussion about the significance of using materials and technologies which themselves might have significant impact on what knowledges are produced, in the context of research or evaluation.

5.3 The significance of the artist as researcher

In the research described here, these materials and technologies were situated within an imaginative aesthetic framework in activities led by an artist. Pain (2013) points out the danger inherent in the seductive 'instant engagement' appeal of creative research collaborations for academic researchers negotiating the 'turn to community', and the lure of academic credibility it might offer practice-based artists. The research processes described in this chapter prompted interest in the ways in which the related practices of artist and researcher, although both concerned with curiosity and communication, differ.

Clearly, there are different skills involved, but a more profound distinction between research and creative practice may lie in different ways of looking at and interacting with the world. Characteristically, for the artist, it is the continual incorporation of experience, thought, feelings and the material world through sketchbooks, journals, photographs, collages, collecting and so on, as potential artworks, and a constant, open-ended imaginative re-assembling of these to create new relationships¹⁴¹. This is a persistent process of experimentation, false starts, re-workings and temporary abandoning; what artist Bob and Roberta Smith calls a "mode of thinking and activity concerned with action" (Smith 2004:136). Arts Council England, reviewing the successful Creative Partnerships programme which brought schools and artists together, defined creative practice as "not simply about 'doing the arts' – it is about questioning, making connections, inventing and reinventing, about flexing the imaginative muscles" (Arts Council 2007:1). The research encounters with artists and the experience of the researcher becoming an artist-evaluator suggested two possible outcomes from this interdisciplinarity:

¹⁴¹ Appendix C, Figure C1, page xxxi., has an example an example of the researcher's own artwork which may illustrate this point

1. artist-evaluators are likely to regard a wider range of things, processes and behaviours as 'evidence' of impact
2. the aesthetic dimension of data is likely to have a greater significance and be regarded as indicative of impact
3. greater attention may be paid to the materiality of the evaluation process

In the Phase 2 and 3 field trials of evaluation methods, which enrolled artists as evaluators, these outcomes and their impact were further explored (see Chapter 7). However, it was in the interpretation of creative data that this issue became paramount, as the next section suggests.

5.4 The interpretation of creative data: a practice-led approach

During the research Phase 1 a modified visual cultural studies approach to interpreting creative data was slowly developed. The following extract from Researcher's Notes, January 2013 gives a flavour of that process and argues for researchers to themselves practice creativity in order to more fully understand creative data. It is followed by two case studies showing interpretation in practice.

"As with 'high' art, meanings are made between people, they are not inherent in the work. These knowledges arise through the combination of 'handling' materials (Bolt 2004:14) and dialogic reflection with the artist-researcher. It is the aesthetic value of the data which suggests to me that, although visual or thematic analyses (like those used in visual cultural analysis) may be useful to identify patterns and direct research questions, asking participants to interpret their own artwork is vital. Although of course they may use this process to construct a new narrative about the research question, or about themselves (as I observed in the initial interviews) These are knowledges expressed through the artwork as data, and in words. It is not a case of asking, 'What does this mean?', but together exploring the affect experienced in the making, and reflecting on choices of technology, materials, processes. Moreover, as a researcher committed to participatory processes, I have been inclined to ask people to contribute their interpretation.

Bolt (2004) makes a point about the particular insights arts practitioners have into artworks because of their experience of the materials and processes, which is relevant to this issue of the interpretation of artworks as data. Bolt calls artist-led creative research 'practice-led research'. For example, when I have been looking (as a researcher) at participants' mark making (responses to a research question), I am aware (as an arts practitioner) that certain marks and tones could only have been made using particular physical gestures and touch – open, outward movements, intense pressure on the paper, or soft, inward movement and, light touches. If they are using

pastels (which I use a lot in my arts practice) I am also aware of the order in which colours have been layered, and so on. I have a similar relationship to video, recognising what technical choices have been made, and to a lesser extent, photography; but my interpretation of a dance performance as research data would be quite different from a dancer's (and I would be reluctant to make it). These reflections lead away from defining characteristics of 'being' an artist - which focuses on attitudes and processes. It seems to be implying that specific practice-based skill sets are essential for the interpretation of related artworks. Actually, I think there may be a more simple resolution, suggested by a key finding from the Creative Partnerships experience. Creative methods in the classroom had greater impact and produced richer outcomes when teachers themselves practiced creativity (McClellan et al 2012). In other words, in order to make the best use of creative methods, researchers must use them for themselves. They need to develop a deeper understanding of materials, technologies and creative processes, and begin to become hybrid artist-researchers".

Researcher's Notes, January 2013

5.4.1 Case study 1: the interpretation of 'before and after' expressive markmaking¹⁴²

(20 participants, two projects, three sets of research activities in each)

This was a brief activity designed to explore the proposal that 'feelings of self-confidence and wellbeing increase after creative activities in a project'. It doesn't immediately tell us how or why feelings might change¹⁴³, and is restricted to temporal and spatial moments, local and contextualised by a specific process. However, in the current research, this activity was repeated as closely as appropriate in the same project over time and across different projects and so, this section argues, led to more generalisable conclusions. Figures 13, 14 and 15 (below) show artworks which are data from three participants made before and after a two-hour creative and craft skills workshops. Figures 13 and 15 were made after the same activity, and Figure 14 on another occasion following a different activity. These examples were chosen because they share visual characteristics of many responses to this particular evaluation activity. Participants were introduced to the idea of 'expressive markmaking' in a group, with a demonstration of the technique, and asked to use it to record their feelings before and after a creative activity

¹⁴² The term 'markmaking' means the use of lines, strokes, marks and colours to express feelings visually, with no attempt at representation.

¹⁴³ Although participant interviews did suggest this (see Chapter 6).

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Figures 13, 14 and 15: 'Before and after' a creative activity: participant evaluation
artworks (chalk pastels on card). 13, 14 'Before' on left; 15 'before' right. Produced at the
Carnival Costume Making Course February 2012.

5.4.2 Production of the data

In ANT meanings become hegemonic in networks through gatekeeping of key ideas which become 'obligatory passage points' that everyone must pass through (Latour, 2004) (see Chapter 3, section 3.3). Taking the approach drawn from visual cultural studies which focuses on the context of production (Rose 2012:32), we can see that the production of all three images relates clearly to the power of the researcher to 'ask the questions'. It sits in a genre of research and pedagogical enquiry with a clear boundary between researcher and researched/ teacher and student. Accepting these roles may be the obligatory passage point which frames the activity for all concerned. In these particular projects, the creative method activity also marked a break from craft activities (making with materials and tools) to a paper-based activity at tables, which may have aroused feelings connected with school experiences for participants and reinforced compliance.

Moreover, the audiencing of these images was complex. They were made for the researcher or for evaluation, for an unknown audience ('academic papers' is an opaque phrase for most participants) and, because they were made individually but not in privacy, by implication also perhaps for other participants or artists delivering the project¹⁴⁴. Such complex audiencing reminds us that there are many possible interpretations of visual data (Hall 1980). In addition, since these images were made for evaluation, they may be as 'contaminated' as any evaluation data by participants' awareness of the need for the project to prove positive impact to secure further funding. The apparently spontaneous nature of embodied interactions is always mediated by context, and, as Tolia-Kelly has pointed out, must always be problematised (Tolia-Kelly 2007:337). The ability of individuals to engage with affect, the specific ways that they are empowered or constrained to do so, are subject to a range of immediate contextual factors, personal and community histories, and structural factors such as economic, racial and gendered access to power and resources (Tolia-Kelly 2007; Lorimer 2008).

So, for example, in an evaluation context such as the one in which this data was produced, participants may have felt grateful (as economically poor people) at being part of a free project: and therefore obliged to reflect enjoyment and personal change. They

¹⁴⁴ Sharing' (that is, showing the images to the group) was always an optional activity and some people always chose not to share. However, the conditions in every session were such that people could see each other's work. In the 'on the hoof' contingencies of an arts workshop, it is difficult to make a private space for evaluation. This is partly because the reluctance to engage in evaluation (discussed in Chapter 2) meant the researcher was unwilling to separate it too much from the activity. The contingencies of cost and venues militate against private space. Moreover, the idea that evaluation would be more effective integrated into the project activities, was part of the trials, so she didn't always seek alternatives. This did not apply to all of the interventions. For example, prompted video diaries in the Rural Youth Arts project were carried out in a separate room (since the teenage participants seem to be more willing to talk in private), as were interviews about domestic abuse in the Children's Centre. In the latter, privacy enabled participants to choose how much difficult personal information to reveal to the rest of the group as well as the Conference and academic audiences.

may have felt unable to resist the request to participate in creative reflection. Section 5.1.2, above, raised but did not resolve this issue of who has access to the possibility of resistance to these methods and what that may mean.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of this creative data also showed that being creative, even as part of evaluation might offer new insights. This is because the process of creative making itself is associated with the creation of new thinking, ideas and feelings (Charny 2011, Dault 2011) and this, therefore, may mitigate the mediation of prior expectations and context.

Context, however, is ever-changing: and although ongoing repetition of the activity had the positive value of making it less intimidating, it also had the potential to become *routine* (that is, participants choosing to reproduce images that seem to 'fit' researcher or group expectations or values expressed on previous occasions¹⁴⁵). For example, it may be that Figure 14 above might have represented an attempt by a group member to produce an image replicating Figure 13 (made a few weeks earlier in the same project). By this third time of markmaking, it is possible that participants had recognised in this a desired narrative. However, this interpretation was strenuously rejected by the maker in a subsequent discussion which was a useful reminder of the need for transparency in interpretation technique and of the sea of power in which interpretation swims. Of course, the potential of participant responses to become 'routine' in this sense is not restricted to creative methods and is a reason why researchers often try to 'triangulate' findings.

A key part of the production of these images was technological. The materials used were new to participants, were easy to use and produce vivid, easily manipulated marks with very little skill. Most participants enjoyed working with these pastels and were pleased with their artwork. In the markmaking activities, the materials provided were, in Actor Network Theory terms, actants in our networks rather than variables, alongside the other non-human members (Latour 2004; Haraway 1991).

To Rose's modalities of meaning construction (Rose 2012) aesthetic value, connected with visual and sensual satisfaction and authenticity (Bamford 2005; Barone and Eisner 2012) adds another layer of interpretation. So, although these images were produced as data rather than art, they may be aesthetically valued for their material qualities or the extent to which they embody a genuine connection to the subject matter. That is, through observation and interview, the interpretation took into account the recognition and significance accorded to the aesthetic dimension of the work for participant-makers themselves. For example, a small number of participants commented in discussion that they 'liked' their artwork and wanted to keep it. The researcher observed that satisfaction with the artwork was not necessarily or solely connected with the clarity of expression it

¹⁴⁵ For example, some of the images were discussed by the group.

embodied, but with its aesthetic value to the maker. Observations and discussions with participants as producers and with participants and project workers, suggested that using 'artist quality' materials in a creative activity can mean that the 'look' of the work may assume greater significance for participants than the content (Williamson 2012), but it also implies that the 'look' of the work (its materiality, its aesthetic value) may also communicate meanings and authenticity to an audience in a different way. For example, in discussion one group of five women were asked by the researcher if they were 'satisfied' with their artwork, if they 'liked' it, or if they 'didn't like' it. Two said it was 'OK', qualifying this with phrases suggesting that this related to how well it expressed their intention, such as, "You can see I felt better here [pointing]". When asked if they liked the way the artwork looked as well, both were unsure. The researcher interpreted this to indicate that they did not regard the artwork as something which *could* be liked for its 'look'. Two women said they 'liked' their artwork because it looked good *and* expressed their intention: for example, "I like the way the colours go [together] and you can see I was all nervous [pointing], I wouldn't say anything"; "I like the way it's all like fireworks this side, bright and orange and yellow... you can just look at it and tell how I feel". Meanwhile, Figure 16 particularly can be interpreted as having a vivid immediacy and compositional balance which not only communicated a sense of movement and change, but also of the connectedness of the maker to the subject and an unmediated visual impact associated with 'successful' artworks. In Barone and Eisner's taxonomy, these works demonstrated 'incisiveness', 'concision' and, for the most part, 'coherence' (Barone and Eisner 2012 :151), that is, they 'hang together' compositionally and stick to the point. In terms of 'evocation and illumination (op cit:153), the embodied nature of the gestural markmaking both reflects and evokes the idea of positive, even joyous (if complicated) change.

5.4.3 Patterns

A second possibility for interpretation was to look for patterns, similarities or differences between the data in a simplified content analysis based on Rose's framework for looking at the image and compositional modality.

The first two of these images share compositional qualities in that the 'before' marks are softer (smudged, colours merged), contained (curving lines which turn into the shape), static on the page (although not within themselves); whereas the 'after' marks are sharp (separate colours, not smudged), uncontained (lines which move out of the shape) and full of movement. Figures 13 and 14 have shapes which resemble cocoons ('before') alongside shapes resembling fireworks ('after'); They could be said to contrast a 'confused', 'inward-looking' shape ('before') with more definite, clear lines ('after'). Because markmaking is an embodied activity, the process of drawing the 'before' shapes in these examples involved inward, circular movements, toward the body; the 'after'

shapes involved a series of outward movements away from the body¹⁴⁶. Chalk pastels respond to force of gesture (pressure on the page) and the 'after' shapes (Figures 13 and 14) would have demanded more forceful gestures to produce more vivid colours and strong lines¹⁴⁷. For example, Figure 16, below, is an example of Meditative Markmaking in Urban Refuge #1, an activity asking participants to express 'inner strength', which they did using soft, circular gestures, and 'what attacks it', which in this example is expressed by more forceful, sharp marks made by pressing harder with abrupt movements.

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Figure 16 Meditative Markmaking in Urban Refuge#1, 2011. Pastels particularly demonstrate embodied responses: making more vivid or sharp marks demands greater force or abrupt, strong gestures, soft circular shapes are made pulling the chalk toward the body. The image above was made in response to a meditation on 'my inner strength' and 'things which attack it'.

I

n Figures 13 and 14 these were interpreted as signifying a sense of increased energy,

¹⁴⁶ It may be relevant that the participant who made Figure 15, described herself as 'very dyslexic' referring to the before and after being reversed in her work compared with the others. Boroditsky (2011) suggests that there is a link between language use and perceptions of time and space which would be an interesting avenue for further research in the context of evaluating creative methods

¹⁴⁷ Chapter 4 had further discussion and examples about why scale is relevant to this discussion of embodied gesture in markmaking.

and confidence to look or act outwardly following the creative activity. Whereas Figure 13 ('after') would seem to suggest increased clarity and outward movement, the 'after' shapes in Figures 14 and 15 suggest excitement and disturbance. Figure 15 ('before') (bottom right) shows very small, low down, static, contained (oval) shapes; and a higher, larger shape as 'after'. The 'after shape' is full of movement, confused (overlapping) lines and colours, but in contrast to the first two figures, these are curved and more contained. This was interpreted as showing a sense of enlargement, and a shift from a static, unresponsive state towards 'stirred up' (although still inward) feelings.

In these and across the range of visual images produced by the creative methods it was not possible to recognise patterns of meaning associated with colour. That is, the same colour might represent a positive or a negative feeling for different participants. It was impossible for me to 'code' colours within an individual's symbolic systems within the constraints of my research: but this would make an interesting follow-up study. What did emerge in chalk pastel work were patterns associated with the *intensity* of colours, related to both colour choice and the physical pressure of the making gesture. Figure 7 (above in Section 5.1) was an example of this in an activity to reflect on friendships before the creative activities in the Rural Youth Arts project involving teenage boys. The participant made spiky, short, straight marks under the word 'friends' with such force that he broke two chalk pastel sticks. In subsequent interviews he described very unhappy relationships and bullying before the project.

Taken alone, the three 'before and after' images are difficult to present as reliable or generalisable evidence, although they may be regarded as *authentic* and 'generative' responses which tell us something relevant about people's feelings. However, the types of shapes in the first two figures, and the compositional relationship in Figure 18 (size, height), were extremely common in this exercise, to the extent that they might reasonably be recognised as patterns. Observing these kinds of difference between the two stages as repeated patterns enabled these conclusions to be drawn:

- that the creative activity being evaluated had an impact on how people visualised their own feelings;
- that they visualised a change which was generally positive, although sometimes disturbing;
- and that this could be indicated through markmaking.

As evaluations these have 'social significance' (Barone and Eisner's term), and, as artworks, a consistent aesthetic connected with the ontological idea of positive change through creative experience. This was confirmed by informal interviews with audiences for the creative data artworks, such as project staff and other participants. However, as evaluations these images alone are not convincing to some funders, who require more

formal 'soft' data¹⁴⁸, such as participant report. These inferences were tested by asking participants for their own views in the third interpretation which was concerned with participants' *intentions*.

5.4.4 Participant narratives

Participants gave their own interpretation of their artwork, sometimes individually and sometimes in the group they were working with (that is, not a separately convened focus group), immediately following the second markmaking. These were either noted or audio recorded. Questions were open-ended, not asking 'what did you mean', but, "Why did you use this colour here?", or "Why did you make that mark like that?". As Chapter 2¹⁴⁹ and the initial interviews suggested, it may be some time – even years - after a creative engagement before participants identify any impact. However, this activity was aimed at discussing immediate (and possibly short term) feelings. Overwhelmingly, participants gave narratives confirming the interpretations made above.

They used phrases such as "shy", "no confidence", "isolated" to describe their 'before' state of mind, and "more confident", "fizzing", "proud of myself" to describe the changes they felt. Participant A (Figure 13), commenting in an interview on her feelings, using the creative data artwork as prompt, said that before four weeks of creative making workshops, she had felt,

I was depressed and like there was no time for me, just the kids and stuff... I didn't really want to talk to anyone in the group except [prior friendship]. She made me come [laughs] ...I didn't think I could do it [learn the craft skills] and I was going to look an idiot

(Participant A interview 2 March 2012).

After the sessions she had felt quite differently:

I'm on top of the world really, I am so pleased with myself that I did it... and that I showed ... I had to explain how to do it to the whole group. I'm really buzzing ...I'm not being big-headed, but I know I can do it".

(Participant A interview 2 March 2012).

Participant C (Figure 15), interviewed individually at the same point in the project, had been unconfident and reluctant to participate at the start of the workshop sessions. She described herself as 'very dyslexic' and, like Participant A, that she only came because a friend encouraged her. When asked what the small black and red ovals in the corner of her image meant to her, she answered only after studying the image in silence for a few

¹⁴⁸ Interviews with funders and sponsors suggested that this is true for publically accountable funders such as The Big Lottery and Arts Council, but that private sponsors (senior managers/owners of companies/ individuals) are more likely to value visual images as 'telling a story' (Initial Interviews, Chapter 4).

¹⁴⁹ Belfiore and Bennett (2007), O'Brien 2010, Mowlah et al (2014).

minutes: "I suppose that's how I felt then, all squashed and little". The researcher's observational inference was that looking again at her own markmaking was helping her to construct the description or narrative. She went on, "This side ['after'] is all floaty". (Interview 3, Participant C, March 2012). Pursuing the interpretation ('disturbance'), the researcher asked what the significance of the wriggling, interwoven lines was in the 'after' shape. She explained that she felt that taking part in the workshops (she specified that she meant the whole experience: 'making time' for herself, arranging childcare, travelling, interacting with the group, learning new skills *and* being creative) had felt

a bit upsetting... not in a bad way...I got a bit churned up. I wasn't going to come after the second week, but she [prior friend] made me and then [another participant] she gave us a lift so I had to come

(Participant C Interview 3 March 2012)

Asked if she 'was enjoying' the course now, she replied: "Yes, I like it but I don't know if I'll stick it, it's a lot of time. I can't see that we'll be able to do it in time anyway, we're going to look stupid" (Participant C Interview 3 March 2012). This participant *did* stay with the project and became a great enthusiast for the second phase, helping to lead her own workshop in the community and becoming confident and skilled. However, the creative evaluation activity and subsequent reflection on it, both accurately reflected and expressed her feelings *at that point*, and helped her recognise them or construct them into a narrative of change. In other words, the creative evaluation activity had an impact on her in addition to the impact of the project itself.

Asking participants to interpret their own creative data can help suggest triggers for change. For example, Participant A (Figure 13) produced an image which can be meaningfully interpreted as expressing change, but only discussion can suggest reasons for that change. In this case, she had felt unconfident about her ability to learn new creative skills such as design and making, but was surprisingly good at them (faster and more accurate than many others in the group). She specifically identifies this as leading to her feeling much more confident. Participant C (Figure 15), who was also fast at learning new skills, clearly cited a range of aspects of the whole experience not just the creative making as leading to the changes implied by her markmaking, (which she condensed, in a later evaluation, into the phrase "making time for myself").

The final set of questions for participants related directly to the creative task in the evaluation. In answer to the question, 'How did you feel when you were markmaking?' almost all participants said that they enjoyed the activity itself, especially citing the quality of the pastels and linking this to greater satisfaction with the finished artwork. Several people in each group asked to take some pastels away to continue drawing. The

researcher's observation was that, for most participants, this activity, although brief (15 minutes markmaking for each shape) was performed with focus and concentration. Several participants said that they preferred it to a previous evaluation activity (short written questionnaire). The evaluation activity itself built participants' confidence and, through mastery of new materials, may even have contributed to a greater sense of agency, widely connected to improved wellbeing. It is worth noting here that the activity was preceded by a playful introduction to markmaking and was used alongside other markmaking evaluations. Resistance to 'drawing' was explored and for the most part overcome by the initial introduction. Nevertheless, there remained a small number of participants who remained uncomfortable with *any* evaluation activity involving personal reflection, although none took up the option of non-participation.

However, because these discussions invariably seemed to confirm the researcher's own 'reading' of the artworks as texts using the processes described above, five critical issues must be raised:

1. The questions did strongly imply that the images carried narrative value which was inaccessible to the researcher; and even the framing 'before' and 'after', contained the idea of experience-related change¹⁵⁰
2. The questions also implied that the participant was an expert in her own markmaking and that only she could interpret it
3. The process also implied that the affect produced in the process of creating the artworks could be both recognised by people experiencing it, *and* articulated in words – which both Thrift (2004, 2008) and Lorimer's (2004, 2008) 'non-' or 'more than-' representational theories suggest is not possible
4. And which denies the possibility of the artwork as useful data of itself
5. The issue of people uncomfortable with any process of personal disclosure yet participating for whatever reason is both an ethical and research accuracy issue, which although never fully resolved in this research did inform the development of evaluation strategies discussed in Chapter 7 (particularly a commitment to multi-diverse data gathering).

Nevertheless, the premise of the research's epistemological stance is that any reading of any text produced as research data is always intersubjective. Meanings are made in artworks between the audience, the work and the artist. A critique of this stance, a 'relational aesthetics' associated with Bourriard (1998), is that this way of approaching meaning in art gives undue power to curators (or in this case, the researcher) to determine the dominant interpretation. Relations between artist and curator/researcher can be various and are by no means intrinsically democratic (Bishop 2004). In an effort to mitigate this throughout the research an effort was made to ensure that conclusions

¹⁵⁰ That may be a relevant factor determining the total lack of artworks depicting 'no change' in feelings.

derived from creative data included an account of the relationship between the researcher and researched and attempted to take 'psycho-social' relations (emotions) into account (Holloway 2009).

5.5 Case study 2: mapping the refuge¹⁵¹.

(8 participants, three research sites, two - three sessions in each)

This is an account of expressive markmaking being used to research the value of 'House Meetings' for young residents in three urban women's refuges, through participants 'mapping' the physical spaces of the refuge and reflecting on their artwork. The refuge charity Director had identified an 'intractable' problem for the organisation, which might be amenable to a trial of creative methodologies. Younger women residents (15-21 year olds) seldom attended weekly House Meetings where day-to-day decisions were made with residents and staff. Simply asking residents and staff, through a questionnaire and face to face interviews had not produced a clear understanding of the reason for this. Specific research constraints included the fast turnover of a transient population who could not be followed up once they had left the refuge, the difficulty of engaging participants already emotionally and practically over-stretched, and the crucial security and confidentiality surrounding the venues. Research access to participants was facilitated by the trust staff felt arising from a previous art project with a different set of residents (Urban Refuge#1 see above). This was important, because access to refuges is highly restricted for security reasons, and residents are often very cautious about contact with outsiders who are not clearly endorsed by staff. It was important also that the research event should be informal, enjoyable and positive, in other words, contribute to the charity's healing programme rather than introduce further stress. In case difficult feelings were aroused by the research event, staff were briefed to offer informal expert support¹⁵².

Expressive mapping is a development from visual mapping, an ethnographic research activity (van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; Pink et al. 2004; Rose 2012b), adapted by using artist quality materials and arts-based techniques and expressive mark-making. This was

¹⁵¹ This research was partly funded by Birmingham City Council's Arts & Young People's Team 'Creative Futures', managed by a West Midlands creative consultancy, Hybrid. Further information and my research blog at the time is at <http://www.hybridconsulting.org.uk/blog/creative-futures>

¹⁵² If creative and visual methods have the potential to allow participants to access feelings previously unarticulated (Pink 2004; MacDougall 1997) there is a clear ethical issue about researcher skills which is discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.8.

in order to explore the potential of the aesthetic dimension and creative 'flow'¹⁵³ in helping participants to express or articulate feelings and ideas. Opportunities to meet staff or residents before the project were limited, so it was decided to 'trial' a version of 'expressive mark making' over two sessions, followed by a map making exercise in the third session. In this activity, residents could 'map' refuge spaces, relationships and processes using colour and mark making to express their feelings about them, which might help them order their thinking about the House Meetings or other issues, as well as express feelings hitherto unarticulated. For the refuge, this activity constituted an evaluation of the House Meetings. It aimed to improve feedback where 'text and talk' had failed. It was particularly indicated in some refuges where there was a language barrier; and it was hoped that this approach would enable younger women to communicate meanings and feelings which would lead to changes in organizational practice. For the research it was an opportunity to explore the idea that "focused and mindful artmaking is an inherently reflective endeavour" (Deaver & McAuliffe 2009:626)

5.5.1 The production of the data

In the interpretation of this data, process and context were paramount. Throughout the activity, interpretation was primarily based on what participants said in discussion¹⁵⁴. Because this activity had not 'interrupted' a creative project (as with the markmaking above), and was not framed as evaluation, it sat more in the genre of play than education, with a greater expectation expressed by participants of enjoyment. Moreover, the overt research question ('why don't you attend House Meetings') was something which already interested the participants (although they were more likely to frame it as 'what's wrong with House Meetings?')¹⁵⁵. Again, as Hall (1980) points out, the audiencing was complex: the primary audience for their views was the refuge organisation. It was made clear that, in terms of sharing with the refuge staff, data would be fed back as a single, anonymised report. But the audience for their creative artwork was an abstract and poorly understood academic research audience, the researcher (a stranger), and each other. The groups met variously in crèche and meeting room spaces, and this showed how important place or environment is in the technologies of production. The child-size of chairs in the crèches and presence of children's art materials, combined with the selection of participants by age, had the potential to associate the activity with childishness (although this was not discussed). These inanimate things, poor lighting in meeting rooms and so on, alongside the materials provided, became, in ANT terms, *actants* in our networks, (Haraway 1991; Latour 2004;). That is, they played an active role

¹⁵³ A term coined by Csikszentmihalyi, M (1996,2002) to describe the experience of being 'transported' from the everyday by creative activity and discussed in earlier chapters.

¹⁵⁴ Participant quotes are taken from my notes written during and immediately after each session and from transcripts of video recordings

¹⁵⁵ I also made it clear that my secondary question was, 'Is this a better way to find out what you think?' and that the activity was part of wider research.

as did the people present and absent, in interactions and the meaning given to those interactions¹⁵⁶. From Researcher Notes made at the time:

Ideally, I should have preferred to radically alter familiar space through changing lighting, scents, materials and tools, but this wasn't possible, although I did provide low-key 'relaxation music'. 'Changing the space' is associated by me with creating the conditions for individual change and creative 'flow'. In my community arts practice I developed this idea as a kind of 'sympathetic magic'. The more physically different and 'magical' the activity seems to participants, the less it is likely to carry an association with failure (for example, in education) or routine, and the more chance there would be for participants to see themselves differently. For this reason I also provided high quality chalk pastels and expensive card, which, as well as being new to participants, produced significantly more attractive drawings than cheaper ones, with no more skill. I told them the costs of these materials¹⁵⁷ (producing gasps of astonishment), in order to encourage them to feel valued and to differentiate them from the children's art materials which may have been encountered at school or in the refuge playroom. In this way, to a limited extent, I was able to create an environment which was different from the participants' 'everyday' environment¹⁵⁸.

(Researcher Notes February 2012)

Contact with some of the young women was fleeting (45 minutes in one refuge). The following account is about three participants who came to three, one-hour sessions.

The three participants were aged 17 (participant A), 16 (Participant B) and 21 (Participant C). Participant B spoke only a little English; the other two had English as a first language. The session was begun by the researcher describing the research issue but also the intention to have 'some fun' drawing. Even in such a small building these young women were not acquainted: the research activity became an informal and calm time for them to learn each other's names and form a slight bond. Informal discussion about the House Meetings happened in casual chat during an initial introduction to mark-making, 'meditative markmaking' (described in Chapter 4, section 4.6.1 and see Figure 16 above). This activity can only be accurately recorded in process, for example by video (which is inappropriate to the activity and especially in this setting). It exploits the performative impact of the embodied gestures of markmaking to enact feelings and create the space for change (Butler-Kisber 2010; McNiff1998). Participants visualise their 'inner strength (colour, shape), draw it and then expand the drawing to fill the page (always a move from

¹⁵⁶ Chapter 3 discusses ANT in more detail.

¹⁵⁷ £1.40p per stick in 2012 (Euro1.68; \$2.13)

¹⁵⁸ Connected by Csikszentmihalyi (2002) to the conditions for creative 'flow'.

small to larger). This activity is both a simple introduction to markmaking and associated by participants with positive feelings¹⁵⁹.

Participant A became very absorbed in creating a map to satisfy her own aesthetic criteria – in fact, she took it away to finish between sessions and said she would put it up in her room afterwards. She brought a sketch of a tiger she had done at school to the second session and took a selection of pastels and card to go on to make drawings for pleasure. Aesthetic value in the interpretation of creative data is connected with visual/sensual satisfaction and authenticity (Bamford 2005; Barone and Eisner 2012). When asked why she wanted to finish the map in private Participant A replied, “I want to think about it “. This may have been the case – or it may have been that she was shy of completing the map within the group, or that the look of it had become important to her – with such brief contact it is difficult to be certain. Nevertheless, it was clear that the aesthetic value of the map had given her pleasure, had given or reinforced her sense of herself as ‘artistic’, and that the process had enabled her to express feelings hitherto unarticulated. Her sense of sensual satisfaction with her work was interpreted as indicative that the aesthetic dimension of the artwork carried its own meanings. For example, Participant B’s map (Figure 17 below) shows the perimeter fence as a spiky white line enclosing the refuge which operates in the image as a frame and enclosure, and functions in her life both as an excluder (of her friends) and a promise of safety. Her spiky (pink) mass in the hallway blocks the door but also, visually, is full of movement and agitation – expressing (she said in interview) her frustration with delay at the ‘signing out’ book and her frenzied hurry to catch her bus. As with the markmaking described in the first example, the maps demonstrated the connectedness of the makers to the subject.

5.5.2 Patterns

In this interpretation, patterns of markmaking, that is, intensity of gesture, are more striking than colour, composition or shape. Participant A had drawn the laundry room as a cloud-shaped, pink, rounded space, using soft circular strokes, involving repeated gestures towards the body. This was interpreted as an inward-looking, calm markmaking, which was confirmed by her comments that it was a “safe, private space”. She drew the communal lounge with vivid strokes (that is, made with a forceful gesture associated by me with intensity of emotion), of yellow and red cross-hatching (extended gestures of

¹⁵⁹ In a number of interviews throughout the research, participants reported positive feelings with this activity and a follow-on sometimes used, drawing ‘what attacks your inner strength’ and then obliterating that and re-drawing strength to fill the page – leaving traces of the process on the page. Generally, it was not possible to not take photographs of these drawings while they were being made, since this would be disruptive, however, Figure 19 above showed an example from another part of the research with permission of the maker.

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Figure 17 Mapping the refuge (video still, 2012.) using mark and colour as a way of extending thinking and a prelude to discussion. Participant B is showing the perimeter fence (in white), the frustrating signing out book (pink) and the “warm, safe” laundry room (in yellow). While colour seems idiosyncratic, the research found patterns relating to intensity of mark and type of gesture.

movement away from the body). She explained that because she found the older women’s conversations stressful, and didn’t feel confident to negotiate the TV channel with them, the lounge was a site she associated with unpleasant feelings. This was a significant finding because conversations in the lounge had the potential to become informal House Meetings. By missing both opportunities, younger women could become even more isolated. Participant B, recently arrived from a Middle Eastern culture, drew her bedroom, described as too small and reluctantly shared with a sister, as a dark blue smudge covered by a strongly marked dark green cross. She drew the staff office as a soft white oval with bright green lines of different length radiating from it like light, commenting:

When we go to the office they sort out every problem, that’s why I love the office [*waves hands over drawing*] it’s very shiny to me

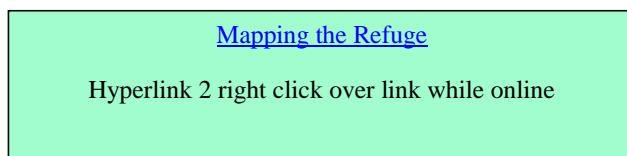
(Participant B: Video transcript February 2012)

Markmaking gestures showed common patterns. However, across all the mapping images, colours were used differently by different participants, but consistently by each participant within their image. For example, whereas Participant A above used pink to indicate softness, safety and calm, Participant B drew the hallway as a mass of harshly-drawn, overlapping, crossed pink lines (Figure 17) and the laundry room (“warm, safe”) as dull yellow.

This is a ... I don't like this place because [*taps the drawing*]
that's when I have to go out ... I'm late for college... I have to be
... sign here [*taps drawing twice*] and this takes time [*taps*
drawing]...I don't like this place...”
Researcher: “So tell me why you made it pink?”
Participant A: “Yeah, because when I go to this place [*taps*
drawing] I was very angry, that's why I do it like this [*indicates*
scribbled lines]

(Participant B: Video transcript February 2012)

She went on to explain that ‘signing out’ had often caused her to miss her bus. Hyperlink 2 is to a short extract from the videoed interview with Participant B, which used her map as a prompt to express feelings about the residence and her place in it.



Markmaking on the maps was interpreted as indicating feelings associated either with physical spaces in the refuges or relationships or processes associated with them. It was possible to build a tentative idea of key issues for the young women around the need for privacy, the difficulty negotiating relationships with older women, especially in communal areas, and the discomfort they felt in the presence of heightened emotions. The process of mapmaking itself was used by participants to identify or reveal deeper feelings about spaces in the refuge (such as which were the ‘safe’ places to be alone, the stigma of the security fencing and impossibility of bringing friends back). The maps also revealed new ideas about processes (the institutionalised ‘signing in/out’) which had not previously been discussed with staff or each other. In Barone and Eisner’s taxonomy, these works demonstrated visual ‘incisiveness’, ‘concision’ and, for the most part, ‘coherence’ (Barone and Eisner 2012 :151), that is, they ‘hang together’ compositionally and stick to the point, but in terms of ‘evocation and illumination (op cit:153), although the embodied nature of the gestural markmaking does evoke consistent meanings, these maps are so complex and layered visually and in the meanings they carry that it is imperative to check interpretations against participant intention.

5.5.3 Participant narratives

In the first session, it emerged from discussion that none of the participants had attended a House Meeting. This they said was because of practical issues: 'not knowing' about them, not being up early enough in the day, or being at college during the day. Talking during creative activities creates a much easier, more casual space for discussion. Sometimes participants comment on their own or another's drawings, and this becomes a prompt for further talk, and comments can be made without eye contact or the focussed attention of discussion. In this way the creative activity facilitates talk when talk might be difficult. However, there also is evidence that absorption in creative activity of itself facilitates a deeper reflection and the development of new ideas¹⁶⁰. Notwithstanding other factors (such as willingness to talk to an outsider), this premise would be supported if the participants were able to articulate their feelings and views more successfully than when they had been asked on previous occasions, as was the case in this instance. The informal discussion gave the first research finding. These younger women did not initially identify themselves as a group, but could agree that, as childless younger women, they did have some needs in common. They would enjoy refuge-based activities exclusively for them, such as 'art' or 'keep fit', when they could play their own choice of music; these should be in the evening, because some of them had daytime college commitments.

During the second discussion 'enhanced' by the more concentrated creative activity, participants identified previously undisclosed reasons why they didn't attend House Meetings, connected with deeper emotions: stress and lack of confidence, and not enjoying what they perceived would be a dull event. They needed their own private space free from the tensions associated with the older residents who were often distressingly 'stressing' about their children. They made positive suggestions, such as, "use the [House] meetings to play your favourite music and talk about it" (Researcher's Notes March 2012).

Each participant was interviewed privately, asking them to 'tell me about your map'. These second set of responses, prompted by and using the artwork, revealed how deeply felt were anxieties about the House Meetings connected with older residents 'stressing'¹⁶¹, which discouraged them from attending. The mapping activity also produced new information about participants' feelings, expressed in a different way. For example, Participant A explained that she had made a 'soft, cosy, pink' space on her map of the laundry room because,

¹⁶⁰ See previous chapter and Treadaway (2009), Hickman (2008), Deaver and McAnliffe (2009) and Sennet (2008).

¹⁶¹ Being volubly anxious, sometimes perceived as aggressive.

I put my washing on late at night and sit there all on my own. It's so cosy with the machine going, and warm. I like the noise of the machine.... I sit on the machine. I like it because I can be on my own, but it's cosy... I don't have to listen to them going on¹⁶²... no one knows I'm there

(Participant A: Video transcript March 2012)

For Participant B English was a new language. Although she had contributed little to the general discussion in the first week and seemed shy, she was enthusiastic about the mapping and became absorbed in the drawing. She used it as a prompt to describe her feelings about the spaces. When asked if she had talked to her mother or staff about her feelings and she confirmed that using the drawing in this way had enabled her to share her feelings and ideas about the spaces for the first time. (The video extract of her describing the map, Hyperlink 2, above, shows both her difficulty with spoken English and her commitment to make herself understood using her map). Participant B was excited by the map making. She asked if she could show it to a House Meeting and encourage other residents to make a map. Staff agreed to call a House Meeting in the evening (instead of the usual daytime) the following week so she could attend. While she and the researcher were planning her presentation, she said that another reason why she hadn't attended a Meeting was because her mother was there and treated her like a child in front of other residents. Presenting the map activity would, she said, "Make my mum think I am adult" (Researcher's Notes). Participant B led the meeting¹⁶³, standing at the front, 'talking through' her map (using it as a prompt and illustration), and encouraging residents to make their own marks on a large wall map which was then left in the lounge to be added to over a week. Attendees were attentive, and most of them participated, following Participant B's instructions. Staff commented that they had characterised Participant B as 'shy and unconfident' and were surprised to see her take this role. She said she was pleased and excited about the event, which had made her feel more confident with other residents.

Although, for the reasons indicated at the start of this section and common in refuge work, follow-up was impossible, it was possible to draw five conclusions from this brief research intervention and interpretations of the creative data produced:

1. that expressive map making can be a valuable research tool in particular contexts, when more conventional methods have failed, facilitating 'text and talk' and drawing out unarticulated feelings;
2. That expressive mapping could in itself produce data susceptible to meaningful interpretation, but this may be 'generative' and authentic rather than generalisable,

¹⁶² 'them going on' refers to older residents 'stressing' in the designated public space, the lounge

¹⁶³ The meeting was attended by about ten residents, including two younger women who didn't usually attend.

3. that the creative research activity itself could be enjoyable and have a positive impact through creating the conditions for creative flow (associated with eudaimonic wellbeing), through its collective nature (making contacts, sharing ideas), and through validation of self (confidence to continue drawing, expressing feelings and ideas);
4. that, coupled with the opportunity to take change-related action in the world outside the creative activity (telling the House Meeting how she felt, leading the meeting activity, being seen as more 'adult' in a challenging social situation), it could help participants position themselves differently within prevailing discourses (as 'artists', as agents of change in the refuge);
5. that both the participants and their audience (staff and other residents) perceived the products of the creative activity (maps) as authentic and valuable, and at least one participant perceived her map as aesthetically satisfying.

In these ways the even this brief creative activity offered the potential for change-related praxis¹⁶⁴.

However, a major criticism of this intervention is that it was too brief and under resourced. For example, the sample was small (eight, although three attended only one session for a variety of reasons), and it was not possible to follow up non-participants or drop outs, or to check my interpretation of the impact of the research on participants by contacting them again after the initial intervention. In terms of feasibility as an evaluation method for small or medium community organisations, there were two issues: firstly, it was a 'labour-intensive' activity, impacting on only a small number of young women, which may not be easily replicable; and second, it required an 'artist-researcher' role to facilitate it and so was less feasible as evaluation for projects without those skills.

5.6 Conclusions: the value and impact of creativity in research and evaluation

The expressive and markmaking activities described here produced creative data which could 'stand alone' for its aesthetic value and its expressive power. Moreover, the process of making this work can be enjoyable and engaging, which has been shown to be crucial for effective evaluations. Even in brief encounters, making this work offers the potential for creative flow, a moment of intense concentration using new materials and skills associated with an increased sense of personal agency and the possibility of re-positioning oneself imaginatively in discourses of self worth and identity. There is also

¹⁶⁴ Although, as Chapter 2 suggests, 'what happens next' for participants is a key (and in this case unexplored) factor.

evidence that absorption in creative activity of itself facilitates deeper reflection and the development of new ideas, and that creative methods might produce different kinds of knowledges, some as new expressions, some immanent in the artwork.

There were a number of findings made in these trials of creative methods which influenced how the research went forward with interpretation of creative data in the rest of the research (described in the next chapter) and in the development of evaluation strategies in Phases 2 and 3:

- A key part of the impact of the various markmaking methods derived from their *embodiment* of feelings. That is, the gestures used to make the marks enacted the feelings represented. Whereas performative enquiry is a relatively recent but well-established qualitative research method (Butler-Kisber 2010; McNiff 1998) it is rarely linked to the gestural performance of markmaking. It is however linked to the construction of identity (Butler 1993) and change: performance helped participants make “significant shifts in [their] perception and attitudes” (McNiff 1998:65). The performative nature of markmaking¹⁶⁵ contributes to the impact of taking part in the evaluation activity itself.
- There are new ethical implications connected with supporting participants in this process, specifically around emotional support and confidentiality;
- The data produced by these activities is complex and layered and sometimes difficult to interpret
- The skills to implement these methods are associated with artists. Practice-led research may not be available for evaluation in small to medium sized non-arts projects. In creative projects this might be determined by the extent to which artists are engaged and participants understand the artistic framework for the activity.

As with any data, the question of interpretation is fraught. Bolt comments that creative data particularly offers layered possibilities, both aesthetic and textual:

Whilst the artwork is immanently articulate and eloquent in its own right, tacit knowing and the generative potential of process have the potential to reveal new insights; both those insights that inform and find a form in artworks and those that can be articulated in words.

(Bolt 2004:7)

However, since the producer of the artwork in this case is the participant, there is a great pull towards asking for participant interpretation of creative data. This is of course

¹⁶⁵ Just as the tentative exploration of collage above suggests that the physical performance of selecting and discarding in problem-solving collage enacts the thinking

congruent with the practice of participatory research, yet implies that the participant is expert in her own markmaking (or whatever method) and that she is able interpret it, which may not be so. It implies that the affect produced in the process of creating the artworks could be both recognised by people experiencing it, *and* articulated in words – which seems counter to recognising the artwork as useful data of itself and belies the ineffable nature of affect. Moreover, since any reading of any text produced as research data is always intersubjective and relations between participant and researcher are by no means intrinsically democratic, an account of the relationship between the researcher and researched and attempted to take affect or at least emotions into account may be all that can give the data a sense of authenticity. An account of the tensions inherent in the difference between the affect produced in the process of generating this data, and the flow of power in the networks of the contexts of its production is essential. This factor is related to willingness or resistance to take part in these methods.

This chapter described key findings in Phase 1 of the research. Since the research was at once an exploration of the impact of creativity and the value of the methods which might be used to recognise it, it formed the basis for the research described in the next chapter. The issues discussed here represent important aspects of the complex context for the research which follows.

CHAPTER 6: the impact of participation and creativity on wellbeing – findings from the fieldwork

Introduction

Chapter 4 explained how the research set out to operationalise the ideas in the first half of this thesis about how people change through their experiences and how knowledge is produced in the context of creative community projects. Chapter 5 examined the role that creativity played in the field research not only in producing change-related impacts but also as a way of expressing that impact. This chapter presents the findings of Phase 1 of the field research. Phase 1 was designed to find evidence for Aim 1 about the nature of impact on participant individual and collective wellbeing and the contexts which might serve to produce it in a range of projects. Because of the importance in this research of epistemologies, findings described in this chapter are viewed both as evidence about impact and as an exploration of methods, of ways of knowing. As the previous chapter explained, although most of the research used conventional qualitative and some quantitative methods, some arts-based, creative methods were developed too. The evidence here, some of it produced using the methods described in the preceding chapter, was then used to shape the trials of evaluation approaches described later in Chapter 7. The findings discussed here are presented in the context of the overall research aim to produce a feasible and useful framework for evaluation.

In summary, it was observed or reported by participants that their participation in creative activities had had a positive impact in all but the briefest encounters. This impact ranged from a few moments of positive recollection of childhood (handling sheep's wool in the Upland Farming project) to a new sense of confidence and the skills to take on running community workshops (for some of the participants 'graduating' from the three-month Carnival Costume Making Course). The first part of this chapter describes these findings.

The fieldwork began to develop an explanatory paradigm based on analysis of this data and further research prompted by that analysis. Evidence described in the second part of this chapter suggests that while participants were being creative in community projects their physical interaction with new materials and technologies produced new embodied knowledges. In the context of a reflective, collective, creative activity these knowledges sometimes led to an opening up of emotional, intellectual or physical space for imagining change. This represents, for some participants, a greater sense of agency and self-worth, often identified by them as improved feelings of wellbeing and widely associated in the literature discussed in Chapter 2 with eudaimonic wellbeing. In projects where

there was also action in the world outside the project informed by these new imaginings, positive impact on eudaimonic wellbeing was intensified, identified through self-report and observation of changed behaviours. The chapter concludes that impact was related to social participation as well as the creation of new symbolic meanings and personal identities (Charny 2011:7). This is a complex interrelationship, where it is not always possible to easily connect cause and effect. Lorimer, writing about research into the cultural geography of affect, could be summing up the complexities of creative projects, when he says that all such researches are 'situated studies' of

sensuous, corporeal, kinaesthetic experience, and mundane
circumstances of materiality, sociability, connection and
association

Lorimer (2008:556)

By this he implicates both the social and non-human world and the way we move through it as subjects for this research. The analyses in this chapter enabled the researcher to identify conditions in projects which maximise positive impact on wellbeing which can be used as a starting point to project evaluation. The chapter has two main parts. The first gives examples from the research about measuring wellbeing and the limitations of both observations and self reporting. It goes on to give examples from the research of key issues, embodiment, materiality, intensity and intention. The second half focuses on four Case Studies leading to the development of a theory of change based on identified conditions for maximising impact.

6.1 Eudaimonic wellbeing: the social connection

Discourses in projects about how desired outcomes are constituted (which may differ between people in projects and over time) also affect the activities they plan and the way they carry them out (McLellan *et al.*, 2012). For example, a project which associates wellbeing with relaxation and pleasure (hedonic wellbeing) will plan to offer different activities from one which associates wellbeing with the development of autonomy and a sense of agency (eudaimonic wellbeing). As Chapter 2 argued (section 2.3), wellbeing is a complex state experienced by individuals but widely recognised as socially situated and linked to enhanced control over one's life, participation and inclusion and, in the sense of 'social wellbeing', with community resilience (Cooke *et al.*, 2011:8). It was very difficult to distinguish hedonic from eudaimonic wellbeing in the research. This partly reflects the interrelationship between the two states in which one may lead to the other and partly because a rigid distinction is not necessarily meaningful. Traditional 'hedonic' measures, such as 'life satisfaction' can themselves be derived from either a hedonic or eudaimonic source or both, while at the same time positive emotions associated with both types of wellbeing influence relevant behaviours. In practice, the research tended to associate hedonic wellbeing with a more fleeting state and eudaimonic with more lasting feelings and behaviours.

Throughout the research the New Economics Foundation indicators for mental wellbeing (MWIA)¹⁶⁶ were used as a 'rough guide' to eudaimonic being, whilst remaining open to new definitions arising from fieldwork. These were chosen because they are evidence-based, derived not only from desk research but also from community profiling and stakeholder and key informant interviews (Cooke et al, 2011:9). They are also in keeping with the UK policy environment, which regards wellbeing as

... a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community.

Foresight, Government Office for Science (2009:10)

In other words, the research needed to look at relationships and networks over time as well as snapshots of feelings and behaviours. The research found that even in brief research encounters, such as the Urban Refuge#2 project described in the previous chapter, where participants could be followed as they took action in the 'real world' (outside the project) eudaimonic impact was always socially situated:

Now my mum see I am adult

(Participant B, Urban Refuge#2 after leading a workshop at a House Meeting where she lives)

I hadn't really been to a gig before...I could see that people who knew me in school could see me doing those...cool things...

(RYA Film Club member Participant#3 after creating a live arts performance at a music event)

Now I've done that, been to that, it made me think, I could go to the Magic Circle now, because I'd done that, it raised my expectations of things

(RYA Film Club member Participant #2 after creating a live arts performance at a music event)

I couldn't believe that people not from my culture understood my film and thought it was good... professional...it was an amazing feeling and I think that's what gave me the courage to talk about it [forced marriage] with my parents and other people, give talks and all that

¹⁶⁶ NEF: Mental Wellbeing Assessment Indicators (2011)

(Woman describing impact of making and showing a video which she valued in a group art exhibition and being highly praised on the opening night, Long Interview#1)

The CCMC offered a strong example of the production of eudaimonic wellbeing as connected with the web of relationships and creative experiences it created over the months. Participants identified these aspects of the project as producing a greater sense of agency:

The creative processes determined teamwork,

you had to work together to get it done in time ... you needed each other to bounce your ideas off – and hold the other end of the hoops!

(CCMC Participant informal discussion at community workshop June 2011)

but the prior friendship of neighbours was crucial:

I wouldn't of come without she made me, but now we're like a team, no one can stop us!

(Participant in CCMC informal discussion August 2011)

The following account told in a recorded interview in a private session during the CCMC Focus Group illustrated the social situated nature of the impact of participation in a creative project and of eudaimonic wellbeing. It was a valuable story for the research as it showed how taking part in a collective creative activity could contribute to the development of community cohesion, what Forrest and Kearns (2000) define as the key domain of effective informal social control. It was told by a participant from an area identified as high in indices of multiple deprivations where vandalism on the housing estate was common. This 32-year-old woman was a 100% attendee at the CCMC and following it co-ran a community workshop making costumes with local children. This, she said, was her first ever paid employment:

Participant: "Erm doing the, having support and being shown and not being expected to do, to be perfect at everything, give us the confidence to, like standing up to people with racism and anti-social behaviour. The group had one situation where there was a group of girls came into one of our club – groups, and er... (laughs) we had to er address the behaviour and the graffiti they

did all over the phone box ... gave us the confidence to actually make them clean that mess up..."

Researcher: "You took a bucket of water out there"

Participant: "Took a bucket of water and a sponge and told them to clean it up (laughs)"

Researcher: "And did they?"

Participant: "They did, and they actually even apologised afterwards (pause)"

Researcher: "And they were tough kids?"

Participant: "They *were* tough kids, and they *were* families that are known round our way and a lot of people wouldn't even stand up to them... but it give us the confidence to actually do that... (pause) "

Researcher: "Did it change them?"

Participant: "Erm, It just showed them that we weren't people to be pushed around and bossed, we weren't going to stand around for any of type of behaviour like that, 'cos it just weren't right...(pause)

Researcher: (inaudible prompt)

Participant: "... the following fortnight they came back and they actually joined in the group and they enjoyed it and realised that we were there to get *them* off the streets and give them something to do" . (End of recording)

Transcript of interview Participant #2 CCMC Focus Group Morning

It is possible to make inferences about *what* has created this impact. The participant ascribes her increased confidence to two aspects of the project: in her recorded story she refers to the *ethos* (supportive teaching style and relationships) of the sessions, "having support and being shown and not being expected to do, to be perfect at everything" and in discussion to the '*real world*' nature of the project activity, and the physical presence of people she regarded as supportive, "I knew I they [staff and other volunteers] would back me up". She went on to say in the same interview that the experience of making and performing in costumes which gained the approval of her community, and which she felt were "impressive" (that is, were aesthetically satisfying as well as practical) made her feel:

"It was great, exciting...it give me a feeling I could do it myself".

The theme of ethos – not being expected to be perfect' and the exigencies of real, urgent preparation of artwork for a public event runs throughout participant reports. For example, Long Interview#2:

It was unusual that a 17 year old was allowed to...you get all sorts of people from all sorts of walks of life and backgrounds in the arts... the creative skills is half what you need, but interest in people is too... I was put in a position of having to learn very quickly... I couldn't always ask questions so I had to do it without asking, straight away

He describes going on to become a leader of creative activities in a youth arts centre and identifies the importance of being and thinking creatively as an artist in this process:

That was important that I could use my own creativity and imagination at the same time as the young people could use theirs

(Long Interview#2 Full transcript in Appendix D)

6.2 Observing and reporting wellbeing

Research contact duration was very varied, but in some cases (RYA, CCMC, Godiva Awakes!) at least a year, and even in shorter relationships this was sometimes extended. For example, although the main research in the Childrens Centre was three days intense activity followed a week later by a few hours presenting, a Focus Group was convened three months later with three of the original ten participants. In the Upland Farmers' project six months after contact with participants had ceased, an extended interview with the project manager provided useful reflection. These research periods gave the opportunity to observe changes in feelings and behaviours over time.

A sense of wellbeing was recognised by the research as being an ineffable affect and therefore difficult to represent except through self-reporting which has a particular strength situated critically in qualitative research but a more limited value for evaluation. For this reason researcher observations were confined to observable changed behaviours, from which a causal link could reasonably be inferred. Sometimes reports about participants' changed behaviours from other relevant people, such as project staff, teachers or volunteers were seen as corroborating or providing evidence when participants were not available. Even so, the researcher was reluctant to make judgements about hedonic wellbeing in the absence of identifiable changed behaviours. Therefore, in keeping with the research's Action Research stance, the iterative loop of checking findings with participants continued throughout wherever possible¹⁶⁷. The presence of positive impact on wellbeing was identified in these ways in the projects:

6.2.1 Participant self-report

1. Participants reported feelings associated with hedonic wellbeing and ascribed them to participation in the activity (such as pleasure, happiness, relaxation, joy, excitement)

¹⁶⁷ Some contact was too fleeting. For example, working with transient populations in the refuges, working with the passing public in the UFW project.

2. Participants reported feelings associated with eudaimonic wellbeing and ascribed them to participation in the activity (such as raised self-esteem, social confidence, disturbance or discomfort, thinking more deeply or in new ways, becoming more articulate, feeling listened to, feeling respected, feeling included, feeling able to take action in the world)
3. Participants reported changed behaviours associated with eudaimonic wellbeing (such as speaking more confidently in public or groups, being pro-active in community activities or volunteering, applying for paid work, training or further education courses, achieving ambitions in a range of contexts, such as work, family, self-expression)

6.2.2 Researcher observations

1. Researcher observed behaviours associated with hedonic wellbeing: participants chose to take part or return to the activity, worked with concentration or absorption, showed pleasure in their artwork or the process by smiling, showing it to others, asking to keep it.
2. Researcher observed behaviours associated with eudaimonic wellbeing: participants showed greater confidence and sense of agency within and outside the project by taking new actions (such as speaking more confidently in public or groups, making suggestions, being pro-active in community activities or volunteering).

This data was produced as completed questionnaires, interview transcripts or researcher observation notes, creative artworks expressing feelings over time, notes of discussions including focus groups. . Chapter 4 explained in more detail, this was analysed thematically, looking for themes congruent with the initial interviews in the scoping phase and the emergence of new themes. Statements and researcher observations were analysed for evidence of the feelings and behaviours described above and the next chapter describes how creative data was analysed.

Table 11, below, presents a summary of these findings which are elaborated in more detail in the sections which follow.

Table 11 Methods used to identify improved wellbeing (numbers refer to numbers of participants involved in each part of the research who were associated with improved wellbeing using the methods described in this Chapter. For example, in the column headed 'Researcher Findings Hedonic', '6/12 participant observation' means that, using the criteria described above, six people out of 12 observed were associated by the researcher with improved hedonic wellbeing. Figures in brackets mean that a smaller number took part in the method specified)

| Project name | Self report Hedonic | Self report Eudaimonic | Researcher findings Hedonic | Researcher findings Eudaimonic | Main creative activity in project |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| Initial interviews | 5/5 | 5/5 | n/a | n/a | Visual arts, performance, video, digital |
| Urban Refuge #1 | 8/12 discussion Focus Group | 0/12 Informal interviews | 6/12 Participant observation Staff report | n/a | Body mapping, visual arts |
| Urban Refuge #2 | 7/8 Informal Interview Discussion | 1/8 Video interview | 4/8 Participant observation; Staff report | 2 /8 Observation Staff report | Visual mapping |
| Childrens Centre | 7/10 Informal int discussion questionnaire Focus Group, video interviews | 3/10 Interview, Discussion questionnaire , Video interviews Focus Group | 7/10 Participant observation Staff report | 3/10 Observation Staff report Focus Group | Body mapping, visual arts |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | 16/16 Informal interviews discussion questionnaire, creative methods | 12/16 Informal interviews discussion questionnaire Focus Group (7) Creative methods | 16/16 Participant observation Staff report Creative methods | 9/16 Participant observation Staff report Questionnaire Focus Group (7) | Making /designing costumes, performance |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | 7/10 Informal interviews Video Diaries Creative methods Discussion Focus Group (4) | 5/10 (5/5 still in project) Informal interview Video Diaries Creative methods Discussion Focus Group (4) | 7/10 Participant observation Staff report Creative methods | 5/10 (5/5 still in project) Particip obs Staff report Creative methods | Digital media, video, sound making, VJ performance |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | 4/15 discussion | 0/15 No follow-up | 4/15 observation | 0/15 | Pottery, storytelling, crafts |
| Godiva Awakes!& Home-coming | Audiences 277/365 52/63 Questionnaire, online survey | n/a | n/a | n/a | Audience for public arts spectacle & performance |

6.3 Positive impact and different kinds of intensity

Positive impact on wellbeing was produced in the briefest of creative activities. Nevertheless, impact was likely to be greater in longer projects where the conditions for creative flow – particularly intensity, absorption and striving – prevailed. So, for example, the RYA Film Club experience of working together on skills-based creative making for several months culminating in an intense moment of creative absorption was transformatory. Case Study 2 below demonstrates this in detail. Similarly, in the shorter but highly intense creative activity of the Childrens Centre (Case Study 1 below), participants implicated both the creative process and the real world action as leading to demonstrable eudaimonic wellbeing. Whereas, as Case Study 3 shows, describing a brief UFW event with poor conditions for creative flow, impact on wellbeing was fleeting.

Positive impact was experienced by a range of participants. For example, among others, teenage boys living in a rural area, adult women from an urban ‘area of multiple deprivation’, members of the public passing through a tourism event, women from many cultures and languages living in refuges, schoolchildren. This increased sense of agency was often couched in terms of raised aspirations by participants:

“It has given me confident to go out and get a job. I would like to go to collage and do art and desing.”

“To get a job in working with kids or somethink in that way”

“Performing in carnival has given me faith that I can do more. I am ~~going~~ hoping to do more performance work”

“doing all this will help me in making a better life for me and kids, and hope to get job ☺”

From participants’ ‘confidential postcards’ at the CCMC Focus group

Positive impact was produced within different kinds of arts genres. For example, by participation in performance, film and music making, craft, visual arts such as markmaking and collage. A more significant factor than genre in maximising the potential for positive impact on wellbeing was the experience of intensity of effort¹⁶⁸. For example, in the Film Club VJ night, the boys experienced both aesthetic pressure (their own desires) and social pressure (from peer groups they aspired to) to produce continual fast moving artwork: “The worst thing is the screen must never go blank” (Participant #4 Film Club VJ night). Intensity of effort was associated with striving to produce aesthetic excellence or with the theme of the

¹⁶⁸ The aspect of the Upland Farmers project referred to here was a casual drop-in with little effort required.

work. Impact was greater where both were present¹⁶⁹. This was evident particularly in the Urban Refuge#2 project, described in Case Study 1 below, when the subject matter was painful and the need to convey it to professionals urgent and intense. Nonetheless, participants identified the intense creative activity as an essential part of this process. Speaking at the conference was identified as the most transformatory activity, leading to a greater sense of agency and demonstrable changed behaviour – for example, setting up their own art group for others at the Centre – but, they “probably wouldn’t of done it” without the three half day creative activities beforehand.

In another example of the interrelationship between intensity of aesthetic experience and of theme (aesthetic content), Interviewee Long#1 asked that her artwork (a short film) be shared in this thesis (it is available at Hyperlink 3, below). This request related to her belief that the personal significance of her artwork contributed to the intensity of the creative experience and consequent impact. She specifically suggested that the film be part of this discussion, saying,

I had a definite idea in mind from the start, the subject meant so much to me that making the film just happened...I loved doing it. They need to see how important the subject was to me *and* how much I enjoyed making the film and how that was all mixed in.

(Interviewee Long #1, third interview, August 2011).

[Participant's Artwork](#)
Hyperlink 3 right click over link while
online

However, this same participant was at pains to also relate the changes she experienced to intensity of relationships within the group of participants. She described in detail the difficult and challenging relationships within the group of ten inexperienced women making individual artwork for a group show over a year. She ascribed some of this to the fact that many of them were making work with intensely personal relevance, and some to the challenge of taking responsibility for the organisational aspects of the project in a democratic fashion:

¹⁶⁹ For example, the Urban Refuge#1 project the creative activity lasted only half a day, but the theme of personal experience was intense and impact was reported. In this project participants’ artwork was displayed at a football ground. The researcher was able to observe great pleasure this gave the six participants who attended the exhibition, but not to follow-up on eudaimonic wellbeing changes or meet the other participants. Similarly in the Urban Refuge #2, activity was brief (three two hour sessions) but the theme intense (deep feelings about negotiating living space). In this project two participants returned to deliver their own creative activity at a House Meeting, so it was possible to observe them both, but only hear self-report from one. Whereas, in the RYA there was opportunity for both creative intensity, effort and absorption and intensity of theme

There was segregation in the group; it was split because certain people felt they weren't included in decisions, but on a practical basis the group was meeting and absent people – decisions had to be made. There was lack of communication and miscommunication.... It didn't sit comfortably with some people, the move to taking responsibility for ourselves...

It was intense, but everybody had a shared vision, we were inspired by our previous experiences and we all really wanted to do this art show. We were also making art about very personal things, I think that had an impact, we were exposing ourselves too. We were constantly learning new things, it was an intense learning journey but we were working towards our goal

She explained that the sense of striving towards aesthetic excellence was another factor in the intensity of experience but again, also in creating impact:

It wasn't just a grass-roots community project that could be shown in a school hall or community hall or something, we were lifted beyond that, lifted higher than that by attaching those artists to us and we had all the right tools and equipment to participate actively – not like sitting listening to a lecture or something, we did it so it seemed more real, it upped the game for us – so I think that's why it was more intense, and it wasn't just like painting a picture either...

...It was an *Arts Council* [emphasis] project, there was expertise, it all fed into what we wanted to achieve and we got that knowledge from all these experts. It felt serious, professional, a professional standard thing, status-driven...

...Because the expectation was so high I think there was also frustration; when you compared your work with a registered artist it seemed nothing. I think we got more comfortable over time when we got more skills.

An extract from the video of this second interview can be accessed at [Hyperlink 4](#) (below). The clip shows a point where the researcher asked an additional question relating to 'intensity of process'. This question arose from the interviewee's repeated references in the first interview to how 'intense' the process had been.

[Extract from Long Interview # 1](#)

Hyperlink 4 right click over link while online

When this participant says “Making this film changed my life” she is referring also to a series of subsequent experiences which were challenging, inspiring and rewarding and which enabled her to reposition herself in discourses about herself as a subject. Her first step was to tell her parents how she felt about the subject of the film, her forced marriage, and then to go on to become a speaker at community events and from there become confident enough to apply for a secure her first job, promotion and so on. That this is a well-worn narrative does not detract from its authenticity. This narrative was clearly part of the process of change itself. What is particularly interesting about this, and some of the other accounts above, is the participant insistence on the interrelationship between aesthetic effort or achievement and the social aspects of participation.

These findings indicated that the impact of creativity in projects is not uniform. Rather, it is created on a multi-dimensional continuum from a momentary flush of pleasure or sense of hedonic wellbeing to a life-changing and sometimes difficult re-positioning. Where participants identified increased wellbeing it was not necessarily a sudden or transformatory change, but partial, incremental, cumulative and non-linear.

However, conditions which maximised this change were associated with the coming together of new understandings (produced by creative absorption) in a reflective, collective context *and* taking action in the world outside the project. In the projects studied in this research, such action could be as simple as an exhibition or performance of artwork or a much deeper engagement in community activities¹⁷⁰.

In the shortest research encounters it was of course impossible to assess the durability of any impact. In longer relationships it was possible to conclude that impact had endured for a matter of the weeks or months of the research contact. Participants, either looking back on previous experience over several years, or looking ahead, were often confident that impact was, or could be, much longer term, and even sometimes life changing. These subjective feelings were hard to evaluate, although they did contribute to a sense of the value of participation for participants. In terms of their usefulness to the participants they often seemed to become part of a positive narrative about personal change, which in itself contributed to a greater sense of wellbeing. In fact, during this largely (but not entirely) participatory research, focussed as it was on feasible evaluation strategies as well as creativity, the impact of taking part in the reflective process itself became apparent. The research suggested that being able to reflect on past experience was a

¹⁷⁰ This was so for all the projects in Table 12 except the Upland Farmers project.

skill that developed with practice over time, and doing so, in the collective context of a project evaluation, had its own positive impact on participants' wellbeing¹⁷¹.

No 'uncomplicated' negative impact was associated with participation in creative activities by participants, although what did emerge was how complex that impact might be. For example, there were second-hand reports (by participants) that other participants 'couldn't take themselves seriously enough as artists' to participate fully in creative processes, and others for whom the democratic participation process was more challenging than beneficial (Long#1 Interview Appendix B).

6.4 Change-related praxis: the role of creativity and participation¹⁷²

Research findings based on both self-reporting and researcher observation suggested that creativity had the potential to play a key role in a range of changes from greater confidence to speak up in a small project group through presenting at a large conference to successfully applying for a job¹⁷³. These findings were associated with the observation that artist-led creative experience in projects had the potential to offer striving for aesthetic excellence characteristic of artists' practice along with risk-taking, open-endedness and commitment to embodied knowledges (Matarasso 2007:457)¹⁷⁴. For example, participants in the CCMC (a 16 week course to teach 16-58 year old women how to make and teach the making of carnival costumes) learnt craft making skills through imitation and doing, frequently re-doing and improving work which was sometimes difficult. The imaginative framework of the project was the history of Carnival Mas and current Trinidadian carnivals. Their community significance was frequently discussed by artists who invited participants to make parallels with their own communities. There was no curriculum, external qualifications or sense of achievement of defined skill sets. Participants were encouraged to accept that they were "all artists now"¹⁷⁵. Towards the end of the course period, artists and participants planned community workshops which were based on participants' acquired skills, friendship groups and levels of confidence. The collective aspect of these creative experiences indicated a link to collective change which is often so elusive and remains difficult to evidence. The experiences these practices offered to participants enabled repositioning through new understandings and action in the world associated with Freire's

¹⁷¹ Chapter 7 discusses this circular aspect of reflective practice in relation to evaluation in more detail.

¹⁷² "...praxis, a constant interplay between theory, ideas and actions that derive from them and in turn influence their development" (Maher 1987:94 in Ryan 2001:68)

¹⁷³ These examples respectively from the RYA project, the Childrens Centre project and initial Interviews Long# 1,2,3,5.

¹⁷⁴ This was not observed in the non-artist-led activity in the Upland Farmers project, although there was hedonic impact as the discussion later in this chapter points out.

¹⁷⁵ Comment from Participant#2 at end of final session.

transformatory praxis even when radical action was not present. The older women in the group contrasted their sense of becoming 'an artist' in the space of the Daimler Building with their roles at home as 'mum', emphasising and perhaps therefore also defending this new role by pointing out how unsafe the building would be for small children and how they would be "hampered" by them. By creating 'local or temporary identities' (Rorty 1991), by 'making strange' (Mulvey 1991), the creative intervention challenges the normative power of performativity and disturbed conventional narratives, making space for this new one.

Some of these changes were recorded in a baseline survey, prepared jointly with participants at the start of the course and repeated towards the end. Appendix D has a detailed breakdown of this survey. Key findings are summarised here (Figures give examples of comments with images from the course):

At the start of the course only 5 people out of 17 (29.4%) felt very confident or fairly confident about their existing making or art skills; only 5 felt very confident or fairly confident about teaching others; and only 4 (25.5%) people felt fairly confident about running a group (no one felt *very* confident). Moreover, 4 people felt very or fairly *un*confident about their making and art skills; 7 (41%) felt very or fairly *un*confident about teaching others *and* running a group.

By the end of the course most people, 13 out of 15 (86%), felt very or fairly confident about their making or art skills and no one felt *un*confident about them. No one felt *un*confident about teaching others and only one (6.6%) felt fairly *un*confident, whereas ten people (66.6%) felt fairly or very confident about teaching. Two people still felt very *un*confident about running a group, but these were both under 16 year olds who were being trained only to support a group, and ten (66%) felt fairly confident and one felt very confident (totalling 73.3%).

The most striking change was in levels of confidence about *teaching* practical skills, which increased from 6 out of 17 (35%) to 13 out 15 (86.6%) by the end. At the start, seven people (41%) felt that they were 'not good' at teaching practical skills and by the end this had dropped to one. The number of people feeling 'good at' designing rose slightly (64.7% to 86.6%), those who felt 'not good' at it dropped from 17.6% to 13.3% - but these were on very low figures (3/17 and 2/15).

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Figure 18 'It's not just how to do it, it's how to do it safely with a load of kids': participant comment from CCMC 'baseline survey re-visited', March 2012, a reminder of the broad skills-learning and confidence-raising outcomes of this predominantly creative course and the role of 'real world' activity in producing these impacts.

There were three main areas of concern at the start of the course: 'not being artistic enough' (52.9%), 'learning difficult practical skills' and 'teaching a group' (both 47%). By the end of the course people clearly felt more confident about learning practical skills since half as many ticked it (down from 8 to 4), with concerns about teaching dropped to 5 from 8. Although there was still some reluctance to claim confidence about 'being artistic enough' – with 41% still listing it as a concern, all nervousness had lessened, so that whereas at the start there were 42 ticks in this question, by the end the overall figure had nearly halved to 23. By the end, no one was worried about using new materials (down from 29.4%) and only 3 people worried about meeting new people (down from 8, i.e. down to 17.6% from 47%).

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Figure 19 'My confidence was on the floor when I started, I never thought I'd be able to do this': participant comment from CCMC 'baseline survey re-visited' , March 2012, a reminder that participants' prior experiences, self-esteem and skills, which are seldom explored in depth by projects, are significant in shaping impact. This participant described a 'journey' of significant positive personal change which she ascribed to participation.

There were two unexpected outcomes which participants recognised at the end of the course – that the course was fun and that it provided valued quality time away from children / for themselves (see Figure 20, below). This finding was checked through discussion and confirmed at several points in the course by several participants. Moreover, there was a large number of comments situating impact firmly in an intersubjective context, relating it to improved relationships. Three people said the course had improved relationships at home – two of these were a mother and daughter both on the course. These respectively commented that it had been a “great shared experience” and “mum knows I'm doing something good”. Five out of 15 (33%) said that attending the course had a positive impact on their activities with their own children. It is worth noting that none of these were anticipated impacts at the start of the course (nor were impact on school or work life or further training or work, below).

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Figure 20 'The best thing for me is it's 'me' time, just for me. I really look forward to coming here': participant comment from CCMC 'baseline survey re-visited', March 2012, an unexpected positive outcome of the project was to create a dedicated time and space for its female participants. It was a reminder that participants' lives, which are seldom explored in depth by projects, are significant in shaping impact.

Seven out of 15 (46.6%) said that attending had a positive impact on their volunteering in the community – comments were that it 'helped with opportunities to volunteer' and 'I already volunteered, but I introduced a type of journal' (a technique on the Course). This last comment suggests that further investigation into depth of engagement might have revealed unexpected details.

Three people said that attending had a positive impact on their work or school life - two comments identified specific benefits: "I connected with one of my teachers about this project"; "this course has helped me in my work as I am now delivering workshops for my community".

Running the community workshops was a demanding, intimidating and risky enterprise for participants (see Figures 18, above, and 21, below) and success would be measured in terms of collective outcomes (costumes made to the satisfaction of workshop participants and the community). Moreover, these outward-looking artist-led practices

can drive the 'ever-present curiosity'¹⁷⁶ which Freire identified as essential for dialogue beyond participants' immediate experience. This stepping away from the primacy of experience to take a wider view of its context, although not necessarily political in terms of producing structural analyses is nevertheless essential to create the conditions for change-related praxis¹⁷⁷. The collective aspect of much creative experience in the projects offered that link to collective change which is often so elusive and remains difficult to evidence.

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Figure 21 'I feel such a sense of achievement that I'm actually running a group. I never really believed I could do it': participant comment from CCMC 'baseline survey re-visited', March 2012, was a reminder of the highly positive impact of 'real world' activity.

The next sections explore in ANT terms both the *idea* of aesthetic commitment and the idea that the materials and technologies of making were actants in the networks of the projects and how they contributed to determining the meanings ascribed to occurrences (Callon 1986; Latour 1987; Clarke 2008).¹⁷⁸ They consider findings related

¹⁷⁶ Macedo in Freire (1970:19)

¹⁷⁷ The term coined in Chapter 3 (section 3.9) to represent the partial and incremental nature of the changes observed in this research.

¹⁷⁸ An interesting comment of the significance of the idea as an actant is suggested by White (2014) discussing the UK artist Antony Gormley's sculpture, *The Angel of the North* in the light of an unpublished paper by PhD student M Blackman (Durham University). White writes: "Gormley's assertion back then that the Angel would become a "reservoir for feelings" seems borne out in Blackman's findings. Her door-to-door survey of 300 locals reveals a possible correlation between liking the sculpture and general life satisfaction, amounting to a 10% appreciable difference in well-being among the Angel's fans in deprived areas. 72% of those interviewed reported "feeling good" whenever they saw the Angel, and 89% considered it had made Gateshead a distinctive place. Likert-scale responses reveal that older age groups are more emotionally attached to the sculpture, but younger people are more interactive in their engagement with it". White, M (2014)Blog Posted on [JUNE 3](#),

to the way relationships and discourses shaped what happened in the projects. Relationships between people and things in the network were the crucible for impact, just as relationships are central to Freire's idea of dialogic pedagogy, which is underpinned by collectivity and respect: "Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect" (Smith 2002).

6.5 Further evidence on embodiment and materiality

In order to follow up the theme from the initial interviews that embodied experiences and encounters with new materials and technologies were highly significant in promoting change, participants in some projects¹⁷⁹ were asked specifically to reflect on the embodied nature of the creative experience, since the research theoretical framework suggested that the production of new embodied knowledges was a major factor in producing change. Participants in Children's Centre (three participants; large-scale body mapping using chalk pastels), RYA project (four participants; Video Jockeying using digital projection and filming equipment), CCMC (6 participants; craft making and design, using a mix of scrap and professional materials and techniques) were asked in informal interviews or group discussion to reflect on this¹⁸⁰. Participants recognised that the embodied nature of the creative activity – the physical qualities of materials or equipment and their own interaction with them - was significant in producing impact. For example, several participants in the Childrens Centre project referred to the smooth texture and bright colours of the artist-quality pastels and linked the activity to extended thinking time:

You can make it look real nice real easy...I liked the sound it made, I had that in my head all night¹⁸¹... [...] ... the colours really looked good, and like ... well, that orange was like exactly how I felt and that stuck in my head too

(Participant#3, Childrens Centre Focus Group September 2012)

2014JUNE 3, 2014 <http://centreformedicalhumanities.org/angel-of-the-north-promotes-well-being-and-cheaper-bread/>

¹⁷⁹ This was a pragmatic choice based on availability of participants.

¹⁸⁰ Initially the questions were, 'How did you feel when you were... [Activity]?' and 'What difference did it make to how you felt that you were ..[activity] - would you have felt that like without ..[activity] ?'. All participants asked were generally positive about the embodied aspect of activities, but none were able at first to answer this question in greater detail than to say that they 'liked' the physical activity or it was 'fun'. Asking the question more specifically (for example, 'What did the pastels feel like in your hand?,' 'Was it difficult to hold the tripod' produced more detailed reflection.

¹⁸¹ The soundtrack of the video extract in Chapter 4 of the RYA expressive timeline (Hyperlink 1) demonstrates this sound!

Participants from both the CCMC and RYA referred positively to the physicality of handling new materials and new technologies. For example, “trying so many different materials...I didn’t realise there were so many different things ...you could do things with all those materials, I’ll never throw anything away again” (Participant #6 CCMC), “using the real tools, you get much better results and you can see it’s going to be different...we couldn’t of made those bodices last year without that stuff” (Participant#3 CCMC), “when I got to use the really big camera that’s when I really got ... it made me feel cool using that camera” (Participant’2 RYA).

Meanwhile, in keeping with the research’s ANT approach, participant observations included detailed notes on the materiality of venues, equipment and craft materials. For example, in a youth arts performance project rehearsal day in April 2011 (part of *Godiva Awakes!*) participants worked in their friendship groups. However, when asked to perform using a new range of instruments, in order to play large, unstable drums, participants (some with marked reluctance) had to mix in new groupings and stand alongside strangers.

The CCMC took place in a building which had originally been a factory warehouse, on a small industrial estate near the Coventry canal. This building and its environs, redolent of Coventry’s manufacturing past, was ascribed a significance by participants and project staff which arguably associated it with serious engineering and commercial endeavour. It was referred to by participants and project staff as ‘The Daimler Building’ (associating it Coventry’s car industry). In informal discussions, participants linked the building with one of the major positive values participating carried for them – the opportunity to have ‘me time’ away from the demands of family: “you couldn’t bring the kids here anyway, it’s too dangerous” (CCMC Participant #6, informal discussion, March 2012). Younger participants contrasted the workspace with school¹⁸². The building functioned both as a reinforcement of the sense of ‘making strange’, excitement and adventure which some participants associated with the course, and with ‘not home’ or ‘not school’¹⁸³. For the first few weeks materials used were mainly scrap and recycled. In week four, however, a new material (a flexible material that could be fixed into shapes through heat) was introduced with much ceremony¹⁸⁴ by one of the artists and presented to the group as a professional

¹⁸² Similarly, in the RYA, Film Club met in the ‘Green Room’ (artists’ dressing room) of the community centre theatre, usually out of bounds for pupils and a source of great satisfaction to participants, contributing to a pleasing sense of difference about the activity and themselves as participants in it.

¹⁸³ The use of place in this points towards a valuable critique of Freire’s binary opposition of ‘liberation/domestication’ in the concept of transformatory praxis. As well as undoubtedly contributing to the creation of *unheimlich*, the ‘making different’ challenge of art, the admission of participants to the ‘secret’ place of professionals also implicitly valorises artists/professionals, and rejects the knowledges, discourse and skills of participants, as the notion of ‘domestication’ implicitly rejects the discourses of women in Freire’s model (Clarke 2002).

¹⁸⁴ One of few occasions when everyone was called to attention as a whole group.

material which would 'lift' their work significantly. The material also changed relationships in the group through demanding a new physical positioning of participants around a table in order to use it. In ANT terms this material became another actant in the network of the group. It became the gatekeeper of two key discourses: firstly that there are different roles, 'amateur' (participants) and 'professional' (artists), the latter having the ability to move between the two worlds of 'art' and 'community art' carrying the elusive and unexplained standard of aesthetic excellence; and second, a deficit model which confirmed participants in need of such expert help.

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Figure 22 'I've used so many new materials, I'll never throw anything away again. It's amazing how ordinary things can look so beautiful when you know how to do it': participant comment from CCMC 'baseline survey re-visited', March 2012. Participants were taught how to use professional arts materials and tools and to manipulate recycled materials using professional techniques. The materials themselves became 'actants' in the ANT sense in the network of the course, helping shape social relations such as collaborative working, influencing design and aesthetics and highlighting skills differentials.

Positive psychology researcher Ilona Boniwell argues that not only do "positive emotions enhance resilience", but that they are associated with extended thinking time, openness and creativity (Boniwell 2006:18). This suggests a definite link with research into the impact of creativity discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.5), for which similar claims are made. Almost all

participants in the current research reported pleasure in the embodied creative activities at some point, however this was complex. That is, findings, particularly those based on reflections on past experiences or where the research contact or project was longer (at least over a week), suggested that 'creative challenge' within an imaginative aesthetic framework was key. This was associated with effort, striving and sometimes disturbance and emotional discomfort¹⁸⁵. Even in fairly brief creative activities effort and challenge were evident from observations and self-report¹⁸⁶. This suggested that the impacts of being creative in a project (such as extended thinking time) were not connected entirely with the fact that being creative was pleasurable.

However, a significant number of respondents also talked about having felt frustrated or 'stressed' at some point (usually when learning to handle new materials or equipment for the first time)¹⁸⁷. For example,

I was really stressing when I was using the glue gun at first, wasn't I? I burnt myself that many times I nearly chucked it across the room
(Participant #2 CCMC September 2012 Discussion)

Others said that they would not have felt so positive about their overall project experience or would not have gone on to tackle more challenging tasks *without* the embodied creative activity. For example, as mentioned above, participants in the Childrens Centre project said that they would not have had the confidence to present their ideas to a conference of professionals without having first enjoyed and felt successful in the body mapping activity:

What makes me feel so good about myself now is that I stood up in that conference, but I wouldn't of done that at all if we hadn't of made the big drawing first...I wouldn't even of stayed... except I really liked doing it once I'd started

(Participant#1, Childrens Centre Focus Group September 2012)

This implies a close interrelationship between creative and social participation, not so much a hierarchy of impact but an intertwined journey towards change.

¹⁸⁵ For example, the CCMC (over 12 months) , RYA (nine months) and the initial interviews all reflected or reported periods of discomfort and disturbance as part of the experience of participation in creative projects.

¹⁸⁶ For example, in the Refuges and the Childrens Centre projects when participants worked with intense concentration and often in silence "trying to get it right" (Participant # 3, informal interview day two, Childrens Centre, .April 2012)

¹⁸⁷ None of the Childrens Centre respondents made comments about the struggle to 'master' materials or equipment. This may have reflected the less skilled and much briefer nature of the activity. Three from the RYA and three from the CCMC, much more skills-based projects, did.

6.6 How people and projects are positioned by discourses

Two complex factors emerged over time during Phase 1 as the most significant in a range of conditions. They are both connected with hegemonic discourses and their impact on project structure and the creation of symbolic meanings. The first finding was about how projects are conceived, perceived and planned¹⁸⁸:

1. Positive impact was produced whether creative activities were positioned as a means to engage attention, to enable participants to express themselves, or to produce extrinsic goals such as improving eudaimonic wellbeing by building confidence through developing a more powerful sense of self. Nevertheless, experiences framed and planned as the latter produced greater impact on eudaimonic wellbeing.

The second was concerned with how participants are positioned in projects by its texts, practices and relationships:

2. The way participants were positioned within a project, for example, as needy or competent, and the perhaps consequent extent to which they were enabled to exercise participatory democratic control of organisational issues, or the extent to which they exercised control over the aesthetic processes, had an effect on the potential of the project to create impact. However, participation in creative flow – itself related to striving for aesthetic excellence – had a more significant effect on impact than either of these.

The roles intended for creativity and participation in the production of impact affected how activities were structured, how they were framed within project discourses, and the stories told about them by a range of people, inside and outside the project itself. The research found that the power to determine the nature of key experiences (extent and type of participation, intensity of creativity, and degree of collectivity) was exercised or negotiated to a greater or lesser extent by *everyone* in the project in different circumstances and over time. For example, an examination of texts, practices and relationships in the early stages of projects showed that the balance of power lay with funders and project managers, to determine aims, target geographical boundaries, recruitment strategies, budgets, timescales etc. At a later stage, it was sometimes observed that artists had greater influence over the form and content of artworks, in negotiation with managers and participants; participants in some projects had greater power in determining organisational issues such as meeting times, or aesthetic content later in the project in negotiation with artists and each other, and

¹⁸⁸ This finding was produced from a range of sources over time, including project documents, interviews with funders, staff and participants, discussions and focus groups. Data about impact was through participant observations, interviews, questionnaires, creative methods.

so on. Generally, however, participants had the least access to determine structures and aesthetic outputs in a project, particularly since they were (in this research) seldom included in project planning¹⁸⁹.

Case Study 6.1, below, resonates with the critiques of participatory practice raised by Cooke and Kothari (2001) and was the first indication in the research that participation and power can be in very different relationships in projects with profound effect.

¹⁸⁹ These findings are tempered by the fact that participants are not a homogeneous group (McLellan *et al.*, 2012), but individuals interact with project activity and people in various and context-specific ways.

Box 5 Case Study 6.6.1: refusing the offer

The issue of who has the power to determine the dominant discourse at any time during a project surfaced early on in the research during the scoping phase. When potential research sites were approached, initial contact was with staff members who might be regarded as 'gatekeepers' of organisational discourse¹. Two projects, both participant-led (that is, with a high level of participant organisational control) rejected the research: these were the only fully participant-led projects in the research.

The first was a rural project run by and for people who had been in touch with the mental health care system. They explained that it was important for them to create and have control over their own interpretation of their project. Interestingly, this was also the only participant-led project with a strong, overt ethos to resist the deficit model implicit in most community projects: "service users are often cast as passive receivers [but in this project] can become advisers, facilitators and highly skilled specialists and trainers"². The decision not to take part in the research was debated through formal participant consultation over a number of weeks, in contrast to negotiations with other projects, where consent was given by project staff on behalf of participants, without consultation, in a matter of minutes³.

The only other project to reject involvement in the research was a participant-led craft group in an urban area of social disadvantage, which had been run for over a decade entirely self-funded, sharing participant expertise to make and sell craft items. This informally constituted group could not be convinced of the need to evaluate its practice or that there were benefits to participating in research to find out why the group was, in its own terms and by the standards of many funded community groups, 'a success story'. The question was 'mull'd over' during several weeks of informal discussion while making activities continued, with the final decision framed as, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"³.

This second 'resistant' group believed that evaluation was only needed to satisfy external funders. Whereas the first group was engaged in ongoing formal evaluation of its practice, reflection in the second was entirely informal. These two responses were useful reminders of the need to find ways of surfacing the processes by which meanings are constructed in the sites studied.

¹ Latour 2004

² Participants have strategic planning and organizational control, and day-to-day management, including the power to hire and fire staff as a 'Community Interest Company', which, they claim, "formalises the user-led nature [...] by placing the Executive Group in the key decision making role. The Executive Group is made up of members, staff, volunteers, and external representatives. The member representatives have an inbuilt majority at all times". (Extract from project website, <http://www.theprojectgroup.co.uk/about-us/introductionproject-group/> accessed 4.3.14)

³ With the exception of the RYA and Upland Farmers when permission was sought and easily secured from more senior managers.

⁴ From researcher notes of participant discussion April 2010.

As described in Chapter 2 (section 2.4) the dominant (although often underlying and not necessarily overt) discourse of community arts projects is a deficit model, to the extent that it becomes, in ANT terms an 'obligatory passage point' (Callon 1986). Participants (often constituted as a group by the project, rather than self-defined) are identified as having a lack (such as low income, single parents with little agency, culturally isolated rural youth) which the project will remedy¹⁹⁰. Within this context, explicit or implicit project aims and ontologies, embodied by the project's planning and structuring of activities are key. A deficit model is linked to ameliorative aims ("low-key and modest": Mowbray 2005:263), rather than social justice aims such as those embodied in the idea of 'transformatory praxis'.

Chapter 2 (section 2.5) discussed the suggestion that any tensions in a project between extrinsic value (production of personal and social change) and intrinsic value (aesthetic excellence of artworks produced) become less important when aspirations to aesthetic excellence are realised, because during the creative process itself extrinsic outcomes are maximised (Froggett et al 2011). This contentious assertion emerged as an important research question for my fieldwork. It hinged on the extent and type of participatory practices in projects, identified by some writers not only as an important factor in producing positive impact¹⁹¹, but *the* determining factor (Kindon et al, 2007:11). In only one of the projects researched was the term 'excellence' used. This was in IP where two directors delivering the project used the term extensively although without further definition¹⁹². Phase 1 fieldwork identified factors associated with the production of aesthetic excellence as to do not so much with a quality inherent in artwork produced in projects but with the processes which produced them. This data came from these sources: interviews with project managers, interviews with artists delivering projects, and informal discussions, focus groups and interviews with participants. Table 13, below, shows how each project defined aesthetic value and what processes were observed.

¹⁹⁰ The term 'deficit model' implies the conceptualisation of participants as recipients of interventions aimed at remedying a lack sited in the participants themselves or their communities. Participants have not necessarily identified the lack themselves and are not in control of the 'offer', that is, the means or form of the intervention. The deficit model has been challenged by community development research which asserts that community resilience can only be built on community assets and positive features (for example, Kretzmann and McKnight, (1993). *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research), yet remains the fundamental principle of much participatory creative community project funding.

¹⁹¹ The term 'positive impact' in projects generally refers to self-reported positive individual changes such as increased wellbeing and confidence, greater sense of agency, observed skills such as improved communication, reflection and practical skills; and observed or reported collective changes such as social cohesion. These changes are associated with the 'extrinsic' value of projects, but may derive from the 'intrinsic' value of the creative experience of aesthetic excellence as much as other experiences such as being creative in a minor way or participating in aesthetic or organisational decision making.

¹⁹² For example, in a rehearsal day for a Godiva Awakes! youth project the word 'excellent' or 'excellence' was used 14 times by the director compering the event; and in a recorded interview with another IP director in November 2013 the production of excellence was used to signify a key aim of the company related to undefined extrinsic aesthetic criteria. In this interview IP director Jane Hytch related excellence to an "undefinable moment that you just know, you recognise it" (JH Reseracher's Interview Notes November 2013).

Table 11 How 'aesthetic excellence' is valued in projects and the processes observed associated with it

| Project name | How artworks produced were valued in project by different people | Aspects of the process of production observed by researcher |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Urban Refuge #1 | They communicated ideas well (staff) 'looked impressive' (Director) They looked 'professional' , 'exciting' (participants) They satisfied participants, used best quality materials, had powerful impact (artists) | Intense concentration, absorption, trying to get it right, sharing meanings, realising personal aesthetic |
| Urban Refuge #2 | Personal aesthetic realised, Communicated meaning well (participants) They satisfied participants, used best quality materials, had powerful impact (artists) | Intense concentration, absorption, trying to get it right, sharing meanings, realising personal aesthetic |
| Childrens Centre | They communicated ideas well (staff, participants) 'looked impressive' (staff, participants) They satisfied participants, best quality materials, impactful (artists) | Intense concentration, absorption, trying to get it right, sharing meanings, realising personal aesthetic |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | Achieved externally valued aesthetic quality (staff) Gained public/community approval (participants) Met external aesthetic, best quality materials, impactful (artists) | Intense concentration, trying to get it right, achieving external design brief, occasionally realising personal aesthetic |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Personal aesthetic realised; gained public/community approval (participants) satisfied participants, best quality materials, impactful , Communicated meaning well (artists) | Intense concentration, absorption, trying to get it right, sharing meanings, realising personal aesthetic |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | Engaged participants attention (staff) Offered pleasant experience (participants) | Momentary connection with materials |
| Godiva Awakes! & Godiva Homecoming | Achieved externally valued aesthetic quality (staff) Gained public/community approval (participants) Best quality materials, impactful (artists) | Intense concentration, trying to get it right, achieving external design brief, occasionally realising personal aesthetic |

Together with the findings above, the data in Table 11 (above) suggest that intensity of experience (and hence the quality of interactions between participants and artists and non-human entities) is connected to the attitudes of *everyone* in a project. It reflects the range of differences in attitudes and expectations about the aesthetic processes and content of projects which can be observed as significant contributors to determining participant experience. It shows, for example, that for participants to achieve satisfaction with their personal aesthetic there needs to be commitment to that from staff and artists, and participants themselves need to want it. The realisation of a personal aesthetic, however derived, is an essential part of the process of producing impact¹⁹³. The following case studies illustrate this and add detail to the discussions above about the significance of attitude and context within these relationships. They have been chosen not as

¹⁹³ Nind 1999:97 in Trowsdale and Hayhow 2013 argues that intensive, high quality interaction with no focus on outcome maximizes positive impact and undermines the negative effect of a deficit model. These findings however suggest that the aesthetic aspiration must also be satisfied.

representative of particular contexts, but as they shed light on the complexities of the relationship between participation and creativity in a range of contexts. They include extracts from researcher's notes made during or immediately after research interventions.

6.6.2 Case study: the Children's Centre

This research took place in an urban Children's Centre in an ex-council housing estate identified as an 'area of multiple deprivations'¹⁹⁴. The researcher was asked by the Centre Manager to research the views of 11 women who had been on the Centre's 'Freedom Programme' (a confidence and skills building courses for survivors of domestic abuse) in order to evaluate the professional services they had received while in abusive relationships. She also wanted a way of presenting the research to a conference of 60 professionals in the field, that is, police, legal staff, health visitors, doctors, hospital staff, schools, housing association and nursery staff. There was only time for a brief research intervention, and no time to meet the participants beforehand. Two participatory artists the researcher had worked with on a previous domestic abuse project set in refuges were invited to collaborate on this¹⁹⁵. From researcher's notes made at the time:

Finding community artists with similar values and attitudes has been a key part of my freelance arts work and I had been discussing my academic research with Adrienne and Kirsty from the start. I felt confident that they could be 'artist-researchers'. We agreed a 'rule of thumb' framework for good practice. It included precepts from fairly standard 'good practice' for community arts work¹⁹⁶, research ethics¹⁹⁷, and one which was specific to this *creative* research activity.

(Researcher's notes, Sept 2011)

The research relationship spanned four months, comprising three short creative workshops exploring critiques of services, with 11 women¹⁹⁸, and, subsequent to

¹⁹⁴ The Index of Multiple Deprivation was produced by the UK government Department for Communities and Local Government. This area (Low Hill, Wolverhampton) was at the time in the 'top' 10% for multiple deprivation (employment, housing, health, education, crime, environment) in the European Union (<http://wolverhamptoncityboard.org.uk/UserFiles/Microsites/wfipn/IMD2010Domains.pdf> accessed 25.6.14). This is relevant information because it situates the creative project in both a 'deficit' model and as subject to extrinsic social aims. The Children Centre in my research was part of a UK government-led initiative, *SureStart*, started in 1998 to improve the wellbeing, safety and educational achievements of children from the poorest families. The project has run with various objectives and funding levels since then, mainly concentrating on establishing pre-school Children's Centres in poor communities, with a range of offers for parents and children such as healthy eating, play-skills, parenting classes and various support services. By 'ex-council estate' I mean that the estate was originally built as subsidised social housing in the 1930s, and now includes a mix of public, housing association and privately owned homes.

¹⁹⁵ Adrienne Frances and Kirsty Hillyer from Birmingham-based participatory artists' company Frilly www.wearefrilly.com.uk were paid as artists to carry out the creative research activity with me as project coordinator and artist-researcher. The impact of blurred roles, common in the field of creative participatory community projects, is discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁹⁶ Webster, Buglass (2005); Matarasso (2009;1997)

¹⁹⁷ For example, ESRC Framework for Research Ethics 2010 (revised 2012) accessed at www.esrc.ac.uk 6.1.2013

¹⁹⁸ Numbers fluctuated between 9 and 11 over the activity

these, a presentation of artwork, with four participants, at a conference of professionals in the field¹⁹⁹. Three months later a Focus Group was convened, attended by the same four participants. The following description, based on researcher's notes made at the time, shows that creative methods use non-human actants (venue, materials) as key players in producing new knowledges:

We had three, 2.5 hour slots with 11 participants on consecutive days, organised around crèche provision – although we did run over on the last day and were joined by a number of toddlers for the last 40 minutes²⁰⁰. We prepared a playroom at the Centre by changing the lighting, playing soft music and burning lavender oil. Materials were high quality card and artist quality chalk pastels. Participants had been recruited by the Centre staff, invited to 'an arts workshop with a chance to have your say'. My research topic and consent forms were introduced during the first session, and it was made clear that the intention was to produce 'messages' for professionals as well as 'have fun'²⁰¹. At first I thought the project was to be a failure: the women were extremely shy, they didn't know each other and had never met us – yet we expected them to discuss a painful and intimate topic. There was no eye contact and one or two participants said they wouldn't or couldn't draw and might be leaving soon. We exchanged names and there followed a certain amount of cajoling on my part, 'just give it a go', 'there's no right way' and so on – but no direct discussion of the research topic (their experience of support services). The first activity was 'meditative mark making': using chalk pastels on black card to visualise 'your inner strength', its colour, shape and size, and then 'grow it' until it fills the page. This exercise is designed to introduce the techniques of mark making (harsh angry line, soft calm smudges etc), to reassure participants that no drawing skills are required, and to offer a positive presentation of self as 'a strong woman'. [*This method was discussed in Chapter 5*]. Everyone eventually took part, some after watching the others for about ten minutes.

(Researcher's notes, Sept 2011)

After an informal discussion about the activity, during which no expectation was made that work should be shared (although five people did so), each participant made a life sized outline of herself on card on the floor and, working individually, began to make marks on areas of the body to represent different 'feelings or

¹⁹⁹ *Conference on Domestic Violence* September 2011, Low Hill Children's Centre, Wolverhampton. Attendees included local police officers, social workers, health visitors, housing association workers, Children's Centre staff, representatives from schools and community work teams.

²⁰⁰ One participant sent apologies and did not attend after the first session, citing practical barriers; another two did not attend after the second session, reducing the final session to eight. No follow-up was possible to find out why. A member of the Centre staff commented informally that 'dropout' reflected the 'chaotic lives' of participants. This was illustrative of a narrative surrounding women involved in domestic abuse situations, but did not add to understanding of reasons why these individuals had withdrawn.

²⁰¹ Not an ideal recruitment process for the research, but characteristic of the contingent practices in creative participatory community projects. However, describing the project in advance as 'academic research' (as well as pragmatic research) would probably have been meaningless as when I did raise this at the first session in order to get consent, participants were unaware of its meaning.

experiences associated with their abusive relationships²⁰². The first session was designed so that there was no direct discussion of individuals' experience except that which arose naturally between the participants as they worked. For example, getting up for a stretch and asking questions about each other's work or commenting aloud on their own activity. This was in order to allow women to determine (through the nature of their markmaking) the extent of their disclosure, and to focus on visual, creative expression. None of the informal interaction was recorded, except for subsequent 'researcher notes' made each evening, and the artist-researchers deliberately refrained from joining in or commenting. These notes show how much more relaxed participants were by the end of this first session. For example, this exchange between two participants looking at one of their drawings (shown in Figure 23 below):

"Q: What's all that orange round the neck for?"
A: "That's where he used to strangle me"

(Researcher's Notes Sept 2011).

Figures 23 and 24 are examples of participant's drawings at the end of the second session, when some text had been added²⁰³.

This activity was continued for the second session, which ended with a short formal discussion (ten minutes) led by the researcher, about 'the good and bad' of different professional services, again without note-taking. Forbearing from recording, although frustrating in research terms was an essential part of building trust in such a brief project on so sensitive a subject. This was confirmed during individual interviews, when participants described the giving statements to police and social workers, which they sometimes experienced as a process of misrepresentation and silencing.

During this second session one participant became distressed and left for a while. She returned for the rest of the sessions. With permission, the artist-researchers took photographs of the artworks in progress, avoiding images which would identify people. At the third session participants were invited to talk about their drawings to the group, which everyone did, and to work on a number of new figures, chosen by themselves, representing different services (legal, health and so on), using mark making and text generated by informal discussion and by asking for each other's

²⁰² This is how this activity was introduced, being very clear that, whereas the overall purpose was to develop critiques of services, this activity was purely personal, a different way of reflecting and prompting ideas.

²⁰³ It was not unusual in body mapping or expressive markmaking generally for participants to add words after markmaking: "writing and artmaking potentiate each other, as imagery reveals inner feeling states, and words can be used to make cognitive sense of the images interact to intensify the potential to produce new understandings (Deaver and McAuliffe 2009:627).

comments. This was characterised in the researcher's notes as a discussion "full of laughter" and "high emotion" (Researcher's Notes April 2011).

For part of the third session, in a separate room, sound-recorded informal interviews were made with four volunteers from the group, talking about their experiences and critiques of the services they had encountered. These people were also to comment on their drawings. These reflections show a high degree of awareness of using mark making as symbolic meanings:

My drawing was basically a symbol of me like how I feel with my body... because er, um, with the orange which I've drawn which you'll be able to see round the neck and the arms, um those were where I had most of the pain, because he used to hold my hands down and stuff and strangle me...Um the red, it was about pressure, because he was always going on at me about every tiny thing, he was always coming on to me.... Like with the clouds [*points to drawing*] I always felt there was a storm on top of me. Every time he spoke to me it was always to make it into a big thing. It's hard but that's what it is, but I'm getting through it...With the picture like I wanted to show who I am, like I put everything on my shoulders and like I try not to think about it...and the broken heart, um, that, that's still kind of there, but with the white lining on the edge it's showing that it's mending, it's getting fixed"

(Participant A, Figure 23, Interview transcript Sept 2011)

For other participants it was as if making the drawing was itself an affirmative activity connected with a positive sense of self:

I've got me standing firm and I've also put a line underneath me as if I'm standing solid, because now I am the point where I am solid [...] I've got the sharpness in the centre of my heart with the softness around it because the softness is my kids and the sharpness is what I hide from everybody [...] I've got the protective wall, which no matter what people try it's very hard to get through and that's after two abusive relationships...

(Participant B, Figure 24, Interview transcript September 2011)

Toward the end of that day the group gathered for an informal 'debriefing'. They discussed how to present the work to the conference the following week and agreed to present the sound recordings (anonymously) with a slideshow of the art making images, and to mount the figures themselves round the conference hall. [Hyperlink 5](#), below, is to the slideshow (16.45 mins) with images and sound as it was presented to the conference as a large-scale projection. Figures 25, 26 and 27 below, show screenshots. Participants were clearly proud and excited by their artwork: the larger than life, brightly coloured, figures looked impressive seen together. It was agreed that they could keep them after the conference, as some were very keen to do this. The researcher asked 'how we could make sure

professionals really took on board participants' comments ?' and the group²⁰⁴ suggested that professionals were invited to take part in a markmaking activity to express their feelings about the service they provided and what they had heard from the women. As expressive markmaking was a new activity to these women, the researcher interpreted this as suggesting that they saw it as having value as a prompt to expressing feelings and ideas. At this point, to the researcher's surprise, three participants offered to attend the conference and stand at the front to answer questions. From the discussion it was clear that this would be a big step, and this was later confirmed by Centre staff. During the conference another participant 'turned up' with her toddler and mother, and watched from the back of the hall.

[Participant slideshow for conference](#)

Hyperlink 5 right click over link while online

²⁰⁴ The suggestion was initially made by one participant and then warmly supported by others.

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Figure 23 'What's all that orange round the neck for?' 'That's where he used to strangle me' : participants in the Childrens Centre project used colour and mark to express feelings and ideas about their experiences of domestic abuse and professional services, using outlines of their own bodies as templates. (Participant 'A' artwork July 2012, Chalk pastel on heavy card, 1.5m x 2m). *Photograph by Adrienne Francis*

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Figure 24 'I've got the protective wall': some participants in the Childrens Centre project used text as well as colour and mark to express feelings and ideas about their experiences of domestic abuse and professional services, using outlines of their own bodies as templates. (Participant 'B' artwork July 2012, Chalk pastel on heavy card, 1.5m x 2m).
Photograph by Adrienne Francis

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Figures 25, 26, 27 Participant artwork and images showing its production at the Childrens Centre were used as a slideshow to illustrate recorded sound interviews at a conference of professionals in the area of domestic abuse (Wolverhampton September 2012). Participants speaking at the conference referred to the artworks displayed to emphasise their comments. Images 25 and 26 show work in progress, 27 shows completed artwork as a slide. *Photographs by Adrienne Francis and the Author*

The presentation made considerable impact at the conference of about 60 professionals. The sound recordings were frank and discussed a range of vital issues coherently and vividly. They described not just personal experiences, but reflections on their implication for services, with several concrete proposals for changing practice. For example, that mothers and partners should regularly be seen by professionals separately, that women in abusive relationships are likely to lie about their relationship status, that there are identifiable patterns of coercive control beyond physical violence which are often missed by professionals. In subsequent written feedback to the Centre from delegates, this slideshow was cited as “revelatory”, “unusually authentic”, and “voices we don’t usually hear” and “highly useful”²⁰⁵. The delegate markmaking activity was noisy and slightly chaotic (partly because of the large numbers involved, partly perhaps because of the unfamiliarity of the type of exercise). The three women volunteers became the ‘experts’, showing delegates how to use the art materials. During the subsequent discussion in the conference, delegates reported a range of feelings about their work, including frustration and disappointment with the level of support they could give in their work, or with the failure of women to leave abusive relationships, and ‘joy’ at perceived successes. Several delegates commented that the markmaking activity had provoked them into thinking about these feelings and marking them as significant features of their practice which were often overlooked. Both participants who spoke at the conference (one of the three was too shy to speak but stood with the others), made several references, while speaking to delegates, to the sound recordings in order to give weight to a point, such as, “you heard what she said on the video” or indicated the drawings (displayed around the hall) as examples, gesturing towards them: “That’s why I drew the line *there*” (*Researcher’s notes September 2011*). At the end of the event the women volunteers were excited and pleased by their own boldness. One woman said to me: “We are the experts in all this [abusive relationships] and they need to listen better to what we’re saying about it”; and another commented: “I never would of believed I could of stood up in front of all those people and spoke” (*Researcher’s notes September 2011*).

Three months after this event an informal Focus Group was convened attended by four participants (from the original 11 in the workshops), of whom three had presented at the conference. They identified this as the most exciting and transformative element of the activity, whilst acknowledging that they “probably wouldn’t of done it” without the three day creative activities beforehand. Among other questions, I asked, ‘what use were the drawings in helping you think about the services?’ Participant C answered: “I felt a bit like I was talking about the

²⁰⁵ Extracts from feedback forms given to Centre Manager after the event and emailed to me.

drawing not me”, which made it easier to “open up”. Creativity enabled the externalised expression of difficult or unarticulated feelings and ideas (*Researcher's Notes December 2011*). Participants were “not sure” whether the drawing helped to ‘order’ their thoughts about their experiences. Nevertheless, Participant A commented that she believed that she and other participants would not have stayed for the sessions without the creative activity; a discussion would have been either ‘boring’ or “too embarrassing because we didn’t know each other”. An important aspect of this was the opportunity to talk with other women and share stories, which made her feel “more normal”, and doing this casually while drawing made that easier (*Researcher's notes December 2011*). Pride in the perceived aesthetic quality of the artworks displayed at the conference was also reported to be a supporting factor in encouraging participants to attend. Because of their pride in the aesthetic quality of the artworks they felt able to use the images as reference points during the conference which helped them to present their ideas and gave them further confidence to do so.

To this mix of creativity, aesthetic value, and participation, can be added the impact of collectivity. Collective experience was present in several ways. Although the main artworks were individually produced, there was a conscious intention in my planning to create the conditions for conversation based around them. Participants worked on the floor together, so could see each other’s work, and the artist-researchers remained silent. At the final creative workshop, participants produced four collective markmaking images, with agreed words referring to particular provision (medical, educational, family, law). Participants were invited to come together to make this work in discussion, and all of them contributed. Two months after the Focus Group the researcher met with three participants at their request. They had decided to set up a participant-led support group for the next cohort of ‘Freedom Programme’ trainees and asked whether she could provide occasional ‘art sessions’ for this group, because they saw these as valuable means to develop confidence and as attractive, enjoyable sessions which could create a sense of group identity. They felt that they could also go on to run art-based activities themselves. This new sense of agency could be ascribed to many contingent factors. The participants were all ‘graduates’ of a confidence building course (the Freedom Programme) and had all left abusive relationships not long before the creative intervention (which implies changed sense of self or changed circumstances). The meeting to discuss their own planned ‘self-help’ group came five months after a creative activity with two outstanding features: firstly, it was very short; second, it included taking positive action in the real world.

6.6.3 Case study: the Film Club boys get cool

The third case study is the Rural Youth Arts project sub-group, Film Club. The research relationship was over a year. Initially, the researcher worked alongside two digital media artists in about ten sessions over a school year, with a group of between four and ten boys aged 12-18. In these sessions, known as 'Film Club', participants learnt a range of digital skills such as filming and editing video, accessing free software, graphics and sound online, making sound and music pieces, linking sound and visuals. The boys came straight from school, which shared a campus with the Arts Centre in an isolated rural location. As part of trials of evaluation techniques, participants were supported to design and carry out a number of evaluation activities using their new digital skills, mostly asking participants, audiences and Centre users about other ongoing arts activities. The researcher role fluctuated between researcher and arts worker, in a programme of research and creative evaluation activities which is discussed further in Chapter 7. Towards the end of Film Club five of the younger participants were helped by the researcher to run a highly creative VJ session at a local youth bands night²⁰⁶. This was a transformatory event characterised by great intensity, evident creative 'flow' and collective creative processes, coupled with transporting the boys, in their own and others' eyes, into a new position of 'cool' which they had not previously accessed. A reflective account of the researcher's participant observation of this key event in this project is Appendix D. During the school year a range of research methods were used to explore the impact of being creative, including prompted video diaries (see Hyperlink 6, below)²⁰⁷,

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Figure 28 Video still from film made by Film Club participants as an evaluation of a new public sculpture and seating from the wider arts project, using sound and video interviews with the public and each other. Their personal responses to the sculpture were largely visual. They used newly-learnt filming and editing skills to express their own pleasure in it, but also, as this image shows, how the sculpture was engaging from a child's perspective. (Video and sound: 4 mins, March 2012)

²⁰⁶ VJ (video-jockeying) is to create large scale projections, in real time, using live, recorded and online visual images and sound, using several video cameras and projectors, and simple graphics software, in response, to and linked by beat and theme, to the live music.

²⁰⁷ It was initially very difficult for the participants to reflect or discuss their experiences and feelings, although this improved over time and with more oblique research methods, such as expressive markmaking. The video diaries were suggested by the participants as a method of recording their feelings and skills development over time. Despite this, because of their reluctance to talk to camera, the researcher began to offer brief prompts, giving a theme to each session's diaries (such as, 'How are you feeling?', 'What did you learn this week?', 'Did you use Film Club ideas or feelings at home or at school this week?'), which was a much more successful way of eliciting comments, although had the disadvantage of directing the discussion, more like an interview than

observations and participant observations, interviews and expressive markmaking. Three months after the project ended a Focus Group was convened, attended by four participants, where they reflected on the impact of Film Club, through group discussion and a collective expressive timeline.

Overall, analysis of this data suggested clearly that Film Club had a significant positive impact on participants' confidence, sense of personal agency, and ability to work collectively. Feelings of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing connected to all these and to the friendships formed in the group through being 'forced' to work together because of the demands of creative technologies were repeatedly reported. For example, when filming and editing each other's interviews with audiences, a camera person, sound person and interviewer worked together using jointly prepared questions; the VJ night demanded that two people filmed using video cameras, another edited in real time, while another manipulated the projection. All this had to be coordinated with each other and an extrinsic factor in the creative process, the beat of the music. In Actor Network Terms, the music's beat, relentless and independent of the human actants in the Film Club network, produced a dominant meaning about its own determining pre-eminence, and the technology determined relationships (ceding or taking physical control, communicating ideas, coordinating movements and so on).

These conclusions were drawn from observations, participant interviews, self-reporting and interviews with Arts Centre staff who knew the boys over a longer time frame. The project had transformatory potential by offering intellectual and social development, and by creating a sense of "a new reality". Its contribution to participant's sense of wellbeing was clearly documented. For example:

Participant B: I look forward to coming to [Film Club] after school because I don't have the ideal life at school, like I get bullied and stuff so it makes me look forward to Film Club...
Researcher: Does it make you feel happier, being at Film Club?
Participant B: Yes it does a bit, it makes me think, ah yesterday I had film club and that was pretty awesome... I think it's made me a tad more confident really and happier when I get home... I guess whenever I have a bad Monday school day Film Club always kind of cheers me up when I go home

(Participant B, Prompted Video Diary Transcript January 2012)

Hyperlink 6 is to an edited version of the prompted video diaries prepared for the project evaluation. It shows participants talking one by one, their comments linked through text to project aims.

spontaneous diary. Chapter 7 discusses how much more meaningful prompted video is (more focussed and easier to edit) is to project evaluation than open-ended filming.

[Prompted Video Diaries](#)

Hyperlink 6 right click over link while online

In their video diaries and subsequent informal discussions participants identified two aspects of the project as having the greatest positive impact. Firstly, there was a sense of satisfaction at learning new skills and immediately implementing them in an open-ended creative activity over which they had considerable aesthetic control (they specifically cited the project's structure of completing an artwork, sound piece or film *within* each session), although little democratic participation. The tenor of the sessions led by the artists was sometimes fairly autocratic within the digital media skills training sessions. Participants followed linear instructions and were positioned firmly as 'inexperienced learners', 'awarded' aesthetic freedom for 'good behaviour' (not chatting, maintaining eye contact, focussing on a task). This changed as the artists became more confident in their roles.

The literal space of the art project (the previously out-of-bounds Green Room) and the social space participants represented a new construction of social relations. It represented the construction of a community through the project (friendships between socially isolated boys), with the more informal dynamics of a single-sex group (in a mixed school). Relationships were predicated on overt outcomes to teach skills, but covert aims to remedy a lack (perceived lack of confidence and low cultural, career and academic aspirations). For example, participants' relationships with the artists and artist-researcher fluctuated, initial boundaries were transgressed and renegotiated, what Massey calls 'power-geometry' of place (Massey 1994:265). From Researcher Notes July 2012 made at the time (Full text in Appendix D):

I was surprised at how readily, in this complex relationship (not uncommon in qualitative research), these young people were able to switch between roles. For example, breaking off from a skills teaching session, in which they were clearly positioned as 'learners', to suggest ways I could evaluate the impact of the sessions on them as research participants: for example, Participant 'Why don't we do a video diary every week instead of you asking us things at the end of the whole thing; then you'll find out how we changed as we went along?'; Researcher: 'Why didn't I think of that?'. They seemed to recognise the nuances of my role, for example, when I was 'joining in' the VJ activity ('joining in' unfamiliar activities on an equal footing is a common part of the 'community artist' role), showing in our informal conversations that they understood that I was also observing them as a researcher and teaching them some technical skills.

The outputs of the creative project (what would be made, when, how, for what audience) were constantly shifting, in a deliberate structure of open-ended activity. This was the artists' (and the project's) intentions, informed by their attachment to discourses about the value of creativity and theories about how people change. The second aspect was the fact that almost all activity led to 'real world' engagement – either as artwork uploaded to the Arts Centre website, or evaluation material which was used by the Arts Project Manager in project reporting, or, and most dramatically, by providing the essential visual performance for their first music 'gig', attended by their peer groups and those groups to which they aspired:

The session required the young people to project live video feed and pre-recorded video onto the back of a stage (and ceiling, walls, floor). We would 'set up' on a scaffolding at the back of a large hall, facing the stage & screen and project onto and into a concert evening with local live young people's bands. It's usual for community artists to use their own kit, so I would use my own large Canon video camera as the live feed, some pre-recorded video clips, and video taken during the event by the young people from several small handheld 'Flip' video to SD cameras – easy to download for use during the event.

In the VJ performance, the young people would be using technologies which they had only recently mastered in the project. Other parts of my research suggested that using technologies or materials which were new to creative project participants, which carried no weight of past failure but also had the cachet of craft or professional association, could be a key factor in creating transformatory praxis – the conditions for personal change. For example, in Western European culture, being taught to use a washing machine with digital features will have a different impact from learning to use a digital video camera, for reasons more closely associated with the different cultural meanings of domestic cleaning and filmmaking than the technology itself. The impact of using new technologies or materials was also affected by a range of other factors, such as age, place and gender. My research also suggested that 'real world' activities, where new skills can be implemented to serious or public purpose, might have a greater impact than activities contained within the project sessions.

The VJ performance has the potential to meet several of my emerging criteria for transformatory praxis. Some of this related to the five young people themselves: in this very rurally isolated small town they all also described themselves in various ways as isolated from their peers. S and C, for example, described themselves as unhappy, isolated and bullied at school; and R that 'nobody at all likes me; actually, the whole school hates me, without exception'. In a video interview D described himself as 'shy'; his experience as 'home educated' gave him less contact with his peers than young people in school. None of them, when asked, said they felt or were regarded by their peers as 'cool', and although there may be a trend towards 'geeky' or 'nerdy' acquiring cool status in youth culture, S and R seemed to use the terms to describe themselves without that connotation. To me they seemed bright, articulate and – with the exception of D – slightly hyperactive (short attention span); awkward and self-conscious outside the group; a little bit 'odd' and completely 'uncool'.

All of them regarded VJ-ing as "very cool" indeed; in this sense VJ-ing in front of their peers had the potential to allow them to re-position themselves in a different discourse – that of 'cool teen', active creators of

the scene, technically competent in 'cool' technology; rather than 'isolated geek'.

An unpredicted outcome of the Film Club's involvement with my research was that they attended some of the Centre's arts events in order to trial evaluation techniques. All the young people reported that they would not have attended the events (cabaret night, alternative comedy) without the project. This was the second band night they had attended through the project and the first independent VJ-ing – their first session had been in support of two VJ experts. None of them had ever attended a music gig before.

We get in early and set up together while the bands are setting up: this gives us the feel of being 'insiders', testing our equipment alongside sound tests and lighting run throughs. I have to work hard at not panicking about my lack of technical skills. I let them do as much as they can by themselves. A boy comes onto the scaffolding and starts examining the kit, causing me to worry: 'Are you a member of Film Club?' I ask; he looks bewildered, 'No, but can I do this?'; 'No, sorry, off the scaffolding, this is for people who are in Film Club'. My unintentionally brusque response is received with glee by R and C, who comments with glee, 'Rejected!'

(From Researcher Notes July 2012 made immediately after the event)

During the VJ session, through a technical failure and the researcher's lack of skills, circumstances led to them taking complete aesthetic and democratic control of the process and technologies. During this exciting event, participants moved from uncoordinated individualistic and competitive activity, with little awareness of the music, to a highly collaborative, highly creative musical and visual performance. Researcher notes made at the time reflect on the event in terms of Csikszentmihalyi's idea of 'creative flow':

When the bands start I realise two things: with the exception of D, they don't share the kits or work as a team; and none of them follows the musical beat (it looks better if you match the visual movement to the beat). They don't tap or nod to the beat either, as if the loud music is not there. I suddenly realise that I have never seen any of them with earphones in, widespread among their age group. I ask S and C whether they listen to much music and they both say no. R and S compete for the Canon, almost pushing each other, jostling over it. C rushes around, jumping up the steps so the laptops and projectors (and the projections on the screen) bounce. I feel I have to intervene to protect the kit. I institute turn taking. D relinquishes the live feed gracefully and moves to the laptop. The projections look good, we notice people in the audience watching the live film of the room and bands, projected onto the ceiling, floor and walls by hazardously tipping the projector around.

During the three-hour event there is a noticeable, and at one point sudden, shift towards teamwork. R is helping C and D on the live feed. Gradually, people are taking turns without prompting. I'm holding C's hand on the keyboard trying to help him get the beat. I'm asking them to time the

camera shots to the singers, the guitar solos, etc and they start to do this independently and fluently. I'm giving lots of praise and positive feedback, encouragement. It's dark and fast and exciting to have the power to light up the space with continually changing images, which contribute so much to the atmosphere of the event - and the projection is very big (fills the stage). The breakthrough is accidental – someone is 'rocking' the zoom switch on the Canon and it stops working altogether. I go through all the routines I know to make it restart, with no success and some panic. I stop C trying his own methods and practically have to wrestle the camera away from him. I mourn my best camera.

Without live feed the audience will soon tire of the looped pre-recorded material and the VJ-ing will have failed – which we all know. I gather them together and ask: 'What shall we do?' S has a solution, some simple software on his own laptop. Without further intervention from me (we are now beyond my competency) he connects it and the whole group plan what to do, S, D and M manipulating the webcam on S's laptop as a live feed, pulling in low quality but recognisable images and using them with S's abstract graphics and the pre-recorded film. They manage this with barely a glitch on the screen. They are all jubilant, particularly S. We all lavish praise on him. The audience has not noticed the crisis.

They are really working as a team now and to the beat. C clings halfway up the scaffolding and waves various things across the lens in time to the music. Independently and in pairs they start taking the Flip cameras off to film, and decide to interview people in the foyer about how they enjoyed the night for the Film Club webpage. I am dancing at the back of the scaffold and joining in with the VJ-ing, taking my turn. I notice that D has started to dance at the back of the scaffold. S, R and M are gradually drawn into dancing, on the scaffold. When the last band plays, they move onto the dance floor, near the scaffold, dancing, leaving D and me with the VJ-ing. This seems like a hugely significant breakthrough: only a few older boys are dancing (and more girls). The Film Club boys look cool!

They are exercising their skills in a 'symbolic domain', in this case the creation of VJ effects, recognised by the audience and two older teenagers who came up at the end to praise the projections:

What was happening? The boys were certainly in 'the flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 2002), that is, carried away by the creative activity – as shown by their sudden leap in attention and skill finding the beat in the music and linking it to the manipulation of images – about two thirds of the way through the evening, having started with no ability to follow the beat and seemingly oblivious to the music.). For all boys it was their first ever live music gig (except as observers of experts in previous session). The 'symbolic domain', in this case the creation of VJ effects, was recognised by the audience and the two older teenagers who came up at the end to praise the projections.

Any impact of the creative activity in itself was closely linked to the action they took which positioned them differently in a discourse about 'cool', modifying their own self image, partly in response to their peers

re-positioning them. This fits with the idea of transformatory praxis being linked to change-related positive action, as well as the creative experience.

Was this participatory art? I believe this became more like a participatory activity as the boys gained confidence and were able to apply skills creatively, that is, when they began to work as a team and choose and link images to the beat independently, when there was a shift of power as I relinquished creative direction entirely. At the point when my skills were evidently exhausted, they took complete control of the activity, and continued to take control even of the clear-up.

In the final research encounter, the Focus Group three months later, participants identified this event as 'the most significant' in these terms: the artwork had been aesthetically successful, and recognised as such by people who mattered to them; it had been a 'real world' activity, in which they had not only demonstrated new technical skills, but mastery of technologies they and their peers regarded as 'cool'; the impact of working together intensely (as the creative process demanded) and successfully (in the 'real world') had resulted in consolidating nascent friendships between Film Club members, who had all experienced difficulties in making friends up until this point.

6.6.4 Case study: 'I love that smell' - the Upland Farming Project

The research relationship in this fourth case study consisted of a number of interviews and discussions with the project manager, commissioners and funders, and two one-day observations, one of which included a trial of evaluation methods, spread over the middle 12 months of a three-year project to improve the mental wellbeing of isolated upland farmers. The project intention at the point the researcher became involved was to use creativity primarily as a means of engaging participants' attention for other kinds of learning, rather than as the prime means of producing changes in understanding, feelings and behaviours, as in the two case studies described above²⁰⁸. Mental wellbeing in the project theory of change was related to the depth of connections felt within communities, so part of project activity was connected with raising awareness through giving information about farming practices to local people. Creativity was used on several occasions, such as farm open days and local festivals, to engage attention, with no intention to create the conditions for creative intensity or flow, or aspiration to produce aesthetic excellence. Participation was casual and brief.

²⁰⁸ In the first year, artists had worked in schools in activities designed to produce more intense creative engagement.

This Case Study is of a four-hour observation of the project's stall at a historic farm open day, in a marquee alongside other projects and local businesses, on a cold and rainy summer's day:

[Project] has small corner of tent with straw bales (acting as both seating and suggesting farming authenticity?) making a semi-circle for a children's story telling session with professional story-teller; table for map making (collage of paper and fabrics) led by project worker; table for simple weaving activity using natural materials, led by same project worker; and small unattended, stall with leaflets and poster display. Marquee is noisy (including occasional accordion-band) and cold, with around ten stalls and about 40 members of the public at any time, wandering around. [Project worker] wearing green wellies and gilet (farming association?)

All ages (four years ? up) invited verbally as they pass, by [project worker], to help make very simple woven artwork using sheep's wool (found on fences), hessian, baling twine, moss, pliable twigs, grass (i.e. not usual materials associated with weaving). This only partially works as materials are uneven and loose. Three young children spend a few minutes, rather aimlessly weaving, drift away [...] Four children (7-12 years?) spend at least 15 minutes weaving and show some concentration and enjoyment; [project worker] tells them about Upland Farming while they work, directs them to leaflets. Children leave when parents collect them, mid-weave. Couple (50's?) wander over and pick up sheep's wool clumps, woman, rolling it in palm, saying: "I remember this... do you remember we used to collect this off the hedgerows?" turns to man and rubs wool on his cheek, he takes it and sniffs it, smiling: "Smell it ... that smell takes you back.." (couple smile, woman rakes through other materials, man: "It's lanolin, that smell, we used to get it all over ourselves..." rubs woman's cheek with it, she says:"I love that smell !"; smiles at [project worker], begins to leave. [Project worker] says, "If you look over there, there are some leaflets about farming nowadays... do you live round here?" but couple have moved away, still apparently discussing memories. They pause for a few minutes looking at leaflet stall...

Weaving table usually attracts between two to four people, usually children or mothers and children, but engagement with the activity is generally brief. Younger children with parents seem to have greatest concentration and absorption in the activity. Activity, especially for younger children, includes handling, rolling, stroking and 'fiddling' with materials (that is, plaiting grasses, coiling twine and so on), apart from the weaving. Although table is sometimes unattended, there are many times (from five to 15 minutes at a time) when the project worker is able to help with weaving and at the same time talk about the farming project, asking questions to explore how much participants know about local practices. Conversations 'desultory' (?), low key, but participants show occasional eye-contact, nods, smiles to suggest listening, so maybe the making is supporting extended listening ?

(Researcher's Notes, August 2012)

During this event observations were also made about the story-telling:

As it is a 'drop-in', children come and go and it is difficult for the artist to keep their attention (shown by their continual chatting, looking around, playing on the bales) – a certain amount of 'fiddling' is normal while children listen, but other indicators of listening (eye contact, answering questions, laughing) are absent for 5/8 children. Nevertheless, there are always about three children seemingly engaged and absorbed in the story (apparently transported to imaginative space). Arrival of the accordion band drew away most of the audience, and made it hard to hear.

(Researchers Notes, August 2012)

The following notes were made about the role of creativity in this event, and the potential to evaluate it, following a discussion with the Project Worker three weeks later:

However slight (brief, non-professional materials, easy, no aspiration for aesthetic excellence, uncompleted) a creative activity is, it has the potential to engage some adults' and children's attention for longer than would have been likely through talking and leaflets alone.

It might be assumed that where children and adults showed signs of absorption in the activity or story, for however short a time, this offered 'extended thinking time' and made them more receptive to understanding new ideas about farming in the story and in the Project Worker's conversation, but this was not evaluated on this occasion. Since there was no motivation to take part except enjoyment, we can assume that those who stayed beyond a few minutes found the activity enjoyable (and several adults said so).

Even in so slight an encounter (participation), the significance of the materiality of making (creativity) was evident in the weaving activity. Handling and manipulation of materials in creative activity is connected with emotional and intellectual impact (Barone and Eisner 2012). For example, handling and smelling sheep wool seemed to provoke pleasant childhood memories and discussion. This was related to the physical interaction, simply looking at the wool or an image of it would not have had the same impact. This judgement could be made because both participants actively stroked the wool on their partner's face (drawing attention to its feel) and smelled it openly, offering it to the other to smell: this was 'marked' behaviour, drawing attention to the physical qualities of the wool.

The failure of the story-telling to produce anything bar a low level of imaginative intensity seemed to me to be directly related to this genre in specific contexts. Storytelling requires the opportunity to 'catch' audience attention, and, for some performances, to engage collective interaction. This suggests that for storytelling there are specific conditions needed to enable creative flow, connected with attention, duration, intensity, related perhaps to the idea of 'magical space', a space

(time/place) to associate with the possibility of imagination, different discourses or re-positioning in discourses.

It was difficult (perhaps incommensurate) to collect evidence about the impact of creativity at this single event, beyond interpretations of observations (about attention, willingness to listen and answer questions). No quantitative evidence (for example, more leaflets taken than at a similar event) was collected. [Project Worker] felt that project staffing was too low to allow for evaluation of shorter events like this. Evaluation of the key outcome for this event - raised awareness (knowledge, understanding) in local communities of upland farming practices - would be cumulative across several similar events, and assessed through questioning sample populations before and after the whole project. Within this process, it would be possible to ask participants to make their own judgements about the impact of creativity on their understanding and knowledge. Participation in this event was much less structured, briefer and required far less commitment than in the other two examples. There was no democratic participation and participants were not formally constituted as a group for this activity. Creative engagement was also slight, with no intention to create aesthetic value or expectation of sustained effort or attention: in fact, the activity was entirely designed to generate sustained attention to the verbal messages about farming. Despite this, being creative probably did have two impacts: it may have facilitated new learning through extending thinking time, and produced small feelings of wellbeing, of unknown duration or impact. In terms of the aims of the activity, both these would be a positive outcome.

6.7 The importance of physical context: theories of change

Throughout the research (even in the UFW brief encounters) the kinds of processes described in the case studies above turned the space of a project (place and time) into a dynamic concept, constantly being constructed as uncertain, through the interrelationship of places, materials, technologies and social relations (Massey, 1999: 272). In interviews with artists the construction of this uncertainty was referred to as a characteristic of creative processes called 'risk-taking' and 'open-endedness'²⁰⁹, but rarely in terms of the social relations, "a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-

²⁰⁹ Interviews and discussions with project artists and project workers

operation” referred to by Doreen Massey refers (1994:265)²¹⁰. In the initial interviews asking participants to reflect back on creative experience over time (described in Chapter 4), moving between different physical spaces was often used as a way to narrate personal change: “I was in backstage for the first time”; “I had never been to an art gallery before”; “It gave me a space where I didn’t have to be subject to the expectations of my family”; “I was suddenly in with the artists, decorating the party room with light”²¹¹. The specific attributes of these places are constructed by networks of relations with “people, technologies, furniture, animals, plants and any other material entities” (Clarke 2003:9; Latour, 1987), but their availability in a project at all is usually²¹² an expression of project planning and theories of change.

The case studies show how important it is to see context in these complex terms. The context of the Childrens Centre was similar to the Youth Arts project. The Centre itself (seen as a benign space unaligned with officialdom and “on your side”²¹³), the unknown and rather challenging space of the art project, the construction of a community through the project (survivors of abuse), the dynamics of a single-sex group (and female artists), and its method (experiences to generate a repositioning as expert). But it differed in two key ways from the Youth Arts experience: firstly, the purpose of the activity (to communicate ideas) positioned the participants ambiguously (expert in their own experience, inexpert in communicating ideas); this ambiguity created space for change, enabling participants to negotiate a key role in determining the conference activity²¹⁴. Second, it was also a highly reflective activity, during which creativity helped participants articulate feelings and ideas. This new reflective framework gave some participants the confidence to take further action (using their artwork as support) by presenting at the conference; and this was seen by them as producing the greatest impact on their sense of agency. And above all, the project’s overt aim²¹⁵ was to articulate knowledges to which only the participants had access and which the professionals needed. This placed the participants immediately in a position of enhanced power within the project, and resituated ‘lack’ with the professionals at the conference.

²¹⁰ However, a subsequent research encounter explored the impact of ‘role’ in the project venue (assuming a mythical, historical or very different character through language, costume, play). This was embedded centrally in an arts company practice, but difficult for practitioners to articulate, nevertheless suggesting strongly that structured ‘playing with’ social relations through performance represented an acknowledgement of the social relations aspect of space (Challis, S and Trowsdale, J (2014), *Not Yet Invented*, unpublished research)

²¹¹ Quotes from transcripts of four different recorded Interviews (2011-2013).

²¹² It is also true that participants themselves, or other actants in a network, can make other spaces available. For example, in one project, flooding caused a shift from a village hall to a school; in another, participants’ suggestion to use a local venue was acted on. In the Children’s Centre project the venue moved to a conference hall for some participants, because of their own initiative.

²¹³ Participant description of the Children’s Centre: “It’s on your side” (from Researcher Notes)

²¹⁴ Up until the creative research intervention the Conference was planned to be led by Childrens Centre staff in the absence of participants.

²¹⁵ The aim to improve participants’ confidence, self esteem, sense of agency or autonomy was secondary and covert, in the sense that it was a means to achieve the primary aim.

6.8 The importance of intention: theories of change

The case studies described above represent quite different configurations of the structure of activities, duration and depth of engagement. An important determinant of this is the intention, in the sense of the ideas, theories of change and world views which inform dominant discourses and help shape planning, feelings, behaviours and attitudes in the project, especially project planners and delivering staff. In the Children's Centre project, although of short duration (three days plus the conference), intense creative participation, arising from the emotive subject-matter, was elaborated by the creation of a focused space (time/place), the encounter with new materials and technologies (high quality materials, scale of work). The intention was to produce artworks with aesthetic value, and it was structured to produce many characteristics of an arts activity (open-ended, risk-taking, challenging). These combined to produce creative flow (intense absorption, 'taking you out of yourself') and so the possibility of repositioning. The impact of this highly creative activity was increased by the 'real world' function of the artworks which gave participants the motivation to strive to express themselves. The project theory of change was that the experience of creative flow would lead to a greater sense of agency and autonomy (linked to increased wellbeing); the project's structure emerged from that theory. The unexpected involvement of four of the ten participants in real world action by presenting at the conference of professionals, and the value they gave to this at the subsequent Focus Group, revised that theory: impact was intensified when both things happened. All this was so also for the Rural Youth Arts project, although a much longer engagement brought participants closer to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow as arising through intensity of experience whilst using a new skillset in a new domain. The significance of the real world action in the VJ night was that it not only created the conditions for creative flow and deep engagement, but also motivation for the striving needed to create aesthetic value. The previous engagement had helped participants develop some necessary skills, but these were hugely enhanced 'in the moment' through this striving. Neither project had high levels of democratic participation throughout, but for those who presented at the domestic abuse conference, democratic participation was a major feature, and on the VJ night participants briefly took complete control, even, as the researcher notes record, with the clearing up at the end. In the Upland Farming project open day event (a small part of a wider project), the intention was to exploit the impact of shallow depth of engagement in creativity to secure attention and extend thinking, within a theory of change based on information-giving. Creative participation was minimal, democratic participation absent, and aesthetic value of low relevance: nevertheless, the event was successful in producing sufficient engagement, attention and sense of wellbeing, to enable information to be given.

Although the particular contexts of each project in the research seem very specific, there are aspects which they have in common as well as differences. An important theme of the research theoretical framework, which emerged consistently in field research, was the significance of the physical world, of technologies, materials and place; for example, the distinction between 'professional materials' and 'Blue Peter', 'scrap' or 'non-professional' materials. The encounter with, and mastery of, new and professional standard materials and technologies was cited by participants many times as a contributor to positive impact. Nonetheless, drawing on the critique suggested by a feminist deconstructive approach (Grosz, 1993), research focus was also turned to the subordinate of the binary (Blue Peter materials), such as the Upland Farming Project used on this occasion. What emerged was that the *intention* behind the choice of materials, expressed through the role assigned to creativity, interacted with the quality of materials to intensify or inhibit impact. For example, in the Upland Farming Project, creativity was being used successfully simply for its ability to engage participants, and the materials used were sufficient for this. They may not have been sufficient to maximize impact in a project where creative flow or real world action was intended to produce a greater sense of agency (as in the Childrens Centre, when high quality art materials were used to produce powerful artworks). In the Youth Arts Project, creativity was used to engage, but also to produce the transformatory effect of flow, both in intensity and mastery of a skill in a domain. For this, mastery of professional standard technologies was crucial, as was striving to produce aesthetic excellence. The Carnival Costume Making Course, described in more detail in the next chapter, offers the most revealing insight into the complexities of this apparent dichotomy. For most of the course, recycled 'Blue Peter' materials were used, reflecting an intention to 'pace' learning to use creativity primarily to engage in order to develop a range of skills, some of them not creative²¹⁶. The materials were recycled scrap, and the technologies domestic (hair-driers, glue guns), but the processes used to manipulate them were not every day or amateurish: they were associated with professional costume-making and new to participants and used to 'embellish' professionally-designed costumes²¹⁷. There was an element of craft skills learning in this part of the course, that is, learning to make consistently, accurately and at speed, which many writers associate with the impacts of creativity (Gauntlett, 2007; Sennet, 2008). Later in the course, a number of professional materials and technologies were used, and these, together with real world actions, performances and participant-led workshops, were intended to produce transformative creative flow, in relation both to intensity and skill, opening up the possibility of participants being able to reposition themselves as artists and experts, and increasing a sense of agency and autonomy. In this project, the binary Blue Peter/professional was associated with a distinction between aesthetic excellence and

²¹⁶ Risk assessment, teaching, organisational skills, both in relation to running workshops and the teamwork required in some creative making processes.

²¹⁷ In research interviews, many participants complained about this aspect of the course, expressing feelings of disappointment at not being allowed to engage fully in creative processes such as design and choice of materials. The discussion in Chapter 7 and Appendix E elaborates on this issue.

process in community projects. These binaries were not dissolved in practice, but were revealed as being far more complex than it at first appeared. The professional materials were powerfully different actants in the project networks to the recycled scraps, not entirely because of their material qualities, and the different relationships these determined (team working, sharing tools), but also because they embodied discourses about value and aspirations. They were, in Actor Network Terms, network effects (Latour 2004). My conclusions were that professional standard materials and technologies are indicated to *maximize* the transformative impact of creativity, but that the role materials and technologies play is always mediated by the intentions expressed in project discourses about change, and embodied in the consequent structure of activities.

6.9 Maximising positive impact

Throughout, the research found that creativity in projects is most likely to have a positive impact, but the extent and type of impact depends on context. The nature of the research, with its close links to evaluation, means that it focussed on what happened within the timeframe of the projects or very soon after. This meant that 'context' referred mainly to project specific phenomena. It did not include, for example, prior experiences or comment on the long-term sustainability of impact beyond three or so months – except through participant self-report. This is a major issue for project evaluation, and, as Chapter 7 will suggest, a major argument for funding of meta-evaluation (beyond individual projects); but it is also a statement against 'over claiming' encouraged by unrealistic commissions.

The findings were that creativity, participation and reflection come together in complex interrelationships to maximise positive impact, and very often their impact cannot usefully be distinguished. Arguments about aesthetic excellence versus process become redundant in this context. However, my research did indicate that all these factors need to be present. This is partly because it became clear as the research data analysis proceeded, that aesthetic excellence or value in projects is most usefully conceived as a set of processes or experiences, characterised by striving, persistence, open-endedness and risk-taking. This means that aesthetic value as process has a central place in producing impact in creative projects, without reference to normative aesthetic standards about excellence, which can undermine planning for other significant factors, such as active participation.

Moreover, the dominant discourses and intentions in a project, often expressed through planning but also negotiated and renegotiated throughout, are among the most important determining factors in the extent and type of impact. They act as mediators for the impact of other factors such as context, artform and space. Discourses which position participants as active agents in their own experiences, and the activities planned in consequence, are more

likely to create the conditions for this impact than discourses which position them as passive recipients of activities which remedy their lack.

Additionally, and this will be explored in greater depth in the next Chapter, the development by participants of a reflective framework was found to be central to enabling the transformatory change associated by Freire with praxis. Controversially, democratic participation in the organisational aspects of projects was not, in this research, a significant separate factor in producing high levels of impact, although it may be in other circumstances, and in this research its lack was sometimes a source of tension. On the other hand, taking part in collective action outside the project in an activity judged valuable by a relevant community (often called 'real world' activity by participants), was a highly significant contributor to impact in several of the projects. Impact was maximised when creativity, participation and reflection were all present. The research findings suggested that the extent and nature of their interaction varies between and within projects. These differences, and the extent to which all three were present at the same time, was related to how projects defined each factor. These definitions – whether overt or not - underpinned intentions expressed throughout in project discourses, structuring of activities, materials and physical spaces.

The implication of this research is that projects can plan to maximise the impact of creativity in their projects by structuring activities to include the conditions for creating creative flow (which will differ between projects but needs to include scope for intensity, extended thinking time and collective activities) and aesthetic excellence (through ensuring that experiences include striving, are challenging, outward looking ,and inspiring, and use professional quality materials and technologies). They then need to plan how participation and reflection will interact with these conditions: active participation, for example, might be in the aesthetic process or in democratic processes, or both, but real world actions are essential. This is the beginnings of a planning tool which the next Chapter will develop. As qualitative action research the value of the above analysis may lie in its resonance for readers and therefore how authentic it seems to them (Latour, 1988). Chapter 7 argues that this may not be a position that can be taken by an evaluator, who must sometimes meet the needs of readers with very fixed expectations.

Chapter 7 Implementing research findings in field trials of evaluation techniques and strategies

Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 presented findings which suggested that a densely interwoven experience of creativity, participation and reflection maximised impact. Moreover, these same conditions could produce positive impact even in brief encounters with creative research methods. Debates which pitted aesthetic excellence of outcome against participatory processes were redundant when aesthetic excellence was redefined as a set of processes and experiences connected with striving, persistence, open-endedness and risk-taking in an imaginative framework, qualities associated with artists' practice. A part of the findings was that practice-led, creative research methods produced different kinds of knowledges through the embodied enactment of feelings which themselves contributed to change-related praxis. Moreover, creative methods were highly engaging, a quality greatly in demand for evaluations. This chapter describes Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the research which comprised field trials of evaluation methods based on the findings, and eventually, of strategies based on these two key ideas from them:

1. that projects can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they offer the conditions identified by this research as maximising positive impact
2. that the evaluation process itself can be designed to contribute to that positive impact.

These trials of methods, particularly their partial success, led to the understanding that evaluation demands a whole project approach. In response to the liminal qualities inherent in creative processes and the uneven, partial and non-linear nature of the impact described in Chapters 5 and 6, evaluation strategies drew on ideas about working in stochastic systems, described in Chapter 3 (section 3.10). This 'complexity awareness' implied a systemic approach. In a systemic approach evaluation is integrated throughout the project activity, carried out by a wider range of stakeholders and participants than usual, and is a significant part of project planning before implementation. The terms 'of the project' and 'of the moment' were also coined as it became clear that evaluations were more effective if they drew on the contexts, practices and skills of each project and that, although their purposes, definitions and sometimes baselines are established from the start, they could be implemented responsively at appropriate moments and in appropriate ways.

In order to 'capture' complex outcomes in the stochastic systems associated with creativity a participatory mixed methods approach was indicated²¹⁸. During Phase 2 initial attempts at implementing a whole project strategy were less successful than later for reasons which are discussed. A relevant finding from Phase 1 and 2 was that things happen very fast in projects, and opportunities for ongoing reflection are few because of time constraints – particularly where team members (artists, teachers, and staff) are contracted for activity sessions only. Therefore, trialling evaluation strategies was dependent on a high level of commitment not only from project management but also from other members of the team. This became an important, perhaps determining, issue for the successful adoption of the proposed approach in Phase 3.

This chapter is divided into three thematic and, to an extent, chronological parts. The first third describes the gradual shift from research to evaluation in this study. It outlines various trials of evaluation methods, including a detailed account of a Focus Group with a collective creative intervention which produced counter-hegemonic discourses at the end of a long and less controversial research process. The second third describes several emergent strategic approaches, including an artist-led evaluation. It explores ideas which funders have about qualitative methods through a number of interviews. Finally, the last third of the chapter describes the way that evidence from Phases 1 and 2 became the basis for a proposal for evaluation based on conditions in a project which the research showed maximises the potential for positive impact. It concludes with two accounts of evaluations in live projects using this systemic, participatory strategic approach in a Pilot of the Arts Council's Children and Young People's Quality Principles and a regional Library Service arts project.

²¹⁸ See Chapter 4

7.1 The shift from research towards evaluation

In this study, research into the impact of creativity and participation was not ever fully separated from research into ways to evaluate that impact. However, as the research proceeded there was greater focus on feasibility of method and value of evidence to the evaluation process in small to medium sized projects. Table 13, below, gives a rough picture of how that focus shifted over time during the research.

Table 13 Timeline: from research (blue) to evaluation of impact (red)

| Project name in current research | 2011 Scoping phase Aim 1 | 2012 Phase 1 Aim 1 | 2013 Phase 2 Aim 2 | 2014 Phase 3 Aim 3 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Initial Interviews | [Blue bar] | | | |
| Urban Refuge #1 | [Blue bar] | | | |
| Urban Refuge #2 | | [Blue bar] | | |
| Children's Centre | | [Blue bar] | | |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | | [Blue bar] | [Red bar] | |
| Godiva Awakes! Homecoming | [Blue bar] | [Red bar] | [Red bar] | |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | | [Blue bar] | [Red bar] | |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | | [Blue bar] | [Red bar] | |
| Not Yet Invented Schools project | | | | [Red bar] |
| Lively Libraries | | | | [Red bar] |

7.1.1 Changing ethical considerations

Evaluation looks for legitimacy in both research reliability and pragmatic use value (Smith 1999; Mathison 2005; Matarasso 2009, 2011). Like research, it involves systematic data collection: “gathering, ordering and making judgements about information in a methodical way” (Rogers and Smith 2006) and what some writers have called ‘additional’ concerns²¹⁹ related mainly to its roots in action and its function in funding regimes. These have been described as:

...feasibility, practicability, needs, costs, intended and unintended outcomes, ethics and justifiability

(Mathison 2006:186).

The overlap between the two practices is most evident in the tradition of evaluation of projects being carried out by academic researchers, as part of post-graduate studies, financial contracts or grants²²⁰. The Arts Council England has commissioned several case study and survey researches, from academics, professional evaluators, and community arts practitioners: roles which people may embody variously throughout their careers²²¹. By thinking about the relationship of both evaluation and research to the construction of meanings and to structural power relations, it became less important to focus on differences of practice in the research except in these terms. For example, as the research developed, the boundaries between research and trials of evaluation methods became blurred. The consequent practical issue that arose were not so much about techniques, but about how the information should be shared – with participants, stakeholders and / or funders, or other audiences. Although this is an ethical issue primarily connected with principles of participatory practice, it derives directly from the different relationships of the two practices to power. Evaluation is characteristically driven by powerful funders, who are able to frame its form and content (what questions are asked, of whom, how and so on), and *many people* involved in evaluation, as practitioners or participants, know this. It is most often informally discussed in projects in terms of ‘accountability’, ‘value for money’ or ‘proof’ (Mathison 2005; Blattman 2011; Matarasso 2009). It usually operates within paradigms framed by hegemonic public or charitable policy requirements which to a greater or lesser extent reflect prevailing structural and cultural power relations. In practice, evaluation strategies are usually determined by funders needs, and the desire to ‘satisfy’ a range of stakeholders may fluctuate or fade during the life of the project. Moreover, funders’, commissioners’ and

²¹⁹ Although clearly research must take these things into account too.

²²⁰ For example, the close relationship in commissioning and funding research between Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

²²¹ For example 509 Arts (2010); Pain, Finn, Bouveng, & Ngobe (2013); also commented on by Matarasso (2009). This researcher had also worked as artist, community arts worker and project manager, evaluator and academic researcher.

project managers' expectations of evaluation and the theoretical frameworks they work within may change during the life of a project (Matarasso 2009) with subsequent impact on methods of data collection and framing and presenting findings. Nevertheless, as Chapter 5 described, the power to determine hegemonic discourses about purpose and value in the current research projects was subject to negotiation. For example, in the early stages of the CCMC participants thought 'their' project should be evaluated on the quality of artworks produced for a community event. But since it was tasked by funders to evaluate on the basis of personal changes in participants' self-confidence and skills, this became the eventual focus of formal evaluation enquiry in the trials. Whereas in a previous project, tasked by funders to target participants with 'single parent status' for evaluation purposes, staff had argued that participants privileged a 'welcoming and friendly' approach which did not differentiate or demand disclosure. In order to create that atmosphere, project management had to engage in protracted and only partially successful negotiations with funders to change the recording protocols and so the evaluation methodology. Arguably then, in the context of a particular project, the issue of who the evaluation was 'for' ("by what means, to what ends" Clarke 2008:157) was most usefully regarded as unresolved and problematic throughout. Within and during each single project there were many agendas, as Hope says, determined by "the ethics, mores, praxis, political ideals and economic circumstance of those involved" (Hope 2011:39). The tension between these varied and varying motivations, such as the 'open-ended' practices of artists and the drive to 'prove' specific impacts for stakeholders, demanded a complex response. The Action Research approach of the current research offered a way to acknowledge the power relationships implicit in evaluation, without necessarily changing them. It helped forefront the fact that ethical issues were fluid and had changed as the research had moved into new Phases, with a much greater pressure to share findings with project management. For example, the research set out to evaluate project processes against the findings of Phase 1 about maximising impact. Where the researcher made a judgement that a project had not created these conditions, evaluation dissemination had the potential to become a controversial issue.

The summaries which follow show how this and other issues were tackled in each evaluation trial. This includes a case study highlighting the significance of collective creative evaluation.

7.2 Methods in the trials

Methods themselves were initially similar to those used in Phase 1 research, as Table 13, below, shows, and related to the practices of the project where possible. The main differences were (as discussed above) an expectation that evaluation findings would be shared with project management in a form useful for their own reporting whenever possible. Table 14 also shows that, as the research continued into Phase 3, attempts were made to trial whole project evaluation strategies in some projects²²².

Table 14 Evaluation methods and strategies trialled in Phase 2 and 3

| Project name | Evaluation methods trialled in PHASE 2 | Main subject of evaluation | Main project activity | Creative activity in project |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Urban Refuge#1 | Expressive body mapping | Services offered | Women's refuge | Expressive body mapping (in the evaluation only) |
| Urban Refuge #2 | Expressive mapping | House meetings | Women's refuge | Expressive mapping (in the evaluation only) |
| Childrens Centre | Expressive body mapping | Professional services | Childrens Centre | Expressive body mapping, (in the evaluation only) |
| Carnival Costume Making Course | Questionnaires, surveys, discussion, nformal/formal interviews, Focus Group, observation, participant observation, reflective journals, expressive markmaking, collective expressive timeline, expressive design | Impact of project itself Including its creative activities and participant-led community workshops | Community arts & public spectacle, carnival, choirs, performance | Making /designing costumes |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Observation, participant observation, ormal/.informal interviews, discussion, prompted video diaries, surveys, questionnaires, video interviews, sound interviews, collective expressive imeline, creative video Modified integrated evaluation strategy mplemented | Impact of overall arts project itself, and Film Club creative activities | Programme of workshops and shows some participant-led organisation | Film Club: digital media, video, sound making, VJ Whole project: public performances, sculptures, arts workshops |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | Dverall evaluation strategy Participant observation, observation, nformal/formal interviews Modified evaluation strategy mplemented | Impact of project itself Including its creative activities, community meetings | Advice, information giving, networking | Pottery, storytelling, crafts |
| Godiva Awakes! Home-coming | Large scale questionnaires, observation, nformal/formal interviews, online surveys Integrated evaluation strategy offered | Impact of project itself Including its creative activities & public performances | Performance design & make, engineering, choirs, dance, aerialists | Performance design & make, engineering, choirs, dance, aerialists |
| | | | | |

²²² Godiva Awakes!, RYA, Upland Farmers, Not Yet Invented and Lively Libraries

| | Whole project evaluation strategies trialled in PHASE 3 | | Main project Activity | Creative activity in project |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Not Yet Invented | systemic integrated evaluation strategy Online surveys, questionnaires, participant journals, observations, participant observations, Focus Group, case studies, discussion, video interviews, participant photography, drawings | The project itself Including its impact creative activities Children's learning Quality of partnerships | Improving learning in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) | Design and build maquettes for performance |
| Lively Libraries | systemic integrated evaluation strategy Prompted observation, observation, discussion, online surveys, questionnaires, physical, collective expressive timeline | The project itself incl its impact Creative activities Quality of partnerships | Increasing library use, up skilling staff, new audiences for art | Craft, storytelling, dance, performance |

It can be seen that there was a shift from the research Phase 1 when impact was the prime focus to a wider focus in Phase 3 on impact plus 'the project itself'. This reflected the function of evaluation not only of proving impact but of 'improving' practice. Of course, there were elements of this focus in Phase 1, because the practices of the projects were to a great extent determiners of impact. In this shift, project aims, as determined by their funders or commissioners assumed a greater importance. The Table shows that in Phase 2 attempts were made to implement evaluation strategies (that is, whole project approaches) but that these were not successful until Phase 3 (and then only to a limited extent). At the time of initial contact, all these projects were overtly driven by the explicit aims of their funding, and aware only to a greater or lesser extent of the aims of other stakeholders, including managers, artists and participants. A development of the research was that whereas methods in Phase 1 had been evaluated in terms of their ability to produce authentic evidence about what was happening in a project, especially in relation to impact – that is, the question set by the research - evaluation methods in the trials were also judged on their ability to produce answers to questions determined by funders. As Phase 3 went on, the aims of project management, participants and artists began to be discovered too and incorporated into methods and evaluations of methods. Funders' requirements are further discussed in section 7.7 below.

The following sections show how trials of method evolved into trials of strategies to meet a wider range of demands for understandings than is usual in evaluation.

7.2.1 Becoming responsive

Although the Urban Refuge and Childrens Centre research has been described in the previous two chapters as research into the impact of creativity and participation using creative methods all three were also trials of the creative evaluation techniques of expressive markmaking used in body mapping and expressive mapping. These methods were used to evaluate, respectively, services provided by the Refuges and services provided by professional agencies. In all three cases it was possible even in relatively brief encounters to create the conditions to maximise impact. Creative flow, real world action and reflection were part of all three evaluations. Each evaluation produced new knowledge about the subject of the evaluation in new ways and as such was deemed successful by participants, project management and the researcher. But each event also showed how important it was that methods were flexible and responsive and could be adapted in or by contexts or participants (as well as the researcher). For example, in the Refuge#1 project participants wrote comments and stories about Refuge services on their body mapping figures, despite being 'instructed' to use markmaking alone (see Figure 32, below). These related to individual experiences of abuse and how the service was able or not to meet their needs. About a third of these texts were in languages other than English. This was a participant-led innovation to the method. There was no doubt that, rather than detracting from the power of the evidence as presented in the artworks, the combination of methods contributed an increased sense of authenticity and agency. Kingsley, argues from an interpretivist, constructivist theoretical standpoint similar to that which frames this research that using visual and narrative methods together "enhances the inherent strengths of each methodology and allows new understandings to emerge that would otherwise remain hidden" (Kingsley, 2009:535). Moreover, by retaining text in languages inaccessible to the audience (researcher, staff, other participants and members of the public at the exhibition) increased attention was drawn to the issue of the 'hidden' nature of these stories as they became 'marked' as highly personal and 'secret'.

In formal and informal interviews following the activity, staff reported that many participants had disclosed entirely new material about their experiences and about how they perceived Refuge services. In Refuge#2, the expressive mapping technique provided a context for the researcher to listen intently to participants, in a focused and sometimes 1:1 context. Nevertheless, when asked directly participants rejected this as a determining factor in enabling them to extend thinking time and marshal ideas about their living space, citing absorption in the markmaking itself as the key factor. Similarly, in the Childrens Centre trial of evaluation methods professionals and Centre staff reported that new critiques of services had emerged through the method, and participants confirmed that the creative process had helped them order and articulate their feelings and ideas. In all three trials, the small numbers of participants who went on to become involved in

real world action using their artwork²²³ reported significant increases in eudaimonic wellbeing, including at the Children's Centre Focus Group three months after the trial. In discussions after the events staff in all projects confirmed this impact. This creative evaluation method worked well as a producer of new knowledges and positive impact. It was engaging and could be a facilitator of real world action. However, it demanded some artist-related skills to deliver and was of necessity small-scale.

7.2.2 The value of extended contact

This research demonstrated how important frequent contact and mixed methods were in producing rich and authentic data but also how unsatisfactory an 'episodic' approach to evaluation can be. In the next three sections the longest research contact, the CCMC, is used as an example. The researcher became a familiar figure during the course attending half the sessions, and then made an observational and interview visit to each of the four community workshops run by participants, observed them in the Carnival parades in Coventry and London and convened a Focus Group three months later²²⁴. This regular and embedded evaluation process had a number of implications:

Familiarity, although of course not without danger – of advocacy or over-identification – meant that methods could be designed to meet contexts. For example, in an atmosphere of trust and goodwill, participants felt able to disclose their discomfort with literacy. This led to more visual and creative methods being developed (such as expressive markmaking) and an observably increased engagement.

It was possible to revisit themes and follow-up new ones over time, through interviews with project staff, artists and participants²²⁵. These were particularly interesting for observing how the language of participation and creativity used by project staff reflected professional or cultural discourses which sometimes appeared to conflict or change during the life of the project. For example, the Director differentiated between 'process work' and 'quality work', referring respectively to the processes of engaging, teaching and supporting community participants, commonly associated with community project activity, and the artistic development and production of artworks of professional quality by professional artists. This latter might be done together with participants, but the focus of intention and attention would be the production of 'excellent' artworks rather than the

²²³ For example, 4/10 Childrens Centre, 1/7 Refuge#2 and an unconfirmed but relatively small number in Refuge#1. Chapter 5 discussed this in more detail.

²²⁴ Imagineer Productions made the researcher welcome to attend this project freely.

²²⁵ These tended to be very brief for reasons discussed below except with the IP Director, who offered several extended interviews.

experience of participants. However, important and sometimes central to the 'theory of change' implicit in this, was the idea that taking part in the production of aesthetic excellence, in however slight a way, of itself contributed to transformatory positive impact. Whereas 'process work', concerned with less skilled activity or less professional - standard materials or technologies, although sometimes a necessary stage in a project, was always restricted in its impact. However, follow-up on this theme with feedback from participants suggested a more complex picture. For example, identified factors that clearly fell into the 'process work' activity were also among those which produced the greatest positive impact²²⁶. The most significant impact was associated with being paid and successfully running community workshops. Where aesthetic excellence was mentioned by participants, it was related to the context of community, that is, to community judgements of quality. This was quite different from the Director's definition, which aspired to a community of "world class art" and the normative standards of aesthetic value in mainstream 'arts and culture'²²⁷. In fact, participants throughout this study²²⁸ rarely articulated a model of aesthetic excellence. This is hardly surprising, since, as Chapter 2 points out, aesthetic excellence is a contested concept and possibly regarded as a specialist area by participants, most of whom in this research had been targeted as 'new audiences' for art (that is, not engaging with cultural events) or 'hard to reach' (not engaging with community provision)²²⁹. The relevance of participants' general ideas about aesthetic value to the attitudes they express about their own artwork in a project is a key area for further research.

Methods which used the tropes and practices to the project activity could be developed in the longer contact period. For example, in the penultimate course session, the researcher asked participants to design a carnival costume to express the theme of their own developmental journey during the experience using colour and markmaking. These drawings were valued by participants and project staff for their aesthetic content and because, especially when presented together in a wall-mounted display, they 'told a story' which was regarded as accurate and useful for evaluation. This activity is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Familiarity and frequency of contact also meant that the researcher could interpret disclosed personal information which set findings in a wider context with some confidence. For example, it was difficult to assess the impact of payment on the

²²⁶ From Baseline Survey described above: : things such as 'time for myself', 'learning new skills', 'being treated with respect' and 'making new friends'

²²⁷ There was an explicit rejection in this discourse of community arts practices which lacked such an outward focus.

²²⁸ Or any other

²²⁹ These categories are from Arts Council funding regimes relevant to this research period and the project discussed. Although not entirely Arts Council funded, it was part of participant targeting by funders or project managers.

participants who ran community workshops following the course through direct questioning. Participants were reticent about the subject. However, the relationship between researcher and participants was relaxed enough for her to ask, "Why is this difficult to talk about?", leading to further discussion and the disclosure that almost all the participants (6/8) were planning to spend the money on food for their families: to "fill the freezers first" (participant interview, July 2012). Reticence had been largely connected with an embarrassed reluctance to be perceived as being poor²³⁰. Only by returning to the subject in an atmosphere of trust was it possible to hear this explanation and to realise that the impact of payment was not only related to status and re-positioning in a discourse about self as wage earner²³¹ (which had been made clear in group discussions) but that it had profound significance in economic terms too.

Because of this continuing relationship participants felt empowered to check the status of a conversation far more than in briefer research relationships: "Is this going in your report?" (CCMC participant comment in discussion, August 2012). This was a counter-intuitive finding, since it was expected that over longer time the roles of 'friend' and 'researcher/evaluator' might become confused. However, it would seem that a longer contact where trust has been established, gave participants greater confidence to be challenging in the relationship (as they indeed became more confident generally as their achievements in the project developed). This was important to help maintain the participatory nature of the research and ethical awareness. In a similar way the frequency and duration of contact gave the researcher/evaluator more opportunities to check her understanding with participants. For example, in her 'readings' of the reflective journals participants kept either regularly or sporadically throughout the project as part of evaluation (see Figures 29 and 30 below), her initial understanding was that they were being used to reflect on feelings, but subsequent enquiry suggested that they were primarily used as a technical record of achievements and as a practical guide "for next time" (CCMC Participant comment in discussion, March 2012). Then, at the final project Focus Group, further discussion suggested that the journals had a more complex role: they were used to record technical methods 'for next time' but also often decorated or presented in a decorative or 'designed' way, with drawings or collage. This suggested that the journals also had an aesthetic value for participants, possibly derived partly from examples of artists' sketchbooks which formed part of their introduction as a method. At the Focus Group two participants said that they used the journals for recording feelings. In this discussion several participants suggested that the journals, whether used to record feelings or not in text, did represent a range of positive feelings (such as 'sense of

²³⁰ During the Focus Group some participants also made complaints about the inadequacy of payments which were previously unvoiced. There is more discussion of this in the Case Study below.

²³¹ 6/8 participants had never had paid employment before this.

achievement') through their materiality and aesthetic dimensions and were evocative souvenirs.

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Figure 29 (above) (detail) CCMC Participant Journal: an entry reflecting journal use as a practical guide 'for next time' with collage possibly suggesting an 'artists' sketchbook' aesthetic (February 2012)

Figure 30 (below) (detail) CCMC participant journal with child's drawing and comment (not shown) 'We love it that now you are an artist mum'. The journals were used in a range of ways by most participants and often held positive feelings and memories. (March 2012)

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However, being able to re-visit this discussion over time also revealed insights at first hidden, such as the child's drawing (Figure 30 above) one mother had stuck in her journal, which was a gift from her child with the words, 'We love it that now you are an artist Mum' (Informal discussion, CCMC, May 2011). This revealed not only the social construction of roles in the process of impact, but also the emotional value ascribed to the journal by the participant. In other words, the interpretation previously offered – the journals are a technical record for next time – was not entirely so. In fact, the journals were used differently by different participants and by individuals differently at different times. Some participants did not use them at all, others were enthusiastic. Images of the journals formed a regular part of evaluation reporting in the project, as they seemed to offer authentic testimony. Although in research this might be challenged, in evaluation reporting for this and other projects in the research, participant handwriting was a signifier of authenticity.

7.2.3 The value of mixed methods

The ability to trial mixed methods in the CCMC offered several benefits. Firstly, a baseline was created early in the project using a short questionnaire about confidence, skills and expectations. This was returned to at the end and clearly showed a significant increase in confidence, especially in teaching or running a course and the unexpected outcome that the course was highly valued as 'time out' from family, especially children (an analysis of the baseline surveys is in Chapter 6 and Appendix D). The duration of contact meant that the survey could be partially designed in a half hour session together with participants who quickly understood the notion of 'baseline'. At the same time, a physical representation of how confident participants felt about different aspects of the course was *performed* (associating different sides of the room with points on a Lickert Scale and moving to the point felt was appropriate) and this was repeated towards the end of the course. This showed similar patterns of feelings, but had the added value of not requiring literacy, embodying personal change and a sense of collective change (as participants crowded into the 'very confident' space in the second activity). It was engaging, brief and told a story. During the same few weeks an expressive markmaking activity (described in Chapter 5) was also initiated and repeated before and after a number of creative activities in the course over several weeks. This gave repeated opportunities to capture 'snapshots' of feelings about the same issues and build them into another story which was easily shared with participants and provided a prompt for further discussion. Other methods, such as post-it note comments, graffiti walls, offered brief, light and frequent opportunities for feedback. These methods were all used as thematic indicators for informal discussions and some interviews in order to check and deepen understandings.

7.2.4 The disappointment of episodic evaluations

However, there were two major disadvantages to this episodic and responsive evaluation. Firstly, even in as welcoming an environment as this (with endorsement from the project Director) it was still difficult to make more than 15-20 minutes time for any one activity, and almost impossible to make a private time/space for more extended interviews. This was partly to do with the pace of work needed in the course and partly to do with the lack of a systematically planned and integrated evaluation strategy. Second, because no such planning had taken place, there had been no engagement of project delivery staff except that which took place during the sessions. For example, when the researcher tried to trial an evaluation method (observation followed by brief interviews) with an associated performance rehearsal, it proved impossible to secure time in a busy session. The artist delivering was not engaged in an evaluation process because there was no process, only a series of discrete activities.

Despite these drawbacks, extended contact with CCMC produced useful data about the impact of participation and creativity and was a sound starting point for developing an evaluation strategy. It produced evidence which was used in project reporting for funders and supporters. However, the quality of the evidence and its value for stakeholders was highly variable. Engagement within the project with evaluation processes or findings was not significant (indeed, to some participants and artists the process was sometimes an irritating distraction). Quantitative data was valued in project reporting, but a means of presenting qualitative and especially creative data, except as engaging visual enhancement, was not yet developed. However, the Focus Group convened three months after the final project activity produced much greater participant engagement and further new understandings. It is presented here as a case study of a trial of an evaluation method in an Action Research framework, which, because of the extended contact time became close to a 'mini-embedded' evaluation strategy.

7.3 Case Study: participant-centred, creative, collective evaluation processes

Chapter 5 described use of an expressive timeline with a group of four young teenage boys in the RYA project. This was a very successful piece of evaluation and an example of a collective creative method producing new knowledges in a highly embodied way through the imaginative framework offered by markmaking. It was feasible (relatively cheap and easy) and produced two pieces of data which were used in the project final evaluative reporting: a physical artwork – the timeline, and a video of informal discussion filmed while it was being made. This example, and the following case study, confirmed the value of collective creative reflection to participants and for evaluative reporting to funders and other stakeholders. It also suggested that collective creative evaluations might produce more 'resistant' evaluations which dispute hegemonic discourses. However, within the Focus Group described below the method was not uncontroversial, as the following account suggests.

Focus groups have a mixed reputation in academic research and evaluation, partly because of their association with market and political research (Yates 2004) and the range of 'how to' books which tend to treat them as simultaneous in-depth interviews (Morgan 1998). However, there are a number of reasons why this method was suitable on this occasion, connected with the research's interpretivist theorisation of competing discourses described in Chapter 2 and the desire to uncover submerged processes within the group which might reveal issues of power and agency. Focus groups, with their emphasis on open, facilitated (but not over directed) discussion, offer the potential to observe how, in a particular setting, groups of people construct their social reality to make collective sense of their experience (Bryman 2008)²³². In order to do this, it is ideal to be able to record who is speaking and how, as well as what is said, and to observe phenomena such as use of space and movement and other non-verbal gestures: but in this case it was not entirely possible, for the following reasons:

Firstly, my relationship with the four participants before the day was friendly and familiar²³³, and I was aware from the Training sessions that at least three of the four

²³² Although I would dispute the view, that, since meanings are given to phenomena in everyday life through social interaction (symbolic interactionism), Focus Groups can be seen as more 'naturalistic' than one to one interviews or other methods, in the sense that they "minimise the intrusion of artificial methods of data collection" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995 in Bryman 2008:35; and Bryman 2008:476); I believe that there are far too many cultural and other factors which shape people's experience and expectation of discussion and argument to make that assumption.

²³³ There is a more detailed discussion of the significance of the researcher/participant role in Chapter 3. At this point, despite the lengthy but very formal Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms signed, I was not sure exactly what understandings of my role participants' held (see footnote 1 above). However, because I had spent about 17 hours in group contact with the participants, I felt able to plan the event with some understanding of their needs.

found formal discussion itself, as well as sound or video recording, very intimidating. Whilst I needed to record as much of the discussion as possible, it seemed more essential to maintain an informal atmosphere to encourage openness. For this reason I decided to use a mixture of methods:

- detailed Observation Notes made soon after the event based on notes taken during the event about physical use of space, body language, non-human and technical factors
- detailed notes taken during the event of what was said and how in discussion and written up soon after
- sound recordings of parts of the discussion with participant agreement
- participants' own notes shared during discussion written up by me after the event
- participants' individual notes given to me during the discussion and not shared
- participants' mark making and drawing on a shared 'timeline'
- participants' wording for a series of agreed 'key points written up during the meeting as posters

Second, I had observed in the Training sessions that a free discussion would not necessarily encourage participation²³⁴, and that less 'exposing' methods would reassure and encourage participants to speak more freely. A Focus Group was convened towards the end of the ten-month research engagement with the Carnival Costume Making Course²³⁵. Appendix E gives a detailed Researcher reflection written at the time in the form of a series of reflections and analyses within theoretical frameworks. The following account is a summary. This was a trial of the method as a way to surface processes by which meanings were constructed in a longer-term research site. The aim was to explore to what extent this method could offer new comments on the effect that discourses about change had on attitudes towards participants, and consequently on project impact unavailable through other methods. As part of an Action Research framework the Focus Group agenda had also been designed with participants. The outcomes sought were 1) that participants could reflect back on the course, subsequent community-led workshops, carnival and public performances; and 2), it would help them prepare their ideas to present to a review meeting with project staff and community workers later the same day²³⁶. The event consisted of a morning session with participants and researcher only, buffet lunch, joined by the Director of the Mas Camp Training and three community workers employed by the local authority to support community development work in the Mas Camp neighbourhoods. The afternoon session was planned as an opportunity for participants to feed back to these professionals their own evaluation of the experience, and to provide an additional context for my research, as participant observation, and 'trial' of an evaluation method, in this case, facilitated group discussion.

²³⁴ A socio-linguistic perspective on group discussion is explored briefly in Chapter 3

²³⁵ The Focus Group (September 2012) participants were adult women (over 21), of whom all but one had left school at 16 and taken no further education or training; they all described themselves as 'low income'; and all but one lived in wards defined as 'priority' areas by the local Council.

²³⁶ See Appendix E for a fuller reflective account.

Participant observation, discussion, photo-elicitation, individual recorded interviews and a collective expressive timeline were used as part of the Focus Group first half day. From this it was found that participants identified attitudes of artists or how artists structured activities as important in two ways, open-endedness and positive regard. Participants described processes using phrases such as “there wasn’t a right or wrong way to do it”, “you really felt it was OK to make mistakes”, “you never knew how it would turn out”, contrasting this with school which was characterised as more rigid, less positive and more linear. Artists’ attitudes were characterised as both positive and responsive: “she always praised you”, “she just ignored people who weren’t joining in and praised you if you did”, “he kept liking my way of doing it, even though I did it different from what he said”²³⁷. Contesting discourses emerged during the event. For example, the course was praised by participants for its positive and encouraging style of teaching / workshop leading. Having observed this group for over ten months, the researcher concluded at first that the participants who attended the Focus Group found it difficult to distinguish between ‘encouraging’ and ‘empowering’ styles of delivery. Their benchmark for this seemed to be a rather authoritarian teacher-pupil model associated by them with experiences at school, which meant that small gestures of respect from project personnel carried great weight. The picture was emerging of a complex ethos, where striving for excellence and lavish praise combined with egalitarian relationships yet directive practice. However, during the collective expressive timeline activity (Figure 31, below), when participants talked informally to each other, two much more critical views relating to participation emerged. One related to a specific incident where several participants had felt ‘not listened to’ and the other to a more general complaint that the project planning had not allowed participants to exercise their own judgement about key issues such as costume design and pace.

Nevertheless, an interim review, made as part of my field trials of evaluation methods, before the introduction of professional materials, reported that, “attendance at the course, despite travelling, late evenings and cold weather, was almost 100%” (Summary Interim Report Sept 2012:1). The baseline developed with participants at the start of the course suggested participants had developed “considerable depth of engagement in artistic practice and commitment to community development”, measured in their own terms. Most participants began the course “fairly confident” about their own practical craft skills but “unconfident” about teaching or running a course in the community, which is where the greatest positive change in feelings came: this was the intention expressed in project planning and in discourses about participants needing paced learning of creative skills before they could achieve the desired aesthetic excellence in costume design. The dominant project discourse expressed by staff was that, participants’ desires to “jump in at the deep end” of design and make needed to be contained, and this seemed to be

²³⁷ From transcripts of Participant Interviews and researcher notes of discussion in the Focus Group first session

connected with a deficit model which also meant that this intention was not fully discussed with participants until raised by them at the post-project Focus Group described above (Researcher Notes Interview with Director, November 2012).

The mix of attitudes embodied in the practices of the project were discussed during both participants' discussions and general discussions at the Focus Group. The researcher interpreted these to be a deficit model which denied agency (expressed in lack of democratic and creative participation), even perhaps one among several drivers of the teaching through positive reinforcement and encouragement which participants so valued in the Focus Group discussion. This was combined with respect for participants as low income, single mothers and people with the capacity to engage with their communities, expressed through personal warmth, cups of tea and so on. However, as this stage of the research represented 'beginner' interpretation of participatory, sometimes ethnographic observation, it may be more valid to say only that a range of intentions and discourses were present at any one time, and that these shifted and changed between people and over time, rather than try to pin them down in detail.

Participants approached the timeline activity hesitantly at first but then with enthusiasm. There were a number of 'divisions' or sub groups, based partly on friendship groups and partly, it seemed on less tangible issues around perceived class position which were observable in the early morning sessions. At the start of the timeline activity one participant mentioned it was her birthday. As people milled around the timeline, several participants added birthday greetings. The activity was entirely public yet each comment was personal. Participants drew or wrote on the timeline using markmaking techniques previously practiced and became absorbed in that activity. As with other similar events in the research, people began to comment on each other's work and this led to a collective discussion about perceived injustices in the project organisation (some relating to lack of aesthetic control) which had not previously been collectively voiced²³⁸. This led to a collective agreement to plan how to raise this issue "without losing it" (that is, without getting angry) in the afternoon's discussion.

From Researcher Notes made at the time:

...it became clear that participants were both willing to talk about these at length and also that they felt unconfident and unprepared to make their points directly to the professionals. For example, Participant A was very angry about a perceived neglect by one of the professionals at an event, but felt she could not raise it without getting angry in a destructive way. This prompted a discussion about how this and other

²³⁸ This was a specific subsequent question

'difficult' (that is, emotionally charged) issues could be discussed in constructive ways, to which the entire group contributed, and which led to Participant A raising the topic calmly in the afternoon.

So, the morning functioned partly as a means of focussing on issues which were important to me, and partly as a way of participants both raising issues of concern to themselves and preparing for the afternoon.

In the afternoon, with the project Director and community workers involved, participant observation of discussion was the sole research method. Drawing on the ANT framework discussed in Chapter 3, analysis focussed on the way that meanings became dominant in the network formed by participants, researcher and staff. It seemed that language was used by community workers and project staff to construct participants as learners and recipients of benefit from the project rather than active, determining players in it.

The afternoon discussion was started by a participant presenting the first key issue for discussion, reading from the poster of participants' own words, and elaborating on the theme (teaching styles). Before a follow-up discussion could start, one of the community workers drew attention to the participant's 'progress' in self-confidence and skills:

Community Worker A: "If it wasn't for [the project's] teaching style you wouldn't have come back the second week, would you [Participant A]?"

Participant A (looking sheepish): "No, probably not".

Community Worker A: "You wouldn't have been able to read that out loud to everyone before you came on the training, would you L....?"

Participant A: "No"

Community Worker A I: "You see, these women didn't really get on at school, did you? They didn't have the confidence to read out loud and stuff like this, would you [Participant A]? She wouldn't have been able to do this a year ago"

Participant A: "No I wouldn't of done"

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon

This 'deficit model' was offered by staff and community workers as an 'obligatory passage point', to which everyone was invited to subscribe, with an observably disempowering impact on participants²³⁹. In response to the more critical points about participation reported from the timeline activity by participants for the first time, the project Director explained that "the plan was" to develop skills in the community over a period of several years, building towards a more spectacular and aesthetically powerful carnival (Project Director, from researcher notes made at the time). This plan had not at that point been discussed with participants: "People are not ready yet to design their own costumes: you have to build those skills step by step" (Project Director, from researcher notes made at the time).

²³⁹ This is described in detail in Appendix E

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Figure 31 'Happy Birthday Sarah': during the process of making a collective expressive timeline. Participants shared personal details and gradually critical reflections about the project emerged for the first time (Approx 2.5m x 1.5m, chalk pastels, card (detail))

However, there were ways in which this may have been subverted by participants. For example, a story about 'freezing out' one of the community workers was raised during a discussion about Journal-keeping (Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 7, Line 19): two of the participants' continual cross-confirmation of each other's stories ("Didn't I, [name]?), choosing to sit closely together²⁴⁰; to initiate cigarette breaks outside throughout the day (even though one of them no longer smoked), could suggest a reference to agency and power *outside* the formal structure, which challenged their role as 'objects' (of the research and the project)²⁴¹; just as the participant's story (told in full in Chapter 6) about how she intervened and challenged racism and vandalism suggested power and agency located elsewhere than a discussion group, in her and her friends in her community.

Two key themes were produced from the data at the Focus Group:

- Firstly, participants reported an increased sense of agency and demonstrated new autonomy by taking responsibility for workshops in their own communities and making other positive changes in their lives in a project with a low level of democratic participation, but high levels of aesthetic engagement and 'real world' activity.

Fig 6.7 running
come

²⁴⁰ There are several references to physical relationships in the Research account, which suggest that a visual 'mapping' of the event, describing the seating, proximities etc might reveal other knowledges; the venue itself is also an 'actant' in this process, see Chapter 3.

²⁴¹ Or she might have just needed a cigarette; or used the break to assuage anxiety, boredom...Clearly this requires another research interview

- Second, a range of conventional and creative methods had been used over nine months to elicit feedback from the group, yet critical views about lack of democratic participation emerged only in the informal collective, creative research / evaluation activity (the expressive timeline) , where attention was diverted from the research process, at the end of this period.

There are several possible explanations for this:

- unlike individual feedback activities or discussion, when the researcher is the focus of reporting, collective activity can create a space for less self-censored expression
- collective creative activity also allows the articulation of representations to emerge from the activity and become 'group knowledge'
- the creative activity itself, that is, the non-human 'actant' (the timeline, pastels, wall space) enabled new views to emerge through embodied reflection in an imaginative framework

The possibility that tokenistic consultation in evaluation could "reinforce the marginalisation of those less powerful" Burns et al (2004:373) and that a dominant discourse in a group might marginalise less powerful group members was kept in mind throughout. It was hoped that the Focus Group, by being positioned much more clearly as 'action research' (with direct benefit to participants) than the rest of the research/evaluation, and coming as it did after a close and trusting relationship with the researcher had been established, offered a safe, more meaningful (and not tokenistic) framework for reflection.

The extended relationship with the CCMC functioned rather like an embedded evaluation strategy. However there were two occasions when a strategic approach was implemented in Phase 2 which led to the more refined approach eventually developed. These were with the UFW and RYA projects and are described in the next two sections. This is followed by a brief comment on what was learnt from the failure to implement a strategy in the Godiva Awakes! and Godiva Homecoming projects.

7.4 Case Study: an emergent strategic approach 1

Initial discussions with the RYA project manager (end of year one of a two year project) revealed that she was leaving thinking about evaluation, as opposed to activity monitoring, 'until the end' partly because some of the targets were so daunting (recorded interview transcript, RYA Project Manager November 2012). Targets included

raising skills and confidence of young people through arts and organisational activities, but also evidence that a thousand local people had 'improved mental and social wellbeing' through the project. As well as developing the Film Club evaluation programme together these discussions helped the Manager formulate a whole project approach beyond the simple activity monitoring she was already doing. This included young participants themselves collecting data through conventional and more creative means, regular audience surveys aimed at capturing engagement and regular participant reviews. This was aimed at meeting the need for evaluation to be continual, diverse and engaging. Perhaps the most useful discussion was about the daunting 'thousand people' target, in a rural community with a scattered and small population. This was resolved by theorising the desired change, and making the argument in her reporting that people's mental and social wellbeing is positively affected by two things, their sense of belonging to a community and the aesthetic quality of their environment. Postcards were produced (and a thousand completed) with two simple yes/no questions: 'Do the improvements to the foyer make you feel more welcomed and at home?' and 'Do the improvements to the foyer make you feel happier'. She concluded,

I can guarantee that if we asked people if their mental health had been improved by some new seating the answer would probably have been No... (laughs) but if the quality and design of that seating meant they were happier with their surroundings and um felt like the area was more welcoming, more conducive to sitting and chatting having a social atmosphere then that's something they're more likely to take it on board

(Transcript of recorded interview with Project manager, November 5th, 2012)

The Project Manager described the main barrier to developing an evaluation strategy as being the imperative to implement activities and the drive to hit numerical targets, adding that 'next time' she would look to develop a flexible plan before project start:

It would be something to look at in the first place um I think having that structure in placewould have been a useful thing to have to look at but then you always change things as you go through the project, continually reassessing the project you know what's working and what's not working so well and moving your attention and your impetus to what is having a result

(Transcript of recorded interview with Project manager, November 5th, 2012)

7.4.1 Case Study: an emergent strategic approach 2

Initial discussions with the Upland Farmers Wellbeing Project Officer were also in Phase 1 and also midway through that project. An immediate impact of this thinking time was that the project team realised they had been working to the wrong outcomes for nearly a year. A plan for regular reviews, baselines, and more engaging and qualitative methods was jointly agreed with the researcher. These included a 'pub quiz' event with a local Women's Institute group in order to establish a baseline and measure improvements in understanding and knowledge (a key project outcome). The final project evaluation report went on to be commended as an example of 'Best Practice in Evaluation' for the umbrella organisation and the project funders. However, reflection on the value of creativity in the project was limited, perhaps in keeping with its limited role in the project but also because project staff felt that such an analysis was outside of their expertise. (Chapter 6, Case Study 6.6.4, is a detailed reflection on a creative activity in this project).

Both these examples led to the implementation of partial and limited evaluations and to the conclusion that barriers to developing and implementing an evaluation strategy were connected with these issues:

- It was difficult *after* a project had started, for pragmatic reasons (set budgets, time allocations) and because ways of working were established without it
- Lack of skills or confidence to implement it
- The need for managing change of attitudes, discourses and practices within an organisation.

During this period the researcher acted as informal consultant to an artist-led Community Interest Company and proposed that this company, Frilly, implemented the systemic, participatory and creative evaluation strategy under development. This account of that process was written following a recorded interview with the two artists

7.5: An artist-led whole project approach

Frilly was contracted to carry out an evaluation of a complex, nine-month, international youth arts project. The project worked at a distance (mainly digitally, some visits) with six youth theatre groups from all over the world, supporting them to develop performances which were refined and combined during an intense, two-week rehearsal time in Manchester, involving local schools and culminating in a public show. This was an experienced youth theatre company, who had been running similar international projects for over ten years.

Reflecting on their experience as external evaluators²⁴², Adrienne and Kirsty (Frilly) identified several key issues in the process:

- They had been contracted after the project had been running for several months, and were therefore unable to implement key ideas about embedding evaluation into planning
- Their main project contacts were freelance artists with no direct connection to project aims and outcomes, or a priori commitment to evaluation
- The purpose of evaluation was related partly to funders' requirements, but mainly to securing future work; that is, not to reviewing and improving as the project unfolded. That is, there was a genuine commitment to surfacing issues for improvement but these related to the next project, not the current one.
- They believed that, for its commissioners, most important outcome of the evaluation was to produce an attractive and accessible report which adequately reflected the richness of this multi-layered project.

This thesis suggests that these conditions are common in the experience of externally contracted evaluators. They form a barrier to developing a systemic strategy, which depends on integration from the planning stage and time to generate commitment from stakeholders. One of the key finding to arise from this trial was that criteria for evaluating processes and outcomes in such a project could more effectively be developed at planning stage with all stakeholders, using external standards or not, depending on the audience for the evaluation. Frilly's experience, described below, represents their attempt to integrate evaluation in these common conditions.

Although the original brief was focussed on the final two week joint performance period in the UK, Frilly decided to begin evaluation while the groups were developing their performances at home, setting evaluation 'tasks' and reporting via the existing project internet network.

There were other barriers to overcome. A number of youth theatre groups from all over the world were twinned with UK groups. Technical difficulties, communication styles and

²⁴² Notes from videoed interview discussion, January 2013

cultural differences gave each group a unique relationship with the UK team, and attitudes towards participant-led evaluation differed widely. For example,

There were some groups where only the adult leader had internet access, and they, they kind of channelled the young people's comments...not exactly censored them, but it was more like an agreed group feedback, not the voices of the actual individual young people...

(Kirsty, Video Interview transcript, 20.1.13).

Nevertheless, this ongoing contact, as well as producing usable data, raised awareness and expectations about evaluation and introduced the evaluators. The evaluation commission brief itself did not specify outcomes to evaluate 'against' and the freelance artists delivering the project were working to overarching company and project aims. Even at this late stage in the project, as part of the research trial, the researcher suggested that Frilly began to develop the project's 'theory of change' through mapping activity to the company's broad aims, and those of the major funding stream, the Arts Council's *Great Art For All*²⁴³ award. Like many other medium sized community arts projects, this project also had small charitable trust awards and local business support: an accessible, positive evaluation was needed to demonstrate activity and engagement, but outcomes associated with this support were sketchy. For example, that 'local young people attract local audiences to an exciting local arts event'. Although the programme was clearly process-driven and the company's practice highly participatory, with young people developing and shaping the content and to some extent the form of the programme (within clear limits), evaluating *process* through mapping is perfectly feasible. At this point there were no widely accepted criteria for quality of process in the sector. Later in 2012 the Arts Council England (ACE) began a consultation with practitioners and young people in order to develop exactly this; there is further discussion of the Children and Young People's Quality Indicators below in this chapter.

In this trial of the emergent strategy, Frilly used quality indicators derived from overarching aims in the company's own literature; these supported analyses of data which were welcomed by the company. These analyses were shared to a limited extent with participant groups during the evaluation, but time constraints, exacerbated by international communications problems, reduced the opportunity to make them part of a genuine reflexive loop of feedback. As external evaluators, contact with the project ended once the final report was accepted: the company may well have seen it (as an attractive and accessible online document) as a tool to increase impact through further participant reflection:

²⁴³ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/great-art-and-culture-everyone> (accessed 24.2.15)

The report is a physical manifestation of a continuous conversation we had as we went along which was a contribution to the impact of the project

(Kirsty, Video Interview transcript, 20.1.13).

Frilly used a wide range of conventional, innovative and creative evaluation techniques, and reported using graphics, video and lots of photography. The creative methods, they felt, were 'good and bad':

they were great because they were very engaging and low tech and produced lots of data, but interpreting that data took much longer than the conventional stuff, especially because we could use software to analyse that, even the quantitative, qualitative stuff

(Adrienne, Video Interview transcript, 20.1.13).

Chapter 2 showed how the evaluation of aesthetic quality is very controversial. There are two relevant issues which fuel this: the difficulty of agreeing what constitutes aesthetic quality; and the difficulty of evaluating the quality of art-based enquiry itself. Finley's (2003) review suggests that quality of research lies in valuing participatory methods and ensuring that the enquiry is relevant to and respectful of the community it researches, creating "an open space for dialogue" (Finley, 2003:294). Although this is very much an ethical stance, the emphasis it places on participation and dialogue, on collecting multiple views, also suggests a way of producing useful evaluations which have value when external standards are inappropriate. Contemporary arts practice, with its attachment to multiple knowledges, lends itself to this kind of research:

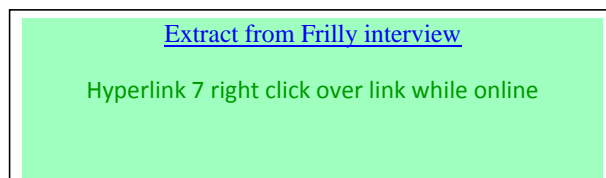
At the beginning of every discussion [with participants], we said, 'whatever you say is the truth, but it's not the only truth'...

(Adrienne, Video Interview transcript, 20.1.13).

Indicators for evaluating aesthetic quality of performance have been developed, but they tend, like the well-regarded New Economics Foundation's *Capturing the Audience Experience* (2010), to use audience surveys, rather than to set standards. NEF measures emotional and intellectual engagement and references the reflective absorption associated with Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'creative flow' (1996, 2002). With this in mind, Frilly agreed with the company that the aesthetic quality of the final performances would be evaluated jointly by themselves, the performance artists delivering the project, the young participants *and* audiences. Frilly's evaluation was

designed to reflect on the experiences of artists and participants as well as audiences, particularly reflecting on the processes leading to the performance and the depth of participant engagement. However, when all this data was collated, there was a close congruence in views, particularly about 'what worked well and what didn't and why'; this was regarded as a validating factor in the evaluation.

Hyperlink 7 is to a brief video clip of an interview discussing this decision.



As part of this trial, Frilly used a wide range of engaging and creative qualitative evaluation methods, some of which developed together with this researcher. These involved simple thematic analyses of text and recorded transcripts, interviews and quantitative qualitative analysis of visual and textual surveys, which they produced as engaging graphics, accessible to most of their evaluation participants (and available to them online).²⁴⁴ Most significantly, for the "blending of form and function" (Finley 2003:287) which 'of the project' evaluation implies (researcher's formulation), they also experimented with methods closely linked to the artforms observed. This meant that sometimes methods were attempted and quickly dropped or modified. For example, the kind of expressive markmaking used successfully in the projects described elsewhere in this thesis seemed "too abstract" for these dance and theatre performers, who were happier with more embodied activities. Frilly developed a routine which involved watching an evening performance then meeting participants the next morning at the start of their debriefing and rehearsal session. Overnight they planned short, engaging evaluation activities using the tropes and physical props of the performance they had watched. These were usually highly physical, group activities, followed by recorded discussion. For example, for a performance involving dance on the theme of personal confusion, the evaluation included an entanglement of bodies following a ball of string, eventually wrapping and trapping the cast.

These time and place specific, tailored evaluations were highly successful at engaging participants. They were regarded by Frilly as an essential part of producing the focussed, enthusiastic and reflective discussions which followed. They also produced data, as observations and short videos, which was difficult to analyse. Frilly's attitude to this data had two qualities. On one hand they made an assertion of expertise - one of Eisner's

²⁴⁴ Full report detailing all methods at <http://issuu.com/redannie/docs/ctw2012evaluation>

(1997) indicators of quality in arts-based research: "what we are experienced in is producing participatory work and working in a participatory way with people" (Adrienne 20.1.13); and, more specifically,

Sometimes we felt we could tell what people were feeling, how the performance went... for individual young people... by the way they did things, what they said during the activity, body language really, energy levels...

(Adrienne, Video Interview 20.1.2013)

On the other hand, although there was participant interpretation, since each discussion began with the question, 'How did you feel during that [evaluation] activity?', there was little further formal analysis, for reasons connected with resourcing (time) and a sense of "not knowing exactly how to proceed" connected with not knowing how to interpret or value the data for final reporting (Adrienne Interview, 20.1.13).

Arguably, Frilly's 'morning after' evaluation activities can be regarded as "performance texts" (Denzin 1997), in which, as Finley says, a dialogic space is opened for both "inquiry and expression". Performance texts are contingent, require imaginative interpretation and are reflexive processes which "redirect[s] attention to the process of doing research, rather than the product or finished report of the research" (Finley 2003:287).

Nevertheless, this trial suggests that, even for experienced participatory artists, a statement discussing the limits and potential for producing knowledges and understandings through arts-based, 'of the project' evaluations would extend their value beyond their role as engaging participants and supporting better text and talk.

The main points which arose from this trial were that:

- Systemic evaluation is a developmental process for everyone involved, during which understandings, skills and commitment can evolve
- Artists with highly participatory practice models may find systemic, 'of the project' evaluation more congenial: it fits better with their skills set and/or temperament
- Creative evaluation activity which is closer to the project genre (in this case, performance) is likely to be more engaging than unrelated methods
- The potential of creative evaluation methods to produce rich, complex data is established, but their place in conventional evaluation reporting needs to be more fully discussed

A systemic strategic approach was indicated.

7.6 A systemic strategic approach

The diagram below summarises the process of the systemic integrated evaluation strategy developed in Phase 3:

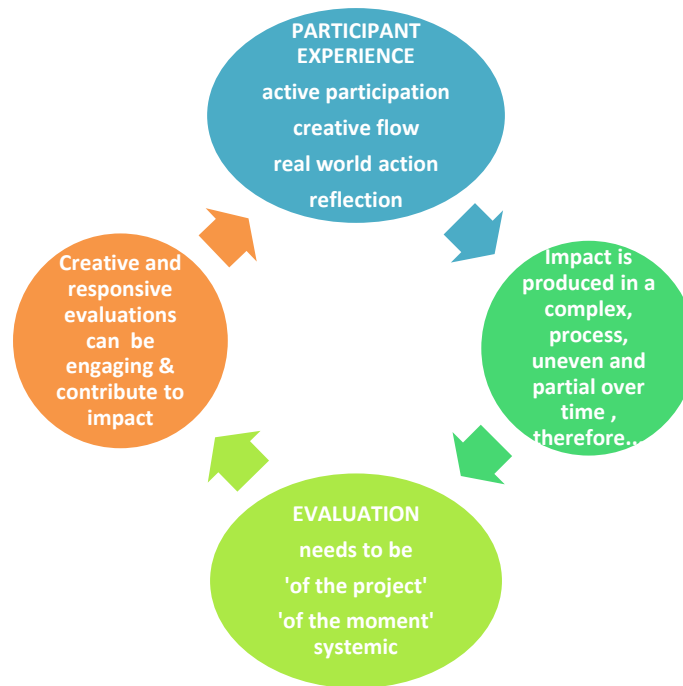


Figure 32 A systemic integrated evaluation strategy

At this point in the research it seemed essential to establish a deeper view of the main audience for the formal evaluation reports which daunted artists and managers alike. The next section explores this from the perspective of a private sponsor and in-post Funding Officers, perhaps themselves caught between conflicting discourses of value.

7.7 What the funders said

Two Funding Officers (Big Lottery, Arts Council West Midlands) and one commissioner (a local arts broker company) and one private industry sponsor were interviewed for this stage of the research²⁴⁵. These were from four of the projects in the research. These interviews were similar in their reflexive structure to the Initial Interviews described in Chapter 4, although none of these interviews were recorded. Texts compiled from Researcher's detailed notes were shared and returned with corrections for a second interview which then produced a second agreed text²⁴⁶. There were considerable differences between the views of the three public funding bodies and the Director of a private engineering company, Roger Medwell (RM), who sponsored the Godiva Awakes! and Homecoming projects. One of these was that Roger was happy to be named, but the funding officers preferred to remain anonymous and so can be seen as representing the views of informed insiders, rather than an official policy line – much of which has been explored in Chapter 2. Such a small sample is not representative, but was taken as a useful indicator of the demands on the small to medium sized projects in the research sample.

The most significant difference between the private and public funders was that RM, as a local resident with deep local loyalties, regarded as evidence his own judgement of local change. He accepted the judgement of participants about the impact of projects at face value. This applied equally to reports of increased hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing which he regarded as equally valuable. As a committed Christian he was interested in participants' spiritual welfare as well as the need for economic regeneration. His inexplicit theory of change was that participation in pleasurable and exciting creative activities was in itself beneficial and led to long term improvements in wellbeing. This was particularly so when projects had a collective public focus, since he believed that "people need a sense of community to feel good, to have a stake and take responsibility" (RM July 2012). RM's main concern was to raise the aspirations of young people locally, as part of a regeneration of Coventry's engineering industry. The issue of what kind of evidence was less pressing for two reasons: firstly, RM felt able to make his own first-hand judgement of the quality of a project in terms of its instrumental impact – which was partly a function of its aesthetic quality. Second, he had the power to make funding decisions without recourse to a system of protocols or criteria.

²⁴⁵ Referred to as A, B and C.

²⁴⁶ As with the Initial Interviews, these texts themselves could constitute the data for a whole piece of research, but on this occasion permission was not sought.

In contrast, the public Funding Officers and commissioners were bound by protocols about evaluation which minimised their own judgement in the interests of equity. For example, at this time the Big Lottery system for 'signing off' projects was that a final report, including budgeting, activity monitoring and evaluation material (although the latter was the least specified) came to the Officer who checked it against set criteria and passed on a recommendation to accept or not to an independent decision-making committee. The report itself was not passed on except in exceptional circumstances. Because of large case loads, 'additional' material such as video, sound recordings, images or participant artworks were likely to be glanced at and filed, and were seldom passed on to the decision-making committee:

we put a lot of emphasis on outcomes, that's one of the most important things to the Big Lottery ...obviously quantitative outcomes are the easiest to measure and are easier for us to record, but the other side, qualitative outcomes, are very important to us ...

We appear to be easier than some other funders in that we mostly accept what our grant holders tell us – maybe we should challenge more on the softer outcomes but we accept that we're not experts in a particular field such as the Arts... Outcomes are the differences being made by the project and that is the most important thing we measure ... It's important that participants are not just turning up but are fully engaged...we expect that projects will demonstrate depth of engagement in a variety of ways, but there must be a written report – this is public money for which we are accountable and we are externally governed as to the type of reports we require

Funding Officer B, researcher interview notes, May 2012

There are two key points here, that the funders are not experts in judging aesthetic quality, and that, perhaps consequently, focus on extrinsic goals, 'the differences being made'. There is a similar picture from the Arts Council Officer, who also comments on the large case load that separate the Officer from making first-hand judgements about the project: "this office has gone from 45 staff to 25, so we have to say to the sector, you need to be sharing best practice case studies yourselves" (Funding Officer A, researcher interview notes, March 2012). Nevertheless, Arts Council Funding Officers often visit projects, particularly their regularly funded companies, several times throughout a project from bid-writing stage. Despite this,

In the annual submission of data we are looking for narrative, what went well, not well, and case studies, but nevertheless we're always interested in receiving qualitative material – there needs to be a balance of the two...

We don't set a framework [for reporting] so it varies in quality, believability – some of it tends to be rather obvious – 'this changed my life'...

Funding Officer A, researcher interview notes, March 2012

The Arts Council particularly values companies which produce data across the duration of several projects and have longer term relationships with participants – although this may not always be obvious from application criteria requiring projects to reach out to 'new' audiences. Examples of 'good practice' were identified in the interview:

[...] website shows ways of measuring depth of engagement, for some projects they do an 'engagement journey' and they continue to link with the same groups of people, they don't drop people after a project finishes...

[they have done] four year's work, outdoor, networking successful, creating powerful spectacles and lots of participatory activity, rooted in communities – they have carried out in depth research, including longitudinal research using data and creative evaluation – this has given a good case for NPO funding²⁴⁷

Attitudes towards qualitative and creative data seemed ambivalent, and this may express a genuine tension between a narrow conceptualisation of equitable accountability and commitment to developing aesthetic excellence:

we give a lot of weight to the participants' voice depending on how it was recorded, is it recorded accurately? this is lost if it's not recorded on a paper document – I would watch a DVD or hyperlink to video or sound, and report on that, but it may never be seen again...

If it moves too far away from what we consider to be 'normal' reporting it becomes harder... I give my guided personal understanding and recommendation of a project, but other people need to be able to pick up that raw data and see where I was coming from, and because of the volume of reports – as an officer I have roughly 45 projects and some people have 60-80 projects reporting has to be in mostly a standardised form.

We like video and images, it breaks the monotony! But to be of real value in the evaluation they need to be accompanied by written explanation.

Funding Officer B, researcher interview notes, May 2012

[...] are good at visuals, less good at evidencing their case for example, explaining their evaluation methodology – images are difficult for a funder – how can I use it? What does it tell me? Images must be set in a context, that is, data, methods, participation techniques – for example, the artists we used, their CVs, any training they did or didn't need...

Funding Officer A, researcher interview notes, March 2012

²⁴⁷ Almost 700 National Portfolio Organisations in the UK (2012-15) are expected to have close longterm relationships with the Arts Council and in return can expect regular funding. More information is at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/relationship-between-arts-council-and-funded-organisations>

Criteria for 'robustness' were not spelled out in either interview:

Government targets are all numbers-led, but when the CEO is making a case for the [national government] budget it's about creativity and celebrating artistic experience...Case studies help us tell our story, but it needs to be good quality qualitative evidence and robust

Funding Officer A, researcher interview notes, March 2012

There was a similar ambivalence towards budgeting for evaluation beyond activity monitoring:

We would encourage people to put more in their budgets for evaluation, but on the whole people don't put enough

Funding Officer A, researcher interview notes, March 2012

There's no requirement to budget for evaluation in the guidelines, but groups can include this as an allowable cost... the bigger organisations/projects can afford the off-the-shelf toolkits for wellbeing assessment, but this would be unlikely to be available for a small project with a budget of say £25k – by the time you'd paid the youth worker and delivery costs – they are usually pretty tight on resources, time or cash, so it's unrealistic ... but at the other end of the scale, £5m projects over five years, for example, can do it

Funding Officer B, researcher interview notes, May 2012

In summary, these interviews, although by no means representative of official positions or industry-wide views, give an insight into evaluation requirements at a practical level from an insider viewpoint. They suggest that whereas a local private sponsor might have the freedom to make idiosyncratic judgements about value and impact, public Funding Officers may experience a conflict of feelings and attitudes towards qualitative and creative methods, being inclined to accept them at one level and feeling constrained to reject them – except as supplementary support – in favour of written reports or written quantitative- qualitative data. There was also a valorisation in both of these interviews of external consultancy evaluations and established published 'best practice' guidelines.

7.8 The trials (and tribulations) of evaluation strategies

The episodic evaluations of Phase 2 failed to meet the demands of three important issues revealed in the research into impact:

- firstly, that change, 'becoming a subject', was not necessarily a 'transformatory' or discrete event but a never ending process, partial and non-linear, so evaluations needed to be as continual and diverse as was feasible and appropriate
- second, that creative activities in projects opened liminal space and produced stochastic systems where cause and effect were not always clearly linked, so evaluations needed to produce and recognise all kinds of knowledges in as many ways as was feasible and appropriate
- and third, that meaningful evaluation in these conditions required the engagement of a wider range of stakeholders than episodic interventions attracted. This engagement was sometimes associated with type of method, but more significantly with the extent to which stakeholders have the power to determine meanings in the evaluation process.

These presented pragmatic challenges to evaluation, usually linked to the time spans of discrete projects and the need to evidence prescribed outcomes. Table 9b, below, is reproduced from Chapter 4. It shows where and when emergent whole project evaluation strategies (as opposed to episodic methods) were proposed in response to these factors. The discussion below describes the process of developing strategies in key areas of the research.

Table 9b Field trials attempts at whole project evaluation approaches

| Project | Point in research | Type of approach | Outcome |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Godiva Awakes! | Phase 2 (after start of project) | Systemic, participatory | Not Implemented |
| Rural Youth Arts Project (Film Club) | Phase 1 (after start of project) | Episodic, participatory | Implemented |
| Upland Farmers Wellbeing | Phase 1 (after start of project) | Episodic, partly participatory | Partially implemented |
| Not Yet Invented Schools project | Phase 3 | Systemic, participatory | Implemented |
| Lively Libraries | Phase 3 | Systemic, participatory | Implemented |

7.8.1 Phase 3: an evidence-based strategy

The projects in this research operated with a range of theories of change, most of which could only be inferred from the design of project activity or the implications of

funder/commissioner documents. Funding documents may have sections asking applicants to describe 'outcomes' and then 'activities that will help you achieve' them²⁴⁸. So, for example, a project with an stated outcome of 'improving social cohesion', which cites 'skills acquisition' and 'pathways to employment' as a method, can be inferred to believe that social cohesion is linked to levels of skill and employment amongst community members. Another with the same outcome might cite 'raised self-confidence'²⁴⁹, suggesting that how people feel about themselves is a determining factor in creating social cohesion. Central to the new strategy proposed in Phase 3 was the explicit theorisation of desired changes. For the creation of positive impact on participants' individual and collective wellbeing, the evidence of Phase 1 populated that theory. In other words, it was possible to say with some confidence that if the conditions identified in the research as maximising impact were present, a project might be expected to produce positive impact. The evaluation process could then focus on identifying the conditions and their impact in the particular form these took in specific projects, expressed through those particular tropes and practices, discourses and materialities. However, this process needed to be part of project planning, even at bid-writing stage, in order that the necessary conditions for change might be present or be recognised. Table 15 is a summary of the conditions which maximised impact in the field trials, as prepared for bidding stage discussions with trial partners:

Table 15 Conditions which maximise impact

| Evidence-based conditions which maximise positive impact |
|--|
| Valuing individual participants & ensuring active participation <i>(what they bring)</i> |
| Aesthetic excellence & depth of experience <i>(striving, challenge, skills development, open-ended, outward-looking, risk taking, supportive critique, inspirational)</i> |
| Creative flow <i>(skills development, intensity of experience, space, extended thinking time, collectivity, engagement)</i> |
| Quality of processes & materials <i>(new materials, technologies; professionalism)</i> |
| Real world impact <i>(collective & individual action taken outside the project itself, in public, in the community; identifiable quality, confident dissemination)</i> |
| Reflective context & skills <i>(theorised change; expressive creative methods; variety of recording methods, collective reflection, & presentation; interim reviews linked to action plans)</i> |
| Long term data collection <i>(through explicit methodologies)</i> |

²⁴⁸ Example from Big Lottery Reaching Communities grant application form 2013

²⁴⁹ Both examples from project documents in this research.

There might be several 'right' ways to evaluate 'complicated' projects and ways of recognising different relationships between cause and effect in different processes, and at different times in the same project (Snowden and Boone 2007). Central to the strategy was the enrolment of as wide a range of stakeholders (participants, artists, volunteers, management and funders) in creating definitions and meanings which can be measured. These may seem to hold limited meaning, but it is this variety of viewpoint and definition which creates richness and authenticity in the complex field. Explicit in this process is an acknowledgement that a variety of aims and outcomes, beyond those of the funders and management²⁵⁰, are important for this richness. Stakeholders (managers, staff, artists, partners, participants) in the 'implemented' evaluation strategy trials in Phase 3 in Table 10, above, were therefore asked to identify their own aims and outcomes, to define their terms and identify ways in which change can be measured. Their engagement in the process of carrying out this evaluation was essential to the success of this integrated and continual evaluation process, not only for pragmatic reasons, but also in order that it should hold meanings for everyone concerned.

Since creativity almost always produces complex or complicated systems and relationships, the aim of the strategy was not to define 'good practice', but to develop an approach that would work in various contexts²⁵¹. It drew partly on 'developmental evaluation', an approach which extends the reflexive loop from the conventional formative review, when change might be made to planned activity if desired outcomes are not being met, to include a further cycle of questioning values, assumptions and relationships which led up to that point (Patton 2011:10). An entirely process-based evaluation would be a site of tension if seen as diverting resources (time, people) from summative evaluation required by funders²⁵². Developmental evaluation could be a feasible way of doing both. This involves collecting data and relating it to outcomes, but implies a different purpose, more closely to do with feedback for changing practice than judgements of worth. For example, since measures for baselines and data collection might change as the project develops, and it makes sense for these to be developed

²⁵⁰ Themselves subject to fluctuation and vagueness as discussed above and in Matarasso (1997).

²⁵¹ Developmental evaluation is based on complexity systems theories like Cynefin, applied to situations where innovation and its evaluation are central. Arguably, creative processes, particularly those involving 'flow' and collectivity, produce these kinds of processes and relationships. For example, in several of the research sites, and in the initial interviews, it was clear that the demands of the materials, technologies and processes of creative making changed or produced new relationships between people (as non-human actants in Actor Network Theory). These can be linked to the developmental evaluation concept of 'emergence', "patterns emerge from self-organisation among interacting agents" (Patton, AEA365 A tip a day by and for evaluators Blog July 2010 <http://aea365.org/blog/michael-quinn-patton-on-developmental-evaluation-applying-complexity-concepts-to-enhance-innovation-and-use/> accessed 10.4.2014).

²⁵² Patton says developmental evaluation is for "those with a high tolerance of ambiguity and a high sense of adventure" (2011:9) not qualities guardians of public funding often feel able to justify in using to inform their reporting. Nevertheless, it is also used to collect data which could be used in summative reporting, although developmental projects are never regarded as finished. This could be particularly useful for small to medium sized community organisations and arts companies to continue collecting and amalgamating data from finite funded projects over longer periods.

within the project, rather than using external normative criteria. For contested and slippery qualities such as 'aesthetic excellence', this seems a useful approach²⁵³. These existing frameworks for developing evaluation strategies in the context of complex projects provided a bridge between the highly reflective and theoretical processes of the research and the evaluation field trials. This was particularly helpful in making the leap from discrete research activity to whole-project evaluation strategy.

The first Phase 3 trials of strategy came through the Arts Council bridging organisation Arts Connect West Midlands²⁵⁴, which in 2013 invited the researcher to lead a Pilot of the Arts Council England (ACE) new Children and Young People's Quality Principles (CYPQP) using the evidence-based, systemic approach.

7.8.2 The Arts Connect pilots

The strategy was first proposed as a matrix to be used as a prompt for thinking and discussion at project planning stage (Table 17, below). It listed the 'conditions which maximise impact' and suggested ways in which projects could identify the potential for these in their project planning processes. For example, the matrix could be used in the recruitment of artists to ensure that artist interviews and portfolios encompass '*striving, challenge, skills development, open-ended, outward-looking, risk taking, supportive critique, inspirational*'. It suggests that project planning documents could show how the conditions for creative flow would be fostered. Above all, the first column of the matrix could be used as a theory of change which could inform planning and practice. In 2013 the strategy was adopted by the Arts Council England (ACE) broker or 'bridge' organisation, Arts Connect West Midlands, for a pilot study involving three arts companies²⁵⁵. Arts Connect saw the strategy as potentially useful because the evidence-based 'conditions which maximise impact' could be 'mapped' against individual project aims and indicators. For the pilot these were mapped against the new ACE Children and Young Peoples' Quality Principles (CYPQP), published in 2013 as still (at time of writing) in consultation²⁵⁶. These principles were rather abstract and the matrix was seen as having the potential to 'populate' them with evidence-based criteria. The pilot was one of several across England to determine whether the CYPQPs improved practice and impact of ACE-funded creative projects²⁵⁷. Imagineer Productions *Not Yet Invented* project with

²⁵³ For example, the researcher was many months into field trials with several projects when she realised that the notion of 'striving' (working hard to achieve something for its own sake) might be a core part of aesthetic excellence, and began to look for indicators to identify behaviours rather than outputs.

²⁵⁴ <http://www.artconnectwm.co.uk/index.php>

²⁵⁵ Imagineer Productions, the Ikon gallery and Motionhouse Dance. All these were for projects involving community partners.

²⁵⁶ See <http://blog.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/children-and-young-people/progressing-quality-conversation> for more details about the ongoing consultation and a list of the Principles

²⁵⁷ When this was written the Pilots were still ongoing

schools and engineering companies, described in more detail below, was the first of these pilots to work with the strategy in this way. Table 16 shows the matrix which was given to participants with the heading, 'Does this activity *have the potential* to create the conditions for significant & lasting change in feelings & behaviour which contribute to personal wellbeing & social cohesion; and how will impact be measured?'

Table 16 The 'matrix' with suggestions for measuring potential

| <i>Conditions for impact</i> | <i>How do we know it has the potential?</i> | <i>Ways impact might be measured</i> |
|---|--|--|
| Valuing participants (culture, experiences, democratic processes) | Written project protocols | Participant report (questionnaire) Observation |
| Creative flow (skills development, intensity of experience, space, extended thinking time, collectivity) | Project planning docs Artist initial interviews Artist CVs | Artists report Participant report (creative activity) Observation Participant journals |
| Aesthetic excellence (striving, challenge, skills development, open-ended, outward-looking, supportive critique) | Project planning docs Artist initial interviews Artist CVs | Participant report (creative activity; journals; questionnaire). Outsider/stakeholder feedback (interviews; spot voting; questionnaires) |
| Quality of processes, materials 'New' materials, technologies | Project planning docs Participant recruitment strategy | Observation Participant report |
| Real world impact (action taken outside the project itself, public, community, identifiable, dissemination) | Project planning docs | Participant report (journals; creative activity; questionnaire; focus group; Baseline survey) Outsider/stakeholder feedback (interviews; spot voting; questionnaires) |
| Reflective skills (theorising change, expressive creative methods, variety of recording methods, collective reflection, presentation) | Project planning docs Artist contracts Staff training docs | Participant report (journals; creative activity); Baseline survey Artists report Staff feedback |

Table 17 show the matrix with the ACE CYPQPs 'mapped' in by the researcher as an attempt to populate these rather abstract goals:

Table 17 The matrix mapped to ACE CYPQP

| Conditions | CYP principles |
|--|--|
| Valuing individual participants & ensuring active participation <i>(what they bring)</i> | 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 4. Positive, child-centred 5. Actively involving CYP 7. Sense of ownership & belonging |
| Aesthetic excellence & depth of experience <i>(striving, challenge, skills development, open-ended, outward-looking, risk taking, supportive critique, inspirational)</i> | 1. Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging |
| Creative flow <i>(skills development, intensity of experience, space, extended thinking time, collectivity, engagement)</i> | 1. Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 5. Actively involving CYP |
| Quality of processes & materials <i>(new materials, technologies; professionalism)</i> | 1. Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging |
| Real world impact <i>(collective & individual action taken outside the project itself, in public, in the community; identifiable quality, confident dissemination)</i> | 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 6. Sense of personal progression 7. Sense of ownership & belonging |
| Reflective skills <i>(theorised change; expressive creative methods; variety of recording methods, collective reflection, & presentation; interim reviews linked to action plans)</i> | 5. Actively involving CYP 6. Sense of personal progression 7. Sense of ownership & belonging |
| Long term data collection <i>(through explicit methodologies)</i> | 1. Striving for excellence 6. Sense of personal progression |

Alongside the matrix the researcher prepared a statement explaining how it might be used, (reproduced in full in Section 7.8.3 below). It identified why an incremental and systemic approach was needed, based on the argument made in Chapter 3 that creative projects are 'complex systems' where cause and effect is not always linear. In complex systems evaluation needs to take a much more open-ended and probing approach as patterns emerge, using for example, "democratic, interactive, multidirectional discussion" (Snowden and Boone 2007), and drawing on ideas and methods proposed by people

within the project rather than imposing 'best practice' methods (Craig et al, 2008). It went on to optimistically assert that,

...the skills to measure impact can be developed by participants as well as artists and other deliverers during the project: understanding the purpose of reflective evaluation and engaging commitment to it is the crucial part. For example, allocating time and resources, being flexible enough to integrate unplanned reflective activities, remaining aware and confident enough to encourage and respond to reviews by changing practice.

The 'conditions' of the first column represent the findings from this research – in abbreviated form. The research found that impact depends on a mix of things: activities, attitudes, processes and even qualities of materials or venues. Most significant of these are processes relating to participation and the experience of being creative:

...these conditions offer a mix of action, skills and open-ended reflection leading to praxis ('ideas in practice'). The core of this experience comprises active participation, creative flow, collective 'real world' action, and reflection about the processes of change.

The matrix was designed so that the 'conditions' in the first column would be defined in terms of specific projects from within those projects. The accompanying statement explains:

Although these are complex and potentially demanding issues, they are raised as an aid to thinking about how your project can shape the participant experience, and how then you might record that. In every case, a light touch, and a brief and enjoyable experience is preferable.

The statement went on to explain that, alongside activity monitoring and quantitative data collection, the matrix "can be used to strengthen the argument for the value of more reflective and creative evaluation in reporting for a variety of audiences". (Researcher's Statement 2014).

Not Yet Invented was the first pilot to use the strategy and the only one to complete at time of writing.

The following section reproduces in full the written statement given to the Arts Connect pilot projects about the matrix.

Section 7.8.3 Suggestions for implementing the matrix

This approach proposes that evaluative reflection becomes part of the culture of your project from its planning and throughout its implementation. It is based on original research by Sue Challis and draws heavily on the experience of participative projects such as Creative Partnerships and other similar initiatives. Many of the reflective skills implicit in the approach are basic to good practice in community and participatory arts work.

Underlying this proposal is evidence that people change through their experiences in complex, often uneven and incremental ways, so evaluation needs to be incremental and responsive; and that participative, creative evaluation can both engage participants and actively contribute to project impact. It's based on research into the impact of being creative, which shows that even brief creative experiences, such as expressive reflection or collage, if valued, can have positive impact on participants' wellbeing and thinking.

The term 'systemic' implies that reflective evaluation matters to every aspect of your project, throughout its life, although it may not be entirely systematic or planned. The experience of learning skills of creative reflection in evaluation activities adds to project impact.

It's also developmental, in the sense that it contributes to staff, artists, participants and stakeholders developing their own ideas and skills, about the quality of processes and outcomes and how they can demonstrate it.

The proposal outlines a number of conditions which can be created in a project which can contribute to a transformative, positive experience for participants. These may not be exhaustive and participants may suggest others. Some of the suggestions have implications for policy or relationships, others for resourcing. Other important factors which lie outside the project or its timeframe are not considered here, although they may have determining impact (such as undermining prior experience, or re-enforcing subsequent experience). These may be reflected in your participant recruitment or long term sustainability strategies.

Broadly, these conditions offer a mix of action, skills and open-ended reflection leading to praxis ('ideas in practice'). The core of this experience comprises active participation, creative flow, collective 'real world' action, and reflection about the processes of change.

In the example below, these conditions have been 'mapped' against the Arts Council's Children and Young People's Quality Principles: this can be done with other frameworks relevant to your project. For example, you might map your specific project aims and outcomes against the conditions: this will help you develop an explicit theory about how your planned activities can lead to the changes desired, which can be shared with everyone concerned.

The matrix can be used as a project planning framework and a checklist for interim and final reviews. It suggests ways that the potential for creating the conditions could be demonstrated, so you can identify strengths and weaknesses in strategies and available skills at the planning stage.

It gives examples of possible ways of measuring impact. In practice, these should be as closely related to the content and form of your activity as possible. For example, using recording methods congruent with your artforms, using collective as well as individual feedback, using creative methods as well as conventional ones. The skills to measure impact can be developed by participants as well as artists and other deliverers during the project: understanding the purpose of reflective evaluation and engaging commitment to it is the crucial part. For example, allocating time and resources, being flexible enough to integrate unplanned reflective activities, remaining aware and confident enough to encourage and respond to reviews by changing practice.

Using the matrix

The first column outlines conditions which my research and experience suggests are crucial ingredients to creating a transformatory experience for participants. You might want to formulate questions at the planning stage and then during the project with participants about these. For example, 'How will we know that the skills, attitudes and values different participants bring to the project are being respected and valued?' Ways of finding this out could be built into artists' enquiry and activities - artists' interviews and portfolios may be useful indicators of attitudes; participant report may be the most useful feedback [here](#).

All the conditions need defining in terms of your specific project. For example, 'Aesthetic excellence' is a complex aspiration and only some aspects are suggested. For example, 'outward looking' implies reference to artistic creation beyond your project. How can you build this focus into your activities? 'Creative flow' is often described as the moment of being 'in the zone', when concentration and imagination takes people 'out of themselves': this might imply creating a 'magical' space and extended time at key points of the project.

Comment [I3]: Do you need to anchor this into exactly what your findings /actions were. I am not sure what you have said elsewhere now.

Comment [I4]: Refs??

In the example below, the second column shows the ACE CYP principles: your own and/or participant desired outcomes could be here. The next columns offer examples of sources of evidence for planning and tools for measurement.

Although these are complex and potentially demanding issues, they are raised as an aid to thinking about how your project can shape the participant experience, and how then you might record that. In every case, a light touch, and a brief and enjoyable experience is preferable.

Used alongside activity monitoring and quantitative data collection, the matrix can be used to strengthen the argument for the value of more reflective and creative evaluation in reporting for a variety of audiences.

7.9 The strategy in action: Not Yet Invented²⁵⁸

This project built on IP's experience of working closely with engineers in the Godiva Awakes! and subsequent Godiva's Homecoming public and community arts projects. It aimed to regenerate interest in engineering in the City through a series of activities bringing artists and engineers together with pupils and teachers in local school culminating in a design and build of a number of large kinetic sculptures used in public performances. Children's achievement in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) would be demonstrably improved and their aspirations raised:

Between March and August 2014, 75 9-10 year olds from Coventry schools sited in some of the most deprived areas of the city worked with professional designers, engineers and artists to imagine and create kinetic structures and perform them as part of the Festival of Engineers on 9th August 2014. The project sought to stimulate interest in a new kind of creative engineering, developed through quality aesthetic experience.

(Challis and Trowsdale, 2014b)

The imaginative framework for the project, created by engineers and artists as 'Imagineers', dressed in flying caps, riding cycle-powered 'time-travel machines' and asking for the children's help was highly valued by participants. It clearly played a

²⁵⁸ This section draws heavily on two reports: an internal (unpublished) report written in 2014 for Arts Connect West Midlands by Jo Trowsdale, Principle Teaching Fellow in the Centre for Education Studies, Warwick University. This report (Trowsdale 2014) was written after extensive discussion with the researcher. It also draws on Challis, S, Trowsdale, J (2014) *Report on the Imagineerium Pilot Project 1*, Warwick University, Imagineer Productions July 2014, the jointly written evaluation of *Not Yet Invented*. At the time of writing Jo Trowsdale was working with Imagineer Productions on the Imagineerum Initiative. She was previously Creative Director for Creative Partnerships in Coventry and for Cre8us, CSWP in Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire 2004-11.

significant role in their engagement and learning. STEM learning was embodied through the making process and movement with two dance artists.

A physical and practical approach to learning scientific concepts was highly successful, with 80% or more of children rating the interest and effectiveness of all such approaches. They learnt about how forces and gravity operate and how mechanisms such as levers, cams and pulleys work, through physical arts-based movement. As they designed and made their imaginative structures they learnt how materials can work.

(Challis and Trowsdale, 2014b)

The project had budgeted for evaluation but, because of a quick turnaround from grant award to project start²⁵⁹, evaluation planning coincided with the start of the project. Nevertheless, it was possible to plan a systemic evaluation which to an extent drew on the skills and practices of the engineers, artists and teachers involved. A series of planning and review meetings were well-attended by all these, with a strong emphasis on improving practice as well as measuring outcomes. The researcher led an introductory meeting the systemic strategy which seemed well received and understood (see comments below). For example, teachers proposed that 'increased curiosity' was a central impact they wanted for pupils and suggested that it could be measured (baseline, throughout and post-project) through recording types and frequency of questions asked. This was carried out by several teachers and teaching assistants throughout the project. Engineers, looking for improved visual imagination proposed a series of games to test progress, but, perhaps because of lack of confidence in the school setting, did not implement this. Children were highly involved in this process as 'paparazzi', using digital photography and tablets to select and record key moments themselves which they could argue demonstrated some of the key outcomes of the project, such as teamwork, problem-solving, communicating. Jo Trowsdale's review of the evaluation strategy pilot (mapped against the ACE CPQPs) reflects the extent to which this changed practice and enhanced the quality of the evaluation experience and evidence produced:

Our impression is that the core concept of this evaluation process has real potential to develop reflective practice as an approach which

focuses upon the conditions necessary to enable certain kinds of change,

invites practitioners to position themselves as the significant actors in enabling and thinking about evaluation

²⁵⁹ Not uncommon in grant-funded project work

uses the very *medium of a practitioners' practice* – in which they are expert - to evidence changes

(Trowsdale, 2014:1)

The Arts Connect pilots produced their own versions of the 'matrix'. Appendix F shows how Not Yet Invented 'populated' the matrix in their evaluation, a highly complicated and difficult to follow document which, although drawn up by the company, was not eventually considered helpful in the process or as adequately reflecting the systemic approach described by the researcher in her introduction to it. [IP produced the matrix in Appendix F for the Imagineerium STEAM project in primary schools. It is a working document and reflects a complex project involving schools, engineers and artists. Although the process of 'doing the thinking' for this matrix was useful in helping to clarify project aims and evaluation strategy, the matrix itself was 'too complex' to be of everyday use \(Informal Interview, Jo Trowsdale, 2012\):](#)

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The format of the process in tabular form did not appeal to artists and did not feed into existing ways of recording for teachers or artists. Whilst orally Sue represented these ideas clearly, the underpinning principles – noted above were differently understood, despite pre-meetings.
(Trowsdale 2014:1)

The Not Yet Invented matrix was *not* the product of widespread consultation, although the evaluation eventually implemented did draw on a range of views and ideas from different 'professional cultures': teachers, artists and engineers. At a group discussion during which both the 'conditions' and ACE quality principles were not challenged, four teachers, two engineers, two artists and two artist-coordinators from IP agreed a number of additional desired outcomes (in red on the matrix in Appendix F) such as : 'engagement motivation, striving' and 'collaborating, co-constructing, maximising teamwork' and matched these to the ACE quality principles. Against the matrix 'condition' *Valuing individual participants and ensuring active participation* they added how they planned to evidence this:

YP²⁶⁰ roles of investigator and (for two sessions of paparazzi, artist, scientist and interviewer represented YP way of seeing / what they valued.

YP to keep personal project diaries

²⁶⁰ YP means Young People

Adults to keep observational journals

(NYI evaluation plan, March 2014, Appendix F)

These evaluation activities became integral aspects of the activities in the project and were highly positively regarded in feedback from teachers, engineers and children. All children kept journals, which were regarded by them in feedback as more personal and open-ended than school exercise books. Four adults (two artists, an engineer and IP Director) kept journals (the meaning of not-keeping/keeping was not pursued).

NYI went on to populate the matrix with ideas about setting baselines citing that engineers and teachers could baseline specific changes 'using their own methods', and these methods became the subject for several group discussions. The 'conditions' provided the framework for planning and delivering these evaluation activities. For example, looking for ways to evidence the condition 'valuing individual participants and ensuring active participation' influenced the decision to provide participant journals. It also contributed to the identification by the IP Director of her personal measure of project success, that children's designs should inform the final build, *and* the way this might be evidenced (through linking individual journal entries to the records of the design process).

Notwithstanding shortcomings of the process of developing the NYI matrix (partly one of change management in an organisation), the report concludes that the attempt to implement the systemic approach involving a wider range of stakeholders than usual not simply as respondents but as agents actively defining and measuring evaluation outcomes had a positive impact on project outcomes as well as the quality of evidence produced:

...it is impossible to know how important [...] context was, however **it appeared that the effect of inviting practitioners to consider their own interest and how they might gather evidence of change was significant in provoking individual and collective thought** – almost as a licence or permission to contribute their own ideas and interact in relation to each other's or collective aims. The quality of talk, especially in the latter weeks of the project and at the collective evaluation was good, allowing honest recognition of areas in need of development, of elements which were in tension and a positive desire to move things forward. Our experience suggested that this combination of factors heightened practitioners' sense of their role in affecting, recognising and evidencing change

(Trowsdale 20014:3, original emphasis)

Within the process children were revealed as competent observers and evaluators, showing as the project went forward “ a refining awareness of what learning looked and sounded like” (Trowsdale 2014:4). However, several proposals by teachers, engineers and artists to implement their own evaluations fell by the wayside. For example, although children were enthusiastic journal keepers throughout the project, adults were not. Trowsdale suggests several possible explanations for this, including the fact that this was a new partnership between professionals with very different discourses about learning and theories of how people change. Much longer time would be needed to develop greater shared values. However, a summary analysis of an online survey of partners carried out by the researcher in January and again in April 2014 suggested that changing attitudes towards evaluation is more difficult than it might at first seem. The success of the partnership was initially linked to communications (including listening), but, looking back, partners identified ‘understanding each others’ purpose’ as much more important than previously realised. Nevertheless, ‘time for planning and reflection’ was rated among the least important issues. The researcher concluded:

We feel that the next step in strengthening partnership work will be to support the re-valuing of planning and reflection as part of the process of understanding mutual aims, roles and purposes

(Challis, S, unpublished internal memo to IP Director, April 2014).

7.9.1 The strategy in action: Lively Libraries

At the time of writing the researcher was also involved in trialling a modified version of the systemic strategy in a rural library service in a project which brought artists into libraries and dancers from the Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB)²⁶¹ into an isolated rural community centre. The Lively Libraries project aimed to increase footfall and library membership through bringing a quality of arts experience to participants (mainly four – 11 year olds) who would not usually be able to access them, either through cultural, financial or geographical reasons²⁶². The library service had no history of in-depth qualitative evaluations of similar projects, partly because this kind of ‘add-on’ project, managed and funded from outside the organisation, was fairly new to it. The service does carry out quantitative activity monitoring with data collected locally and analysed centrally. Once again, the researcher was able to discuss the systemic approach only after the project planning had been completed and the project was about to start. However, it was possible to share ideas with the project officer and key partners, regional

²⁶¹ See <http://www.brb.org.uk/lively-libraries.html> for more details

²⁶² This was the first time the BRB had performed or worked in Shropshire, and is especially inaccessible in the small towns with poor public transport infrastructure which were the venues for the project

arts organisation Arts Alive²⁶³ and a group of 22 librarians as the project was starting. At this meeting the researcher did *not* share the matrix, drawing on the comments from the review of Not Yet Invented that was over complicated. She focussed on two outcomes:

1. engaging a wider range of evaluators than is usual in determining the process not simply as respondents
2. deepening understanding of the project's theory of change

These resulted in three important innovations in the evaluation process. The first was a 'prompted observation sheet', developed following a meeting with library staff and so far used by librarians and volunteers who have observed the arts workshops. This was a simple breakdown of key quality indicators for the project which has the potential to focus observations and allow comparative and cumulative analyses of feedback. This sheet has allowed a range of untrained staff and volunteers to make continual evaluative observations throughout. The second was a training day about evaluation for which additional funding was secured. At this highly participatory day the researcher demonstrated creative, visual and engaging evaluation methods and collected feedback about the project through them. Basic concepts such as theory of change and baselines were explored, and library staff encouraged to think about their own desired outcomes for the project and how they would measure them, so they could be added to individual prompted observation sheets. The 'conditions for maximising impact' were discussed and ways in which they might be created in brief or limited creative activities. The third innovation was to agree key elements from the 'conditions which maximise impact' and turn them into simple printed postcards asking for feedback from parents and children in the workshops. This was a process of simplifying complex ideas so that they would produce numerical data. At the training day and throughout the project so far it was clear that many stakeholders were ambivalent or hostile towards changing their evaluation practices, sometimes through lack of confidence or a sense that evaluation was outside their job role. At a time when the Service was suffering deep financial and staffing cuts, staff seemed either to feel evaluation was an additional load or a refreshing example of their views being taken into account. Nevertheless, a majority of library staff were engaged wholeheartedly in thinking about and discussing their own aims, for themselves personally and professionally, for the participants, for their own library and so on. Artists were also engaged. For example, a story-teller devised her own measure of 'engagement':

At the start of my sessions they all sit round the edge of the space, the parents on chairs, children on cushions. If the session has worked well by the end they are all sitting on the floor, parents and all – this will be my measure – if they have moved to the floor

Sal Tonge, Storyteller, informal interview, June 2014

²⁶³ See <http://www.artsalive.co.uk/family.aspx> for more details

At the same time this artist pointed out that she was paid to run three half day sessions: any additional workload, as she described evaluation, should have been built into her contract.

Although it is too soon to make an analysis of this trial, it served to bring home the previous observation (above) that changing practice is highly context dependent. When the researcher notes from the training day discussions are analysed, they are likely to suggest the presence of a number of competing discourses about evaluation, what constitutes evidence, and how people change. Above all, that the systemic strategy is highly demanding of commitment and a willingness to embrace the stochastic nature of creative activities.

7.10 Conclusions about strategy

Phases 2 and 3 of the research demonstrated that episodic evaluations cannot offer the level of commitment and engagement necessary to produce the rich and authentic evidence needed to prove the impact of creativity and participation on wellbeing. This is for two reasons. Partly it is because cause and affect are not necessarily linear in creative projects which therefore demand a continual and integrated evaluation process; and partly because episodic interventions make it difficult to involve a wider range of stakeholders than is usual not as respondents but as active determiners of evaluation criteria and processes. This is important because it is only by engaging many viewpoints and using a wide range of methods could multiple knowledges, feelings, discourses and impacts be acknowledged. In this process it is essential for stakeholders – from funders to volunteers – to develop their own theories of change but also to understand others. The research showed that lack of skills or confidence to or a sense of role could also be barriers to implementation. However, this understanding needs to happen at the project planning stage, since theories of change, even if implicit, are likely to help shape practice, structures and delivery. It was difficult *after* a project had started, for pragmatic reasons (set budgets, time allocations) and because ways of working were established.

This chapter showed that implementing a research strategy which challenges established practice (such as the systemic strategy proposed here) is highly context dependent and requires management and commitment – which was beyond the scope of the current research.

However, the trial in Phase 3 in the Not Yet Invented project showed that projects *can* be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they offer the conditions identified in the findings as maximising impact. In this and the Lively Libraries project, those conditions

were used as criteria to evaluate practice. As well as in these two projects, and during the early stages of the Arts Connect West Midlands ACE CYPQP pilots with the Ikon Gallery and Motionhouse Dance, the 'conditions' have been accepted as representing not only research-based criteria but as being broadly congruent with professional experience in the field. They have also been informally welcomed as adding concrete content to the rather abstract ACE Quality Principles.

Phases 1 and 2 both showed that the evaluation process itself can be designed to contribute to positive impact, either through participation or creativity or an interaction between the two. That is, through the empowering process of determining and measuring outcomes or through engaging in creative processes which in themselves produce the positive impacts associated with creative flow.

In summary, the central concept of this systemic approach has great potential. It enables project managers, artists, partners and participants to think about the conditions necessary to produce the positive changes they set out to achieve and to use these in an active process of evaluating against these criteria and their own or other outcomes. As such, particularly because of its insistence on extended and early thinking about evaluation and involving a much wider range of stakeholders it has potential to develop genuinely reflective practice. It enables practitioners "to position themselves as the significant actors" (Trowsdale 2014:1) using the tropes and practices of their own professions, which has positive implications for that essential factor, engagement, and consequent positive impact on sense of agency and wellbeing.

CHAPTER 8: ‘This is exciting!’ A new perspective on evaluation

8.1 A new contribution to knowledge

The first two aims of this research set out to develop feasible and effective evaluation for small to medium sized creative participatory community projects based on evidence about their impact on participant wellbeing. In field research it found that creativity, participation and reflection were densely interwoven in projects and that their impact was related to this evolving relationship and the changing contexts it produced. It was able to identify a range of conditions reflecting these interrelationships in which positive impact could be maximised. While it was possible to evaluate aspects of this impact through episodic interventions, field trials showed that it was more effective to develop a systemic evaluation strategy. This proved to offer two advantages: the potential to engage many stakeholders, not just as respondents but as agents actively defining and measuring evaluation outcomes, and the potential for reflection about impact as process rather than outcome.

The research’s original contribution to knowledge lies in the way it brought together research about creativity and research about evaluation in two new ways. Ideas about evaluation in complex systems were brought together with research about the liminal and disruptive nature of creativity. Evidence about the experience of being creative was applied to the experience of doing evaluation. These ideas were synthesised in the field trials, in a range of small to medium sized creative participatory community projects in diverse contexts in the West Midlands of the UK. Projects in this research ranged from a few hours to over a year, with diverse contexts, artforms and participants. Through the field trials an approach was developed based on evidence that taking part in evaluation can itself contribute to positive impact. A strength of the research was the enactment of its commitment to an epistemology of multiple knowledges which led to a highly reflective and ethically aware practice and two outcomes for an evaluation strategy: the exploration of embodied knowledges through creative methods; and the recognition of the fundamental importance of making a project’s many epistemologies explicit, in the shape of theorisations of its desired impacts. This explicit theorisation informed reflection in projects but also, by making methodology transparent, offered the opportunity for much needed longer term comparisons beyond the life of a single project.

8.2 The impact of the research

Towards the end of the research period its tentative findings were taken up by a significant player in the field, the Arts Council-funded 'bridge' organisation Arts Connect West Midlands²⁶⁴. The investment Arts Connect has made in three pilots²⁶⁵ of the research's evaluation approach as a way to explore the value of quality principles has been an encouraging endorsement. It also represents a field trial of the research's evaluation strategy which reflects its third aim, to assess the value of the research beyond this immediate study. More than anything, it confirms that the research remains timely and useful. These trials show that evaluation of creativity in community projects is still an unresolved but not necessarily irresolvable problem. That it might always remain a site of tension is not seen by this researcher as a necessarily negative outcome. On the contrary, it may be where the productive difference between the impact of being creative in projects and the impact of other types of participation lies.

8.3 Research epistemologies and methodologies

Evaluation is largely about recognising change. It must therefore be concerned with dynamic processes – how we got from then to now and what might happen next. As part of organisational planning it is also about defining and recording the nature of those changes in a way that satisfies stakeholders in those processes – or at least some of them. During the period of the current research, in the academic and professional debate about establishing value in creative participatory projects these key issues were increasingly problematised in two ways. They can be summarised as a lack of explicit epistemologies or theorisation of the changes projects aim and claim to produce, and the failure of evaluation to engage the commitment and perspectives of a sufficiently wide enough range of participants – from commissioners through artists to participants. Both these are associated with enhancing the credibility and usefulness of findings.

In response to these problematisations the research drew on an interpretivist epistemology which is concerned with how knowledges and narratives about the world are produced through dynamic social interaction. This meant that qualitative methods such as participant observation, observations, informal and formal interviews, video

²⁶⁴ <http://www.artconnectwm.co.uk/index.php>

²⁶⁵ Two ongoing at the time of writing. One of them, Not Yet Invented, had completed at time of writing and is discussed in Chapter 7.

diaries, Focus Groups, and questionnaires predominated in Phase 1, which focussed on assessing the contribution of participation in creative projects to wellbeing. Key concepts, such as wellbeing and aesthetic excellence were interrogated through mainly thematic analysis of data produced in these ways. Actor Network Theory (ANT) informed participant observations about how particular discourses became hegemonic in the social networks of projects, and became 'obligatory passage points' to which everyone must subscribe in order to access the activity. It supported understandings about the impact of fluctuating ontologies over the life of a project on the construction of changing identities and perceptions of self. For example, it helped the researcher identify the limiting power of the deficit model implicit in projects where defining need, excellence and success is a privileged activity. Commitment to the idea of multiple knowledges and the participatory nature of the projects themselves meant that the research also aspired to an Action Research model (AR), which offered an ethical framework as well as commitment to constantly check understandings in an iterative and reflexive loop. This aspiration was never fully realised in the exigencies of research and the diverse contexts and durations of projects and research encounters. It was in continual productive tension with another unrealised aspiration which was to limit research methods to those which might feasibly be used by small to medium sized projects in their own evaluations. One way that the AR model informed theoretical development in the first few months of the research was through an in-depth, iterative interview process with participants. This was useful for producing participant-led insights into the significance of 'intensity' relating to either participation or creative flow in the context of striving for undefined aesthetic value as a producer of impact. Thematic analyses of this data²⁶⁶ also called attention to the embodied nature of creativity and the connection between materials, technologies and expressivity²⁶⁷. The theoretical frameworks in ANT and Non-Representational Theory (NRT) became important ways of understanding the significance of non-human entities in creative processes and the production of emotions (affect) in movement through the social and non-human world.

The dissolution of the binary human:non-human in these two theories²⁶⁸ led to a better understanding of the impact of embodied practices and the heterogeneity of knowledge production, enrolling Eisner's insight that "not only does knowledge come in different forms, the forms of its creation differ"²⁶⁹ into the research methodology through the development of new creative methods. These methods were used in a range of research

²⁶⁶ Initially using NVIVO and Microsoft Word software to quantify key words and phrases, returning to respondents twice for checking understandings and encouraging the development of narratives which in turn were observed to have impact.

²⁶⁷ Barone and Eisner (2012:5)

²⁶⁸ Particularly through Latour's principle of generalised symmetry (2005,2004) and Massumi's idea of affect as synaesthetic process (Massumi, 2002:35),

²⁶⁹ (Eisner 2008: 5)

sites and offered participants the experience of creative flow and extended thinking time associated with being creative, for example within the imaginative framework of using colour and marks to express feelings and ideas. The artworks produced through this research (and subsequent evaluations) were often found to have aesthetic value for their makers. Further research found that creative methods themselves had potential for positive impacts on wellbeing such as are associated with participation in creativity. However, this practice-led research connected with arts-based professional skills - especially in the interpretation of data - raised two issues for Phase 2 of the research, the exploration of evaluation. These were firstly, the availability of such skills within a project, and second, the acceptability of the data produced to audiences for evaluation. To an extent these issues were drivers of the development in Phase 3 of evaluation strategies based on existing project skills and representing a wide range of types of data produced through different methods.

8.4 Findings about impact on wellbeing

The research found that a positive impact on wellbeing through participation in creative participatory community projects was almost always observed or self-reported²⁷⁰. It found that impact was maximised when certain conditions were simultaneously present in the participant experience. These were connected with the emotional and imaginative engagement produced by intense concentration in creative flow which opened a disruptive imaginative or actual space²⁷¹ for participants that enabled them to imaginatively re-position themselves in existing discourses or develop new narratives about themselves and the world. At the same time, the physical process of engagement with materials, equipment or space associated with manipulating the world through being creative had an impact on thinking. It produced embodied knowledges, extended thinking time, and helped to order thoughts and imagine new possibilities. Both these impacts increased participants' sense of agency and sometimes led to observable changes of behaviour associated with eudaimonic wellbeing. Where these creative activities had a collective element, as was sometimes the case, it was possible to make a link to collective impact. However, these impacts were significantly enhanced by two other conditions. Firstly, when participants were offered a reflective framework which supported this re-positioning, and second, when the creative activity involved action outside the project (such as community performance, making or work) which had an impact on the 'real world'. These two conditions were linked theoretically in the research to a critical reading of Freire's idea of transformational praxis through new

²⁷⁰ Although it was difficult to distinguish between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing in brief research or evaluation encounters

²⁷¹ For example, in the Carnival Costume Making Course, providing unusual opportunity for time away from family and a dedicated venue quite different from any encountered before, which captured participants' imaginations. This venue (old industrial warehouse) functioned as a 'magical space' where participants could 'be' in a different way from usual and where the conditions for creative flow were made possible.

understandings supported by dialogical pedagogy and leading to political action. In this reading, where impact was partial, incremental and uneven over time and space, and the real world action more likely to be developmental than radical, the term 'change-related praxis' was deemed more appropriate. These findings situated being creative in a project as a social process connected with intersubjectivity. It also identified being creative as a process which of itself has the potential to be empowering. In this process an aspiration to aesthetic excellence or value is expressed not through a normative outcome, but through the experience of absorption, striving and persistence connected with the idea of flow and with artists' practice.

The research found that participation in projects took many forms, most especially as the power to determine aesthetic form and processes or organisational structures or a mix of both. These varied not just between projects but were also a subject of implicit or explicit negotiation during projects, to the extent that the term 'participations' was deemed a more useful way of marking them. So, in a single project, the power to determine structure and funding, artistic form and materials, meeting times and refreshments might flow between individuals or groups (funders, managers, artists, participants) over time and place. In an unexpected challenge to a powerful argument in the field about the development of agency (described in Chapter 2) the research did not find evidence that organisational or democratic participation was a greater producer of eudaimonic wellbeing than aesthetic participation (power over aesthetic choices) in the conditions above. However, impact was maximised when creativity, participation and reflection were *all* present. The research findings were that the extent and nature of their interaction varied between and within projects. These differences, and the extent to which all three were present at the same time, was related to how projects defined each factor, because these definitions – whether overt or not - underpinned intentions, ontologies and theories of change expressed throughout in project discourses, structuring of activities, materials and physical spaces.

8.5 The evaluation trials

Phase 2 of the research trialled evaluation techniques designed to capture the processes described above. They mirrored and sometimes overlapped with the qualitative methods in Phase 1. However, as the evaluations began to widen their sources of enquiry, from funders through artists to participants and occasionally audiences, more mixed methods were used, including large-scale questionnaires collecting participant data or views and online surveys. These contributed to a rich picture alongside the more participatory and creative methods, producing either a 'snapshot' of behaviours and self-reported feelings

or measurements of change by defining criteria, setting baselines and returning to them later. However, it was difficult to build a coherent picture of impact through episodic data collection. This was particularly inadequate in the stochastic systems created by the presence of creative activities. The research explored the reasons why, although in almost all settings the data produced in these evaluation trials was valued and used by project managers, it was difficult to engage people not usually involved with evaluation, such as artists or staff, except as respondents, or to make enough time to integrate evaluation into project activities. In Phase 3 the research moved on to implement a systemic evaluation proposal. In this proposal project stakeholders (participants, partners, volunteers, artists,) were invited to contribute their own aims and desired outcomes and discuss ways they could measure changes using the tropes and materials of their own practices. Clearly, this was a developmental process, highly dependent on the researcher's ability to engage people, for example, to convince them that they had the necessary skills and that their effort would produce data which would be valued. In most cases stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to think about the project in these terms. For example, in one project it was "significant in provoking individual and collective thought" and "improved the quality of talk"²⁷². However, it became clear that integrating a systemic evaluation approach was an organisational management of change issue only partially related to the strength of its evidence base. Evaluation tended to be seen by managers and others as an activity to be considered only after the project had "started to produce outcomes"²⁷³. The common employment structure in the field (projects drawing on a pool of self-employed artists) makes an integrated strategy more difficult to apply. For example, in one project an artist paid on a sessional basis complained that evaluation was "a task too far"²⁷⁴. Moreover, for practical reasons it was difficult (although not impossible) to engage projects at the planning (that is, bidding) stage.

8.6 Ongoing and future developments

Arguably therefore there was a flaw in the research design which had not anticipated the need to trial a systemic, integrated evaluation approach. However, it does indicate a key area for further research, which would seek to work with projects from the planning and bidding stage. In fact, this process has already begun: at the time of writing the researcher has been working with a major West Midlands Library Service from planning and bidding stage on a successful Arts Council and charity-funded creative bid involving library staff and artists. Project activities have not yet begun, but discussions about evaluation have been held with all stakeholders. Library staff, artists and project

²⁷² Trowsdale 20014:3

²⁷³ This summarises comments in interviews with managers and staff in The Rural Youth Arts project, the Upland Farmers Wellbeing project and Carnival Costume Making Course (reported in Chapter 7).

²⁷⁴ Lively Libraries, artist's comment in interview, August 2014 (see Chapter 7, section 7.6)

managers all seem highly engaged as active determiners of criteria and measurements not merely respondents. This has been a creative and engaging process in itself, related to the practices and skills of these participants. Although this is not strictly a research project, but a paid commission to produce an evaluation report, the possibility of carrying out and publishing research within this process has been agreed. There is no doubt that this is an engaging process. One of the most rewarding incidents in an evaluation planning meeting for a small-scale implementation of the findings with a group of Special School teachers in Birmingham in July this year was a comment this researcher never thought to hear about evaluation: "This is exciting!" Meanwhile, two further Pilots of the research findings with Arts Connect West Midlands, mentioned above, are underway. These, with the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and the Motionhouse Dance Company in Leamington, are opportunities to continue Phase 3 of the current research. This research also includes a high level of review and dissemination of its findings through the wider Arts Connect and Arts Council consultations about its Children and Young People's quality principles.

As Chapter 4 argued, the decision was taken for a breadth of research sites to reflect the highly diverse nature of projects, contexts and participants in the West Midlands. This reflected its aim to produce useful recommendations about evaluation in a wide range of contexts, but also that there are already many in-depth academic evaluations of single projects, the best of which limit their conclusions to that specific context. The systemic approach trialled in the research, based on defining theories of change which largely drew on existing skills and practices in each project, has potential for wide application. However, there were two areas connected with the creative evaluation methods trialled which indicated a need for further in-depth research.

Firstly, in the experience of using collective creative methods the emergence of counter-hegemonic discourses about projects could be described as embryonic 'evaluations of resistance', and during the process of implementing a systemic evaluation strategy when artists were asked to define and measure their own outcomes using their own practice a similar sense of emergent resistance was identified. The possibility that creative methods produce new data which may tend towards the counter-hegemonic and the implications of this for understanding the impact of creative participatory projects clearly indicates a subject for further in-depth research. Towards the end of the research period the researcher was able to carry out a small but in-depth research (not yet published) in a domestic abuse refuge in London²⁷⁵, when creative methods were used very successfully to elicit a critique of legal services from residents.

²⁷⁵ See Chapter 4, Figure 5

Second, interviews with public funders²⁷⁶ challenged the view that they are not interested in 'soft' data as evidence of impact. Public funders were clear that creative and visual data might be considered if accompanied by an explicit theory of change and descriptions of methodology – but not without. Indeed, in several of the projects studied this was the case²⁷⁷. This was a positive factor in shaping the proposed evaluation strategy, but, particularly given the evidence discussed in the thesis that funders' demands may change during the life of a project, there is a need for further research to explore how this might operate in practice.

Finally the research showed that, although creativity may sometimes seem 'magical' to participants, it is not magic. It is possible to evaluate creative processes for their potential to produce impact and to become more critical about what we can say with confidence about that impact. The most significant aspect of the findings of the research was that it described the conditions which maximised that magic and that impact, and that these were accepted as a valid starting point for evaluation by practitioners and participants.

²⁷⁶ Big Lottery, May 2012, Arts Council, May 2012

²⁷⁷ RYA, UFW, Refuge#1 funders all accepted 'soft' evidence from this research with those provisos

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Appendices

Appendix A Chapter 2

1.0 Selection of texts for literature review

This review is concerned with texts from three areas, academia, policy and practice. The focus has been texts at “the intersection of knowledge and practice” (Artworks 2013), which is where the research itself, with its emphasis on developing useful evaluation strategies, is situated. Texts reviewed include: research-based texts written by academics or practitioners, which review the field or specific practices for academic audiences, commissioners, or the public (for example, university-led evaluations of projects and project-led evaluations, artists’ reports on their own work public policy documents, guidelines and ‘toolkits’, written for governments, charities or funding bodies, by academics, practitioners, or politicians.

These are all significant as representing ways that creative participatory community projects are constructed and defined (Mackay et al, 2011). In public policy documents, the Arts Council England (ACE) is significant because, although only 7.5% of its core funding¹ goes to participatory creative community projects, it is the source of most of their funding (Thelwell 2011). As the government’s key arts funding broker, its policies, values, debates and requirements carry great weight in public debate and in the field. Nevertheless, it no longer acts as a repository for case studies of evaluations of its funded community projects. Although the projects ACE supports illustrate a wide range of genres, practices and scales of projects and diversity of context and participant, ACE does not differentiate in its data collection, except broadly by budget², so its data specifically for small to medium sized creative participatory community projects is hard to analyse.

There has been no attempt to balance numbers of texts from specific genres of practice and types of project in this review, but to range widely across them, looking for repeated “claims, assumptions, goals, and [...] practices” (Ellsworth 1989:298) relating to the themes creativity, participation and wellbeing, and their evaluation in a range of projects and contexts. So, for example, although there has been no deliberate focus on children and young people, the reflective and highly researched experience of using creativity in schools as part of pedagogical processes, epitomised in the UK by the Creative Partnerships programme³ over-represents this area in the literature (REF). Similarly, the field of ‘arts and health’ practice, which tends to focus on physical and mental health, is well represented in the literature (REF). Although the research itself mainly focussed on projects which aimed to improve social wellbeing, there is considerable overlap between these types of project. Moreover, these various texts frame the subject of evaluation for practitioners and may help to form attitudes and feelings which are crucial to implementation (Matarasso.2009).

¹Participatory arts – because they’re worth it 5.4.2012 Guardian Online
<http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/apr/05/participatory-arts-worth> (accessed 1.6.14)

² Private email from ACE (2.6.14). The website lists total budgets against total numbers of projects funded but does not break this down further.

³ UK government’s Creative Partnerships programme (2002-2011) brought artists into schools to promote a range of learning.

Appendix B Chapter 4

B 1.0 Interview Schedule

Methodological Framework

My methodology for this research is based on a modified Grounded Theory : “derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process” (Strauss & Corbin 1998:12) ie the collection of data leads to the production of theories or key concepts in an iterative loop.

Purposive sampling : I have chosen projects with key variables (urban, rural, with/without overt personal development input) which are strategically relevant to my research question.

Theoretical sampling : this ethical submission is for an initial phased to refine my PhD research questions. This means I will use this phase as a way of surfacing key concepts and categories and mapping relationships to inform the next stage of my research.

Thematic analysis : an issue-based approach to understanding cultural knowledges, will produce research categories and surface hidden cultural components, while offering structured research technique (Sackman 1991:33). I will analyse texts produced by interviews (fieldwork notes underpinned by recordings) thematically, looking for instances of commonly held understandings about the world – causal explanations, narratives, ontologies, beliefs, values and prescriptive norms of behaviour habitually referred to by the communities studied.

These themes will be mapped onto a framework (“ matrix-based method for ordering and synthesizing data”) categorizing recurring motifs (Ritchie et al 2003:219 in Bryman 2008:555)

Coding : thematic analysis will run alongside and inform the process of coding emergent themes and mapping or producing new relationships between them in a three stage process, moving from ‘open’ through ‘axial’ to ‘selective’ coding (Bryman 2008:543).

Successive comparisons: each instance of data collection is compared and offered back to a sample of participants to check my understanding and allow for their own revision. This is to act as a check and ensure that the development of concepts through thematic analysis and coding remains or becomes related to the meanings which participants *themselves* construct about their own social reality - rather than the researcher’s. This analysis is related to a constructivist or interpretivist critique of grounded theory (Bryman 2008:549).

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Sackman, S (1991) *Cultural Knowledge in Organisations: exploring the collective mind* London: Sage

Strauss A, Corbin JM (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* USA, Calif. Sage

Outcomes

The purpose of the interviews is to identify key concepts and categories about the impact of participation and the nature of the activities and delivering organizations. For this reason, the questions are mainly open and function as prompts to informal discussion.

Interviewing 1 (With project participants)

Interviews will be one-to-one, face-to-face encounters with a fixed limit of an hour. This is enough time to create a rapport and not too much for participants and interviewer to become tired. It's also related to my fieldwork note-taking limit.

The aim is to encourage an informal discussion, prompted by the questions below.

Interviews will be conducted in a private space within a public setting familiar to the participant. This is to encourage participants to be confident and to re-iterate the boundaries of the relationship and the limits of the conversation, indicated in the PIC.

When possible and appropriate, I would like to share questions with interviewees before the interview as a handout.

Interviews will be preceded by a re-reading of the PIC and Consent Form, to check understanding; and ended with a check that the participant is happy with the interview, knows she can withdraw from it or censor remarks during an agreed period.

Introductory Questions (15 mins)

How long were you in any way involved in the project – from first contact ? (including as audience of work produced/ a project event) (Prompt: define 'the project')

How long were you actively taking part in *creative* activities ? (Prompt: define 'creative' in that project context)

Did taking part in the project help you: [tick all that apply]

Do better at school or college

Get work [New work/better work]

Make new friends

Take up voluntary work

Feel more confident

Learn new skills (say what you learnt)

Feel more physically fit

As well as the creative activity, did you take part in any other activity ? [tick all that apply]

Learning a specific new skill [say which]

Literacy or Numeracy training

Personal development training [say what kind] (Prompt: explain term)

Anger management

CV or jobsearch training

Careers advice

Discussion Questions (40 mins)

'What did you do in the [] project ?' [Prompt: define 'the project']

'How did you feel taking part changed you ?'

'What made this project special for you ?' (Prompt: not just participation, but detail what aspects)

'Did taking part change your life at all ?' (Prompt: your life path)

'Have you done any new things since the project which you wouldn't have done before it ? For example, voluntary work in your community (Prompt: define community); with work; or in personal relationships, family, friends ?'

'Did it take a while for you to recognize that the project had an impact on you ? How long ?'

'What had the greatest impact on you: the creative activities (Prompt: define 'creative' in this context) or other things ? eg social side / making friends / learning new skills (creative / not creative) / personal development / increased confidence / work-related skills or advice / other things (detail)'

'Some activities were collaborative, some more individual: which had the greater impact on you and why ?' (Prompt: define collaborative/individual; give examples)

'How did the project change anything for your community – even for people who didn't take part ?' (Prompt: define community; give examples)

'What were the negative effects of taking part ?' (Prompt: for you or others; give examples)

'How did [the project leaders/artists] treat people ?' (Prompt: was it special in any way ?)

'Were there any problems in the group ? How were they tackled ?'

'Is there a special story you'd like to tell ?' (Prompt: typical/most important)

Closing questions (5 mins)

'Are there any other questions you think I should be asking ?'

'Are there any other people you think I should interview ?'

Interviewing 2 With event delivers /artists/animateurs

There will be two types of interview, a) and b):

Question posed before an activity takes place, with no prompts, asking for quick response:

'What do you imagine you would like to know (if you could!) before the session, about participants' experiences during the session ?'

As soon after the activity has completed as possible, a 30 min informal discussion prompted by the first question and this one (below),

'What would you have liked to know (if you could !) during the session about participants' experience during the session ?'

One hour interview in a private space (see protocols above), about a completed or current project. The aim is to encourage an informal discussion, prompted by the questions below:

Introductory Questions (15 mins)

What was your job title in the project ?

How long were you in any way involved in the project – from first contact ?

How long were you actively taking part in delivering creative activities ?

Discussion Questions (40 mins)

'What did you do in the [] project ?' [Prompt: define 'the project']

'How did you feel taking part changed you ?'

'What was the main aim of the project ?' (Prompt: in your view)

'What was your main aim in your role ?' (Prompt: in your view)

'Can you complete this sentence: for me, the project would be a success if we could show that ... ?'

'What were the project's successes ?'

'What evidence is there that participants were changed in some way by taking part ?' (Prompt: anecdotal / first hand / reported; incl learning skills, attitudes, knowledge)

'What were the main creative activities for participants ?'

'How did creative activities in the project have a special impact on participants ? '

'Did collaborative activities have a special impact ? (Prompt: describe it; give examples / evidence)

'Were there other activities with the intention of changing people ?' (Prompt: eg additional skills learning, personal development:
Learning a specific new skill [say which];Literacy or Numeracy training; Personal development training [say what kind] (Prompt: explain term);Anger management;CV or jobsearch training;Careers advice)

'Is there evidence that participants changed in other ways ?' *eg did better at school or college;Got work [New work/better work];Made new friends;Took up voluntary work; Behaved more confidently;Learnt new skills (Prompt: anecdotal / first hand / reported)*

'Did it take a while for participants to recognize / or report that the project had an impact on them ? How long ?

'Did the project change anything for the project participants' community – even for people who didn't take part ?' (Prompt: define community)

'How do you think we should measure the impact of such projects on individual participants ? on their communities ?'

'Were there any negative effects of taking part ?' (Prompt: for you or participants)

'How would you describe the ethos of the delivery work team (staff and volunteers) ? (Prompt: 'ethos'= values + style of work; give examples)

'How did / does the work team develop its ethos (eg meet together to discuss, have training, develops naturally) ?'

'Were there any problems in the group during this project (among participants/staff/between/other people/issues) ? How were they tackled ?'

'Can you identify ways of working in this project that you would like to do differently next time ?'

'How will this change happen ?

'Is there a special story you'd like to tell ? ' (Prompt: typical/most important)

Closing questions (5 mins)

'Are there any other questions you think I should be asking ?'

'Are there any other people you think I should interview ?'

B 2.0 Consent and information forms

B 2.1 Adult consent form as example of consent form

Research Project: What are the impacts of taking part in a creative project?

This form is asking you to agree to let Sue share her ideas about these research findings as written reports, blogs, websites, images and video. She will also share her research with Coventry University and Imagineer Productions. When you sign (below) you can choose whether it's OK for Sue to show images which disclose your identity (face or first name). If not, Sue will make sure that your identity (face or name), address or anything else which could identify you, is *not* shared. She might want to quote something you said, but will not use your name or anything which can identify you as the speaker.

Please tick

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation, consent and my information / data at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence.

Tick box (a) or (b) as appropriate:

4a. I would like the information I give to remain anonymous

4b. I am happy for the information I give to be identified

Tick box (a), (b) or (c) as appropriate:

5a. I am happy to be filmed / recorded and identified as part of the research project

5b. I am happy to be filmed / recorded *but not identified* in the research project

5c I do not wish to be filmed / recorded at all for the research project

6. I agree to take part in the research project and confirm I am over 18 years of age

• Name of participant:Date:.....

• Name of Researcher Sue Challis Signature.....Date.....

Participant Information Sheet

Can you help answer the question: 'What are the impacts of taking part in a creative project?'

This is a study to find out what impact taking part in a creative project has on you or your community. In other words, does taking part change you or your community?

It is sponsored by Coventry University, the Economic and Social Research Council, and Coventry-based public arts company, Imagineer Productions. It's part of a course of study for the researcher leading to a qualification (PhD) and could be useful to community groups and project funders.

Why am I asking you?

You have been asked to help because you have taken part in a project – either a creative arts project or creative environmental project. So you might have some ideas, comments or thoughts to share about your own experience. You might have some ideas too about the impact on your community – where you live, work or a group you belong to, for example.

Do I have to take part?

Not at all – it's voluntary. And you can change your mind at any time, withdrawing your consent and information: that's not a problem. If you do, please let Sue (the researcher) know asap. If you have second thoughts about any information you have shared, tell Sue asap too.

You might be asked to do one or more of these things:

Observation

Sue might want to watch an activity and make some notes later.

Informal interviews

Sue might want to ask you questions about your experience in a short interview (about an hour). She may take notes or use a sound recorder.

Questionnaire

Sue might ask you to complete a questionnaire which will take about half an hour. This will be anonymous, ie your identity (name) will not be revealed. All the answers will be put together and Sue will try to feed back general patterns to you. You will not know who said what.

Group discussion

You may also be invited to meet other participants for a short group discussion about the topic (about an hour). If you want to join, that's helpful. If not, that's fine, just let Sue know. In the group, Sue will ask a few questions to get everyone started. She will ask everyone to agree to listen and respect others' views (although people may not always agree!), and not to make damaging comments about named individuals.

The disadvantages of taking part

Sue will always try to arrange times to suit participants, but it *will* take up some of your time – during the activity and in breaks or at other times when we agree to meet. If Sue is observing an activity, you might feel self-conscious: please let her know if this is a problem. You will have to give up your time freely and possibly travel to a meeting. In the end, you might not agree with everything Sue writes in her reports.

The benefits of taking part

Taking part will help you think about your own experience and explore the feelings you have about it. If you join the group discussion, you'll also meet up with others and find out what they think. And you will have played an important part in helping to find out more about the impact of creative projects.

Will my information be kept confidential ?

Sue will keep all the information she collects securely, for about three years, and then destroy it. Information you share will be used anonymously, ie your identity (name, face) will not be revealed.

Although your contribution may be given an anonymous code number, Sue *will* want to take your name and contact details (on the consent forms). Personal details will not be seen by anyone else; will be kept separately from the research findings; and will be destroyed after about three years.

Sue will either record or take notes. She might want to contact you later (by telephone or email) to check her understanding. She might want to invite everyone back for another meeting to do this. If you want to come, that's helpful. If not, just tell Sue.

What will happen to the research ?

The research will be written up and presented as part of Sue's PhD course. She will share her findings (summaries of the information and her ideas about it) with Coventry University, and may want to write about it in blogs, reports and articles during the research and afterwards – still keeping everything anonymous. Sue will try to give participants relevant summaries of the research when possible.

Complaints

If you're not happy with any aspect of this research, talk to Sue. If you want to take it further, contact Sue's Supervisor, Phil Dunham (below). This research has been approved by Coventry University Ethics Approval process.

Thank you !

If you would like to contact Sue, email her at challiss@coventry.ac.uk or write to Sue Challis, PhD Postgraduate Student, Department of Geography, Environment and Disaster Management, George Elliot Building, Coventry University, Coventry CV1 5FB. You can contact Sue's University supervisor, Dr P Dunham at apx163@coventry.ac.uk or the same postal address. You can find out more about Imagineer at www.imagineerproductions.co.uk

B 3.0 Additional ethical submission for creative and participatory methods

Methods Protocol

Both the literature review, observations and interviews in the Phase 1 of the research suggested two new directions for this data collection phase:

Evaluation methods developed jointly with participants are likely to be taken more seriously by them and to produce more authentic findings;

Creative methods, sometimes linked to the creative techniques used during the projects themselves, can also be valuable methods producing depths of responses which may not emerge using traditional especially written direct questioning, written or verbal.

Jointly developed methods

There is widespread research suggesting that evaluation is seen as irrelevant and burdensome by participants and stakeholders. Engaging the commitment of participants and stakeholders (artists, volunteers and managers) to develop evaluation techniques can ensure that they are commensurate with activity and feasible, that they are linked directly to project outcomes and aims. It may help uncover additional aims.

Creative methods

Participants asked to discuss their feelings about an activity or process may find it difficult to articulate a complex response, or to share personal information. Research demonstrates that carrying out a creative or 'making' activity encourages unselfconscious reflection; at the same time, creative techniques (such as expressive mark making, where colour and marks are linked to emotional responses in a simple meditative activity) can be used to express responses in a non-written or verbal form. This data must then be analysed in a way that produces relevant and consistent explanations. (NB these methods are subject to further evaluation in this research through interviews with funders and commissioners about the interpretation of such data and its value to them – see Interview Protocol in this submission).

Implications for this ethical submission

I have laid out the overall research protocols for this research in the initial ethical submission. This next phase of the research will proceed within these protocols and the guidance identified. However, this phase may also produce a number of methods which cannot necessarily be detailed at this stage or even in advance. For example, participants may suggest a brief feedback activity to be carried out 'on the spot' or a wide range of short term approaches. These will be assessed informally by me within the ethical framework established. Where these breach this framework I will veto them, explaining why. I will continue to investigate the effectiveness of these methods using the protocols and techniques in ethical submission.

Explanation for participatory development of methods

Before participants are asked to help plan evaluation for their own projects, the following explanation will be discussed with them:

'You have read and understood the PIS and Consent forms for this project. I believe that you may have some good ideas for evaluating this project yourself. In order to do this you need to know what the project is trying to achieve and what you want to get out of it. Then you can work out ways to find out if these things have happened. This will help you make a group evaluation plan.

There are some ground rules for evaluation and my research has to abide by them.

Firstly, evaluation has to include everyone and be suitable for everyone who is involved – or we won't hear the whole story. You need to think about how your plan might exclude some people or groups of people – such as people who don't want to write or people who are too shy to speak up in public. But if someone still doesn't want to take part, you must make it easy for them to say so. Better still, you can listen to their ideas for changing the plan so that more people want to take part.

Second, evaluation mustn't upset anyone. It must be easy for people to say difficult things as well as positive things without upsetting other people. People need to feel safe. You need to tell

people how all the information and ideas you collect will be anonymous and only used for the evaluation. You can't keep information which identifies people by name or in any other way. Third, you need to be sure - and to be able to explain - how the plan will find out what people really think or feel. For example, you might need to ask people at the start, middle and end – or even after it's over, or ask them in more than one way. You might need to ask a range of different people about the same event – using different methods

Fourth, everyone who takes part in the evaluation will need to read a PIS and sign a Consent Form'.

B 4.0 Interview protocol for evaluation

Embedding an evaluation strategy

In this phase of the research I will be encouraging 3-4 key stakeholders (eg project managers, officers) to develop an embedded research strategy based on a theory of change. Projects which develop their own 'theory of change' and 'map' evaluation onto their project plan increase stakeholders' and participants' understanding and encourage them to value the process of evaluation, especially if they can be seen to be part of improving practice as well as proving impact. This embedded evaluation is more likely to produce authentic and in depth data. PIS and Consent Forms as before will be used.

3.1 This will be done through a number of informal discussions lasting from one to two hours, based on the following protocols:

Describe the research and share PIS and Consent form

Introduce the idea of theory of change and give research references

Discuss the specific project aims relevant to this research ie qualitative

Map a range of methods against the project plan, discussing feasibility and costs

Agree a timeline of activity

Agree a schedule for my research activity vis a vis this activity

Discussions with funders/commissioners

During this stage of the research I will also hold a small number of face to face discussions with representatives of creative community project funders or commissioners (eg Arts Council or Big Lottery Project Officers) aimed at assessing what kind of evaluation methods they regard as useful. These informal discussions may also include showing examples of creative or participant-led methods and asking for critical feedback.

PIS and Consent Forms as before will be used.

These discussions will be carried out within the Research Protocols identified in the previous P1115 Ethical Submission and will include feedback of notes for correction, agreement about what are identifiable quotes and the questions,

4.1 These discussions will begin with a description of the research and include these key questions about specific projects:

What kinds of evaluations do you think would work the most effectively for soft outcomes for this project, given its scope, resources and funding ?

Could you identify evaluation of soft outcomes which you regard as excellent?

[Describe examples] these could be regarded as creative evaluations – how useful would you regard them as for this project – what are their strengths and weaknesses for your needs?

[describe examples] these are participant-led evaluations - how useful would you regard them as for this project – what are their strengths and weaknesses for your needs?

Are there any other questions you think I should be asking ? Are there any other people you think I should interview ?'.

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B 5.0 Descriptions of Initial Interviewees

This section gives a brief introductory description of each of the interviewees involved in the initial interviewing process

Interview Long#2 May 2011

This describes various encounters with creative projects in the experience of a 20 year old man reflecting back to his early teens. During that time he felt unhappy with academic life and began to volunteer at a local community arts and youth Centre. He eventually dropped out of college and got a temporary office job at the Centre. As a volunteer, participant or staff member he started to take part in artist-led activities at the Centre. He describes the artists as close in age to himself, and focusses on how differently they related to young participants than teachers did in school. The activities (mainly over the period of his Summer job when he was 17) included learning to shoot and edit videos to an arts brief, decorating venues for music and arts events, creating and projecting digital art material in live music and other public events. He makes the point that all the activities led to an artwork being produced (usually quite quickly) for public exhibition or performance, often a collective activity. He went on to lead workshops for younger children and continues in a permanent office based role at the Centre, where he continues to engage with creative activities. He is unable to distinguish between the impact of 'any good community project' and a creative project.

Interview Long#3 May 2011

This 35-year-old white British woman living in a rural area is reflecting back to early childhood when absorption in occasional creative craft-making activities were a haven for her during difficult times. These led to engagement with a local Saturday dance club, which again was an escape from family life. She particularly describes the excitement of collective activity and performance. A weekend drama course when she was 13 enthralled her: she felt independent and successful for the first time. As an older teenager she took part in a local arts Centre digital media project, run by young artists. She describes the excitement and challenge of mastering new equipment, especially since she was the only female participant, the 'completely different' and much more equal relationships with the young adult artists than school or home, the challenge of being directed in a real life project, the pleasure in making and showing her own films. She went on to take a media degree and now teaches media and film studies to teenagers.

Interview Long #4 June 2011

This 55- year white British old woman living in an inner city area was reflecting on the experience of an abusive childhood which denied her personal expression, followed by family responsibilities on a low income, and very low self-esteem. Three years before the interview she had taken part in a year-long arts project which supported her to make artwork about her childhood. The power of this experience, and the impact of exhibiting

the work publically, she describes as 'life changing', not in the sense that it changed her material circumstances, but that it changed the way she felt about herself. Before the art project she had been on a confidence and skills building course; she says that this got her to the point where she was ready for the art project. Since the project, despite ill health, she has become very active as a volunteer and local campaigner in her local community, an area of 'multiple deprivation'.

Interview Long#5 June 2011

This 38-year old white British man living in a small town was a school 'drop out' who took part in creative projects in a local youth club. He describes his encounters there with young artists as 'transformative' because of their egalitarian and collaborative attitudes, which made him feel like 'an equal' rather than a 'young person with nothing to offer'. He feels that finding the creative outlet saved him from becoming depressed. This seemed to be as much about relationships formed during intensive creative activities, mainly filming and performance, as the making itself. He cites mastery of new technologies and the freedom to develop skills using expensive equipment as he went along, that this equipment and the serious attention of the artists were available to him as key to its impact. He describes himself as becoming grounded and confident because of these experiences. He has gone on to become a self-employed videomaker.

B 6.0 Notes on Initial Interviews and transcripts

Long#1 and Long # 2

Examples of notes made on transcripts from two informal interviews with the same longitudinal respondent

The body of this text is extracts from a transcript of a audio recording of an informal interview with Long I #1 (respondent 1 of the 'longitudinal interviews' ie people who could reflect on experience over several years) carried out in July 2011. The meeting lasted 2hours 30mins. The interviewee was shown the original document after the interview and asked to 'make any corrections'. These two corrections are shown as yellow highlights. A second informal interview (meeting one hour) was carried out two months later when the researcher asked additional questions related to two themes drawn from the transcript by the researcher. The second interview was videoed (an extract is embedded in Chapter XXX). Although this was an informal interview, I based my questions around a series of broad topics which had been agreed in my ethical framework by the University.

The themes I drew from this transcript are 'participation' and 'intensity of experience', shown by green (30 refs) and pink (25 refs) highlights respectively. The theme 'participation' is connected in these comments to 'democratic participation', that is, personal development through 'taking ownership' of the project. 'Intensity of experience', in this account, relates both to personal feelings and to intense experiences of creativity. In the second interview, the interviewee agreed that these two themes "probably" highlighted experiences in the project which had the most impact on her. I returned to the transcript a year later, looking for themes relating specifically to creativity (7 refs) aesthetic excellence (6 refs) and real world action (11 refs) (factors which had emerged from other areas of research).

Researcher comments are shown like this (italic). Some of the comments are framed as questions which I asked in the second interview. Comments added a year later are shown in CAPITALS.

1.0 Introduction – what I knew before the interview

Long I #1 was one a group of about ten Birmingham and Black Country women who had met for two years previously on a Home Office funded personal development course, 'Active Citizenship'. Immediately following this, and together with the current researcher, then the lead artist, the group wrote a successful bid for funding to the Arts Council West Midlands for a 12-month project to make an art exhibition at a local gallery and museum (part of Wolverhampton Art Museum and Art Gallery, WMAG). The project was well-funded and had 'in-kind' support from WMAG, in the form of workshop space, publicity, gallery space and secondment of a community outreach artist. The project was run by the participants, who employed the lead artist (me) and other artists, curator and technicians. The group had a Treasurer and Secretary and Constitution. Participants met almost fortnightly for 12 months, with many 'making' and skills workshops run by a range of artists identified by the lead artist and by participants depending on the direction of their work, with approximately monthly 'business' meetings. There were additional evening 'art appreciation' discussion meetings and a residential weekend to visit London galleries. Travel and childcare and all materials costs came from the project. Participants worked in groups to learn skills, but made individual work on an agreed theme, and gradually specific artists were brought in for individual tutorials; participants also had regular 'sketchbook' tutorials with the lead artist. They worked towards an unusually successful group show in a professional venue, with professional curation, which attracted large numbers of visitors and received high praise from the Arts Council.

1.1 My expectations before the interview, of the interview

I felt that long enough time had elapsed since this project (six years) for Respondent IA#1 to speak freely to me despite my close association with it then. I also felt that she would have had time to reflect on its impact. I had had little contact with her since the project, except 12 months previously, when I had asked permission to show her artwork to another community arts group. On this occasion she volunteered to talk to the group, and began her comments by saying, 'Making this film changed my life...' going on to described the impact of the project on herself, her life path and her career. This suggested that she and other participants in this project (whose experience of it might be quite different) would make good subjects for the research. The fleeting contact we had had over the intervening period led me to expect her to be fairly fluent and articulate and my judgement was that she would have the confidence to make critical remarks if she needed.

2.0 Interview transcript and notes

Q You wrote the bid together (with support) before the project, that is, the idea was jointly developed and planned. Was this significant?

Comment [s1]: Theme of participation being central to transformatory praxis

A The whole project was about taking ownership, those relationships we already had through [the previous project], we wanted to take it further. We came up with the [art] project...

Comment [s2]: 'personal development' theme

...the expertise... the project support and guidance to write the bid, to stimulate our thinking, that was really important, what to do. It created a critical discussion. We met three or four times before, while we were preparing the bid...there were some people who'd had negative experiences of trying to organise something together and they were doubtful, but there were enough positive people to try it.

Comment [s3]: This is 'personal development' AND 'intensity'

Q What was it like writing the bid?

Comment [s4]: Were there 'gatekeepers' to participation?

A There was segregation in the group; it was split because certain people felt they weren't included in decisions, but on a practical basis the group was meeting and absent people – decisions had to be made. There was lack of communication and miscommunication.

Comment [s5]: 'intensity' theme: This links to the psycho-social theory that personal transformation results from 'difficult' experiences which challenge participants' worldview or positioning in discourses

Q It was quite tense ?

A [facilitators from the previous project] had to come in near the start and in the middle of the project to try to give advice, some people felt that finances ... they felt not kept in the picture, that certain people were being [gestures to suggest quotation] "being paid to participate", what I mean is, in order for me to participate I needed money for childcare – we all had travel money – but childcare was the baseline for me, I wouldn't have even have started it. I was a single parent with one very young and one with ADHD; it would have been impossible to participate.

.....[general conversation]

Some people didn't like it that their business, the financial support they got from the project, was being scrutinised by the group, when we were in [the previous course] [the facilitators] were responsible for the finances, but now it was the group's responsibility and so the group knew each other's financial business.

It didn't sit comfortably with some people, the move to taking responsibility for ourselves. There was a kind of hierarchy in [the previous course] where [the course facilitators] handled the money, but now it was just us, so we relied on our own discretion and confidentiality and the group dynamics changed. Some people felt uncomfortable, claiming, hoarding, it was embarrassing.

Q It sounds quite intense?

A It was intense, but everybody had a shared vision, we were inspired by our previous experiences and we all really wanted to do this art show. We were also making art about very personal things, I think that had an impact, we were exposing ourselves too. We were constantly learning new things, it was an intense learning journey but we were working towards our goal and had proper timescales.

Q What set the timescales?

A We had to set them to do an exhibition. The quality of people who came in was high, it wasn't just a small community organisation putting some art together for a community centre. Having those people gave us the feeling that we were going to be working to a high status, not just a community project, something bigger. It was an Arts Council [emphasis] project, there was expertise, it all fed into what we wanted to achieve and we got that knowledge from all these experts. It felt serious, professional, a professional standard thing, status-driven.

It wasn't just a grass-roots community project that could be shown in a school hall or community hall or something, we were lifted beyond that, lifted higher than that by attaching those artists to us and we had all the right tools and equipment to participate actively – not like sitting listening to a lecture or something, we did it so it seemed more real, it upped the game for us – so I think that's why it was more intense, and it wasn't just like painting a picture either.

Because the expectation was so high I think there was also frustration, when you compared your work with a registered artist it seemed nothing. I think we got more comfortable over time when we got more skills.

Not everybody took it so seriously though. Some people mocked their own stuff, [a participant] felt her stuff wasn't going anywhere anyway, she was never happy with it.

Q Did you feel like that?

A I've always loved art. My parents didn't allow me to draw because it wasn't Islamic, so I used to draw portraits, of pop stars and so on and hide them behind photographs. I wasn't allowed to pick art at school, I had to pick needlework, textiles, because it was more traditional. So I think

Comment [s6]: Were there 'gatekeepers' to finances or defining meaning of 'eligible', 'need' ?

Comment [s7]: This was added after first reading: possible need to emphasise or legitimate what happened?

Comment [s8]: Was this wandering off topic a response to embarrassment discussing conflict? See [s22] below

Comment [s9]: She makes several refs to group/shared vision - participation

Comment [s10]: The result of intensity or previous experience of personal development course ?

Comment [s11]: CREATIVITY, AUTHENTIC, UNARTICULATED KNOWLEDGES

Comment [s12]: CREATIVITY, AN 'INTENSE LEARNING JOURNEY'

Comment [s13]: PARTICIPATION

Comment [s14]: This relates to the theme in ArtsCompany#1 , AND Freire's transformatory praxis, of 'REAL WORLD' activities being more significant of Art&LeisureCentre#1 projects with young people & maybe Children's Centre#1 domestic violence conference project – check this in interviews

Comment [s15]: AESTHETIC EXCELLENCE

Comment [s16]: Again re –positioning as 'professional' see ArtsCompany#1 ; AESTHETIC EXCELLENCE

Comment [s17]: REAL WORLD ACTION

Comment [s18]: Interesting to see ranking of community art, as ArtsCouncil 2011 see refs

Comment [s19]: Discourse of EXCELLENCE, quality, professionalism see [s55]

Comment [s20]: Importance of venue, materials, technology of ANT ?

Comment [s21]: again

Comment [s22]: 'difficulty' again

Comment [s23]: Is this describing the process of re-positioning?

Comment [s24]: Why i need to interview everyone in this project & cross ref

Comment [s25]: What were the variables which made it different for her? (if true)

Comment [s26]: Is this 'readiness to receive' or predisposition and how significant is this ? Ask other this question.

am a creative learner and not everybody is: different people get different things from it, don't they?

Comment [s27]: This may be readiness to receive too, since most art projects 'teach' through 'doing'

.....[general conversation]

Comment [s28]: Was this wandering off the interview because it was difficult to talk about not everyone enjoying/getting a lot out of the project ?

Q You've told me before that something about the experience was transformatory for you. What was special about this project for you ?

A We didn't think we could achieve such a high profile exhibition, the fact that it was going to be a proper exhibition was so important to me; we were a group of people who wanted to achieve the same outcomes, we had the same vision...

Comment [s29]: Impact of 'real world'; of action as well as re-conceptualising; of status/professionalism cf ArtsCompany#1

... we were a local group of women who had no experience of art and came together and created dynamic work that would be spoken about and that reflected our own experience... we wanted to find a way of communicating our journey to other women...

Comment [s30]: Group-ness reference see comment [s6]

...it was more dynamic...

Comment [s31]: No prior experience; new experience: linked to development and to 'work that would be spoken about' – pride, professionalism, real world

Q What were the negative aspects ?

A That people didn't feel they were included in the whole process, I thought that [a participant] did include everyone and made sure they were included, but their perceptions were that they weren't... we had to be more effective, the group dynamics changed, we had to deal ourselves with managing conflict, that was the biggest change for people, the dynamics of the group... we were accountable, not [the previous course facilitators], people had to lead it, to overcome issues, some issues were quite petty, they had to be overcome by ourselves.

Comment [s32]: Participation feels different to different people ? were there 'gatekeepers' of participation ?

I think it was competitive in the group ... [laughs]

Q What about ?

A People's art, some people were very good at art and I felt I had to [gestures to suggest quotation] 'up my game' .

Comment [s33]: Partly about conflict in the group but also about high expectations, professionalism, real world ?

When I chose my subject I knew I could make a good piece of art about it, I was already working on my piece, in my head, I knew exactly how it would be; it was close to my heart and my story... as opposed to some people who didn't have a clue ...

Comment [s34]: Is this a description of the CREATIVE PROCESS ?

...I had a storyline [for her film], how long it had to be, so every shot had to tell a story, certain things that had to be shown; the opening shot, somebody sitting there, the seriousness as the film progresses – I knew, I was just recording what I lived, recording my experience... I had expert advice about how to do it...

Comment [s35]: This could be said to be about PARTICIPATION too, as it's about the participants determining the form and content of the artwork with the support of experts – as opposed to making 'excellent' art to a prescribed aesthetic standard and/or form

Q When did you get a sense that this was an important or transformatory experience?

A Before the show I was completely task-pleased that I had finished, that's how I saw it then, that I had achieved it and it had come to an end, I was very pleased... but on the opening I was extremely emotional about the work, it was like someone else was telling my story not me – I was extremely emotional.

Comment [s36]: Useful phrase ! is this what most on the spot FEEDBACK records (as opposed to evaluation which is more long term & deeper?)

.....

Q It was a very buzzy opening night, was that part of it?

Comment [s37]: Is this part of the CREATIVE PROCESS a sense of separation from the artwork, standing back and letting it speak for itself ? ie not 'just another community art project' where context is all ???!!!

A It was shocking that people weren't from my culture and that they understood, they understood the processes, the comments on the night, that it was a very powerful piece of work, that forced marriages are not as black and white as they seem ... I was very nervous, intimidated by the amount of people there and what they were looking for, worried that it would be classified as 'another forced marriage piece', but instead, it was as if I'd spoken, there were no words in it [her film] but people understood.

Comment [s38]: Re-positioning again, plus see above [s31]

Q Did going to the Tate in London [part of the project half way through] have an impact on you?

Comment [s39]: ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN ARTICULATING /DIFF KNOWLEDGES

Comment [s40]: See [s31]

A It showed me art wasn't just about painting and drawing, there could be different types of art, media, people just standing there – it opened my eyes, it made me feel I was on the right track and what I was doing was artistic.

Comment [s41]: Re-positioning as professional

Q What happened as a result of making the film and showing it, after the project? Do you feel that it continued to have an impact on you?

A I put the past to rest, making the film, I was facing up to what had happened to me, I felt I didn't have to reflect on it any more. I used the film to talk to my parents, I showed it to them. They said, you are going to embarrass us, this is an awful thing, not a socially acceptable thing to do – facing up to the fact that they did force me to marry as opposed to arrange it – but the idea of going outside the community with it, going public, bringing shame on the family and the community – I got very negative feedback from them, but that's what I expected.

Comment [s42]: This gives an insight into the impact of the project on the wider community – she showed it to other people outside the project (ie not only at the exhibition); question- is video more ACCESSIBLE than other other forms because it looks like a TV documentary?

I showed the film to people I knew but not close friends, people from the same culture. People were surprised, they said they hadn't imagined I had struggled with anything like that, their perception of me was a strong woman who hadn't gone through any of this kind of stuff. It was really good for me to get feedback on the film from strangers.

Comment [s43]: Impact on wider community PLUS re-positioning herself continues after the project – she uses the artwork to further her personal development outside the project – was she 'ready to receive' ? Community projects often regarded as 'catalysts' to change

In the community work I did, volunteer work, I spoke about [the project] and what it was, but I didn't show the film. I would definitely use it again as part of a funding bid now for another art project.

Comment [s44]: This is really interesting: an impact directly related to levering in resources into the community: also shows the personal development of the participant (who was not involved in bidwriting at the time of the art project).

I got involved in a Home Office project about Forced Marriage through showing the film to [a community contact]; they educate people in the community and give support to women. I didn't show them the film but I talked about making it. I wanted to take it a step further and the result was we put on a drama together, three nights, a bi-lingual play in the school. We treated it in a comical way, we brought in outside dancers and included the local area, local councillors... we were sold out all three nights – it was a mixed audience but the non-bilingual people could still follow what was going on.

Comment [s45]: More wider impact

Q Do you think your experience in the [IA] project was relevant to doing this ?

A Oh yes, the skills I developed in making the film and the support and guidance we had – I applied it all to the drama, and then there was all the reading instructions, working out the budget, planning the time to get the film done on time, timing scenes and editing, all these things...

Comment [s46]: Participant asked for personal detail here to be omitted

.....[discussion becomes personal]

Comment [s47]: During the very long reply to this I practiced 'refelctive listening' – making non-committal encouraging sounds & maintaining eye contact, without asking further questions. I think she is unusually fluent.

Q Can you tell me how [the project] changed you or affected your life path ?

Comment [s48]: This may be more significant than the interview allowed, and perhaps needed some further questions – the previous course was almost entirely about personal development and clearly made a big impact on this interviewee – how to separate that from the art project which was so closely linked ? Hopefully, the framework does this.

A I was 33 when I was in the art project, seven years ago. I had two kids, a girl three and a boy 13, I'd been a single parent since 2000. I was employed as a 'Home Links' worker. The [previous course] helped me get the confidence to get that job, before then I was a Receptionist... the art project fed into my job, action planning, minute taking, effective

communications, ways of communicating, networking, picking up ideas from others, what they do, teambuilding – I started after school arts clubs because of it and lots of different initiatives... I also felt confident at *bid writing* [emphasis].

I would say it raised my aspirations and inspired me to do more. I felt more confident and had more self esteem – that I had achieved it. At the start of [the art project] I thought I would be one of the 'gofers', come along for the ride, that I wouldn't make an art piece... nobody told me what was out there, it had to be experienced.

I put on a lot more activities for the young people [at the school where she worked] and I started putting on activities for the parents. I started connecting more with women in the same situation as me, women who were still stuck in a rut. would make a direct link [to the art project] to me putting on additional activities and art activities ... additional to my job, I set up holiday activities, art, drama, dance, it just kind of escalated... but I needed to do more at work, because it wasn't challenging enough at work.

I got more active in my local community, people heard about it and rang up and asked for more and it just grew and grew... lots of ladies events, because that's what the community wanted.

I kept taking the opportunity to tell people at work what I was doing, and then I became Attendance Manager for the whole school, which before me had been a senior leadership team job, it was a big step, definitely would not have done that previously.

I needed direction in my life so I took on a Foundation Degree at [local FE college], two years part time, then I got bored with my job and they created a position for me, because I kept on doing the community work and they saw the benefit of it, it worked, they made a post of Community Learning Coordinator. It was a tough interview, there were high calibre candidates, mostly degree holders, but what gave me the edge was I was active in the local community and I had all the ward facts and figures and I understood all that stuff.

I've been doing it for three years now. It's completely changed; now it's Business and Community Development, securing CSR [Corporate Social Responsibility] agreements with large corporations. I started a BSC in management at [local university]. I completed that BSC Honours, that was such a day, my parents have told me, my dad told me, he is very proud of me... my mum can't say they did wrong, but she said, "You did the right thing about your marriage"...

I use 'LinkedIn' [internet professional network] and lots of training opportunities I tap into... recently I started an MA in Education... I'm using data collected in my job...

.....[discussion about IT at work]

I don't feel I'm challenged in my job and I feel I have a lot more to offer. The targets are more difficult now because I asked for them to be – I know I want to develop further but I don't know what... I'm on a lifelong journey of learning... my job is to develop as an individual.

Q How important was the Personal Development course you took before the art project? Can you separate out the impacts of the two experiences?

A Those two years were phenomenally [emphasis] important.

Q Was there anything about the way the artists worked with you that was important?

Comment [s49]: This is both participation & intensity: also relates to the creative process & learning styles

Comment [s50]: Self reported wider impact on community: this is also hard evidence but we can't extrapolate

Comment [s51]: One of several comments directly relating the art project to transferable skills/self confidence outside the project and over some time after it

Comment [s52]: As [s44]

Comment [s53]: This links back to making the artwork

Comment [s54]: This positions her as a professional – this is different from how she describes herself at start of art project

Comment [s55]: See [s10] and [s42] this needed further questions really

A Yes, they weren't intimidating, they were flexible, encouraging, it was more like coaching of mentoring than teacher/student. They were professional.

Q What do you mean by 'professional'?

A Most of us were just along for the ride, none of us were experienced [in art], we were grass-roots ladies, we didn't know about schedules, processes... they knew their jobs, they knew how to get people on board, what works, what doesn't, how to do it, what is the timescale.

Q Is there one moment or story about [the art project] which stands out as making a difference to you ?

A Watching the exhibition take shape, when we were putting it up, the actual exhibition, in that empty hall, watching it come to life and thinking, 'We've landed' we've achieved it'; and seeing the amount of work behind the scenes to make an exhibition, it was eye-opening.

Comment [s56]: Argument here for the special quality of ARTS projects, the special impact of CREATIVITY

Comment [s57]: Cf ArtsCompany#1 and positioning as professional

Comment [s58]: How I love this phrase; could be unpacked

Comment [s59]: 'They' means, the artists running the project

Comment [s60]: Real world stuff again; plus achievement of PUBLICALLY RECOGNISED quality , discourse of EXCELLENCE see [s14]

3.0 Reflections on the process (notes made after second interview)

I think it worked well to give a chance to 'correct' the notes – I made it clear that corrections would be identified as such – this was re-assuring to the interviewee who felt she had some control (I removed some personal comments altogether for the same reason). I do not plan to show her this document, with my speculative comments on it.

It's clear to me that that a couple of themes emerged which need further follow-up. I don't feel I can ask this interviewee to meet again but will have to do this in future sessions with other people. It's a big time commitment for me and them.

The themes which my reading produced link in to other themes arising elsewhere in the project, especially: intensity, participation, personal development, public recognition of excellence, re-positioning by artist's practice, creative process, self & others.

3.1 Notes made a year later

This interviewee identified (self-reported) impact of a very 'concrete' kind: aspirations raised and skills acquired leading directly to improved employment (new job and promotion) and additional community involvement (volunteering and in work). She ascribes this change to certain experiences in the project: intensity (a mix of creative 'flow' and social relationships), taking responsibility (democratic participation), striving for aesthetic excellence, and real world action (with approval from beyond her own community). These experiences are highly interrelated. She mentions several incidents which can be called 're-positioning' , notably, through the successful public exhibition (herself as artist, as communicator) and the subsequent use of the artwork within her own family and community (herself as autonomous). She describes a growing sense of personal agency which she directly ascribes to her experience of the project.

The interviewee makes useful points about the differential impact of the project on different participants:

- some people couldn't take themselves seriously enough as artists to participate fully in the creative process (lack of confidence ?)

- some people found the democratic participation process more challenging than beneficial;

I also infer from her comments that,

- she was predisposed since childhood to see herself as 'artistic', although this had never been articulated (this was so of another participant from the same project who also reported big positive impact); people have different starting points, barriers and receptivities
- there were different levels of commitment to the group 'vision' and probably different motivations for taking part

3.2 Reflexive reflections (notes made same time as 3.1 above)

3.2.1 Time passed

The time elapsed since the original creative experience did enable this participant to reflect far more coherently than she could immediately after the event. However, re-reading her interview transcript now suggests to me that this period also gave her time to construct a coherent narrative about the impact of the project, which she developed within the processes of positive changes she went on to experience. For example, continual re-telling the story of her forced marriage and subsequent divorce in community settings, using the film, placed it in available discourses about self-realisation through creativity, disclosure, 'coming to terms with' the past and 'moving on'. This doesn't mean the narrative is invalid, but in recognising its role in contributing to her re-positioning in these discourses about her life, we can also guess that things which didn't 'fit' may have been glossed over or forgotten.

3.3 The power of my expectation versus contextualised detail

This interviewee may also have been aware of my thesis – that creativity could lead to positive change –through the framing of my research question. This would also carry the weight of academic sanction (of which she, as an aspirant undergraduate, was aware, and, possibly, uncritically so). This may have helped shape her narrative. Nevertheless, I think there is enough detail in her interview (about the role of intense processes, the successful exhibition and *Private View*, subsequent use of the film) to cast new light on what led to the changes she describes. It is these details which give me confidence to claim a causal link in this case. That is, the experience of intense involvement in a creative project (involving democratic participation, encounters with new materials and techniques, striving towards aesthetic quality, real world action with community recognition), *combined with the previous experience of confidence-building in the Active Citizenship course*, was both a catalyst and a determining factor for specific positive personal changes (greater agency and sense of autonomy, wellbeing, confidence and skills).

3.4 The selection of this research subject

I selected this participant for my first interview because I still had her contact details, because she is articulate, and because I knew her life had changed positively and dramatically since the project, and because she had already indicated she ascribed that change to her participation. Since then, I have also interviewed a second participant from the same project, who made similar observations, not only in an ontological narrative, but also in the describing details of processes which she believed led to positive change. So, my reasons for selection were partly pragmatic (I had their contact details and I knew they had reflected and could be articulate), and partly connected with my desire to prove my thesis. However, I knew they linked the project with positive change, but not what were the indicated specific processes within it. I twice contacted all ten members of the same project, and these two were the only ones to respond. I

knew that there were one or two participants for whom the project had been less transformative and less satisfying, even perhaps one for whom the same indicated processes (intensity, striving for aesthetic quality) undermined her confidence and wellbeing. Reflecting here about my previous reflections, I was aware that finding research participants for whom the process of creativity in projects had a negative or neutral impact was difficult. This is congruent with Matarasso's findings about creative community project evaluation and my own professional experience: people with negative views may have dropped out during the project, lost contact afterwards, be reluctant to speak. The process of identifying feelings or even 'feeling' them is also subject to ontological frameworks and the availability of various discourses (Thrift 2008)¹.

My expectations before the interview, of the interview

I felt that long enough time had elapsed since this project (six years) for Respondent IA#1 to speak freely to me despite my close association with it then. I also felt that she would have had time to reflect on its impact. I had had little contact with her since the project, except 12 months previously, when I had asked permission to show her artwork to another community arts group. On this occasion she volunteered to talk to the group, and began her comments by saying, 'Making this film changed my life...' going on to describe the impact of the project on herself, her life path and her career. This suggested that she and other participants in this project (whose experience of it might be quite different) would make good subjects for the research. The fleeting contact we had had over the intervening period led me to expect her to be fairly fluent and articulate and my judgement was that she would have the confidence to make critical remarks if she needed. I therefore expected her to be able to identify specific experiences which led to change and also to associate transformatory change with creativity.

Reflections on the process (notes made after second interview)

I think it worked well to give a chance to 'correct' the notes – I made it clear that corrections would be identified as such – this was reassuring to the interviewee who felt she had some control (I removed some personal comments altogether for the same reason). I do not plan to show her this document, with my speculative comments on it. It's clear to me that a couple of themes emerged which need further follow-up. I don't feel I can ask this interviewee to meet again but will have to do this in future sessions with other people. It's a big time commitment for me and them. The themes which my reading produced link in to other themes arising in the literature review, and beginning to come out elsewhere in the project, especially: intensity, participation, personal development, public recognition of excellence, re-positioning by artist's practice, creative process, group dynamics.

Notes made on re-visiting the transcript a year after the first interview

This interviewee identified (self-reported) impact of a very 'concrete' kind: aspirations raised and skills acquired leading directly to improved employment (new job and promotion) and additional community involvement (volunteering and in work). She ascribes this change to certain experiences in the project: intensity (a mix of creative 'flow' and social relationships), taking responsibility (democratic participation), striving for aesthetic excellence, and real world action (with approval from beyond her own community). These experiences are highly interrelated. She mentions several incidents which can be called 're-positioning', notably, through the successful public exhibition (herself as artist, as communicator) and the subsequent use of the artwork within her own family and community (herself as autonomous). She describes a growing sense of personal agency which she directly ascribes to her experience of the project.

¹ A popular example of this would be culturally gendered expectations about anger which may lead women to 'feel' upset and men to 'feel' angry in the same situations, that is, to interpret the embodied manifestations of feelings in these different ways.

The interviewee makes useful points about the differential impact of the project on different participants:

- some people couldn't take themselves seriously enough as artists to participate fully in the creative process (lack of confidence ?)
- some people found the democratic participation process more challenging than beneficial;

I also infer from her comments that,

- she was predisposed since childhood to see herself as 'artistic', although this had never been articulated (this was so of another participant from the same project who also reported big positive impact); people have different starting points, barriers and receptivities
- there were different levels of commitment to the group 'vision' and probably different motivations for taking part

Reflections on the video: the time between experience and reflection²

What is striking in the video is the fluency of speech. The time elapsed since the original creative experience did enable this participant to reflect far more coherently than she could immediately after the event. However, re-reading the video now suggests to me that this period also gave her time to construct a coherent narrative about the impact of the project, which she developed within the processes of positive changes she went on to experience. For example, continual re-telling the story of her forced marriage and subsequent divorce in community settings, using the film, placed it in newly available discourses about self-realisation through creativity, and others about disclosure, 'coming to terms with' the past and 'moving on'. This doesn't mean the narrative is invalid, but in recognising its role in contributing to her re-positioning in these discourses about her life, we can also guess that things which didn't 'fit' may have been glossed over or forgotten.

Reflections on my own reflections, made a year after the first interview

1. The power of my expectation versus contextualised detail

This interviewee may also have been aware of my thesis – that creativity could lead to positive change – through the framing of my research question (my own notes before the first interview show that I expected her to make a causal link because she had previously hinted at this). This would also carry the weight of academic sanction (of which she, as an aspirant undergraduate, was aware, and, possibly, uncritically so). This may have helped shape her narrative. Nevertheless, I think there is enough detail in her interview (about the role of intense processes, the successful exhibition and *Private View*, subsequent use of the film) to cast new light on what led to the changes she describes. It is these details which give me confidence to claim a causal link in this case. That is, the experience of intense involvement in a creative project (involving democratic participation, encounters with new materials and techniques, striving towards aesthetic quality, real world action with community recognition) had a positive, transformative impact. However, it was combined with her previous experience of confidence-building in the Active Citizenship course, both a catalyst and a determining factor for specific positive personal changes (greater agency and sense of autonomy, wellbeing, confidence and skills), and reinforced by subsequent opportunities arising from the creative project, to consolidate these. These arose

² I also made more detailed notes on the video (which I watched three times) about my interpretations of emphasis and fluency. The notes above represent my key conclusions from these (they are not typed up).

directly from her experience of publically and successfully exhibiting a material expression of her movement through the project, her artwork (an idiosyncratic and powerful film about her own forced marriage and subsequent divorce which led to first-time discussions with her parents, community groups, and finally, in her account, directly to her first job, in a school³). In the section below, 'Different intelligences', there is discussion of theoretical perspectives on the unfolding in this way of 'affect'.

2. The selection of this research subject

I selected this participant for my first interview because I still had her contact details, because she is articulate, because I knew her life had changed positively and dramatically since the project, and because she had already indicated she ascribed that change to her participation. Since then, I have also interviewed a second participant from the same project, who made similar observations, not only in an ontological narrative, but also in the describing details of processes which she believed led to positive change. So, my reasons for selection were partly pragmatic (I had their contact details and I knew they had reflected and could be articulate), and partly connected with my desire to prove my ontological premise. However, although I knew they linked the project with positive change, but not what were the indicated specific processes within it. I twice contacted all ten members of the same project, and these two were the only ones to respond. I knew that there were one or two participants for whom the project had been less transformative and less satisfying, even perhaps one for whom the same indicated processes (intensity, striving for aesthetic quality) undermined her confidence and wellbeing (see Table 4.1 below). Reflecting here about my previous reflections, I was aware that finding research participants for whom the process of creativity in projects had a negative or neutral impact was difficult. This is congruent with Matarasso's findings about creative community project evaluation and my own professional experience: people with negative views may have dropped out during the project, lost contact afterwards, be reluctant to speak (Matarasso 1997). The process of identifying feelings or even 'feeling' them in the first place is also subject to ontological frameworks and the availability of various discourses (Thrift 2008)⁴.

(Researcher Notes Longitudinal Interview #1, July 2011, see Appendix 4.0)

6.1 Example of notes from informal interview with longitudinal respondent Long#2

The body of this text is extracts from a transcript of a audio recording of an informal interview with Long I #1 (respondent 1 of the 'longitudinal interviews' ie people who could reflect on experience over several years) carried out in February 2012. The meeting lasted 1 ½ hours. The interviewee was shown the original document after the interview and asked to 'make any corrections'. There were none offered. A second informal interview was offered but declined.

³ Available on a private youtube link, <http://youtu.be/ieMzMNY6Q-s>. This is a private link because she has given permission for sharing for academic purposes only, so please do not re-share. It is a short, quirky and intensely personal film, which has now been shown many times in community and voluntary sector meetings in the West Midlands, where she has herself led the discussion: in other words, she has said she has retained some control over its dissemination and is able to contextualise it each time in her own (evolving) account (private communication July 2012).

⁴ A popular example of this would be culturally gendered expectations about anger which may lead women to 'feel' upset and men to 'feel' angry in the same situations, that is, to interpret the embodied manifestations of feelings in these different ways (see the discussion on affect below in this Chapter, 'Different Intelligences').

Although this was an informal interview, I based my questions around a series of broad topics which had been agreed in my ethical framework by the University.

The themes (where interviewees describe what led to change in themselves) I drew from this transcript are 'participation' and 'intensity of experience', shown by **green** (7 refs) and **pink** (0 refs) highlights respectively and derived from the first Longitudinal Interview I carried out. The theme 'participation' is connected in these comments to 'democratic participation', that is, personal development through 'taking ownership' of the project. 'Intensity of experience', in this account, relates both to personal feelings and to intense experiences of creativity. I returned to the transcript six months later, looking for themes relating specifically to **creativity** (13 refs) **aesthetic excellence** (0 refs) and **'real world action'** (1 ref), and **encounters with/mastery of new technologies** (2 refs) or materials (factors which had emerged from other areas of research).

Researcher comments are **shown** like this. Some of the comments are framed as questions which I asked in the second interview. Comments added a year later are shown in CAPITALS.

Comment [s61]:

1.0 What I knew before the interview

Long#2 is a 20 year old administrator & front of house worker at a community arts & youth music centre in a rural town. I made contact with him because I had met him in this role occasionally and in a Further Education setting. He talks about the significance of youth arts projects he took part in one summer when he was 17.

1.1 What I expected before the interview

No clear expectations, since I am not sure of Long#2's role and history. He was clear that he wanted to have the opportunity to correct the transcript and not be identified, I think this is to do with not wishing to be seen as a representative of the centre.

2.0 Interview transcript and notes

Q. Can you tell me about your experiences in creative projects when you were younger ?

A. In 2007, I was 17, that was my first experience at [the arts centre]. I had tried to get work experience with a graphic design firm here in [the rural town] but I ended up coming here to some of the Summer Holiday workshops for young people – stop frame animation, music making, giant shadow-puppet workshops and when the summer finished a moviedrome, film making course. I asked to volunteer shadow it, Wednesday evenings, that was the springboard really, I was doing things at college, at the Sixth Form, second year A levels, but this was the **springboard**.

It was totally **new** to me – working with young people, 8 to 13 year olds... **the equipment for the animation and film making was new**, I'd never done it **before** – I was nervous but I picked it up quickly, within the first few workshops I felt it was something I wanted to do

Up til then I had wanted to be a graphic designer, my heart was set on it, then **suddenly** this experience of working with young people, they were learning at the same time as me, I enjoyed the teaching aspect of it and I **was learning at the same time as them as well**... being put in a position of having to learn very quickly, make decisions, with 20 young people I couldn't always ask for help so I had to do it without asking, straight away as well... **creatively, there was no right or wrong way**, I think that was important, I could use my own creativity and imagination at the **same time as the young people could use theirs**

Lots of young people have a bit of experience, their minds are wild and imaginative, it doesn't take them long to get fixed up – I've always had the mindset of someone older, I didn't mind taking responsibility... if I'd done this when I was ten I wouldn't have, I was too young **then**

Comment [s62]: Several people speak of 'key' events.

Comment [s63]: Also, a completely new experience

Comment [s64]: ENCOUNTERS WITH NEW TECHS OR MATERIALS

Comment [s65]: SUDDEN

Comment [s66]: Democratic participation

Comment [s67]: Open ended nature of creative activities a frequent mention in interviews etc

Comment [s68]: THINGS HAVE TO HAPPEN AT THE RIGHT MOMENT?? FOLLOW UP

Meeting people like [workshop leader], artists and workshop leaders, people who were able to inspire young people, more open to ideas and whatever young people put forward to use as a starting point, never saying it's wrong...

Comment [s69]: Again, open ended attribute of creativity & artists

Comment [s70]: Non judgemental

I've always liked routine and knowing what to do, the freedom was new to me, it was unsettling for me, it wasn't graphic design, I realised I didn't want to do that full time, maybe do a bit, but I wanted to do something creative but working with people, graphic design started to seem too solitary, it was working for clients and helping people, but I'd never really thought about helping people to develop and do things for themselves, it was a bit of a flowering for me... it came from the style of teaching, it was also that for the young people – acceptance – in school you are always jumping through hoops to do set things to get to a set place, its creative in a way but for specific things – the workshops were also shorter, a day, a week – it takes jumping through hoops out of it, it's short bursts of being creative and expressing yourself.

Comment [s71]: Creativity unsettling, unheimlich, disturbing – this contributes to transformatory change?

Comment [s72]: He identifies relationships all the way through as significant

Comment [s73]:

Comment [s74]: Artists' approach/creativity

Comment [s75]: NOT SCHOOL – A COMMON DESCRIPTOR IN LATER INTERVIEWS

Comment [s76]: Open ended

Comment [s77]: Two ways of contrasting using movement metaphors

Comment [s78]: Informality linked to creativity: processes determining relationships?

Comment [s79]: Transformatory praxis thru real world experience??

Q. What was it about the activities which had the most impact on you do you think ?

A. If you're someone who has not got much confidence of self esteem in that creative environment, informal, you can come out of your shell – I've always been quiet and reserved, I had to speak up and take responsibility in the workshops, I always thought I'd be in the background, suddenly people were coming to me for help, suddenly it made me realise they see you as having the skills and experience

Comment [s80]: Creative processes leading to groupwork/collective learning, TP again ?

The task – you're producing an animation in a day and you have to take it away at the end of the day - at school or college you're doing work but it's not real, it's just to prove you can do something

The format was the workshop leader with me shadowing, they worked in pairs or groups of three or four, I liked the group element, I tend to work on my own and I enjoyed the groups, so seeing you can work in that group way and bounce ideas off each other, the group dynamic, most of the group dynamics did work, there were some with group issues that arose

Comment [s81]: A common comment, mastery of new technologies/materials

The mastery of the techniques, skills and equipment, cameras, it was more important that it was technical equipment, up til then i'd always used paint brushes, pens, paints, this was my first opportunity with photography and film...the mastery of the equipment – I didn't consider it before as a career, I was still at college then, but I started using it in my own work, I got satisfaction even after four or five weeks, I didn't have access to them at home or at school, and I liked it that I was trusted with the equipment

Comment [s82]: Characteristic of artists' practices? Not school etc

Confidence, leadership – I'd never seen myself as a leader or talking to a group – it helped that they were 8 to 13 year olds, if it had been people of my own age it would have been difficult, I wouldn't have felt that I could have that authority and respect... 8 to 13 year olds are quite focussed ... I didn't do anything at that age, I'd never been to any workshops, it wasn't planned it just happened in the space of a few weeks – if I'd got a graphic design placement I wouldn't be here now, I'd have gone to university etc

Comment [s83]: LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE

It was unusual that an inexperienced 17 year old was allowed to ... you get people from all sorts of walks of life and backgrounds in the arts, people not degree qualified, with passion and interest, the creative skills is half what you need, but interest in people is it too – they were interested in you.. I was sort of like a trainee, following their footsteps...

Comment [s84]: ARTISTS' PRACTICE

Comment [s85]: Implied degree etc would be barrier to his engagement

I admire that skill to relate to everyone, to dig out of the person how they can relate to the work, it's all some young people need, is to know that they have something in common, especially with someone in their late 20s, early 30s, in terms of young people it still feels like someone young

Comment [s86]: Democratic participation

Comment [s87]: Again, artists' p

... I felt like I was working with peers, you learnt as you went along, I realised it was a good way for me to learn, but it was the first time I'd learnt that, I'd never done hands on ...it's the hands on I really enjoy, more than if I'd gone to Uni, the hands on that helps you really learning practical things, not theory, things you weren't planning to pick up – in the past five years I've learnt maintaining a website, front of house...

Comment [s88]: He said he was from an academic family who didn't value craft skills: this may have been a reaction that, as well as true for him?

Comment [s89]: Real world action

Comment [s90]: PROBLEM FOR EVALUATION WHEN ITS UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES!

Seeing one of the films which was a collation of the films made that day, finished results, see where your ideas helped, viewed it with participants in the room, that was a significant moment – just a 60 second plasticine animation, not sophisticated ...

Comment [s91]: Collective making

My plan was to be here a couple of years and go somewhere else, it's five years on, I need to go somewhere outside [rural town] ... I've run animation and film workshops, I still do the odd workshop and I enjoy the behind the scenes...

Q. Would you say there was any specific aspect of the creativity which led to the kinds of transformations you have described?

A. Transformation? I think you'd get that in any other good community project, it doesn't matter what the actual content is, its new skills, working with new people, the mix of people, collaborative, the attitude of the leader – I haven't worked on general community projects, but that's my perception ... you need to talk to everyone, friends and family too, for evaluation, maybe one or two years ago to see what's changed, or even ten years, even if you did something five years ago, it could just be a first step, you'd need mature reflection...

Comment [s92]: Although interesting that he thinks this, it isn't based on his own experience

Comment [s93]: PROBLEM FOR EVALUATION OUTSIDE TIMEFRAME OF ONE PROJECT

Q. What kind of evaluation do you do here?

A. Here the workshop leaders fill in a form with ten questions, the positives and negatives of the workshop, things to change and things to improve... the young people do an A4 sheet, rate the workshop 1 to 10, would they come again etc...sometimes we have film evidence with feedback, which may be useful now or for future reference or bids... I'd like to know if any of them go on to take a relevant career route, ie they did that ten weeks of digital workshops as a child and it inspired them... in the long term, whether they remember or cherish it or if it's long forgotten...whether people will be coming back in twenty years and telling us..

Comment [s94]: Perennial problem

In our rural projects we get feedback but not about the communities, it could be from people who have witnessed the work, family, friends, schools, the public...

2.0 Reflections on the process (notes made after transcript offered for corrections)

This was a much shorter interview than the others so far, perhaps because he was definitely more cautious in his remarks, but also perhaps because he was reflecting back on only three years. I felt he was more guarded in his responses than some of my interviewees.

Creativity is cited 13 times in this interview and as the main transformative experience and the main explanation for its impact is the kind of open ended and informal relationships which it engenders itself and which characterised the artists' delivery style. This is interesting because democratic participation is only mentioned seven times – suggesting that this interviewee perceives relationships he thinks are derived from the creative process as more significant to him than those of project organisation. Although he doesn't make many references to mastery of new techniques, he is very definite that this is important.

Comparing this interview with the first one I did (Long#1), the most immediate difference is that Long#2 refers to creativity 13 times and Long#1 only seven times; Long#1 also refers six times to aesthetic excellence, which is not mentioned by Log2. This may be because the nature of the projects he worked in (for younger children) did not lend themselves to intensity – although other young teenagers I interviewed did speak of it, or because of his personality or implicit theory of change. For Long#1, intensity of experience is clearly a or even the main transformative experience – but this is not mentioned by Long#2. He had long term contact with projects – but not with the same project and participants, as Long#1 did. His experience did not include such high level public exhibition work as Long#1 (he mentions real world activity twice only, she mentions it 11 times), although it was valued for being 'real' not 'theory'.

Nevertheless, he is adamant that even in 'short bursts', his experience of creative projects was transformatory and life changing.

7.0 Large scale questionnaire used at Godiva Awakes!

This questionnaire was distributed by volunteers and the researcher (with complimentary pencils) to large audiences at a two-day Godiva Awakes! public art performance and carnival parade, to be completed in the street during or immediately after the event. People were invited to complete online if they chose. 365 questionnaires were completed. In some cases, volunteers used the questionnaires as prompts and filled them in themselves according to respondents' replies. In other cases groups of up to four people answered collectively, which was recorded variously as one or four responses. It was not always possible to distinguish these in the final analysis which was using SPSS software.

This was a two sided A4 sheet.

Imagineer Productions and their partners would like to hear your feedback on these events. *Please return to the volunteer, or collection box, or complete online (see end)*

1. Please say what you have done:

Godiva Awakes Sat 28th July.....watched [] took part []

Carnival procession Sun 29th.....watched [] took part []

Godiva sets off for London Mon 30th.....watched [] took part []

2. Tell us what you thought of the event[s]? Please tick all that apply.

Inspired me [] Held my interest [] Made me think []

Made me feel proud of myself / family [] Made me feel cheerful / excited []

Made me feel proud of my community [] Confused me [] Disappointed me []

Other – please say

3. Did these artistic events tell a story or an idea to you ?

| | | | |
|------------|--|-----------|--|
| Yes | | No | |
|------------|--|-----------|--|

If yes, please explain briefly what you think it was about.

| |
|--|
| Godiva: Carnival: |
|--|

4. To what extent do you agree/ disagree with the following statements?

| | Agree strongly | Agree to an extent | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree to an extent | Disagree strongly |
|---|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Community activities like this are important to me | | | | | |
| Artistic events like this are a good way to bring people together | | | | | |
| Artistic events like this enrich my life and make me feel happier | | | | | |
| Artistic events like this are a good way to celebrate our local talent, industry and heritage | | | | | |
| Events like this support the local economy | | | | | |

5. Have these event(s) made you more interested in activities such as music, dance, exhibitions and performance than you were before ?

To see more Yes [] No [] To take part more Yes [] No []

PAGE BREAK

6. What brought you to the event (s)? Please tick all that apply

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| I was a participant | |
|---------------------|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| I attended as a relative / friend of a participant | |
| I want to feel part of my local community | |
| I am interested in the arts, music, dance, exhibitions and performances | |
| I was curious because I haven't been to events like this much before | |
| Other - please say | |

7. **Do you have any other comments about these artistic events** (eg any improvements, best things about them, types of activities you'd like to see in the future, the value of them to you or the area, who should pay for them etc) ?

About you – just as important to us !

1. Were these events the *main reason* for your visit to Coventry city centre at this time ?
Yes No
2. About how far did you travel to these events ?
Under 5 miles 5 – 25 miles Over 25 miles
3. What is your home postcode ?
Or country if you travelled from outside UK.....
4. Roughly how much did you and your family/group spend altogether at all these events on refreshments and purchases ? (No of people in group.....) We spent altogether about £.....
If unsure, was it: under £10 [] about £25 [] about £50 [] £100 or more []
5. If you stayed overnight in the Coventry area, roughly how much did you and your family/group spend altogether on accommodation ? £..... Did stay overnight but don't know cost
6. What is your age? Age: 0-15 16 – 24 25 – 34 35- 44 45 – 54 55-64 65-74 75+
7. **What is your ethnicity (cultural identity) ?**
White British White Irish Mixed (White/Caribbean) Mixed (White/African) Mixed (White/Asian) Mixed (Asian/Black) Asian Indian Asian Pakistan Asian Bangladesh Black African Black Caribbean Chinese Other please say.....

Imagineer has a database of people over 18 who would like to know about events and activities by email. If you would like to be on it please give your name and email. This information will not be used for any other purpose or shared.
Name.....I am over 18 years old

Email address:

If you want to complete this questionnaire online, please go to
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BSQ7GX3> **Thank you!**

APPENDIX C Chapter 5

C 1.0 Collage in evaluations: exploratory ideas about value and resistance

1. Invitation to take part:

Participants were given or emailed the following statement and sent or given an highly similar bag of randomly chosen collage materials accompanied by the research Participant Information Sheet which was used throughout the research and is reproduced in Appendix D. This sheet makes it clear that no disbenefits can arise from not participating:

I am interested in exploring the value of collage as a tool from problem-solving. If you wish to take part please make some time to think about a personal or professional problem which has so far seemed intractable. While you are thinking about it, please begin to make a collage using as much of the materials provided as you chose. The collage need not be directly relevant to your problem or represent it in any way. When you have finished please return it to me or send a photograph. Please then email me or tell me your reflections on this process as:

- a) An activity
- b) A help in thinking about your problem or anything else

I will then write this up and return it to you for checking my understanding. At this time I might ask some supplementary questions. Please get in touch with any thoughts on the process at any time.

2. Case study 1 Collage as an aid to problem-solving (researcher's own activity)

During the second year of my research I attended a Higher Education Academy workshop on collage, *Exploring Layers of Meaning*, University of Chester (26 March 2012), and made a collage myself which was a significant help in solving my own problem of making the transition from community arts practitioner to academic writer (Figure 3 below). This extract from a journal article written at the time sums up the value time demonstrates the significance of the collage to me, particularly the process of selection from random materials. As Butler-Kisber says: "Novel connections, and gaps or spaces, can reveal both the intended and the unintended" (Butler-Kisber 2008: 269):

"I made a 3D collage bag about my problems with academic writing (*See Figure 1 Appendices below*). A phrase from the provided text sprang at me: '... that idea kept back ...' (I think from a Conrad story), and leafing through the collage materials I chanced upon a map showing the house I was born in: as the Quakers say, these two finds 'spoke to my condition', helped me understand my reluctance to commit to a genre of writing that seemed to obliterate me and strengthened my resolve to understand how writing might become both academic and creative.

"Specifically, to see the relevance of the ...[creative]...process to the wider debate about academic writing and creativity, and, more urgently, to the tensions I embodied trying to understand where my own creativity sat in (what are for me) the arduous and sometimes opaque protocols of academic discourse. Although I had long been familiar with John Wood's *Critique of the Culture of Academic Rigour* (2000), encountering the Writing PAD project through a 'hands on' HEA seminar was the trigger

for this: it gave me permission to regard my own creative activity as a way of knowing".
Challis, S (2013: 189-190)

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Figure C 1 Researcher's own collage: *That Idea Held Back* (paper bag approx 30cms x 15cms and provided 'found' materials) made as a reflection on the difficulty of retaining a sense of oneself making a compromise to draw more definite conclusions in the process of academic writing

3. Case study 2 Collage as a means to extend thinking time

(65 undergraduate, final-year Geography students, 15 Youth and Community Work students, Coventry University 2012 and 2013)

Extract from Researchers Notes made at the time:

At the start of two, two-hour lectures entitled 'Visual and creative research methodologies' I gave each Geography student an envelope containing a similar range of collage materials (text, images, fabric, paper, scissors, glue) and explained that the intention was to explore the idea that concentrating on making a collage whilst listening to complex new ideas would support understanding (Butler-Kisber 2008). This activity was drawn from my own experience at the HEA workshop described above. While they worked in silence on their individual collage books (folded paper) I gave a lecture about a range of visual and creative methods, using digital slides, occasionally asking them to 'look up now'. At the end of the session we discussed their

experience and at the start of the second session (a week later) had a brief group discussion reflecting on its impact. I made notes from this discussion but there was no further follow-up as it was the last session of term in each case. This was by no means a satisfactory research exercise, having no means to measure changes in concentration or learning, except through self-reporting. However, as an activity suggestive of further research, I have included it here for its relevance to issues of resistance to and acceptance of creative methods, rather than the light it sheds on collage as an aid to thinking. Further research might include a questionnaire reflecting on self-reported change and feedback from other lecturers, and some longer term contact.

For Youth and Community Work students I was restricted to one two-hour session which was less formal (for example, sitting in a circle rather than in a lecture theatre). I introduced the session as above, but invited students to select collage material from a wide range laid out on a table. Students made collage books while I gave a presentation about visual and creative methodologies. The making was followed by a group discussion and some people shared their books.

Text 4 Researcher's observations from notes made after each Geography student session

Two sets of two, two-hours teaching sessions, with collage in first session of each set; November 2012, and November 2013:

"Some students made work clearly referring to the lecture content ; these sometimes used text or phrases from the lecture or commented on it. For example, one male student made an image of his children learning arts as well as sciences, saying, "I want them to have both, to be whole people, not like me I just did sciences", rather wistfully adding, "I haven't got any children yet" (my notes from group discussion). Others made collages clearly relating to feelings. A male student made a page of overdrawn, confused lines and smudges, , with fierce concentration while listening to a video clip of a woman describing her experience of domestic violence. He commented: "I was feeling strong feelings while I was listening, it was quite upsetting really. I wasn't really thinking about the drawing". My interpretation of the drawing was that it reflected his turbulent feelings through colour and markmaking, and intensity through strength of physical gesture (pressure on page and over drawing). As such, it might offer a useful prompt to further discussion or thinking. In each class one student stapled his finished book together and said that it was 'private'. This could suggest that personal feelings had been expressed (although these may simply have been critical of the process or 'rude').

"These were mixed gender groups (marginally more female). In each group all but three students participated (total five male, one female). There were varying degrees of willingness to take part. In the final discussions several students (about 5/35) said they found the process "useless", "a distraction" or "pointless"; a similar number said it was "interesting", "enjoyable" and they could "see the point". In each session five people were willing to 'share', that is, show and talk about, their own collage, usually describing what it represented to them and how they felt making it. The people who shared made broadly positive comments about the activity (for example, that they 'enjoyed' it). Six students (three in each group) said they felt that the activity had improved their concentration. In both groups several students said that they had been repeatedly told off in school for persistently doodling during lessons. They related doodling to a way of improving their concentration and 'enjoyed' the collage activity.

"There was no way of telling if this activity did improve concentration, although the self-report of a small number of students might suggest so in some cases. However, as a 'pilot' for the method with a large group, including many adult males (missing from most of my previous research which

was mainly with teenage boys and adult women) it was suggestive. My informal observations suggested that more female students found it easier to attempt and to enjoy the activity, but I cannot be sure this was true without further research. More male students voiced their reluctance, but there could be many reasons for this. Resistance to participation was linked in discussion either to lack of commitment to qualitative methods (many of the students were using exclusively quantitative methods in their own research and had not used qualitative methods before) or to reluctance to do an arts-based activity because of lack of skill or experience. "Where there was reluctance, I did not feel that it was the 'open-endedness' per se which was a barrier, rather a lack of belief in the usefulness of the method generally, or for themselves in particular.

"The Youth and Community Work students (also mixed gender, mainly female) were generally more receptive to the collage making, and many of them in discussion could relate it to activities they might carry out in their own professional practice and qualitative research. They saw it much more as a prompt for discussion than an aid to concentration, than did the Geography students. Several did relate it to doodling as means of concentrating, and most said they 'enjoyed' the activity. The most obvious difference between the two sorts of students, was that all in this group shared their collage in the discussion: one student who had stapled his closed, explained this as an expression of specific feelings relating to self-disclosure rather than the activity. Several students in this group made collages about personal feelings unrelated to the lecture (Figure 6 below). On the whole, I felt that there was less resistance to the activity in this group; but again, this informal interpretation suggests a number of more specific lines of enquiry, about prior experience, current skills, gender, age, ethnicity and so on.

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Figure C 2 Participant collage (folded paper to A4 size and provided 'found' materials), made expressing personal feelings by female Youth and Community Work student

C4.0 Examples of meditative markmaking

These three examples are of participants' work in a 15 minute meditative markmaking activity in a domestic abuse refuge in September 2013 (carried out with Natalie Ohana-Eavry). After a short introduction to the idea of markmaking and the qualities of the pastels, participants were asked to visualise their 'inner strength', using phrases such as, 'that part of you which has survived everything which has happened to you since childhood', 'which is always there', 'visualise where it is in your body, what colour it is, what shape, what size'. Participants were invited to expand their initial image to fill the A3 paper with the phrase 'grow your inner strength to fill the page'. These examples are given here because in some projects it felt intrusive to photograph this activity in progress or even finished work, and participants often elected to take their artwork away with them, because they liked it; and because permission was given in this case. These images are highly typical of the marks, shapes and colours produced in this activity in all the research – not just that in refuges (and which, by chance, was never carried out with male participants).

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Figure C 3 Participant artwork#1 *My Inner strength*: Refuge. Sept 2013 (chalk pastels on A3 black card)

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F

Figure C4 (above) and C5 Participant artwork#2 ans 3 *Inner strength: Refuge*.
Sept 2013 (chalk pastels on A3 black card)

APPENDIX D Chapter 6

D 1.0 Carnival Costume making Course ‘baseline’ questionnaires

Analysis of baseline questionnaire at Carnival Costume making Course prepared for Imagineer Productions management

1.0 This is an analysis of two paper questionnaires completed by individual participants in the Imagineer MAS Camp Training Course. They represent a baseline in the first week of the course, compared with a second survey in the penultimate week (the last week deemed too busy for questionnaires). The second survey questions were also informed by regular observations of the group, which suggested areas for enquiry not covered by the first.

These responses, whilst interesting in themselves, have the greatest value as indicating questions and themes for further investigation with the same group during phase two of the project and this research (observation of the costume making workshops and a Focus Group).

Total questionnaires = 17 (100% of participants) for first baseline; and 15 (88%) for the second . **Second survey results are shown in red.**

2.0 Q1 How confident do you feel tonight (1=not very, 5 = very)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------|------------|------|-----------|------------|------|
| Making/art skills | /// | / | ///////// | ////////// | //// |
| Teaching others | // | //// | ////// | ////////// | /// |
| Running a group | //// // | /// | ///////// | ////////// | / |

At the start of the course only 5 people out of 17 (29.4%) felt very confident or fairly confident about their existing making or art skills; only 5 felt very confident or fairly confident about teaching others; and only 4 (25.5%) people felt fairly confident about running a group (no one felt very confident). Moreover, 4 people felt very or fairly *un*confident about their making and art skills; 7 (41%) felt very or fairly *un*confident about teaching others *and* running a group.

By the end of the course most people, 13 out of 15 (86%), felt very or fairly confident about their making or art skills and noone felt *un*confident about them. Noone felt very *un*confident about teaching others and only one (6.6%) felt fairly *un*confident, whereas ten people (66.6%) felt fairly or very confident about teaching. Two people still felt very *un*confident about running a group, but these were both under 16 year olds who were being trained only to support a group, and ten (66%) felt fairly confident and one felt very confident (totalling 73.3%).

3.0 Q2 I am good at... (or bad at)

| | Good at | Bad at |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Designing | ////////// ////////// | Xxx xx |
| Making | ////////// ////////// | x |
| Using new materials | ////////// ////////// | |
| Art tools | ////////// | Xx |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| | ////////// | x |
| Safety | ////////// ////////// | X |
| Teaching | ///// ////////// | Xxxxxxx x |
| Learning practical skills | ////////// ////////// | Xxx |
| Understanding | ////////// ////////// | Xx |
| Problemsolving | ////////// ////////// | Xxx Xx |
| Encouraging others | ////////// ////////// | Xxx x |
| Other | /Working as a team | |

It's interesting that participants in this form of questioning started the course fairly confident about their practical skills: discussing this question, some people mentioned that they had previously been involved with carnival costume making and other voluntary craft activities.

This suggests that Q2 'How confident do you feel tonight?', was interpreted by respondents as being about their abilities *in the Course* – ie in the future, and may perhaps also have reflected a degree of uncertainty about the Course demands; whereas Q3 'I am good/bad at...' was interpreted as being about skills previously demonstrated elsewhere.

It seems safe to assume that in the second survey, people were referring to their current level of skills (ie at the end of the course).

The most striking change in Q3 was in levels of confidence about *teaching* practical skills, which increased from 6 out of 17 (35%) to 13 out of 15 (86.6%) by the end. At the start, seven people (41%) felt that they were 'not good' at teaching practical skills and by the end this had dropped to one. The number of people feeling 'good at' designing rose slightly (64.7% to 86.6%), those who felt 'not good' at it dropped from 17.6% to 13.3% - but these were on very low figures (3/17 and 2/15).

The second survey added 'working as a team' as an acquired skill – this may reflect emphases of the teaching during the course.

4.0 Q3 What are you nervous about tonight ?

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Using new materials | //// |
| Difficult practical skills | ////////// //// |
| Attendance | / //// |
| Not being artistic enough | ////////// ////////// |
| New people | ////////// //// |
| Teaching a group | ////////// |

| | |
|-------|------|
| | //// |
| Other | |

There were three main areas of concern at the start of the course: 'not being artistic enough' (52.9%), 'learning difficult practical skills' and 'teaching a group' (both 47%). By the end of the course people clearly felt more confident about learning practical skills since half as many ticked it (down from 8 to 4), with concerns about teaching dropped to 5 from 8. Although there was still some reluctance to claim confidence about 'being artistic enough' – with 41% still listing it as a concern, all nervousness had lessened, so that whereas at the start there were 42 ticks in this question, by the end the overall figure had nearly halved to 23. By the end, no one was worried about using new materials (down from 29.4%) and only 3 people worried about meeting new people (down from 8, ie down to 17.6% from 47%).

5.0 Q4 What do you hope to achieve by coming to this training? START OF COURSE

This open-ended question was used to formulate Q5 and Q6 in the second survey.

In the first part of Q4, *For my community*, only 2 of 16 comments related directly to teaching or inspiring creativity/art and 5 (35%) related to teaching skills/information; the biggest group of comments (8 of 17, or 47%) were connected with community development - 'helping others', 'giving something back', 'get people involved', 'get people off the street', 'making carnival a success'. These detailed responses suggest an awareness of and commitment to 'community' as a concept, and that creative skills may not be so valued *for themselves*, but more as a means to an end.

In the second part of Q4, *For myself*, 7 (41%) out of 17 comments relate to learning new skills and 8 (47%) to gaining confidence. Comments relating to being creative were less cited (23.5%). Even though this question followed the question 'What do you hope to achieve for your community?', 3 comments related to becoming more involved or helping in the community. This may relate to gaining experience for paid work or to a depth of commitment to community development.

This table compares the second part of Q4, *For myself*, with Q7 in the second survey (*What else has coming on the course meant to you?*).

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Comments connected with skills | //////// //// |
| Comments connected with time for self/away from children | /// |
| Comments connected with confidence/self esteem | //////// //// |
| Comments connected with creativity : | /// /// |
| Comments connected with enjoyment/social: | //////// |
| Comments connected with giving to others /community: | /// |

This comparison suggests that there were two unexpected outcomes which participants recognised at the end of the course – that the course was fun and that it provided valued quality time away from children / for themselves. Comments about giving to the community (which do not appear in the second survey here) appear in Q5 (86% positive response) and Q6 (46.6% of comments).

6.0 Q5 How do you feel the course has helped you? SECOND SURVEY

Between 15 (100%) and 13 (86.6%) ticked all the skills listed (Attend every/most weeks; Become more confident; Make new friends; Learn new skills; Give back to my community)

Learning new skills was ranked as the most important, with becoming more confident close behind (the least important was attending every week). However, only nine people completed the ranking (out of 15), probably because of poor questionnaire design.

7.0 Q6 How has coming on the course changed things in other parts of your life? SECOND SURVEY

Three people said the course had improved relationships at home – two of these were a mother and daughter both on the course. These respectively commented that it had been a “great shared experience” and “mum knows I’m doing something good”. Five out of 15 (33%) said that attending the course had a positive impact on their activities with their own children. It is worth noting that none of these were anticipated impacts at the start of the course (nor were impact on school or work life or further training or work, below).

Seven out of 15 (46.6%) said that attending had a positive impact on their volunteering in the community – comments were that it ‘helped with opportunities to volunteer’ and ‘I already volunteered, but I introduced a type of journal’ (a technique on the Course). This last comment suggests that further investigation into depth of engagement may reveal unexpected details.

Three people said that attending had a positive impact on their work or school life - two comments identified specific benefits: “I connected with one of my teachers about this project”; “this course has helped me in my work as I am now delivering workshops for my community”.

‘Get paid work’ and Courses/training’ also received two positive responses out of 15

8.0 Q7 What else has coming on the course meant to you? SECOND SURVEY

Not sure yet/fun/ having 3 young children can be stressful and hectic at times, so coming to this course is MY time. I have enjoyed every part of it from learning to meeting new people, everybody is welcoming and friendly/It’s my time, I have a very hectic life at the moment so, having this few hours to myself has been very very enjoyable, it has made me feel valuable & important/its been great, I loved it/. A great experience, creating a sense of pride in carnival, thanks for the opportunity/a way of having artistic freedom/it made my confidence much better and that’s important/getting to know new people & hope to get work from this/social activity, learning new skills, become more creative/getting out with people of my own age instead of being around children/this course has been really interesting for me as I don’t do anything really to do with arts but from coming to Imagineers I would say that I am now a little artistic ©/learning new skills & helping others/being able to be confident, learning new skills/to get involved with other things

Comments are overwhelmingly positive (14/15), with no negative comment. The generally high level of personal detail in the comments suggests that they are considered, authentic responses.

Out of 15 comments, most commented on was the positive enjoyment, fun and social aspects of the course (6): if we add to this the comments about having quality time away from children (3), the quality of the social experience is the most commented on aspect of the course.

However, this should not necessarily be taken to mean that other factors are not so important; for example, quality time (especially that which offers another identity than 'mum' or employee/unemployed person) may be a key factor in raising self esteem (4 comments); and these may both be key factors in creating an environment conducive to learning new skills.

D 2.0 VJ Night in Rural Youth Arts Project,

Researcher's notes of Participant Observation 22/July/2012

Notes written before the event:

I have been asked to support the small group of 13-15 year old boys from the 'Film Club' who had been participating in my research, by running a 'VJ' session at a local youth bands event in the same Centre. The eight or so members of Film Club, recruited from the adjacent Community College and locality, had met regularly with a digital artist over a year, developing digital media skills and methods of evaluating the 'soft' impact of the Centre's arts projects. They also learnt related creative skills, such as VJ-ing, projecting mixes – 'mash-ups' – of found and their own video and graphics with their own or other music, for live music or dance events.

My research involved them as subjects (what were the impacts on them of these creative activities?) and as co-researchers (as they initiated and trialled evaluations with Centre users); and to complicate things further, I also taught them some technical skills and supported their evaluation activities at weekend sessions in a role more like a community arts worker than researcher.

I was surprised at how readily, in this complex relationship (not uncommon in qualitative research), these young people were able to switch between roles. For example, breaking off from a skills teaching session, in which they were clearly positioned as 'learners', to suggest ways I could evaluate the impact of the sessions on them as research participants: for example, *Participant* 'Why don't we do a video diary every week instead of you asking us things at the end of the whole thing; then you'll find out how we changed as we went along?'; *Researcher*: 'Why didn't I think of that?'. They seemed to recognise the nuances of my role, for example, when I was 'joining in' the VJ activity ('joining in' unfamiliar activities on an equal footing is a common part of the 'community artist' role), showing in our informal conversations that they understood that I was also observing them as a researcher *and* teaching them some technical skills.

The arts project manager asked me to help because another community artist had let her down at short notice. I protested that my technical skills did not extend to supporting a 'VJ' session, but was persuaded by her desperation and not wanting to let down the young people, with whom I had developed some rapport – and with wishing to continue a positive research relationship with them all.

She suggested paying me a technician's fee; although the cost and time to me of travelling (two hours), the preparation time (about three hours) and event time (four and a half hours) – meant that the fee felt small. My acceptance of the role and the significance of the fee was experienced by me as part of ambivalent feelings about mixing researcher/paid arts worker

roles, framed by a sense that as a 'professional community arts worker' I shouldn't work for nothing, and my awareness that the role 'researcher' has developed increasingly more permeable boundaries since my first experience of it 30 years ago. My ambivalence was also fuelled by the value I place on myself as a role model - a middle-aged woman with digital media skills is still unusual – plus a fear that my skills would not be sufficient.

I was somewhat reassured by my readings of academic accounts participatory research in which the researcher – not without some conflict of roles - is simultaneously in another relationship, such as youth worker (for example, Leyshon 2002); and a discussion about the implications of this in the subject journal, *Progress in Human Geography* (Pain 2004). If I went in with my eyes open to issues about power, ethics and representation, perhaps I could mitigate potential problems?

I asked the arts project manager to get verbal permission from the young people for me to include the event as an 'observation' for my research – which they gave. I felt comfortable with this, because not only have I have received written parental consent for their participation in the research, including observations, but also the young people and I had frequently discussed the research topic – evaluation – and it has been the main subject of activities during Film Club sessions. In other words, these young people were aware *as they can be*, which may be limited, about my motivation for spending time with them, asking them questions, proposing activities etc.

However, their awareness is certainly limited by their ignorance about universities and the purpose and uses to which research might be put, as their remarks in informal conversation revealed. Their consent may have been predicated more powerfully on their relationship with me as an individual (a pleasant, non-authoritarian, responsive adult offering exciting activities using digital technology), rather than commitment to the content of the activities (trailing methods of evaluation); or it may be the 'price' they are prepared to pay to take part in the Film Club activities. For example, making video interviews with Centre participants, or keeping a video diary, may be experienced as more a 'fun' than a research task.

My research might therefore meet the limited ethical criteria of 'having no negative impacts'. But in order to have a positive impact in the activist sense of furthering social justice, participatory researchers have argued that it is necessary to become critically reflexive, that is, to "explicate the role of outside researcher and knowledge" (Pain 2004: 658). Perhaps the VJ night could be used as an opportunity to critically reflect on the extent to which my research was participatory?

The session required the young people to project live video feed and pre-recorded video onto the back of a stage (and ceiling, walls, floor). We would 'set up' on a scaffolding at the back of a large hall, facing the stage & screen and project onto and into a concert evening with local live young people's bands. It's usual for community artists to use their own kit, so I would use my own large Canon videocamera as the live feed, some pre-recorded video clips, and video taken during the event by the young people from several small, handheld 'Flip' video to SD cameras – easy to download for use during the event.

In the VJ performance, the young people would be using technologies which they had only recently mastered in the project. Other parts of my research suggested that using technologies or materials which were new to creative project participants, which carried no weight of past failure but also had the cachet of craft or professional association, could be a key factor in creating transformatory praxis – the conditions for personal change. For example, in Western European culture, being taught to use a washing machine with digital features will have a different impact from learning to use a digital videocamera, for reasons

more closely associated with the different cultural meanings of domestic cleaning and filmmaking than the technology itself. The impact of using new technologies or materials was also affected by a range of other factors, such as age, place and gender. My research also suggested that 'real world' activities, where new skills can be implemented to serious or public purpose, might have a greater impact than activities contained within the project sessions.

The VJ performance had the potential to meet several of my emerging criteria for transformatory praxis. Some of this related to the five young people themselves: in this very rural isolated small town they all also described themselves in various ways as isolated from their peers. S and C, for example, described themselves as unhappy, isolated and bullied at school; and R that 'nobody at all likes me, actually, the whole school hates me, without exception'. In a video interview D described himself as 'shy'; his experience as 'home educated' gave him less contact with his peers than young people in school. None of them, when asked, said they felt or were regarded by their peers as 'cool', and although there may be a trend towards 'geeky' or 'nerdy' acquiring cool status in youth culture, S and R seemed to use the terms to describe themselves without that connotation. To me they seemed bright, articulate and – with the exception of D – slightly hyperactive (short attention span); awkward and self-conscious outside the group; a little bit 'odd' and completely 'uncool'.

All of them regarded VJ-ing as "very cool" indeed; in this sense VJ-ing in front of their peers had the potential to allow them to re-position themselves in a different discourse – that of 'cool teen', active creators of the scene, technically competent in 'cool' technology; rather than 'isolated geek'.

An unpredicted outcome of the Film Club's involvement with my research was that they attended some of the Centre's arts events in order to trial evaluation techniques. All the young people reported that they would not have attended the events (cabaret night, alternative comedy) without the project. This was the second band night they had attended through the project, and the first independent VJ-ing – their first session had been in support of two VJ experts.

Notes written directly after the event:

The band night was in the Centre events hall which is used as a cinema and theatre. For the event, which attracted about 50 young people aged between 13 and 18 and a few adults, the space was blacked out with coloured spotlights on the stage. Alcohol is strictly forbidden. Front of house and stage lighting is run by young people in the wider arts project. In an area with little public transport, many young people arrive with their parents, some of whom wait in the foyer; nevertheless, the evening does slowly warm up, with a few girls and eventually some boys dancing and circulating the space.

We get in early and set up together while the bands are setting up: this gives us the feel of being 'insiders', testing our equipment alongside sound tests and lighting run throughs. I have to work hard at not panicking about my lack of technical skills. I let them do as much as they can by themselves. A boy comes onto the scaffolding and starts examining the kit, causing me to worry: 'Are you a member of Film Club?' I ask; he looks bewildered, 'No, but can I do this?'; 'No, sorry, off the scaffolding, this is for people who are in Film Club'. My unintentionally brusque response is received with glee by R and C, who comments with glee, 'Rejected!'

I try to keep my instructions to a minimum: first, I ask them to identify potential hazards. They come up with all the relevant hazards I can see and some sensible solutions, such as

'tape down the cables'; C offers his usual lateral thinking as impracticable yet attractive fantasies. I make sure they can all use the tripod camera, Flips and laptop and give 'one rule': 'Never let the screen go blank'.

When the bands start I realise two things: with the exception of D, they don't share the kits or work as a team; and none of them follows the musical beat (it looks better if you match the visual movement to the beat). They don't tap or nod to the beat either, as if the loud music is not there. I suddenly realise that I have never seen any of them with earphones in, widespread among their age group. I ask S and C whether they listen to much music and they both say no.

R and S compete for the Canon, almost pushing each other, jostling over it. C rushes around, jumping up the steps so the laptops and projectors (and the projections on the screen) bounce. I feel I have to intervene to protect the kit. I institute turn taking. D relinquishes the live feed gracefully and moves to the laptop. The projections look good, we notice people in the audience watching the live film of the room and bands, projected onto the ceiling, floor and walls by hazardously tipping the projector around.

During the three-hour event there is a noticeable, and at one point sudden, shift towards teamwork. R is helping C and D on the live feed. Gradually, people are taking turns without prompting. I'm holding C's hand on the keyboard trying to help him get the beat. I'm asking them to time the camera shots to the singers, the guitar solos, etc and they start to do this independently and fluently. I'm giving lots of praise and positive feedback, encouragement. It's dark and fast and exciting to have the power to light up the space with continually changing images, which contribute so much to the atmosphere of the event - and the projection is very big (fills the stage).

The breakthrough is accidental - someone is 'rocking' the zoom switch on the Canon and it stops working altogether. I go through all the routines I know to make it restart, with no success and some panic. I stop C trying his own methods and practically have to wrestle the camera away from him. I mourn my best camera.

Without live feed the audience will soon tire of the looped pre-recorded material and the VJ-ing will have failed - which we all know. I gather them together and ask: 'What shall we do?'. S has a solution, some simple software on his own laptop. Without further intervention from me (we are now beyond my competency) he connects it and the whole group plan what to do, S, D and M manipulating the webcam on S's laptop as a live feed, pulling in low quality but recognisable images and using them with S's abstract graphics and the pre-recorded film. They manage this with barely a glitch on the screen. They are all jubilant, particularly S. We all lavish praise on him. The audience has not noticed the crisis.

They are really working as a team now and to the beat. C clings halfway up the scaffolding and waves various things across the lens in time to the music. Independently and in pairs they start taking the Flip cameras off to film, and decide to interview people in the foyer about how they enjoyed the night for the Film Club webpage. I am dancing at the back of the scaffold and joining in with the VJ-ing, taking my turn. I notice that D has started to dance at the back of the scaffold. S, R and M are gradually drawn into dancing, on the scaffold. When the last band plays, they move onto the dance floor, near the scaffold, dancing, leaving D and me with the VJ-ing. This seems like a hugely significant breakthrough: only a few older boys are dancing (and more girls). The Film Club boys look cool!

C, who is the youngest, starts playing about in the dancing, sliding on the floor and play fighting: this isn't cool, of course, but it is confident and comfortable in the space, unselfconscious and fun. By the end of the evening they are all high with excitement and

triumph. Carrying on successfully when the camera broke has given them a real fillip. Two older teenagers come up to the scaffold and tell the Film Club that they liked the VJ-ing. The Centre organiser praises and thanks them. When the lights go up they look exhausted, C is bouncing almost literally off the walls. They are very professional in the way they get on with dismantling the kit without prompting, and in 15 minutes we're done.

Notes written the next day

What was happening ? The boys were certainly in 'the flow' (Csikszentmihaly) , that is, carried away by the creative activity – as shown by their sudden leap in attention and skill (finding the beat in the music and linking it to the images manipulation – about two thirds of the way through the evening). The 'symbolic domain', in this case the creation of VJ effects, was recognised by the audience and the two young people who came up at the end to praise the projections.

Any impact of the creative activity in itself was closely linked to the action they took which positioned them differently in a discourse about 'cool', modifying their own self image, partly in response to their peers re-positioning them. This fits with the idea of transformatory praxis being linked to change-related positive action, as well as the creative experience.

Was this participatory art ? I believe this became more like a participatory activity as the boys gained confidence and were able to apply skills creatively, that is, when they began to work as a team and choose and link images to the beat independently, when there was a shift of power as I relinquished creative direction entirely. At the point when my skills were evidently exhausted, they took complete control of the activity, and continued to take control even of the clear-up.

This account should be linked to video interviews/diaries where the participants give their own accounts.

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APPENDIX E Chapter 7 CCMC Focus Group

The Mas Camp (CCMC) Focus Group Day: reflective write-up after the event, using Researcher Notes written on the day and interview transcripts

1.0 Introduction: purpose and structure of this Section

This is an account of a morning Focus Group with project participants and an afternoon evaluation meeting with them and professionals associated with the project.

The Focus Group was one of the last research events of several in the Mas Camps Case Study (described in the previous section) and its contribution represents an additional context for understanding the impact of the Mas Camps Training project on participants and the value of different evaluation techniques 'trianled' there.

As described in more detail in the previous section, the Mas Camp Training involved ten adults and seven 16-18 year olds, all women, in 2 ½ hour, weekly workshop sessions for three months, usually led by one of the Arts Company Directors. My contact with this group comprised fortnightly visits throughout the Training, an Observation visit to each of the four Mas Camps (community workshops for children to make Carnival costumes led by pairs of Mas Camp Trainees), and necessarily brief conversations during busy Carnival parades in Coventry and London.

During my visits to the Training I made Observations, took photographs and video, and led a series of creative evaluation activities, as well as a baseline questionnaire and its follow-up. These creative evaluation interventions included facilitating regular group discussions, initiating and supporting individual participant 'sketchbook' journals, meditative mark-making, physical group activities (such as placing self on an imaginary starting point and pacing out changes), the design of Carnival costumes to express the experience, and one to one semi-structured interviews. All the adult participants agreed to attend a Focus Group meeting after the summer Carnival and London trip; four did attend, and what follows is an analysis of some of the data arising from that one day event in mid September, a month after the final project activity.

The event consisted of a morning session with participants and researcher only, buffet lunch, joined by the Director of the Mas Camp Training and three community workers employed by the local authority to support community development work in the Mas Camp neighbourhoods. The afternoon session was planned as an opportunity for participants to feed back to these professionals their own evaluation of the experience, and to provide an additional context for my research, as participant observation, and 'trial' of an evaluation method, in this case, facilitated group discussion.

The purpose of this selective account is to give an insight into the way data was collected on that day, and to contextualise emerging conclusions about the process of transformatory praxis in the Mas Camp Case Study. As with my visits to the Training itself, the Focus Group day represented both research into the qualitative impact of participation in a creative project, and also a trial of evaluation methods which community projects or participants might use themselves.

To reflect this, I have organised the account in two sections, loosely corresponding to these two 'layers' of enquiry. Firstly, in Section 2.0, I analyse the data produced, critiquing its usefulness for the Carnival project in producing responses to the question the Focus

Group meeting set out to answer ('What are the impacts of participation in a creative project?'); and second, in Section 3.0, offering a more reflexive account about the processes of the Focus Group day itself, particularly what they can reveal about power and agency in evaluation. Power and agency, expressed through 'positioning' in discourses and 'real world' action, are key elements in producing the conditions of transformatory praxis which this study explores.

Taken together, these two accounts help develop understanding how different individuals or groups in the project have different 'theories of change' and how these might function as causal explanations. Evaluation which theorises change helps its readers make more informed judgements about its findings (Camina 2004; Matarasso 2009; Thelwell 2011) and offers greater potential for practical application (Blattman 2011). In Section 4.0 a taxonomy of these theorisations arising from the whole research analysis is further developed.

The account of the Mas Camp Focus Group Day is presented in chronological order because it also represents my own 'researcher narrative', an unfolding of events within the framework of my own 'theory of change' which demonstrates the causal explanations I had begun to develop in the course of the research process; although of course the process of analysis of data was not linear, moving to and fro as each new research event suggested new understandings or reflected on previous ones (Rogan et al 1997).

This account also attempts to be a reflexive text, which presents a challenge to the reader. For example, it is tempting to regard the transcripts of participants' speech and their own writings (on 'confidential postcards') as carrying a greater authenticity and therefore offering more valid knowledge than the researcher's notes of conversations or the participants' visual representations of their feelings which need interpretation. Or that they in turn tell us more than the researcher's reflections on her own feelings during the event.

However, since the purpose of reflexive research is not to produce a single truth or to simplify a complex reality, but to problematise, interrupt or disrupt representation, *none* of this can be regarded as 'raw' data or as more or less subject to producing relevant understandings. Moreover, since this event was part of a 'trial' of various evaluation techniques with the urban Carnival project, there remains a practical imperative to assess how it represents meaning at an everyday level (Patai 1994; Pillow 2003): hence the two-part analysis. Therefore, in the Conclusion to this account, I try to draw together these findings to produce an 'evaluation of evaluations' and a proto- taxonomy of participants' theories of change.

1.1 The Focus Group: method and structure

Focus groups have a mixed reputation in academic research and evaluation, partly because of their association with market and political research (Yates 2004) and the range of 'how to' books which tend to treat them as simultaneous in-depth interviews (Morgan 1998).

However, there are a number of reasons why this method was suitable on this occasion, connected with the research's interpretivist theorisation of competing discourses, the desire to uncover submerged processes within the group which might reveal issues of power and agency. Focus groups, with their emphasis on open, facilitated (but not over directed) discussion, offer the potential to observe how, in a particular setting, groups of

people construct their social reality to make collective sense of their experience (Bryman 2008)⁵. In order to do this, it is ideal to be able to record who is speaking and how, as well as what is said, and to observe phenomena such as use of space and movement and other non-verbal gestures: but in this case it was not entirely possible, for the following reasons:

Firstly, my relationship with the four participants before the day was friendly and familiar⁶, but I was aware from the Training sessions that at least three of the four found formal discussion itself, as well as sound or video recording, very intimidating. Whilst I needed to record as much of the discussion as possible, it seemed more essential to maintain an informal atmosphere to encourage openness. For this reason I decided to use a mixture of methods:

- detailed Observation notes made soon after the event based on notes taken during the event about physical use of space, body language, non-human and technical factors
- detailed notes taken during the event of what was said and how in discussion and written up soon after
- sound recordings of parts of the discussion with participant agreement
- participants' own notes shared during discussion written up by me after the event
- participants' individual notes given to me during the discussion and not shared
- participants' mark making and drawing on a shared 'timeline'
- participants' wording for a series of agreed 'key points' written up during the meeting as posters

Second, I had observed in the Training sessions that a free discussion would not necessarily encourage participation⁷, and that less 'exposing' methods would reassure and encourage participants to speak more freely. I planned a structure for the morning event, and this is more or less the way it happened, with frequent breaks for refreshments and cigarettes, and much 'story-telling' and laughter. My structure planned for some facilitator intervention - initiating activities, and posing one or two questions which were central to my research as part of each activity - but allowed for participants to raise questions and follow their own themes. I planned activities with change of pace or intensity too, as potential tools for maintaining engagement and comfort. The morning session (with approximate times taken) unfolded as follows:

- Introductions, refreshments: discussion about shared aims for the day, timings etc; confidentiality and 'ground rules' for 'listening with respect'; agreements on all these made through group discussion; stories about the London trip (30 minutes)
- Video and photo elicitations to remind people about their experiences (group discussion), stories about training sessions and community workshops (20 minutes)
- Group timeline on wall using colour, markmaking, text and drawing (individual public activity) (15 minutes)

⁵ Although I would dispute the view, that, since meanings are given to phenomena in everyday life through social interaction (symbolic interactionism), Focus Groups can be seen as more 'naturalistic' than one to one interviews or other methods, in the sense that they "minimise the intrusion of artificial methods of data collection" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995 in Bryman 2008:35; and Bryman 2008:476); I believe that there are far too many cultural and other factors which shape people's experience and expectation of discussion and argument to make that assumption.

⁶ There is a more detailed discussion of the significance of the researcher/participant role in Chapter 3. At this point, despite the lengthy but very formal Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms signed, I was not sure exactly what understandings of my role participants' held (see footnote ¹ above). However, because I had spent about 17 hours in group contact with the participants, I felt able to plan the event with some understanding of their needs.

- Group discussion (with some individual sound recordings made during frequent breaks) about 'key points' about participants' experience which they wished to present and discuss with the professionals at the afternoon meeting, including participants dictating 'posters' of key points (individually) for afternoon session; expressions of lack of confidence about presenting, strong feelings and stories around some 'key points' (an hour)
- 'Confidential postcards'; private, individual activity answering two questions on a postcard (ten minutes)
- Group discussion to plan format of afternoon session (15 minutes)

This differed from my notional plan mainly in the longer time needed for the discussion of 'key points': it became clear that participants were both willing to talk about these at length, and also that they felt unconfident and unprepared to make their points directly to the professionals. For example, Participant A was very angry about a perceived neglect by one of the professionals at an event, but felt she could not raise it without getting angry in a destructive way. This prompted a discussion about how this and other 'difficult' (that is, emotionally charged) issues could be discussed in constructive ways, to which all of the group contributed, and may have helped Participant A raise the topic calmly in the afternoon.

So, the morning functioned partly as a means of focussing on issues which were important to me, and partly as a way of participants identifying key factors which produced impact during the project, and partly raising issues of concern to themselves and preparing for the afternoon.

The afternoon session was offered by me to all its participants as an opportunity for Trainees to feedback their views to professionals who organised or supported the Mas Camp and who were intending to raise funds to continue similar work – as well as another 'trial' of an evaluation method. I had indicated to participants and others beforehand that the emphasis in the afternoon would be evaluation as improving practice as well as reporting on impact.

In email exchanges before the event, I offered to 'facilitate' the afternoon discussion: in retrospect it would have been easier for me to continue to gather research data had someone else taken the role. As a result, my data from the afternoon is limited to notes written by participants and my own skimpy notes written at the time; plus my write up of these and recollections soon after the event.

Although this account will suggest that such notes do have a value, it points to the practical desirability of facilitation and recording being done by different people, and to the practical implications when we recognise that research events have multiple functions.

2.0 The focus group as a trial of methods

A trial of methods in this case must contribute to an understanding of to what extent they can surface useful critiques of past practice or produce evidence of impact - individual or social change – 'convincing enough' to be viewed as evidence by participants, partners or funders.

And of course, each method itself implies a theory of change – something about the processes which lead to transformation. For example, as suggested above, a Focus Group, predicated on the premise that meaning is socially constructed and that the struggle for hegemonic meaning can be observed, can be linked to the idea that being

able to reflect on one's changed position in an existing or new discourse is part of the process of transformation and hence impact. In this case, as an *evaluator*, looking for evidence of impact, I also needed to test specific ideas about the nature of creative projects. These ideas needed to be specific enough to help participants, partners or funders understand what processes caused impact, as well as what impact was caused.

A number of themes had been identified in the course of this research which provided an evaluative framework for my observations. These are factors in projects which can lead to impact. The themes can be summarised as follows:

- *Excellence/ striving* (to produce a high or better quality product – performance, artwork etc)
- *Creativity* (absorption in the creative task - Csikszentmihaly's 'flow'- and the extent of participant control over creative processes)
- *Ethos* (good community work practice, participant-led, democratic)
- *'Real world' activity* (is the work an intervention in the world outside the project – linked to Freire's conditions for transformational praxis)
- *Embedding* (to what extent is the evaluation process structural in the project or organisational practices).

In order to avoid asking 'leading' questions which might distort the discussion, I chose to use these themes as a framework for my observations rather than a basis for questioning. Instead, my questions concentrated on evoking personal memories and feelings about experiences and requests for evidence of personal or community change, in the first instance through photo-elicitation.

2.1 Photo-elicitation: remembering and framing memories⁸

Still photographs and video taken of activity by the researcher during the project were used to stimulate the first discussion of the day, from which the extract below is taken. This technique was needed to prompt memories and reflections about personal experience as long ago as nine months, and as an easy lead-in to more focussed discussion. Using a slideshow of images and video supported by questions such as "Can you describe what is happening in this picture and who is in it? Can you remember what you were doing/feeling/thinking at the time?", "What do you think about that now?" was effective. Attention was directed towards the slideshow, not participants, which may have made it easier for people to contribute. A transcript of this conversation would have been interesting, but must be balanced against the inhibiting impact of recording.

The extract below, taken from my 'Researcher reflections from notes', written up just after the event, suggests that photo-elicitation is an effective way to remind people about 'what happened' in a project and to anchor the discussion to concrete examples:

This was a useful way to recall memories and to provoke discussion. For example, the above discussion prompted the group to agree to raise the question of 'who should agree the designs?' to the afternoon meeting. It also prompted me to ask more detailed questions about the significance of 'designing the costumes yourself – a question I

⁸ Banks' warns that the complex meanings photographs and video have as 'objects' in social relations mean that as a method it is "not always straightforward in practice" (Banks 2001:88 in Canal 2004); the significance of the selection and content of images by the researcher in this case was informed by the themes above, but, as explained, I did not share these in advance with participants in case it directed their replies. In retrospect, I

relate to the value of creativity – by asking for concrete examples, rather than raising abstract issues.

So, for example, I asked whether anyone had made a design which was used and how did it feel? [Participant B] gave the example of a design for a skirt which “[Professional A] gave the thumbs up” and was made in the workshops and worn in the Carnival: “It was great, exciting...it give me a feeling I could do it myself”. [Participant A] added, “We could of designed costumes ourselves, we could next time”.

I asked whether the way the Training was organised encouraged or discouraged this feeling. This question led to a lively discussion about ‘teaching styles’

(Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 4, Lines 22-34)

In this case, photo-elicitation produced lively discussion, about a concrete example, which led immediately to a central and controversial issue for the research - the significance of creativity (designing rather than following a design) in producing impact. Impact is *ascribed* (“it give me ”), and described in terms of positive feelings (“exciting”) and increased self-confidence (“a feeling I could do it myself”); and corroborated by more than one participant, (“We could ofwe could next time”). Moreover, the group rapidly identified the specific nature of the project (teaching styles) which they believed created these impacts, and this led on to a more detailed discussion (see below).

In transformatory praxis an individual's subjectivity is not only related to structural factors, but to the available discourses with which she can interpret the world. In contemporary creative community projects, change is often more closely linked to the ability to position oneself differently, perhaps through the experience of being positioned differently by others, within *existing* discourses about the world, for example, vis a vis who has the ability to make high quality artwork or other products. The ‘theories of change’ participants are expressing here are related to creativity, to ‘real world’ activity (the costumes were used in public) and (in the discussion about teaching styles which followed) to project ethos.

The photo-elicitation also produced a number of stories about incidents relating to impact, the most elaborated of which was also sound-recorded straight after its first telling in discussion, during the break which followed, and is discussed in the next section.

2.2 Self reported change : participant narratives

During the photo-elicitation participants were asked to think about ‘concrete examples of change’. This kind of self reporting is very common in qualitative evaluation (Matarasso 2009 , Clements 2007, Crehan 2011) and widely accepted by participants and partners and to a lesser extent funders (see ‘Funders Interviews’ Chapter 3). In this extract (a transcript of a sound recording) Participant A identified the impact of being involved in running a community workshop as helping her stand up to “people with racism and anti-social behaviour”.

The recording was made towards the middle of the morning, in a private space, after a gentle technique to prompt discussion and conversations about purpose and confidentiality. At the start of the morning no-one wanted to be recorded. It is important for this method that the speaker feels relaxed, confident and safe.

The story told describes both personal and social change, and attributes it directly to the project's ethos (specifically, teaching style) and ‘real world’ activity:

Participant: "Erm doing the, having support and being shown and not being expected to do, to be perfect at everything, give us the confidence to, like standing up to people with racism and anti-social behaviour. The group had one situation where there was a group of girls came into one of our clu – groups, and er... (laughs) we had to er address the behaviour and the graffiti they did all over the phone box ... gave us the confidence to actually make them clean that mess up..."

Researcher: "You took a bucket of water out there"

Participant: "Took a bucket of water and a sponge and told them to clean it up (laughs)"

Researcher: "And did they?"

Participant: "They did, and they actually even apologised afterwards (pause)"

Researcher: "And they were tough kids?"

Participant: "They *were* tough kids, and they *were* families that are known round our way and a lot of people wouldn't even stand up to them... but it give us the confidence to actually do that... (pause) "

Researcher: "Did it change them ?"

Participant: "Erm, It just showed them that we weren't people to be pushed around and bossed, we weren't going to stand around for any of type of behaviour like that, 'cos it just weren't right...(pause)

Researcher: (inaudible prompt)

Participant: the following fortnight they came back and they actually joined in the group and they enjoyed it and realised that we were there to get *them* off the streets and give them something to do" . (End of recording)

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 9, Lines

4-20

This narrative, which has a degree of authenticity as original speech describing first-hand experience, gives a classic example of the development of community cohesion, what Forrest and Kearns (2000) define as the key domain of "effective informal social control".

It is also possible to make inferences about *what* has created this impact. The participant ascribes her increased confidence to two aspects of the project: in her recorded story she refers to the *ethos* (supportive teaching style and relationships) of the sessions, "having support and being shown and not being expected to do, to be perfect at everything" and in discussion to the '*real world*' nature of the project activity and the physical presence of people she regarded as supportive, "I knew I they [staff and other volunteers] would back me up".

2.3 Creative and visual methods : making space for affect

For a number of reasons, as a change of pace, to help preserve relatively spontaneous speech and to encourage participants to report on different or more difficult to express feelings, at this point in the morning session I initiated a creative feedback session (mark making), which participants were familiar with as they had tried it in different contexts during the Mas Camp Training evaluation activities. Mark making, an open-ended activity where personal choice is used to express feelings through marks on paper (harsh, soft)

and colour (dull, bright), is an established method in ethnographic anthropology (Pink et al 2004; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001) and an emerging one in community arts evaluation⁹.

Participants all contributed to the activity using pastels on black card to make a joint 'Timeline' for the project, recording personal key moments using colour and marks to represent feelings (Figure E6 below). Everyone took part, and the activity was cited by one participant afterwards as a significant moment. From my Researcher's Notes:

The timeline was a lighthearted activity which partly functioned as an alternative way of organising thoughts, ie visually, and partly as a break/change of pace, accompanied by coffee and cake. Everyone contributed to it, some with verbal commentary and others (especially Participant D), in more or less silence. The cake did prompt her to mention it was her birthday, which led to several 'birthday greetings' drawings on the timeline. As she was leaving the session she told me that she had really enjoyed it, and that she felt "much more part of the group now": and that this activity seemed to be a key part of that process – she also said that she felt that she knew people better and they knew her better, because they had listened to each other.

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 11, Lines

18-23

Despite been seen as 'lighthearted', and, in my Researcher notes, as not a "highly valued activity", it did, I concluded, draw out "a different kind of information, much more about affect than skills" (Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 2, Lines 2-5). For example, one participant drew an angry devil and 'not-smiley' face to represent her continuing anger about an incident, but did not raise the matter in the discussion with professionals. The Timeline was in fact the only place that certain very positive and very negative emotions were recorded, as well as specific complaints (organisational and about ethos).

It may be that 'complaints' as such were more easily made, perhaps seen as less confrontational, in an activity which seemed 'lighthearted', was semi-private, and was not 'face to face', even though the Timeline as designed to be shared in the afternoon session. Given the contentious position of visual evidence as documentation (Pink, Kurti, Afonso 2004), its immediate value in this context, where other methods have been used successfully, relates to the process of eliciting more complex feedback as part of a range of methods.

⁹ See Chapter 3 section on 'Creative Methods' for a wider and more critical discussion of mark making

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Figure E 6 Participant collective timeline of the CCMC project (detail) (chalk pastels on heavy black card 3.4m x 1.5m)

From Researcher's notes :

The timeline shows 'negative' things above the line and 'positive' above, the project starting on the left. Above the line marks are generally more exuberant and brightly coloured, with some metaphorical drawings (flowers, smiley/sad faces, cross devil faces), and text.

Two of the 'below line' text are very personal: for example, 'Lost', 'very nervous' (comments which had not emerged in the discussion) but mostly 'below line' has been used for specific complaints: "Bad Publicity", "Age groups, no under 8s" etc. Several of these points were not made in the discussion.

Above the line is much more about feelings: "excited", "very confident", "Proud to represent Coventry" (in London), "self expression", with images of 'flowering', decorated with "new skills", "opportunity", "potential", "empowering", also not mentioned in the discussion. There are several ticks around £ signs with a drawing of a full food cupboard – reference to payments made to Trainees [for delivering the Mas Camp Workshops in their own communities].

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 10

Several impacts are identified here which relate to increased self-confidence and positive feelings, ascribed to creativity ("self-expression") and "new skills" [making skills and organisational skills] : "opportunity", "empowering", "flowering". 'Real world' interventions are credited with impact in two ways: firstly by reference in drawings to the Trainees' payment and its significant contribution to the families' economies (£ signs and food cupboards); and second, through the patterns of exuberant marks clustered round the key public and celebratory events. Other activities, such as the Training and the community Workshops ('Camps' on the Timeline) are given less unambiguous treatment.

So, the mark making activity was an effective way of *deepening* participant contribution to the evaluation (Alfonso and Ramos 2004:76), and of visually presenting structural patterns about the project processes. These representations can be interpreted as reflecting participants' unspoken theories about change – that 'real world' activities (as

opposed to slow learning processes) were, if not the instigators of change but at least the temporal points at which change was recognised.

2.4 Group discussion - the nature of the project

Overall, in this research account, Researcher 'notes of group discussion' form the bulk of the data. On several occasions they record participants' view that the project increased community participation - a key factor in social cohesion and well-being (NEF 2012); for example, as this extract from the next activity in the morning, a Researcher-led, participant group discussion, suggests:

Researcher: Why do the Carnival at all?

Participant B: "It keeps the kids off the streets, teaches them to respect where they live"

Researcher: What evidence have you seen that it does this?

Participant A: "They get involved in more community stuff, like last year we ran art club and the same kids came [this year] who never came to anything before"...

Participant B: "We got really positive feedback from the parents, they were very supportive"

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 4 Lines 27 + 5

There is further discussion of the criteria for judgements about the authenticity of this kind of evidence in Chapter 3, but, taken at face value, it shows that participants ascribe to the project both the impact of providing activity "off the streets" (with the implication that 'the streets' represent both a danger to children and are a site of their anti-social behaviour), and activities which increase social cohesion – "respect where they live". Not only this, they identify the children as 'hard to reach' ("who never came to anything before"), a category of participants which, along with 'new audiences', is the Holy Grail of publically funded community arts projects. Parental involvement ("they were very supportive") is regarded as another key factor in social cohesion. The extract gives a concrete and therefore verifiable first-hand report of impact - not just "They get involved in more community stuff", but a concrete example, "the same kids came", which can be cross referenced by community workers and housing association outreach staff.

The Researcher 'notes of discussion' can also be used to help us better understand the participant meaning given to project *ethos* in the recorded participant narrative (2.2) and *creativity* in the photo-elicitation discussion (2.1). These notes have been presented in the research data in two ways, as researcher summaries and as dialogue¹⁰. Two extracts suggest that both the very positive teaching style of the project director and the nature of the making activities themselves had an impact. For example, these are notes of the discussion on project ethos with four participants in the morning session (individual contributors not identified):

"Everybody felt on a level, you didn't feel anyone was any cleverer than anybody else"
"You felt equal" "She had a way of just kind of ignoring people who were... "
[Researcher: Were what?] "... people who were not joining in properly or saying things about other people or their work, she just blanked them and it didn't matter" "she made you feel you were really part of something" "she never made you feel like you were no

¹⁰ Without identification of the speakers it is difficult to paint an entirely satisfying picture of how meaning is socially constructed through this discussion, but it may give a flavour of the process.

good” “she gave lots of praise...always praising your work, holding it up and saying, ‘Fabulous work everyone’” “you remember, she stopped everyone and we had to show what we were doing... explain about the materials we used and all that”

“I liked the way she didn’t tell you how to do it, she kind of said, this is what you have to make, find a way of doing it... and there wasn’t a right way” “you could do it in your own style” “and things didn’t have to be perfect” “not like school, where there is a right and a wrong way of doing it” “she gave you so much praise you knew you were on the right track and you got the confidence to get on with it” “you could learn by making mistakes, it didn’t matter if you made mistakes, not like school.... I hated school”

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 7,Lines 7-33

“There were lots of things you couldn’t do on your own, you had to have like an assembly line to make some costumes, or you needed two people to hold it while you did it, or something” “we were a good team running our Camp, we were ‘good cop/ bad cop’, easy and strict”

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 8,Lines 2+

These notes tell us that participants thought the ethos of the project included a very positive teaching style (“lots of praise”) and learning was through doing, with scope for participants to use their creativity within a proscribed task. It is typical of ‘hard to reach’ participants (as these are described by the project funders (see Mas Camp Training Case Study) that they describe their experiences of school negatively (“I hated school”) and define ‘good’ teaching as “not like school”. This, among other things, suggests that, in our taxonomy of factors which affect impact, participants’ *prior experience* may be a crucial catalyst for the effectiveness of particular project ethos.

The discussion also suggests that the project tasks themselves (making and embellishing carnival costumes in multiples of up to 50) demanded teamwork skills, and that both these aspects contributed significantly to impact (increased skills and confidence). It is significant to be able to say about the project, that its impact partly derived from its specific nature, from learning through doing, from creative making, in a positive, collective setting.

These inferences were ‘triangulated’ by the afternoon discussion with partners:

[Project Director] “the process of making the costumes, you had to do it together, you had to work in teams to get it done” [nods and murmurs of agreement from participants]

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 15,Lines 16+

[Community worker] “If it wasn’t for Judy’s teaching style you wouldn’t have come back the second week, would you [Participant A] ?”

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 15,Lines 22+

We can’t infer that the project ethos was ‘democratic’ (in Webster’s 2011 ‘ideal type’ community project) from this extract: the phrases

“Everybody felt on a level, you didn’t feel anyone was any cleverer than anybody else”
“You felt equal”

refer to relationships *between participants*, not to participation in project planning and decision making. In fact, other parts of the discussion, about costume design, makes it

clear that the participants' 'say' in the creative direction of the project was very limited and that they thought they should have had more:

Participant D: "That's when [Participant] she made up that design..."

Participant C: "...but it never got used did it?"

Participant D: "No, I hate that, when they don't use the design... we spent ages making hats and we never got to wear them, they said we couldn't wear them on the day and the kids, everyone was very disappointed..."

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 4, Lines 17-21

This is a significant discussion (taken up again in the afternoon), because we can infer that a democratic ethos is not necessarily a key factor in producing the conditions for change, even in a 'making' project (rather than, say, a rehearsed performance where there is more expectation of direction); which is a contested view in the field (Webster 2011, Smail 2005).

The discussion also raised the question of how inclusive the project ethos was, especially around participants' 'fit' or perceived bad behaviour:

She had a way of just kind of ignoring people who were... " [Researcher: Were what?] "... people who were not joining in properly or saying things about other people or their work, she just blanked them and it didn't matter"

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 7, Lines 8-10

This issue wasn't further discussed on this occasion – it became a topic for later discussion – but it reinforces the emerging picture of a complex ethos, where striving for excellence yet lavish praise combine with egalitarian relationships yet directive practice.

It remains difficult to ascribe cause and effect in such a complex activity. This is reflected in my Researcher's notes, which again suggest that *prior experience* (a quality held by participants) may be crucial:

Coupled with [Participant A] and [Participant B]'s comments about the value to them of their pay for the workshops, I was building a picture of lives with little margin of luxury: this makes it even more difficult to specify exactly what aspects of community projects lead to which impacts – and perhaps explains why community project deliverers like [...] intuitively feel that "working class participants are more responsive" (conversation July 2011), because seeming trivial or tangential aspects connected with equality and respect go a long way.

Researcher notes, Focus Group Lunchtime Page 13, Lines

10-13

Part of the purpose of the morning group discussion was to record participants' own words as a series of hand written posters which they would use to present their ideas to the professionals in the afternoon discussion by reading them out or using them as prompts. This proved to be an effective way of getting feedback, but only, I believe, because it was built on the morning's series of short activities approaching memories, feelings and ideas in a gentle, tangential way.

Researcher notes of this discussion record participants' self-reported skills and confidence gains, adding detail to the baseline questionnaire data collected at the start

and end of phase one of the project and shifting the emphasis from 'self-confidence' to the more specific organisational skills demanded by the next phase, running community costume making workshops.

There is the potential for these to become 'transferable skills', but evidence that participants could actually demonstrate these skills would need further corroboration – such as the research Observations of the workshops themselves, as well as feedback from workshop participants, parents, children and project partners. This is the Poster about skills prepared by participants in the morning:

Skills learnt - organisation, planning, how to use and get different materials, set up the room, how to manage staff (volunteers), using different equipment, fire safety, having a First Aider. Teamwork skills were very important and we feel we all improved our teamwork skills, we all became good teams running our camps

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 8, Lines 6-10

Self reported feelings which indicate, as these do, a "sense of competence or [...] sense of being connected to those around them" are key measures for the widely used National Economics Foundation's 'Well Being Indicators' (NEF 2012).

2.5 Participants' own words: aspirations and wellbeing

The research account shows that each of the methods used produced slightly different responses. For example, when asked in the next activity to complete a few sentences in private (on 'confidential postcards'), participants wrote about their personal aspirations for employment following their increase in self confidence – which were not mentioned in other responses or in the group discussions, morning or afternoon. There could be a number of reasons for this, but it's maybe most useful in suggesting that a range of response gathering activities is needed, including private reflection.

If the content of the 'confidential postcards' are coded¹¹ they produce these patterns of remarks (sentences or lists) associated with

Giving back/volunteering in my community: 3 citations [*eg I'm going to work harder in my community to get young people involved in carnival*"]

Positive personal develop (eg confidence, wellbeing) : 9 citations [*eg "I know longer feel like I can't do stuff. Takeing part has really helped me come out of myself more"*]

Raised aspirations for paid work or further training : 5 citations [*eg*

"it has given me confident to go out and get a job. I would like to go to collage and do art and desing."

"To get a job in working with kids or somethink in that way"

"Performing in carnival has given me faith that I can do more. I am going hoping to do more performance work"

"doing all this will help me in making a better life for me and kids, and hope to get job ☺"

The postcards carry authenticity as objects, in participants' own handwriting, and as open-ended responses to the prompt, "what would you like to do next?". Again, the NEF

'Well Being Indicators' cite optimism about the future and raised aspirations as key factors in promoting wellbeing.

This activity was the last before lunch, when the professionals joined the Focus Group.

3.0 Reflexivities of discomfort¹²

Maintaining a vigilance about meanings and assumptions is a task for the reader of reflexive texts as much as the author: it may be uncomfortable but essential to admit to not knowing, to "leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar" (Pillow 2003 :177). This next section is both an attempt to uncover assumptions in the Researcher account and to create a reflexive account which may help develop the research process and understandings about evaluation.

Impact evaluation, with its emphasis on positive change, can unconsciously privilege performances which demonstrate just this: it does not readily or necessarily identify stasis or steps backwards. So, one question for this section might be, what didn't change?

3.1 The researcher role

The Researcher feelings recorded in the Research notes reflect a continuing unease with the role of researcher and a desire to establish a more proactive role as facilitator of a particular kind of evaluation process, a process within which participants develop their specific skills in communication and assertiveness in order that they might change the balance of power in a formal discussion with professionals. In other words, a desire to change people and the course of events, not 'merely' to observe them, for example :

I was disappointed because my aspiration had been that the participants would lead the meeting
Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 16,Line 12

Although such confusion is endemic to participative research (Hall 2009, Pillow 2003), it is intensified by this specific method, that is, to 'trial' evaluation techniques. From Researcher's notes:

On reflection, I can see that it may have been useful to the research to observe the afternoon meeting without this preparation process. However, this preparation is also part of an evaluation process, that is, a method of improving the quality of participant feedback, and it also reinforces the thesis that a participative evaluation process contributes to impact (for example, by extending skills). On a personal level, I wanted the participants to feel they had presented their ideas cogently and believed that the professionals would 'take on board' their authentic feedback more easily if they didn't feel attacked. I wanted the participants to be able to position themselves as equal partners in the project.

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 5,Lines19-24

Ambivalence about the researcher role is further suggested in the text by use of the word 'neutral' ('neutral venue'; 'a neutral enough person' Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 1, Line 19; page16,Line 7) to characterise the Researcher in this situation as some kind of positivist empirical data-gatherer, although my reading about

¹² Pillow (2003) uses this term to imply ways of thinking about, doing and analysing research that challenge power, that support "self-representation and self-determination" yet also recognise the "political need to represent and find meaning" (p192).

reflexive ethnography clearly reminds me that 'neutrality' in any sense is not a role available to the researcher (Pillow 2003; Bryman 2008, Ryan 2001 and others).

Feelings of irritation recorded in my notes about the perceived "patronising" attitudes of two of the professionals recall what Villenas (1996) is describing in her work as an indigenous woman researching other indigenous women, that is, a desire of the researcher to distance herself from her 'professional' audience (in this case, 'the professionals' in the afternoon discussion, as well as the readers of the research) and identify with the participants as working class women.

For example, the Researcher notes text *could* have characterised the neighbourhood workers and arts organisation director as 'project partners' rather than 'professionals'. As well as shifting the emphasis from difference to shared meanings, this would have had the effect of positioning the participants as equal partners. That I chose in these notes to emphasise difference is only partly a reflection of the perceived hegemonic discourse of the project which itself made this distinction, and partly (surely) from a desire to stake my own 'allegiance': what Villenas, characterising the researcher role in this kind of situation as complex and challenging, calls a process embodying "collusion and oppositionality, complicity and subversion" (Villenas S 1996 p 729).

This discussion about Researcher ambivalence, unconscious 'partisanship' etc is a useful caveat for an evaluator – a similar role, often less self-consciously undertaken. It may perhaps have the most practical value in provoking evaluator reflections about the dangers of 'advocacy' for impact in evaluation and as a reminder about the difficulties of participatory methods.

3.2 Positioning 'these women' : what didn't change

The afternoon discussion was started by a participant presenting the first key issue for discussion, reading from the poster of participants' own words, and elaborating on the theme (teaching styles). Before a follow-up discussion could start, one of the community workers drew attention to the participant's 'progress' in self-confidence and skills:

Community Worker A: "If it wasn't for [the project's] teaching style you wouldn't have come back the second week, would you [Participant A] ?";

Participant A (looking sheepish): "No, probably not".

Community Worker A: "You wouldn't have been able to read that out loud to everyone before you came on the training, would you L.....?"

Participant A: "No"

Community Worker A I: "You see, these women didn't really get on at school, did you? They didn't have the confidence to read out loud and stuff like this, would you [Participant A] ? She wouldn't have been able to do this a year ago"

Participant A : "No I wouldn't of done"

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 17, Lines 11-17

This exchange highlights positive change (growth in self-confidence and skills) as an impact of the project, and yet, by framing it as *marked* reveals a lack of change in the perceived relative relationship between the roles of 'professional' ('us') and 'participant' ('Other'). The participant is in this way both dismissed as an equal participant in the discussion, and confirmed in her lack of agency: "*these women* have had a lot of

support from the community team” (Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 18,Line 5). (*my emphasis*)

Similarly, another comment characterising “these women” as having a greater potential for creativity , (as sentimentalised ‘noble savages?’), contributes to the construction of their Otherness :

I think people like this, who are less educated, can grow more, they have the ability to learn and make really beautiful costumes, to be really enthusiastic... I don’t know, I just like working in these areas...”

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 17,Lines 19-21

Caught up within a desire to empower the participants to reposition themselves in a discourse about themselves and a perceived infantilising relationship to the professionals, it was not possible for me as Researcher to recognise ways in which they might express power, other than assertive, fairly formal, speech, or to recognise the way in which I might have positioned myself as ‘knowing what’s best’ for them.

My own ‘management’ of the morning discussion to fit my strongly desired outcomes (a confident presentation of participant views in a specific manner) contributes to this undermining of participants’ agency. It all suggests that a profound change in relationships, in a sense of agency necessary for transformatory praxis has not (at this point) happened: some things have stayed the same.

However, there were ways in which this may have been subverted by participants. For example, a story about ‘freezing out’ one of the community workers was raised during a discussion about Journal-keeping (Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 7,Line19): two of the participants’ continual cross-confirmation of each other’s stories (“Didn’t I, [name]?”), choosing to sit closely together¹³; to initiate cigarette breaks outside throughout the day (even though one of them no longer smoked), could suggest a reference to agency and power *outside* the formal structure, which challenged their role as ‘objects’ (of the research and the project)¹⁴; just as the participant’s story about how she intervened and challenged racism and vandalism suggested power and agency located elsewhere than a discussion group, in her and her friends in her community. A re-reading of the recorded participant story confirms this interpretation:

3.3 Transformatory praxis : theories of change

In the Participant Narrative (section 2.2 above), the participant uses ‘us’ ambiguously; it may mean us (more than me) or me (me alone). It’s unusual for her to use the active construction, ‘I did’ (in this extract she avoids it by saying “Took a bucket...”); rather, she uses the expression ‘it gave us the confidence to’, ‘it’ being the support of the project and workshop group. The exception is the climax of the story, and even here she uses ‘we’ rather than ‘I’: “we weren’t going to stand around for any of type of behaviour like that”. These constructions may reflect a kind of embedding in the group, in her friendships and community and a key part of her identity, but also perhaps a lack of sense of individual personal agency. The relationship she may have to her personal agency is a critical factor in the concept of transformatory praxis (described in Chapter 2). A possible cultural

¹³ There are several references to physical relationships in the Research account, which suggest that a visual ‘mapping’ of the event, describing the seating, proximities etc might reveal other knowledges; the venue itself is also an ‘actant’ in this process, see Chapter 3.

¹⁴ Or she might have just needed a cigarette; or used the break to assuage anxiety, boredom...Clearly this requires another research interview

attachment to collectivity may demand a rethinking about the hegemonic imposition implied in the *individualisation* of personal agency in theories of change.

Throughout the text we can read tensions between different stories told about what produces the conditions of transformatory praxis, different ways of theorising a “collective construction of social reality” (Sackman 1991:33).

For example, a community worker re-frames a participant story describing an independently successful intervention in the workshops, as a *supported developmental stage*:

Community Worker A: ... they had to sort out problems, behaviour and so on, but they were supported in the neighbourhood [by the community workers], but, you did do very well with discipline and that, didn't you? Much better than before.

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 16, Line 18

The project Director presents a similar reframing of the participants' achievements and their desire for more creative autonomy, expressed clearly and assertively in the afternoon discussion, as a *developmental stage*:

Director :... [the company] is beginning to raise the quality of the costume designs here, it's a journey, you couldn't design them all now but you could do more than last year, maybe you could this year, we're trying to get world class costumes, we need to get you up to the next level of making, making skills...”

Participant B: “Yes, like we couldn't of run a camp last year but we could now...”

Participant C: “But people want to make their own costumes...”

Director “Yes but, for the past four or five years [the company] has owned the Carnival, it belonged to [the company], we're moving now to it belongs to the people in the neighbourhoods...”

Researcher notes, Focus Group Afternoon Page 19, Lines 3-10

In this way we can begin to identify competing ‘gatekeepers’ (Latour 2004) of understandings of how change happens and begin to think about whose interests are served by different theories of change. For example, *supported incremental development* is the founding paradigm of community work which justifies the role¹⁵.

Similarly, the arts company Director emphasises the importance of ‘striving’ and aesthetic ‘excellence’: “we're trying to get world class costumes, we need to get you up to the next level of making, making skills”. This fits well with the national funding policy of one of their key funders the Arts Council England, which is to support ‘excellence in the arts’ (ACE 2011) and is an important aspect of how the Company constructs its own identity in an arts world which tends to value aesthetic excellence above good community work practice¹⁶.

Nevertheless, discussions in the Focus Group about teaching styles suggest the company may enact a different practice in the field. Participants elaborated how constant praise was used as a motivator and ‘striving’ for ‘excellence’ was tempered by contingency:

¹⁵ Cf Coventry City Council *Coventry Statement of Community Involvement* July 2012

¹⁶ See Interview with Arts Company Director Chapter 3 and the discussion in Chapter 1

"she gave lots of praise...always praising your work, holding it up and saying, 'Fabulous work everyone'" "you remember, she stopped everyone and we had to show what we were doing..

... and there wasn't a right way" "you could do it in your own style" "and things didn't have to be perfect" "not like school, where there is a right and a wrong way of doing it"

Researcher notes, Focus Group Morning Page 7, Lines 7-33

This paradox suggests that 'excellence' is a complex concept which demands further unpacking and that a reflexive analysis can offer layered and complex understandings about how meanings are produced.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Focus Group day represented research into the qualitative impact of participation in a creative project, and also a trial of evaluation methods which community projects or participants might use themselves, asking to what extent they can help us answer the question, 'What impact did this project have on individuals and the community?'.

A more reflexive account about the processes of the Focus Group day itself was explored as a way of exposing issues of power and agency in evaluation. Power and agency, expressed through 'positioning' in discourses and 'real world' action, are key elements in producing the conditions of transformatory praxis which this study explores.

Taken together, these two accounts were designed to help develop understanding of how different individuals or groups in the project might have different 'theories of change' and how these might function as causal explanations, but also how these explanations relate to the impacts participants described.

A trial of methods must contribute to an understanding of to what extent they can produce evidence of impact - individual or social change – 'convincing enough' to be viewed as evidence by participants, partners or funders. A number of practical lessons emerged about the difficulties of recording an authentic voice and the implications of recognising that research events have multiple functions. Nevertheless, a key factor in the success of the Focus Group as it was structured was the range of methods within it and the extent to which it was 'tailored' for participants. This mix of light-hearted, creative and supportive activities was effective. It produced a number of pieces of evidence of personal and collective impact with the ring of authenticity, for example, narratives of original speech describing first-hand experience, original participant documentation. It produced concrete accounts of impact which could be corroborated, and in some cases were during the day.

Methods such as photo-elicitation and the mark-making Timeline had two effects: *deepening* participant contribution to the evaluation, and shifting it away from a simple 'snapshot' of feelings on that day. Moreover, participants ascribed impact to clearly identified factors.

For example, photo-elicitation produced discussion about a concrete example, which led immediately to a central and controversial issue for the research - the significance of creativity in producing impact. Impact was *ascribed* and described in terms of positive feelings and increased self-confidence, corroborated by more than one participant and the group rapidly identified the specific nature of the project (teaching styles, central to project ethos) which they believed created these impacts, and this led on to a more detailed discussion.

Participants reported individual positive feelings and increased self confidence through all these methods. Through the process of collectively producing 'posters' of key points for discussion, they reported increases in a range of making and organisational skills which they ascribed to the 'real world' nature of their experiences. It is possible also that, by participating in the Focus Group itself – specifically, the process of raising evaluation issues with professionals, participants demonstrated that some of this increased confidence had led to transferable communication skills.

A particular narrative gave a classic example of the development of 'informal social control' corroborated by other participants and community workers; in addition, participants' writing showed raised aspirations for paid work or training. Both these are widely recognised factors in producing wellbeing and social cohesion.

At the same time, analysis of group discussion suggested that participants' power and agency, and even their own sense of it, may be contested, even within a project or for partners whose aims include the development of this very thing. The emerging picture is of a complex ethos, where striving for excellence yet lavish praise combine with egalitarian relationships yet directive practice, reminding us that it remains difficult to ascribe cause and effect in such a complex activity.

We can summarise the impacts of participation as being :

Increased self confidence and sense of competence

Raised aspirations

Increased well being

Specific making and organisational skills

Improved communication skills

Greater sense of connection to their community

Simplified abstractions of the different and overlapping discourses in the project about what factors promote these changes can be loosely grouped like this, (their 'gatekeepers' in brackets):

1. Gradual transformation through learning skills in an externally managed, step-by-step programme which manages a shift towards autonomy (arts company)
2. Sudden transformation through being part of a high quality ('excellence'), collective, art event (arts company, participants)
3. Incremental transformation through being supported by professionals over years in various ways – the arts project contributes to rather than is the sole promoter of change (community workers)
4. Sudden transformation through being supported by peers in difficult real-world situations (participants)
5. Incremental transformation through collective reflection enabling participants to be more assertive in real life situations (research text)

The Focus Group offered additional supportive evidence that the following research themes were relevant, and that this could be inferred from analysis of participants' own words (through thematic analysis or coding):

- *Excellence/ striving* (to produce a high or better quality product – performance, artwork etc)

- *Creativity* (absorption in the creative task - Csikszentmihaly's 'flow'- and the extent of participant control over creative processes)
- *Ethos* (good community work practice, participant-led, democratic)
- *'Real world' activity* (is the work an intervention in the world outside the project – linked to Freire's conditions for transformational praxis)

In addition, it suggested that participants' *prior experience* of learning may be a crucial catalyst for the effectiveness of particular project ethos.

In summary, these evaluation methods were effective at producing authentic self-reporting, the most common form of qualitative evaluation, acceptable as verifiable evidence to participants and a range of project partners and to a lesser extent by funders and commissioners. At the same time, a more reflexive text was useful in questioning accounts from participants and professionals (and the researcher) about *how* these impacts are produced. For example, a key way in which the issue of transformatory praxis is currently framed within creative community projects (especially arts-based, as the discussion in Chapter 1 suggests) is as a debate which pits 'process' against 'product'. This analysis shows that the 'how' of impact is not only extremely complex, with presentation and practice sometimes possibly divergent, but that there can be a struggle to establish hegemonic understandings even within a single project.

It also adds to evidence (elsewhere in the research) suggesting that this particular project, the Mas Camp Training, may be effective in producing positive qualitative impact through establishing the processes and relationships needed to create a coordinated, large-scale public arts event *without* the democratic sharing of creative decisions widely regarded as central to producing social and personal change in community arts¹⁷.

Moreover, a reflexive account enables us to recognise that there are ways in which relationships, expressed through positioning within discourses of empowerment, have *not* changed or are in flux at this point as part of that struggle for hegemony; and most significantly, that participants may express their own agency and power in ways not readily available for analysis in the Focus Group, but which suggest areas for further research.

¹⁷ As described in Chapter 3; eg "integral to the Community Arts process is that people are not only involved in the art form itself, but in the creative decisions..." (Webster 2011: 10)

APPENDIX F Chapter 7

7.1 The evidence based matrix for evaluation populated by Imagineer Productions

Imagineer Productions' evaluation plan for *Not Yet Invented* (reproduced with permission of IP) **2014**

The Arts Connect pilots produced their own versions of the 'matrix'. Appendix F shows how Not Yet Invented 'populated' the matrix in their evaluation, a highly complicated and difficult to follow document which, although drawn up by the company, was not eventually considered helpful in the process or as adequately reflecting the systemic approach described by the researcher in her introduction to it. IP produced the matrix in Appendix F for the Imagineerium STEAM project in primary schools. It is a working document and reflects a complex project involving schools, engineers and artists. Although the process of 'doing the thinking' for this matrix was useful in helping to clarify project aims and evaluation strategy, the matrix itself was 'too complex' to be of everyday use (Informal Interview, Jo Trowsdale, 2012):

Title: Imagineer Productions' evaluation plan for *Not Yet Invented* (reproduced with permission of IP) **2014**

Examples of abbreviations: CYP: Children and Young People's Quality Principles; Obs: observations; Tchr: teachers; chn: children; YP young people (i.e. project participants)

| Conditions for maximising impact | Arts Council CYP quality principles | Possible evidence of potential | Examples of ways used to measure impact | Ways data was analysed/ or planned to be analysed |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|---|
| | NYI (Imagineerium) outcomes | | | |

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|--|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Valuing individual participants & ensuring active participation (what they bring)</p> | <p>2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 4. Positive, child-centred 5. Actively involving CYP 7. Sense of ownership & belonging 1a engagement, motivation, striving 1d collaborating, co-constructing, maximising team</p> | <p>Written project protocols (eg diversity, equality documents) Project concept and experience positioned YP as experts: all stages echoed the idea, design, build and pitch process, with professional support, professional resource and resulted in three real builds and involvement in a public event. YP roles of investigator and (for two sessions of paparazzi, artist, scientist and interviewer represented YP way of seeing / what they valued. YP to keep personal project diaries* Adults to keep observational journals** Time to complete them in session and after sessions Interviews</p> | <p>1a Baseline before start in school, ongoing in project & post project in school: YP self evaluation in diaries (key questions (text/drawing) & freeform reflection); regular verbal contributions through 'interviewer' roles; teachers to evaluate as baseline and extent of 'transfer' into school; adults structured & free observations in diaries; 1d as above PLUS baseline, interim, post project teamwork exercise Engineers, artists to evaluate success of team activities on a scale/using own methods</p> | <p>- 1a Key word frequency analysis Discourse analysis (descriptive) from interview transcripts Numerical analysis of scale on baseline / Questionnaire analysis re. enjoyment - photographs / film clips to illustrate (possibly identified population sample as case studies, small nos?) creative/visual data analysis ? 1d as above PLUS Time taken to complete joint task set by engineers/artists, plus reflection, obs Tchrs baseline how effective chn are at learning with and from others: offering ideas; responding, adapting, listening</p> |
| <p>Aesthetic excellence & depth of experience (striving, challenge, skills development, open-ended, outward-looking, risk-taking, supportive critique, inspirational)</p> | <p>1. Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 1a engagement, motivation, striving 1b initiative, confidence, risk-taking 1c curiosity, imaginative / divergent thinking, 1e technical / practical skills 1f using arts /</p> | <p>Project concept is of real commission: a challenge: Project planning Artist initial interviews Artist portfolios YP to keep personal project diaries* Adults to keep observational journals** Time to complete them in session</p> | <p>1a As above 1b As above PLUS ongoing group timeline in sessions: what worked, what didn't, how we solved etc 1c As above PLUS baseline, interim, post project divergent thinking exercise ? eg solutions to problems 1e As above PLUS engineers/artists to devise short fun 'test', before, post</p> | <p>1A As above 1B As above 1c self evaluation & discursive comment from evaluators & others Structured video diaries 1e engineers/artists to administer & analyse PLUS Tchrs baseline and observe within sessions how effective YP motor skills are and how readily they master</p> |

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|--|---|--|--|---|
| | <p>maths / science languages and processes</p> <p>1g development of self evaluation; setting own experience in wider context; developing theory of change</p> | | <p>project</p> <p>1f As above PLUS engineers/artists to devise short fun 'test', before, post project PLUS Record current NC levels in Literacy, Maths, Science and Art, recording also FFT predicted levels, FSM, EAL ***and attendance data Observations recording new, specific vocab use descriptive / imaginative language use of mathematical thinking accurate application of maths use of scientific processes systematic scientific thinking designing / drawing of ideas to show / test / develop an idea trialling in new media practical testing of an idea in performance (any discipline) Chn rate for self when and how well they used maths, science, art or literacy; Focus group interviews</p> <p>1g As above PLUS discussion, self-report, questionnaires' projection timelines of own life</p> | <p>skills of and complete technical / practical tasks</p> <p>1f engineers/artists to administer & Analyse</p> <p>1g As above PLUS YP to peer record what motivates them to learn as baseline / or scenario choices?</p> |
|--|---|--|--|---|

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| <p>Creative flow (<i>skills development, intensity of experience, space, extended thinking time, collectivity, engagement</i>)</p> | <p>1.Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 5. Actively involving CYP 1a engagement, motivation, striving 1c curiosity, imaginative / divergent thinking 1d collaborating, co-constructing, maximising team 1e technical / practical skills 1f using arts / maths / science languages and processes</p> | <p>Project planning docs Artist initial interviews Artist portfolios</p> | <p>Artists report Participant report (creative method);Observation Participant journals</p> | |
| <p>Quality of processes & materials (<i>new materials, technologies; professionalism</i>)</p> | <p>1.Striving for excellence 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 1a engagement, motivation, striving 1e technical / practical skills 1f using arts / maths / science languages and processes</p> | <p>Project planning docs; Artist portfolios.Participant recruitment strategy</p> | <p>Observation Participant report</p> | |

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|--|--|--|---|--|
| Real world impact <i>(collective & individual action taken outside the project itself, in public, in the community; identifiable quality, confident dissemination)</i> | 2. Being authentic 3. Exciting, inspiring, engaging 6. Sense of personal progression 7. Sense of ownership & belonging 1a engagement, motivation, striving 1b initiative, confidence, risk-taking 1d collaborating, co-constructing, maximising team 1e technical / practical skills | Project planning docs | Participant report (journals; creative method; questionnaire; focus group) Baseline. Outsider/ stakeholder feedback (interviews; questionnaires) | |
| Reflective framework and skills <i>(theorised change; expressive creative methods; variety of recording methods, collective reflection, & presentation; interim reviews linked to action plans)</i> | 5. Actively involving CYP 6. Sense of personal progression 7. Sense of ownership & belonging 1c curiosity, imaginative / divergent thinking, 1f using arts / maths / science languages and processes 1g development of self evaluation; setting own experience in wider context; developing theory of change | Project planning docs Artist contracts Staff training docs | Participant report (journals; creative activity); Baseline survey; Artists report Staff feedback Interim review reports 1g | |
| Long term data collection | 1. Striving for excellence 6. Sense of personal progression | Digital & local legacy/contacts, planning docs; | Focus Groups/ Online surveys/ stakeholder data | |

