Coffee, Milk and a Sprinkling of Sand

An Initiative to Assist Non-traditional, Mature Students form Supportive Networks in Higher Education

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Overview

- Contextualising the study
- Working with the visual
- The World Technique
- Ethical qualitative inquiry
- Written in the sand
- Findings and actions

Complex and Divided Land

- The distinctiveness of Wales, in terms of its political life and culture, has grown considerably over the last decade.

- Nevertheless, beneath the imagery of the definitive nation, Wales remains a complex and divided land (Mackay 2010)

Divided Wales

- Between 1945 and 1980 the income differential between individuals in Wales narrowed- since 1980 the gap between rich and poor has widened

- Increase in social and spatial polarisation

- Divide through geographical distribution

- 'Los Angelization' of socio-economic terrain demonstrated in the creation of new ghettos of prosperity and poverty

Anatomy of Economic Inequality in Wales (Davies et al, 2011)

- Significant gaps in attainment related to indicators of relative poverty

- GCSE pupils entitled to free school meals were two and a half times less likely to attain grades A-C

- Social housing residents were 10 times less likely to be graduates compared other types of accommodation

- Living in poverty, reliable predictor of educational attainment and related opportunities in the employment market

Mature Students in HE

- Psychological consequences of spatial positioning of 'border crosser' (Lucey et al 2003)

- Classed, gendered and relational positionings can conflict with mature students education trajectory and often contributed to their withdrawal from academia (Mannay 2013; Mannay and Morgan 2013)

Visual Methodologies

- Previous engagement with the visual (Mannay 2010; 2013)
- Making the familiar strange (Delamont and Atkinson 1995)
- Defamiliarisation
- Power and participatory methods
- Auteur theory (Rose 2001)
- Unforeseen disclosures and ethical dilemmas (Mannay 2011)

Visual Journeys

Night time

The World Technique

- Sand therapy - NOT Freudian or Jungian
- Lowenfeld (1939) – 'world technique'
- Do not attempt to interpret the symbolism of the world but rather wait for the meanings to be identified by the child, 'in recognition of the multiplicity of meanings the world may contain'
- Figures in the sand tray become a primary vehicle for intra-personal and inter-personal communication, where 'each figure holds unique and personal meaning for individuals'

The Study

- Participants created three-dimensional scenes, pictures or abstract designs in a tray filled with sand and a range of miniature, realistic and fantasy, figures; and everyday objects to reflect their educational experience
- Elicitation interviews – auteur theory
- Engage participants at the level of affect

Psychoanalytically Informed

- Should we take psychoanalysis outside of the clinical situation of the 'consulting room'? (Frosh 2010)
- Should we be engaging with a psychoanalytically informed technique in the absence of a trained therapist?
- Explore the boundaries sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift 2006)
- For Lowenfeld (1950), the action of making worlds can in itself begin the process of amelioration in the disturbances and discomforts
- Interior experience persists throughout the life course and is of profound importance but has so far been insufficiently studied
- It is this aspect of the interior life that the 'world technique' can elicit

Isolation in the Academy

- They were all the same and were friends and **I** was just this sort of strange entity in the lecture theatre
- You feel quite isolated

Knowledge and Support

- Maybe it's having access to a key individual that keeps people going?

Work Life Balance

- I partially buried her because she's like in quick sand, because there's too much for on person to do

- I had to some how be magician to keep everyone happy

Coffee Club

- Actioning the affective

- Just to say thank you for this morning. I always find the meetings useful, and sometimes positively therapeutic!

- Thank you for your kind words and support. What you've organised is wonderful!

Project Summary

- The 'world technique' can elicit affective accounts of interior life worlds
- Isolation, lack of knowledge and support, work overload
- Affective accounts can initiate action
- Coffee club – opportunity for building support networks, sharing problems and solutions, being with people 'like me'

Concluding Thoughts

- Lowenfeld (1950, 325) writes, 'I am anxious that my whole research and therapeutic method, of which this equipment is part, should not be misunderstood or distorted when part of the equipment is borrowed and adapted for a different purpose'.

- We hope that Lowenfeld would see this development as respectful to her original work; and see its potential as a tool of qualitative inquiry; to extend the parameters of visual methods, to fight familiarity, to engage with subjective worlds of participants, and ultimately to contribute to informed policy initiatives.

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