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Becoming eventful: making the ‘more-than’ of a youth activist conference matter

EJ Renold ^a, Victoria Edwards ^a and Tuija Huuki ^b

^aSchool of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Wales, UK; ^bFaculty of Education, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland

ABSTRACT

This paper theorises the speculative process of how an arts-based online youth activist resource, AGENDA (www.agendaonline.co.uk) is becoming eventful and re-mattering youth voice on gender and sexual violence. Utilising the concept of the ‘cwrdd’ – a Welsh word for gatherings made, found and stumbled upon – we explore how our AGENDA cwrdds attune to, nurture and platform a range of micro-political moments across performances and workshops that entangle human and non-human participants. Inspired by Erin Manning’s concept of the ‘more-than’, we illustrate how the cwrdds carry the past-present-future potentials of what has mattered and is mattering to young people.

KEYWORDS

Gender; sexuality; youth conference; arts-activism; new materialism

Introduction

Responding to the insistence of the cry ‘it matters’ does not mean justifying its claim, constructing the reasons why it should indeed matter. It means intensifying it (...) giving it the power to problematize (...) and make things matter. (Stengers 2019, 16)

Children and young people around the world are marching, petitioning, organising, performing, crafting, singing, dancing, vlogging and hash-tagging their anger, pain and frustration at the new twists and turns of persistent intersectional gender and sexual injustices and violence¹. Knowingly and unknowingly supported by a rich history of feminist, queer and post-colonial movements, laws and legacies, the last decade has witnessed a steady stream of youth-led activisms. Collectively, they are calling time on what matters, from slut-shaming, sexual consent and FGM, to trans* rights, inclusive sexuality education and why feminism should be on the school curriculum (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019).

While any rupture to the status quo is risky, some individuals, groups and communities feel this weight more strongly than others. Their insistent ‘cry’ of how ‘it matters’, can be silenced or sensationalised, depending upon who is calling for change, what change is being called for, how they raise what matters to them and where these expressions surface. Some cries are muffled or immobilised through practices too often steeped in what is considered socially and culturally taboo, including gendered, classed, raced and sexualised assumptions of what is age-appropriate (Pihkala, Huuki, and Sunnari 2019).

CONTACT EJ Renold  renold@cardiff.ac.uk, Renold@cf.ac.uk

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This is particularly prevalent in the context of schools, including those that are supportive of and enabling youth gender and sexuality activism². Indeed, the visceral backlash experienced by young people who openly speak out and campaign on issues of gender and sexual violence can include everything from throw-away dismissive comments (e.g. 'you're too young', 'you're too idealistic', 'that won't work', 'it's too risky', 'you're being disruptive', Renold 2016) to sustained and vicious attacks from peers of all ages (e.g. 'feminazi', is a prevalent and go-to term of abuse hurled at feminist-identified young people fighting for gender equity, see Bragg et al. 2018).

There is an emergent research scholarship that recognises and critiques the lack of spaces, structures and pedagogies that might nurture and platform young teen rights to communicate their matters of concern and/or do something about the injustices and inequities they feel and notice. However, there are few published accounts theorising the process of what such conducive contexts might look like and offer³. This paper responds in part by sharing the story of crafting events (which we refer to below as 'cwrdds') for making a co-produced youth activist resource, AGENDA (www.agendaonline.co.uk), designed specifically to creatively share 'what matters' on these issues, ensure they continue to matter. It is a journey that each co-author, Emma Renold, Vicky Edwards and Tuija Huuki, has been involved in directly, both locally and at a distance, in ways that are informing their own ethico-political research-mattering journeys, in Wales and Finland⁴.

Introducing cwtch and cwrdd

Erin Manning argues that to conceive of art as the manner through *how* we engage, helps us glimpse 'a feeling forth of new potential' (2016, 47). This requires careful attention to how the proto-political potentials of feelings and ideas are performed and transformed through events and the crafting of artefacts. It also demands an 'ontology of engagement' (Stengers 2019, 19) marbled with a Baradian ethical 'response-ability' (Barad 2007) that blurs any clear divide between research, engagement and activism. To help us communicate the situated ecology of our ethico-political praxis we use two Welsh words that have become important 'mattering concepts' in our process (Lenz Taguchi and St. Pierre 2017): *cwrdd* (c-oo-rrth) and *cwtch* (cutch). *Cwrdd*, which means 'to gather, converge and touch, run into, stumble across, join, exchange, encounter by accident', attunes to the speculative and collective process of how 'what matters' surfaces and 'intra-acts' (Barad 2007)⁵. Rather than refer to our AGENDA events as 'conferences', from here on in, we refer to them as *cwrdds*⁶. *Cwtch*, broadly translated means, to cuddle or hold, a safe place, or a hideaway. We use *cwtch* to communicate the ethico-political human and more than human process of participating within and beyond each *cwrdd*.

Inspired by the speculative 'lingerings' in the call for papers of this special issue, we reflect on what it means to choreograph the political with an arts-based praxis drawing on our experience of crafting three youth *cwrdds* in south Wales (UK) where young people, educational practitioners and policy-makers were key players and participants. Our first *cwrdd* is the launch of the AGENDA resource in 2016 by young people to a wider public of practitioners and policy makers interested in finding out about the resource. The two subsequent AGENDA *cwrdds*, *Educating AGENDA* (2017) and *Inclusive AGENDA* (2018) were events designed specifically to provide up to 100 young people

with a platform to share their activism with other young people, and adult practitioner allies. *Educating AGENDA* was aimed specifically at schools and the newly developing field of relationships and sexuality education in Wales (see Renold and McGeeny 2017). *Inclusive AGENDA* foregrounded the importance of an intersectional approach to inclusivity when addressing gendered and sexual violence and was aimed at schools, youth groups, alternative educational units and special schools. Following our mapping of the conducive socio-political terrain which supported the making of the AGENDA resource, this paper is structured into four sections.

In *'making dartaphacts matter'* we introduce the performative role of the dartaphact at the launch of AGENDA. As we describe in this section, *dartaphact* has become a working concept to theorise the process of using artful practices (i.e. *darta*) to create ethical-political objects that communicate and 'make things matter' (i.e. *dartaphacts*). We share the process of learning to craft and stage an environment for *dartaphacts* to touch, move, inform and transform – a process which we have then developed in future *cwrdds*. Each subsequent section then maps the speculative process that shapes the before, during and after of how an AGENDA *cwrdd* can unfold. Here we draw on the *cwrdds*, *Educating AGENDA* (2017) and *Inclusive AGENDA* (2018). In *'disOrdering the day with sense and semblance'*, we share the four movements – *platforming, experimenting, gifting and bodying* – that structure an AGENDA *cwrdd* in ways that allow the process to open to its more-than. Our use of the term 'more-than' is inspired by Erin Manning's work (2013, 2016) and is a concept that alludes to the variation of experience, where experience is always already inventive and carries traces of the past that propels a feeling-forth of becoming Otherwise. In this paper, we use the concept of the 'more-than' to foreground the speculative journey of how each *cwrdd* carries traces of what has mattered, is mattering and might continue to matter, entangle and intensify in ways that cannot be predicted in advance.

Diving deeper into the processual aspects of the *cwrdd*, *'adDressing the cwrdd'* explores the performative and participatory roles of past and future *dartaphacts* in the curating of an AGENDA *cwrdd*. *'ScOUTing what matters'* offers a glimpse into our on-going out-reach work and attunes to how each *cwrdd* platforms 'what matters' in a give and take dance of ethico-political response-ability. The final section draws out the implications of making the more-than from our research arts-activisms matter in the toxic assemblages of neo-liberal university engagement and impact agendas.

Making way for AGENDA

In activist philosophy to be is to be felt. To effectively register. To be is to be in effect. To be is to get into the act. (Massumi 2013, 20)

During 2015–2016 Emma facilitated the 'starter project' (Safe To Act, Right To Engage and Raise) with a group of 12 young people (age 13–17) from three different high schools across rural, coastal and urban south Wales (UK) to create what became a Welsh Government endorsed youth activist resource, 'AGENDA: a young people's guide to making positive relationships matter' (Renold 2016). This guide is a free to download 75 page bi-lingual (Welsh-English) interactive tool-kit co-created with and for young people in Wales⁷. Emphasising the Latin origins of activism, *actus*: 'a doing, driving force, or an impulse', AGENDA invites young people to notice and call-out oppressive forms of gender and

potentiality of the new to unsettle in ways that might open alternative figurations of being and becoming.

Making AGENDA has been and continues to be a collective process informed by years of experimenting with others to ethically craft artful participatory research-engagement-activist encounters on some of the most sensitive issues with and for young people⁹. It is also an iterative process, inspired by an ethico-political new-materialist ontology of surfacing ‘what matters’ with a speculative pragmatism (Debaise and Stengers 2017) and an explicit attempt to put the act back into activism (Braidotti 2010). In brief, the *speculative* explores how what matters remains open to its more-than, or becoming Otherwise; the *pragmatic* explores the conditions that will bring the more-than of what matters to its actualising potential. As Stengers (2019, 19) has recently written, this is not a process where ‘academics’ critique from a ‘safe distance’ or ‘enter the ontological turn’– this is ‘engagement all the way down’, an entanglement of being there in the thick of things.

The rise of AGENDA in Wales has emerged in a specific and conducive socio-political context. Young people’s change-making desires (Libby et al. 2018), place-based historical legacies of revolution (Morgan 2014), devolved, national policy development on gender-based and sexual violence, a new relationships and sexuality education (Welsh Government 2015a, 2015b), a political context that platforms children’s rights, gender equality and social justice (Rees and Chaney 2011), multi-agency feminist partnerships and researcher expertise and experience (Renold 2005, 2013, 2018) have all *intra-acted* (Barad 2007) to form a dynamic assemblage of possibility. Indeed, AGENDA’s unfolding continues to be a journey which ruptures any linear formation of research-engagement-activism or a priori ‘method/ology’ (see Renold 2019a for a full cartography of the making of AGENDA).

AGENDA’s affirmative approach to risky, radical and overtly political content has gained momentum. Schools in particular are reaching out for support, and AGENDA, via our outreach team¹⁰, has been responding. AGENDA is and has become more than a resource. It is a lively doing and embedded in an immanent praxis. It is becoming eventful, ‘both in the sense that it is a happening, and in the sense that when it happens something new transpires’ (Massumi 2013, 82, drawing on Langer). The launch was the one of the first encounters where we began to learn about what it means for a resource to become eventful, through the making of *darta* and *dartaphacts*.

Making dartaphacts matter: choreographing the political with a ‘relational architecture’

A relational architecture is oriented toward the disseminating end of things, toward potential expansion, but is anti-institutional. It unsettles. It pushes the envelope of the processual continuum. (Massumi 2013, 53)

Art is about constructing artifacts – crafted *facts* of experience. The fact of the matter is that experiential potentials are brought to evolutionary expression. (Massumi 2013, 57)

In a post-evidence and post-truth world when research data struggles to matter, and inquiry after inquiry, policy after policy seem to unfold as hollow or unsustainable grand gestures, new practices and new concepts are needed. In recent years, the making and mattering of the concepts, *darta* and *dartaphacts*, (Renold 2018), have

become useful both within and beyond the academy to re-animate what arts-based activist research can do (see also Renold and Ringrose 2019). As the quote above from Brian Massumi sets out, *darta* (a hybrid of 'data' and 'art') has become a working concept to theorise the process of how arts-based methods can support the articulation of difficult experiences. *Darta* can also become change-making *dartaphacts* – art-ful posthuman activist objects that carry affects and feelings of crafted experience, communicating 'what matters' into new places and spaces. A good example of this is the story of the graffitied rulers (*darta*) that became the ruler-skirt (*dartaphact*) in the case study Ruler HeART (Figure 2), or the salvaged motor-bike wing mirrors (*darta*) that became a positive relationships tree in the case study, Reclaiming Relationships (*dartaphact*). Gradually learning how to curate, perform and install *dartaphacts* was first explored at the launch of the AGENDA resource in November 2016 at the Pierhead building in Cardiff Bay (south Wales). This event was co-composed with the original 12 young people from the stARTer project (introduced in the making way for agenda section above) and was aimed to enable other young people and the wider public, consisting of over 100 policy-makers, educators and third sector professionals, to get a feel for how AGENDA has mattered and can come to matter.

Fielding potential is a situated process and place matters. We chose the Pierhead venue in Cardiff Bay specifically for its multi-cultural heritage and platforming of contemporary political voice and agency to meet its explicit aspiration: 'to inspire a new generation to forge a Wales for the future' (www.assembly.wales). Subverting the customary practice where policies or reports are launched through spoken words on a stage to a predominantly stilled and passive audience, we composed AGENDA's launch to tap into its ethico-political discursive, material and affective qualities. In doing so, we hoped we might enable participants to connect more directly with the *what*, *how* and *why* of AGENDA so that, 'the activity of the work's potential is opened up by the process itself' (Manning 2016, 53).

We booked the venue for a full day, and sandwiched the public launch in between two 2-hour sessions made up of over 40 young people (age 14–18) from schools and youth



Figure 2. Ruler (*darta*) Skirt (*dartaphact*). Photo by EJ Renold.

groups (and their teachers and youth workers) across south Wales. The morning session included inviting young people to take part in one of AGENDA's arts-based activist activities: WHAT JARS YOU? (see Figure 3). Within 30 min they had stuffed their jars with darta; hand-written messages on sticky notes about what affected them most on issues related to gender-based and sexual violence in their lives. Two members of the original stARTer group placed the jars on two wooden trays with the words 'what jars us' and 'fragile', to discursively signal the affective vulnerability of their contents.

When the launch opened its doors to the public at lunchtime, participants received a personal copy of the resource and were gifted their very own jar (see Renold and Ringrose 2019 for more about this JARring process). We then invited them to take a seat at tables full of AGENDA products in a room framed by further tables laden with dartaphacts created from the case studies in the resource accompanied by the newly crafted dartaphacts from earlier that morning. Our tentative aim was two-fold: first, for adult participants to get to know-feel the resource via an embodied encounter with their own gifted JAR, materialising the affective capacities of the 'doing' of AGENDA; and second, to affectively jolt those who ostensibly hold decision-making powers connecting them directly to youth voice using dartaphacts created through and for political awareness-raising and change.

As a team, we seemed to be learning how to stage an environment to become eventful with what Massumi (2013, 53) citing Lozano-Hemmer (see <http://www.lozano-hemmer.com>) refers to as 'relational architecture': that is, how an event unsettles and offers the more-than of dissemination with a process that continues to expand and create. Asking them to reach inside what JARS young people with a gift that incorporeally binds them to what matters, we were not only inviting them to support a resource where connecting through gifting is a central praxis. We were also encouraging them to 'inhabit their



Figure 3. What Jars us?. Photo by EJ Renold.

complicity and make it turn' (ibid) by doing something about the issue that was raised. For example, they were invited to fill a large JAR with their own messages on how they could support young people, and to reflect on the support they might need in return to achieve this¹¹). Indeed, the ways in which we went on to curate and stage the two following AGENDA youth cwrdds were greatly informed by the power of this process.

Disordering the day for sense and semblance

A sensible event (...) requires allowing oneself to be touched, and allowing what touches you the power to modify the way you relate (...) when we are touched, we are touched by something, and such an event cannot be explained away as a mere figment of the imagination. It is rather an awakening of the imagination. (Stengers 2019, 16)

The crafting of our two AGENDA cwrdd's involved a careful composition of performative parts to gather together as a series of w/holes: that is, for collective expressions (whole) to surface with plenty of escape routes (holes) for affective matterings to make their way in the world. A key aim is to matter-realise (Braidotti 2010) the resource in a space designed to enable young people and their adult allies to be touched by and respond to these matterings. Each cwrdd is designed to create and share dartaphacts that might enable participants to register the sticky, circulating affects (Ahmed 2004) in the here and now of 'what matters' in ways 'that cannot be explained away' (Stengers 2019, 16). Key to this process is structuring the day with a series of enabling constraints in a relational architecture that allows for plenty of wiggle-room for what surfaces to take shape and form. Massumi, drawing on Langer (1953), refers to this process as the 'semblance' in what we are theorising as a 'sensing' event. This section focuses on curating the *disOrder of the day* so that *sense* (i.e. to be affected in multi-sensory ways) and *semblance* (i.e. when being touched by what matters has room to proliferate and grow) can intra-act.

Platforming AGENDAs

AGENDA cwrdds mirror and subvert the clock time of a school day starting with an extended 'assembly'. However, unlike a traditional school assembly which rarely platforms young people's own off-timetable activisms, AGENDA participants are invited into a space designed specifically for the outing of what matters, via dramas, poems, songs, dances, films and speeches. This first hour materialises the core section of AGENDA, 'Young people making a difference in Wales'. Here, a series of performative activisms are heard and felt by young people in the room, and by those working with young people too (see *ScOUTing What Matters*, below). Each youth performance is interspersed with short position pieces from key political and influential figures who are often available for a limited time. These have included the Welsh Minister for Education, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and the directors of Stonewall Cymru and Disability Cymru. Contributing in a panel, individually, or as participants in an activity, they are placed with purpose so that young people's performative activisms are heard and felt.

Experimenting with AGENDAs

Following a short break, teachers and young people¹² take different journeys, with each group learning more about AGENDA's relevance to their own context. In small groups

and sometimes collectively young people try out some of the AGENDA activities which are designed specifically to spark a trans-individual arts-activism. For example, they might begin from the personal by reflecting on 'what matters to me' and move through to sharing their darta with others and co-creating a collective dartaphact. Previously, these have included a 'Line of Action' from the stop-start plates, a 40 ft 'Runway 4 Change', a collective 'What Jar's You?' and a mass Ruler-Rattle (see <https://vimeo.com/300026336>). These activities take place in the main assembly hall and have been facilitated by young people (e.g. an experienced school-based LGBTQ* youth group) and teachers who know the AGENDA resource well, and can work with its run-a-way¹³ praxis. They are also supported by 8–10 AGENDA volunteers,¹⁴ one per school or youth group. While the young people's activities are underway, the teachers and youth workers are in a break-out room, exploring the underpinning principles of the AGENDA resource (see Renold 2019a) and the different ways in which they might make AGENDA work for them and their students through an interactive workshop.

Gifting AGENDAs

The late morning activities and workshops culminate with an invitation for the teachers and youth workers to re-join the main space, and interact with the darta and dartaphacts created by young people. Key here is allowing just enough time for young people to share their darta and dartaphacts (if they choose to), and plan forward what might be possible in their own locale. It is also a dedicated moment for teachers to register the affective energies generated by enabling young people to platform their views in creative ways. For example, one group's pledged 'gold plate' for how to make their school more inclusive resulted in them setting up a new 'gender and sexuality support group'¹⁵ (Figure 4) – a need sparked by two students who during the 'runway 4 change' activity shared troubling coming out stories, as lesbian and as non-binary.



Figure 4. Gold Plate Pledge. Photo by EJ Renold.

Bodying AGENDAs

While the creative activism workshops always contain a run-a-way element, the final session of the day works directly with the body and the lingering affects in the room (e.g. excitement, rage, tiredness, restlessness, frustration etc.). This session is AGENDA's wild card, where we trust in what it means to co-compose movements for the not-yet, with an experienced choreographer, Jên Angharad. Emma has been working with Jên for over 8 years with diverse groups of children and young people. From one-off sessions, to week long workshops and six month projects, Jên's praxis is to work young people in ways that open movements and feelings to their more-than (for a full theorisation of this process, see Ivinson and Renold [in press](#)).

For both AGENDA cwrdds in 2017 and 2018, Jên invited *all* participants, including young people, teachers, youth workers, members from third sector agencies, caterers and AGENDA volunteers to explore what she calls their 'inner, outer and skin-o-spheres' with a loose aim of encouraging the noticing, holding and letting go of feelings that may have surfaced throughout the day. Jên will also draw on some of the feelings, movements and dartaphacts she notices throughout the day. She then introduces a lightly planned movement session that directly involves the darta and dartaphacts made earlier in the day. We focus on the 2018 cwrdd, '*Inclusive AGENDA*' to explore this process in more detail.

Just before lunch, young people are invited to take part in a piece of activism based upon Emma's involvement in the Welsh Government's #thisisme campaign (www.gov.wales/this-is-me). The core message of this campaign was to raise awareness of and open up a public conversation about the harmful impact of gender norms. *Rulers*, for noticing and moving with the fixity of gender norms, and *ribbons*, for noticing and moving with the fluidity of gender norms, are our dartaphact making materials for this session. Young people are invited to individually graffiti gold rulers with ideas on 'which rules needed to change to make the world more gender fair, gender equal, gender safe'. They are then invited to collectively rattle the rulers for 60 s (one for each elected politician in Wales) to sonically demonstrate 'what gender equality sounds like'.

As anticipated from a previous ruler-rattling workshop (see Renold 2019b), the activity ignites a glorious riot. Many rulers crack and splinter. Noise levels rise. This session is followed up by decorating multi-coloured silk ribbons with messages of who or what supports doing gender Otherwise. Each ribbon is pre-tied to six brass letters that make up the word A-G-E-N-D-A. Dividual (rather than individual) expressions of change take shape and the process creates a series of collective dartaphacts – dartaphacts to move with.

Encouraging young people to move in ways connected with their ribbons and rulers takes time. Uncertainty creeps in. Jên moves with the bodying ticks of knotty un/knowings. She suggests that members of each group share a move, like a flick of the hair, a wiggle of the hips, a hand gesture, a hop, or a spin, for others to try out. From here, each group is invited to make a short movement piece, or just one move, that can be gifted for others to try out. Some groups fly, others fall flat and fold into awkward or stilled movements. Some young people watch from the side-lines. Jên picks up movements from different groups or individuals, embodies them, and shares them for others to perform. Energies re-distribute. Awkward looks and stiffened bodies loosen. Sounds of screams and laughter fill the room.

Teachers begin to join in. Some comment that they have never seen their 'students so engaged', or 'move like that before'. Puzzlement and curiosity are strongly felt affects. In 20 min, only a couple of young people are watching from the side lines. Emma, sits next to one boy who doesn't want to move, but happily helps collect and give out the ruler-skirts for others to try on (nb. these were dartaphacts made from a previous AGENDA workshop with over 200 young people, see Renold 2019b). He and a group of girls nearby look surprised and shocked when a group of 'rugby lads' line-up to wear them, responding to Emma's shout-out: 'OK who wants to wear our gender equality ruler skirts?'. With only 30 min to go, we press play and the 'This is Me' soundtrack, from the blockbuster film, *The Greatest Showman*, blasts out from the hall's speakers. Almost immediately and simultaneously, Emma notices one young person who bursts into song, and another who bursts into tears. The soundtrack, we find out later, connects them to a difficult time, a relationship break-up. Their teacher takes them to the Cwtch, a dedicated time-out space (see below). They return and watch from the sidelines. Young people from their school, and some they met that day offer hugs. They take in one or two. Energy and noise levels continue to rise.

We form a runway with two lines of splintered gold rulers. Jên divides up those who want to rehearse a small movement piece, composed from at least one movement from every group. Six volunteers either hold up a brass A-G-E-N-D-A letter, and the remainder hold onto a ribbon and form a canopy to move under (see Figure 5).

While it's impossible to describe the multiple movements that make up the piece, dartaphacts participate and everyone has a part to play. Movements, ideas and affects are shared. Emma and their film-maker, Heloise Godfrey-Talbot, who is documenting the



Figure 5. Moving with Dartaphacts. Photo by EJ Renold.

day through image and sound, witness the scene of one group dancing their way under a rainbow arc of change-making messages, held up and supported by post-human forces and a structure (i.e. the soundtrack, the AGENDA letters, the runway of rulers and the ribbons) that seem to be making their movement possible. There is no final performance. There is only a dance-in-the-making that draws the day to a close – a process which seems to have enabled participants to attune to, be touched by, and share with each other, the bodying affects from the day. Some feelings are spoken and shared. One young person, still catching their breath, shouts out: 'It's like the wedding scene from Mamma Mia ... except with an LGBT twist!' Another young person responds with, 'I've never done so much exercise in my life!'

Addressing the cwrdd with dartaphacts as ethico-political enunciators

Both the 2017 and 2018 AGENDA cwrdds have been hosted by one of Cardiff University's conference centres located inside a student campus. This venue was chosen not just for its accessibility (parking space for cars and school buses), functionality (break out rooms off the main hall space) and affordability (a fraction of the cost of most corporate venues). Taking over a space that is used as an academic venue for the generation and sharing of knowledge was also central. Using this space for the re-mattering of youth 'voice' (Mazzei and Jackson 2017; Mayes 2019) on experiences that 'academic outputs' struggle to inform policy and practice on, provided a powerful and bubbly 'relational architecture' for some subversive entanglements.

For each event, previously created dartaphacts as ethico-political enunciators of past activisms, and the raw materials for future dartaphacts-in-the-making are carefully positioned in the space for participants to notice. Dressing the space to address what AGENDA can become is a careful doing. Our aim is to create an environment that clues participants in to what might happen or has happened, both explicitly, and in ways that work can with the prehension of knowings in the making. We provide a glimpse of this process below from the 2018 *Inclusive AGENDA* cwrdd, a theme sparked by the numerous outreach activities that year in which (too) many young people were telling us how schools were failing to acknowledge the pains and pleasures of minority and intersectional gender and sexual identities, expressions and relationships (see Quinlivan 2018; Kjaran and Sauntson 2019).

Young people¹⁶, via their teachers or youth workers, receive their own illustrated AGENDA pack in advance. It includes a short story of how AGENDA began, what to expect from the day, from food and clothing to the full programme of workshops. Our experience, however, is that sometimes this pack is received too early or too late to digest the information, or it is not engaged with much at all, and sometimes, not at all. AdDressing the space is thus a vital process in the journey of 'becoming participant' (Renold et al. 2008, see also Renold and Edwards 2018 for the use of ethical objects for 'making informed consent matter'). For *Inclusive AGENDA*, ribbons, rulers, jars and plates were key protagonists. As soon as young people arrived, they were greeted by AGENDA outreach workers¹⁷, each wearing coloured ribbon-sashes, suffragette style, inspired by the fashion activism in the AGENDA primary school case study 'All of Us' (www.agendaonline.co.uk/allofus). Each sash was pinned with the worker's first name and preferred pro-nouns. The young people started at the registration desk where they

picked up a programme and their choice of a 'squishy' (i.e. a soft foam animal figure, see below), passing a mannequin-torso draped with a graffitied ruler-cape. Moving on to their seats, they passed a busy AGENDA stand, skirted with red and green plates carrying young people's messages for what they want to stop and start to achieve gender equity and end gender injustice. Table-tops displayed copies of the resource, AGENDA post-cards, and a tray with 'fragile' stickers holding over 20 small glass jars, each stuffed with messages from young people about what JARS them about current RSE. Above the stand, an 8ft by 3ft AGENDA collage created by an undergraduate student experimenting with creative evaluations from the previous year's *Educating AGENDA* cwrdd (Figure 6) was displayed. Adjacent to this stand is a room with the sign CWTCH – a time-out room filled with arts materials and cushions. Along the journey to their seats young people have been welcomed and addressed by dartaphacts shared with permission from previous AGENDA workshops and events. Each dartaphact signals directly the artful ways in which AGENDA can come to matter, and explicitly or implicitly communicates that youth voice is mattering.

Once seated, and facing the stage, some young people might notice that the projector stand has 8 empty jars tied up with ribbon. AGENDA is spelled out in 3D brass letters, with each letter holding 8 different coloured ribbons and placed on the lip-edge of the stage so that a cascade of rainbow ribbons stream over onto the floor below. These, as we have detailed above, become part of the movement piece. Indeed, during the welcome, and throughout the day, Emma introduces each dartaphact or the materials of a becoming-



Figure 6. Assembling Agenda. Photo by EJ Renold.

dartaphact to signpost that something has mattered or might matter, with an ongoing refrain that draws attention to the many forms of participation. We pause here to illustrate this past-present-future refrain, with the story of the 'squishy cat'.

At the 2017 *Educating AGENDA cwrdd*, as young people were leaving, they received a tiny velvet red heart sprouting two tiny arms, with a Velcro fastening that could wrap around a wrist to form a bracelet. This heart was chosen to connect with the HeART activism of AGENDA (see Renold 2018; Pihkala, Huuki, and Sunnari 2019). Only a small minority (around 4–5) of the 75 young people who came to the conference declined to take one, and many asked if they could have more than one. Continuing this gifting refrain at the 2018 *Inclusive AGENDA cwrdd*, each young person was offered a small 3 × 2 cm 'squishy' animal figure (see Figure 7), but this time, on their way into the venue, not on their way out. Everyone took one – it was a popular toy for pre-teens and teens alike at the time. Like the heART, the 'squishy' was more than just any 'gift'. In her introduction to the day, Emma tells the story of why they were offered a 'squishy' to cwttch on their arrival. She tells them about a recent visit to a local high school (who could not come to the cwrdd due to clashing commitments), where she and her team were supporting the start-up of a new LGBTQ* youth group. One of the group, Emma continues, kept a squishy cat in their trouser pocket throughout the school day so that they could hold, stroke and squeeze it when things got tough. Emma relates the daily abuse the young person received for how they were expressing their gender and sexual identity to the audience. Storying the squishy in this way, introduced one of the core cwrdd themes (inclusive genders/sexualities), and was also an explicit affirmative move to signal that AGENDA and the things we might make together, can be unsettling and painful necessitating a critical and ethical pedagogy. Only six squishies (see Figure 7) were abandoned, found and



Figure 7. Island of Lost Squishies. Photo by EJ Renold.

assembled at the end of the day suggests this was a gesture that perhaps resonated and cwtched.

If a situated 'performative installation' is 'first and foremost the submitting and inserting of objects as process and result (...) a symbiosis of event and work' (Omlin 2015, 6) then the AGENDA daptaphacts that populate and are storied into the space operate at the threshold of process and product. They carry the past-present-future potentials of how what matters and might matter can look, sound, feel like and generate. Collectively they intra-act to matter-realise a human and more-than-human cwtch – a discursive, affective, material environment forged with an ethico-political 'relational architecture'.

Scouting what matters

At the 2016 launch of the AGENDA resource young people not only got a taster of putting AGENDA to work, they were also invited to experiment with a range of creative activisms back at school or in their youth group, with the promise that they could share any 'happenings' at the 2017 *Educating AGENDA cwrdd*. The development of this cwrdd (and future cwrdds) was thus at the outset contingent on and shaped by how AGENDA might land, resonate with and matter to young people in their own locales and communities. Given the potentially radical and risky content in the resource, we offered every school on-site support from our AGENDA outreach team¹⁸. During the ensuing months, we undertook multiple site visits to various schools and youth groups and a process of reaching out, folding-with and responding to a range of troubles evolved. This final section, shares some of these troubles, and how response-ability is entangled in an immanent praxis that our outreac work cwtches and cwrdds.

One group from a coastal valleys town, became particularly animated and exercised at the launch. During the 30 min session dedicated to mapping 'What's Your AGENDA?' they designed a series of pop-up performative activisms in their school the following week. Their ideas included silent-statues to address the limits and possibilities of cosmetic culture for all genders, and a flash-mob dance in their school canteen, accompanied by a speech about what they wanted to stop and start in their school to address a range of discriminatory and oppressive gender and sexual practices. Their pop-up activism ended in a call for others to join their new group 'SLAM' (pseudonym). Over 30 young people, age 11–16 joined SLAM's fortnightly meetings in the first term. They were clearly tapping into a need and desire for young people to collectively speak up and do something about a range of entangled issues. However, as they became more visible and active in the school, their advocacy for contemporary feminism and identification as 'feminists', seemed to spark a visceral backlash that SLAM (despite multi-gender membership) was implicitly discriminating against 'boys' via a well-worn 'what about the boys?' discourse (Keddie 2020), steeped in a sticky soup of 'feminist killjoy' affects (Ahmed 2017). This backlash, which is by no means unusual for feminist and queer youth groups (Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi 2019), alerted us to our own response-ability, that is, our ability to respond with an ethic of care (Barad 2007). How could our outreach cwtch this unfolding in ways that allowed the making and mattering of AGENDA, and all the young people enlivened by its process, continue on its way?

In a creative turn of events, we found out soon after SLAM began that a 'male-voice choir', *Only Boys Aloud* (pseudonym) had started up in their school. We speculate that

this may have been in direct response to the perceived 'girls-only' SLAM group¹⁹. The irony of a boys' only choir and the politicality of voice was not lost on us. Rather, it gave us plenty to work with, especially when this news was accompanied by another 'chance intrusion' (Massumi 2013). Taylor (age 13) from another AGENDA launch inspired group, Listen Up (pseudonym), had just written a song (apparently overnight), about rights, respect, safety and the strength of togetherness when people and ideas meet 'face to face'. Being there, enabled us to work swiftly with each potential arc of becoming. With support from Alys (pseudonym), a core member of our stARTer practitioner team, and the music and drama teachers from both schools, we invited *Only Boys Aloud* to become Taylor's backing chorus for her performance at the summer AGENDA cwrdd, in a programme which included an original SLAM drama and a suite of intersectional feminist and queer performances. Over 8 members accepted and co-composed a chorus to accompany Taylor's feminist anthem. They rehearsed via skype and assembled for the first time on the day of the event. Live and lively, with all the affective residues still lingering from the 4 performances that came before (including SLAM), they received a rapturous and extended applause. In that time-slip moment we felt an assemblage in formation in ways that seemed to be activating the past-present-future potentials of how voice, and specifically, the vitality of Welsh voice (this time, in all its entangled gender multiplicity) was matter-realising Taylor's vision of 'strength in togetherness', 'face to face', as process, and in performance.

Working collectively to co-compose and cwtch the more-than of unsettling, raw and painful experience has become a refrain in much of our outreach work and scOUTing process. Sometimes it includes choreographing the political via direct interventions as highlighted in the example above. At other times it can involve inviting young people to share a potential idea generated from an AGENDA workshop or offering an established group an opportunity to create and gift a new dartaphact. One group, for example, created a piece of physical theatre to address heteronormativity in the classroom, based upon their own observations and experiences. A core process of our AGENDA cwrdd's do, however, involve enabling young people to share what matters and participate, through dartaphacts only and thus in ways that keep their identity anonymous (which for some is a legal requirement). Sometimes this involves sharing a poem or film without the young person or group present. At other times, they might be physically present, (i.e. in the room), but they might not want to introduce or even be associated with the dartaphact. In some cases, how we cwtch the different modes of 'becoming-participant' (Renold et al. 2008) can occur in the split second before a performance. For example, over a period of months, Vicky worked with two young people to create a digital story about the schizoid abuse and empowerment of girl-gamers through the creation of carefully manipulated barbie-monster-dolls and their own rendition of the song 'Once I was seven years old' by Lukas Graham. Aware of their ambivalence to introduce and/or be recognised as the authors of their film, we programmed only the title and the school. Some swift eye contact between Vicky and Emma just before its showing, signalled whether one or both of them were going to introduce the film. Each of the film's two creators had challenging social relationships in school. One experienced sustained homophobic bullying and in the movement through non-binary-queer-trans identities had been selective about who they confided in. The other experienced significant and sustained bullying and these factors, combined with multiple complex emotional and additional learning requirements

there was an understandable reluctance to stand in any spotlight. Previous conferences had been well-attended by young people from their school and their circumspection was, particularly in this regard, valid. Vicky introduced the film, taking her cue from the film's creators. ScOUTing and gifting the dartaphacts that form the events that make up our AGENDA cwrdd is a response-able practice. It is a process that demands being in the midst of things, with a trusty cast of collaborators that can attune to and cwtch the potential chaos of what a cwrdd crafted with speculative pragmatism might ignite.

Never ending: to cwtch and cwrdd the more-than of how academic-activisms matter

The post qualitative inquirer, the inventor, the creator, assumes an affirmative attitude of trust in the world and experiments. (St. Pierre 2019, 7)

Activist practices (...) demand engagement, involving partners for whom such practices matter, not choosy, off-ground, theory-armed onlookers. (Stengers 2019, 19)

Guattari (1995/2006, 129) argued that artistic-academic 'toolkits composed of concepts, percepts and affects' will be used by 'diverse publics at their convenience'. The AGENDA resource is one such tool-kit, where its affirmative, creative, transformative and transversal approach to potentially radical and risky content has indeed become 'used' in myriad ways depending upon the assemblage it gets caught up in (see Curtis 2018; Economic and Social Research Council 2018; Braidwood 2018). This paper has attempted to map some of the process of what becomes possible not only when a national youth activist 'toolkit' has been co-produced with the diverse publics, 'for whom such practices matter' but what can become possible when an artful and speculative praxis invites 'those it rallies to think, imagine, create' (Stengers 2019, 19) so that what matters, is mattering and has mattered might surface and shake-up the status quo. It is an entangled embodied and embedded praxis that has been cultivated and sustained over many years of learning how to fold with a specific relational field, of local, national and international policy-practice-activist assemblages (Renold 2019a).

Carefully choreographing and cwtching the political with young people has entailed a specific run-a-way praxis that tries to attune to and platform young people's multiple micro-political gestures. It is a process which involves a careful scOUTing and gifting of what might be shared. Participants, who can be human or more-than-human (a film, a ruler-skirt) are gathered (cwrdd) in assemblages stumbled upon, forged or invited into, by being there, engaged, reaching-out in what is becoming the more-than of our 'out reach'. With each section, we have tried to share the process of how AGENDA is more than a resource, always on the make. We have illustrated how becoming eventful with AGENDA continues to be an on-going affirmative experiment of how to craft and cwtch an environment, with a 'relational architecture', that allows 'what matters' to surface in the clock-time of a school day. Our cwrdds are not conferences that bring people together to display or exchange pre-formulated ideas. Instead, as we described above, these are 'sensing' events, with 'semblance' built in so that feelings and ideas can connect, grow and become 'more-than'. They are designed for in-acting AGENDA, with performances and workshops, lightly planned and always speculative. They are crafted with dartaphacts gifted or created in-situ in a disOrdered programme that at some point, at any moment in

time, might just enable participants to enter or create a scene where 'new process not products (...) energise new modes of activity, already in germ' (Stengers 2019, 15). This is a post-human ethical praxis where noticing and nurturing creative ways to share what is mattering, is forged. This process is the 'becoming eventful' of our AGENDA cwrdds.

The making and mattering of the AGENDA resource and the concepts and praxis informing and emerging from the process joins a wider movement of feminist and queer posthuman and new-materialist scholar-activist practices in arts-based research in education²⁰. However, as many of these authors will testify, it can be a precarious, fragile and testing process to sustain such deep engagement in toxic higher education assemblages that continue to only register and value what can be quantified and measured in a metric system that assumes a linear process (research-dissemination-impact) in a sea of meaningless, yet mattering, 'impact factors'.

While there are many important critiques of the ways in which university systems are territorialising the arts for neoliberal impact and engagement agendas which gloss the deep ethico-political stratifications of how engagement outreach policies and practices might intensify the vulnerabilities of those most at risk, this is not a time to withdraw from or ditch these new directions (Bochner 2018; Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen 2018). Rather, it may be a critical opening of how one assemblage (the neo-liberal impact machine) might entangle with another assemblage (the rising ethico-political onto-epistemologies of researcher response-ability, Stengers 2019) in ways that can radicalise the impact and engagement agenda. Perhaps now is the time to inject some 'ethical vertigo' (Guattari 1995/2006), into the research impact agenda, with a dose of sense and semblance that might unsettle these toxic assemblages just enough to make them sway and tip them off balance. Such affirmative disruptions might support the potentialities of how the ethical matterings of our scholar-activisms can make a difference, although not always in ways we might predict or anticipate and where process not product or measurable 'outcome' is foregrounded and valued. This paper is one small drop in articulating part of that process, making visible different ways to experiment with what more our research engagements might do, be and become, in events and with dartaphacts designed specifically to make the more-than of a resource, become eventful, and continue to matter.

Notes

1. See, for example the work of Damodar 2012; Alturi 2013; Jackson and Mazzei 2016; Mitchell and Maria 2018; Shefer et al. 2018; Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez 2018; López López 2019; Gallagher 2020.
2. See for example, the edited collections of Allen and Rasmussen (2017) and Kjaran and Sauntson (2019) and the gender and sexuality activist research in Ringrose and Renold (2014), Jackson (2018), Kim and Ringrose (2018), Keddie (2020), Rodela et al. (2020) and Jones (2020).
3. For published papers, see the work of Coll, Ollis, and O'Keeffe (2019), Quinlivan (2018), Talburt (2018a, 2018b), Page et al. (2019) and Keddie (2020).
4. The crafting of this paper was also unanticipated, sparked as it was by an urgency for us to collectively theorise the making and mattering of the processual and speculative AGENDA cwrdds for past-present-future cwrdds in the making in Wales and Finland (see Dr. Huuki's research, 'Gender-based violence in pre-teen relationship cultures: How history, place, affect and arts interventions matter' funded by The Academy of Finland 2016–21, project number 295000).

5. We draw on Barad's (2007, 141) concept of 'intra-action' to highlight how phenomena (e.g. people, things and affects) are always already entangled and are constantly influencing and participating in action with each other.
6. The 'cwrdd' was first introduced by Jên Angharad and put into practice for the 2017 Future Matters Collective event, of which Emma and Jên are core members. See <http://www.maxwellhicks.com/fmc/talks/making-futures-matter-september-2016/>.
7. This process involved and was supported by representatives from third sector partners, collaborations that had been on-going for over 7 years (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Cymru, Children's Commissioner for Wales and Welsh Women's Aid), the process (in which over 50 young people participated in) was sparked from the Welsh Government's practitioner's guide on whole school approaches to 'healthy relationships education' and its explicit encouragement for schools to 'support young people to campaign and raise awareness of gender and sexual violence' (Welsh Government 2015b).
8. We draw here on Erin Manning's medieval appropriation of art as process, as 'the way' through which we engage and take response-ability for what emerges.
9. For our research, see Ivinson and Renold (2016, 2020), Renold and Ivinson (2019), Renold and Ringrose (2017), Renold et al. (2020), Renold and Edwards (2018). See also Taylor and Hughes (2016), Ringrose, Warfield, and Zarabadi (2019), Page et al. (2019) and Strom et al. (2019).
10. Core members of AGENDA's outreach team include: Matthew Abraham, Victoria Edwards and Kate Marston.
11. These messages informed not only the crafting of future AGENDA workshops, but were drawn upon informally in the development of the new Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum for Wales.
12. Permission from parents and carers are sought in advance. Sometimes, youth workers/teachers will accompany with young people that might request this or need additional support (e.g. language, behavioural).
13. The concept of the run-a-way was inspired by young people's own analysis of the unanticipated twists and turns of our research activism in the early formations of the AGENDA resource ('not knowing where our project might go to next', and how 'our ideas were always running away from themselves'). Inspired by Erin Manning's notion of an old medieval definition of art as 'the way', as the manner through how we engage, in-acting a runaway praxis requires a careful attention to the ineffable proto possibilities of ideas as they roll, flow and are transformed through words, artefacts and new events.
14. The AGENDA cwrdd volunteers can be undergraduate and postgraduate volunteers, paid and volunteer AGENDA outreach workers and youth workers from third sector organisations. There are at least two planning meetings prior to every event, with a full briefing pack, AGENDA training for those new to the resource/process and dedicated roles that play to people's strengths and passions (e.g. photographer, safe-guarding, arts-workshop facilitator etc).
15. We discover, 4 months later, via the school's twitter feed, that this new group was formed, and launched during the school's first Pride week.
16. Parents/carers also sign and return a consent form for their child's participation via the school or youth worker.
17. The AGENDA team supporting the 'Inclusive AGNENDA' (2018) cwrdd included teachers, msc/phd students and university lecturers: Matthew Abraham, Max Ashton, Siriol Burford, Victoria Edwards, Catherine Phillips, Henna Nissa, Catrin Pallot, Catt Turney, Emma Renold and Honor Young.
18. The AGENDA outreach team, during the first year, consisted primarily of Emma Renold, Vicky Edwards and ex-teacher/well-being consultant Siriol Burford.
19. We speculate, based on previous research into feminist/queer youth groups (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019) that SLAM's overt feminism and bodying of queer gender was threatening entrenched gender norms in an ex-mining locale that continues to invest in the historical legacies of binary gender relations and roles that have enabled previous generations to survive harsh economic conditions, yet are experienced by contemporary generations as often unbearable in a highly visible world of living/doing gender, where old norms are

simultaneously under erasure and reinforced (see Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012; Renold and Ringrose 2019).

20. For examples, see Hickey Moody (2017, 2018), Hickey-Moody and Page (2015), Renold and Ringrose (2019), Gray, Knight, and Blaise (2018), Denzin and Giardina (2018), Harris and Taylor (2016), Springgay and Zaliwska (2017), Springgay and Truman (2017), Stanger (2018), Taylor and Bayley (2019), Coleman, Page, and Palmer (2019), Harris and Holman Jones (2019), Pihkala, Huuki, and Sunnari (2019), Huuki (2019) and Strom et al. (2019), Coleman and Ringrose (2013).

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Notes on contributors

E. J. Renold is Professor in Childhood Studies at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Wales. Inspired by feminist, queer and new materialist posthumanist theory, her research investigates how gender and sexuality come to matter in children and young people's everyday lives across diverse sites, spaces and locales through co-productive, creative and affective methodologies.

Victoria Edwards is a PhD candidate at the school of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. Her doctoral research focuses on youth gaming cultures, digital health and gender and sexual well-being, and uses creative and participatory research methods and posthuman theory to explore the embodied practices of teen gamers with additional learning requirements.

Dr Tuija Huuki is associate professor in women and gender studies at the University of Oulu, Finland. Her research explores gender-based violence in educational environments and specifically feminist post-structural, new-materialist, post-human approaches to understanding force relations, affectivity, and subjectivity across the course of a young life.

ORCID

E. J. Renold  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6472-0224>

Victoria Edwards  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9208-4488>

Tuija Huuki  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5149-0626>

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