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## **EXPLORING ADULT LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON WIDER COMMUNITIES THROUGH ARTS-BASED METHODS: AN EVALUATION OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY THROUGH FILMMAKING**

**ABSTRACT:** This article reports on a project that employed narrative inquiry captured on film to explore the creative practices of five mature graduates. They had previously been mature students and continued to work within their various communities after they had left formal education.

The participants were asked to describe their creative practice and its impact on other people through interviews and presentations. A researcher with help from a professional filmmaker carried out the project. From the initial footage, three polished, edited versions of the films were made. The participants could use the films to promote their own work if they so wished.

Narrative inquiry is a means of seeing the connections between significant incidents and longer-term impact beyond formal education. The film footage was able to capture the connectivity between formal education, the participants and the people who had been touched by their creative practices. It successfully gave a narrative coherence to the participants' stories. Where appropriate, the visual aspects of creativity were captured, in this case, the participants all had a creative practice, and the visual realm was an important part of their stories.

The findings of the project were that the participants had some shared values about the importance of creative education. They all developed portfolio careers in order to carry on their creative work. All the participants were able to give examples of particular instances where their creative practice had had an impact on other people. In other words, adult learning does not just influence the individual but can have a wider and longer-term impact on others.

**KEYWORDS:** Arts-based research methods, art and design, adult education, learning journeys, portfolio careers.

### **Introduction**

This article reports on a project that made use of arts-based methods to investigate possible links between adult education and the impact five mature graduates had on their communities after they had graduated and left formal education in the United Kingdom. The participants had studied art and design through Access to HE (an enabling course) as well as undergraduate and postgraduate education. They were asked to tell their stories about their learning journeys and what they were doing post-graduation. Their narratives were captured on three films. A researcher with help from a professional filmmaker carried out the project. From the initial footage, three polished, edited versions of the films were made. The participants could use their film

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to promote their own work if they so wished. This added an aspect of mutual benefit to the research process.

An approach was employed that had its roots in narrative inquiry, where story-telling and filmmaking were brought together. Narrative inquiry as used here is a means of seeing the connections between significant incidents and longer-term impacts beyond formal education. (Broadhead & Gregson 2018; Andrews 2014; Butler-Kisber 2010; Clandinin & Connelly 2000). The characteristics of narrative inquiry are that they are a way of understanding experience. It is also a collaboration between researcher and participants over time and in social interaction with milieu. The terms of narrative inquiry are based on Dewey's concept of situation, continuity and interaction. Narrative inquiry weaves together the personal and social (interaction) with the past, present and future (continuity) in a particular place (situation). This means that a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is constructed (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. 50). The film format attempts to represent this narrative space where the participants can tell their stories. Where appropriate, the visual aspects of creativity were captured through presentations; in this case, the participants all had a creative practice, and the visual realm was an important element of their stories. Arts-based research is 'an effort to utilise the forms of thinking and forms of representation that the arts provide as a means through which the world can be better understood and through such understanding comes the enlargement of mind' (Barone & Eisner 2011, p. x). This was seen as appropriate because the five participants were all creative practitioners and had received an art and design education. The visual language shared by the practitioners could enhance their narratives.

There were challenges when using this method. The researcher chose to analyse raw footage because editing can dramatically change a story. As with other forms of narrative inquiry such as verbal or written accounts, edited films are prone to pitfalls, such as narrative smoothing and adaptation through exaggeration for dramatic effect. However, it must be noted that the dissemination of the inquiry inevitably entails selection and editing. All stories are co-constructed by those who tell and those who retell them. They emerge in interaction with present or absent others. The editing and selection are consequently a further element of construction in which the narrators themselves are normally excluded. Clandinin et al. (2009) have talked about the ethical responsibility of the researcher to tell an authentic story and to make processes of the story's creation transparent. The researcher was mindful of the need to represent their stories with integrity when analysing and presenting the participants' narratives. The use of film also led to other ethical dilemmas around anonymity of the participants.

The purpose of this research project was firstly to evaluate the usefulness of filmmaking as a means of recording and analysing adults' learning stories. Secondly the

project aimed to find out what impact adult education had on communities while recognising the benefits gained by the individuals. The theoretical context considered the research previously undertaken on mature graduate outcomes and how often mature graduates showed a concern for creative practice, civic participation and community engagement, alongside paid employment. It could be seen that the participants had constructed portfolio careers, appropriate to their personal aspirations and altruistic concerns for others (Cawsey, Deszca & Mazerolle 1995; Bryan 2012).

The film footage was able to capture the connectivity between formal education, the participants and the people who had been touched by their creative practices. It successfully gave a narrative coherence to the participants' stories.

The findings of the project were that the participants had some shared values about the importance of creative education (person-centred, community based, social justice, democratic education, widening access to the arts). In two examples, the participants noticed a particular social need that their work could help meet. All the participants were able to give examples of particular instances where their creative practice had had an impact on other people. The importance of their own life experiences, including their previous learning journeys was seen to be an important factor of their continued creative practice. In other words, adult learning does not just influence the individual but can have a longer-term impact on wider communities.

## **Theoretical Context**

Universities in the United Kingdom currently collect data about what undergraduate students do when they have achieved their degrees through the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) survey. There has been little focus on mature students and the relationship between age and post-degree employment (Woodfield 2011). The dominant discourses about graduate outcomes are around the extent to which they have secured part- or full-time, paid graduate-level work and the extent to which they have gained a higher salary. There is evidence that there are wider benefits for individuals, families and communities (Broadhead, Davies & Hudson 2019). Participation in adult learning can lead to self-fulfilment, better health, family role models, and civic participation (Smith & Saunders 1991; Woodley 1995; Feinstein & Hammond 2004; Schuller et al. 2004; Hammond & Feinstein 2005; 2006; Woodfield 2011). However, the focus of this article is the outcome for those mature graduates who chose to use their skills to develop their creative practices and those of other people. They have not sought to get a 'better' job in the traditional sense, but wish to pursue a portfolio career, where they may take part in an assemblage of part-time work, community engagement activities and creative practice (Cawsey, Deszca & Mazerolle 1995). One way of dealing

with the precariousness of the creative professions has been for artists and designers to construct 'portfolio' careers where a person undertakes many kinds of freelance and part-time jobs concurrently and consecutively (Bryan 2012). The physical, material and emotional investment adult students put into their education can lead to very different work patterns and ways of living than they had previously experienced; indeed, being an artist or designer could be very different from what they imagined or expected.

Different ways of working may not have been uppermost among the mature graduates' original reasons for studying art and design, however motivations are complex and fluid depending on the changing contexts of education and work (Kember et al. 2008). Although these choices may not lead to job and financial security, they would enable the mature graduates to pursue activities that they saw as important. Kenny et al. (2010, p. 11) undertook research in Ireland on mature, disadvantaged students and found that 'Many students were focused on using their qualification to escape from low-status, unstimulating and low-paid work. A degree was a bridge to finding work that was more meaningful'. They went on to argue that 'The graduates repositioned themselves in jobs in which they could envisage a future and that entailed greater levels of commitment and autonomy. Most notably graduates have chosen to work in the educational sector, very often in their own communities' (Kenny et al. 2010, pp. 116-117). This suggests that some mature students see the wider social purpose of their education rather than the narrow lens of functionalism and the utilitarianism that drives much of the discourse about lifelong learning and higher education.

The importance to mature learners of community and working with others has been identified by other researchers. For example, Reay et al. (2002) have suggested that non-traditional students undertaking an Access course placed value on community and cooperation rather than on more individualistic approaches to decision-making. In their research findings, altruistic motivations for learning seem to have been ascribed to female mature students in particular. Skeggs (1997) identified a 'respectable' working-class femininity, associated with strong morality including codes of (hetero) sexuality, domesticity and motherhood, often based on a high regard for the family and the local community. Other working-class femininities may include the 'community stalwart', the woman wishing 'to give something back', a motivation that goes beyond that of the individual or family (Maguire 2001).

Stone and O'Shea (2012) have argued that learning on enabling courses can lead to 'more active citizenship' (McGivney 1999, p. vi). This is where students become more interested and involved in community, social and political interests and activities, there is also an increase in 'intellectual interests, social liberalism, altruism, feminism and life satisfaction' (West et al. 1986, p. 64).

To summarise, the state discourse about graduate outcomes is focused on paid graduate-level employment. However, the DLHE survey does not capture the nuanced employment and professional practices within the creative industries. Nor does the DLHE reflect the complex motivations of mature graduates and the choices they make in terms of continuing their creative practices after graduation. There is some research to suggest that these students study their subject for many complex reasons and going forward they sometimes choose to 'give something back' to people in their communities as part of their portfolio careers.

## **Research approach**

The research approach can be best described as arts-based research which comprises two elements, narrative inquiry and filmmaking as a means of documenting and disseminating that inquiry. Art-based research comprises a range of strategies or approaches that draw upon one or more of the arts in the inquiry (Butler-Kisber 2010). They are centred in the belief that experience, understanding and meaning are multifaceted (Rolling 2010). The arts offer ways of knowing derived from sensory perception leading to emotional, aesthetic and intellectual responses to the world. These different way of knowing can potentially enhance a researcher's comprehension of complex human interactions.

Butler-Kisber (2010) places narrative inquiry within a qualitative, arts-based paradigm. The associated processes of reflection on past events, telling, listening and retelling are suitable for those inquiries that wish to capture experience (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Butler-Kisber 2010; Rolling 2010; Farenga 2018). As this project was investigating mature graduates' learning journeys and post-graduation experiences this approach was seen as relevant because it is, 'research that uses the arts, in the broadest sense, to explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience' (Savin Baden & Wimpenny 2014, p. 1).

Given the nature of the data collection method used here – narratives collected on film – it is imperative to establish the ontological reality that is being investigated and the epistemological consequences of that decision. Piantanida, McMahon and Garman (2003) provide a useful framework for evaluating the 'appropriateness' of the chosen method in relation to a research topic.

They propose making methodological decisions clear and transparent by applying a 'logic-of-justification' to the selection of the research approach where it is asked, 'What is the nature of social and educational reality? What is the relationship of the investigator to what is investigated? and, How is truth to be defined?' (Smith & Heshusius 1986, p. 8).

***What is the nature of social and educational reality?***

In this case arts-based research is appropriate for researching social realities that are complex and contingent on particular contexts. For example, the intersections of inclusive, creative and educational practices that are carried out in local communities by individuals who themselves have been previously marginalised within formal learning sites. Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that it is not possible to isolate cause from effect, 'because there are multiple causes for every effect and all variables are understood to shape one another across time and space, either subsequently, simultaneously, or recursively' (Rolling 2010). These social realities can also be interpreted from many perspectives, including those held by participants and researchers that privilege the emotional and aesthetic aspects of their stories, practices and experiences. Arts-based approaches are able to explore this diversity of meaning and interpretation (Butler-Kisber et al. 2003; Rolling 2010; Sinner, Irwin & Adams 2019). In the case of film, expression can come from the words the participants say, the tone of their voices and the way they move their bodies. Furthermore, audio-visuals can also communicate meaning through colour, light, pace and framing. Layers of meaning can be explored that may not be accessible through other forms of data and analysis.

***What is the relationship of the investigator to what is investigated?***

As a researcher, I occupy a position of both insider and outsider (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). I have worked with mature students in a professional capacity. I have also been involved in participatory arts as a practitioner. Therefore, I have had some common experiences and understandings shared by the participants. However, I do not share the creative practices of these particular artists and have not experienced graduating as a mature student. This leads to a critical but empathic distance between myself, the inquirer and the participants. Piantanida, McMahon and Garman (2003, p. 188) argue that, 'Art and aesthetic expression were valued for their power to cultivate one's own sensibilities, engender empathy toward others, evoke or provoke responses from others, offer catharsis for troubling experiences, celebrate the human spirit, and/or foster awareness of and sensitivity toward marginalized or disenfranchised groups'. The shared values, empathies and understandings around creative practice suggest that an arts-based approach facilitates narratives that are constructed between researcher and participants.

***How is truth to be defined?***

Notions of validity, significance and exportable generalisations can be problematic when using arts-based research methods and may be irrelevant in some contexts (Sinner,

Irwin & Adams 2019). Within the field of education there is a dominance of science-based research, therefore indicators of research quality (e.g., validity, reliability, replicability, generalizability) are assumed (Rolling 2010). There is also an implication that there are ‘truths’ or generalisations that can be inferred from the research. In contrast, Piantanida, McMahon and Garman (2003, p. 187) argue, ‘that a culture of arts-based research in education is still evolving, and any consensus on the hallmarks for judging such studies has yet to emerge’.

The outcomes from the research appear not to fit the quality tests of validity, reliability and generalisation. However, Butler-Kisber et al. (2003) argue that experimenting with art-based approaches enhances the validity/trustworthiness of the work. They were able to disseminate their findings in new ways, and from different points of view. This led to more focus and transparency when explaining the work to others.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the notion of trustworthiness as an alternative to validity of the research, where, ‘the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of’ (p. 209). Rolling (2010, p. 110) proposes that, ‘the indirect sources of arts-based outcomes may require a kind of interpretive validity. Interpretive validity in arts-based research might invoke each of the multiple readings within a research study to serve as a criterion for trustworthiness’.

Bassey (1999) also argues that notions of trustworthiness were very suitable for research in educational settings due to the complex nature of the context and interactions of people within the educational process. The outcomes of research could be described as ‘fuzzy’ generalisations in that rather than seeking to find an absolute truth or law, the research aimed to say this happened within this context and it could happen within another one. In other words, claims derived from case study research referred to what is possible, likely or unlikely (Bassey 1999). The constructing of a detailed and rich description and a coherent and chronological narrative account was seen as an important test of trustworthiness.

### **Method of narrative inquiry through filmmaking**

The method was partly informed by the project, *UK Further Education Transforming Lives* project (Duckworth & Smith 2018) where people were filmed telling their stories about the impact education had on their lives. It also had similarities to the work of Mumtaz (2015) and Walsh, Rutherford and Crough (2013) where multimedia art forms combine storytelling with digital media revealing personal stories that enhance our understanding of human experiences. Mature graduates from the previous seven years were asked if they would like to be part of a research project that would involve being filmed.

The five consenting participants were contacted through email so they could be informed about the aims and objectives of the research and told that it would contribute to a greater understanding of the motivations and achievements of mature students. Before the filming took place the five were asked to prepare themselves for talking about their experiences and about the projects they were currently undertaking. They were given some open questions to consider: Can you describe your creative practice? What are you currently working on? Do you think your previous experiences have had an impact on what you are doing now? If so, can you explain in what way?

A professional film maker was employed to shoot and edit the films. They were able to set up a first and second camera which would help with editing and capturing the speaker from different angles to make the film more visually interesting. The participants were asked to talk in response to the questions. They also gave visual presentations about their work, that were recorded and edited into the films. The participants created the presentations independently with no direction from the researchers.

This led to two hours of 'raw footage' that provided a type of field data that could be used for analysis. This raw footage was also edited into three films that the participants could use to promote their own projects if they so wished. This provided an element of reciprocity to the project, that was not used as an inducement to take part but suggested later on in the project. Duckworth and Smith (2018) have proposed that reciprocity is important; it can mediate against objectifying and/or exploiting the participants.

The participants were sent copies of the films so they could check that they were happy with the content. Any concerns raised by them would be dealt with through the editing process.

### **Ethics of narrative inquiry through filmmaking**

The project raised some ethical dilemmas and Duckworth and Smith's (2018) research was a useful guide in deciding how best to act. The project had been reviewed and approved by the University's ethics committee; however, a more reflective approach was used throughout the project to ensure the work was ethically produced. A tension arose between the convention in educational research of keeping the participants' identities anonymous and the need to acknowledge those participants as authors of original creative works. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have noted that this is a common issue in narrative inquiry, especially when narratives become so detailed that individuals can be recognised from the text. Additionally, if the films were made public as an output of the project the participants would be recognisable. The approach taken by Duckworth and Smith (2018) was, 'We adhered closely to the BERA ethical guidelines (2011) throughout the project offering all participants anonymisation at the recruitment stage, but as the



focus was on the transformative qualities of their educational experiences, most wanted their real names to be used. Each video was edited and then shared with the participant prior to publication. Re-edits were undertaken at the participant's request.' (p. x).

This project used the participants' names in the films in a similar fashion because it was important to recognise their intellectual property as authors and artists. However, in the written analysis of the project alternative names were used to provide some protection from any unanticipated repercussions from the research. The analysis was not based on making judgments about the participants' creative works, even though they were part of their stories.

The relationship between participant, researcher and filmmaker in this form of narrative inquiry created the data; researchers cannot stand outside the research (Clandinin et al. 2009). The data comprised a number of interlocking narratives: the images filmed; the images edited in (and those left out); the words spoken in the films; written accounts by the authors, artists, researcher; records of interviews or discussions; the presentation of the research results. Narrative inquiry does not necessarily end with the dissemination of the stories but can carry on through post-presentation interaction and beyond. Thus, the ethical consideration of the research outcomes was involved and long-term. Narrative inquiry was research, but it was also the relationships between people which made ethical questions of how to act well with others central to the inquiry (Caine et al. 2013). The tensions in these relationships needed to be acknowledged and seen as a source of ethical reflection (Clandinin et al. 2009; Caine et al. 2013). The researcher was mindful that their words and stories could have unsettling impacts once they were shared with others (Caine et al. 2013).

Ethical considerations were central to the decision to tell the stories that were told in this study. The dignity of the participants was preserved and the long-term impact of the stories was considered. These considerations were not only related to the interactions that produced a joint narrative. Thought was given to where and when the stories were heard, read and seen.

### **Analysis of film footage and related field notes**

The analysis was undertaken in two main stages. The first, descriptive stage, was where the stories found in the raw film footage were teased out and represented in written form; the importance of this was that themes in the data could be understood in context. The second, conceptual and interpretive stage, was where the stories were broken down into themes. The result of this process was that some elements of the stories became decontextualized. At this point the researcher drew upon reflective practice and interpretation in order to identify important themes that ran across the stories.

The analysis was then fine-tuned in the writeup where the researcher aimed to provide an account that comprised, ‘transparency, inclusion of participant voice, aesthetic qualities, verisimilitude and utility’ (Butler-Kisber 2010, p. 31). Through writing the article and making the edited version of the films, the themes became distilled and recontextualised into the outcomes of the project.

Butler-Kisber (2010) comments that the research process appears to be linear and in clearly defined stages, for example, collecting field notes, analysing the data and then writing up the report or article. However, within arts-based research the process can be much more fluid and iterative. In some senses the analysis goes on throughout all the stages depending on what the researcher brings to the process. The analysis of the themes developed through a de-contextualising and re-contextualising cycle which was much more iterative in practice (Duckworth & Smith 2018). The raw film footage, which was studied for common themes, proved to be really useful because it could be revisited and reviewed.

## **Description of findings**

The analysis began with a description of the three projects undertaken by the participants. *Sew for Change* was created by Eliza. Jake and his partner originated *Art School/Ilkley*. Karen, Mandy and Angela were all members of TCL Collective, which they started with two other artists. All the projects engaged with local communities to promote the participation in creative practice.

### ***Sew for Change***

Eliza was in her late 50s and had studied most, if not all, of her post-compulsory education part-time which had brought many challenges (Broadhead & Gregson 2018). While undertaking her own studies Eliza was also running sewing classes for other people in her community. She had previously studied on an Access course which led her to her undergraduate education in textiles. Finally, she went on to postgraduate study where she seized an opportunity to take part in an international residency as part of an Erasmus+ project with a social design collective (Brave New Alps 2019). This seemed to be an important turning point in Eliza’s story, leading her to make the courageous decision to take time off from her paid work to develop her own creative practice outside the United Kingdom.

Eliza set up a sewing project in Rovereto, a city and commune in Trentino in northern Italy. Once she had established herself there, she set up sewing workshops for refugees and migrants. Using her textile skills Eliza aimed to, ‘find out what their future is, e.g.,

stay in country or return if possible, what they want their future to be and how they can make this happen?’

Eliza sought to,

‘capture these questions/thoughts through the visual – by writing, mark-making or drawing on fabric. This would then be embroidered and eventually ‘gifted’ back to the women.’

After working on her project for three months Eliza returned to the United Kingdom and graduated from her postgraduate course. She then began developing more work that used sewing as a catalyst for social change and self-reflection.

During Eliza’s film and visual presentation, it was revealed how she continued to work with many community groups in the United Kingdom. She taught dressmaking skills, and at the same time was able to use this to gather stories from her learners. For example, she worked with a student-led initiative to tackle Period Poverty internationally by running workshops where people could sew, assemble and distribute reusable, washable ‘Days for Girls’ sanitary kits (Freedom for Girls 2019). Eliza claimed there were,

‘Two principal goals of helping: manage problems in living more effectively and develop valued outcomes/ utilising opportunities. [Participants] become better problem solvers going forward. Sewing is just another way!’

Eliza saw a need and that her skills could meet that need; she did not do this for financial gain. Although she was supported on her trip to Italy and this was an opportunity for her to travel, she did have to contribute a lot to the project herself. She also risked the stability of her day-to-day existence by taking three months off work. Eliza was doing this work for different communities of sewers alongside her part-time employment and her own creative practice. She created a form of portfolio career that was appropriate and unique to her particular circumstances.

### *Art School/Ilkley*

Jake who was in his 50s had previously studied on a part-time Access course in art and design and then, because of his previous experiential learning, was able to undertake postgraduate study, achieving his master’s in 2016. After graduating he created Art School/Ilkley with his partner. Art School/Ilkley taught art workshops for young people after school and creative courses for adults in the evening. The courses were non-formal and not accredited. The Art School also delivered weekend day courses that explored drawing through stitch, printmaking and life drawing. Jake explained in his presentation and film that, ‘My sense is that the arts in schools are at an all-time low but there is a sea change. Access and undergraduate study need to be defended... the only available route for many at the moment’. He continued,

'I have worked on two collaborative projects, which involved residency, response and exhibitions. I am also project managing new studio and exhibition space as part of the new project. This space will also house Art School, of which I am a joint founder, which runs workshops and classes for the community, working with 11-18-year olds after school, and adult classes in the evening. This month, under the Art School banner we have facilitated a Bradford School Trust to celebrate creativity in education. This involves nine schools coming together for a single day of celebration, music, visual arts, performance and dance.'

Even though the Art School currently was not focussed on accreditation, Jake explained how some of his learners had used the sessions to prepare a portfolio of artwork so they too could attend an Access course. Thus, a progression route had been made into formal education for those who needed it. Jake talked about the importance of his learning journey and previous employment,

'My life experience has given me entrepreneurial skills, which helped me set up a project that would pay its way. From the confidence I have gained from Access and my master's I have been able to pass it on to other people. I treat them like professional artists.'

Jake founded Art School/Ilkley in order to provide art education for those who could not access it formally. He is currently working through sharing his skills and knowledge with a wide range of traditional and 'non-traditional' learners who wish to be creative practitioners. Jake's film and presentation also indicated that Art School/Ilkley gave opportunities to other mature graduates to teach and deliver creative workshops. This extended the reach of the work to other practitioners and developed a rich community of practice.

### *TCL Collective*

There were five members of TCL Collective who had met in higher education and decided that they would set up an exhibiting group after they completed their master's course in Creative Practice. At least three of the TCL Collective had similar learning journeys to Eliza and Jake in that they had studied on Access courses prior to undergraduate and postgraduate art and design education. Karen, Mandy and Angela had worked with the other members of the collective on various exhibiting and art activities in Ireland and the United Kingdom. They had worked together to make a visually exciting presentation that documented all their different activities. The three artists were filmed individually so each could tell their own story. Karen commented that the, 'TCL Collective are preparing for their forthcoming trip to Southern Ireland, Kinvara. Fellow artists will be joining us. Our mission is to respond to place and generate work

that will culminate in a pop-up exhibition at the KAVA (Kinvara Area Visual Arts) at the end of the week.

Mandy explained that, 'My work is community orientated, I exhibit in cafes, community centres, art trails.' She continued to talk about the impact her work had on other people,

'Through the arts trail, I have worked with other people. I have given some of them confidence. Broken down barriers and fears. If I can do it, you can do it! It can be overwhelming, for example, I was working in a community hall where someone had seen my work on Instagram and came rushing over with enthusiasm, wanting to buy it!' Mandy also talked about her part-time teaching role on an Access to HE courses that she did to supplement her art practice.

## **Interpretation of findings**

The second stage of the analysis was to consider some interpretations of the findings. Seven themes were identified from the film footage that captured the participants' stories. These were: risk and sacrifice; helping others in local communities; the value of art and design; the significance of previous learning; portfolio careers; emotion and showing the work of other people.

### *Risk and sacrifice*

The mature graduates were able to take various risks when leaving their education and also made sacrifices in order to perpetuate their creative practices. For example, Eliza took a risk with her employment by giving up three months to go to Italy, without knowing who her future students would be or what it would be like working in another country. She also sacrificed her own time in all the community sewing activities. Jake and his partner sacrificed financial security in order to set up the Art School/Ilkley, without knowing what the response would be from the local communities. They also worked long hours to ensure the success of the project.

### *Helping others in local communities*

There were aspects of everyone's stories which were about using their creative skills to help other people. Eliza's work around period poverty was aimed at improving the lives of young girls through sewing. Jake wanted to give opportunities for mature graduates to get teaching experience; he also wanted to provide an opportunity for people in his community to study art and design. Mandy and Angela talked about the pleasure their work had given other people, recounting the responses they had received from their audiences and how they had made them feel.

### *Value of art and design*

All the mature students valued art and design education. This was very explicit in the example of Jake who recreated an art and design pedagogy because he believed it would benefit other people. Eliza used her participatory sewing workshops as a means of exploring issues and stories with others. Mandy brought art and design skills to others through various interventions in community centres and arts trails.

### *Significance of previous learning*

Within the participants' narratives it can be seen that their creative activities were part of their wider stories in which their previous education experiences play a significant role. Eliza took part in the international residency to Italy through her engagement in her master's course. Jake was inspired by the art and design pedagogies he had experienced himself, and these were the basis of his own teaching practice. The connections Jake made when he was studying were utilised when he was looking for artist-teachers to teach in his art school. The TCL arts group met each other during their previous education. In other words, their education appears to have not only developed skills and knowledge but also social capital (Johnson et al. 2020).

### *Portfolio careers*

The participants combined their work with local communities with other activities and were all engaged in developing their portfolio careers. Eliza worked part-time, continued her own sewing practice and her sewing workshops. Jake continued his own part-time self-employment, his own creative practice alongside managing and teaching, with his partner, at Art School/Ilkley. Mandy undertook various teaching and community roles as well as continuing her own photography practice and being part of the TCL Collective. Karen and Angela worked in jobs they had done for many years while at the same time continuing their own creative practices and taking part in many TCL Collective exhibitions.

### *Emotion*

The emotional aspects of the participants' stories such as pride, passion, sentiment and joy were apparent in the film footage and at certain points have seeped out into this article. For example, Angela talked about the impact her Access education had on her life. It was not just the content of the story that was meaningful, but also the manner in which she told the audience about her experiences. Angela's film footage was very moving and evoked feelings in the researcher that were beyond 'disinterested' academic

study. This is important because the participant's visible emotional response to her own story indicates the value and purpose she places on educational opportunities.

### *Showing the work of other people*

The participants showed images of the work they had done with other people in their presentations which formed part of the film footage. They were clearly really proud of what their own students and tutees had achieved by being part of the workshops and community activities. Art School/Ilkley in particular show-cased the work of their students to a great extent. Broadhead (2020) has argued that critical review and exhibition is an important aspect of informal learning associated with community arts education.

When looking at the themes identified in the film footage and the participants' stories it can be seen that they contribute towards a wider picture where creatives appear to hold some common values. These are related to a belief in the importance of creative education and that it should be person-centred, community-based and driven by social justice and democratic values in order to promote widening access to the arts.

### **Reflective evaluation**

There were benefits and disadvantages in using film making to inform narrative enquiry. The participants' stories were told by themselves in the first instance. They were able to communicate by the tone of their voice and stance of their own bodies what was important to them. Emotion was conveyed and gave the film footage a feeling of authenticity. The film could also capture the participants' own presentations about the visual imagery created by themselves and the people in their learning communities.

However, Pink (2007) has pointed out that filming may actually interfere with the relationship between researcher and participant. The awareness of 'being filmed' may be off-putting to some people, influencing how they come across on camera. The knowledge that participants were going to be filmed may have discouraged some people from taking part in the project.

Working with a professional film-maker could also have disrupted the relationship between the researcher and participants. However, their technical skills were very helpful and allowed the researcher to focus on the content of the narratives. The researcher's lack of technical expertise did not impede the research process because they could rely on the film-maker's knowledge and skills in filming and editing. When making the three finished films, the dangers of editing became very apparent to the researcher. The aesthetics of the films were hard to separate from the research findings because context and form are always integrated in the final outcome. Edited films are prone to pitfalls,

such as narrative smoothing and adaptation through exaggeration for dramatic effect. This influenced the decision to analyse the unedited footage that comprised uncut responses to questions and the participants' presentations of visual work.

The three edited films stand on their own as outcomes from the project. But writing this article has been another vehicle for analysing the raw film footage and reflecting on the findings and method. By interpreting the raw footage in order to identify the themes, the researcher was able to construct yet another narrative within a written account that may reach a different audience.

## Summary

The project led to an evaluation of the method which combined narrative inquiry with film making. It was seen that the method enabled the participants to talk about their own experiences and show the visual materials that were important to them. This method represented the emotional aspects of the stories. It seemed that the medium served as a potential channel for the emotional aspects of the emerging narratives. The aesthetics of the whole created further emotional elements, whether of the narrator's making, of the filmmaker's, of the researcher-editor's, or of the watching audience.

The film footage was also able to capture the connectivity between formal education, the participants and the people who had been touched by their creative practices. It gave a narrative coherence to the participants' stories. However, it could be argued that while coherence may aid communication with an audience, narrative incoherence may actually be more authentic as a reflection of the 'messiness' of lived experience.

The findings of the project were that the participants had some shared values about the importance of creative education (person-centred, community-based, social justice, democratic education, widening access to the arts). The stories the participants told were an opportunity to reflect on their own achievements and to think about the impact of their own work on other people. In two examples Eliza and Jake noticed a particular social need that their creative work could help meet. All the participants were able to give examples of particular instances where their creative practice had had an impact on other people. The importance of their own life experiences, including their previous learning journeys, was seen to be an important factor of their continued creative practice. In other words, adult learning does not just influence the individual but can have a longer-term impact on wider communities.

The outcomes for mature graduates seemed to involve the development of portfolio careers as a means of coping with the precariousness of the creative industries. But the portfolio also enabled the mature graduates to engage with many different activities so they could continue to do the work they believed was important for themselves and



others. These participants were able to continue developing their own creative practices after they had left formal education. The transition from education to being an independent creative practitioner can be a challenging time for new artists. This is because access to resources, technical support and critical review is usually diminished when people leave their art and design courses. Eliza, Jake, Mandy, Angela and Karen were able to draw upon their own community-based projects for similar forms of support.

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