

Conducting arts based research to enable critical thinking

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CRN mid-career Fellowship project: Collaborative drawing

How Drawing can enable critical thinking about social justice, access, inclusion and policy in early childhood.

CRN members created drawings to critically explore issues around social justice, access, inclusion and policy in early childhood. The project introduced alternative and innovative ways for conducting educational research: Arts Based Educational Research (ABER) methods.

The project used a mode of drawing called 'intergenerational collaborative drawing'; adults and children drawing simultaneously on the same surface. The process assists in thinking about and communicating on big ideas and complex issues.

Members drew collaboratively with others such as university students, children, parents, teachers and others to investigate their ideas and conceptions about social justice, access, inclusion and policy in early childhood.



Drawing as a research methodology

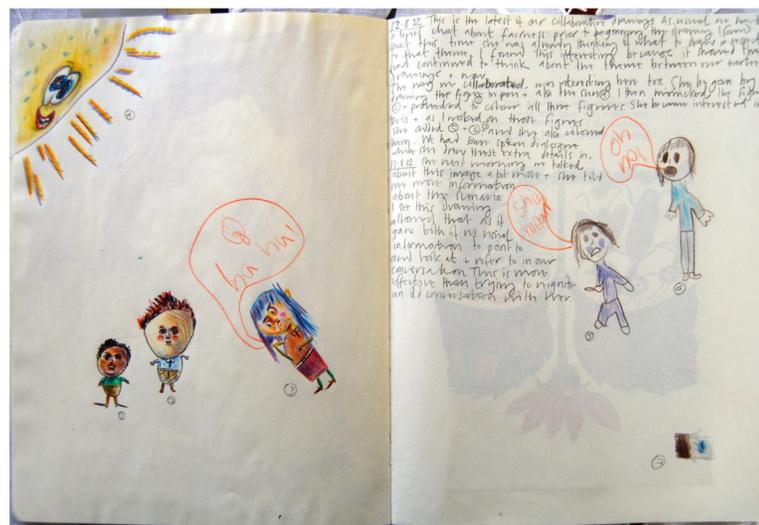
Contemporary researchers regard drawing as a valid method (see Bland 2012; Wall, Hall and Woolner 2012), however it is not overly used.

Using collaborative drawing as a data gathering method requires understandings of the 'symbolic or authorial style used by the author/s to render the description and/or interpretation' (Flick 2007, 17). It is important to understand that drawing, like other forms of communication operates within different genres: as the intention changes, so too does the drawing in terms of its style, content, purpose.

Drawings can possess subtle differences in ways that written texts do. Drawing collaboratively can visibly and coherently communicate in a research context (Derry 2005; Literat 2013): spoken dialogue, written communication, questions asked and discussed, consolidation of prior discussions, knowledge, readings, experiences, reference to techniques occur between collaborating drawers irrespective of their ages, prior knowledge and experiences.

As an example of arts-based research methodology, collaborative drawings are not considered illustrations of the research, they are the research, and can accompany other modes of actual research such as field notes, conversations, and readings, and act as different types of data (Kalmbach Phillips, Harris, Legard Larson and Higgins 2009).

Drawing helped to amplify and expand upon what might be gleaned from observations, interviews or questionnaires. Drawing did not rely upon descriptive language but exposed the imagination and visualization of the research process.



How useful is collaborative drawing?

The project prompted thoughts about safety and fairness for children, and for researching with/on/about children.

Drawing with children, students, family members and colleagues:

- Raised awareness of how drawing can connect with children's ways of doing things;
- Facilitated assessment of policy and curriculum;
- Assisted in developing action plans and/or interventions; and
- Galvanized thinking about new ways for doing and understanding research into early childhood.

Salons

Salons became popular in Europe in 17th Century as sites of philosophic and literary conversation. A group of female CRN academics experimented with the salon to challenge presentation and dissemination norms that hierarchize and centralize the human.

The salon was experimented with as a critical-cultural, methodological site. The events were reflected on through arts based inquiry - video art examined conceptualizations of rhizomes and assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) at the events and how these might affect conventions around academic disseminations. Assemblages, or clusters of things can include people, food, chairs, tables, bodies, lights, space. The salon, as a critical-cultural site, when thought about in terms of clusters of things helps to disrupt hierarchized ways of approaching and presenting research.

The CRN group experimented with salon evenings as a critical, feminist-cultural site and as an alternative to the usual sites (such as conferences, or lectures) which were regarded by us as regulated and hierarchical. The two salon evenings, held in 2012 enabled attendees to "make...random, proliferating and decentered connections" (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxvii) about their ideas and research projects, and an opportunity to be together in an 'open system' that could be "untimely, indeterminate and nonrepresentational" (Masny & Cole, 2012, p. 73).

The salon offered up an alternative forum for sharing knowledge through "emergent and egalitarian, local, and ...communal" conversation (Finley, 2011, p. 435) which is polyvocal, collaborative, and inclusive.



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