



## Community and Collective Learning

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Research in  
Higher Education  
Practices Series



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# Community and Collective Learning

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*The Pedagogy of the Moment: Building  
Artistic Time-Spaces for Critical-Creative  
Learning in Higher Education*

*Community and Collective Learning*

Edited by Tatiana Chemi and Alison  
Neilson

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## Series Preface

The collection of four booklets 'The Pedagogy of the Moment: Building Artistic Time-Spaces for Critical-Creative Learning in Higher Education' is part of the Artist-Led Learning in Higher Education project, led by Aalborg University and funded by Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships. Our intention with the series is to produce a timely synthesis and creative rethinking of research on higher education topics of national and international relevance.

This book series provides knowledge, inspiration and hands-on tools on research in higher education, with a special interest in problem-based learning (PBL) approaches. We

discuss, investigate and provide argumentative analysis for the ways in which specific approaches to higher education are relevant and how educators can use them in their contexts. We appreciate original, relevant and resonant research based on sound theory and on meaningful, creative, transformative practices. We encourage our authors to formulate recommendations with concrete examples of how to practice them in different contexts in higher education, and to critically address the ways in which specific practices are or become relevant to higher educational contexts.

Lone Krogh, Antonia Scholkmann &  
Tatiana Chemi, Series editors

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# The pedagogy of the moment

## Building artistic time-spaces for critical-creative learning

Tatiana Chemi and Alison Laurie Neilson

### Darkness in our Time

We came together by way of the Erasmus+ project, *Artist-Led Learning in Higher Education (ALL)* but, in 2020, much deeper connections burgeoned with the namesake of this programme than anyone would have ever imagined when we first encountered in 2018.. We are colleagues from eight partnering educational institutions from Italy, Denmark, Norway, UK, Finland, Portugal, France and Iceland. Our shared interest is the critical-creative introduction of the arts in non-arts programmes in higher education. More than 500 years after Erasmus of Rotterdam lost his mother to the Plague, the Covid-19 virus has given us a window into past and present horrors. The isolation, the sicknesses, the deaths and all the multiple impacts to our daily lives have caused deep reflections on our personal, and social lives. We cannot ignore the inequities of today, the differences between people in terms of vulnerability and ability to recover, but we can offer reflections on the hierarchies

of education that are implicated in these inequities. In exploring artist-led learning in higher education, we must acknowledge the “subaltern” voices who

... speak hundreds of languages and communicate in song, oral storytelling, dance, poetry, and rituals. Such voices use performative styles, reflecting an array of indigenous epistemologies that go far beyond prevailing Western academic styles and venues for dissemination, resisting external definitions of what is of worth, and often reflecting relational versus individualistic constructions of human beings and other creatures.

(Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 39)

We cannot claim that we were engaging in decolonizing practices as we initiated our project, but pandemic crises and complex

responses to them led us towards unexpected investigations around “the pedagogy of the moment” that unfolds in the present and shapes critical-creative learning environments. The concept of the “pedagogy of the moment” is part of the transformational educational discourse by scholars such as Ibrahim and Glithero, (2012) and Koepke (2015), but we use it here primarily as a metaphor to capture both the possibilities and perils of being present in, but also locked inescapably into, the present moment.

### **One hand holding another**

While we honour artist-led and arts-based learning, we invite a critical self-reflection to illuminate the hypercomplex reality that we inhabit. Artistic practices can take us to places that we might not want to explore, but that lead us critically and gently to “the end of the world as we know it” (R.E.M). These encounters are important: sensing, feeling and bodying are fundamental in our practices. How does my life touch yours and yours mine?

ALL project outcomes aim for cultural understandings to flow without being colonised or appropriated, but just cherished and loved. For instance, the linguistic loan of “the red thread” enriches us across our countries as we create a shared vocabulary. This is fundamental in intercultural projects, especially as we seek bodily and sensory communications. To co-construct knowledge

appropriate to creative learning, communication and knowledge-production must be challenged away from what is already known. To innovate educational practices that are often left out (bodies, affects, experiences), working with the arts and professional artists have opened up new ways of doing so, but also new dilemmas. The experimentation carried out in the ALL project went through the same process that the expression “the red thread” went through: from diversity to sharing. The artistic activities and the embodied language that is proper to them insinuated a pedagogy of the moment (here and now) at higher educational institutions, bringing forth new opportunities for creative interactions across disciplines.

### **The red thread**

The expression “the red thread” speaks to the relational exchanges within the ALL project. The saying “the red thread” may not make much sense in English. In several European languages “the red thread” is an expression that indicates a coherent common thread, a discursive line of thought, a clear commonality. As common to most European exchanges, this metaphorical expression, once non-existent in English, has been adopted in British cultural and scholarly contexts, with the consequence of shaping shared cultural and linguistic references, a common ground of comprehension, and reciprocal learning, a red thread of cultural fellowship, a shared

*le fil rouge*

*den røde tråd*

*il filo rosso*

*punainen lanka*

*rauður Þráður*

*den røde tråden*

*o fio vermelho*



feeling of ownership and community that respects differences, rather than conflict or normalisations. This metaphor constructs our collection of booklets, with each booklet as a thread that is autonomous but also entangled with the other threads. Each thread builds around two contributions that share similar colours and that are expanded in a “red thread”. The red thread is a comment that each colleague in the ALL project has crafted in resonance to a chapter by another. This poetic strategy emerged as means for performing the collective character of our work, and in order to shape a thread of commonalities throughout the four booklets.

### **Practice-based chapters hand-crocheted together as a book**

The first piece of *Thread One* uses a provocative approach to explore the day-to-day practices of higher education, highlighting artist/practitioner collaborations and challenging norms of time and space. The second piece arises from musical connections to educational practice. It invites the reader to experience “lumen in tenebris” (light in darkness, or happiness in darkness) through their emotions evoked by Gothic rock music.

The first writing in *Thread Two* is a crocheting together of personal history and the ALL project online meetings, including how Covid-19 made a mess of it all. The second,

a presentation of theatre-based activities, is an invitation into a military leadership programme which goes way beyond the norm and engages our deepest experiences, in body and spirit, of life and death.

*Thread 3* includes a case study of a long-term collaboration between a creative learning centre which supports arts and artist collaborations with a university, the university practitioners and musicians from Turtle Key Arts. This case study suggests trusting processes and explores the ethics of practice as a continuing process. The second piece focuses on an artist-led workshop on palmistry, and explores the way that a postgraduate class questioned and created broader understandings of being a community.

*Thread 4* describes experiences with art-led teaching that evokes ethical questions about using powerful methods which have the potential for unpredictable impacts beyond our ability to know or control. The second piece focuses on theatre and the magic it makes, highlighting the embodied learning and communications from learners, and looks at artists/educators’ practice as research and research as practice.

With our collection of different, but related, artist-led practices, we wish to bring a creative criticality to the work of educators and artists who are curious about or engaged in each other’s work.

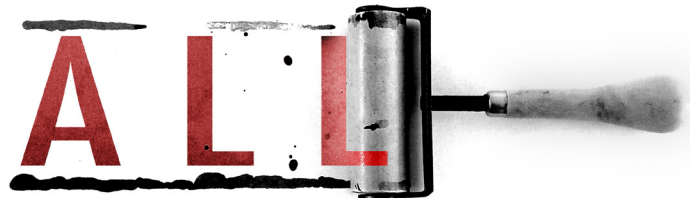
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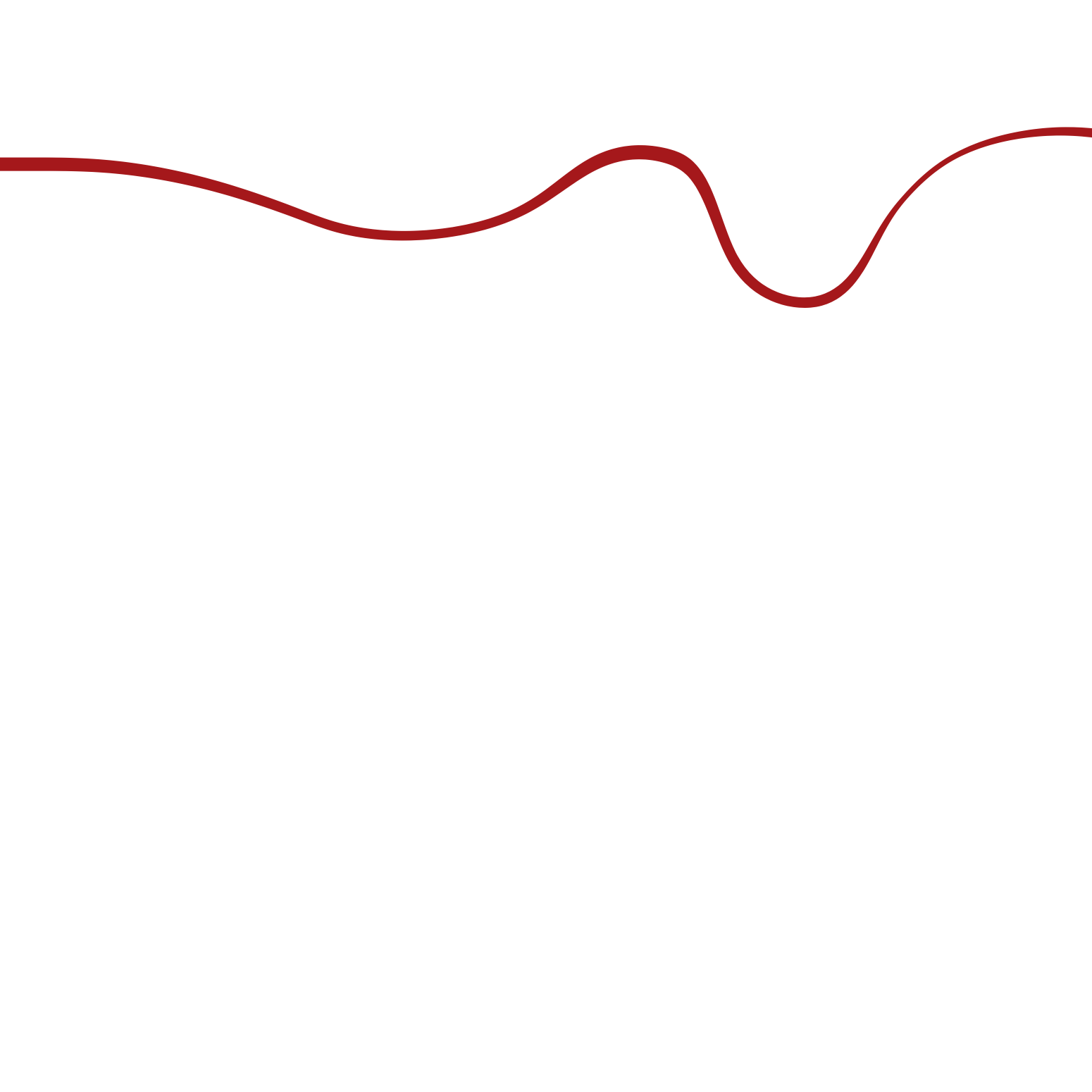
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Artist-Led Learning in Higher Education



# Towards Transprofessionalism

## Artists in Higher Education

Allan Owens  
Anne Pässilä  
Nick Ponsillo

Monica Biagioli  
Charlotte Cunningham

### Introduction

Case study is very much 'a choice of what is to be studied' (Stake, 2000, p.435). In this case study, it was initially the experience of musicians working with higher education students in a substantial professional project. This then shifted as the study unfolded to explore the value of the artists' experiences illuminated through arts-based methods for the arts organisation which employed them. As a result, we deliberately do not focus on the artists' works or voices, but on the value of their voices being heard by the arts organisation they work for through transprofessional means. It is for this reason that the research methodology is arts-based, leaning towards learning (Adams & Owens, 2021) rather than the concerns of artistic

research with the processes through which 'art' and 'knowledge' become qualified (JAR, 2021). The case study values the 'highly personal', 'situational' and 'intricate' (Stake, 1995, p.135) arc of practice-based innovation in 10 phases from the initial project, the artists telling their own stories, to the transprofessional organisational setting. In order to stress the importance of the relational dialogical dimension of this project and research, first names are used, and the style of writing is deliberately informal. We have also tried to make as transparent as possible the role of the key broker, researchers and artistic director in organising the project as they researched into it. The artists were three musicians from Turtle Key Arts. TKA are one of the UK's most exciting



Figure 1. Turtle Song artists, students and participants, University of Chester.

creative producers with a mission to ‘unlock creative potential’ through access to art, develop talented emerging performing arts companies and make art available to those that might not otherwise get the opportunity. Their touring workshop *Turtle Song* is a collaboration with English Touring Opera and the Royal College of Music. The participants were postgraduate MA students and Year 2 students on the BA Popular Music Programme, Department of Performing Arts, University of Chester; adults with dementia and their carers. The adults and carers were predominantly from the Chester area, living in the community. Some were brought to the sessions in transport provided by the Ealing Community Transport charity.

## The Higher Education Context

**Phase 1:** Collaboration flows through a *Turtle Song* project and this Chester-based iteration followed in that tradition, beginning with a scoping conversation between the Philip Barker Centre for Creative Learning (PBCCL) based at the University of Chester and TKA. Since the first *Turtle Song* at the Royal College of Music, London in 2008, the project has been introduced in Cambridge, Wolverhampton, Dulwich, Hackney, Suffolk, Oxford, Stockton-on-Tees, Leeds, Norwich, Croydon, York, Reading and Newbury. On average three *Turtle Song* projects take place each year, though this was the first time TKA had collaborated with an HE institution in the

North-West of England. Each project integrates music students from the partner institution as an important part of the practitioner team, offering on-project professional development through practice. Therefore, the scoping conversation during the project between TKA and PBCCL revolved around the content and delivery model of *Turtle Song*, timescale, artistic practice, the practitioner team and student involvement, as well as potential opportunities for research.

This phase of the collaboration also involved negotiations with the Department for Performing Arts at the Kingsway Creative Campus, venue for this *Turtle Song* project. These negotiations were both practical in nature, such as the reservation and use of a dedicated project room, participant recruitment, venue access and technical support, as well as artistic, such as the participatory practice and how music students at the university would integrate into the practitioner team. Chosen as the workshop space for the duration of the project was a performance studio, which provided a fully equipped venue full of artistic potential with audio visual equipment and supporting technician and a sense of both familiarity and occasion each time the group met.

Over the past decade, TKA has undertaken a number of evaluations of *Turtle Song* projects, which have explored the experience of people with dementia and their carers participating in the music-making, as well as the benefits,

such as social connections, intergenerational relationships, inclusion and empowerment through a creative and meaningful activity, in addition to supporting participants to live well with dementia (TKA, 2018). These evaluations have contributed to the growing dementia and music discourse and align with the recognised benefits of music in the context of dementia (Campbell et al., 2017; Dowlen et al., 2018; APPG, 2017; Howell & Bamford, 2018) and, in the view of TKA, have revealed a consistency in the experience of *Turtle Song* participants. In light of this, TKA were keen to explore the experience of the practitioners delivering the project, a comparatively overlooked area of dementia and music research. Previous TKA evaluations had used more traditional social science methods. The opportunity to explore the experience of artists through an arts-based research method and, by using a different approach, to hear what new perspectives might be revealed about an extremely familiar project was an exciting prospect and one of potential artistic significance for the TKA management team.

## **Phase 2: The Researchers and ethics**

The research team grew organically as the study design developed through an iterative dialogue between the team members. This resulted in a team consisting of Allan Owens with expertise in the use of critical-creative pedagogy and

learning through arts-based research (Adams & Owens, 2016, 2021). Anne Pässilä co-designed the iStory method (Pässilä et al., 2017) with Allan, her research interests focusing on understanding how to increase human potential through arts-based methods in organisational contexts, informed by a reflexive model of research-based theatre. This provided the theoretical basis of the iStory method employed in this case study. Nick Ponsillo's interest is in the lifelong use of the arts to support health and wellbeing, and the integration of artists and arts practice in non-arts sectors. With a background in participatory music and arts management, including the development of creative projects involving people living with dementia and their carers, Nick was the broker for the project. Monica Biagioli's interest is in exploring the links between cultural artefacts and the value attached to them. She has developed the Zine method (Biagioli et al., 2021), which provided a basis for creating the data prototype zine and part of the data sharing process with the *Turtle Song* partner organisations.

In terms of ethics the team worked with Nicholson's (2005) concept of 'becoming ethical' whereby ethical considerations are understood to be ongoing, requiring constant negotiating over and above standard university ethics approval. In practical terms this meant that during and after each of 10 stages of this project we gathered for immediate action reflection, to capture emotions, and for critical evaluation

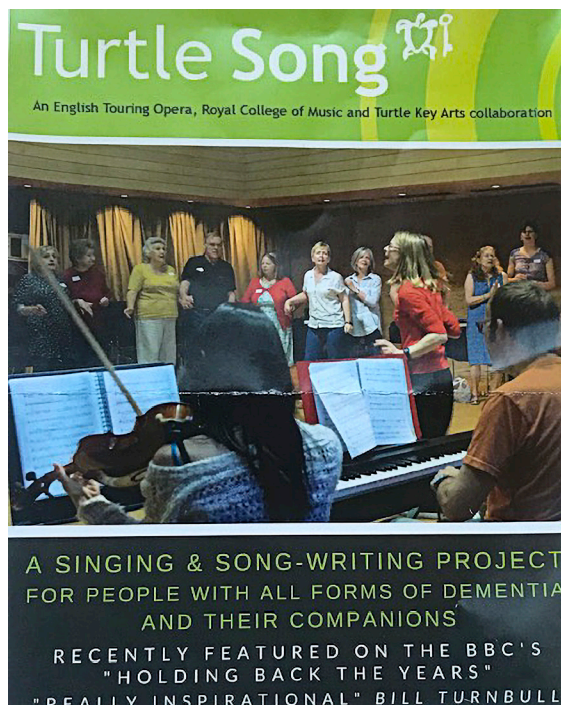


Figure 2. Turtle Key Arts Collaboration Poster.

of actions taken. In addition to this planned preparation, these meetings allowed us to work through situational detail - who said what, "Nick you said this" "Anne, you picked up on this", "Monica, I felt that..." Allan "I was not sure about ..." - an ongoing 360-degree analysis.

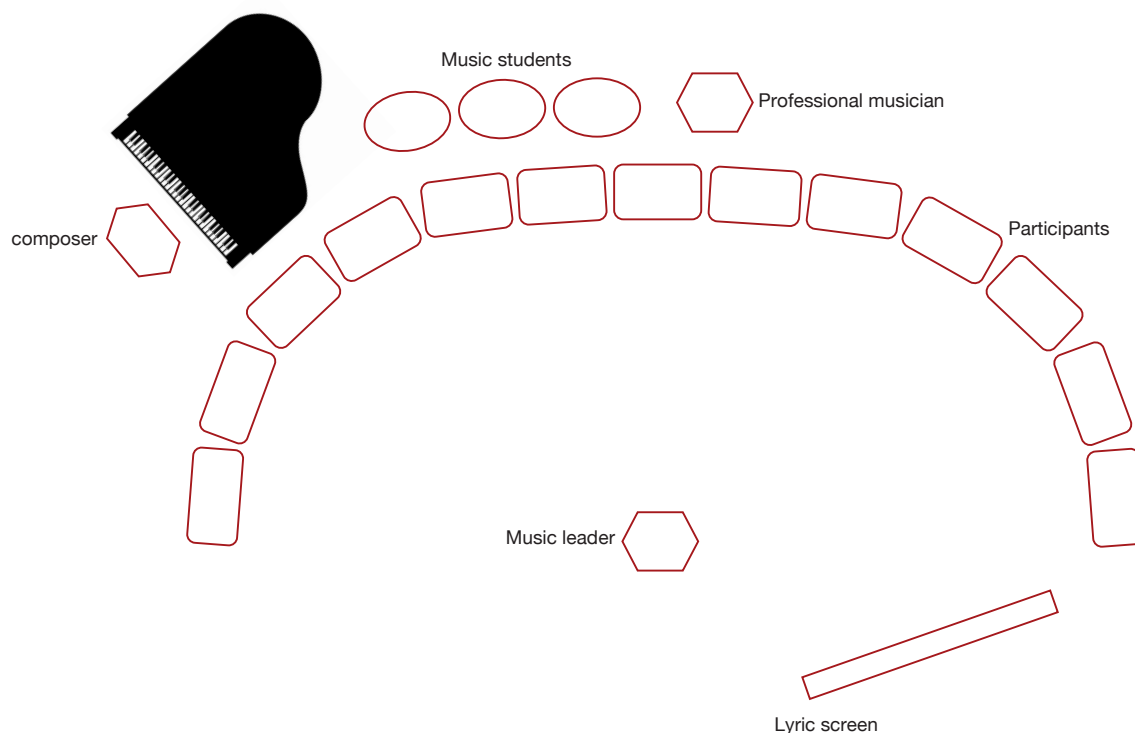
### Phase 3: Turtle Song Artist-Led Experience

*Turtle Song* runs over a period of ten consecutive weeks, with weekly sessions

of two hours consistently taking place at the same time and at the same venue. This Chester project took place between September and November 2018 at the Department of Performing Arts, Kingsway Creative Campus at the University of Chester.

A *Turtle Song* project team consists of a lead music practitioner and a composer, who are supported in the group music-making by music students from the partner university. The Chester project was the first time that the lead music practitioner fulfilled this role, although she was experienced in creative music-making and 'musiking' (Small, 1998) with a wide range of participants and abilities, including as a former *Turtle Song* musician. On this occasion, the usual team was augmented by an additional music practitioner with experience of previous *Turtle Song* projects to support the lead music practitioner in delivery. Alongside the professional musicians, three music students took part as team members: an MA music student and two second-year students on the BA Popular Music Programme. The final component of the team was a local project manager, who co-ordinated the project, liaised with the team and recruited the participants, people with dementia and their companions.

Before delivery began, a training session took place for the participating students, led by the professional musicians. *Turtle Song* as a project was introduced and, through practical experiences, *Turtle Song* creative music-making



techniques, applied music practice and person-centred practice in a dementia context (Kitwood, 1997) were explored. Awareness of dementia as an illness also formed a part of the training to prepare students for the creative *Turtle Song* environment. For the students this was the first time that they had encountered people with dementia and the first time using participatory music-making as practitioners.

*Turtle Song* aims to create a new song cycle and music based on the experiences of the

people taking part. Each session sees the participants seated in a large circle in the workshop space. Once everyone had been welcomed and were comfortable, an inclusive and fun vocal warm up followed by gentle exercises formally began the session. Movement or dance are a feature of *Turtle Song* and encouraged as a part of the creative process through embodied responses to music and music-making (Kontos et al., 2017; Dowlen et al., 2021). Once the warm-ups had been

completed the group were re-introduced to the song and music they had created during the previous week. To remain inclusive and ‘in the moment’ (Dowlen et al., 2021; Keady et al., 2020) *Turtle Song* uses a large screen on one edge of the circle onto which words and lyrics are projected in large letters. If needed, participants referred to the screen to join in the recap. After the recap the participants broke into small groups of four or five people, finding their own creative space within the workshop room. At this point the student musicians took a supportive role in a co-creative process, putting their *Turtle Song* training into practice to co-develop lyrics and music based on reminiscences about Chester and living in the city, sharing moments of meaning in the emerging biography of the group members. When the small group work ended, the group re-formed into the full circle and shared their new music with the others.

At the end of the ten weeks, a sharing event of the new song cycle was held by participants, at which the workshop space transformed into a performance-orientated environment, with moments of spontaneous dance, before an invited audience of 110 people comprising family, friends and guests. Field notes and photographs were taken at the sharing performance, focusing on the responses, engagement and interactions of people with dementia, their companions, artists, students, academics and others present.

## Phase 4: data generated using iStory method 4 x 2-hour sessions

(Early spring 2019, Faculty of Education, Chester)

The iStory approach deliberately does not use broad surveys of response which aim to measure impact through numbers and produce written text reports that tend to sit on shelves and are read by very few. Instead, it works in the way of thick description and arts-based methods (Eisner, 2008) reinforced by artful inquiries with those directly involved in the work to identify benefits. We allowed 2 months to pass, to acknowledge immediate and delayed effects, before undertaking the initial iStory scripting in story-capture form. We interviewed all 3 artists and 1 student:

- Director
- Composer
- Musician
- Postgraduate MA Music student

We also visually captured the stories in 43 drawings.

Rather than sitting together with the musicians and asking structured inquiry questions, we were writing, drawing and sketching, as academics and arts practitioners creating this space with the artist, in order for things we did not know to emerge (Martikainen et al, 2021). For example, in one



Figure 3. The 4 story-captures, Allan Owens.



Figure 4. Example of one iStory drawing.' Anne Pässilä.

session Anne was drawing balloons and the musician we were inquiring with started to explain what the balloons meant. This was to do with issues relating to her professional identity and fears related to leading the process of the project as well as staging the final performance. She identified fear as part of this, and so the iStory method identified and legitimated this as one stage in her becoming the leader of this process.

The drawings act in this way as artefacts that we can use as inquiry. Anne's sketching is deliberately naïf in style, and functions by creating ellipses, which are spaces for imagination and understanding. These are usually very accessible and the metaphors immediately recognisable, so there is little difficulty in looking at and seeing meaning and there is a strong sense of playfulness (Pässilä et al, 2015). The drawings lean towards comedy rather than tragedy, allowing hidden thoughts to surface and for tacit knowledge to be made explicit (Polanyi, 1966). Anne's drawing is informed by dramaturgical skills, those of analysis and radical listening, as she tries to capture in situ what is being shared.

When the drawings are finished Anne puts these on the table and asks the musician what resonates for them in the drawings, and if they want to add anything. If they say "I would like this" she draws them a new sketch of the experience they are talking about. The process starts to emerge on the table through

the drawings, and the aesthetic distance this creates allows for a light, playful but concrete representation of experience. As Anne is listening, Allan is leading the process with words using dialogical drama inquiry skills, to help them to share lived experience. For example, "Can you recall the beginning of the Turtle Key Arts project? What did you think at the outset? Did this change during your involvement?" In other words, he allows the person to recall and articulate their lived experience in these phases as they emerge in his or her mind. The process is not linear in this sense, but is iterative, coming back to earlier points to pay attention to details (Lehikoinen, 2015). In this way the phenomena being explored – artists' experiences in higher education - become visual artefacts in the physically co-created space of a shared table.

### **Phase 5: iStories Created in video form**

(Late spring 2019, Faculty of Education, Chester)

The first version of the video for the three artists and the student was made quickly during the two hours spent at the table. Allan, using the story-capture method, (Owens in Benmerguui et al, 2019) would story-tell from the written script he had created from the artist/student's responses. Anne moved the phone camera to the relevant drawings

sketched whilst listening. The video recording was then played back to the artists/student, who were asked if this accurately captured the substance of what they wanted to say. If not, the script was edited, things deleted, others clarified and so text added. We then quickly made another version using the same techniques. The question was asked again - whether this accurately captured the essence of what they wanted to say. If no, the text was changed again. When the face-to-face table meeting finished with these two-video takes, we took photos of sketches for documentation purposes. In the following days Allan altered the narrative according to the last feedback from the artists/student and added audio to the sketches again videoed by Anne. This method uses phone-fast delivery, no film studio or editing process. We asked each of the musicians and the student to send us one of the music tracks from the Turtle Song project they were involved in, which was used as introductory music for each of the artist and student iStory videos.

Validation took place with the artists, at each stage of every two-hour table session, for example, after Allan's script writing, Anne's sketches, and making the video. The validity checking came through questions and retakes, for example "Is this right for what we heard from you". This is not often found in social science approaches but is a strong element in iStory. A telling feature of this method is that all participants wanted a copy of their own

iStory video, a micro moment of their lived experience captured.

## **Phase 6: creating the prototype data zine**

(Early summer 2019,  
Faculty of Education, Chester)

The zine is a literary method that engages writing, drawing and the readymade aesthetic and there are many precedents of its use. In this study we use it as a method of collecting and analysing data within a framework of qualitative analysis, the aim being to maintain a more overall sense of the experience of an individual participating in an activity within the organisational context (Biagioli et al, 2021). We envisaged the zine pack as a way of bringing together all the work delivered and produced during the sessions. Working as a team, Monica and Anne devised the required components for the zine pack and Monica designed and constructed the pack and zine components, modifying existing multi-page folded constructions.

The idea was to express through form (both folded and sequential), the experience of running the *Turtle Song* sessions. The pack was meant to operate like a 'starter' pack for creatives when facilitating sessions, providing key information as well as blank components to be used as affordances during and after the events.



Figure 5. Creating the prototype data zine, Monica Biagioli.

The pack consisted of five components: an outside envelope that folded down into two openings; two four-panel, accordion-fold pamphlets; and two zine templates. The outside envelope opened up into a poster and served as a place for planning the session and where the facilitators' ideas could be expressed and contained. The first pamphlet would introduce the *Turtle Song* project to the facilitator, providing guidance and key principles to aid in the design and construction of each session. The second pamphlet would contain the facilitators' summary of how the session went, and would include any findings from the session. The two zine templates would be used to create zines for the sessions so that participants could record their experiences during and after the session. With participant permission, the zines would be collected and included in the pack as part of the session archive and summary to be returned to Turtle Key Arts.

We met with the Turtle Key Arts team to present our idea for the facilitator starter pack. Monica set up a presentation section at the meeting, where a selection of zine formats (multi-page paper constructions) was displayed. Writing and drawing materials were also made available. Zine construction zines were handed out to all at the session, and they were invited to write and draw and notate as part of the session. After this short introduction, we discussed with the team a possible approach to co-design a 'pack' that could be used by

facilitators to lead *Turtle Song* workshops. This pack would contain zine templates of constructions that would be relevant for the sessions to be used by participants. This approach received interest and was appealing as a form to help facilitators conduct their sessions and as a method to capture participant experiences during the sessions. It was agreed that the zine construction format applied during this meeting would be trialled at a future *Turtle Song* session, to start testing its potential. This was put on hold as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Phase 7: data sharing with Charlotte Cunningham of TKA (Chief Executive)**

(Late summer 2019, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London)

In the fourth phase, we took the iStories down to London to share with Charlotte at TKA base, the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith. Nick had brokered the meeting on behalf of the whole research team who were interested in keeping the data warm (Bateson, 2017) to see what use it might have for TKA and for the artists. We shared ideas around a prototype zine format for this. Charlotte thought it could be useful to share the ideas with members of the *Turtle Song* partnership (TKA, English Touring Opera and the Royal College of Music) and invited us to come back in autumn to do this. The videos

worked as a mediator for the discussion. We played a couple of these and then sent them to her as part of a collective sense-making process. At this point the videos became artefacts for Charlotte to reflect on the well-established work of TKA.

We did not quite know how to proceed at this stage, so we trusted in the process (Pässila et al, 2016) and shared this with Charlotte. Nick remembers being a bit nervous in sharing the iStories, as they were so different from methods of research he had used previously. He wasn't sure if Charlotte expected to receive something more definitive, perhaps expecting to have an outside perspective presenting data that had been processed and already interpreted. Nick was also not sure if Charlotte would be open to a process where she engaged with the data and made sense of it herself; but once we started presenting and talking about the method, he felt that she appeared engaged in that process. Charlotte said she had never had the opportunity to engage with data in this way and the sense-making part of the process interested her. For example, she really appreciated coming to understand, through one iStory video, how the trust she had placed in one of the musicians to lead one project had given the musician a real boost in confidence. She recognised that this enabled that artist to fulfil her brief really-well and saw that it could

become part of the organisation's explicit processes, to recognise and acknowledge the significance of giving autonomy.

Using data for practice-based innovation purposes (Melkas & Harmaakorpi, 2012) is very much about making visible tacit knowledge such as in the example above, knowledge that in a classic survey or traditional employee inquiry would remain hidden. By keeping data warm in this way, the artists' experiences were valued by their employer. Practice-based innovation does not happen in closed R&D innovation units (Ellström, 2010); instead, fuel for innovation can come, as in this case, from practice and evidence-based knowledge. Reflecting on this we came to understand more clearly the two important roles in this innovation process. Firstly, the role of facilitating innovation processes such as ideation, linked to organisation systems, strategy and functions, requires good facilitation techniques and abilities to keep those involved inspired. The second is the broker role, also requiring a high skill level, with knowledge, for example, of the organisation, but also broader knowledge, not being locked within the organisation. An example of this was Nick, with his expertise in social and health care and third sector service providers, and his ability to apply this in a different field.

## Phase 8: data sharing with the organisation

(Autumn 2019, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London)

Nick sensed this could be a next step and set this up with Charlotte as something she wanted to do and with the people she wanted to be in the room. Before the two-hour session we checked in with Charlotte about how to frame it for development purposes. When reflecting, we noted that this was very different from the accepted practice of paying an evaluator to produce a report on a programme or organisation.

We ran a two-hour session with members of TKA, English Touring Opera (ETO) and the Royal College of Music (RCM). The participants were part of the whole partnership of Turtle Key Arts. For some this was their first meeting, others had worked with the organisation for many years, or had just moved position, or were administrative staff. Charlotte briefly framed the session, stressing it as a chance to talk and collectively reflect on the *Turtle Song* project by using the data we had brought with us in the form of iStories. When listening to the iStories they identified this as a concrete reflection space for the artists to make sense of projects and their own practice and an opportunity to articulate artistic knowledge

Having shared the iStories of an artist with participants, we then invited each participant to share their own Turtle Key Arts journey from their own perspective so together we could take the first step in the iStory process; Allan wrote text and Anne drew, just as in the first stage. It allowed the participants in the two-hour session to talk about emotions, as some of them had led *Turtle Song* projects. For example, one participant talked about the often very powerful emotions that run between the person with dementia and their carer. When each participant had told their story, Anne invited them all to gather closely and look at the drawing she had done for each of their own Turtle Key Arts stories. This allowed them to clarify, add or simply recognise what they had just said. It gave time for Allan to work with the text he had written down as they spoke and use the arts-based method of story capture, an oral re-telling of all the stories to music, starting with the lines “One autumn day in the year 2019 a small group of people made their way through the streets of London to the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith... They were all part of the Turtle Key Arts partnership and had agreed to gather to look back on all they had been doing together over the years, to understand backwards so-as to learn forwards. They sat around a table, and each told their story. The first one began, “I first came to ...”

In this way participants' stories were heard for the third time in that space. We reflected on the importance of repetition and valuing and pausing in the arts and how this had been used to structure this collective reflection session based around the original artists' experience data, kept warm. In this session there had been much laughter and some tears of recognition in the room, parallels with the emotional engagement of the original artists' iStories. Reflection followed with discussion about what the session had allowed for and how things might be taken forward. In response to this Monica shared the prototype zines she had prepared for use by artist teams in future *Turtle Song* projects in Higher Education in spring 2020.

### **Phase 9: Revised Timeframe due to Virus Lockdown**

(Should have been spring 2020, now aiming for autumn 2022)

This will depend on the intentions for the *Turtle Song* workshops in the current pandemic situation. Documenting all steps of the design development process will be one step as we aim to iterate the approach for future workshops. For example, to develop the prototype data zine in collaboration for use by artist teams in future *Turtle Song* projects in Higher Education.

### **Phase 10: Critical reflection including limitations of approach**

The world of work for artists is changing and artists are working in settings that are outside of art institutions, for example, collaborating in transprofessional contexts on the boundaries between professional disciplines where ideas from the arts cross-fertilise with expertise in other fields such as health care, social work and business (Lehikoinen et al., 2021). Artists have worked in hybrid ensemble contexts, often with other artists. In transprofessional contexts this means "crossing professional boundaries and entering new arenas to meet the growing needs for creativity, transprofessional collaboration, change, and wellbeing in organisations and society" (Lehikoinen et al., 2021). Some artists are expanding their professional practices by stepping into transprofessional teams, for example, working with students while simultaneously working in professional fields. In the *Turtle Song* case, the artists' professional field was health care and wellbeing, where they collaborated applying their artistic knowledge to a process with other professionals.

According to Pässilä (2012, p. 80-81) "Too often, learning and innovation are viewed through a prism of 'good and beautiful', as if people only learned good things or produced good innovations in beautiful processes where everyone lives happily ever after. The 'fight or flight' metaphor illustrates this paradox; learning and processing innovation are

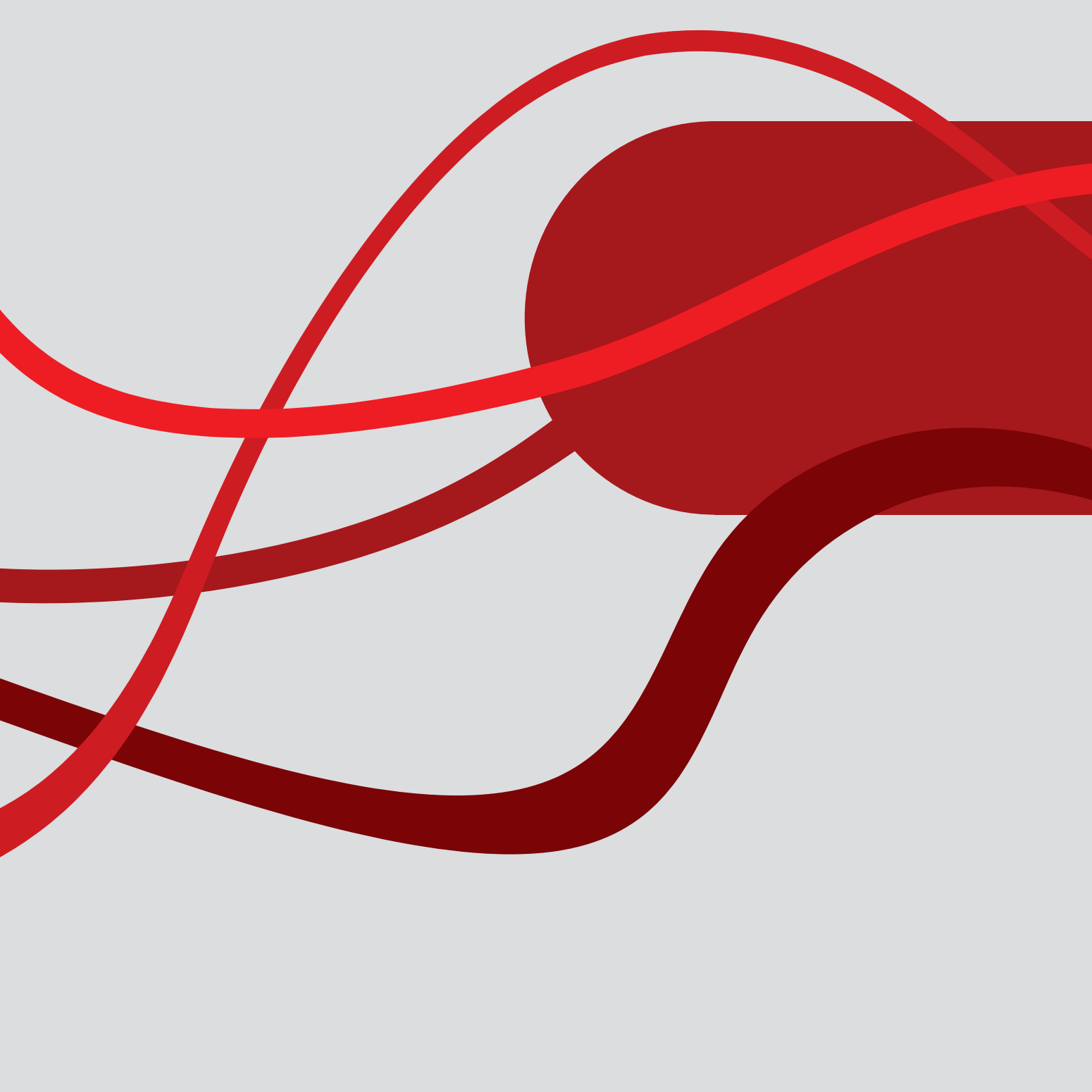
neither good nor bad, but rather perplexed, polyphonic, and often messy processes that require the questioning of one's assumptions." In this sense, transprofessional action in higher education is a complex and collaborative learning process between students, *Turtle Song* artists and PBCCL artist (Nick) who holds a role of knowledge broker and facilitator mediating reflection and innovation process, scholars from education, performance studies, design and innovation studies.

We emphasise learning as being polyphonic, the concept used here to illustrate the nature of learning in co-design and co-creation, comprising the ensemble of various perspectives, voices and points of view existing simultaneously throughout the 10 stages of this case study. We also suggest that *Turtle Song* is an example of trans-professional over-organisational innovation. It is the implementation of a new organisational process in and beyond academia, aimed at increasing value for health care and wellbeing organisational actors, for people living with a diagnosis of dementia and their carers. This value, however, was co-created within a trans-professional team and participants. In this way the main logic for producing knowledge to facilitate trans-professional over-organisational process innovations is "linked to social knowledge production in which various types of tensions and obstacles are faced from an interpretative perspective, and

generation takes place through multi-voiced discussions between organisational actors and between these actors and their customers and stakeholders. Organisational process innovation is grounded in the assumption that we, as people, are continuously constructing meanings of our worlds and ourselves rather than the assumption that there is a reality from which we can separate ourselves" (Päsilä, 2012, p. 48).

Theoretically we lean on practice-based innovation, which is triggered by problem solving, meaning-making and sense-making setting in practical contexts. In the *Turtle Song* context, the role of Nick as broker was crucial. *Turtle Song* was carried out in non-linear processes that utilise artistic, scientific and practical knowledge production and creation in cross-disciplinary innovation networks.

The limitation of this case study can be highlighted from a positivistic research perspective. Through this lens the *Turtle Song* case study cannot be generalised in accordance with positivistic demands, based as it is on qualitative arts-based research design and such a small sample of participants. Instead, we focus deliberately on local situational understanding of those involved, pointing to the value placed on personal narrative valued by the artists and the polyphonic perspectives valued by the arts organisation which employs them to work in higher education settings.



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The background is a solid grey color. A large, semi-transparent grey circle is positioned in the upper right quadrant. Several thick, vibrant red lines of varying thicknesses and curves sweep across the entire image, creating a dynamic, abstract pattern. Some lines are straight, while others are curved, and they intersect each other and the grey circle.

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# Telemicroscopic

Chiara Paolino, Federica De Moli

I am looking through a giant telescope. The minute detail of things far away are suddenly brought so close. What was on the horizon is suddenly here in front of me, in the very palm of my hand. What was cold, not moving, now suddenly warm and breathing. We are human beings looking into a soul through the eye at the end of this arm. I never noticed it in this way before. With the reassuring confidence of the artist, of the educator, of the sailor who has done this ten times, ten thousand times, my hand is held.

This never happened to me, but I want that it does, that I could have this chance in the face of

the everyday, something heightened for a short time, that a newness might creep in. The rushing thoughts of the day slow, there is vulnerability, surprise, touch, materiality, dreams.

This is perhaps what it means to look at the world through an interpretive lens, through the arts and the flows of learning through what comes. At the same moment I see my elder daughter's hand and a piano player, a fighter, a grandfather and am washed over by a huge wave of emotion but I am standing firmly rooted in the landscape of aesthetic experience, cognitively challenged as questions float to the surface rising as quickly as bubbles:

Is a truly good society one that  
believes it is never good enough?  
Is a truly good community one that  
believes it is never good enough?  
How can we be a community in  
this arts management programme  
learning for the world we are  
already in?

We are planning for the future through being  
and doing it now, and even as I say this, I realise  
we are doing it now as we each rush to give our  
interpretations, as we wait to listen and hang  
onto the words and movements in this arc of  
post dramatic aesthetics.

One hand holding another. Fingers tracing  
lines on a palm in a conversation without  
words. Touch. A simple, sensorial connection,  
feeling history. Experiencing a life lived, a life  
living and a life to come – yours, mine, ours.

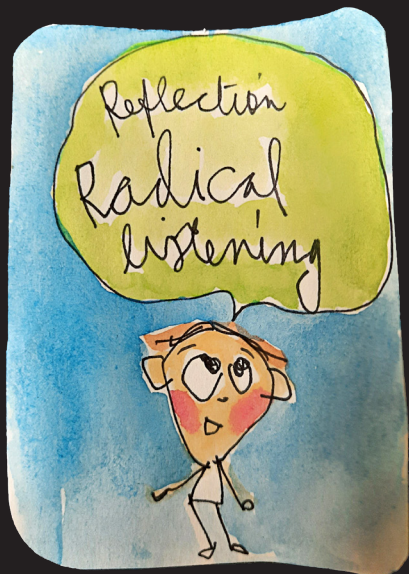
What have these hands touched? What do  
these mythical symbols mean? What stories do  
they hold? What were their hopes and dreams,  
dreams and fears? We move back in time rooted  
on one spot. Still. Reviving the past uncovers  
knowledge stored in our bodies that helps us  
to see into the future and make sense of the  
present. Through touching one point of another  
being I learn a complete view. Culture. History.  
Experience. Emotion. Love. How does my life  
touch yours and yours mine? As we share and  
make meaning through our touch, I discover  
more about me than I am able to share, gifting  
to others and learning in return.

The body is relevant.

The body is knowing.

The body is biography.

The body is self.



The element of touch identified as being central to the meaning making for the arts management students in Milan resonates with the Turtle Song experience. Transcending different art forms and age groups, the element of human touch is common to both artist-led experiences described in these chapters and also reflects the importance of touch within human experience. Whereas the intimate and personal touch realised an exploration of self, identity and meaning making in the past and present for the Milan students, the use of touch within Turtle Song projects reinforced the importance of embodied, sensorial and relational connections between those living with dementia and their loved ones. It was a way for people to meaningfully share time together without the use or need for words or language skills: often a barrier to communication, self-expression and agency for some people living with dementia. Rather than an exploration of the past, touch within Turtle Song was centred in the present moment and as a part of the creative process. This is movingly and most appropriately shared in a song called 'Touch' composed by group members of a previous Turtle Song project:

Touch,  
Human touch, healing touch, loving touch, forgiving touch, soothing touch,  
To ease the pain,  
For we have touch, human touch, loving touch, forgiving touch, soothing touch  
To ease the pain.

Touch was the method used for exploring self and identity in Milan and an important part of the Turtle Song process but music making in the Turtle Song project was a way to share and interpret the life story of group members living with dementia. The making of meaning was crafted through a creative music dialogue led by group members. The sharing of self and an understanding of life story and biography are important factors in how care is shaped with people living with dementia. For people living in the later stages of the illness and with limited language skills this can result in caring environments and strategies regardless of whether there is actual meaning or connection for the person living with dementia. Increasingly arts-based methods and practice are being used as a way for the person themselves to communicate with loved ones and care professionals, share themselves and their biography, revealing the intimate and personal on their own terms and in their own ways to support the development of meaningful care and life experiences. Whilst this practice may seem a backwards looking process, the relational nature of a creative

process can forge and sustain relationships in the present resulting in meaningful care and life experiences for person with dementia and carers shifting with the preferences of people with dementia.

In both chapters meaning making and understanding through post dramatic aesthetic experience, set in place and through an artistic intervention is central. In Milan, this occurred with arts management students, in Chester with music students and staff and board members from a London based arts organisation. There is common interest in expanding students' skills and awareness to focus on the tacit nature of the aesthetic experience and knowledge. These kinds of skills are quite difficult to learn in a traditional classroom session, or within the daily operations of an organisation. When the outside comes in or inside goes out, learners can increase their capacity to navigate the complex non-linear systems made visible in this transprofessional context. Bringing artists and practitioners into higher education learning processes means that this learning takes place in the middle of actions. Both contexts provide real problems and the sort of perplexed situations in which Dewey (1934) says learning is happening. If we are engaging with something when we know how to do it, we are training through repetition, which of course can have much value just as running maintains a level of fitness; but learning in the midst of action (Passila, 2012) allows for the

development of different skills that are key in perplexed situations.

In both chapters the learning process is driven not by the lecturer bringing problems into the classroom, but through the encounter, such as when students or members of organisations are working with artists or practitioners from outside the university. In Chester, the learning occurred with students and professional musicians and members of an arts organisation, and in Italy, with a professional Palm reader and post graduate management studies students. The perspective in both chapters is that arts and humanities can be integrated into thinking, business or music or any other separate discipline, hence it becomes transdisciplinary. There is an aspiration in both to allow for a more rounded consideration of individuals, encompassing not only their rationality, but also their intuition, feelings, and non-linear thinking. The palm reader creates a community of interest as do the musicians. From this perspective artists, are actually *with* people, not working with people as their source material; this is the opposite of using people's physical acts and collecting these as material. The history of community arts (Jeffers, 2017) shows that the possibilities for artists working in community for the needs of that community are rich, as in this case which took place in university learning spaces. The results include an arts piece in Chester that has a strong communal dimension, and an increased sense

of community in Milan because of learning by the group for the group, not artists performing. This allows for emergence and attribution of meaning in higher education by the students themselves, not given to them by academic staff, and in organisations by workers not management. In this respect both approaches offer profoundly democratic processes of work.

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# Meaning Making through Artistic Interventions

## An Aesthetic Approach

Federica De Molli  
Chiara Paolino

### Introduction

In this chapter we explore how meaning making can take place through aesthetic experience, which is set in place through an artistic intervention that involves the members of arts management students.

Our theoretical framework is based on the organizational literature that is increasingly paying attention to the practices and processes that influence dialogue and meaning making – namely the creation of meaning and sense with respect to issues or themes presented – among organizational actors (see Elsbach & Flynn, 2013; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007, 2009; Seidel & O'Mahony, 2014; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018). According to these studies, the aesthetic experience - generated through the intimate and

personal experience of the world through the five senses - represents the basis for intellectual experience and knowledge development (Strati, 2010; Welsch, 1997). Moreover, the tacit nature (Polanyi & Sen, 1967) of the aesthetic experience makes knowledge development happen on an experiential and emotional level, rather than on a logical and analytical one. Scholars interested in exploring the aesthetic aspects of organizational life have demonstrated how not only practical knowledge (e.g. learning a craft) can be transmitted through aesthetic experience (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018) but also how shared aesthetic experience can help meaning making (Michels & Steyaert, 2017; Strati, 1999; Weick, 1995). For example, experiencing the same aesthetic stimuli, breathing the same

atmosphere, sharing the same places and actions with other people, might cause the organizational actors to develop a shared representation and knowledge of the organization (De Molli et al., 2020).

Although these reflections have brought interesting results in the organizational studies debate, they have rarely considered artistic interventions and arts-based methods within this theorization (few exceptions are Chemi & Du, 2017; Sutherland, 2013). In addition, apart from a few contributions (see Suspitsyna, 2013), these reflections have not been applied to the emergence and attribution of meaning in higher education, where the perspective of management is often more explored compared to that of the students.

With our study we aim to fill this gap, and ask the following research question: *How do members of a group of students construct meaning through the aesthetic experience of an artistic intervention?* We address this question by analysing the experience of a group of students (19 in total) of a Master in arts management who were involved in an artistic intervention. In this analysis, we focus on how group members collectively develop meanings through the aesthetic experience of participating in an artistic production and the aesthetic interaction amongst them. Empirical data have been generated through observations and photos made by the researchers, written

self-reflections and videos of shared experience in meaning making done by students.

Through this study, we illustrate that the aesthetic experience connected with the artistic production leads group members to question and then to create new meaning to the concept of being a *community* of post-graduate classmates. In particular, from our analysis it emerges that the aesthetic experience helped the students to articulate both an emotional and a cognitive reaction. As a result, the students engaged in the attribution of a divergent meaning to their being a *community*, which we labelled as ‘critical and emphatic meaning making’. Thus, we elaborated a model, where both an emphatic and a more critical view of the educational community emerged.

### **A short premise about aesthetics and sense making in organization, in management and organization studies**

To engage in sense making requires individual to back off their daily practice and analyze it from a different standpoint, often retrospectively. In this way, a new understanding of the organizational context might emerge (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). When considering the relationship between meaning making and aesthetics, management studies, and especially organizational research, has widely investigated

this issue. In particular, research on organizational artifacts and materiality (Bechky, 2008), has illustrated that, by physically interacting with organizational materials and technologies, individuals find a way to discuss and negotiate meanings in a way not guided by logic, but by the aesthetic shared experience of the object and by the aesthetic interaction with the others. Physical objects and organizational artifacts therefore, seem to help organizational actors to overcome organizational challenges and make sense of their position within their own working context (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). One of the assumptions supporting the relationship between materiality and sense-making revolves around the notion that cognition does not act in isolation, but as a set of mental representations that have to interact with the resources distributed in the material context to happen and to lead to meaning emergence (Orlikowski, 2009; Weick, 1995). Interacting with objects, both physical and digital ones, allows to process information visually and materially, to connect them in a different way, to represent them and thus to externalize our cognitive work, having the chance to look at it from a different standpoint (Nicolini et al., 2012).

Connected to this stream of research focused on materiality and sense-making, organizational studies has acknowledged the relevance of aesthetics and emotional

communication to build individual and collective sense making (e.g. De Molli & De Paoli, 2021; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018). In this context, the perspective on materiality has been theoretically enlarged to consider more widely the sensorial experience individuals in organizations might encounter, in order to elaborate models to explain how visual, auditory, tactile stimuli might support the organization of information, their elaboration and interpretation (De Molli et al., 2020; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018).

Thus, while research about aesthetic and sense making is very strong in this regards, how artistic interventions and arts based methods enter in this discussion still deserves to be discussed (cit. Linstead, 2018). According to this view, in the following paragraph, we aim to clarify how arts has entered into the theorization of the relationship between aesthetics and sense making, by summarizing the major and the most recent contributions. In particular, we aim to emphasize the power of art to create a sensorially grounded sense-making process, blending together emotional reactions, serendipitous thinking, and linear reasoning.

## **Artistic interventions and aesthetic meaning making**

At the beginning of his book, in order to make the case about the importance of integrating humanities and science knowledge (in

particular business knowledge) in the workplace and in the wider society, Formica and Edmondson (2020) says “If the defining quality of humanities is the expression of the human condition by mood and feeling, calling into place all the sense, evoking both order and disorder, then the need for business to exercise the epigenetic rules of human nature to bias innovation, learning and choice has never been greater” (p. 8). According to this perspective, arts and humanities, when considered as integrated to business thinking - and not as separated disciplines - could bring to a more rounded consideration of individuals, encompassing not only their rationality, but also their intuition, feelings, and not linear thinking.

Artistic interventions in the workplace has been widely referred in these terms. When integrated in the organizational life, they have showed their power to stimulate a different way of considering and tackling issues and of experiencing the organizational environment. This power includes a more comprehensive view of the human experience and contribution to the workplace (e.g. Antal & Strauß, 2013). This call by Formica and Edmondson (2020) about the importance of the integration between humanities, arts, and business in the workplace recalls what two important reviews on the topic of artistic interventions highlighted in 2018. The first review to be mentioned is a quantitative one by Ferreira (2018), collecting 137 articles published on the topic of artistic interventions

published in refereed scientific journals from 1973 through 2015. We quotes it here since the possibility to run a bibliometric analysis on a such a number of articles, analysing the main authors, journals, and network of co-citation emphasize the idea that artistic interventions might constitute a structured academic field. A field where this interdisciplinary approach, involving humanities- and business-cantered knowledge, has been developed in academia. When considering the mirroring of this integration process in the workplace, Carlucci and Schiuma (2018) in their qualitative review about the power of arts for business, had stressed the fact that the 21-century management could not rely anymore on logical, consequential and rational thinking to face the challenge of an increasingly complex world. A new management should include the consideration of employees’ emotions, feelings, energy, by managing organizations’ emotive, ethical, experiential characteristics and by integrating them into the business processes. In this light, artistic interventions can bring to the workplace all these dimensions, challenging the view of the physical organizational spaces and equipment and provoking a new way of looking at problems and issues (e.g. Adler, 2006; Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Nissley, 2002).

In this light, artistic interventions are aesthetic experiences that involve emotions and feelings, our senses, mind, and body. As such, they motivate organizational members to develop

reflections about what they see, feel, and hear in the workplace in a way that is free from the usual approach they develop to traditional tasks and activities (Antal & Strauß, 2013). Indeed, the assumption underlying the link between artistic intervention and aesthetic experiences is that 'in arts-based education individuals learn experientially by transforming cues to develop non-rational, non-logical capabilities and self-knowledge that constitute and cultivate experiential knowing, aesthetic awareness and, in general, the so called soft issues of managing and leading' (Eaves, 2014, p. 148). Thus, the linkage between artistic interventions and aesthetic experience and knowledge has to be traced back to the power of arts in the organizations to let members experience freedom and the opportunity to move beyond their comfort zone, having the chance to express themselves in a fuller way, which includes their senses and bodily. While translating these aesthetic experiences, meanings and interpretations are evoked and shared, and not defined in a deterministic way. Through the presence of arts and the related aesthetic experience, individuals are empowered to diverge from their usual thoughts and methodologies, and to reconcile their lines of reasoning if they feel so, having enlarged their understanding of a situation through the contribution of Art. Artistic interventions elicit diversity, plurality, diverge and convergence, crafting and thinking, producing unedited

ways of learning and meaning making among organizational members experiences (Paolino, 2019; Paolino et al., 2021; Paolino & Berthoin Antal, 2020).

This power of arts to produce aesthetic experiences and meaning making has been empirically investigated in different settings, including the managerial ones (Sutherland, 2013; Sutherland & Ladkin, 2013) till the educational ones (Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015).

An empirical example of the relationship between artistic interventions and aesthetic knowledge is the widely known use of artistic interventions by the collective Rimini Protokoll that in 2009 used Daimler's 2009 Annual General Meeting and transformed in a play for their aesthetic organizational inquiry (Biehl-Missal, 2012). Through this project, the Rimini Protokoll aimed to raise attention towards the theatrical nature of organizations and to elicit multiple and diverse interpretations, rather than delivering an organizational solution. It is important to emphasize that the kind of poetry that The Rimini Protokoll practices in their artistic interventions could be defined as post-dramatic aesthetics, which stresses the use of all our senses and resources: performance, voice, movements, materiality. This combination could be considered as relevant to elicit aesthetic exploration and knowledge, given the complexity, the non-linearity, and interwovenness of the feelings and impressions they activate (Taylor, 2003).

Very recently, due to the challenges of the pandemic Covid-19, this opportunity that art offers to appeal to our senses and bodily experiences in a complex, post-dramatic way, to produce new interpretations and knowledge has been theoretically and empirically investigated for educators. In her self-ethnography about the educators' response to Covid-19 pandemic, Chemi (2020) has illustrated how the engagement in arts-based methods, poetry, live performance might change because of the impossibility of the human contact. In this story-telling of her own reaction, Chemi has stressed how much the pandemic solicited her attention on the body, and how immersing in the bodily needs and feeling could support a different understanding of the current situation. Furthermore, the author has emphasized the importance of adopting metaphorical language and contents, relying on the use of reference to 'matter (photos, bodies), discourses (dramatized fiction), and technologies (computer)' (2020. p. 7). The point of view of the educators adopting arts-based methodology during the Pandemic and their reflection is particularly meaningful to understand how artistic interventions could generate an aesthetic response to external challenges.

To conclude, artistic interventions stimulate aesthetic meaning making, by eliciting reactions and reflections based on the feelings and the

bodily experiences that the involved individuals go through. This happens especially when there is an aesthetic, post-dramatic complexity, underpinning the artistic intervention itself. In addition, the meaning making process is not linear, but it alternates serendipity and linearity, divergence and convergence, leaving individuals open to engage in interpretations, in eliciting and discussing meaning. It does not provide determined solutions to issues and it does not denote and label concepts univocally and in a deterministic way.

In the light of this literature review, we consider relevant to investigate the process through which a complex post-dramatic artistic intervention might generate aesthetic experiences in a group of student and lead them to elaborate their own meanings within their educational setting. The novelty of our approach could be retrieved in the fact that, if artistic interventions have been adopted in educational settings, they have been so to develop specific competences, while their openness and their not-deterministic nature has been neglected. The analyzed intervention was not conceived as purposeful and the authors have analyzed it considering the meanings that had spontaneously emerged, coming to the conclusion that the presence of art and of the artist motivated students to elaborate on their being together, as a *community*. We believe that this approach could lead to a finer grained specification

of the emotional and cognitive processes underpinning the emergence of meaning.

At the end of this literature review, before explaining our methodology and findings, in order to define better the contribution of our chapter, we would like to conclude with a final remark about the paucity of research in the field of higher education about sense making processes, as they are experienced by learners. In her article about socialization among international students as a sense making process, Suspitsyna (2013) affirms that 'in the field of higher education, research on sense making from an organizational perspective tends to focus on the decision-making of top administrators (Eddy, 2003; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Organizational analyses of individual students' sense making are still rare (Gilmore & Murphy, 1991; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002)' (Suspitsyna, 2013, p. 1353). Adopting students' perspective could be a valuable lens to discuss a more inclusive view of decision-making in educational setting and to questions the usual way management might conceive artistic interventions.

## Methodology

Studies that adopt an aesthetic lens in order to explore aspects of organizational life such as meaning creation have usually been grounded in qualitative methodologies (e.g. Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018; Strati, 2003). Qualitative methods,

indeed, are particularly fruitful for exploring dynamic phenomena - such as the construction of meaning - bringing out the different interpretations from the data and analyzing them in depth and, at the same time, being able to maintain their subtle and variegated nuances (Strati, 1999). For this reason, our research employs qualitative methods with an interpretive approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014).

## Data collection

The data collection for this study revolves around a workshop organized in May 2019, at the Catholic University of Milan, which involved 19 students of the Master in Arts Management. The workshop focused on palmistry and on the interpretation of the hand through its lines, shape, color and temperature. The workshop has been organized thanks to the collaboration of the artist Francesca Grilli, who is also a professional palm reader and led the students in a shared experience and activities. Activities started with an explanation of the historical and cultural significance of palmistry. The workshop began with the short documentary the artist created about the meaning of hands for her. The documentary portrays the moving hands of a young woman and of an old man, whose background voice narrates the history and values of his hands and how he has experienced his life through them, from



Figure 1: Introductory moment and palmistry explanation

fighting during the war to playing the piano. At the end of the documentary, the audience discovers that the old man is the grandfather of the artist, who had passed away and whose experience and memory stimulated the artist to study the value of our hands as an interpretative lens of the world. After the documentary, the artist-guide showed the students images taken by ancient books where hands were considered

to be mystical symbols, able to reveal secrets and future scenarios (see Figure 1).

This was followed by a pictorial phase, where the participants learned how to have a complete view of all the lines through the imprint of the hand (Figure 2). The phase of the pictorial activity already required to the participant to engage with different materials, a particular type of paint, paper, brushes, and



Figure 2: Imprint of the hand and reading techniques

to start touching and understanding their own hands, in order to dry them, to stretch them, so that paint could stick better and in order to start looking at hands' lines and shapes.

Students were introduced to contemporary techniques of professional palm reading and also learnt how to notice and read the details of the hand - namely its shape, colour, softness, sensation to the touch, elasticity and fingers

– by practicing together. Practical exercises have been performed both in groups and individually. From reading the details of the hand, participants were invited to hypothesize the other's personality traits, experiences, emotions and dreams.

Although neither the researchers nor the artist set the workshop on hands with the aim of reflecting on a precise these, almost all the

reflections that emerged both in the videos and in the self-reflections revolved around the dreams, fears, ideas and goals of being a community of students in arts management student today. The footprints that have been created during the workshop served as artifacts that helped participants to overcome tacit knowledge (Polanyi & Sen, 1967) and to develop stories and shared meaning together in an interactive and immersive aesthetic experience.

Empirical data have been generated through observations and pictures, done by the researchers, of participants during the workshop (17 in total). Students also produced videos (12) of them reading the palms each other and creating meaning together. Finally, students have been asked to write a self-reflection on the experience.

### Data analysis

In line with previous research on aesthetic meaning creation (e.g. Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018; Strati, 2003), we analysed data by following the principles of inductive theory-building through an interpretive approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). Therefore, while collecting data, we started to uncover apparently relevant elements and formulate preliminary insights. After re-reading the field notes and re-examining videos and pictures, we inductively coded them by assigning labels to pictures and text units (sentences or paragraphs) (Coffey & Atkinson,

1996). We started to triangulate the different data types (photos, videos, and field notes), and developed a preliminary list of descriptive codes. Through subsequent reflections, we consolidated our codes into broader categories and finally grouped them into the main aggregated themes that emerged from the analytical work (e.g. 'primary emotions'; 'rebuilding memories').

In order to involve the reader in the experience of meaning making done by the participants of this study, we adopt an open text.

## Findings

From the analysis of the data and their triangulation, the model represented in Figure 3 emerged, illustrating the process and the outcome of the aesthetic meaning making the students have engaged in through the artistic intervention.

Before clarifying the practices underlying the emergence of meaning (that we labelled 'emergent and elaboration processes') and the outcomes of the meaning making activities themselves (that we labelled 'critical and emphatic sense making'), it is important to stress the aesthetic valence of the artistic activities the students went through and their 'post-dramatic' character. The palmistry workshop is a complex activity requiring participants to engage with their senses and bodies in different moments and with different intensities. Though we live through them, we

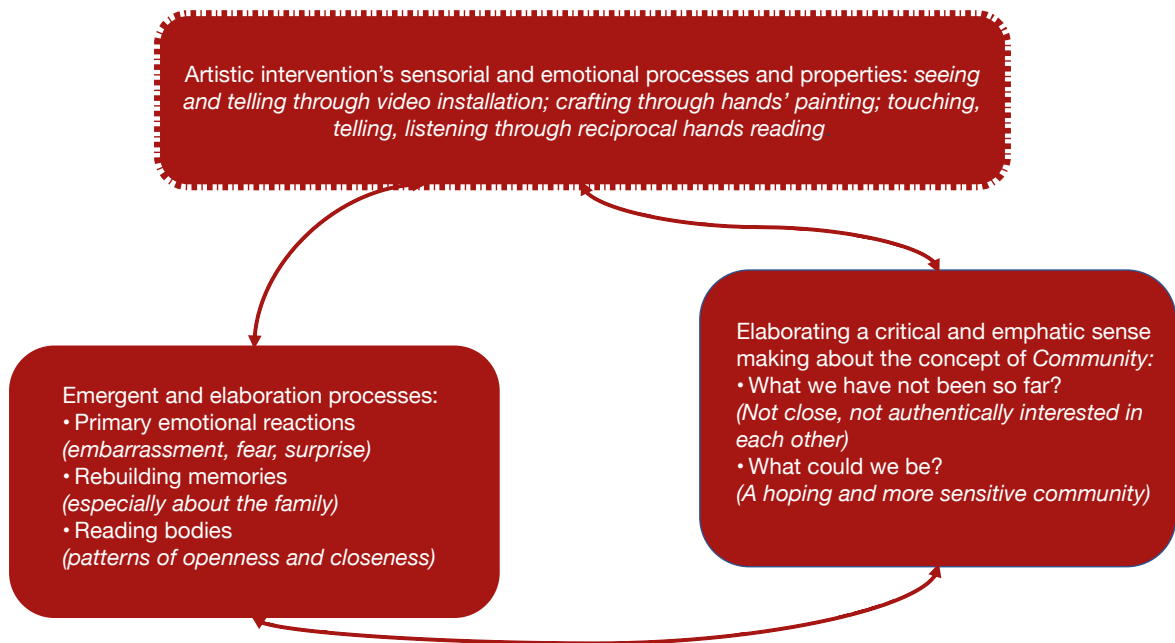


Figure 3: The process and the outcome of the aesthetic meaning making through artistic intervention

rarely think about our hands and how they put us in contact with other people, with the material world, and how they support us in expressing our feelings and thoughts.

As noted in the methodological paragraph, the artistic intervention organized by Francesca Grilli had multiple stages, all requiring a diverse stimulation of participants' aesthetic reactions and judgement. The documentary was a video requiring intense visual and auditory attention since the faces and bodies of the two characters are never visible, the

camera is focused on their hands and on the voice of the old man. The cognitive part with the explanation of the origins of palmistry is very brief and it was carried out by showing as much as possible the ancient books palmistry started being explained in. Then the painting activity required participant to touch and study their hands, to experience the effect of the paint on them. In this regards, the palm reading was even more intense, since participants had to hold their hands and touch them reciprocally, reading them to each other, while being

aware and personally in charge of recording their palm reading (participants were made aware that the recording was a part of the activities and that the artist had already used recordings from other workshops for her artistic installations in museums and art centres. Thus, a more or less voluntary dimension of staging of the palm reading was present as well).

In addition, we need to consider that palm reading is rich in symbolism and metaphorical meanings, that are all concepts management students have been estranged for long time in their education path and that have the potential to provoke emotions in them.

While reading the comments of the participants, watching the videos, and listening to their recordings, the authors had the chance to understand how the emotional and cognitive processes, then leading to the meaning making, were grounded into these intertwined set of aesthetic stimuli. In particular, through our analysis, we unveiled that the meaning making relies on intermediate emotional and cognitive activities, that we labelled 'emergent and elaboration processes'. These intermediate activities between the aesthetic experience and the aesthetic meaning making can be articulated into three different parts: 1) primary emotional reactions; 2) cognitive re-elaboration of memories; 3) body reading and understanding.

About the 'primary emotional reactions', participants immediately expressed as a response to the artistic interventions their

emotions without thinking them through. As in the following quotes:

'During palm reading, I felt a strong fear, but also a strong desire, curiosity about my future and about how to connect my past and my present, my current choice about arts management'.

'During the experience, I felt amused, but also embarrassed, maybe also because my partner was a male, I do not know (...) during the palm reading, I felt somehow ashamed, I was trying to think about how not to offend the other person, by reading his hand'.

About the 'memories', many participants were led, especially through the documentary, to think back to their infancy and to their own grandparents, in an attempt to revive the past, in order to explain the present. They made the attempt to go back in time, to the memories of holding hands with their grandparents, as re-experiences those feelings and bodily sensations could provide them with cues to interpret what they were doing in that moment.

About 'reading the bodies', participants showed this new view on others' bodies, as they could be a new way of understanding others' attitudes. As in the following quotes:

‘I was extremely surprised by the spontaneity with which he took my hand, his gesture was free from any embarrassment. On the opposite side, another colleague stayed with his arms crossed all the time, trying in this way to step back from the activities and from us’.

‘Our hands, they bring us warmth, they connect us to the world. They have a power that paradoxically we consider as given, but that it is extraordinary’.

These sensorial, cognitive and emotional reactions led participants to articulate a ‘contrasting’ meaning making about their experience as a community of students. The contrasting side of this sense making outcome is rooted in the fact that the palmistry workshop has created the ground both to express and understand the disappointment toward the fact of not having being a community and to articulate a path of hope to be more united, stronger citizens of the same learning group in the future. The emotions, memories and engagement with the body that the artistic interventions produced led the participant to read with honesty the fact that so far they had missed the opportunity to know each other. Touching their hands, thinking back about their families and their past, reading and recording

their future showed them how much they have been estrangers so far. At the same time, the construction of this interpretation was coupled with the understanding about what they could be as a group in future, if they keep in mind the value of staying connected with their mind and senses. As in the following quotes:

‘I finally viewed and understood that I had been with a group of people, all people physically in class with me, that I do not know at all and with whom I have not shared anything meaning so far’

‘we have overcome the barriers of stillness, that denote the reciprocal knowledge among people. I have understood that the hand has a power to connect and that we should not neglect this power in future times to stay connected’

## Conclusions

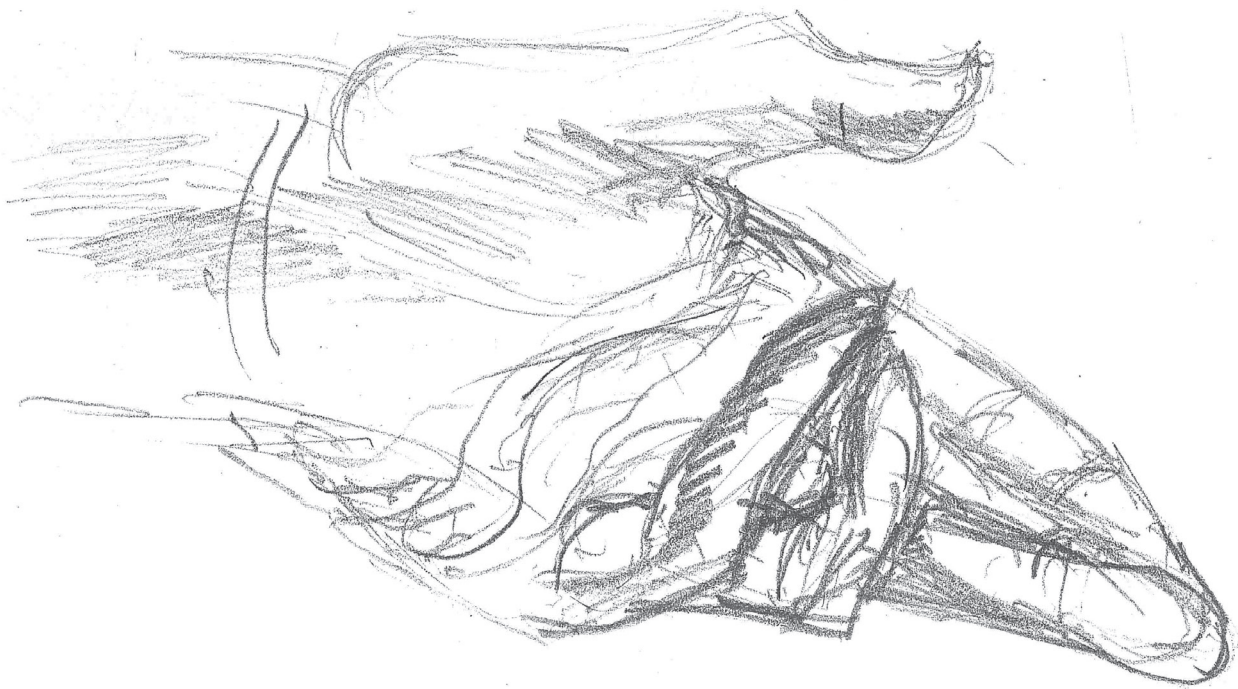
In this study we have explored how meaning making can take place through aesthetic experience, which is set in place through an artistic intervention that involved the members of arts management students. Our findings show that the aesthetic experience connected with the artistic production facilitates the emergence of new meaning to the concept of being a *community*.

With this study we contribute to the debate that, since the 1960s, became increasingly popular in organization studies and which focuses on the creation and transmission of tacit knowledge (Polanyi & Sen, 1967) in organizational contexts. Indeed, several studies have shown how knowledge sharing in work contexts can happen not only through logical reasoning but also through aesthetic experience and sensorial socio-material interaction (Nicolini et al., 2003; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2018; Strati, 2003). Our study reinforces these theories by illustrating how meaning making can also emerge through aesthetic interaction with socio-material actors.

The study also demonstrates how both the aesthetic and the symbolic dimensions can play a key role in stimulating meaning making even in working contexts - such as that of management - where these dimensions are traditionally neglected. Indeed, the use of art and of a strongly symbolic practice - such as the palm reading - made the participants to dialogue at a symbolic-emotional level that allowed them not only to make sense of the central concepts posed in the exercise, but also to establish a very strong connection between

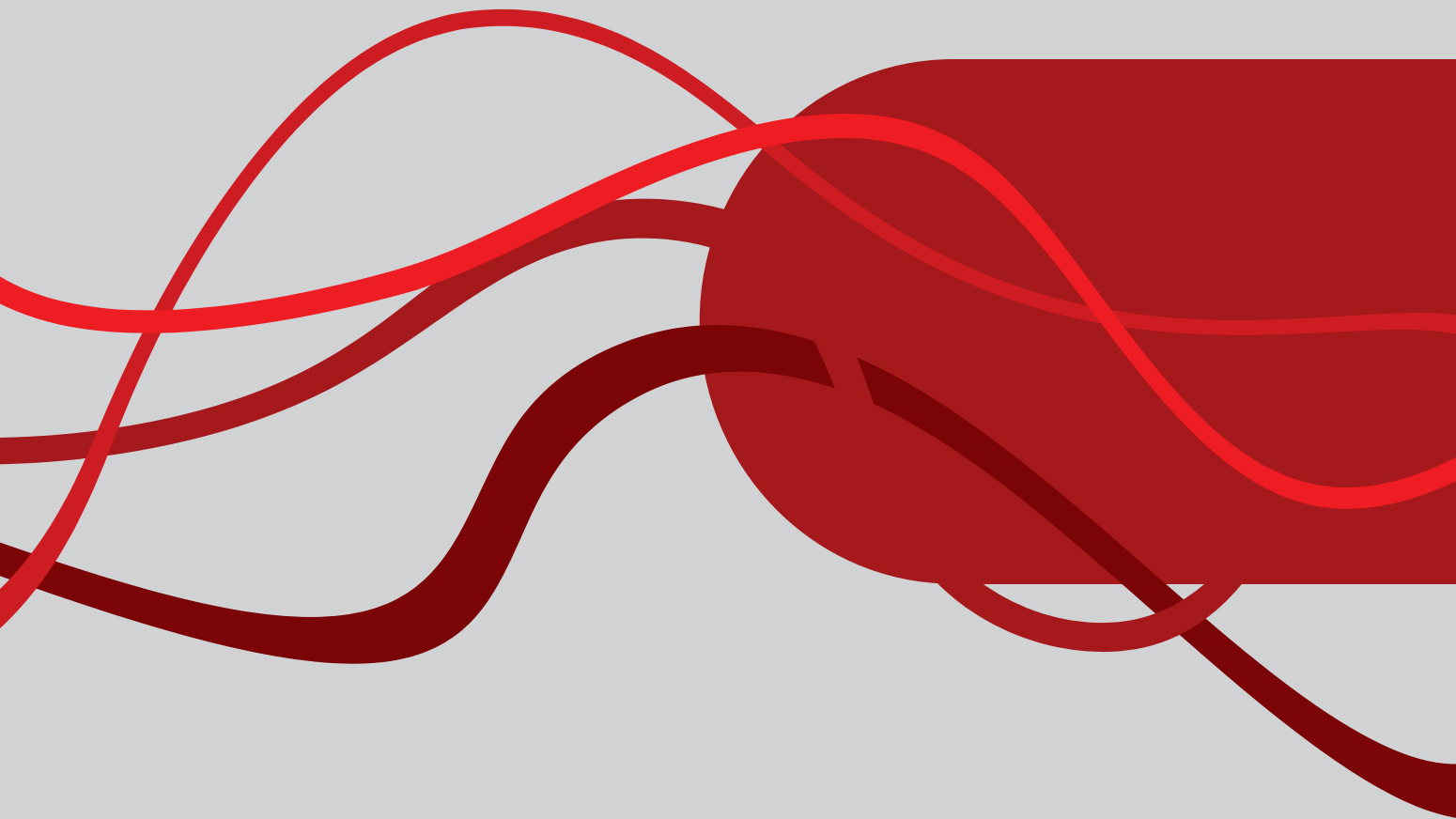
them, which also allowed them to improve mutual listening and observation, that are central aspects for several organizational practices such as team work, for example. The fact of having demonstrated that symbolic and aesthetic communication can develop soft communication skills such as these, should be useful for those involved not only in education, but also, more generally, in people management.

Furthermore, a communication stimulated by symbolic-aesthetic elements also allows the emergence of new and unexpected ideas, precisely because the aesthetic interaction does not take place in a rigorous, linear and deterministic way, but rather unexpected and open to novelty. This process, done in interaction between group members, favours new connections between ideas and the emergence of unexpected interpretations, all elements which, according to modern theories of creativity (see Amabile, 1996; Grant & Berry, 2011; Hjorth et al., 2018), are at the basis of the emergence of creative solutions in teams and are necessary for innovation. Greater attention to aesthetic interaction in team work would be useful for companies that aim to stimulate creativity and innovation.



## Ceci n'est pas une main

(cf Magritte, 1929. This drawing, by Alison Neilson, is from an activity led by Andrea Inocêncio during the virtual visit to Portugal for the ALL Transnational Meeting in May 27 & 28, 2021. Additional hands appear in Hand Comic Book in booklet 4, pgs 65-70 and part of this drawing activity is shown in booklet 1, page 17)





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# Arts-based methods

## The body, the co-creation, the aesthetic participation

Arts-based method can be revelatory when it comes to unfold how the body can be the place of our identity, the 'what' and the 'how' we happen, authentically. Interactions among artists, students, people with different abilities and disabilities. The Turtle Key Arts artistic intervention, involving musicians, composers, students and people affected by dementia, and the workshop on palmistry led by the artist Francesca Grilli with management students, both speak about how the body can substitute the mind in participatory processes of co-creation. Arts-based methods, when meant to be, go back to art's craftsmanship roots and to the artistic intent of honest creation, can push for equal and democratic participation of people, independently from the usual categories we adopt to consider their ability to contribute. People affected by dementia,

students, and composers, artists, palm readers and managers-to-be can all find a place to be through their bodies and to express something meaningful for their development. Dancing, producing sounds, touching hands, trying to rely on them to establish a connection, these are all ways to open participation to everyone, because these practices do not imply any cognitive evaluation, and they avoid all the traditional and rational ways of establishing who we are in a certain moment. Arts-based methods create the space for suspending the expectations on our mainstream ways of using our brain and our bodies and senses, from tactile impressions to auditory ones, through which we build our worlds.

Allan Owens, Nick Ponsillo and Anne Pässilä

Who are these people?

Why am I here?

Why are we sitting in a circle?

It's all very strange... And now what happens?! They ask me to move.. but why?! I won't! I'm shy. I don't understand..

The girl in front of me is moving.. she follows the music.. she seems to enjoy it.. how can she be so relaxed? Also the boy next to me is starting to move his body, he is feeling the music..

Everyone around me dances and I feel so embarrassed!

Come on! Let's try! I should let myself go. I close my eyes and start listening.. I hear the music but also feel the others around me.. we are connected. I am not alone anymore. I smile at this girl. We are connected by the music, by the movement.. It seems I know her. We are feeling each other, listening to each other. I feel the others around me.

Music takes shape, it becomes a dialogue among us.

I was not ready for the unexpected but I'm glad I welcomed it.



‘Embodied participation’ is not the only thing that keeps these two interventions together. There is the idea of community, which is related to the participation and to the co-creation we have talked about above. Both Turtle Key Arts and palmistry have raised the importance of locating artistic interventions within a community and how arts-based methods could be the way to create a space for a new community. In the palmistry workshop, individuals spontaneously started to talk critically about how they had not until then paid attention to each other as a group of people where help and closeness could be possible. Touching and studying each other’s hands brought these individuals to realise how many times they had ignored each other, and then afterwards to elaborate positive thoughts about the need to develop a community. In the Turtle Key Arts experience, the concept of community touches art, disability, ability, learning and knowing. Individuals experiment together, being related to each other, by belonging to a community interested in

inclusion, research and arts production. Even the ‘sponsor’ organisation is included in this idea of pursuing relatedness, since it is not proposed with a final ‘outcome’ at the end of the intervention, but with a more open narrative, where the organisation itself participates in generating an interpretation and has to pour something personal and autonomous into the artistic intervention. This openness that produces a sense of community (a community, a group of reference where I can contribute without being judged), also exists in the palmistry workshop, since the artist collects the audio recordings of the palm readings as materials for future artworks. The management students involved were aware of that and they were left with the intriguing and liberatory thought that they were all contributing together to making art, to a making that is not instrumental, since we still do not know how we will use it.

### **Thread 1: Affects, Transformations and the Artists' Voices**

Digging emergency holes near the gate:

A zine about our practice

Alison Laurie Neilson & Andrea Inocêncio, Portugal

Gothic pedagogy

Glenn-Egil Torgersen, Herner Saeverot &

Kristian Firing, Norway

### **Thread 2: The Artist - Educator Alliance**

Artist-led learning in embodied writing workshops

Tatiana Chemi & Pierangelo Pompa, Denmark

Arts-based methods at The Royal Norwegian

Air Force Academy:

A journey of stress, growth and love

Kristian Firing, Glenn-Egil Torgersen &

Herner Saeverot, Norway

### **Thread 3: Community and Collective Learning**

Towards transprofessionalism:

Artists in higher education

Allan Owens, UK, Anne Pässilä, Finland,

Nick Ponsillo, Monica Biagioli &

Charlotte Cunningham UK

Meaning making through artistic interventions:

An aesthetic approach

Federica De Molli & Chiara Paolino, Italy

### **Thread 4: Performance and Performativity**

From simulation to dissimulation

Addressing the dark side of marketing

through art and fiction

Catherine Morel & Philippe Mairesse, France

Performative inquiry: To enhance language learning

Rannveig Björk Thorkelsdóttir &

Jóna Guðrún Jónsdóttir, Iceland