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; Bowell & 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
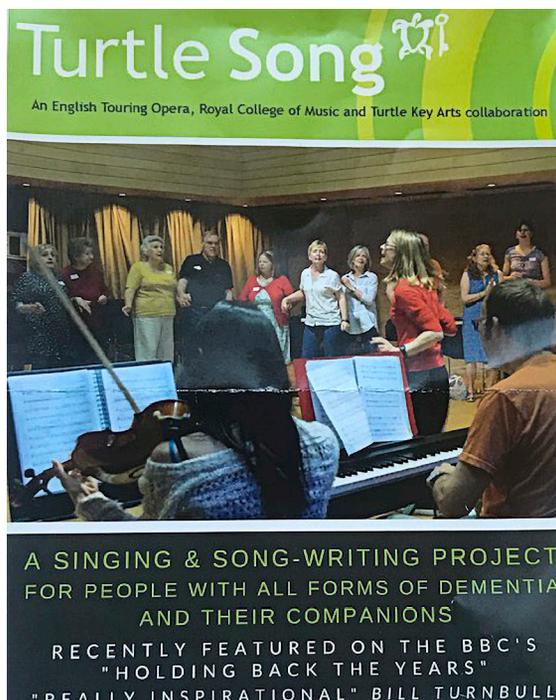
Figure 2. Turtle Key Arts Collaboration Poster.

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

Music students

Professional musician

composer

Participants

Music leader

Lyric screen
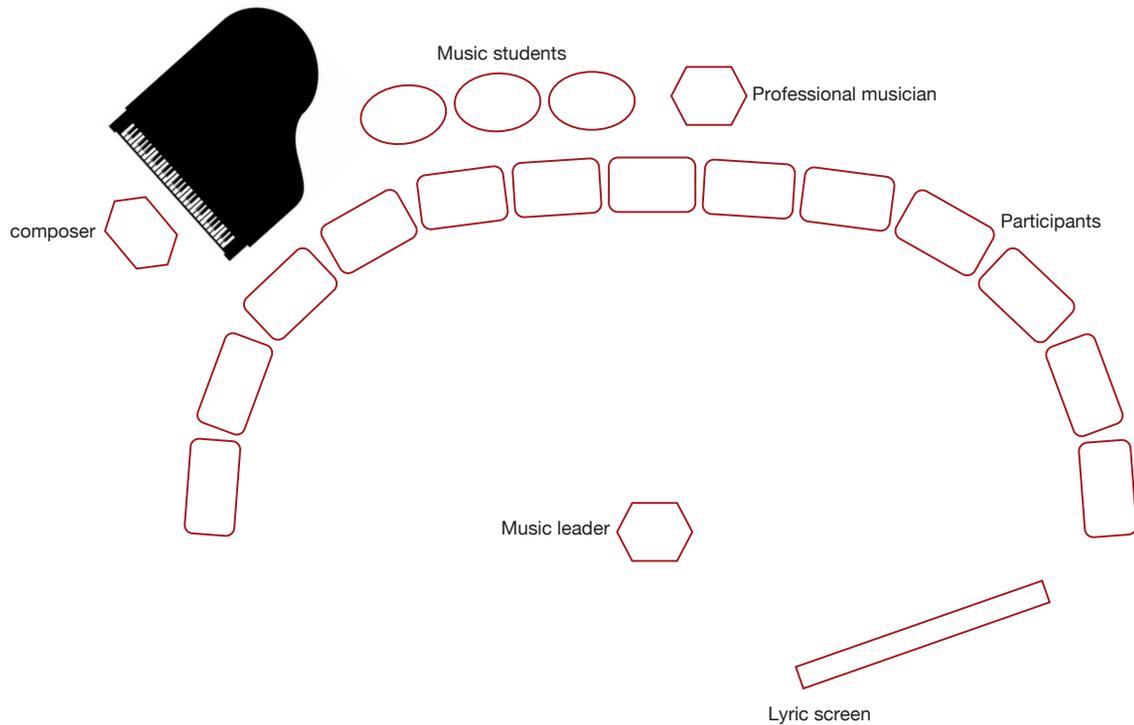
techniques, applied music practice and person-centred practice in a dementia context (Kitwood, 1997) were explored. Awareness of dementia as an illness also formed a part of the training to prepare students for the creative *Turtle Song* environment. For the students this was the first time that they 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 involve 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 (Biagiolli 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" (Pässilä, 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.
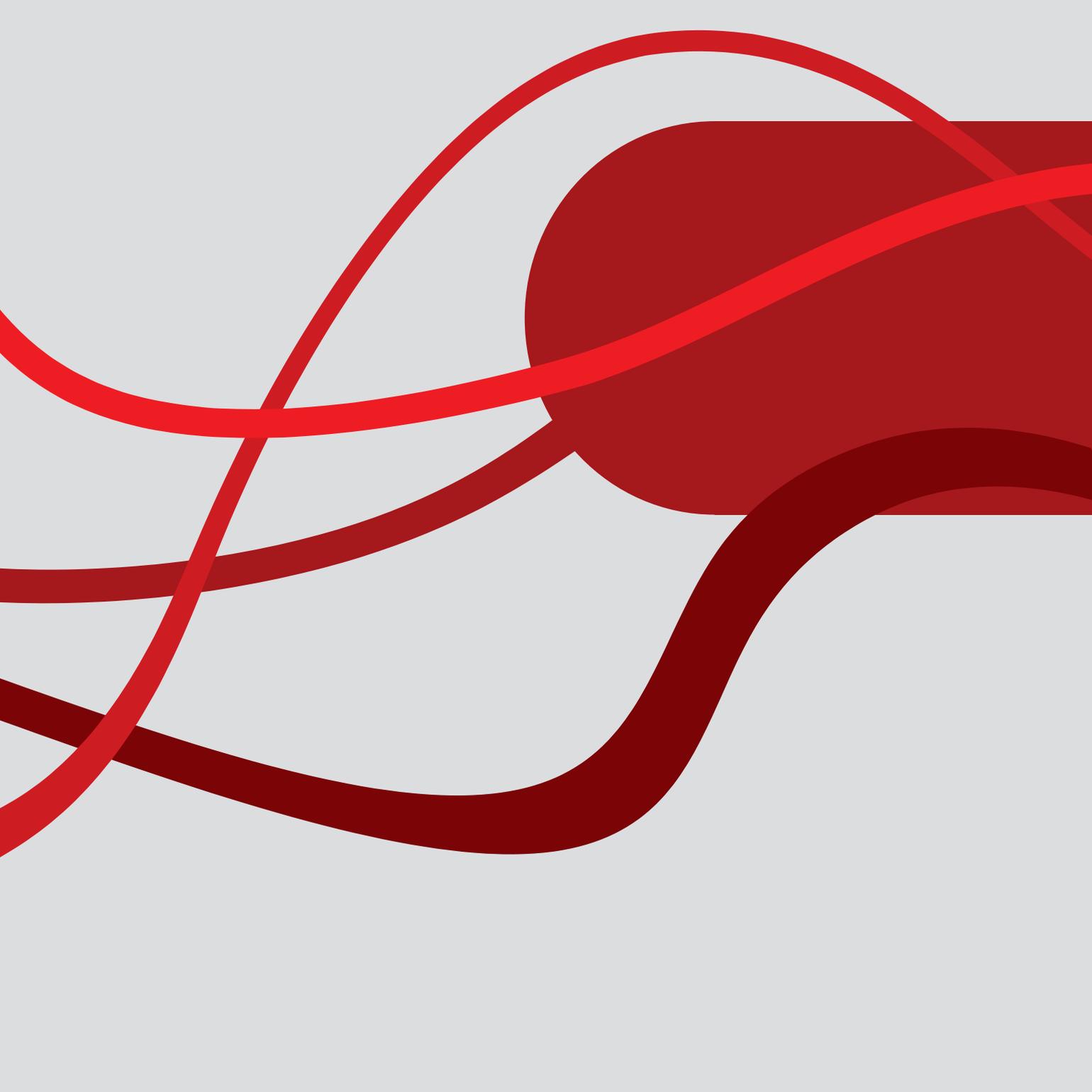
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Allan Owens
University of Chester, UK
Mail: a.owens@chester.ac.uk

Anne Pässilä
LUT University Lahti Campus, Finland
Mail: Anne.Passila@lut.fi

Nick Ponsillo
University of Chester, UK
Mail: n.ponsillo@chester.ac.uk

Monica Biagioli
University of the Arts London, UK

Charlotte Cunningham
Turtle Key Arts, UK