Distancing when undertaking first person action inquiry: two devices

Abstract

Action Inquiry is a methodology with the desired outcome of research action producing systemic change. In the context of a doctoral study seeking to explore how art-based pedagogies may empower educational practice, Action Inquiry was an obvious choice where empowerment involves social work practitioners exploring this question together. As part of a participatory approach, a process of self-examination is integral to the author's inquiry as a means of contextualising professional practice in terms of social, cultural and political dynamics, and as a means to appreciate the journeys of participants in the author's inquiry. In this article the author discusses distancing, a process of estrangement, as a means of exploring and analysing personally generated data. Two devices are developed to enhance distancing in self-inquiry, particularly when the data is challenging because it is 'too close' to the inquirer. The first is a visual Johari Window (Luft and Ingram 1955), involving a series of self-portraits and collaged images related to the author's educational journey in life. The second is a dramatic device inspired by the work of Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote and Bolton 1995) that involves the development of a fictitious character who presents the work of the author and provides opportunities for transformative reflection. The character of William Loveday is developed during a number of educational events using an iterative spiral of planning, performance, evaluation and further performance. The inquiry shows how visual art and drama can provided potent possibilities to critique and reappraise both doctoral work and practice education through a process of distancing. The author highlights how these devices can be adapted to numerous practice situations involving self-inquiry and participatory inquiry and to empower educational practice.

Key Words: distancing; drama; first person action inquiry; visual autoethnography

William Loveday (*William is standing in front of an art installation containing a drawing/collage*):

'Notice the quick hatched pencil marks feeling their way, exploring the contours of the artist's face. Is the restless drawing betraying an uncertainty? Four portraits in one, all drawn from a side view, each one different. The eyes are not making direct contact, which you would usually expect from an artist's gaze in a mirror. What impression do you have from the artist's expression?'

I have created William Loveday. He has spoken at a number of conferences and educational events to explain and critique aspects of research work that I was finding difficult to articulate as an artist, social work educator and inquirer. In this excerpt he is discussing a drawing/collage I had been making, presented as part of an art installation exhibited at the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) 'Creative Doctorates' symposium in 2018. The art installation is a piece of visual autoethnography based on self-examination and reflections of my educational journey through life. Why is self-inquiry so important in my doctoral journey and what voice does William bring to my inquiry that necessitates his presence?

In this article I discuss the interconnecting relationship between first-person action inquiry and visual autoethnography. I was concerned I might be too close to my data, thus posing a risk to the trustworthiness of my inquiry. To provide distance between myself and my doctoral work I developed two artistic/performative devices, a visual Johari Window (Luft and Ingram 1955) and the creation of an alter ego based on a dramatic convention originated by Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote 2000). I used the action planning cycle/spiral developed by Kurt Lewin (1946) to develop the latter. Although the notion of 'distancing' will unfold throughout the article, I use Stig Eriksson's presentation of this concept as a poetic and pedagogical strategy involving a process of 'making strange' or 'estrangement' as a means to reflection and learning (Eriksson 2014:3-4).

My doctorate study is an inquiry into how art-based pedagogies might empower critical social work practice education. The term 'practice educator' is used to describe those professionals who are responsible for facilitating and assessing the students' practice learning during their placements. The intended inquiry impact is to show how practice educators may develop their teaching and extend their repertoire of approaches by using art-based teaching methods to support student learning and assessment during social work placements. In particular, I hope there will be an

impact on how practice educators empower their students in the development of their critical understanding and skills by developing art-based approaches.

A key opportunity for my development has been my participation in a faculty learning group at Birmingham City University UK, a community of practice involving academics who are interested in performative modes of inquiry and inquiry dissemination. This has been a nurturing and enabling forum, with opportunities for individual and collective creative voices to be heard at conferences, symposiums, workshops and in publications. I contributed to a collective sculpture that toured a number of educational events, including 'Disrupting Inquiry Practices' at Coventry University, and 'Creative Caring' at the Centre for Social Care, Health and Related Research conference at Birmingham City University, both in 2018. This took the form of an art installation and the aforementioned drawing/collage.

Figure 1. Art Studio - installation at 'Creative Caring' conference,
Birmingham City University 2018.

The metaphor of the art studio referenced the apprenticed artist in Renaissance Europe, who was dependent upon using materials discarded by the master to produce apprenticed work as part of his journey towards being a professional artist. This metaphor resonated for me, as I considered myself an apprentice inquirer learning my craft. The installation was put together using materials from my own studio and old jars and bottles acquired from local antique stores and junk shops, filled with powdered pigments.

While putting together and showing the installation I encountered two particular challenges. First, I found it difficult to articulate some of the ideas behind my inquiry that positioned creative outcomes as prominent without being heavily dependent upon a written explanation. Second, I felt I was too close to my material to differentiate the objective and subjective aspects of my autoethnographical work.

Inquirers need to be aware how their identity and beliefs impact on every aspect of their inquiry (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). I position myself as a critical qualitative and participatory inquirer, where the presence of the self as inquirer is essential, impacting upon all stages of the inquiry process (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). From the planning stage, the interaction with participants, the analysis of data and how inquiry is presented, all involve human interaction to some degree or another. Heron (2001) argues that beliefs about the world and how it is experienced are revealed in inquiry by ontological questions about the nature of reality; epistemologically by the extent of our knowledge and the relationship between the knower and reality; and methodologically by the way the inquirer can find out about reality through increasingly evolving belief systems constructed between communities of knowers.

This leads to the discourse on objectivity, where reality is external, waiting to be discovered; and subjectivity, where knowledge is constructed and contingent. The hegemony of objectivism found within the positivist paradigm has long been challenged, with the overarching criticism being that external phenomena cannot be entirely independent from the mind of the inquirer (Guba and Lincoln 1982; Reason 1994; Heron 2001; Marshall 2016). Any findings are shaped by the inquirer in the interaction with the world. Statements of fact are theory-laden, formulated within a set of pre-existing theoretical assumptions, and value-laden. There is selectiveness within the values implicit in the set of theoretical assumptions in preference to the

values represented by rejected theoretical assumptions (Heron 2001). In traditional terms, the researcher is distanced from the research, a neutral observer objectively examining human phenomena (Reason 1994). But this is a different kind of distancing from that concerning this article, where subjectivity is openly acknowledged and embraced, and where objectivity/subjectivity are not seen as binary opposites but more nuanced (Heron 2001).

Consideration of professional identity has been evident in my career as a social worker. In my professional development it has been essential to be critically aware of my identity, values, and belief systems, and to engage in critical reflective practice in order to avoid discrimination. My self-awareness project has been situated within social and political contexts and has engaged in an understanding and commitment to challenge organisational, cultural and structural oppression (Thompson 2012). A similar journey of exploration is a key area of development for students during their practice placements and the critical self-awareness of practice educators is vital to empower this process. However, it is a continuous one due to the insidious nature of oppressive practice. Thompson (2012;192) states that if we become complacent by failing to check we are carrying through an anti-oppressive stance, 'discriminatory ideologies can subtly re-establish themselves in our thoughts and actions'. I consider there is a clear symbiosis between the critical self-awareness required to be an effective social worker and inquirer, which is crucial to the humanitarian ambitions espoused by the social work profession such as social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, respect for diversities, empowerment and liberation (IASSW/IFSW 2014).

The link between visual autoethnography and action inquiry

By considering how art-based approaches might complement the work of social work practice educators in enabling their students' learning, I set out to understand my own educational journey as a means of appreciating the social, cultural and political contexts that influence my professional identity. In doing so I hoped to be more appreciative of how such factors influence other practitioners, and to contextualise how professional practice can be understood and undertaken.

The use of visual autoethnography and first person action inquiry seemed relevant choices, but how well would they function and how might the arts relate to these two approaches? Both can provide a systematic inquiry approach to help the practitioner-inquirer investigate and analyse practice related problems or challenges by making sense of her/his own position and professional behaviour, together with those of others, within the context of work cultures (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Marshall (2016:8) describes first person action inquiry and autoethnography as 'cousins' 'with many similar intentions of reflexivity' but emerging from different heritages.

As socially orientated inquiry, Whitehead (2002) positions ethnography as a predominantly qualitative approach. The 'auto' or 'self' denotes the inquirer or ethnographer being the source of the data. Chang (2008:51) states that autoethnography is a powerful tool for inquirers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings, specifically citing social work. Rather than being a descriptive self-indulgent introspective process, Chang supports the inquiry integrity of autoethnography with its provenance in empirical anthropology and social ethnographical inquiry. Defined as a combination of self-situated cultural analysis and interpretation with 'narrative details', Chang maintains that vigorous methods of data collection and analysis can result in a social scientific approach to inquiry (ibid 2008:46).

Pink (2013) develops this approach by engaging with visual material in inquiry as the central data component, this being typically generated by the inquirer. A criticism of visual autoethnography is that of image interpretation. The viewer may see the image very different from the image producer; things not intended or envisioned. Pink (2013:23) states that: '[a]ny experience, action, artefact, image or idea is never definitively just one thing but may be redefined differently in different situations, by different individuals and in terms of different discourses'. Similar to my art practice and how people view my artwork, I find the participatory and interpretive engagement in critically orientated artistic endeavour a desired aspect of the process. Just as the narrative might change every time it is told, so too an image is contingent upon how it is situated, the meanings it evokes, the knowledge it conveys and how it is interpreted (Rose 2016). The centrality of the visual within an autoethnographical inquiry seemed natural given the nature of my inquiry interest.

In seeking to explore how art-based pedagogies may empower educational practice, the desired outcome of action and change involving practitioners within a specific professional context made action inquiry a clear choice. The systematic, transparent and replicable qualities of action inquiry lend themselves well to the ambitions of my inquiry in extending and developing innovative practice education. A framework involving different levels of plurality outlined by Reason and Bradbury (2001) provides further mutual symbiosis with autoethnography and beyond. First person action inquiry addresses the ability of individual inquirers to act with awareness and meaningfulness when examining and living in the external world. This is not simply an introspective process but is developed by critical feedback from relevant others (Marshall 2016). Such opportunities as supervision sessions with my inquiry supervisor, presenting at conferences, symposiums and workshops, and sharing reflective drawing/writing with others, have enabled me to develop a deeper critical understanding of my work. Second person action inquiry involves making co-operative inquiries with others into issues of mutual concern, beginning with a pilot study I undertook with practice educators and to be followed by future iterative cycles of participatory inquiry (Reason and Bradbury 2001). Furthermore, my engagement with fellow academics in the faculty learning group and the shared experience of the collective sculpture are examples of second person action inquiry. Third person action inquiry involves creating a wider community of inquiry and larger scale dialogue, achieved for example by presenting at conferences, engaging in professional media sites and publication.

Acosta et al. (2015) identify individual autoethnography as an initial and inductive stage in collaborative action inquiry, each participant then sharing their narratives in order to explore and evaluate the structural, cultural, and behavioural perspectives related to their practice. Although broader, this resonates with the idea of reconnaissance, an appraisal of where the practitioner-inquirer is currently positioned in relation to the inquiry, the desired achievements of the inquiry, and the relevant methods to realise it (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). Developed further by Dillon (2008) reconnaissance involves both self-reconnaissance (an exploration of the inquirer's beliefs and professional behaviours within a particular inquiry context) and situational reconnaissance (an exploration of the practice context related to the inquiry from an insider viewpoint). Acknowledging that both these forms of

reconnaissance often occur throughout the inquiry process, Dillon considers living inquiry as a relevant approach, where beliefs, strategies and ways of behaving are treated as fluid, not fixed, unfinished, and not clear-cut. This requires a continual process of adjusting, observing what emerges, and bringing things into question (Marshall 1999; Marshall 2016). Hill builds upon this embodied approach by stating that the practice of reconnaissance is 'not restricted to a place and time but continues in a haphazard way throughout the duration of the action inquiry process' (Hill 2008:29). The question 'how far back do you go?' is posed as a rhetorical one (Dillon 2007; Hill 2008), but in terms of the knowledge generated by exploring historical and cultural situational experience, this needs to be related to the inquiry project. In my case, this goes back to childhood to evaluate how experiences, both positive and troubled, have informed my educational beliefs and practice, uncovering strengths and baggage. In previous praxis as a practice educator I lacked confidence in using my identity as an artist to enrich student learning, because my multiple identities as artist-practitioner-educator-inquirer had not come together sufficiently. Art-based practice was not something that was explicitly related to social work practice, even though social workers are encouraged to be creative (Burgess and Laurance 2007). By taking an autoethnographical approach and exploring factors that had influenced me, inspired me, troubled me and even held me back in the past, I hoped I would appreciate the journeys of other participants in my inquiry, and a desire that valuable insights may be applicable beyond my inquiry.
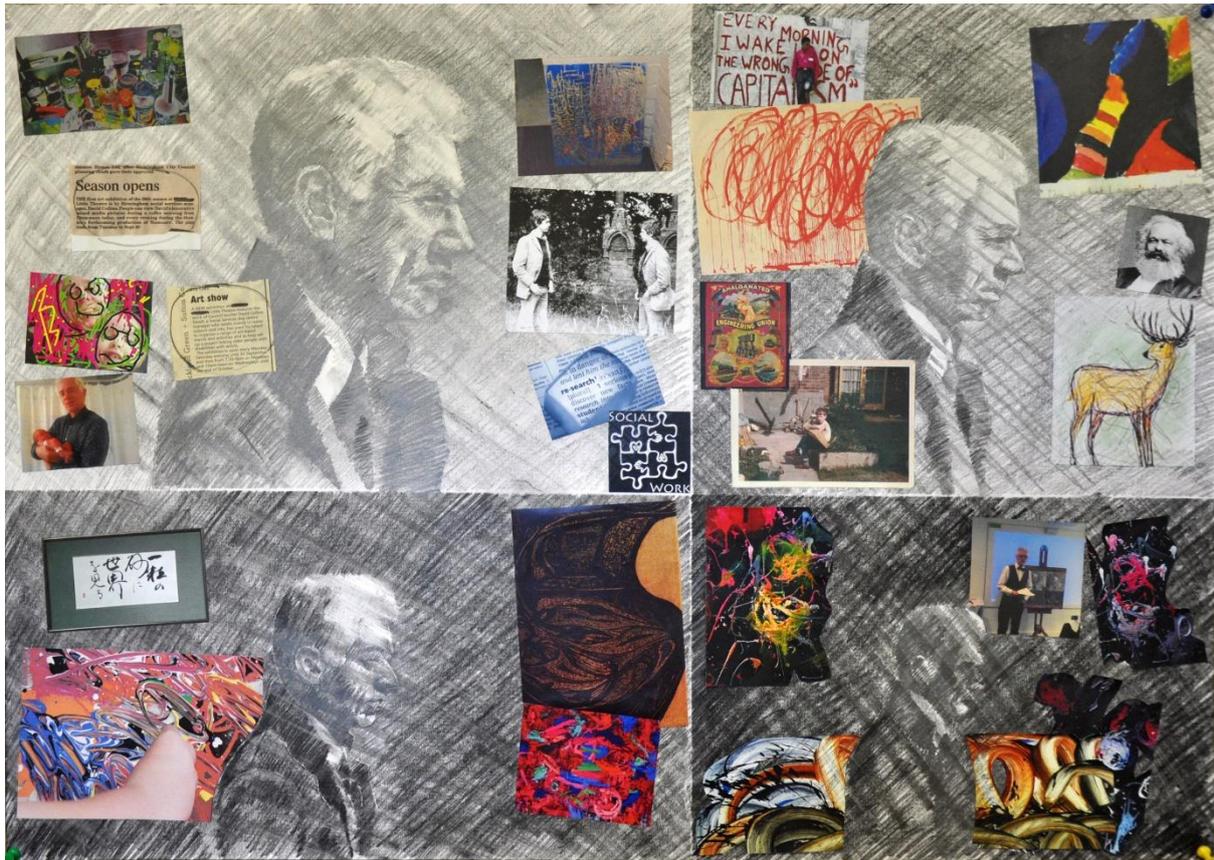
A visual Johari Window

The idea of using Johari Window came from a pilot study workshop I ran with social work practice educators in 2017. The aim was to conclude the workshop by jointly working upon some form of artefact that summed up participant experience and learning, but we ran out of time. Based upon an in-depth case discussion, the group decided they would have worked on a collage using Johari Window, had there been sufficient time. Johari Window is a heuristic model of interpersonal awareness developed by American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram, and is a popular model in social work education in the UK (Luft and Ingram 1955). The name Johari is a conflation of their first names – Joe and Harrington. It can be used

individually or on a team and organisational basis. The window is divided into four panes. The first is the open self, where one is aware of oneself and others are also aware. The second is the hidden self, things one is aware of but others are not. The third is the blind self, where one is not aware of aspects of one's identity whilst others are. And the fourth is the unknown self, where one is not aware of oneself and others are also unaware. Usually, through an exchange of adjectives, things are shared that may increase awareness in these four areas leading to greater self-consciousness. The window is often pictorially depicted as four equal sized panes, but the aim is to increase the open self and decrease the hidden, blind and unknown selves.

Developing the idea as a visual autoethnographical exercise to explore how my educational journey through life had informed my ideas and beliefs about education, I drew four self-portraits from a side view, one for each pane of the Johari Window. Each one was drawn in pencil from a photograph, which helped me to treat myself as an object, a piece of data. Each one had a differing degree of clarity created by a hatching effect, to mirror the degree of clarity denoted by the four characteristics of the Johari Window. I became conscious of avoiding self-flattery and attempted to draw with candour, including the tell-tale signs of ageing.

Open Self   Hidden Self

Blind Self   Unknown Self

Figure 2. Visual Johari Window (drawing and collage)

Onto the drawings I collaged images that evoked responses to the different selves within the window. Each image contained a narrative related to my educational journey. Sometimes images were evocative, stimulating memories and reflections. A painting from a series called 'Bacchus, Psilax, Mainomenos' by the American abstract painter Cy Twombly conjured up childhood memories and represented an early example of my reaction against authoritarian educational approaches. I'll let William comment on the connection:

William Loveday *(making a comment about the hidden-self section of the Johari Window drawing/collage)*

'Scribble, indecipherably calligraphic and graffiti-like mark making, euphoric loops that soar upwards and red floods of paint that drip, ooze and cascade down the canvas paying homage to gravity. Twombly captures the

spontaneous experiential expression of discovery found in young children's art. Inspired by Homer's Iliad the series references the dual and almost schizophrenic nature of the god Bacchus (also known as Dionysus), oscillating between pleasure and sensual release (psilax), and debauchery bordering on the nihilistic (mainomenos) (Cullinan 2011). These paintings resonate with David for a number of reasons. He had acute difficulties with reading and writing as a child, and only became confident from the age of eleven. The sweeping, swirling painterly gesticulations of Twombly signify his earliest joy of drawing and painting as a child, where the visual was a primary means of articulating his feelings. David recalls being chastised by a stern and intimidating priest at Sunday school for doodling while he was in full flow of indoctrination. 'Drawing belongs to the Devil' he was told, the priest's face thrust within inches of David's. Like the theme of Twombly's painting, David took a Bacchanalian-like pleasure in obstinately continuing with his doodling, much to the priest's intense annoyance. The priest told his father after class, but fortunately being someone who had a complete distain for pompous authoritarianism, his father took no notice'.

Furthermore, I consciously selected images as representations of my experiences or aspects of my identity. For example, also in the hidden-self section of the window is an image of both a trade union banner and that of Karl Marx, which referenced my father's trade unionism. I recalled the lively debates I witnessed as a child between my father who was a socialist and political activist, and my uncle who was a member of the Communist Party. Through my autoethnographical reflections these memories emerged as influential experiences that later informed my choice of social work as a profession. Other images were evoked from experiences during my current doctoral journey. The elegant calligraphy in the blind-self section of my window represents a comment made at my approval panel presentation for my doctoral inquiry about the quality of my writing, something that had significant meaning given my difficulties earlier in my life. Situated in my unknown section, I included a photograph of myself enacting William Loveday at a conference. This experience presented me with an opportunity to discover something new about myself, which I expand upon in this paper.

Using visual images as part of a research project and making these publicly visible in conferences and publications raises a number of ethical issues. In self-narrative inquiry the identity of the researcher is already disclosed, and the identities of others may be discernible by association. When aiming for inclusivity in self-narrative work, it is useful to ponder the question of ownership posed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): does the narrator own the story simply by telling of it?

Ethical practice in visual base research is not straightforward (Rose 2016). The continuous and rapid development of information technology and social media have challenged traditional understanding of consent and copyright laws. Images are uploaded on and downloaded from the internet at a phenomenal rate on a daily basis. Kress (2010) argues that image-making, circulation, sharing and mashing are profligate features of contemporary visual culture, and in many situations, privacy, consent and copyright have become irrelevant to many people. Furthermore, Sturken and Cartwright (2009:212) state that contemporary art practice engaging with digital images problematise our understanding of originality, authenticity and ownership, raising 'questions of reproduction and copyright to new levels of intensity'.

The use of found images in my drawing/collage have been reconstituted and recontextualised in relation to other images in an attempt to establish new meaning, thus posing questions of authorship. Most of the images have been produced by myself. I have gained consent from my daughter to include images of my granddaughters, together with their consent obtained in an age-appropriate way, to illustrate the issue of work/life balance and my incalculable educational journey as a parent and grandfather. Wherever possible I have obtained permission to use other images, for example, I contacted my late father's trade union to gain permission to use the image of their trade union banner. Although guided by ethical statements and practice guidelines regarding visual methodologies, such as the Code of Practice outlined by the International Visual Sociological Association (Papademus and International Visual Sociological Association 2009), I have found variations that possibly reflect the complex and emergent development of visual based inquiry. Pink (2013) makes the point that different people, contexts and cultures have different notions of ethical practice and this challenges the idea that there is one set of ethical rules when undertaking ethnographical research. Rose states that current discourse

on visual-based research ethics is often framed in terms of rights and the 'institutional imperative of ethics review boards' (Rose 2016:371). In addition, my reflexive practice is essential in order to be continually aware of the power relations between myself and participants throughout the whole inquiry process.

What have I learned from making a visual Johari Window? That autoethnography and first person action inquiry is not about focusing on myself alone but involves understanding others. Everyone has their unique journeys that inform their beliefs and current practice, and we are socially situated in developing our awareness of ourselves. Understanding my own journey has increased my appreciation of others' journeys, and how these are culturally framed. Furthermore, working with visual images has enabled a more penetrating inquiry into my own memories, experiences, and the cultural contexts in which these are situated. They have enabled me to identify and examine critical incidents related to the development of my educational practice, and to a degree has helped me to objectify these experiences, a kind of distancing from the emotional attachments associated with my past narratives. Perhaps it has provided a temporary dispassionateness in order to see these narratives slightly anew. I have stopped taking some of these memories for granted, the familiar has begun to look a little strange. As an educator, such insights have led me to delve more deeply into previously unexplored spaces in my relationship to subjective and objective experience, extending the understanding of my own epistemology and ontology. What about future development of this work? Perhaps William's critique offers some ideas about this:

> William Loveday *(William is commenting at a faculty learning group seminar on using drama in research dissemination 2018)*:
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> 'The drawing/collage begins to stir David's memories and to loosen fragments of habituated past narratives into a visual structure. It has been through exhibition that he has been able to unpack these images for viewers, engaging him and others in interconnected conversations and shared dialogue. Cultural interpretations have begun to develop. Unconscious matter has been uncovered. Although the process of self-inquiry is not a linear one, as one memory generates more narratives, moving backwards and forwards, not necessarily in chronological order, a more systematic self-observation and

reflection is required (Rodriguez and Ryave 2002). I hope to see David develop more works, perhaps focusing on different points of his educational journey'.

Enter stage right

Faced with the daunting problem of being able to disseminate my own work and ideas in a critical way, and encouraged by my inquiry supervisor, I considered a dramatic device to present my art installation at a number of conferences and educational events. I had not participated in drama since a number of embarrassing performances in school productions as a child and was clearly out of my comfort zone and pushing the boundaries of my own learning. In order to provide an element of distancing from my inquiry I chose an educational drama convention devised by the English drama teacher and academic Dorothy Heathcote. This involved the development of a fictitious character that would present and critically comment upon my work.

Despite showing talent at drama school, Dorothy Heathcote was subject to discrimination by being told she had no future on the stage because of her size and stature. She began teaching in schools in Yorkshire and immediately developed an unorthodox approach in the way children were engaged as full participants in drama. In the 1950s she began a long academic career, firstly at Durham University, and later Newcastle University, making a significant contribution to drama educational theory. A particular focus of her work was using drama as a means of engaging students in inquiry and reflective learning. By developing theatrical strategies such as 'Teacher in Role' (Johnson and O'Neill 1984), 'Mantle of the Expert' (Heathcote and Bolton 1995) and 'Rolling Role' (Heathcote 2000) she examined the teacher/student relationship and how to empower students to engage in critical thinking about their lives and society.

The presence of Heathcote's work in contemporary debates and practice which involves showcasing the student voice, power and control in the teacher/student relationship, and the development of critical thinking and inquiry, shows her lasting

legacy to drama education (Booth 2012). Eriksson (2014) highlights the central importance of distancing in Heathcote's pedagogy. Whether used as an aesthetic principle in developing fiction, a protective factor in dealing with sensitive subjects, or a poetic device to facilitate creativity and learning, Erikson maintains that distancing is 'foundational' in a process that combines art and pedagogy (Erikson 2014:4). Through strategies of detachment Heathcote's aim was to make something strange in order to examine it anew.

Erikson (2014) draws parallels between Heathcote's ideas about distancing and those of a number of writers and dramatists, including the Russian writer and literary theorist Victor Shklovsky and the German playwright and theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. Shklovsky (1917) considered the habitualness of perception stemmed from the lethargic effect that results from processing experience and phenomenon for practical action. Things are only recognised and no longer seen, events are computed and categorised but not fully experienced. Shklovsky counteracted this through poetic language, having the potential to move beyond the prosaic language of everyday life and creating fresh powers of perception. In doing so he developed the concept of 'Ostranenie' which means 'making strange'. By a process of estrangement and de-familiarization, routine and automatic responses can be circumvented.

For Brecht, things and experiences that seemed 'the most obvious thing in the world' equated to giving up on our attempts to understand life and the cosmos (Brecht [1936] 2001:71). In his use of theatre as a means of critical reflection, he developed the concept of 'Verfremdung', which is usually translated as 'alienation'. Willet has pointed out the ambiguous and problematic nature of this translation due to negative connotations of imposed separation and discrimination, but Brecht's concept had been too firmly established in dramaturgical circles to change (Willet 1984). By alienation he meant an artistic approach to detachment that transforms the familiar and the habitual into something 'amazing' (Brecht [1936] 1963:196). To clarify his concept of Verfremdung, Brecht (ibid:101) stated: 'Estranging an event or a character means first of all stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them'.

Eriksson (2014:8) not only draws comparisons between Heathcote, Shklovsky and Brecht, but states that Heathcote made specific references to them in her writing, which represents a similarity of direction. Drawing from the spirit of this philosophical approach and Heathcote's concepts of distancing and estrangement, I developed the fictitious character of William Loveday, an independent art critic and curator. The name William came from my grandfather, who died when I was a child, but his loving and generous nature has always remained with me. The surname came from the fact I was born in Loveday Street Hospital in Birmingham, long since demolished to make way for urban development.

To achieve a systematic approach to evaluating the usefulness of this distancing strategy, and because I had the opportunity of developing William over a number of educational events, I considered the process of iteration which was originally conceptualised by Kurt Lewin (1946:206), cycles or spirals of 'planning, action, fact-finding, and evaluation'. I thought there was scope to modify the original idea and applying it to the performance, giving my inquiry robustness and rigour by having more than one 'event' in one 'situation' (Howell 2004:356). Each of the iterations would be followed by reflective writing for analysis, and my inquiry supervisor would be present for two of the iterations and offered to observe and give feedback.

Figure 3. The author enacting William Loveday at UKCGE workshop
'Doing the doctorate differently' 2018

Cycle 1: William's first appearance was at a UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) all day workshop called 'Doing the doctorate differently; creative methodologies and pedagogies' held in 2018. I had set up my art studio installation in the main room of the symposium during lunch and some of the participants were already curiously exploring the art materials before I began. I had not fully scripted the session but intended to guide the participants through the installation using a detailed sequential structure to ensure that no important information or issues were omitted. Prior to the event I had a few awkward unwitnessed rehearsals and was still feeling apprehensive. When the symposium restarted, and in accordance with Heathcote's technique, I informed the participants I would be leaving the room and return as William, to explain my work and ideas. I returned wearing a bowtie as a simple prop to both signify my change of role and help me switch into the character of William. I was aware that participants may be suffering some after lunch lethargy, so I asked everyone to suspend their disbelief and pretend they were in an art gallery, to get up, and to engage with the installation. Everyone obliged and quite a

number of participants picked up some art materials, paint brushes, jars of powered pigments, and unscrewed paint tubes to smell the oil paint. I overheard evocative memories being exchanged, and playfulness was evident from some of the participants. William started his talk as participants in the drama started to return to their chairs. The talk went well. I made only one small slip-up during the twenty-minute dialogue and I was surprised how easy I had slipped into the role. William thanked the participants at the end of his talk and announced that he would be leaving the room, returning as David Collins to answer questions. I returned minus the bowtie, formally signifying that I was now out of role and was again myself. This was followed by some useful questions and feedback, which showed that the installation and performance had been positively received.

Reflecting after the event and taking on board feedback from my supervisor, I considered that Heathcote's technique worked well. By formally announcing I was going in and out of role, the strategy had the effect of engaging the participants in the process and valuing their involvement. In keeping with the Heathcote approach, the smallest of props was needed to effectively signify going into role and maintaining this throughout the performance. It did feel strange being someone else talking about my work, but in a positive way. It shifted my focus and perspective, creating the effect that I was conveying my work less directly. It felt like I was coming to the performance from the side, rather than head-on (enter stage right). I identified a number of areas to develop for the next iteration. I found it difficult to cover all my intended content due to the time being taken with participants viewing the installation. My pace was quicker than I preferred and I needed to review my material. Perhaps most importantly, I had placed expectations upon William to explain my work, but there was scope to move beyond explanation and for William to articulate and develop some of the key arguments related to the installation and my doctoral work.

Cycle 2: William's next performance was a few days later to a group of students at the beginning of their doctoral studies from Birmingham City University, at a symposium to demonstrate creative approaches to inquiry. Because the art studio was labour intensive to transport and set up, I made a video of the installation. I scripted the talk in much more detail than the first iteration, with carefully timed changes of images synchronised with changes in spoken content. Based upon my

reflections of the previous iteration, I condensed some of the content and elaborated on others, to give William the opportunity to develop some key arguments.

I felt there was a positive level of engagement from the participants, and although they were considering a diverse range of ideas in their own doctoral work, the performance was successful in modelling how creative approaches have value. Furthermore, such approaches can have a philosophical and epistemological basis, and can develop defendable practice. The video recording did not work so well. It did not have the same level of participation as the actual installation, where participants could physically engage with the materials. The timing was problematic as the images in the video were advancing too quickly and became out of synchronisation when William was developing key arguments. One feedback comment suggested that a higher level of understanding would be conveyed to participants if more explanation and context were made before William came into the room. This feedback led to further reflections to inform the next iteration and to change and refine the performance.

Cycle 3: The next iteration was a seminar entitled: 'Using drama methods to articulate inquiry', which was held at the faculty learning group at Birmingham City University. This was one of a series of themed seminars looking at different aspects of performative and creative modes of inquiry and inquiry dissemination, and was done in collaboration with doctoral students and post-doctoral academics who had engaged with drama in their inquiry methodologies. For practical reasons, I was unable to set up my installation and therefore used a revised version of the video. The video now contained only static images, but with fade-in transitions, tracking and zooming in/out to give a sense of movement. I consciously intended to freeze-frame images at times so that William could be a little more spontaneous and have space to develop arguments. I spent a little more time giving context before William began his performance. The synchronisation of images and spoken delivery worked more effectively, but it still did not have the same gravitas as the live installation. I was feeling more confident and was able to articulate arguments more clearly as William. I felt that William was beginning to develop his character more fully. The questions and discussion that followed indicated the audience were actively engaged in the

performance. For example, one comment touched on the critical potential of William's voice and how this could be extended beyond my own work to include the advantages and tensions of working within different research paradigms and methodologies. Another participant thought there were traces of witticism and provocativeness in William's delivery, and considered the potential to develop this further to engage the audience in more debate. This has encouraged me to develop a wider criticality and to develop William's character further.

A key reflection from all the performative iterations was that Heathcote's method produced not only an interesting way to disseminate inquiry ideas and activities but was successful in providing new and transformative ways of considering my work through distancing. My experience is attuned to what Eriksson (2014:11) terms 'poetic distortion', derived from Heathcote's own writing. By this he means distortion in a positive context, from the real world to a poetic world in order to see it in a different light. Heathcote made this explicit by saying: 'The arts are metaphoric and analogous, and we can be spectators of ourselves in ways often denied in a life, because we can distort time to give opportunity for reflection to be encountered' (Heathcote and Hovda 1980:5).

In my experience of enacting William Loveday, I did feel a degree of estrangement from being myself. This helped me experience my ideas and work differently. The distancing effect supported a deeper analysis by stepping outside my familiar frames of reference, looking from a different perspective, and engaging the reactions and reflections of others in the process. There was value in the preparation of each iterative cycle by considering the core of my ideas and theoretical understanding, and by the need to communicate these in a clear, succinct and engaging way as someone other than myself. This was enabled by the need to develop a different relationship to participants when speaking about my work and ideas, than in a more traditional didactic way. Furthermore, in the dualistic interaction between self and alter ego, where space was created for similarities and differences to be played out, I found myself less defensive and more open to critical feedback. Without generating some of these benefits of distancing, it is doubtful that I would achieve such new insights.

Another key reflection was that the process of inquiry inspired by Lewin (1946) helped me to develop the strategy and role of William in a more systematic and planned way. The spiral of planning, action, fact-finding, and evaluation supported my efforts to adjust, adapt, and refine in order to improve the strategy. Because the context of the performance changed every time, I recognised that this process was an on-going one. The process of reconnaissance went beyond the fact-finding process, to include how I situated myself in the inquiry and to question my own professional identity. William has become an alter ego, a part of myself I was finding difficult to articulate. Engaging participants in the process, maximised most fully in the first iterative performance, has enabled both a self-reflective and a collaborative-reflective inquiry, and has further potential for development. It seems fitting for William to have the last word, which he articulated at the faculty learning group seminar:

> William Loveday *(William is speaking at the faculty learning group seminar on using drama in research dissemination 2018)*:
>
> 'By weaving together strands of poetic and dramatic practice from modernists such as Shklovsky, Brecht and Heathcote, pulling these together to underpin inquiry, and valuing the spaces and openings for collaborative dialogue, David has not only created my character to articulate his doctoral work, but he has managed to combine education, art and inquiry in such a way that the aesthetic quality of inquiry dissemination has taken centre stage. By doing so he is saying that, not only should inquiry be aimed at improving the human condition, but the aesthetic qualities of our practice are important too'.

Conclusion

The process of self-examination common to both first person action inquiry and autoethnography is reliant upon interaction with others, and in gaining feedback within a framework of systematic inquiry to provide rigour. This has been enhanced by developing the two devices inspired by Luft and Ingram, and Heathcote, providing further opportunities for dialogue and critical analysis through exhibition and performance. The use of visual art and drama has provided potent possibilities to

critique and reappraise my doctoral work through a process of distancing. They have also offered an additional benefit by providing creative ways to disseminate inquiry ideas and findings. Furthermore, such work is congruent with a broader and emergent agenda involving performative inquiry and research dissemination, strengthened by the Frascati Manual in 2002 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015) and exemplified by the work of Haseman (2006), Peterson and Langellier (2006), and Gergen and Gergen (2014).

Although undertaken in the context of inquiry into social work practice education, I believe these devices can be adapted to numerous situations involving self-reflection and participatory inquiry. In particular, drawing ability is not necessary when making a visual Johari Window, photographs and other images for collaging purposes are just as relevant. It can be an engaging way of developing relationship building, mutual understanding and co-participatory assessment involving a student and practice educator, and be revisited and developed at several points during a placement. Heathcote's device could be used by a student as a self-reflexive exercise and part of identity work when developing anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.

In terms of research methodology, the value of such work in exploring deeper levels of self-awareness is important when moving beyond first person action inquiry to second and third person action inquiry or from autoethnography to more collective forms of ethnography (Chang 2008). This has supported a greater awareness of my positionality in terms of being a social work educational practitioner and inquirer, my impact on other participants, and upon the inquiry methodology. Methods that achieve a distancing effect within the spirit of qualitative inquiry can support the process where the self is seen as a subject of inquiry, and by providing lenses through which to explore and gain more societal and cultural insights. Both the visual Johari Window and the enactment of William Loveday have engendered moments of estrangement, stepping into unfamiliar places, and encountering the reaction and responses of others. Unconscious, elusive and emotional personal experiences have surfaced, held within intentional and systematic inquiry. Things have emerged that I had taken for granted.

I intend to develop both devices further and to include them in my doctoral thesis, which will take the form of an assemblage including an art installation, performance, and publication of this paper, accompanied by a richly contextualised written exegesis. I am currently working on the idea of developing a soliloquy involving William interviewing myself, which would be an interesting way to get some of the inquiry context and even methodology across. Such approaches continue to provide new perspectives of self-discovery and to develop my practice as a critical thinking educationalist.

Photo credit: All photographs by Paul Atkinson, Birmingham City University.

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