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Using the Arts for Food Research and Dialogue

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This Briefing Paper is intended to share ideas and learning arising from the authors' experiences of using arts-based methods in food research and engagement, as well as to give some insights into the issues that arose from a workshop for academics and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) developed by Brighton and Sussex Universities Food Network (BSUFN) and hosted by the Food Research Collaboration (FRC) in 2016. It examines the use of participatory and community-centred approaches to explore pressing food policy questions, as well as providing guidance on how to apply these methods in practice. It is intended to be relevant to academics, particularly those interested in using participatory action research methods, and CSOs working with community groups on food issues. The authors' main interest is the way in which arts-based methods provide a set of tools which can reveal, and give voice to, perspectives on food issues which remain otherwise absent from research and policy debates. In the authors' experience, this happens either because community members are not asked for their views or because of the way in which much traditional/positivist/biomedical academic research is based around pre-determined research questions that do not provide adequate space for community members to explore and voice their own concerns. It could be said that to date, much food research has failed to meaningfully engage with the general public, both during the research process itself and in raising awareness and achieving changes in the food system, which the research evidence indicates needs to happen.

The paper firstly outlines why food research is a necessary and important area of exploration. Following this it examines the development, lineage and underlying principles of participatory and arts-based methodologies as approaches to research. Three arts-based and participatory methods are then reviewed in greater detail: i. Photography and film ii. Drama, and iii. Collage. These three methods were the focus of the BSUFN/FRC workshop in 2016. For each of these three examples, theoretical and methodological implications and ethical issues are discussed, enabling readers to fully consider how and why they might apply these approaches. In reviewing these emerging and alternative approaches for engaging communities in research processes, this paper presents a consideration of ideas, narratives, positions and actions relating to food, research and knowledge construction. The authors believe this paper to be an important addition to debates around how arts based and participatory methods might improve the processes, impact and contribution of food research. The paper presents a collaborative effort between academics, researchers and civil society organisations (CSOs) all of whom are concerned with improving research, learning and engagement in relation to food. The paper concludes with recommendations and suggestions on how academics and CSOs might use these methods as part of their research and/or practice.

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1. Why food research is a necessary and important area of exploration, and why new approaches to food research are needed

Food choice in humans is a complex process and its many determinants have been well documented over the years (1). Food research has considered food in its many contexts: historical, cultural, economic, political and in relation to health. More recently, research has considered food's place at the centre of many health, socio-cultural, environmental and ethical interactions. The impacts of industrialised food systems are far reaching, including over and under-nutrition; food insecurity, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss (2). This presents an urgent challenge to transform our food system to tackle its infrastructure, so that the future of food is optimised in relation to human and planetary health (3). Policy choices made by governments – such as on infrastructure development, access to resources such as land, water and finance, environmental policies and agricultural subsidies – influence production, marketing, availability and affordability of food (which together influence access). Governments are often also concerned to focus on public awareness, food and nutrition skills, capacity and knowledge building (4), focusing nutrition and dietary decisions at the level of individual responsibility.

Transforming our food system means tackling inequities and power imbalances, addressing the environmental impact of current production and consumption patterns, and reducing food waste at every point of the food chain. In order to do this, we need to think (and act) differently - championing novel ways to make sense of the many nuanced complexities of food and our food system. A key element in the transformation of the food system is how we share and create new knowledge that supports this transition towards a food system that delivers good food for all (5). Evidence supports the use of innovative community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing generally (6) so it makes sense to align this with novel food research methods specifically in order to build knowledge and capacity in this emerging field, and to listen to the perspectives of people more usually the target of public health campaigns or behaviour-change initiatives. Arts-based methods provide potential for generating narratives for connective food activities that can be transformative, allowing food to become a powerful catalyst to re-connect people, culturally and socially. These creative methods present an important academic contribution to methodological landscapes, as well as offering, more broadly, a way of understanding our food culture and social world.

2. The development of participatory visual methodologies

Participatory and arts-based methods have emerged in recent years as innovative and exciting approaches to research across a range of disciplines and settings (7-12). Emphasis on the importance of community and collaboration in the production of creative work can in many ways be traced to the emergence in the 1960s of community arts movements and a desire to challenge and destabilise traditional notions of aesthetic value (13,14). Appearing in academia during this time was a similar destabilising of traditional approaches to research and knowledge construction and the emergence of disciplines such as cultural studies, for example, wherein scholars such as Hall (15), Hoggart (16), Hebdige (17) and Williams (18) began to apply ethnographic and anthropologic research methodologies to the study of cultures closer to home. Growing interests in ideas of community, the 'lived everyday' and social change merged with a desire to wrestle traditional notions of art, politics and aesthetic value away from the 'grand institutions', giving rise to new approaches to understanding society and generating knowledge. The development of participatory and action research methods through the work of Heron (19,20), Reason (21,22) and Argyris (23) for example, continues to highlight the ways in which knowledge and learning takes place as dialogic, co-constructed and through processes of exchange. These movements can be considered in many ways precursors to our current applications and understandings of arts-based and



participatory methods; highlighting changing social and political landscapes, the increasing power of the visual in contemporary culture, and its relation to research and 'the academy' over time. The combining of arts based methods with participatory and action research approaches is claimed by many of its practitioners to enhance the exploratory inquiry process (24-26) and it is upon this work that we build.

In this paper we discuss some of our experiences of using these approaches with a focus specifically on food. The provision of a centralising topic - predetermined by us as researchers, academics and educators - raises important questions for participatory and arts based methods. As an approach that attempts to democratise the research process (27) many participatory practitioners believe that research agendas ought to be determined by participants at every stage of the process. As we discuss in our various ways, our recognition that food - policy, practice, regulation, production and beyond - is an area in need of greater research meant that a level of predetermination was established at the outset of our respective projects. As we suggest however, the broad scope of this topic and the use of methods that enable multiple interpretations and explorations of it, offers an approach that is able to address issues felt to be important in their contribution to academic research as well as in their capacity to enhance community knowledge.

It is important to acknowledge that not all uses of creative arts-based methods follow a participatory approach. Many practitioners use creative and arts based methods as additional approaches within a broad range of methodological 'tools'. This reflects the diverse and evolving nature of 'doing research' and challenges to traditional positivistic approaches that many of these bring.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore every arts-based research method, therefore we focus specifically on the use of photography and film, drama and collage as these are the methods the authors have most experience of. However, methods such as creative writing, spoken word, poetry, music, dance, theatre, storytelling, film, installations, sculptures, painting and drawing, mapping, and increasingly, digital media and design, can all be useful and effective approaches used alone or in combination with participatory research. We do not claim that these processes are neat and orderly. Indeed, research processes - particularly those which are qualitative and small scale - are acknowledged by many to be 'messy', complex and challenging (28). This paper proposes an exploration of just some of these aspects and aims to make a contribution to debates within this evolving field.

3. Photography and Film

Perhaps more than in any of the other arts method, the use of photography for food research straddles both the creative and the documentary (see Box 1 for suggested typology).

3.1 Method

In biomedical research methods, photography has been used to illustrate food portion sizes in photographic food atlases since the 1990s (29). These were first introduced as a tool for estimating portion sizes in dietary surveys; participants were shown photos of a range of portion sizes for common foods and identified which best matched their serving size. This was quicker and less invasive than asking participants to weigh everything they ate which was known to lead to changes in subjects eating patterns and an underestimation of typical intakes. However, studies show participants tend to overestimate their consumption when comparing with food portion atlases(30). Food portion photographs have also been used as teaching resources to indicate suitable portion sizes for children, particularly infants and toddlers through the 'weaning' period, and latterly have become a key component of weight management education.



More recently, interest has grown in the potential for using ‘smartphone’ photography for both image based food recording in research and for educational purposes. The science of translating a digital photograph into a weighed dietary record is still in its infancy, and currently studies tend to rely on comparing the photo image with conventional portion size food atlas images, whether by hand or by computer (31). More promising is the potential of digital photography to enable people to log their food intake as a visual food diary and receive feedback on their dietary choices within education programmes or via Apps(32).

Box 1: Typology of usage of photos in research or engagement around food (proposed by authors)

- *Documentary record* - using image to record food intake, food availability, preparation method as a visual food diary. The photographer is participating in the recording, but has no control over the agenda.
- *Photo elicitation* – captures the tacit aspects of food, locating the food narrative in the context of the outer environment
- *Non participatory photo elicitation* - using images prepared by researcher to stimulate discussion, e.g. in focus group discussion,
- *Auto photo elicitation* – using images created by individual participant to stimulate discussion, e.g. in one-to-one dietary counselling
- *Participatory photo elicitation* – using images prepared by researcher or others, but selected, ranked or worked on by participants, e.g. in participatory workshop, collages, cartography of food
- *Photo voice/ photo visualisation* – participants take and select images to represent and evoke their priorities, e.g. in participatory action research

‘Photo-Elicitation’ is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research process in order to maximise the possibilities for empirical and ethnographic enquiry (33). Photo elicitation has been widely used in qualitative food research to stimulate discussion in interviews and focus groups. Harper maintains that images ‘evoke deeper elements of consciousness than do words’. Its close relative is the more traditional ‘Photo-Voice’ method (34) where the participants themselves take the photographs. This has been implemented in health research to build skills within disadvantaged communities, for example, it has been used successfully in the homeless population (35). Photo-Voice is very much part of a participatory research ethos through participants generating their own images in which they express their ‘voice’ to ‘lobby’ on a key community issue. The photograph can be a neutral third party (36) and this can be particularly useful when discussing issues with vulnerable people (37).

As an extension of ethnographic methods, visual ethnography includes photos taken by the researcher as a form of data for analysis (33). In this way, the creator of the image is able to shape and inform the resulting dialogue through the image and the explanation of the image. It is, therefore, appropriate that images contribute data for research. The use of images as a method of communication to represent knowledge and experience suggests that the production of images may be a useful, and at times necessary, method for research participants to share their perspectives. There are parallels between this use of photography and the creation of images through collage, as discussed below.

Visual ethnography can incorporate participatory methods in the production of photographs through giving research participants cameras to capture images for the researcher to use as data. Through the combination of visual ethnography and participatory research methods, the production of photographs as a form of data is now also used in practice-based settings rather than for research. Participants or community groups are given cameras, either digital (including cameras in



smartphones) or film (often disposable, single use cameras) and a topic or theme to capture. Through the process of taking photographs, reviewing them, and discussing the content of the images captured, dialogue on a topic is created. Many individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, find it easier to talk about a photo they have taken than they would if just talking in a group or interview (38). In a 2001 study Ells discussed eating habits and food purchasing behaviours with children by discussing photos taken in nearby shops. Although in this example the photos were not taken by the children themselves, the use of photos initiated and enhanced dialogue on food preferences for research purposes. As such, the process of taking photos and the resulting image enhance dialogue on a topic and may elicit greater depth on perspectives and priorities for the individuals concerned.

Participatory photography is similar in process and intention to participatory video or film. In this method, participants or community groups are given video cameras to create a film(39). Clips of film are edited to produce a film on a topic or theme. Within this method, the editing process often creates a first stage of dialogue as participants select clips to be used in the final video. Typically films produced through this method are short in length but may produce full-length documentary-style outputs. A second stage of dialogue comes when the videos are reviewed after editing or shown to a wider audience.

3.2 Practical issues

There are specific constraints associated with using photography and film as a method for research, participation, engagement, or dialogue creation. It requires access to cameras, whether capturing still shots or videos, and whether digital or film cameras. There is an expense associated with this that will typically be carried by the researcher, institution, or community group. The advent of the 'smartphone' encompassing a digital camera has altered this to some extent in some areas of the world, but it is important that individuals are not excluded from a participatory process because of lack of access to the required technology.

An additional challenge of this method is the individual's or the collective capacity to work with the technology and use it effectively. This includes taking photographs that are in focus, and possibly with the appropriate exposure, taking videos with audio, and reviewing and editing photos or video footage to create a film. Working with a partner who has expertise in community participatory photography is an option to overcome some of these issues.

When using photography as a creative method to explore a topic, depending on the context and reason for the project, it may be appropriate to review and discuss every photograph taken by participants, including those which have not come out well due to lens obstructions, poor lighting or lack of focus on the image. Reviewing images that may otherwise be discarded may uncover some additional issues that should be explored, for example, those photographs participants would have taken had they not felt too embarrassed to bring out the camera. Within creative participatory methods, the process of image creation and discussion about the resulting images are as important, if not more so, as the images themselves.

3.3 Ethical concerns

There are particular ethical considerations associated with photography, which revolve around three key issues: participant consent, ownership of the image, and the subject of the image. Where a researcher produces photographs or films, the participants must provide consent to be involved in the research process. As in a standard ethical procedure, participants should be given anonymity, if they should so wish, and have the right to withdraw at any time. This would not necessarily be the case when photograph and film are used for dialogue and engagement purposes rather than academic research. With this method of image production, typically the researcher maintains ownership of the images but, depending on the context within which they were produced, co-ownership may also be given to the respective research participants or community.

In an approach through which the participants produce the photos and/or film, they must again provide full consent prior to being involved in the research, and also be given anonymity and a right to withdraw from the process. When this method is used, it is important that the participants who produce the images maintain ownership and are free to use the images as they wish. In these circumstances, the researcher may make it a condition of consent that they too have co-ownership and are able to use the images for specified research purposes. Research and participant ownership of the images or film can take a range of forms but in order to meet ethical requirements of participatory research processes, the expected joint ownership must be specified in any consent and agreed terms of the research prior to undertaking the image-creation process.

The third ethical concern in the creation of photographs and videos is related to the subject of the image and is relevant regardless of who is taking the photo or film. If the image is directly of another individual, it is necessary to obtain model consent, at least verbally and in some cases written, for the photo or film to be taken. Likewise, if it is directly of property belonging to others, such as an image of someone's house, their consent should again be sought prior to taking the photo or film.

There are circumstances in which prior consent may not be necessary for taking photos or films. In particular, these are images of public spaces or images which include people at a distance or when the people in the image are not the dominant subject. There is no clearly defined boundary between when consent is or is not necessary when producing photography or film because the context of the purpose for which the image is being created will have bearing on the need for consent. It is important for a researcher or facilitator to bear this in mind when initiating this method and to use their best judgement in advising others involved in the process.

3.4 Case study: The Food as a Lifestyle Motivator (FLM) Project by Clare Pettinger

The FLM project was set up in Plymouth in 2014, with the aim of exploring creative PAR methods (in this case photo elicitation), to engage 'marginalized' service users to gain insight into their food practices and experiences⁸. The project is ongoing, with a longer term vision to consider how, by engaging harder to reach communities (through creative methods, using food as a 'centre piece'), better understanding can be gained of their food experiences, and the underlying mechanisms at play that make them susceptible to compromised nutritional health. By developing more innovative engagement techniques, the project aims to explore how empowerment approaches with food might be used to enhance health, wellbeing and social capital. The pilot phase of FLM was carried out in a residential homeless centre with a convenience sample of n=9 male services users. FLM has been funded by various sources, including Plymouth University's Sustainable Earth Institute and a British Academy/Leverhulme small grant. Local community partner Fotonow CIC supported FLM⁹.

3.4.1 Application of the methods

'Photo-Elicitation' was introduced through a 'Photo-Dialogue' exercise with a sample of homeless service users (n=12) who presented at the centre on the day. Images of various foods were shown to them and they chose images that they 'liked' and 'disliked'. Discussion followed around their image choices, to encourage participants to think about their own food experiences. This discussion was recorded and transcribed and used in analysis, (for which consent was gained).

Participants were then issued with a disposable camera and given brief instructions on how to use it. They were asked to take photos of their food activities over a ten-day period. The period of ten days was chosen to incorporate several food events that were planned with centre involvement. There was minimal instruction given as to composition or aesthetic considerations of taking photos, as it was deemed

⁸ See more about FLM at: https://issuu.com/issrplymuni/docs/falm__3_

⁹ <http://www.fotonow.org/>



appropriate to allow for authentic portrayal of their relationship to food and food activities. Two focus groups were then run, so that returnees could talk about their chosen photographs in relation to their food practices and experiences.

The adoption of thematic analysis (40) suited the multi-disciplinary research team (Dietitian, Social worker, Occupational therapist, Sociologist and General Practitioner), offering the advantage of being independent of theory and applicable across a range of disciplines and epistemological approaches.

Participants were given the option of giving consent for all, some or none of their photographs to be used in dissemination. It was deemed possible that individuals may not remain anonymous if they consented to allowing photographs to be published. Third parties images - 'model' release consent - were also obtained from all people represented in the photographs. Subjects appearing in photographs were not identifiable (and some were air-brush removed). It was made clear that recognition of individuals may be possible.

3.4.2 Results

Photo-elicitation methodologies allowed participants to contextualise from their own perspectives and on their own terms (37). The act of taking the photograph in itself provided them with motivation (for some) to engage with the study's focus on food centred relationships in an otherwise traditionally 'hard to motivate' population.

Some of these narratives are presented below alongside their consented photographs (and agreed anonymous pseudonyms).



Nemo: "I can't eat in the dining room because I am scared of crowds and large groups of people. I have problems with my head, PTSD, epilepsy and people basically - well, manners, elbows out and passing wind and shouting at each other"



Paul: "She [Bella] needs it. I make sure she's fed. She's my priority. I'd rather go without than see her go without. But it never happens here anyway. She never goes without here"



Ross: “Food has become a major part of my life. I really enjoy cooking, actually it beat the demons in my head...look how far I’ve come...I just go in there...It’s like being in a restaurant, using the imagination. Just see things. I like to try different things, and flavours”

Using photo elicitation as a participatory method for the FLM project was successful - it unveiled powerful food stories as told by homeless individuals. Our participants demonstrated engagement with the creative methods and an understanding of socio-cultural values around food. Their individuality was highlighted, yet compliance and many levels of resistance were also expressed, both in relation to the research process itself, but also as regards their food preferences and practices. This participatory process has facilitated a deeper understanding of the diversity of this population group, and given them a ‘seat at the table’ - listening to their voices is crucial for their engagement and inclusion in community activities (see Pettinger et al (41)).

4. Drama

There is a rich history of drama being used to give a voice to those who are typically ‘marginalized’ and to open up conversation about topics that are otherwise challenging to address. Forum Theatre has been a highly regarded participatory theatre form that has been adapted all over the world. It was developed by Augusto Boal in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s as one of the forms used in ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’(42). In forum theatre, real life situations, often presenting a conflict, are played out by actors: spectators are supported to transition to participants, named ‘spect-actors’ (42). This enables different perspectives to be conveyed authentically and creates an opportunity for the ‘spect-actors’ to explore alternative ways a situation might play out in every-day life (43). Yet the work of Boal is now being questioned ethically in the field of applied theatre and participatory practice. A seminal piece by Heddon and Mackey (44) confirms the growing number of practice examples in the area of applied drama and environmentalism, yet they highlight the crucial need for more rigorous and sustained critical engagement with this emerging topic.

As with other the creative approaches, drama illustrates a clear spectrum, from tokenistic use of arts methods to fully immersive creative arts approaches. Box 2 outlines a typology of some key drama approaches with acknowledgement that there are many different terms and overlaps which can vary depending on the context. This is a key consideration for its application to food research and engagement. By its very nature, participatory drama fosters true co-production, so coordinators or directors must be able to ‘let go’ of control. Encouragement for such practice is often lacking in science based areas.



Box 2: Typology of the spectrum in drama based practices (proposed by authors)

- *Applied Theatre* – theatre used to question, discuss and address issues that are of concern or affect the participant. The emphasis is the process, not creating performance for an audience. It can be used as an umbrella term and incorporate the practices listed below
- *Participatory Theatre* – an audience will interact with performers. This can range from being controlled and scripted, i.e. joining in with a song which would not be considered Applied Theatre, to the audience directing the content and performing, i.e. forum theatre or ‘flash mobs’
- *Forum theatre* – a form of participatory theatre designed for an audience which can become involved and explore alternative situations
- *Community Theatre* – includes theatre made by, with, or for, a specific community. It can be used in Theatre for Development, focused on issues or skills development
- *Invisible Theatre* - a form of theatrical performance that is enacted in a place where people would not normally expect to see one, for example, in the street or in a shopping centre
- *Role play* - the person is assigned a character and an expected agenda
- *Educational theatre or Theatre in Education (TiE)* – delivering a message using drama and performance. This can include Entertainment-Education
- *Dramatherapy* - is the use of theatre techniques to facilitate personal growth and promote mental health

4.1 Method

Participatory drama projects are normally held over a series of workshops in order to create a safe space for personal expression, to train people in the techniques of the chosen form, to allow for reflection and development, and to rehearse if required. Examples of participatory theatre can be found in a wide range of socially focused projects around the world, ranging from public health (such as HIV) awareness and work with prisoners and young offenders, to use in community-led policy advocacy or Participatory Appraisal such as local planning consultations.

Theatre based interventions are also becoming widely used in the food-health arena. For example, forum theatre has been used successfully in a Devon based healthy lifestyle programme targeting children and families, as a way to promote greater ownership, engagement and motivation for goal setting, leading toward healthier behaviours (45). This project showed that an after-school theatre programme motivated and engaged both parents and children and increased awareness of the need for making healthy lifestyle changes, but authors confirm that such novel development methods need to be embedded into comprehensive programmes with both educational and environmental components.

Similarly, ‘Educational theatre’ offers a promising approach for engaging communities with messages about healthy (food) behaviours (46). Such interventions aim to stimulate the processes of expression; the experience of a dramatic performance allows for communication of emotional states and increases the opportunity for reflecting on and learning from them (47). For this reason, more therapeutic drama-therapy approaches can also be increasingly used for individuals suffering from eating disorders and other food related psychological disorders. It is possible to evoke a gradual emotional awareness through the development of specific techniques of expression (using the body, speech, rhythm, and props) in order to promote more opportunities for communication and processing.



In relation to food specifically, an arts organisation, Encounters, started a project called 'A patch of ground' in 2009 to build relationships with the natural world and between communities. During a 20-week programme two intergenerational groups met to create their own garden, grow, cook, share stories and discuss issues. Theatre practitioners worked with the groups to lead activities inspired by eco-philosopher Joanna Macy's cycle of behaviour change: Gratitude, Despair, Seeing with New Eyes, Going Forth (48). These personal experiences and ideas were combined into a public performance which used a range of methods including film, storytelling and puppetry. The two groups were in East London and Totnes, Devon and they met to share their performances. Feedback from participants asserted the personally transformative nature of this programme¹⁰:

"Beautiful. Truly inspirational and extraordinary; an emotional piece of work that should be shared across neighbourhoods in this country." Alicia Smith, Culture Liverpool

"The project has fostered new friendships. It has enriched our lives, bringing people together whose lives would never have crossed." Patch participant, Liverpool

"Being in the show was frightening and then exhilarating. An amazing experience."

"I was very moved by the performance. The fact that the men, women and children who presented the piece were very diverse contributed to its impact. I think that they will have a greater commitment to doing what they can to protect the natural world and create a sustainable future for the world. It certainly had that effect upon me."

There are many additional drama exercises which can be used to initiate the exploration of topics, one example is often termed a 'fishbowl', another involves improvising polarised situations. In 'fishbowl' three people sit in the centre to discuss food-related issues, with others watching. Any person is able to leave the fishbowl at any time but someone from the outer circle must then take up the vacant seat in the centre. Polarisation exercises were developed by Chen Alon with Palestinian/Israeli theatre group 'Combatants for Peace'(49). A simplified example is that the group finds an issue or statement they have divided opinions about, such as 'food is too expensive'. The group splits in two and, facing each other, repeat the statement 'I'm looking at you look at me looking at you'. Then both groups create together three images; 1. The image of how you see the other group 2. The image of how you think the other group sees you and 3. The image of how you actually are. Conversations had during these exercises can then be used to develop performances through further dramatic exploration of the food related themes which emerge, or to identify areas of interest for further workshops or research.

4.2 Practical issues

Participatory drama is a powerful medium for tackling sensitive matters, such as taboo-related topics, conflict situations and inequalities, based on gender, ethnicity or religion. It is, therefore, important to make sure the creation of a drama piece is part of a process tailored to the needs of the target group involved in the dialogue or research, as this is where the learning and opportunity for new ideas occurs. Creating a suitable space is also important so that participants feel safe to spontaneously act/react and freely express their thoughts and feelings. Encouraging engagement and participation is key, as drama around everyday issues can unwittingly become didactic or entertainment can become the priority if too much focus is placed on the audience (50).

¹⁰ see <http://www.encounters-arts.org.uk/index.php/a-littlepatchofground/> and <https://vimeo.com/38013023>



4.3 Ethical concerns

In terms of ethics, there are many challenges for drama practice. During drama activities, it is impossible to anticipate all the situations that might possibly occur. However, there are examples that can highlight some of the potential ethical concerns (51). For example, during a Theatre-in-Education (T-I-E) piece in a school, do schools have the right to select and mandate student attendance? Similarly, is it unethical to bring a drama piece to a community where its members are directly opposed to the practice and beliefs being performed? For street theatre, there is freedom of choice and informed consent (people choose to watch or not) but invisible theatre (designed to raise consciousness about a certain key issue) might be deemed unethical as the audience has not necessarily consented to be part of the performance. Over the past decade or so a vital and vigorous drama/theatre education research community has emerged to support the development of sound and ethical practice. These issues must be considered when engaging with drama practice methods.

4.4 Case study: Edible Education programme at Lammas Secondary School, Waltham Forest, London by Poppy Flint

Edible Education (EE) is the education project of anti food waste community interest company 'This is Rubbish'. It uses food waste as the starting point for young people to explore related social and environmental issues with a global perspective. At the heart of the project is its values-led approach that aspires to strengthen intrinsic values which are inherently rewarding to pursue and more associated with caring for the community and planet, as opposed to extrinsic values which are based on external approval or reward (52).

EE ran a pilot programme with group of students from years 7 - 11 who were all members of the Lammas Spoken Word group. The over-arching aim was to support the young people to make a personal, creative response to issues connected with food waste and to share these with an audience.

4.4.1 Application of the methods

The programme ran on two full school days with about six weeks in between and the second day finished with a performance for parents, teachers and invited guests. Performance was core to this programme rather than being just one element of the workshop. Having a set deadline by which to produce a public show was a key motivating factor behind the effort the young people put into creating the presentations and rehearsing them.

The EE team made a presentation and ran group activities to introduce the issues linked to food waste. Groups were supported to develop role plays of given scenarios which placed them in different situations in the food supply chain. For example, one involved a farmer having a conversation with a buyer about whether it is worth harvesting the crop if some of it will be below the standard for sale. The students were asked to invent the details around the case study such as the background context in which the dialogue was taking place.

Figure 1: **Lammas Secondary School students writing and rehearsing spoken word poetry**



The students' spoken word teacher facilitated them in writing poetry inspired by what they felt were the most important issues but that would also make a captivating performance piece.

The second day was focused on preparations for the performance; rehearsing, making informative posters and decoration, and, very importantly, preparing snacks for the audience from food that was otherwise going to be wasted.

The students all performed some role in the evening, whether competing, handing out food in the cabaret show format or performing their spoken word poem. There was a surprisingly diverse range of themes and approaches.



Figure 2: **Lammas Secondary School students serving roast vegetable kebabs (made from food that would otherwise have been wasted) at their performance event, 'Don't Waste'**

The show was a great success and certainly the EE team were very impressed by the effort that the students had put in between the two days of workshops. None of this would have been able to happen if the teacher was not already passionate about this topic and working with EE. She decided to continue with the work and

supported the group to work with a film-maker to produce a video for youth voices competition¹¹.

4.4.2 Results

Whilst the work was a success it was hard to distinguish whether the primary motivator was telling people about the need to reduce food waste or the excitement and pressure of the event and film itself. Theory around values-led work does set out that it is critical to be aware of the difference between the values of the end goal and the characteristics used to achieve those values, i.e. is success seen as a means to an end – or is the process of achieving success a goal in itself?

A follow up interview was held with a focus group of the student participants to try to elicit what they took from the experience and what they think about food waste.

Analysing their poetry and the interview transcripts produces very different insights and ideas of what had the greatest impact for the students. Key elements that emerged from the participants were 'desire' and 'agency' – desire to talk to other children and adults about their key messages and agency because of the fact that that they would not have been interested if it wasn't for the motivation of the teacher and EE team. In one girl's words, 'If you didn't care we'd have flat out ignored you'.

5. Collage

Influenced by Dada, Surrealism and German Expressionism, collage came to prominence in the early part of the twentieth century largely through the work of artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Pablo Picasso. Its influence continued in the art of Eduardo Paolozzi, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Hamilton, among others, and can be seen more contemporaneously through Andy Warhol and Jamie Reid, for example. Utilising found images and objects - bus tickets, photographs, cardboard, wood and pieces of newspaper - collage engages a process of deconstruction in the tearing, cutting and gluing of images and objects to paper and wood. The juxtaposition created when images are brought into relation with each other generates what Boden (53) refers to as a 'combinational form of creativity'. Different meanings associated with the images, when put side by side, offer the potential for the emergence of new meanings and narrative constructions. Drawing on Ernst Bloch(54) and discussing German Expressionism and its relation to experimentation and social psychology in the early twentieth century, Brown (55) suggests that:

'Expressionism offers experiments with disruptive and interpolative techniques' which include 'montage and other devices of discontinuity', all of which in their own fashion 'strive to exploit the real fissures in surface interrelations and to discover the new in their crevices.'

The blurring of the lines between art, experimentation and psychology and the possibility that collage and montage might be thought of as 'devices of discontinuity' places them in an interesting relation to research, particularly ideas of emancipatory research. The act of 'doing' in the finding and selection of images followed by tearing, cutting and gluing arguably develops a sense of appropriation and ownership that can be experienced by participants as empowering, a sense not of being a passive recipient, but of being agentic in relation to one's culture. This sense is at play in the 'culture jamming' and AdBusters art movements (56,57) wherein the subversion of advertising and images from popular culture creates a socio-political commentary, a distortion that reflects culture back to itself.

¹¹ This can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrVYhgza800>



The decision making involved in the placing and gluing of the images is reminiscent of relational and concept mapping techniques (58,59) where spatiality speaks in certain ways. Here relations are externalised, made visible and available for discussion. When taking place in the context of a group, collage engages ideas of co-produced dialogue, as Kester (60) suggests, borrowing from Bakhtin (61):

'The work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation - a locus of different meanings, interpretations and points of view'.

In asking 'why did you choose to put that picture there?' we enter into a dialogic process that reveals not only pre-conceived narratives at play but also enables the co-construction of meaning through the making and sharing of interpretations. That art should enable scope for interpretation is elaborated upon by Eco (62) raising Barthesian (63) questions of audience and artist and where, and with whom, meaning making lies. We might say that the ambiguity of the visual, the 'non-sense' of collage and the 'assemblage' (64) of diverse images and associated meanings prompts a sense making ability through which existing narratives are elaborated upon and new narrative forms emerge. See Box 3 for typology of uses of collage.

Box 3: Typology of uses of collage (proposed by authors)

- *Exploration* – collage is used to explore an issue
- *Narrative construction* – collage is used to co-create narratives
- *Documentation* – collage is used to document a perspective or process
- *Artwork* – collage is used as an artistic representation of an issue

5.1 Method

Starting with a theme around which to work, defined by participants, the art and research group moves between processes of immersion in the art making and reflexion upon it in the form of group discussion. Through this, ideas and connections discovered in the making process are brought into the dialogic space. Themes are grouped and regrouped through these cycles, a movement borrowed from action research (65) between generative forces of creative chaos and orderly narrative sense making. Collage making provides a material, physical and psychical space and an accessible and non-imposing process approach to doing research, able to engage groups in many diverse forms and settings.

5.2 Practical issues

Practical considerations in carrying out this type of research involve the need for space in which to work, often participants need to be able to spread out. As scissors and gluing are involved the work should be supervised if taking place with children or vulnerable adults. Materials also include large pieces of paper. Rolls of lining paper are ideal, they are usually cheap and easy to find in hardware stores. A large and diverse selection of magazines and images are also necessary. Boxes for storing cut out images are also useful for future projects and workshops, the more diverse the selection the better.

5.3 Ethical concerns

As with all research that seeks to work in collaboration with community members and the public, ethical considerations must be taken into account. While unlike photography or other forms of art making in which people are likely to appear as it were 'in the flesh', collage making when used in research processes nonetheless needs to adhere to certain guidelines. As such, participants must be given all information pertaining to the use of their art works as not only art works but also as research documents. This means providing information sheets that clearly outline what the research is about, who will be carrying it out (including contact details) and what the aims of the research are. It also means making it clear to participants that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, including

of values and wider policy, socio-economic and cultural factors that impacted participant's food choices and sense making surrounding food.

Following the mind mapping activity, group members decided to embark on making 'visual mind maps' as a form of continuation and a bridge between 'doing research' and collage as an art practice. It is feasible to ask whether the move to visual mapping was an attempt to increase or decrease narrative complexity. Were we ordering existing themes - containing and making sense of them - or generating more - exploring and developing? Participants decided to work in two groups. Group A appeared to build on the mind map themes and organised their collage into four sections accordingly. A theme of 'tradition' included pictures of cakes, Union Jacks and the words 'tea', while 'nature' included pictures of farmers and trees. Another corner addressed 'body image' and included pictures of women, pies and tape measures. In contrast, the top right hand corner seemed less structured and included pictures of dog bowls and the words 'I'm okay, I'm alive'. I assumed this was the contribution of a participant who had been moving between the two groups (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: **Group A's visual mind map/collage**



While Group A's collage undoubtedly highlighted concerns to do with food choice, the literal depictions of issues relating to food poverty appeared descriptive and as if the audience was less able to take part in the interpretative work that Eco (62) suggests as important. In a reversal of Barthesian (63) ideas, meaning remained with the makers of the collage and instead of an expansion of narrative complexity, there was arguably a reduction of it. In contrast, Group B's collage felt disordered and less tied to the themes, and as such, that it demanded that the audience do some of the interpretative work. This can be argued as increasing narrative complexity and making available new ways of thinking about the issue in the context of the group (see Figure 5). Indeed, in later processes of art elicitation within the group interview, the less narratively comprehensible collage provided greater scope for discussion and interpretation and the generation of further narrative affordances.



Figure 6: **Final exhibition piece, Jubilee Library Brighton Festival 2015**

6. Collaborative learning

In the true nature of participatory approaches, and for these methods to be fully realised, there is a need for strong and synergistic collaborations across a broad range of sectors. It has been previously agreed that government, business and civil society have responsibilities to address food system and justice issues (73). This means building optimal ways to work together, with clear identifiable purposes across a broad diversity of organizational structures and cultures (74). By working more effectively together, with shared values and goals, cross-sector relationships can be consolidated, thus strengthening the often misunderstood and conflicting agendas between the different partners. The Food Research Collaboration (FRC) has this philosophy at its heart. As the only UK initiative dedicated to bringing together academics and CSOs, it strives to develop strong synergistic partnerships working together to improve the UK food system.

The creative arts based methods workshop in May 2016, as a collaborative endeavour between the FRC and BSUFN, is an example of the drive towards collaborative and innovative partnership working. The workshop brought together a range of cross-sector partners to share the principles of arts based creative methods. By exchanging knowledge of best practice, the workshop successfully illustrated great scope for using these methods across the various settings.

Further information about the workshop, including artwork and a report, are available here: <https://bsufn.com/creative-methods-and-food/>¹².

7. How might academics use the methods?

In the academic setting, creative methods can be very powerful in their own right, but can also act in a complementary capacity to strengthen mixed-methods approaches. Adopting such approaches, including more participatory styles of endeavour within a multi-disciplinary research team, for example, can provide essential space to be reflexive on research practice. Participatory approaches can also be used within educational and pedagogic contexts, to support learners with

¹² Links to further reading and resources are also available from this website.



knowledge exchange and support educators in their own continued professional development.

As we have identified in this paper, our use of participatory and arts based approaches have been situated in arenas where the agenda was predetermined in that it was established as food research specifically. As discussed earlier in the paper, whilst the setting of research agendas by academics and practitioners may seem to contradict notions of participatory research, it is possible to maintain that in doing so we promote a 'dual function' of this research mode, creating a collaborative learning environment for both academics and research partners. Academics have a real opportunity to work closely with CSOs (in line with current public engagement agendas), which would permit more optimal identification of the 'real-life' food issues faced by communities, so that realistic and robust research (and evaluations) can be delivered, fostering social sustainability alongside the potential for cross-sector collaborative funding bids.

8. How might CSOs use the methods?

From a CSO perspective, arts based and participatory methods provide accessible and engaging approaches to working within communities and have the potential to build powerful dialogues. Participatory approaches enable community members to work democratically alongside academics in the co-production of knowledge, offering important reciprocal relationships that can challenge and rebalance power differences and identify points to take action for change. The People's Knowledge has written extensively on this (please refer to People's Knowledge and in particular Chapter 11, for a glossary of terms around participatory research and practice (75)). Such approaches can enable community voices to be heard; empowering participants to take a 'seat at the table' and share and discuss with policy-makers things discovered and co-created within the community and research process.

9. Conclusions

In this paper we have provided a brief overview of the lineage of participatory and arts based research methods highlighting how, as traditional notions of research were challenged by changing socio-political and cultural concerns, so too methods of research and ways of understanding the world began to change. Using three examples of approaches, we have illustrated the diverse ways in which arts-based and participatory methods can contribute to the food research landscape and engage researchers, CSOs and their communities. We have examined how photography/film has the ability to define one's own representation, and how this can be thought of as an emancipatory practice as well as providing a way for researchers and CSOs to better understand the experiences of the people and communities they work with. Discussing processes of participation in the context of drama, questions of practitioner positionality and relinquishing control explored the challenges of collecting data in diverse settings. The emergence of collage as a research method was described as offering a generative approach that, through the bringing together and juxtaposing of ideas and images, enabled the discovery of new narrative constructions and a blurring of boundaries between 'doing research' and art.

As well as theoretical examinations of participatory and arts-based methods, the paper also described practical applications through case study reviews. These revealed the ways in which these methods illuminated sometimes complex issues surrounding food; stories and narratives that arguably go unheard in much current research and debate. These methodological approaches can perhaps be seen as a response to the need to transform our food system and its associated complex social, political and cultural issues. In adopting modes that embrace and attempt to work with complexity, rather than compartmentalise knowledge, participatory and arts-based methods offer an important contribution to methodological landscapes and ways of understanding social worlds. As the academy becomes more responsive to new ways of generating meaning and understanding the world, so too measures



of evaluation and an ability to influence processes of social change and transformation might also develop. It is our hope that in adopting and exploring these methods and making a case for their use we might contribute to important and timely conversations surrounding food research as well as addressing methodological debates.

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