Individual experiences, collective creativity: what can journaling tell us about motherhood, community and belonging?

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Dr Jessica Bradley, School of Education, University of Sheffield 19 April 2023

NEXUS Belonging Research Network

Today's talk

Individual experiences, collective creativity: What can journaling tell us about motherhood, community and belonging?

The COVID19 pandemic was experienced differently across the world and in individual lives, highlighting inequalities and forcing new and unexpected attention to everyday life and even the right to an every day. In this seminar I discuss research in progress in the North of England with creative journaling with mothers, part of a wider programme at the intersections of arts and health which explores the role of and possibilities for creative practice in supporting people to 're-emerge' after the COVID19 pandemic. Drawing on multimodal data generated through participant observation, I critically engage with notions of everyday life, creativity, and collective and individual experiences.

Who am I?

- Interdisciplinary linguist (modern languages, applied translation studies, applied linguistics)
- Lecturer in Literacies, Programme Director of BA Education, Culture and Childhood since 2020; Deputy Director of EdD; Literacies Research Cluster Director 2019-2022
- I supervise EdDs, PhDs and teach across BA, MA and doctoral programmes
- Research in creative arts contexts
- Ethnographic research and arts-based methods

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What am I interested in?

Creative arts contexts, including street arts and visual arts

- Approaches to multilingualism including translanguaging
- Lived experiences of multilingualism/identities
- Engagements with language(s) through storytelling and folklore
- Linguistic landscapes and their transdisciplinary potential
- Belonging/non-belonging
- The arts / multimodality intersections and complexities
- The 'infra-ordinary' (Georges Perec)
- Epistemological concerns about how we engage with people through our research
- Literary framings of everyday life, including memoir and autobiography

How do I research?

Interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary methods

Ethnographic orientation (what does this mean?)

Literacies as a social practice (e.g. Brian Street) and a way of engaging with and communicating our worlds

In collaboration with artists and creative practitioners

Critical approach to co-production

[as slowly and as thoughtfully as I can]

What have I been researching recently?

Supporting adoptive parents through multi-arts creative practice (Research England, 2023)

Artistic and **creative social interventions** to address post-Covid19 health inequalities (Re-emerge, 2022 - 2023)

Transdisciplinary co-produced approaches to **linguistic landscapes** (LangScape Curators, 2015-2017 (Bradley et al., 2018; Bradley & Atkinson, 2020); Multilingual Streets, 2019-2021 – see here)

Artistic engagements with multilingualism (Visual representations of multilingualism, 2018-2019 (Bradley et al., 2022; Bradley & Atkinson, 2022)

Translanguaging as a lens for reading **multilingual modernist poetry** (beyond Babel: multilingual literature and not knowing languages, Taylor-Batty & Bradley, 2021)

Ethnographic research into street arts production and performance PhD Translation & Translanguaging in Production and Performance in Community Arts (AHRC, TLANG Project) (Bradley, 2017a; Bradley, 2018; Bradley & Moore, 2018; Bradley, 2020)

Various arts-based projects around **migration** (Migration & Home: Welcome in Utopia, 2016 (McKay & Bradley, 2016); Migration & Settlement: Extending the Welcome, 2016-2017)

Arts Based Research

Arts Based Research (ABR) - a short & incomplete history (Barone, Eisner & Barone, 2012)

Arts based research originated as a term in 1993, at Stanford University.

Scholars including Elliot Eisner.

Research guided by aesthetic features - what might it look like?

Artistry in research is nothing new - but still contested.

Strong and creative resistance to critiques of 'bias' or 'subjectivity'.

Arts based research was - and is - an effort to utilise the forms of thinking and forms of representation that the arts provide as means through which the world can be better understood and through such understanding comes the enlargement of mind. (xi)

'What did occur to me (Tom Barone) during my early years as a graduate student at the University of Chicago was that the arts had something to say to people and something to say that was important. If this was true, then why not use the arts methodologically to reveal what the arts make possible in various situations?' (xii)

Arts based research is a process that uses the expressive qualities of form to convey meaning. (xiii)

An umbrella term? (Patricia Leavy, 2019)

'Approaches to research that employ the creative arts' (Leavy, 2019, vii)

'Transdisciplinary approach'

'Methodological tools' across 'any or all phases of research'

These tools **adapt the tenets of the creative arts** in order to address research questions holistically. This process of inquiry therefore involves researchers engaging in art making as a way of knowing (McNiff, 2014; Chapter 2, this volume).

Arts-based practices may draw on any art form and representational forms that include but are not limited to literary forms (essays, short stories, novellas, novels, experimental writing, scripts, screenplays, poetry, parables); performative forms (music, songs, dance, creative movement, theatre); visual art (photography, drawing, painting, collage, installation art, three-dimensional (3-D) art, sculpture, comics, quilts, needlework); audiovisual forms (film, video); multimedia forms (graphic novels), and multimethod forms (combining two or more art forms). (4)



What is it and what is it not? (Barone, Eisner & Barone, 2012)

Arts based research represents an effort to explore the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations and that, when it is at its best, culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art. (1)

So, in doing arts based research are we seeking to create something that resembles 'art'?



What is it and what is it not? (Barone, Eisner & Barone, 2012)

Choosing a form of representation - what is made possible and what is constrained? (1)

Beyond 'words', giving space to the 'ambiguous'

Broaden the conceptual umbrella of research

Thus, the contribution of arts based research is not that it leads to claims in propositional form about states of affairs but that it addresses complex and often subtle interactions and that it provides an image of those interactions in ways that make them noticeable. In a sense, arts based research is a heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world. (3)

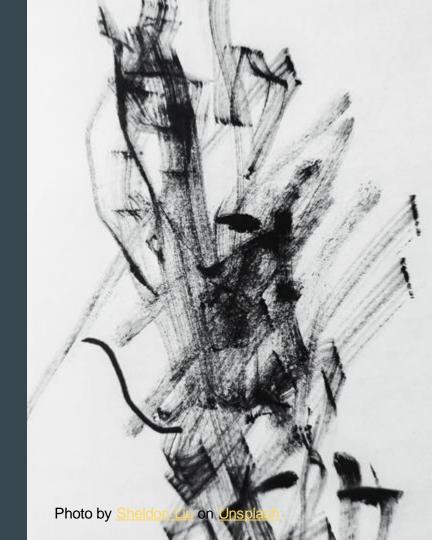
Are we trying to complexify?



Photo by Steve Johnson on Unsplash

Exploiting the power of 'vagueness' (Barone, Eisner and Barone, 2012)

Arts based research as a starting point Arts based research as pushing back on 'what can be quantified' and 'prescribed' Arts based research showing methodological diversity and pluralism is possible Differences in approaches lead to challenge, and challenge leads to debate and insight But can it be trusted? What does it mean to be trustworthy in research? Credibility - and making our conversation more interesting



But what is an art form in this context?

Arts based research emphasises the generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding some person, place of situation. It is not simple a quantitative disclosure of an array of variables. It is the conscious pursuit of expressive form in the service of understanding. (8)

To create an expressive form that will enable an individual to secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations studied. (9)

What might these expressive forms be?



Other ways of conceptualising (Leavy, 2019; Chilton & Leavy,

2015)

A paradigm (Leavy, 2019, 4)

Partial lexicology

TABLE 1.1.	Partial Lexicology	of Terms for	Arts-Based	Research
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A/r/tography

Alternative forms of representation

Aesthetically based research

Aesthetic research practice

Art as inquiry

Art practice as research

Art-based enquiry

Art-based inquiry

Art-based research

Artistic inquiry

Arts-based research (ABR)

Arts-based social research (ABSR)

Arts-based qualitative inquiry

Arts in qualitative research

Arts-based educational research (ABER)

Arts-based health research (ABHR)

Arts-based research practices

Arts-informed inquiry

Arts-informed research

Critical arts-based inquiry

Living inquiry

Performative inquiry

Performative social science (PSS)

Poetic science

Practice-based research

Research-based art (RBA)

Research-based practice

Scholartistry

Transformative inquiry through art

Note. From Chilton and Leavy (2014). Copyright © 2014 Oxford University Press. Adapted and updated by permission.

Why do ABR? (Leavy, 2019, 9-11)

- New insights and learning
- Describe, explore, discover, problem-solve
- Forge macro-micro connections
- Holistic
- Evocative and provocative
- Critical consciousness, raising awareness and empathy
- Unsettle stereotypes, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalised voices and perspectives
- Participatory
- Multiple meanings
- Public scholarship and usefulness



Creative Inquiry

Creative Inquiry (Bradley & Harvey, 2019)

Applied Linguistics research with, into and through the arts (91)

- •research with the arts (i.e., what can working with the arts tell us about applied linguistics?);
- •research into the arts (i.e., what can working with applied linguistics tell us about the arts?); and
- •research through the arts (i.e., using arts-based and arts-informed methods as theory and methodology). (93)

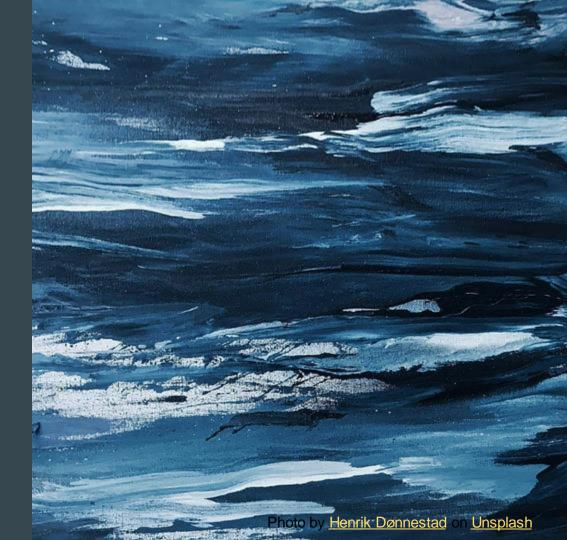
Research 'with'

- Artistic artefacts what can they tell us about language/languaging/com munication as part of a wider social context?
- Artworks which include language in some form
- Expanding the notion of 'language' beyond the logocentric (e.g. Tony Crowley's mural photographs in Belfast)



Research 'into'

- Researching language and communication in creative contexts
- Arts spaces as spaces of learning
- How do people communicate within these contexts? For example in short term theatre production? (e.g. Toinen Koti, Sari Pöyhönen)



Research 'through'

- More aligned with Arts
 Based Research
- Or Arts Informed Research
 (e.g. Butler-Kisber, 2010)
- Collage to present young people's engagements with language in public space (Bradley et al., 2018; Bradley & Atkinson, 2020)



Creative inquiry

More than this, creative inquiry presents an orientation to research.

In the research I present today, I conceptualise it as dialogue with the people, context, space, time, activity in which the research takes place

How does what *I do* as a researcher and *what I attend to* engage with the people, context, space, time, activity?

How open and flexible *am I* within these spaces?

How can I engage with 'non' language, or 'the unsayable' in contexts where these are foregrounded?

About Re-Emerge

What is the role of the arts in help after COVID19 pandemic?

Complex ecology

Arts organisations

Artists (including freelancers)

Health practitioners

communities/participants:

Mothers (and babies and children)

Dementia support groups

Families of young children

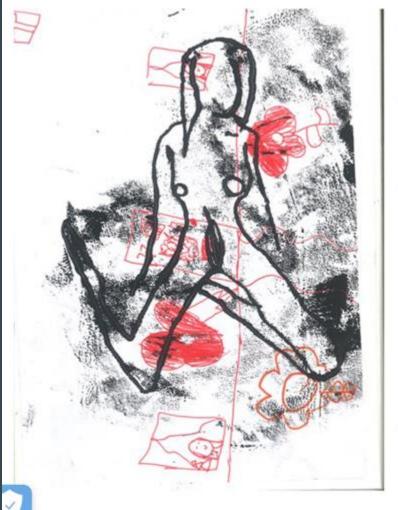
Adoptive families





What is it?

https://www.kcl.ac.uk/cultura l/projects/2017/maternaljournal



A team of visual and craft artists, poets, cartoonists and writers devised and delivered creative workshops at which pregnant women and new mothers were supported in the creation of their personal journals using sketchbooks, diaries and scrapbooks and through looking at digital platforms such as video diaries, blogs, Twitter and Instagram. Participants were invited to share their work through discussion with the wider group to develop a long-term strategy of journaling for good mental health and wellbeing.

Research in this area has focused on the general psychological benefits of keeping a diary, the use of music, song or dance by women with postnatal depression, or on the use of creative forms to explore maternal experiences, such as poet Hollie McNish's Nobody Told Me. There is also a proliferation of blogs, social media groups and websites such as Tell me a good birth story, which suggested that testing journaling for expressing complex experiences of the maternal experience had great potential. Journaling differs from keeping a diary because it is not just about recording

experiences but also thoughts, feelings and reflections in a variety of genres.

Maternal Journal - who is it for?

A group should be facilitated by a midwife, birth worker, mental health professional or experienced workshop leader. Please be aware that strong feelings can emerge during the group workshops, and they are not recommended for people with a history of severe mental illness.

(https://www.maternaljournal.org/setting-up-a-group)



Journaling Motherhood

In particular, journaling has a strong female legacy of being used by women* in their everyday lives and by writers and artists. It is suggested that it can also act as a therapeutic device by providing a means to check in on feelings, help to understand triggers towards poor health, document good and bad days, and put experiences into perspective.

Journaling in pregnancy has particular poignancy as it relates to the inevitable marking of time, the nature of the experience as 'a journey' and the sense of being in a liminal space (a threshold between one state and another). It is also commonly a time of great imagination and vivid dreams — all good material for a journal.

Participants felt safe enough to reveal and explore thoughts, feelings and experiences openly (Godfrey-Isaacs, 2019, 119)

Journaling Community

Multiple, complex, conflicting and intersecting definitions of 'community'

'Imagined' (Anderson, 1983)

'Local'? 'Shared activity'? 'Shared life stage?' 'shared experiences'?

Defined by funder, defined by health trust?

Defined by shared identity?

Community arts / participatory arts (Matarasso, 2016)

- Community arts (1960s-1980s)
- Participatory art (1990s-2010s)
- 'A restless art' (2010s now)

Journaling Belonging

Fluid, ever changing, cannot be assumed

Temporally (and spatially) bound

Multidimensional and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991)

Politicised

How do mothers narrate and perform identities and belonging through creative journaling?

What does creative journaling 'do'? Offer a space to explore 'belonging'? Help us to understand more about what it means?

Why are we generally interested in 'belonging' and what do we think 'belonging does'?

What are the risks focusing on 'belonging' at a time when the word seems ubiquitous?

The individual and the collective - in/through/with journaling

To focus on journaling, for which the very focus is the creative exploration and communal sharing of the everyday, I take, as my point of departure, the position that the individual is always implicated in the collective, and, of course, vice versa, aligning to some extent with notions of the 'transrational' voice (Harvey et al., 2021), as both 'individually uttered and collectively produced' (p.1).

Researching mothers journaling

Researcher role is complex, complicated! and constantly negotiated

I am researcher, I'm also evaluating the programme, as participant observer in workshops I'm embedded, I share characteristics with some of the communities the project is aiming at, I've led a series of 'spin' off, public engagement projects, I've facilitated sessions when practitioners are unwell, I've juggled babies in the creche for the women's group so we have the right ratios, I've co-curated exhibitions, I've co-created a zine.

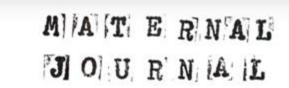
How are we researching? How are we evaluating?

- co-produced model (working with the project team)
- ethnographically informed
- observations, interviews, questionnaires, conversations, artworks
 - what kinds of *challenges* do people face? Post-Covid19 and in accessing creativity?
 - what *changes*, in a workshop, over the course of a programme, over a few months?
 - what *happens* within these spaces?
- how can we research in ways which are sensitive to the context and the participants? how can the research methods engage with the creative practices under observation?

Towards collaboration with participants

- co-produced<u>zine</u>
- artworks for public exhibition
- Continued multi-site exhibition
- travelling artworks...

To what extent might we describe this as participatory or co-produced research?





Fieldnotes

Notes from a session...(23/01/23)

The conference room is also busy with 7 participants, 6 with babies and 1 who is pregnant, due in March. The table is set out as usual, with prams around the outside of the room and in the corridor between the activity room and the baby room. Pens, paper, paints, pastels, collage, sheets of paper, felts are all across the table. It is a welcoming and friendly space. The women have been given registration forms to fill out at the end if they want to keep participating. Most have already filled them in. There is a steady stream between the baby room and the activity room as the morning goes on. Towards the end, a number of babies are in prams and being pushed to sleep. Babies are passed in and out to feed as needed. The other childcare assistant, L, arrives at 10.45. She also knows the babies well, they attend a mother and baby group at Tredacted 1.

Hands

The activity is about hands - https://www.maternaljournal.org/miniguides - my amazing hands by Alice Simpson, the same activity we did at the training last week. The group don't hesitate in getting started, using paints, collage, pens, etc.

MINI JOURNALING GUIDES



MY AMAZING HANDS by @aliceandastrid

- Draw around your hands. What materials have you got? Just a pen, a pencil or more?
 - Use these to write and draw all the things that your amazing hands do everyday.



Notes from a session...(23/01/23)

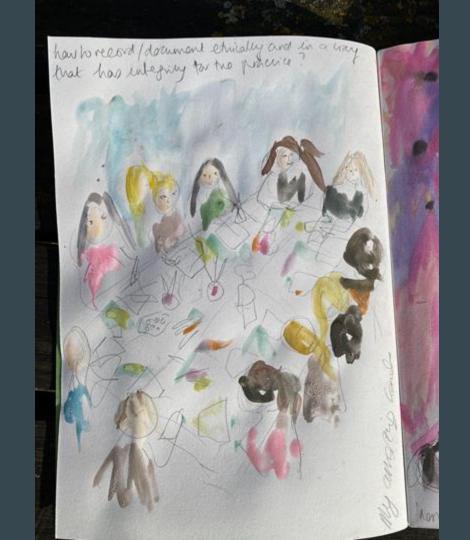
The last times I have done this activity I found I focused on my mornings, listing the different things my hands do from waking up and on the school run. I decide to focus on the evenings, thinking about what I do before I go to bed. I resist the urge to use pen or paints straight away and instead go for pencil. I sketch out my hand, frustrated by my clumsiness and how bulky I manage to make my fingers. I start to try and shade, focusing on knuckles and my bitten, short, unsatisfactory nails. My wedding ring that won't actually come off. A sleeve. I then write around my fingers, rather than on the insides of my hands as I have done in previous activities. In pencil I write 'holding my book as I try to read, turning off the light, running a bath and filling glasses with water and ice taking out the uniforms'. The small rituals of evening, of attempting to find time to read a few pages of my book, of thinking of a a bath as E does, as a way to slow down and be ready for sleep.



Notes from a session...(23/01/23)

As we draw, paint, collage the room moves as people go between the baby room and the corridor when needed. It is something of a dance, one that is made easier by the experience of the practitioners in the baby room, their calmness, their understanding that the MJ space is for the mothers and yet that the babies are part of this.

Close to the start of the session, before sketching my hand, I draw the group, I draw the table and loosely sketch the women around it. I do it quickly to try and capture the moment, to capture the participants and think about the movement, the lightness of the morning, the lightness of the chatter. The art materials, the drinks, the coffee cups, bottles, milk, baby snacks, biscuits that are like malted milk biscuits but not malted milk biscuits, the mince pies (don't eat them, they are past their sell by date).



Notes from a session...(13/05/2023) Isla Macrae

This morning's session consisted of painting pottery which was made in the pottery throwing session last week. Lxxxxx and I were tasked with painting a beautiful clay cast of a pregnant body, which we decided to carve and paint bright flowers on, an ode to the changes which happen to the body during pregnancy. Everyone's pieces of pottery were unique and different, some of them signifying pregnancy and motherhood, and others simply serving practical purposes with no "deeper" meaning at all. The session was filled with the lull of chattering amongst the women and the occasional babbling of babies. It was a relaxed atmosphere, and I experienced myself how the choosing of colours, the mixing of paint and the motion of delicate brush strokes allowed me to switch off for a few hours, the thoughts of looming deadlines disappeared. From chatting to one of the women, it became clear to me the significance of the sessions to her, which she told me was her favourite time of the week. For her, the sessions provided moments of calm in the busyness and chaos which comes with having children, allowing her to focus on something that was solely for herself. It was also apparent to me the sense of comfortability these women had built up with each other throughout the months, with talk often turning to the mundane aspects of life, and childcare naturally being shared amongst the group.

Notes from a session...(22/07/2023) Lauren Brennan

FINAL!! MJ Exhibition Workshop

22nd July 2022

What do we do?

Cutting and chatting

Cutting up magazines ready for the collaging activity next week

Chatting

Chatted a lot about our relationships and experiences as participant observers

The complex experience of this

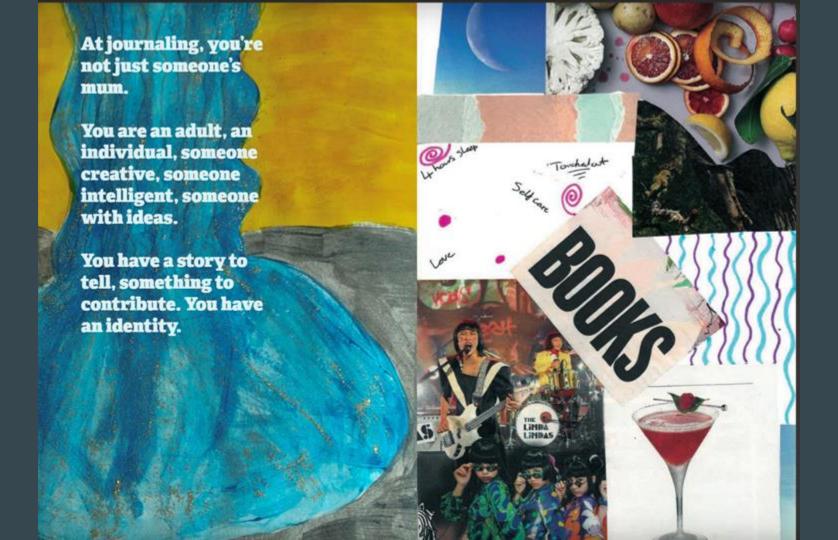
It's not burdensome but it's a lot to process and a weight on our shoulders - concerns / worries for the women we work alongside

How do you manage these relationships in an appropriate manner?

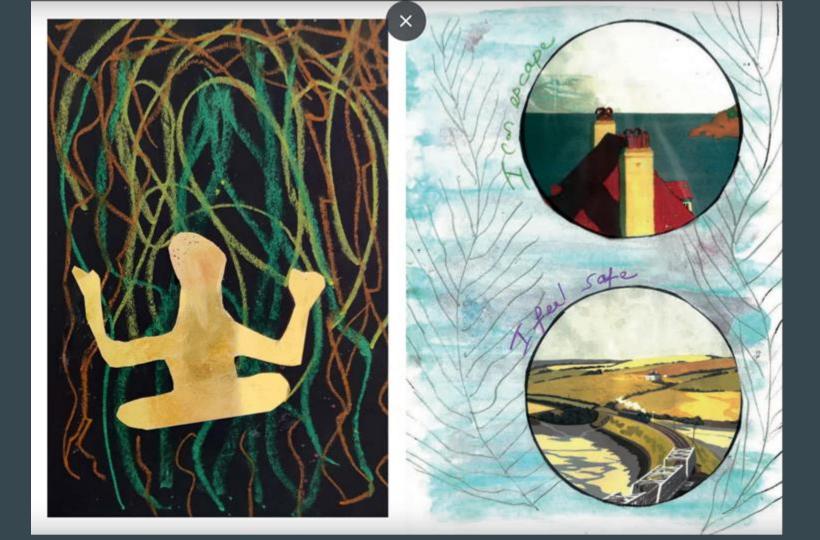
Collective zine

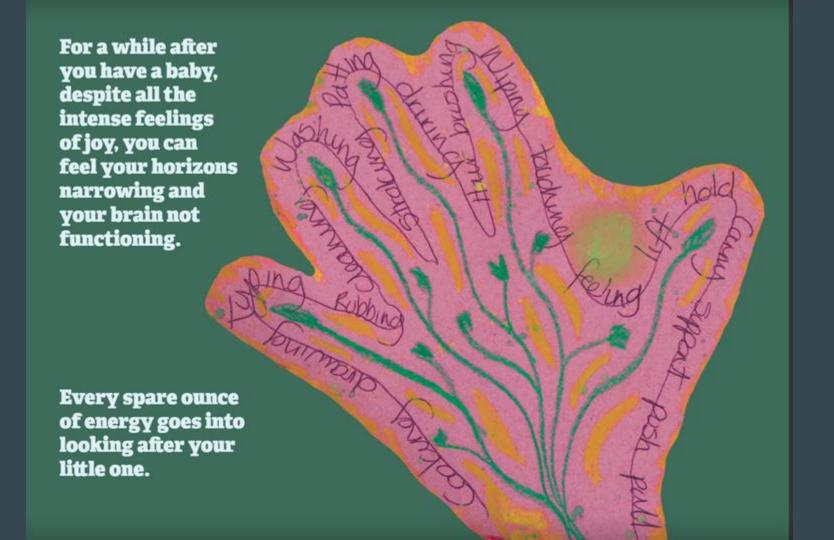
MATERNAL JOURNAL

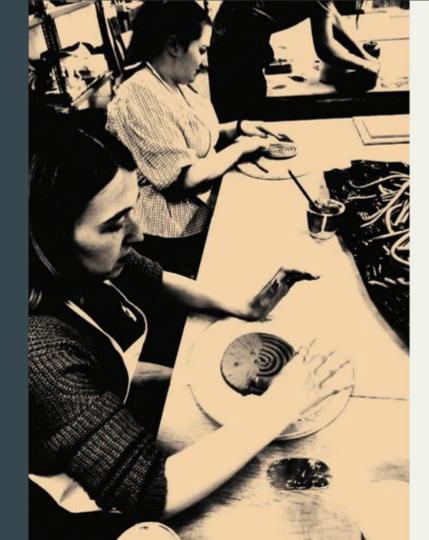










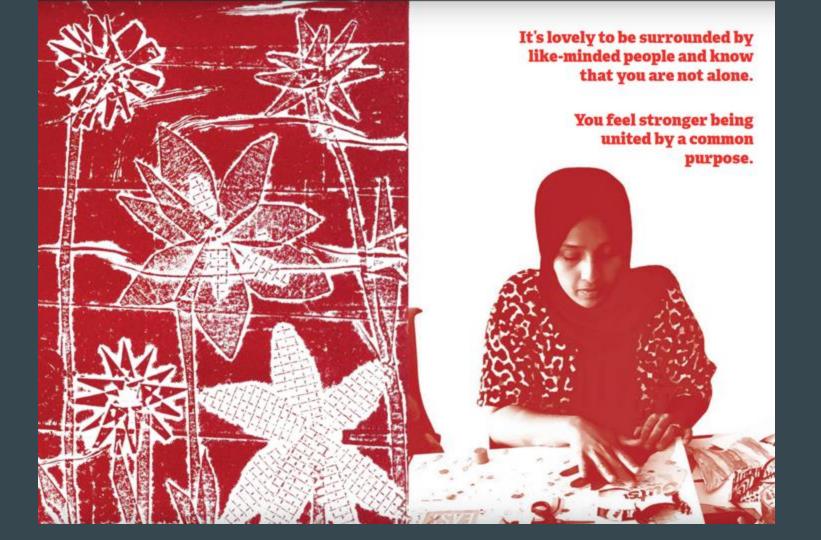




It allows you to celebrate motherhood - the highs and the lows - in a safe space.







Motherhood

'At journaling you're not just someone's mum'

'For a while after you have a baby, despite all the intense feelings of joy, you can feel your horizons narrowing and your brain not functioning'

'Every spare ounce of energy goes into looking after your little one'

'It allows you to celebrate motherhood - the highs and lows - in a safe space'

Community

'I can escape'

'I feel safe'

'I have met lots of different mums and we have all had incredible opportunities to write poetry, paint, and have a go at ceramics, printmaking and embroidery'

Belonging

'You are an adult, an individual, someone creative, someone intelligent, someone with ideas'

'You have a story to tell, something to contribute. You have an identity'

'No expectations'

'Say the unsayable'

Reflections and discussion: What can journaling tell us about motherhood, community and belonging?

- Possibilities of creative journaling spaces for mothers (and others)
- Enables externalisation (through creative practice) of experiences in a guided setting
- Sharing artworks and claiming experiences, finding alignments and disalignments, sharedness and unsharedness
- Arts based methods integral to researching
- Critical attention to methodologies and how researchers engage with the space into which they have been invited (and privileged to attend and participate)
- Co-production as emergent, as iterative and as ethico-onto-epistemological
- Complexities of 'decentring' language and not returning to logocentricity in absence of methodological imagination and flexibility (Harvey, Tordzro & Bradley, 2022)

Contact me

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Let's try it out! Maternal Journal activities

Remember! These activities are based on workshops with mothers (and anyone who defines as a mother). We'll need to change the focus a little for our workshop today.

There is no right or wrong way to approach these tasks! Just let your imagination flow and don't be afraid.

We will be reflecting on these from a number of perspectives:

- What was it like to engage in the activity, what did it feel like?
- How would you do 'data generation' as a researcher in these contexts?
- How might researchers draw from these kinds of creative methods in their research?

MINI JOURNALING GUIDES



STOP & STARE by Emily Leslie

- Take a few deep, grounding breaths. Soften the gaze. Where does it land? Take a mental or actual snapshot of that frame; as if holding up a magnifying glass;
- Describe the scene; the textures, light, sound, scents either in words or sketches. Notice that which gets overlooked.

MINI JOURNALING GUIDES



CREATIVE DOODLING by @godfrey_isaacs

- Choose a biro or pen & cover a page with doodles.
 - Take coloured pencils or pens and start colouring in sections.
 - Add words that relate to how you are feeling.



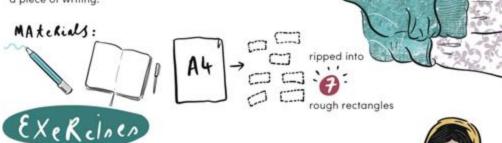
- Add other decorative marks with different coloured pens.
 - Carry on adding until you are happy with the results.

Your list POEM By Hollie McNish

Hollie McNish is a poet and writer.

holliepoetry.com

List poems are a relatable, simple way to start structuring a piece of writing.



Step 1: Questions and answers - 10 mins

Write the following on separate pieces of paper and turn over when done:

- One piece of good advice you were told about pregnancy and or parenthood.
- One piece of annoying or unhelpful advice you were told about pregnancy and or parenthood.
- Three short, sharp sentences about your relationship with socks.
- Something about your body that other people wouldn't know.
- Show off and swear about your favourite body part.
- Describe in a few vivid sentences a place, view or event in which you felt really content.



Step 2: Collage - 10 minutes

- 1. Read your answers out loud.
- Choose images to repeat if wanted.
- Choose start and end lines.
- 4. Make a rough order of answers.

Step 3: Writing - 20 minutes

- Do not write a title vet.
- 2. Do not write more than 15 lines.
- 3. Start each new 'idea' on a new line. 3. Make any final changes.

Step 4: Edit - 15 minutes

- 1. Stop. Close your eyes. Distract yourself. Look again.
- 2. Read your poem aloud continuously for a few minutes.
- 4. Choose a title.
- 5. Write 'by (your name)'

Step 5: Sharing - 30/40 minutes

If in a group, come together and take turns to read to each other. Or share online using: #maternaljournal







30-40 Mins







Reflection on the creative activities

As a 'participant'

- What was it like to engage in the activity, what did it feel like?
- What did you enjoy? What did you find challenging? Anything you didn't like?

As a researcher in these workshops

- How would you do 'data generation' as a researcher in these contexts?

As researchers thinking about your own research and how you might approach it

- How might researchers draw from these kinds of creative methods in their research?
- How might these artefacts convey meaning?
- How about when produced by participants and when produced by the researcher?

What do you think some of the ethical challenges might be of researching in this context? To what extent might arts based research approaches engage with these?

Read more

Some films you can watch later and more information about MJ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxIHW6yeAA4&t=11s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUGqA_ihts8&t=5s

https://www.sallygolightly.co.uk/maternal-journal/

Some blog posts you can read about Re-Emerge

Bradley, J. (2022). Re-Emerge? Different perspectives on the experiences of parents during COVID19 and the opportunities of creativity. iHuman. [Online]. Available from https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ihuman/re-emerge

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Brennan, L., MacRae, I. & Bradley, J. (2022). Re-Emerge: Reflecting on the Maternal Journal Training workshop. 10 May 2022. SoE Research. [Online]. Available from https://medium.com/soeresearch/re-emerge-reflecting-on-the-maternal-journal-training-workshop-9b2c25569d75.

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