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Using an arts-based design to explore the experience of Shared Reading: a pilot study

Abstract

This pilot study explores the use of an art-based design to record the experience of a Shared Reading workshop. There is considerable evidence of the effectiveness of Shared Reading as a support for well-being across a wide range of situations and settings and studies have suggested that this literature-based intervention may have the potential to supports both thinking and feeling. However, describing the personal and emotional responses that provoke the impact of Shared Reading is a challenge. The capture of the discussion occurring during this pilot workshop is made visual using both words and pictures, and this 'capture' is then synthesised and an evocation is created using the medium of film. This paper discusses the process and the effectiveness of this arts-based approach as evidenced during data collection, in interpretation and again in dissemination, and implications for further use of this methodology are explored.

[Paper word count: 5,865 plus references]

Despite the challenges involved in working on the thin line between art and research, the learning curve it creates for researchers, its value in terms of creating understanding and its capacity to engage participants makes it a worthwhile endeavor to invest in.

Coemans and Hannes, 2017, p. 34.

Introduction

This paper reports on a pilot study on the use of an art-based design to record the experience of a Shared Reading workshop. Shared Reading is a literature-based intervention, developed by the national charity, *The Reader*, in which literature is read aloud and group members are encouraged by the trained leader to respond personally to share feelings, emotions and memories (Billington, et al., 2010). An arts-based research design as explored in this study can be described as 'the use of tools from the Arts (and Humanities) in carrying out Social Science research and/or disseminating its findings' (Jones and Leavy, 2014 p. 1).

The arts are central to Shared Reading. The shared literary text used for discussion is, by definition, an art form: Shared Reading relies on providing, 'a rich, varied, non-prescriptive diet of serious literature' (Billington et al., 2010 p. 6). This art form uses text, presented

visually (i.e. written) which is transformed to text experienced aurally through the 'read aloud' nature of Shared Reading. The capture of the discussion prompted by this text is, in the case of this study made visual using both words and pictures, and this 'capture' is then synthesised and an evocation of what was discussed is created. This arts-based approach to exploring Shared Reading has not been used in this way before; it is evident during data collection, in interpretation and again in dissemination and therefore explores an original approach to exploration of this subject.

Shared Reading has been shown to have community value in a variety of settings, yet the actual experience of Shared Reading is difficult to capture. Each of these creative responses serves to capture personal perspectives of the experience of the workshop. Each provides a 'record' – partial and personal but also powerful – of what is a transitory experience. Another group responding to those two texts may bring very different experiences to the table; even the same participants might respond very differently on a different occasion. Capturing the transient content of these workshops is a challenge. During training to become a 'Reader Leader', provided by the charity *The Reader*, video footage is used to portray what a session might entail. Although this is powerful, it remains somewhat clinical, and the presence of the camera may impact the spontaneity of participants' responses. Clearly the same may be said of the presence of note-takers, either of written or illustrative materials, but the impact may be qualitatively different.

Research questions

The questions raised in this pilot study are:

- Are these forms of art-based response helpful in capturing the Shared Reading experience?
- Might they be helpful in supporting further reflection and exploration?

Literature

Research methodologies employed to investigate Shared Reading have been rigorous and wide ranging, and have included both quantitative and qualitative measures, spanning study over some 20 years. The approaches used have been both detailed and scientific, but they have not – to date – included arts-based researched methodologies.

Arts-based research may be understood as 'any social research or human inquiry that adapts the tenets of the creative arts as a part of the methodology...[where] the arts may be used during data collection, analysis, interpretation and/or dissemination' (Jones and Leavy, 2014, p.1), and its value within qualitative research is becoming increasingly recognised (Cohenmiller, 2018). Lawrence (2008) discusses the effect that it has, drawing an appraisal of language-free art that has interesting parallels with Shared Reading:

A painting, a poem, a dance can stir up emotion as it touches something deep inside us. Perhaps we connect to a personal experience of our own ... Experiencing, being with the emotion, resisting our temptation to run from it can open up opportunity for tremendous growth and learning.

Lawrence, 2008 p. 67.

In the same way, Shared Reading can be understood as having the experience of 'something deep inside us' at its core, taking as it does its inspiration from literary fiction texts which have the 'potential to mediate human experience and find and alleviate personal trouble' (Billington, 2011 p. 70).

The use of art-based methods in the collection of data is widely recognised as supporting participants' communication. Such approaches may be employed when working with those who otherwise 'lack a voice', for example with young children where drawing may be taken as 'symbols for the researcher to interpret and analyse' (Eldén, 2011, p. 68). In these cases, the interpretation responsibility lies with the researcher, who 'reads into' the drawings and uses them to support otherwise hesitant or insecure speech. Work using drawing with fully verbally articulate participants also exists, for example, Johnson's exploration of the creation of sketched storybooks by trainee teachers, and the use of these to enhance trainees' reflection on their practice (Johnson, 2002). A rather different methodology is the use of visual data collection by the researcher. This current study builds on the work of Heath and Chapman (2018), who recorded a year-long Leverhulme Trust-funded project working with artist Lynne Chapman at the Morgan Centre for Research into Everyday Lives at the University of Manchester. In this they discuss the potential of observational sketching as a social science research tool, suggesting that researchers who use this method claim, 'not that drawing is better than other media, but that a sketch does something different to, say, a photograph or a written field note' (p. 715). Back and Puwar in their book, *Live Methods* (2012) describe similar approaches, advocating for 'methods which live up to the richness and vitality of real-life experience (Heath and Chapman, p. 715). They advocate that the nature of the data that is generated through sketching, specifically, is different from that generated through other methods, whether word-based or visual (for example, through the use of photography). They are interested in what a drawing leaves out, just as much as what it records, and are interested also in the social context of sketching and the way it 'can act as a bridge between researchers and non-researchers' (p. 717).

Midgely (2011, p. 2) similarly explores the particular power of drawing:

Drawing is not in competition with photography, it offers an alternative view or perspective ... [It] efficiently conveys the tensions and passions witnessed on location.

In contrast to photography, the process of drawing is 'sketchy'. It usually provides a partial representation and is 'characterised by the editing away of extraneous detail in order to focus on the core of what is being drawn' (Midgley, 2010, p. 2).

Heath and Chapman agree that the artist who draws must decide what to record and what to leave out. This may throw 'a new and unexpected light on how we might interpret any given social landscape' (p. 719). They articulate how sketching produces a partial record, in a way that an electronic recording would not, as the artist is 'necessarily selective' in what they draw, allowing them to 'attend to the small details, the things that particularly fascinated us about what we were observing, rather than feeling that we ought to give equal attention to all that was in front of us' p. 719). However, they also argue that in another sense drawing may contain more information than a photograph. A photograph is of a fixed moment in time, where a drawing evolves in real time and in parallel to what is happening. As Midgley explains, 'Documentary Drawing or reportage, unlike documentary film or photography, attempts to capture minutes and hours as opposed to fractions of seconds in a single image' (2011, p. 2). Shannon-Baker and Edwards (2018) argue that 'visual methods complement, expand, and ask questions of [other data] (p. 936). Adding captions and written notes to visual representations may allow the researcher to 'capture something of the atmosphere in which the sketch was produced'. In this way, Quickfall's words and images as presented in this study, 'may fuse to create a 'record' that would not be captured by either method used alone.

Lawrence (2008) suggests that art invites a 'conversation' between artist and viewer. This conversation is qualitatively different when the artist seeks to do more than record, but instead seeks overtly to interpret. The film which Rimmer produced in response to the workshop provides a more abstract response than Quickfall's 'live capture' sketches and notes. It provides the potential for an artistically inspired dissemination 'in addition to or as a replacement of a purely academically written text' that 'enables a more empathic participation' and provides the stimulus for increased dialogue' (Wang et al., 2017, p. 13). In this sense, the film moves away from art as 'recording' and towards art as 'reflecting' and as such, can be seen as art *in* research, rather than art *as* research, although this definition remains tentative. Wang et al. make a definition of *art in research* as a:

type of inquiry in which artistic methods are used as a supporting tool for research [including art that is] used to determine the focus of the research, formulate research questions, generate data, collect data, analyze data, represent the findings of the study, represent a response to the findings, evaluate the research, disseminate the research findings, and/or generate meaning and trigger responses from the audience.

Wang et al., 2017 p. 15.

As such, art in research has many faces!

On many occasions in research an artistic response of this kind is produced from within the participatory group, the artist working with the participants to produce output that is meaningful to them. This approach, according to van der Vaart, van Hoven & Huigen (2018) allows for the artistic response to be 'democratic', and to enable wider access to the response than were it given as a (written) academic paper. Diver suggests that local communities who are the subject of anthropological enquiry may be excluded from the dissemination of that research, where use of writing 'employing specialized academic language [may reinforce] multiple layers of social hierarchy (Diver, 2014 n.p.). This concern led Diver to 'focus on collaborative research methods that incorporate visual formats as a means of giving back to community research partners' (Diver, 2014 n.p.).

Shared Reading groups meet in settings as diverse as homeless hostels, asylum-seekers refuges, GP surgeries, neurological centres, dementia care homes, drugs and alcohol rehabilitation, mental health centres and in secure and probationer settings (Billington, 2011). Although the written word is the initial means of exploration in these groups, this 'democratisation', as described by Dever (2014) remains essential. The read-aloud model of Shared Reading means that 'people from a wide range of sociocultural backgrounds and educational experience ... are able to participate and contribute meaningfully' (Billington et al., 2017 p. 156) and 'even people who cannot read ... can participate meaningfully' (Billington 2012, p. 70). An arts-based response to the workshop may similarly encourage inclusive dissemination of research regarding Shared Reading. Equally, the expression 'giving back' in Diver's work remains interesting; the creation of an artwork that reflects or explores the emotions that emerged from the reading of the texts may well provide a 'giving back' to those participants, allowing for increased emotional engagement and exploration. This provocation may, indeed, be part of the intention. Citing Barone & Eisner (2011) Wang et al. suggest that art-based research may 'draw attention to complexity, raise more questions, and even generate more uncertainties than certainties for artist-researchers and audience' and that this may 'very often [be] part of their initial goal' (Wang et al., 2017 p. 13).

Method

The Shared Reading workshop explored in this Pilot Study took place during the *Academic and Creative Responses to Death and Dying* conference at Bishop Grosseteste University in January 2020. This conference, now in its third year, is an interdisciplinary exploration of death and dying, hosted by the university Chaplaincy team, that brings together 'members of the public, practitioners, creative artists and scholars working across the arts, humanities, sciences and theology, whose work, research and working/creative practices relate to death and dying' (*Call for Papers*, November 2020).

The workshop that formed this study was open to all delegates, although for reasons of space and workshop size was limited to 15. The workshop was led by this paper's lead

researcher, who completed training by the charity *The Reader* in December 2019 in order to facilitate the session. Two texts were explored: an excerpt from Act IV scene vii of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where Queen Gertrude describes the death of Ophelia, and Charles Causley's poem *Eden Rock*.

In each case, the text was read aloud twice, and the leader prompted personal responses and thoughts that emerged from the text. Delegates were encouraged to respond 'creatively' rather than 'academically' to the texts, in that memories, thoughts and feelings were encouraged rather than analytical or critical responses. Throughout the two readings, Quickfall made notes and sketches, recording participants' responses, and Rimmer made written notes.

The sketches and notes from Quickfall's work, together with recollection of the session prompted by these supports, were collated by Lawrence immediately following the session and were then revisited in discussion by all three researchers. The synthesis of these responses is reported in the Findings section of this paper. In the subsequent three-week period Rimmer worked his notes into a piece of animated art, reflecting his interpretation of the themes that were explored. A link to this film can also be found in the Findings section, together with a narrative on the film by the artist.

Ethics

There are quite specific ethical issues in the capture of visual data that provide consideration above and beyond those usual regarding research data collection. Ethics Committee approval to use these data collection methods and dissemination was obtained before the start of this study, and written consent was obtained from participants at the beginning of the workshop for both visual and verbal data to be collected, and for the data gathered during the workshop to be 'used as the researcher sees fit, including publication, presentation and other forms of dissemination as appropriate'. This data was guaranteed to be 'fully anonymised', which provides an interesting challenge when sketches are the source of data recording. There is interesting overlap here between the ethical considerations of research and those of art. Observational sketches by artists are frequently made in public spaces, and active consent is seldom obtained and 'it would be considered unusual for an artist to be expected to do so' (Heath and Chapman, 2018 p. 726). Heath and Chapman further suggest that there are parallels with the 'role of a non-participant ethnographer observing and taking notes (and perhaps also sketching) in a public space' suggesting that such a research 'would be unlikely to seek formal consent to do so'. The participation of the members of this group in a formal conference workshop, however, carries different responsibilities. Consequently, permission to sketch was sought before the workshop and permission to use the sketches granted at the end of the workshop, when the reality of the extent to which those sketched remained 'anonymous' could be appraised by participants. An active opt-out to the use of the data was articulated.

Findings

Arts-based response 1: using sketches, drawing and notes

Introduction



The workshop began with a description of Shared Reading and an exhortation by the session leader for delegates to try not to bring previous knowledge to the workshop. This was a challenge for some participants, not familiar with the concept of Shared Reading, who were keen to bring their - often considerable - pre-knowledge of the text to the discussions. It took some concentration for these participants to understand the concept of experiencing the literature 'in the present' and of allowing it to spark thoughts and recollections unconnected with familiarity with Elizabethan theatre or of literature criticism. However, the group leader persevered, and the workshop began to take on an authentic 'Shared Reading' atmosphere.



The suggestion that the participants should try to 'forget' within the confines of the workshop was interesting in the context of memories as explored in the texts under discussion.

The first text was read aloud twice by the leader, with a pause between readings to allow for personal reflection. The second read-through of the speech paused at the words, 'Muddy death', giving a tension to the reading.

First text: from *Hamlet*, Act IV scene vii

QUEEN GERTRUDE

One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow; your sister's drown'd, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drown'd! O, where?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

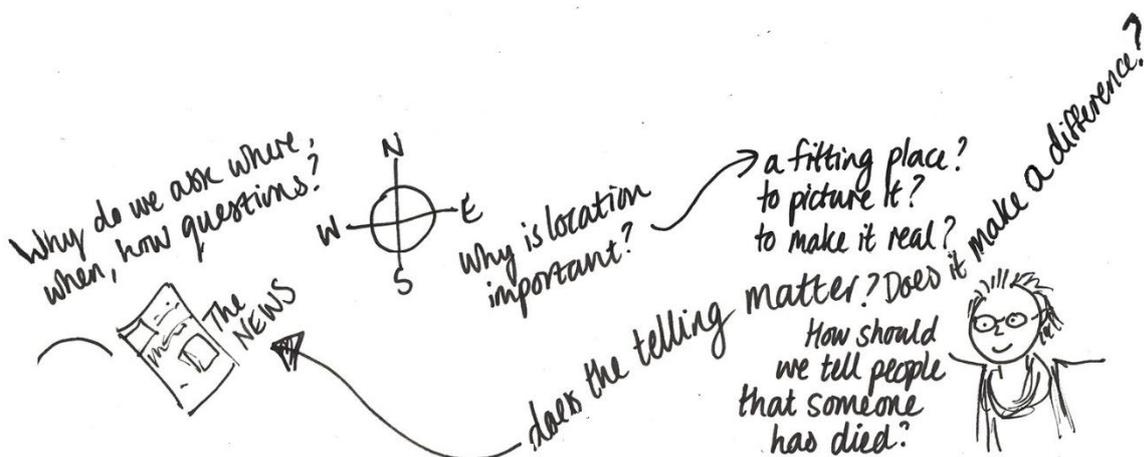
LAERTES

Alas, then, she is drown'd?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Drown'd, drown'd.

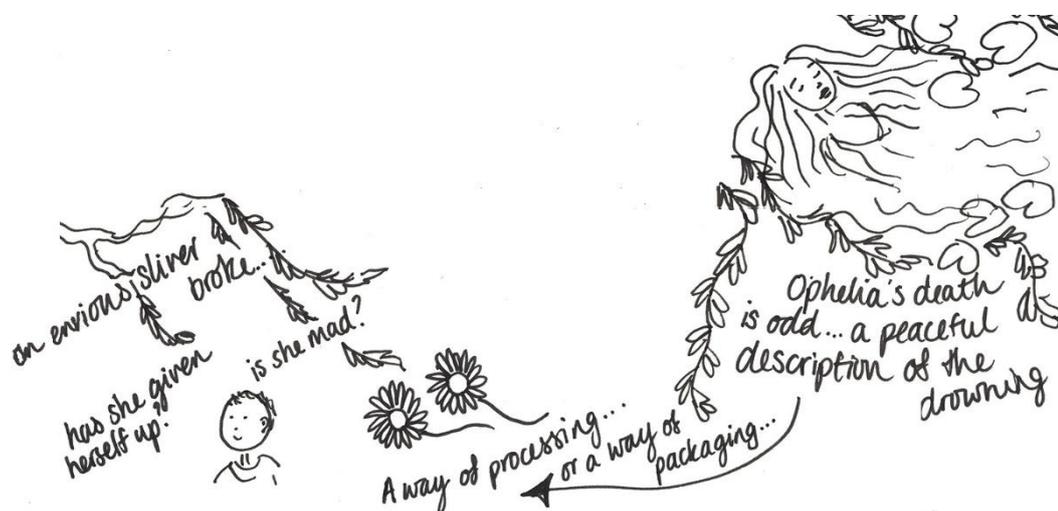
The discussion began with an exploration as to why the first response to news of a death should be to ask questions. Some participants felt that 'knowledge is power', and that the seeking of details might be a way to reclaim understanding, or a way of helping the shocked brain to process challenging information. There was interest in why the when or how of death should carry such importance, or the location of that death as reflected in Laertes immediate response to the news: 'O, where?'



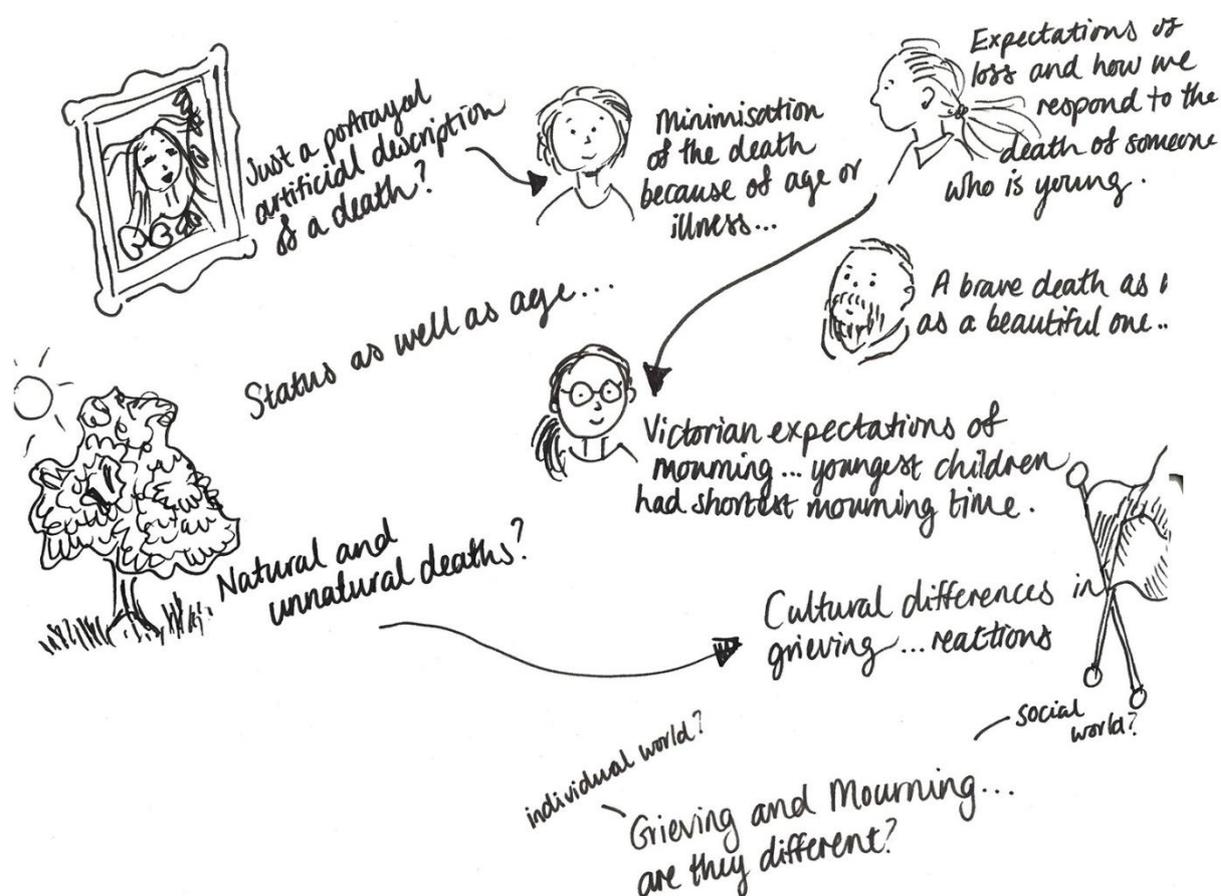
This grew into a wider conversation about the ‘telling’ of a death, and how the most compassionate way to do this might be. Some felt a certain resentment that the responsibility to lessen pain and embarrassment appears to fall to the teller in such a situation, even if that person is the more bereaved. There was some expression of guilt, too, as participants suggested that it is in the telling that the person dies for the person being told.



It was felt by many in the group that Ophelia’s death, and the description of that death, were at odds. The peace and beauty of the description felt, to some, ‘packaged’ and unauthentic. There was also discussion as to how much the responsibility for a death can be laid at the feet of the person who has died. Anger at the person for dying was recognised as a valid response, but there was disagreement about how much the person’s part in their own death should be used as a way of understanding that death by those who survive.



This led to a wider discussion on the description as ‘realistic’. Was Gertrude supposed to have witnessed it? Is what she describes what really happened? As a description of an off-stage event in a piece of fiction, people exclaimed surprise at how powerful the image of the death remained (it was compared to the death of Bambi’s mother in the 1942 Disney film, which happens out of shot but remains vivid in many people’s minds). There was further comment that the description is of beauty and tranquillity, and that it carries a serenity at odds with the subject matter.



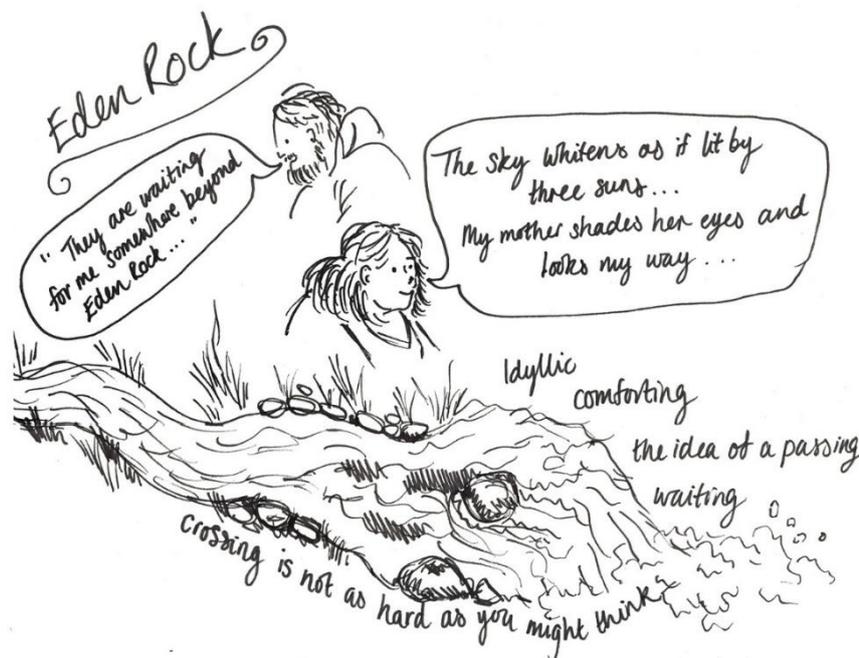
The concept of a 'Brave Death' was introduced, and the way that 'bravery' is often a word used in descriptions, particularly of people who 'battle' diseases such as cancer. There is a military tone to this concept of a 'fight' with death, but other workshop members also remarked the concept of making a 'beautiful' death, especially in the Catholic tradition.

One participant raised the issue of Ophelia's relative youth, and how culturally we may respond differently to the death of someone who is young to that of someone who is old, or to someone who is healthy as opposed to one already ill. This raised the concept of 'status' of death; one participant suggested that when someone's death is announced, their age is often requested by the person being told and the 'degree of sympathy' adjusted according to the answer. It was suggested by another participant that this perspective is relatively new, and that in Victorian times - when the death of children was more common - mourning time for children was actually shorter than for adults. This raised further discussion as to whether the death of children could or should ever be seen as 'natural'.

People were interested more generally in the idea of natural and unnatural death. The descriptions of nature in Gertrude's speech were revisited, and the sense of Ophelia being 'native' to the scene around her. There was discussion of the cultural differences regarding how death is seen as being an accepted part of life in some cultures and hidden or a subject of fear in others. Questions as to whether these attitudes impact on grieving were asked, as well as introduction of the idea that grieving and mourning may be different concepts, one originating from a personal world and the other from the social world of expectations.

Second text: *Eden Rock* by Charles Causley

The second text explored through Shared Reading in the workshop was *Eden Rock*, by Charles Causley. This was read aloud by a volunteer from the group, and then again by a second volunteer.



They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock:
My father, twenty-five, in the same suit
Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack
Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress
Drawn at the waist, ribbon in her straw hat,
Has spread the stiff white cloth over the grass.
Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light.

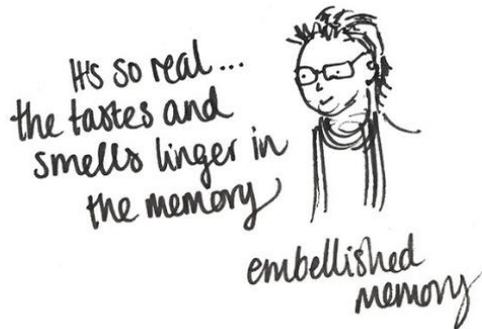
She pours tea from a Thermos, the milk straight
From an old H.P. Sauce bottle, a screw
Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out
The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

The sky whitens as if lit by three suns.
My mother shades her eyes and looks my way
Over the drifted stream. My father spins
A stone along the water. Leisurely,

They beckon to me from the other bank.
I hear them call, 'See where the stream-path is!
Crossing is not as hard as you might think.'

I had not thought that it would be like this.

There was real appreciation of the details that Causley gives in the poem, particularly the suit of 'genuine Irish tweed' (with the sense of pride that was felt to be evident in the description) and the milk in the old HP sauce bottle with the 'screw of paper for a cork'.



However, this level of detail led some group members to question the embellishment of memory, and whether anything was ever as perfect as that. How much, they wondered, did the narrator's sense of an idyllic scene lead to an 'editing' of the truth. Indeed, some members suggested that nostalgia, by definition, relies on a lie.

There was discussion that the mother in the poem, with the description of white cloth and of her hair acting like a halo, becomes something of an angelic recreation, lacking the concrete authenticity of the dog or the tea from the thermos. Group members were keen that memories of loved ones who have died do not make them artificially improved or sanctified. One participant indeed was heard to remark somewhat acerbically that family members may no longer be perceived as annoying when viewed in distant memory! Another participant became particularly interested in the idea of the three suns and light, and of a link to near-death experiences. There was some disagreement as to whether the poem could carry the comforting message that it appears to do about an afterlife.





within the adult. This drew an appreciative response from the group and was a very positive way to end the session.

There was lively debate to end the session as to whether, if we were to meet loved ones in an after-life, what age they (and we) would be. One participant in particular was very perturbed that the narrator in *Eden Rock* now appears to be older than the parents he remembers. The question was asked as to whether we each carry the child we were within us, so that even when we are old, our parents would still recognise us as the children we used to be. This question was answered with an anecdote by a workshop member recalling how his niece understood that the child lives

Arts-based response 2: Creation of an abstract film

The second example of a recording of what emerged from the workshop is less an illustration and more an evocation of what was discussed. Artist John Rimmer attended the workshop and took written notes throughout. He then worked these into a non-representational 'response' to the session, which sought to record the themes and underlying emotions – the 'essence' – of what was discussed.

Much of the surface verbal response to the texts were interested and engaged but appeared to lack emotion. Comments, as recorded above, were largely analytical regarding the experience of death, the telling of its occurrence and the revisiting of memories. Although many members were recalling the death of loved ones, only one member became visibly upset during the course of the workshop. She was comforted by a member of the group and withdrew for a time. The remaining members appeared sympathetic, but were not deflected from their discussion on the way the dead may be 're-packaged' in recollection, and even the degree to which they were comforted by the idea of meeting their relatives again. As one remarked, an after-life would be extremely crowded, and not entirely by people you would want to meet again!

Despite this surface atmosphere of calm acceptance and even humour, however, there was a pervasive sense of melancholy that ran underneath a great deal of the workshop. This was most powerfully evident during the discussion of *Eden Rock*. There was a reluctance to be seen to 'buy in' to the powerfully hopeful message of this poem and yet a fierce desire to

do so. Participants seemed unable to trust that this simple message of hope could be accepted.

Rimmer's interest is in how individual and collective responses relate and inter-relate. He explores how participants in the workshop made connection with each other as they discussed the shared and universal experience of death, as articulated through the literature. For example, there emerged repeated discussion of the environment and nature, of the imagery of the 'cloud' of bereavement and of discussion of the communication of the news of death and the mediation that takes place in the telling of others of a death.

These connections are synthesised by Rimmer into the film. Rimmer describes this process of articulation, reaction and creation as 'a journey':

The film opens with a view of the world from above, with a soundscape of birdsong. The atmosphere is calm and idyllic, although shadows cross the image as if made by clouds or smoke. These becomes clearer, and the viewer realises that they are caused by the view out of a train window. We – just like the metaphor – are on a journey. Underneath the visual imagery is a soundscape of a ticking clock. Time is passing. This 'heartbeat' forms the background to all that the viewer sees.

The image of the film now includes two teacups, full and appearing to circle around each other. This dancing motion, it becomes apparent, is gradually spinning the two cups further apart. The imagery of social interaction is therefore becoming increasingly disjointed and communication and intimacy both are strained. The cups eventually still and take up a fixed position, some distance apart.

This status quo is interrupted by the appearance of a telephone. The form of this appears initially as a hard to identify shape, very dark and intrusive. It becomes clear what it is and that it is a rather institutional telephone, not a mobile, so that its appearance is contextually confusing taken with the positionality of the train journey. The phone rings – loudly and intrusively – and the image shakes. It is both demanding and threatening.

The handset lifts, pauses and is then dropped. The ticking clock (the 'heartbeat') ceases and time stands still.

Simultaneously a red mist emerges and envelopes the telephone and the screen. When a cup reappears, it is alone – isolated – and empty. The shaded area, red and grim, grows and retracts, but is ever-present. The cup itself grows smaller and the cloud moves from an angry red to a muddier brown, enveloping and obscuring the cup and becoming the filter for the journey image. It does, eventually, fade as does the journey image from the train window; birdsong returns and the film ends as it began with the blue of the planet from above.

The film is intensely poignant. It melds figuration and abstraction and is – purposely – far from overt in its meaning but conveys a powerful sense of loneliness and of loss. It evokes a depth of emotion which belies the simplicity of the elements used.

Rimmer understood his role in the workshop as being immersed in the discussion group. He was personally affected by a close family death in the preceding two months, and so positioned himself as both participant and observer/recorder of dialogues arising from the readings. Rimmer states that ‘although I was very aware of my person circumstances at the time, the twofold activities within the workshop created a neutral feeling in terms of the subject of death...’ Rimmer’s notes picked out recurring themes, motifs, largely bypassing direct quotation for single words/lists that were evoked by the reading of the texts. He sees Quickfall’s illustrative/annotative responses as an agile recording of events that also depicts a linear temporality that happily fits with the video’s quality of duration.

Rimmer acknowledges that at the time of the workshop any aesthetic and/or idea as to how the interchanges and spoken thought of the participants might be formed into moving images were not considered. The reading of the text and participants’ reactions occupied his thoughts at that time, and it was only at a later stage that reflection of the recorded data and feedback from Quickfall and Lawrence allowed a creative response to emerge. Van Den Scott views the use of visual methods fitting ‘...broadly into three groups of practices, visual data can be used as the story itself, to elicit a story (from our participants or from ourselves as we seek to understand), and to tell a story’ (Van Den Scott, 2018, p.723). Although the workshop and creative responses are a combination of visual and spoken word, it can nonetheless be seen to mirror the three groups:

1. *as the story itself* – The performance of reading texts in the workshop
2. *to elicit a story* – The participant comments captured by illustration and notes
3. *to tell a story* – Illustration and Video outputs.

Rimmer’s video response had a quick turnaround in its creation so as to feed back to the group. He states, ‘the version of the video that the group saw is a sketch or draft which after more feedback and discussion from the group and facilitators elicited a reworking and refinement’. As such this creative process differs from Rimmer’s usual working practice; he views this video as being co-authored by all the participants and as such works as ‘data display’:

Data display in a graphic format is a way of portraying information succinctly and efficiently, illustrating details provided in longer textual information. Visual displays provide a multidimensional space to organize data and show connections between different pieces of relevant data

Verdinelli and Scagnoli, 2013, p.360.

The video emerged from the workshop participants’ attempts to make sense of artistic portrayals of death through the written word. This collective response has been fascinatingly captured into something singular which provides a ‘creative response to death

and dying' that manages to capture both individual and communal thinking, articulating and circumscribing the many voices in the workshop within a single visual form.

The film can be accessed [here](#).

Discussion

Data that has been recorded personally has already undergone a layer of filter. It is not as factually accurate as data recorded through video or sound recording, but in some ways it may carry a greater emotional truth. This 'layer of filter', however, requires scrutiny. In this type of research, the researcher is 'present' in a way not experienced in other forms of research. When discussing the creation of his film *Rufus Stone*, the product of a 'multi-year qualitative research project', Jones articulated how he 'had a concept for a film developing in my head at the same time' as the data collection was happening, and how 'it was very difficult not to solidify what I was imagining but wait for the data and its interpretation.' (Jones and Leavy, 2014 p. 2). Despite this interplay between creativity and collected data – or perhaps, indeed, because of it – Jones asserts that 'The end result is very much more than a sum of its parts' in research of this kind, 'if it is carried out creatively' (Jones and Leavy 2014 p. 2).

Midgely recalls how, when an artist is given access to moving or emotionally charged events, their work hope to 'communicate with powerful poignancy'. He does not attempt to remove himself from the involvement in what he is drawing. If genuinely powerful emotion is present, he suggests, the artist is affected, and this is translated to the viewer of the finished work. 'The artist arguably producing works of emotional strength reflecting the experience whilst the viewer invests the drawing with their own feelings, a noteworthy cross fertilisation of sensitivities' (Midgely, 2011 P. 14).

This 'cross-fertilisation' could potentially be most powerfully employed in the feeding back of the art outcomes of the Shared Reading experience to the group members. The use of the art products of this study, for example, as 'texts' to be explored in a Shared Reading group is an interesting prospect. Even more powerful might be if the products are 'fed back' to the participants who created the data, providing a looped or circular engagement with the potential to deepen and enrich responses. This work will continue after the appraisal of this pilot study.

Conclusion

Lawrence (2008) observed that the arts, by engaging the senses, provoke strong, affective responses for both the creator and the viewer. Our emotions, she suggests, can provide a catalyst for 'knowing' that goes beyond the traditional and cognitive. She suggests that the arts invite a conversation with the viewer by being able to stir up emotions by touching something deep inside them. Subsequently, the viewers can be stimulated to connect to a personal experience of their own, to tap into empathic connections with issues of

(universal) concern, or 'to envision alternative realities for a more promising future' (p.75). Shared Reading has a similar ambitious aspiration, one shown to be effective through a wide range of studies and research methodologies. This pilot study into an arts-based methodology suggests that, just like Shared Reading itself, this approach may have potential to be a vehicle for enrichment, personal understanding and growth.

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