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BERA Annual Conference 2018

Abstract submitted for inclusion within the Creativities in Education SIG.

Presenter: Tracy Hayes, University of Cumbria, Lecturer in Working with Children, Young People and Families

The address to which correspondence should be sent:

University of Cumbria
Fusehill Street
Carlisle CA1 2HH

Email: tracy.hayes@cumbria.ac.uk

Abstract title: Responsive, Responsible Research: Lexi's story

In this session we will explore creative methods for sharing research that are responsive and responsible. This is based on my recently completed doctoral research, which was a transdisciplinary exploration of young people's relationship with nature. I looked at a range of facilitated programmes that offered outdoor learning opportunities and explored what young people thought of their experiences. The focus of my study was to find a way to research and analyse how experiences such as these can enable young people to develop a positive, personally meaningful relationship with nature, and then to make use of this learning to inform policy and practice (see Hayes et al., 2016). Themes that emerged highlighted the role of the practitioner/facilitator; peer, family and school pressures to 'grow-up' and be responsible; the importance of playfulness (Hayes, 2016/2015), kindness (Hayes, 2017), responsiveness (Hayes, 2013), comfort and belonging. Making use of data elicited through a mix of participant observations, informal interviews, conversations and anecdotes, I created stories based on these experiences. Embracing the use of everyday language, I have focused on small, intimate, personal stories – the kinds of stories that tend to get lost amongst bigger, less subjective studies. And I centralise them within my presentations and published work. This has the specific purpose of enabling me to adopt a young-person centred approach to both conducting my research, and to the outputs developed from it.

Although there has been movement in recent years towards adopting a more inter/transdisciplinary, creatively interpretive approach to research, this is still seen as controversial, arguably undisciplined, and is not generally accepted by policy makers as a credible method. There is still a political preference for more traditional, quantifiable and, in my opinion, simplistic methods, which ignore (or at the very least limit) the complexity, the nuance, the messiness and funniness of what we are studying. I find this unethical and more to the point, unkind to those we are studying. I argue that this is an area that warrants further research and publication: we have a responsibility to keep up the momentum of challenge, and to promote more caring, humane ways to conduct and present research.

In this spirit, I will share with you one of my stories to exemplify how this approach can be effective for presenting findings and for generating discussions with a range of audiences (student, academic, practitioners and public). The words directly attributed to Lexi (pseudonym) are taken from the interview recording, used in the sequence in which they occurred, although they have been 'tidied up' within the spirit of creative nonfiction (see, for example, Cheney, 2001; Gutkind, 1997). I will share it here in a non-extrapolated manner to show you what I have found, rather than to tell you (after Ingold, 2000). This is an approach advocated by both Pelias (2004, p1) as a way of inviting 'identification and empathetic connection' and Sparkes (2007, p522), in that in this format, the tale '...simply asks for your consideration'. It does not linger on methodology or theoretical concepts, instead, leaving it open to your interpretation. I look forward to your response.

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