Getting into our bodies to surface the values which inspire our activism: An exploration of collage making techniques.

Geraldine Mernagh and Alice Bennett

Workshop

Among adult educators working with marginalised groups, there is a strong tradition of choosing to enter this work because of the deep conviction that access to education is a matter of social justice and equality.

As practitioners we recognise that our values play a central role in determining how we approach our work with adults. However, we have experienced a sense of disconnection from these core values and their genesis in our initial transformational experiences, which brought us into adult education. We are increasingly challenged by a growing sense of dis-orientation as we experience frustration and overwhelm in our learning spaces, arising from what we consider to be excessive bureaucratic and irrelevant regulation. The subversive practice of navigating the tensions of a dominant market place, which favour an outcome driven approach to learning, over the welfare and aspirations of learners, can be emotionally very demanding.

This means that we need to make sure that our practice is grounded in why we value this work, so that we can continue to bring hope with a future oriented sense of agency into our practice. Knowing what these core values are and Honouring them, is an essential aspect of anchoring and sustaining us in transformative educational and research practice.

We need to reconnect to those pivotal experiences in our life histories which first inspired our entry into work as activists in adult education and research. What is required is more than a perspective shift (Mezirow, 1991). The process of making collage is well suited to interrogating this multi layered experience by ‘providing a novel and metaphoric language with which to give shape to thoughts and ideas’(Biffi & Zuccoli, 2016, p.135).

In this workshop we will show how we engage with collage making and arts-based reflection to conduct an auto-ethnographical examination of significant life experiences which have motivated us to become adult educators committed to social justice and hope. This leads us to a further discussion on how we consider our doctoral research as an activist response to counter cynicism and despair in ourselves and others.

We will also interrogate how the process of collage creates an extended epistemology for valuing other ways of knowing. Enabling a shift from a cognitive based response to the world
to an embodied experience where we co-create a space in which it is safe to participate with our whole selves and our whole bodies including our emotions, intuition and relationships Meyer (as cited in Meyer, 2012).

We will conclude with a discussion, which explores further applications of this life history/arts-based approach for interrogating human lives on a deeper level and the contribution they make to deepening our understanding of what we mean by activism.

443 words

**Question:** What it means to be an activist and whose values we represent?

**Keywords:** Life history. Hope. Transformation. Values. Embodied Learning.

**References:**

Biffi, E., & Zuccoli, F. (2016). 'It is not the glue that makes the collage' (Max Ernst): Training in educational research as an artistic process. In L. Formenti & L. West (Eds.), *Stories that make a difference: Exploring the collective, social and political potential of narratives in adult education research* (pp. 135-142). Lecce, Italy: Pensa Multimedia Editore s.r.l.
