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**What is educational about arts activities?**

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**Abstract**

What is educational about arts activities? This dissertation attempts to find out by studying a small group of adult learners engaged in a community photography project in Bristol.

The dissertation will examine the background and the context of the photography course, explain how it was initiated, funded, facilitated and evaluated. The story of the learning process, the case study, will be presented in detail in order to analyse the effect on the lives of the participants of involvement in the project; to discover what, if any, learning took place, how it took place, and what its significance was to the participants, tutors, facilitators and the researcher. Learning moments observed and recorded during the research process are mapped and interpreted along with interview material collected directly from project participants so that the learning path from the beginning to the end of the programme, and beyond, can be followed and analysed. The methodology of qualitative inquiry and action research will be considered; the conflicts and challenges in the role of the researcher explored, and ethical issues of representation and responsibilities involved in data collection methods examined in some depth. Issues about the nature of arts activity arising from the from data collected are analysed, such as questions about the status and role of artists. Can we learn to be artists? How had attitudes to education changed? What sort of personal transformations had been achieved?

Issues around dissemination of both the learning process and the results of the arts activity will be considered, such as the recontextualising process that led to the body of work being published as part of an online learning resource, with regard to issues of authorship and participation. Finally there is consideration of the impact of the project overall in terms of ongoing sustainable development of learning opportunities in the arts for this community.

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## Introduction

What is educational about arts activities? This dissertation attempts to address the question by studying a small group of adult learners engaged in a community photography project. The problem with a small-scale inquiry is that it provides small-scale answers; will the insights gained into the complexities of this case, however deep and meaningful, have any relevance and resonance in the wider world of education? First it will be helpful to clarify the question and to think about the reasons it is being asked. Why is art important?

Once we abandon the elitist assumptions that the only purpose of art is Art itself, art can only be made by the talented or by those unable to do anything else, or that the so-called creative impulse is somehow beyond education, we can begin to see the wider purpose of art, and recognise its value in education and in society. Art tells stories, communicates our ideas and aspirations, makes representations, provides decoration, illustration, exhortation, celebration, and intimidation. Art endeavours to serve a social and cultural purpose, as Cawelti and Goldberg state, (1997: 1)

The arts are the embodiment of human imagination, the record of human achievement, and the process that distinguishes us as human beings. We form human communities and cultures by making art – through stories and songs, drama and dance, painting and sculpture, architecture and design. (Cited by Walling 2000: 85)

Langer (1958) argues that art expresses the intricate, dynamic pattern of human feeling in a manner more powerful than language. She speaks of art making feelings appear rational in a way that language cannot, not because feelings are irrational, but because “most people cannot conceive anything without the scaffolding of words.” She says,

The function of art is to objectify feeling so we can contemplate and understand it. It is the formulation of the so-called inner experience, the “inner life” that is impossible to achieve by discursive thought because its forms are incommensurable with the forms of language and all its derivatives.... One may call a work of art a symbol of feeling... it represents something like a direct vision of vitality, emotion, subjective reality. (p.91)

Langer goes further, arguing that art has an important influence on the culture and politics of society, “efflorescence in the arts is apt to lead to cultural advance, it formulates a new way of feeling and that is the beginning of a cultural age....Art education is the education of feeling.” Conversely, she points out that “neglect of artistic education is neglect of feeling” and a society that does this “gives itself up to formless emotion, which is a large factor in the irrationalism which dictators and demagogues exploit.” (pp. 93 – 94)

Gardner argues that while researchers into human development and learning have acquired considerable knowledge in the last century, it has been from a limited perspective,

The developing individual is seen as one who is gradually acquiring those habits of systematic classification, internally consistent explanation, rigorous principles of deduction, and timely application of organised rule systems that are the hallmark of Western science. (Gardner 1990: 6)

He believes that artistic forms of knowledge and expression are less sequential, more holistic and organic, and identifies several ways of learning; from the concept of active involvement as reflective practitioner, to more distanced forms of art appreciation. From the first artistic encounters, he argues, one gains a sense of the nature of creating and reflecting; this sense continues to evolve throughout life so long as one remains actively involved in artistic activities. "Consistent with the developmental perspective, growth involves a deepening of knowledge, and an attainment of higher levels of understanding, rather than the simple accumulation of facts."(p. 42) What is important is the capacity of arts for thinking in "visual-spatial kinds of symbols, in terms of forms, what they represent, what feelings they can express, how they can be composed and combined, and what multiple forms of significance they can embody." (p. 42)

Eisner too claims that teaching facts alone are not sufficient in a vision of education that does justice to the capacities of the human mind. He argues that the arts promote an empathetic understanding of others; "the ability to create forms that communicate through the reaches of our imagination and the depth of our feeling attest to the human need to invent ways through which meaning can be pursued, stabilised and made public."(Eisner 1998: 45) The skill of the artist is to convert material into a medium in order to convey meaning.

Works of art can recontextualise the world, encouraging new insights by challenging expectation, making the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar, something that researchers also aim to do in their observations of people, places and events.

Eisner argues that the arts are carriers of meaning, and,

If the concept of literacy is extended to include the ability to encode or decode meaning within forms in which meaning can appear, then education in the arts is one way to become literate. Broadened further, an education in the arts like one in the sciences, is a means through which students form multiple forms of literacy, thus opening up meanings that different forms of representation make possible. .... Linguistic capacities do not define the limits of our cognition. (p. 45) As Polanyi (1958) says, "We know more than we can tell." (Cited by Eisner 1998: 45)

These are the writings and thoughts of the theorists and experts in the field, which will be useful to consider while following the unfolding story of this arts project. Education involves a process of personal growth, and empowerment and it is this process of change, more than the art product itself, which is the subject for exploration in the Case Study. Creativity, developing skills and understanding in order to convert the material into a medium, communication, cooperation, risk-taking, awareness of self and surroundings are part of that process. The photography will be considered, in as much as it is a vehicle that allows us to gain an insight into the learning that was occurring, and became a resource for further learning through recontextualising, exhibition and dissemination.

There are many learning narratives in the Case Study; that of the participants and tutors in the arts activity, and that of the researcher. The process of research itself, methodology, and the role of the researcher will be discussed in order to complete the picture of the significance of this case in the lives of all involved.

Chapter 1 introduces the Case Study, and explains some of the characteristics of case study research as they apply to this Case. The purpose and scope of the research is established, the main organisations involved in the Case are introduced, and project development is outlined with regard to aims and objectives, resources, and limitations of time and resources.

Chapter 2 examines the methodologies of qualitative inquiry and action research, both from a theoretical and practical point of view, and the role of the researcher is brought to the foreground. The challenges and conflicts involved in action research are discussed and data collection methods analysed with regard to ethical concerns and responsibilities of representation.

Chapter 3 is the Case Study. This is a narrative account, presented as a diary of two photography courses, and subsequent exhibition of images. It contains detailed descriptions of a group of people learning through an arts activity, reflections on the learning moments for both participants of the project, the tutors, and for the researcher. In this section the complexities of interactions, the development of ideas and practice, the dilemmas and concerns of individuals and the group are explored in depth.

Chapter 4 is an evaluation of the Case, and draws out some of the issues arising from the Case itself for further analysis. The “thick descriptions” including voices of the participants are used to explore the multiple perspectives inside the narrative, to observe empowerment and learning in an arts context, and to examine the impact of the project on the long term personal and creative development of the individuals by locating the project within the bigger picture of their lives.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion, which concentrates on the bigger picture, locating the Case Study in its wider financial, cultural and political context, and looking

towards the future by considering issues of dissemination, sustainability, participation, and progression.

## **Chapter 1 - Introducing The Case Study**

This section introduces the case study, the people and organisations involved, explains why this project was chosen as a case study for research, and how it was planned. First, it will be helpful to outline some of the characteristics of case study, explain why it was useful for this type of research, and to identify the nature of the data that will emerge.

**Stake, (1995: ix) calls case study,**

**The study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.**

**In the case study, researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalisable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.**

**The case study is both restricted and holistic; it has boundaries. Usually the study takes place within a time scale, is located in a geographical place, and involves a limited number of people brought together for a specific purpose. Other boundaries may be negotiated and reviewed as necessary to provide the flexibility to focus on material that is, or becomes, relevant through the study. This means that the unforeseen and the unusual can be considered, not excluded, so retaining more of the “noise” of real life, which may contain a significant part of the story. As complete a picture as possible is built up of all relevant components.**

**As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) point out, the restricted scope of study allows the researcher to engage with complexity, and facilitates the construction of detailed, in depth understanding of the unique intricacies of the case. “Thick description” is one of the features of the data possible through this type of focused study; it is so rich in information about the people, place, context, and interactions that are taking place that it can convey to the reader what the experience itself would convey.**

**Thick description also includes data dealing with cultures, community values, attitudes, relationships and motives, and can come from several points of view. Often case studies include the voice of the participant and other contributors; allowing others to speak for themselves can bring an important element of authenticity to a case, when sensitively represented by the researcher. There are many stories in a case; the study should provide an opportunity for presenting multiple perspectives.**

**Case study is an intimate form of research (Davies (ed.) 1994), depending on the use of personal skills to build collaborative relationships with the people in the case. This raises ethical issues of representation, respect for**

others, privacy and permission, of which the researcher should be aware. There is an element of trust that should be considered by the researcher; there is also a power differential, as it is through the researcher that the story will be told. There will be issues of power, control and equality within the case that the researcher should take into consideration when planning and carrying out the study, and when interpreting data. The social and political context of a case can impact on budgets, time and resources, both within the case itself, and for the study. Case study may be used to explore institutional relationships, and portray the struggle for control between the people and institutions they create.

All case study research involves at least a small invasion of personal privacy; this should be acknowledged. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that they do not interfere with the lives of others, or represent them in a way that could cause personal or professional harm.

The Case Study presented here has many of these characteristics. There are boundaries, a focus of activity, a collaboration of organisations to consider, a limited number of participants, whose voices are heard in the data. These aspects will be clarified further below, as the background to the case is explained. By studying a case, I hoped to collect data that would provide a rich source for making “thick” descriptions. I wanted to represent the learning experiences of others, from their points of view as much as possible. I wanted to discover the significance of this project in other peoples’ lives. I was dissatisfied with conventional tick-box methods of evaluation, which only gave answers to predetermined questions. I wanted to read between the lines. It was one small-scale inquiry taking place in a specific context; through it I was attempting to answer the huge question, what is educational about the arts? Could I possibly be so general? Maybe a better question would be, what is educational about *this* arts experience? Would it be educational at all – would it be an arts experience?

The case study selected is a community based photography project for adults in Bristol, organised by Parkway Parent and Child Project in collaboration with Watershed Media Centre, supported by Community Education<sup>1</sup> through the Widening Participation Fund.<sup>2</sup> As (then) Education Coordinator at Watershed, it was part of my role to help organise collaborative outreach projects such as this. The project eventually

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about Community Education in Bristol can be found at, <http://www.bristol-lea.org.uk/lifelong/commed.html>

<sup>2</sup> Further information about Widening Participation can be found at, <http://senet.lsc.gov.uk/guide2/wideparticipation/index.cfm>

resulted in two photography courses, each leading to production of images which were exhibited at Watershed.<sup>3</sup>

The research was instrumental in that the project happened at a convenient time for the study to be carried out; and it took place within the Education Action Zone<sup>4</sup> area. This was important in that the study programme is linked to the Arts Council of England<sup>5</sup> initiative taking place in schools in inner-city Bristol during this time. The question, what is educational about the arts, was their agenda, but closely connected to mine in many ways as an educator working within an arts context. The case was also intrinsic in that the project would be studied for what it may reveal and contribute to the professional development of myself and others. I hoped the study would inform my practise as an educator in the arts, and improve it, as well as attempting to answer the question. I was aware that I was responsible for the existence of the project, closely connected to it and with a vested interest in its success; I would have to become critical of my own practise; how objective would I be in my observations, and would I be able to reflect on my learning process as well as that of others? The methodology is that of action research, and is discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

#### About Parkway Parent and Child Project

Parkway Parent and Child Project, based in St Werburghs, Bristol<sup>6</sup>, is an informal Family Support Centre. It has been an integral part of the local community for over thirty years, providing parents, carers and children under five years old in this culturally diverse area of Bristol with a safe and stimulating environment in which to learn and play. There are Parent and Toddler “drop in” groups, a Crèche, a Two’s Group and a Playgroup, and there is one to one support to enable children with disabilities and additional needs to be included. Parkway Parent and Child Project (2002) seeks to,

contribute to the social, emotional and educational well-being of all children aged 0-5 years, by providing a range of services tailored to meet their needs and by supporting their parents and carers in Inner City Bristol. (p.2)

Parkway Project aims to empower parents through participation at all levels, from sharing their child’s progress, to joining the Management Committee. There is a busy programme of informal learning opportunities and social activities that

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<sup>3</sup> These images, accompanied by an extensive photography learning resource, have now been published online at, <http://dshed.net/digitised/neighbourhood>

<sup>4</sup> Further information about Bristol’s Education Action Zone can be found at, <http://www.breaz.org.uk> Please note this site is under construction.

<sup>5</sup> Further information about the Arts Council of England can be found at, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk>

<sup>6</sup> Names of people and places have not been changed, by permission

parents and carers are encouraged to take part in.

### About Watershed

Watershed Media Centre<sup>7</sup>, set up in 1982, as Britain's first Media Centre, has built a regional and national reputation for expertise in photography and has a history of community involvement. The programme has included accredited photography training courses and exhibitions of photographic work from locally based outreach projects as well as internationally acclaimed artists. Watershed's priorities are now in moving image and digital media, and the well equipped darkrooms will be relocated by Spring 2004, but the principle of providing opportunities for lifelong learning through engagement with the programme within a lively, accessible and culturally diverse environment remains the same.

### Collaborative outreach projects

Watershed outreach projects often result from approaches made by community groups who wish to collaborate in order to utilise our facilities and expertise in photography or digital media. This generally involves arranging a programme for a targeted group of learners, either at Watershed, or at their own premises, with a tutor selected by Watershed.

Often, as in the case of the Parkway Parent and Carers Photography Project, the aims, objectives and content of the programme requires discussion and negotiation to ensure it will suit the needs of the learners; a course outline with a budget is then drawn up and agreed before the programme goes ahead.

In April 2002, Sally Gamble, Parkway's Parent / Carer Coordinator approached Watershed to discuss a possible collaboration. The alternatives discussed were photography, digital video, or web design. Following negotiation between Sally and potential course participants, photography was chosen as the most popular option.<sup>8</sup>

Funding was sufficient for four two-hour weekly sessions plus one longer darkroom session. The sessions would have to be short because this was the time available while the children of the learners were in the Crèche; the longer session required special arrangements. The group's stated aim was to improve their photography, and I wanted to enable this to happen by devising an exciting and stimulating programme that would give participants some understanding and "taster" experiences of as many aspects of photography as we could provide in this short time. We concentrated on providing a structure for the process of learning, for introducing technical skills and ideas about visual awareness. We were more flexible about outcomes. I felt it was important for participants to take responsibility, as I believe in this route to personal development, autonomy and

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<sup>7</sup> Further information about Watershed can be found at <http://www.watershed.co.uk>

<sup>8</sup> The course options discussed and eventual course outlines are available in Appendix 3

empowerment which is, to me, part of education, so there was no predetermined theme or set of outcomes, apart from the possibility of an exhibition at Watershed. The choice of whether, and how, to exhibit work would be up to the participants. My knowledge and understanding of photography and previous experience of organising similar projects, together with Sally's input and knowledge of the parents who she had consulted about the project, enabled us to formulate a programme that we believed would be relevant and enjoyable for the participants, and a pace of learning that we thought would be fast and challenging but exciting too. I visited Parkway to see the rooms where we would meet, we decided the start date, and I found a tutor, so that without the responsibility of teaching, I could concentrate on collecting data for research during the sessions.

## Chapter 2 - Methodology

In this chapter I will introduce some of the theoretical underpinning of the methodology that is used in the case study, ideas about qualitative research, and more specifically, action research. I will demonstrate the relevance of the role of researcher through reference to my reflective practise as I carried out the case study. The way data was collected during the case study and the thinking that informed my choices will be examined. Ethical issues and considerations are integrated throughout the discussion, and will be drawn out where necessary.

What is qualitative research?

There are many definitions of qualitative research; it can be applied as an umbrella term covering many styles of social and educational research, drawing on a variety of disciplines such as sociology, social anthropology and social psychology. Definitions change; for example Ely (et al 1991: 2) cites theorists Lincoln and Guba (1985), who changed their preferred label, “paradigm of naturalistic inquiry” to “paradigm of constructivism research” by 1989, and Tesch (1990), who compiled a list of forty-six terms under twenty-six approaches in four basic research groups. She went on to indicate that these approaches concerned themselves both with meanings and the way people understand things, the signs and symbols that are used by members of a group to make sense of their world, and with patterns of human behaviour involved in language, rituals, and culture. I was interested in exploring these sort of patterns in the case; the project participants were concerned in their representation through photography.

Eisner points out that all knowledge, including that gained through quantitative research, is referenced in qualities, and that there are many ways to represent our understanding of the world:

**There is a kind of continuum that moves from the fictional that is "true" - the novel for example - to the highly controlled and quantitatively described scientific experiment. Work at either end of this continuum has the capacity to inform significantly. Qualitative research and evaluation are located toward the fictive end of the continuum without being fictional in the narrow sense of the term. (Eisner 1991: 30-31).**

**The truth is out there – or is it?**

Ely (et al 1991:2) cites Kuhn (1970) to argue that we live in an era of paradigm revolution; many of us grew up with a positivist or empirical world view where the claims of scientific research were held to be absolute, this has been increasingly challenged over the last few decades by an alternative paradigm frequently referred to as naturalistic, or phenomenological. Researchers have long debated the relative value of qualitative and quantitative inquiry (Patton, 1990). Logical

positivism, or quantitative research, uses experimental methods, controls, and quantitative measures to test hypothetical generalisations. The aim is to try and discover a "truth" that is thought to exist "out there." Phenomenological inquiry, or qualitative research, uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand and interpret phenomena in context-specific settings. Each represents a fundamentally different inquiry paradigm, and researcher actions are based on the underlying assumptions of each paradigm. As Ely explains, researchers operating within the naturalistic paradigm operate from a set of axioms that view realities to be multiple and shifting, that take for granted the simultaneous mutual development of researcher and researched, and see all inquiry, including the empirical, as inevitably value-bound,

The ability to envision a prism of viewpoints rather than merely one single perspective is crucial if one is to engage successfully in this research methodology which is premised on the notion of multiple realities.  
(Ely et al 1991: 133)

Qualitative research embraces constant change and transformation, as Lincoln and Guba (1989: 16, cited by Ely et al 1991: 193) show in their statement,

Our work is simply another construction....there is no universal truth to which our construction is a more or less good approximation. If we have a moral imperative in our work, it is simply this, that we will continue to make every effort to seek out and take account of every reaction and criticism that we can, and will attempt to deal with them, even if that means completely abandoning our present position and embracing an utterly different one – which is what we believe is meant by the phrase 'paradigm revolution.'

For some theorists, such as Smith and Heshusius, (1986, cited by Hoepfl 1997) there is no "out there" out there. The only reality they accept is a completely mind-dependent one, which will vary from individual to individual. They claim that naturalistic research can offer only an "interpretation of the interpretations of others," and that to assume an independent reality is "unacceptable" for the qualitative researcher, because no technique or interpretation can be "epistemologically privileged" (p. 9).

### Subjectivity and objectivity

In qualitative research, the goal of impersonal, so-called value-free, objectivity assumed by quantitative research is discarded, but was this ever objective in the first place? There are many researchers who question the true objectivity of statistical measures and, indeed, the possibility of ever attaining pure objectivity at all (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 op cit; Eisner, 1991). Patton (1990) believes that the terms objectivity and subjectivity have become "ideological ammunition in the paradigms debate." He prefers to "avoid using either word and to stay out of futile

debates about subjectivity *versus* objectivity." Instead, he strives for "empathic neutrality" (p. 55). While admitting that these two words appear to be contradictory, Patton points out that empathy "is a stance toward the people one encounters, while neutrality is a stance toward the findings" (p. 58).

The general premise underlying the analysis of qualitative data is that the researcher's self plays an important role in both the production and interpretation of the data. The identity, values and beliefs of the researcher are present, as Patton recognises, but essentially he argues once the researcher takes this into consideration they will be able to put their judgements on "hold" and proceed with "balance." Another position is to accept that the researcher's self is an excellent primary research tool for investigating the both world at large and for exploration into self. Sometimes we are invited to "walk in the researchers shoes" as follows,

Some people say that all research is me-search. I did not intend to have my sister's death, my mother's bout with cancer, my marriage plans or my own medical history come creeping into the field work; but like the fearfully imagined night creatures looming large as a child's imagination under the bed, these things clamoured for a place in my study and made themselves at home.....My courage in facing the life and death issues I wanted to study ebbed and flowed.... I wrestled with demons in my log and talked of stumbling blocks and uncertainties.... In searching for new means of accountability and trustworthiness as a researcher I came to know more intimately my own needs.

Deborah Lamb, quoted in Ely et al (1991: 191)

Transformation of the researcher themselves can be another powerful outcome of undertaking qualitative research according to Ely (1991) who says,

For some of us, and I place myself in their number, a growing understanding of the philosophical bases of the naturalistic research paradigm has accompanied an overall broadening and refining of world view, a redefinition of values, the development of what the Loflands call a 'transcendent' view, so that we can say 'You are not the person you were when you began' (Lofland and Lofland, 1984: 119-120)

The process of "making the familiar unfamiliar" and "making the unfamiliar familiar" has been described by Ely et al (1991: 124 – 132) amongst others. This type of observation involves abandoning assumptions, challenging stereotypes, and searching for a better understanding of self, in order to be able to represent others more clearly, which can be an intense, emotional and painful process. Feelings of anger, anxiety, self doubt and uncertainty in researchers have been documented by several qualitative researchers, such as Lee-Treweek (2000) who describes feelings of vulnerability and isolation in the field, and others (Hughes 1960, Lofland and Lofland, 1984, Shaffir et al 1980, and Zigarmi and

Zigarmi 1980) cited by Ely, (1991) who believes that the emotional demands of this types of research can be too great for some.

## Action Research

According to Davies, (ed. 1994: 13) action research is a radical methodology that challenges the assumptions and status of traditional research. It is radical in that it is carried out by people directly involved with the social or educational situation that is being researched; these are practitioners who approach the research from the inside, rather than professional researchers who claim to be experts at generating knowledge approaching from the outside. The aim of action research is to produce “practical wisdom” (Eisner, 1991: 58) which can be fed directly back into the practice with the aim of bringing about change. The validity of the action research is tested by evaluating the impact of these changes in a continuous process of data collection, reflection, analysis, interpretation, action and further reflection.

Carr and Kemmis (cited by Smith 1996), sum up the basic principles of action research as follows,

Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162).

Zuber-Skerritt (1992b: 15) provides this model;

- *Critical* and self-critical collaborative enquiry by
  - *Reflective* practitioners being
  - *Accountable* and making the results of their enquiry public
  - *Self evaluating* their practice and engaged in
  - *Participative* problem-solving and continuing professional development
- (Cited by McNiff and Whitehead 2002: 51)

According to Davies (ed. 1994: 9), action research methodology bridges the divide between research and practice. The theory-practise issue has been explored by Elliot (1991) in relation to teachers who can feel threatened by the imposition of theories generated by outside researchers. He argues,

Theory for teachers is the product of power exercised through the mastery of a specialised body of skills and techniques. It negates their culture which defines teaching competence as a matter of intuitive craft knowledge tacitly acquired through experience.... As such it is remote from their practical experience of the way things are. To bow to a theory is

to deny the validity of one's own experience-based professional craft knowledge. (pp. 45 – 46)

He locates action research in the kind of reflective practise which Schön describes (1983). Through ongoing reflection, the practitioner builds up a repertoire of ideas, images and examples directly from their own practise, that they can draw upon to inform actions in the situation that is unfolding, and to effect change. Schön, like Dewey (1933: 123), saw this as central to reflective thought.

Lewin (1946 cited by McNiff and Whitehead 2002: 40), is generally credited for coining the term 'action research' and developing one of the first models. Working in an industrial context, he described action research as a spiral of steps involving planning, reconnaissance, execution, and evaluation, the results of which could be used to modify the process. This later came to be understood as an action-reflection cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, and was influential in the works of Kemmis and Corey as the basis for understanding how to act to improve educative encounters. (Corey 1953, Kemmis and McTaggart 1988, cited by McNiff and Whitehead 2002: 45)

Stenhouse (1975) also developed the model of reflective practise in an educational context. He took the central idea of the teacher and researcher being closely related, and called for teachers to reflect critically and systematically about their practise as a basis for curriculum theorising and development. Teachers should be the best judges of their own experience. By accepting responsibility for their own work teachers could examine how they were influencing educational processes. This involves,

The commitment to and the skills to study one's own teaching; the concern to question and to test the theory in practise by the use of those skills. (Stenhouse 1975: 144)

Subsequently, action research has gained a significant foothold both within the realm of community-based, and participatory action research; and as a form of practice oriented to the improvement of educative encounters eg. (Carr and Kemmis 1986). Stringer (1999) states that a fundamental premise of community based action research is that it commences with an interest in the development of a group, community, or organisation. Its purpose is to assist people extending their understanding of their situations in order to resolve problems that confront them. Community-based action research is enacted through an explicit set of social values. In modern, democratic social contexts, it is seen as a process of inquiry that has the following characteristics,

- It is *equitable*, acknowledging people's equality of worth.
- It is *democratic*, enabling the participation of all people.
- It is *liberating*, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.

- It is *life enhancing*, enabling the expression of people's full human potential. (Stringer 1999: 9-10, his emphasis)

He identifies three basic phases for action research,

- Look - building a picture and gathering information. Definition and description of participants of the group, problem, and context.
  - Think – reflection, interpreting and explanation. Analyse areas of success, deficiencies, issues or problems.
  - Act – resolving issues and problems. Through evaluation judge the worth, effectiveness, appropriateness, and outcomes of those activities. Act to formulate solutions to any problems.
- (Stringer 1999: 18; 43-44; 160)

McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 53) argue for the “certainty of uncertainty” advising practitioners to allow for the presence of external influences or the “spontaneity and untidiness” of life. It is useful to view these models as guidelines only, not a way to predict and control the future by turning action research into an oppressive technology. Action research is a form of researching one's learning. In common with other forms of qualitative research, it is a process in which all participants, including the researcher-practitioner is prepared to grow and adapt. As Polanyi says, (1958:143)

When we do action research we make our thinking different. Having made a discovery I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, a heuristic gap between problem and discovery. (Cited by McNiff and Whitehead 2002:)

### **The role of researcher: being part of the project**

In this section I will consider, from my point of view, the role of researcher, as it related to the Parkway Parent and Carer photography project. This draws on the methodology of action research; reflecting from within the practise in order to devise strategies for change, as discussed above. My role in outreach projects is usually that of tutor, technician or coordinator, all roles that allow for facilitation, intervention and evaluation to take place at various times to try and ensure the success of the project. Now I would be researcher as well. The implications of having so many “hats” should be explored. The ever-changing relationship between the project participants and myself will be discussed, and the challenges and conflicts outlined. How would I deal with the role of reflective practitioner?

As researcher my role required collecting detailed documentation for in-depth theorising about learning through arts activities. After each session I reflected on the activity, how the participants had interacted, their photography, what they said about their photography, and what they might have learned. I took part in

evaluation discussions with participants, and encouraged tutors to facilitate feedback throughout the sessions. Where were the limitations that prevented learning? What could be done to change them? Where issues of an organisational nature required discussion I shared my reflections with tutors, or staff at Parkway. Some issues such as lack of time and funding clearly had an impact on the programme and duration of the course, but could not be changed in the short term. Other changes were made as direct result of observation and evaluation; for example, time in between sessions was extended for the second course, as a direct result of feedback from the first course. This cycle seems close to an action research model of data collection, reflection, analysis, interpretation, action and further reflection, and led to recommendations for change, some of which could be acted upon. Much of the reflection on the process of learning in a community setting, taking into consideration the views of the participants, and trying to improve the programme, I considered integral to the role of coordinator, and would have done anyway. The difference was reflecting on my own learning. My attitude to research started to change.

From the start I prioritised clear communication about the research. I introduced myself as a student researcher, explaining the reason for the research, who it was for, and why. I imagined research would involve a lot of note taking, photographing and interviewing, so I prepared people for this and asked permission. Project participants already knew I was from Watershed and responsible for setting up the project. Throughout both courses there was ongoing discussion regarding practicalities such as darkroom sessions and exhibitions, where I was back in the role of coordinator, my "comfort zone." I was concerned about possible conflict between the roles of coordinator and researcher, from an ethical as well as a practical standpoint. I was aware of invading peoples' privacy - they may not want their learning process studied and written about. I wanted people to give authentic feedback, not to give up or disappear if there were problems in the project because it would not look good in the research. Nor did I want participants to feel I monitoring their progress and be intimidated by my presence. I was careful to disassociate my roles, to explain that I was there to observe, and that I was a learner like them. I also explained to tutors what the research process was for so that they understood I was not assessing their teaching abilities - although in my role as coordinator I did make judgements about them, which are apparent in the Case Study.

Generally the course participants appeared unconcerned about being observed for research purposes. During the first few sessions they asked few questions about the research, seeming far more interested in the course itself. Parkway staff were pleased that I was documenting the project as I agreed to provide photos for their annual report.

One of my assumptions was that the researcher should not influence the activities, so I aimed to make no interventions in the sessions I was documenting. I wanted to be the so-called "fly on the wall." Even so, I was aware that my

presence could influence interactions between people and the flow of learning, because I was still a person in authority, not a fly on the wall. As I began observing people engaged in the learning process, my assumptions began to be challenged. If anything got in the way of the learning I was not sure what I would do – should I try to sort out problems or should I observe failure as well as success, even if it were within my capabilities to solve the problem?

Challenges: reflective notes on the conflict of roles

One challenge I experienced as an observer of a group activity where I am more used to being the tutor, was not to interrupt or take over. I had control issues - sometimes it was an effort to leave it to the tutor.

These are examples of situations from the Case Study where the multiplicity of my roles became problematic, and I had issues about intervention;

- During a session using the lighting studio I begin to panic that the tutor is going too slowly for everyone to have time to take photos. Setting up studio lighting can be an extremely lengthy process, and I have miscalculated how long it would take. In my role as researcher / passive observer I feel I cannot influence proceedings by asking the tutor to do things differently, besides, it could undermine her position. In this session I am acting as technician, so my solution is to be controlling in the technical role; encouraging participants to take photos speedily by giving them lots of assistance, and being super-efficient with the lighting equipment. It is a rather indirect approach to ensuring a successful outcome, but reasonably effective. (Course 1: session 3)
- Another time I have differences of opinion with a tutor over ethical issues regarding taking photos of people without permission, and personal safety when photographing on the streets. Members of the group have raised this as a problem. The tutor seems to assume that most people find it acceptable to take pictures of people without their knowledge or permission, anytime and anywhere. He does not understand the problem, which makes it difficult to discuss. I suspect he is influenced by too many macho photojournalists. In the case of personal safety I feel intervention is necessary; trying to ensure people do not put themselves at risk while photographing seems more important than my research. I assume my role of course coordinator and advise caution. I also initiate discussion as tactfully as possible about the issue of privacy and permission, so that participants can hear all sides of the debate and decide what to do for themselves. (Course 1: sessions 2, 4, 5)
- A new participant arrives for the course on the second week. Other participants are busy and excited looking at the results of their photos taken over the previous week. She does not have photos to show everyone, nor does she understand the technical discussions that are

taking place. It is unfortunate for her that no one has time to explain what she has missed. The tutor is focused on the group discussion and does not make time, although he should. I do nothing to help, partly because I am busy observing, and partly because in my role as researcher I do not believe I should intervene. On reflection I think my passive attitude may have appeared uncaring, possibly contributing to this potential learner deciding not to appear again. This is a learning point for me; not to be so uptight about maintaining the role of researcher that I prevent myself from being part of the learning process. (Course 1: session 2)

Throughout the project I reflected on my relationship to the group as a whole and to the participants as individuals. What did we have in common? What were the differences in age, class, race, sexuality and religion that may influence my observations? As a non-parent could I relate to them as parents? How could I make judgements about them?

To begin with I perceived myself as an outsider, although on reflection, I was probably the person most deeply inside the project even before it began, and as I got to know the members of the group this imaginary construct fell away. My assumptions were constantly challenged or reinforced, from the first session when I realised I had been expecting a teenage mum's group rather than the more mature and sophisticated group who appeared. I found out where they lived, what music they liked, about their children, friends, politics, favourite places, and things they hated, through their discussions and ideas about photography. An unexpected route to greater involvement came because I live very near Parkway, so many project participants turned out to be my neighbours. I started seeing people around, in shops, cafes, on demonstrations; their issues about living in the inner city that were being communicated through the photography were also my issues, and I related as part of the same community. My questions regarding what we had in common were beginning to be answered, I saw where I fitted in on a personal level, and began to relax.

As the project progressed I took an increasingly active and diverse role. In the lighting session and the first darkroom session I acted as technician. During most sessions I made tea, got stationary from the office, did photocopying and other tasks so the tutor could continue uninterrupted. On the second course I taught the darkroom session; multitasking between tutor, technician and researcher is described in the Case Study. (Course 2: session 3) As I became drawn out through the various roles, project participants behaved differently towards me, involving me in discussions, asking for advice, for example, when editing and selecting material for exhibition, and writing exhibition copy. My role as photographer now seemed important; I was an extra person who could help in their photographic endeavours. By the end of the second project I was totally involved and it was as if the project had two tutors.

The ethics of data collection: responsibilities and representation

Qualitative data, such as words, images and sound, as much as the analysis, are the product of the interpretive process. The data does not exist “out there” waiting to be discovered, pure and untouched by the act of research, but is produced by the research process itself. I was aware of issues of subjectivity and selectivity. How could I ensure the integrity of my data?

### Making notes

A major form of data collection was note taking. I intended to observe all the sessions taking place, but I did not want to influence the activities taking place. Making notes in a notebook was chosen as a simple and non-intrusive method. I wanted to describe in words all that happened. As Terry Denny says (1978) “Weak theory comes and goes but superb description stands the test of time.” I had no theories, I just wanted to observe and record. But describing events and people in words felt very subjective, and I was tempted to embellish. I wanted to hear the voice of the participant in the narrative, but how could I do that using my words? I was not sure whose story I was telling, mine or theirs? I was not sure how notes could be validated, and I did not expect anyone from the project would have the time or inclination to read and check them.

### Photography

Photography was an obvious choice to back up the notes, as that is my background and area of expertise. This was a photography project so it felt appropriate. But it is wrong to assume the camera never lies, as any photographer knows only too well. Everything captured on film is selective. I found myself looking for the “decisive moment” as described by Cartier-Bresson (1952) which in this context seemed to be any visible evidence of learning – the way people interacted with images, books, cameras, etc. and showed pleasure when they understood something. This was rewarding, but was it really representative? The fact that such moments happened and were recorded can be used to document selected points along the learning journey but cannot tell the whole story.

### Digital video (DV)

Digital video was used early on to record a session when I was too busy as technical support to take notes, and using a conventional camera would have disrupted the session for technical reasons. The ability to record sound was valuable in documenting the conversations and discussions that were an essential part of the learning process, and the moving image could show body language, changing facial expressions and interactions over a period of time, creating a picture more complete than still photography or written observations.

But DV is also selective, it is subject to the same framing conventions as still photography, and the sound quality provided by many DV cameras is poor

without an external microphone. The large volume of data gathered creates its own problems. Playing back hours of DV tape and annotating and transcribing material is time consuming; deciding what is important as evidence can cause problems for the neophyte researcher.

#### Evaluation questionnaire forms

Using notes, photography and digital video is useful in providing detailed data. But the author of data is also the agent of representation. It is important to hear the voice of the participant. What do they think about their learning? I devised questionnaire based evaluation forms, to gather such information in a structured way.<sup>9</sup> These were similar to those routinely used for all Watershed courses and projects, using tick boxes for predetermined questions but inviting further comments on the reverse. Problems with this type of evaluation occur if the forms are only given out at the end, anyone who “drops out” does not get to give their opinions. Evaluation forms usually ask only a few focused questions and allow a limited range of answers, so while they may be useful to show if participants were reasonably satisfied or not by a course or project, this type of evaluation method does not give individual detail or the bigger, more longterm picture of how a learning experience fits into a person’s life.

#### Interviews

Half way through the first course I started to interview participants, by asking each person a series of questions. My “interviewing” technique was informal; I asked what participants were getting out of the project personally, what they thought they had learned, what they found most enjoyable, whether they were in favour of the project being extended, and what criticisms they had. This was useful information but rather unstructured, I let people ramble and wrote notes and quotes, which I read back to them to check for accuracy. I did not use a formal interview procedure because I felt it could be quite intimidating; participants might “clam up” and actually tell me less than they were already doing in the informal situation. Also my time and their time was limited, I had to find out what I could while people were busy in the darkroom or during tea breaks. Sitting down with a structured set of questions and a recording machine did not seem appropriate for this group. This approach seemed fruitful, and developed into ongoing dialogue between participants and myself.

Recently all participants of both courses have been engaged in a web publishing project which created an online exhibition of the images produced during the original project. Further opportunities arose to discuss the photography and the longterm impact - if any - of the project on individuals’ lives. For some participants, this was a year later, but they were still keen to contribute their thoughts, with the benefit of hindsight, to the new project. These conversations took place at their homes, at Parkway, or at Watershed and were led by the

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of evaluation forms can be found in Appendix 1

participants. I used the same note taking technique as before. They provided valuable insight into many aspects of their lives and backgrounds that have an impact on how art and learning can be perceived. Two of the conversations<sup>10</sup> are more like therapy than research, and could not have been conducted in a formal interview situation and certainly not represented by a questionnaire.

There is further discussion of participant feedback in the Evaluation chapter, and many of the comments and quotes obtained through informal interviews are represented on the web site at;  
<http://www.dshed.net/digitised/neighbourhood>

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<sup>10</sup> The results of two interviews are transcribed in full and presented in Appendix 2.

## Chapter 4 - Evaluation

Traditionally, evaluation has meant matching outcomes of a course of action to its objectives, as described by Bloom (1965). Eisner (1985) points out that educational objectives and standards are typically derived from curriculum theory, which assumes it is possible to predict with a fair degree of accuracy what the outcomes of instruction will be. The stated objective in this Case was for a group of course participants to improve their photography. The rationale of the course can be seen in terms of participants increasing knowledge and understanding of the subject, practising technical skills, and developing a visual awareness, but to evaluate on this basis would be to lose the “thick description”; the detailed account of interactions and relationships that has been built up through the research. This evaluation intends to utilise “thick description” of the Case Study to explore the multiple perspectives inside the narrative, to look at empowerment and learning in an arts context, to bring out the voices and issues of the participants, and to attempt to draw the map of the learning moments described in the Case Study as it stands now, more than one year on. Will evaluation help to answer the question, what is educational about arts activities?

It may help to think about the role of the evaluator as a reflective practitioner, or connoisseur and critic (Eisner 1985: 87-103), about programme and practice evaluation, or formative and summative evaluation; in action research it appears that these stages, foci, and roles can emerge and repeat in an endless cycle. The evaluation process may not be conclusive or complete; its real purpose may be to enable further actions to be taken on the basis of recommendations that are made.

There has been evaluation happening to a greater or lesser degree throughout the Case Study. There has been evaluation of photos at different stages of their production, editing and selecting for exhibition, evaluation and feedback from course participants about their experience of the learning structure and limitations of the course provision. There have been recommendations for change, some of which have been acted on and re-evaluated. Learning moments for the participant and the researcher have been mapped. But where does the map lead? In this section I aim to bring the voices of the participants to the forefront, and to analyse their learning experiences in order to find out what impact the photography project had in terms of their personal and creative development. What was the value of the photography project to them?

### Awareness of self

In some cases the self-perception of individuals had been shaped through learning and through the process of photography. To some, the opportunity to exhibit creative work was important and raised questions about art, the audience, and the role of the artist. For instance;

When Jacqui asks at the private view of the exhibition, “Are we all artists now?” she is both exploring a new role for herself, and questioning the status of artists. She has been examining her ideas about art from the beginning, when she said she had never done anything “arty” before, (Course 1 session 1) and wonders if her use of colour in some of her images is “artistic”. The production of images that are worth the attention of others is significant to her. It makes me consider the role of the “professional” artist, compared with the person who has made art and shown it for the first time; who is more of an artist?

How to become an artist was also a concern for Fee<sup>11</sup>, who says,  
I always wanted to do art - to be an artist. But how do you become an artist? Do you need to do a course, to get a degree? Van Gogh didn't. Now I feel I'm getting somewhere, I don't think you need to be a “professional” to make work that's worthwhile. Getting together with others to be creative is fun..... Encouragement from the others on the photography course was good; I wasn't just in isolation at home. Art is just a way of looking at the world that is different from other people. I notice things that I don't think other people notice. Being an artist is just having the bollocks to call yourself one..... I find it really hard to be confident about what I do - I couldn't call myself an artist in case people laughed at me. It's just confidence and taking my ideas seriously. It's that academic thing again that says you have to have a certificate, its so ingrained. (May 2003)

These are Fee's views on creativity, calling herself an artist, and the difficulty she experiences in taking her own creative processes seriously. She has skills in diverse arts and crafts forms, and is a highly qualified person academically, but has a lack of confidence around presenting her own creative work as “art”, and seeks validation though exhibition, career or qualifications.

**Fee's comments about having her work in an exhibition at Watershed are revealing; (Case Study, Neighbourhood exhibition) She seems “hungry” for new creative experiences, but wonders what to do with the material she produces. Is it art if no one gets to see it? She has enjoyed the photography course, especially welcoming the opportunity to exhibit her work – has this helped her move on with her perception of herself as an artist? She says, finally, “It's something I feel so passionate about but I just don't know what to do with it.”**

Photography has now inspired Fee to become interested in digital media; she wants to learn about animation, web design and desktop publishing. She says, “What came out of this course was that I really got into the photography. Then I got into Photoshop, and now I want to do multimedia. I want some teaching and

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<sup>11</sup> There is a full transcript of this conversation in Appendix 2

another course with structure.” She’d like me to organise this, which is why she brings it into the conversation.

### Attitude to learning

One year after the photography course, Chris told me how his experiences at art college had left him with a fear of failure, and had prevented him taking part in any learning for fifteen years,<sup>12</sup>

I hadn’t done anything creative for ages - I was planning on having a creative life but lost the opportunity and got flung out of college. I got really scared and I felt I could never go on a formal course again. I wanted to make things, I did the best part of three years of a ceramics degree but then I got fired (pun intended). I smashed all my work just before the finals. I couldn’t do the criticism part of it, I was really overly critical of absolutely everything I ever did and I still am. There’s still an element of that, but this course has been gentle with nothing actually hanging on it - there were no exams or tests on the photography course, but enough encouragement to bring things in and not put the photos in the bin. It has helped me reclaim a corner of my life. (May 2003)

He has renewed confidence in himself, and learning in a more formal context now seems a possibility,

I’ve found I’m not completely shit at learning things - and I’m off to college in September, I’m doing plumbing, so I’ll bend a few pipes - but it’s the educational process that’s important. I’m not so terrified, I can now sit down and learn instead of kicking the whole thing into touch through fear of failure.

### Professional development

I visit Libby to collect her photos to scan for the online publishing project, and ask what she is doing now - she is working for a charity, and says “That photography course helped me get my new job - one of the things I do is to take photos of people in meetings and try to make it look interesting!” I ask if photographic skills were on the job description - “Oh no” she says, “they just dropped it in at the interview but they were really impressed when I said I’d been on a course, and I’m sure that’s how I got the job.”

These are some small “vignettes” from different perspectives that give a longer-term view than those in the Case Study of how project participants felt the course had impacted on their lives. These self-revealing details are illuminating, and show the significance of the course to the participant in relation to the rest of their lives – their experience, ethos and ontology, and their hopes and aspirations and

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fears. I interpret the content of these conversations as evidence of personal transformation; reassessment of identity, development growth and even empowerment through learning that occurred during, or as a result of the involvement in the project. Art and learning are interlinked; Jacqui, Chris and Fee talk in terms of producing art, or being an artist, making work with the intention of having it seen. Chris has found the confidence to seek new learning, Libby talks about photographic skills getting her where she is today. All these views indicate people have developed new ways of interacting with the world through the creative process.

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## Conclusion

It may now be possible to address the question, what is educational about arts activities? But there are a few problems; even if much learning, and momentous personal development has been observed taking place in one small-scale inquiry, it does not follow that this will be the case in all arts activities. Could this model of learning in an informal community setting be extended to other communities, or to more formal education situations such as schools and colleges? What was the impact on the learning of the participants of the wider Community Education context in which this project was set? How significant was the role of Watershed? How “unique” was this project? I will explore the factors immediately outside the project itself to try and discover how they influenced the learning experience, in order to reveal external factors that other situations may have in common. Other questions arise; how do we define what is educational? And what about dissemination, sustainability, progression? What happens now?

I will deal with the financial, cultural and political context of the Parkway Parent and Carer Project first. As a small community based organisation, funding for Parkway comes piecemeal from various different sources, and is usually short term.<sup>15</sup> Courses and workshops are a relatively small part of the provision – and are seen in the context of providing childcare, family support, and improving parenting skills in one of the most deprived areas in Bristol, as stated,

The project combats physical isolation by offering a friendly and welcoming environment where parents and carers can spend time together. It also contributes to combating economic and social exclusion by supporting employment and learning, building skills and confidence and providing access to affordable childcare.  
(Parkway, 2002: 16)

Learning opportunities are being recognised as a means to help address issues of social exclusion - in 2000 the Parent / Carer Coordinator role was created to expand and develop this work: So far,

strong links have been developed with City of Bristol College who provide tuition fees for some courses, and in Sept 2001 the project received funding for the first time from Bristol City Community Education’s Widening Participation Fund, which provides tuition fees and wages for Crèche staff in return for match funding. Parkway Parent and Child Project is also a member of the Inner City Lifelong Learning Network. (p.9)

Under the auspices of the Widening Participation Fund, which aims to increase access to education at all levels for students and learners from the most

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<sup>15</sup> Further information about the funders of Parkway Parent and Child Project can be found in the Credits section of the Neighbourhood site, at, <http://www.dshed.net/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Neighbourhood.woa/wa/creator>

disadvantaged backgrounds, course provision at Parkway Parent and Child Project has flourished in an atmosphere of increasing security and confidence about the future. The photography project should be seen as part of a programme of informal, non-accredited short courses and workshops, which include yoga, batik, massage and DIY. This framework made it possible for Watershed and Parkway Parent and Child Project staff to design a course that was flexible enough in its learning objectives to suit the needs of known learners and achieve a good balance of stimulation, structure and challenge, but with open ended outcomes and without pressure. Potential learners were consulted about course content beforehand, and a flexible approach maintained throughout the project, neither of which would have been possible in the rigid accreditation culture found in most schools and colleges, and even in much of Community Education. There was real access to this course; affordable childcare, a convenient and friendly familiar environment, and no pressure of exams. These were all important considerations for someone like Chris, for example, who sees education as a risk.

Although the budget of the photography course was modest and we stretched it as far as it could go, this course was seen as a huge investment, involving the purchase of costly materials and the hire of specialist facilities. Time was a scarce resource, being restricted by Crèche hours. Both courses were short and most sessions were only two hours. More funding would have made it possible to extend the course, take more time in the darkroom and probably would have suited the learners better. Course participants brought up this issue repeatedly, they found the whole experience far too short. It was the major criticism written on evaluation sheets. In one course evaluation session Chris recommended, "making it permanent." Although the photography project was seen as a success story by Parkway staff, it is clear that such high investment courses will only ever make up a small part of their programme of activity overall. This experience of arts-based learning as being resource-hungry is probably not unique within small community organisations who do not have a creative agenda as such. This will not change unless the funding situation and priorities of organisations are encouraged to change, allowing the potential of learning in the arts to be utilised in promoting personal and institutional development.

What impact did the collaboration with Watershed have on this learning activity? I argue that the connection contributed to the status of the course amongst the participants, as follows; if Watershed, an organisation that takes photography seriously, has an exhibition of photography made by a community group, then it must mean that the photography of the community group is worth taking seriously. Maybe this is what triggered some of the participants' re-assessment of self as artist. My presence every week and many conversations about exhibitions and photography probably contributed to the feeling of connection with Watershed, and encouraged this way of thinking.

The problem with many short-term community based projects is that when they are over, there's nothing left. Practitioners, specialists, researchers, "parachute" in, and then are gone. The relationship with Watershed continued, with a new project, Digitised: Communities Online;<sup>16</sup> a web publishing initiative supported by the New Opportunities Fund.<sup>17</sup> Publishing the body of work produced during the photography project online would provide a more permanent exhibition with a potentially limitless worldwide audience. The gallery of images would be accompanied by photography learning materials aimed at teachers, students, artists, community leaders and anyone interested in starting photography. The Digitised: Communities Online project stated aims are to "encourage groups to deliver a range of original creative work which reflects their aspirations, cultures and concerns" which is similar to what was happening in the work produced by the Parkway course participants. The digitisation process involved a continuity of commitment between Parkway and Watershed, and was valuable for my research; in the process of collecting photos to scan, and further information for captions on the web site, many new insights into the significance of the original photography project were gained. Dissemination of this body of work to a wider audience provided opportunities for recontextualising, repackaging, allowing creators, as they are now known in database-speak, to review their work as a new entity. This progression of ideas and practice was valuable in the research process, enabling a deeper understanding of the significance of the photography project in the lives of the participants.

The web site holds the complete body of work accompanied by new comments and captions of the creators, which is an insight into an inner city neighbourhood; people, environment, issues and concerns, pleasures and fears. Ideas about visual literacy, the skills of photography, looking and becoming more self aware, were qualities that enabled the creators to communicate about their lives to the audience; much of this was developed as part of the original learning process. A learning resource is provided, designed to enable further engagement with creative material, and to provide community leaders, teachers and students with ideas about project work for themselves, knowledge of the subject area, and technical information written and illustrated in an accessible, non-academic style, easy to download and photocopy and completely free of charge. This process leading from community education arts activity to online gallery to learning resource may provide an example of an arts activity becoming educational in a wider context; and could represent a possible model for future online learning activities. It is an example of education leading to more education, which Dewey (1916, cited by McNiff and Whitehead 2002: 53) defined as the purpose of education.

**Although it may appear that the NOF-Digitise model is a perfect dissemination vehicle for this project, it represents a lost opportunity in**

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<sup>16</sup> Available at, <http://www.dshed.net/digitised>

<sup>17</sup> Further information about NOF-Digitise can be found at, <http://www.nof.org.uk/default.aspx?tc=42&tct=2&fc=250&fct=1>

some ways; this is because the aims of NOF-digitise are not completely compatible with the learning objectives of Watershed. If Parkway project participants had been able to become involved in the digitisation, design and publishing process, and provided with access to technology and training, there would have been far more value in terms of potential participation, engagement, learning and eventual control over the site. Contributors could have become authors. Unfortunately NOF-Digitise does not support such “training” activities, which for Watershed was a shortcoming. For project participants, contribution to the Neighbourhood site consisted of submitting prints for digitisation, signing consent forms with regard to Intellectual Property Rights, consultation about text and captions, and in some cases, talking about what the photography course meant to them in terms of personal and artistic development. The opportunity to review and recontextualise was useful in terms of research, and re-evaluation of the project, but not a real opportunity in web design for the contributors, who would have been keen for a more practical involvement. It is worth noting that a creative digital photography outreach course organised in collaboration between Watershed and Parkway Parent and Child Project starts in mid January 2004, on the day this dissertation is submitted, again supported by the Widening Participation Fund. Many photography project participants have signed up. The fact that the commitment of these learners to the process of education was sustained, and continues to rise to further creative challenges, is indication in itself that there is educational value in arts activities.

## **Appendix List**

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**1/ Sample evaluation forms**

**2/ Chris and Fee's interviews in full**

**3/ Course proposals and outlines**

**4/ Details from case study**

**5/ Exhibition copy**

**6/ Minutes of meeting 4/3/03**

**Ruth Jacobs**

**Module 2 - Dissertation**

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**Jan 2004**

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