

Whose research is it anyway? Community University partnerships as agents of change

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Diasporas,
migration
& identities



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Ethnographic research collaborations

- Ferham Families exhibition
- A Reason to Write
- Writing in the Home and in the Street
- Social PARKS
- Language as Talisman

All rest on ethnographic collaboration with
children and families in research

Ferham Families (2006-7)

- Invited British Asian Families to co-curate an exhibition about their family life
- Funded through the AHRC's Diasporas Migration and Identities research programme
- Involved visual artist, Zahir Rafiq, in the process of recruitment, the design of the exhibition and the website:

<http://www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk>

FERHAM FAMILIES

A VISUAL EXHIBITION OF BRITISH ASIAN FAMILY HISTORY

British Asian family life documented for the benefit
of the present and the future.....



Every object tells a story

website

- [Website](#) constructed by Zahir Rafiq, with money from the University of Sheffield Knowledge Transfer Opportunities Fund.
- Flash presentation funded by Creative Partnerships
- Family literacy practitioners advised and KE funding enabled learning resources to be developed in partnership with NIACE

As an Asian person myself I thought it was a good idea to get positive messages across to the general public in Rotherham, to show that, you know, immigrants contribute to this town and work really hard and to this day, the present day, they still contribute in certain ways, positive images of Asians, in today's political climate, there is a stereotype of how Asian families, they just think about arranged marriages. I'm not saying that doesn't go on but the majority of people are just normal, law abiding, not boring, but to just get that normal view of Asian families, common view of Asian families, common something that the white population can relate to, because at the moment they can't relate to Asian families, at the moment, but there is so much that they can, and I hope that will come out of this project, that's why I wanted to do it, it's a great cause. (Zahir Rafiq in Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009:84)

- What I have learned is the importance of representing Asian families – and now I want to do this through portraits of contemporary Asian people that represent this new reality. .. That to me will be one of my goals as an artist is to represent that. If it wasn't for projects like Ferham Families, that kind of thing wouldn't happen and be part of public art work.

(Zahir Rafiq in Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq
2009:91)



Andy Pollard

- I believe that an extremely positive picture of the local British Asian population was painted.. ..We went in one day, and the teachers from the local secondary school were using the space, and it was their second visit and it was a really diverse range of kids and it was really important for those families and those kids – it sent a really strong message. (Pahl, Pollard and Rafiq 2009:88)

Change agent

- Project was able to address racism within the town at the time
- Endured and is currently being revisited through SHHIRC funded Literacy Revisits
- Source of resilience for young people in the project
- Resources on website used by family literacy practitioners in partnership with NIACE.

Writing in the home and in the street

- On Writing in the home and in the Street
- Involved community walks, collaborative ethnography and oral history with art element
- My focus was on everyday writing practices in home settings in Rotherham
- Worked with children in a school to look at the everyday writing in their community
- Co-produced a film that made a difference



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Writing in home and in the Street

- Stimulus was video made by Steve Pool and Richard Steadman-Jones about the writing they found in the East Herringthorpe area
- Children responded by conducting a series of walk arounds
- They then produced a film and two PowerPoints that were shown to the School Improvement Service and at the ESRC festival

Kate: When you see a nasty word do you think it is good or bad?

Marianne: Bad. We have got it on our gates someone wrote it! When I first moved into my house there was graffiti all over the wall and they had had a paintball fight. You can still see it, it were black and it were white and it was hard to get off. Me granddad had to do that. (Discussion in the street recorded in June 2011)

Kate: I want to know what you think of the graffiti on this slide?

Luke: It's all rude! We should spray it.

It's not fair on young children



Change agent

- Young people were able to suggest to the police that they get rid of offensive graffiti
- Concern about levels of homophobia and racism in area within graffiti led to youth work focus on raising awareness
- School improvement service listened to young people's presentation and thought differently about the area.

Community co-curation

- Exhibitions at Jessop West and Bank Street Arts
- Bank Street Arts gave a residency to two girls (aged 12) from East Dene, Rotherham who co-curated a room in the art gallery.
- Zahir Rafiq as artist supported the process.
- Repurposed library book for teenagers

Change agent

- Recognised differences between English, visual art and socially engaged ethnography in relation to audience and purpose
- Young people appreciated the Art Gallery, did not enjoy University experience as alienated them.

Social PARKS

- Collaborative project
- Lots of different academics
- Focused on the role of parks in promoting social interaction
- Made a film in the park about the project

Impact

- Led to a community showing of a film about Rawmarsh Park, in Rawmarsh, which was widely viewed on the night
- Brought together the skate park boys with young people who attended the youth service as well as elderly people and families who used the park in the day [Sparks Film](#)

Change agent

- Led to increased focus on park as site for large scale community events including Halloween and skate park celebrations.
- Valuing of the park as space for young people to meet and talk
- Led to Language as Talisman project

Language as Talisman

- Partnership with Rawmarsh youth service, two schools, UoS English department, Education department, and Inspire Rotherham
- Focus is on protective power of language
- Young people have talismans that protect them
- Working with youth service who developed their own programme

The knowledge is in the park

- Development of new space where all the partners include community groups materialize language in different ways
- Rap, poetry, sayings, stories, all placed in speakers in the park
- Idea for the project came from group discussions with young people in the park
- Young people made a film about their experience of social workers

Language as Talisman

- We built on our previous experience of using ‘provocations’ as a way to generate productive encounters between participants from different contexts: community members, school children, artists and writers, youth and literacy workers, teachers and academics.
- It opened up a space for participants to develop a collaborative exploration of:
 - the role of language in mediating power and offering protection,
 - the place of tradition in shaping language use,
 - the relationship between narrative and language as a protective medium,
 - everyday experiences of ‘crafting’ language, and
 - the materialisation of language in different media.

- We initiated this work in the conviction that reflecting upon one's own use of language can be a powerful source of resilience but that this reflective process should not involve the imposition of academic knowledge on participants.
- While it is true that academics have useful frameworks for examining these issues our work did not prioritise academic approaches, starting instead from the image of the talisman and so creating the possibility of less predictable encounters and a richer range of work. (Pahl et al 2012)



Change agent

- The film made by young people has been shown to social workers
- First Gay Pride march planned in Rotherham.
- Development of new project on fishing
- Focus on working with young people at risk from racist and homophobic discourses

Current issues

- Focus of the youth service is on resilience
- Anti-racist and anti-homophobic work a key part of their focus
- How do we interpret the community focus in relation to researcher interests?
- Concept of co-production can involve difficult decisions about resources

Future projects

- Making meaning differently – on voice and influence of young people through alternative media (AHRC Connected Communities funded)
- Bridge project – connecting young people from different background across the area – linked to the work of Angie Hart through CuP approach (ESRC/AHRC Connected Communities funded)

Co-production involves

- Time
- Mess
- Money
- Letting go
- Uncertainty
- Unclear outcomes
- Complex productions
- Failure as well as success

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