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Arts-Based Educational Research: The Challenges of Social Media and Video-Based Research Methods in Communication Design Education

Lorraine Marshalsey^{ID} and Madeleine Sclater

Abstract

This article discusses the practical and ethical challenges and benefits of using social media and video-based research methods – also known as Photovoice – to investigate contemporary Communication Design education. The two visual research methods discussed include the social media mobile application Snapchat[®] and participant-generated GoPro[®] video filming. The investigation focused on understanding students' on-the-ground, lived experiences of studio learning within two distinctive higher education case study settings in the United Kingdom and Australia. This study employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an inquiry process and incorporated a methodological framework involving a combination of narrative inquiry, visual Participatory Design (PD) and visual ethnography. The findings of this study revealed the impact of specialised studio and classroom-based Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) on student learning and engagement as the participants expressed differing responses to their own learning and community of practice at each site. The choice of arts-based educational research methods used for this study allowed the relationships between place, lived experience, and community to be explored. Students, in effect, became investigators of their own practice through engagement in a rigorous set of visual methods, which placed the tools directly into their hands.

Keywords

arts-based educational research (ABER), participatory action research, Photovoice, narrative inquiry, Participatory Design, visual ethnography, design education, studio learning, Communication Design

Introduction

This article discusses the practical and ethical considerations of using social media and video-based research methods to investigate studio learning in Communication Design education. This study employed Participatory Action Research (PAR), and incorporated a methodological framework involving a combination of narrative inquiry, visual participatory design (PD) and visual ethnography. The investigation focused on Communication Design students' on-the-ground, lived experiences of learning spaces within distinct higher education settings in the UK and Australia. In each case study, the research activities took place over an eight-week period, beginning in the UK, followed by Australia. Three participants engaged with the research activities in Case Study 1 at the school of art in the UK. In Case Study 2, the researchers collaborated with seven participants via weekly research workshops at the college of art in Australia. In this research, two distinct types of learning spaces were investigated – specialised studio spaces (Case Study 1) and classroom-based Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) environments (Case Study 2). In Case Study 1 (UK), participants engaged in their practice within one conventional, open plan studio space, and in Case Study 2 (Australia), participants worked within several TEL equipped lecture theatres and classrooms. Of the research methods employed in these case studies, two methods are discussed in this article: the social media mobile application Snapchat[®] and the participant-generated GoPro[®] video-based method.

This study was conducted with student participants using Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an inquiry process. This overarching research approach, combined with the methodological assemblage, enabled participants to actively construct and co-construct their understandings of the contexts within which they were working (McNiff & Whitehead 2006, 2010; Chevalier & Buckles 2013) and to express their voices more confidently in the case study settings. The purpose of this study was therefore to systematically examine the relationship between student learning and engagement within the rapidly changing landscape of learning spaces in higher education within two international case studies. One of the research aims was to consider how contemporary Communication Design pedagogy can be adapted in order to enable students and teachers to engage better with this evolution of learning spaces (Marshalsey 2017; Marshalsey & Sclater 2018).

Following the data gathering at each of the case study sites, the collective visual files that were generated by participants were shared among the participants (at each site), facilitated by the researchers for review, discussion and reflection. At each site, participants were invited to reflect critically upon, and evaluate, the contextual factors which, they felt, had influenced the data gathered from their own site. They were later invited to review the data gathered by research participants from the other international site. The participants from the two case study sites expressed differing responses in relation to their own learning and

community of practice. Their lived stories arose directly from their active engagement with their distinctive learning environment where they were supported to diagnose, intervene and solve problems in relation to a specific real-world issue (Gray & Malins 2004; Clandinin 2007, 2013). In this study, the issue was to explore students' experiences of learning by looking in particular at the relationship between engagement and learning within Communication Design studio education.

In brief, the findings of this study reveal that the participants could either feel disrupted or supported in relation to their engagement with their learning in the diverse learning spaces. In the UK, they reported that their social, informal, day-to-day exchanges with peers and staff within their physical studio community was central to their collective and individual engagement, learning and creative practice. However, in Australia, the Case Study 2 participants were less positive when reporting on their creative engagement with their TEL-dominant institutional learning spaces. For example, to compensate for the absence of a stable physical learning community within the institution, Case Study 2 participants developed their own self-guided strategies to support their learning and engagement. In essence, they created their own offline and online studio communities outside of the boundaries of their physical classroom learning spaces – mainly in cafes, at home and via social media. These findings, derived from the participants actively engaging with social media and video-based research methods to become investigators of their own learning spaces, allowed relationships between place, lived experience and community to be explored.

Communication Design and experiential learning

David A. Kolb and Roger Fry's experiential learning by doing model focused on the theory that the learner must be willing to be actively involved, reflect and conceptualise (Fry *et al.* 2008). American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952) advocated real-life active and interactive experiences in education encourage experimentation, social community, and independent thinking. Dewey argued that through interactions with the environment, individuals receptively accumulate experiences; they are constantly reflecting, reorganising and reinterpreting the confusion of sense information in their day-to-day events (Goldblatt 2006, 18,19). Learners must utilise decision-making and problem-solving skills during a continuous process of cyclic reflective experience as they explore personal interpretation, playful practice and stages of decision making in Communication Design (Shumack 2009).

Communication Design, as a discipline, which embodies graphic design, illustration and photography, has seen a significant shift of focus from specialised studio educational environments to fully augmented digital classrooms. Design courses today can rarely afford separate dedicated studios, specialist workshop technicians, or resources that embrace both traditionally wet and digitally dry creative practice (Boling *et al.* 2016, 161). Thus, the students' experiential learning of this specialised discipline, and its range of production methods, would seem to be lessening as traditional resources and space become less common (Scott-Webber 2012). It is important, therefore, to understand how Communication Design education is evolving through the use of emerging pedagogical practices that incorporate a repertoire of physical, blended and online learning platforms. It is also important to understand what impact these learning spaces are having on student learning and engagement. This research investigation focuses on capturing participants

experiences of studio by applying cyclic experiential learning through engagement with research methods combined with critical reflection.

Methodologies and methods

What follows is a brief outline of the selected methodologies and methods used in this study, as shown in Figure 1, to support the subjective approach. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen as the principal qualitative research approach as PAR interprets and documents a range of phenomena from an individual's viewpoint (Macdonald 2012). PAR informed the research framework and the design of the case studies. Then, narrative inquiry, Participatory Design, visual ethnography and Photovoice formed the bricolage of methodologies and research methods in this study.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the overarching research approach to the study provided participants with the necessary scaffolding to become investigators of their own practice and experience. In this study, PAR facilitated the adoption of a methodology that was progressively open-ended, allowing the research activities

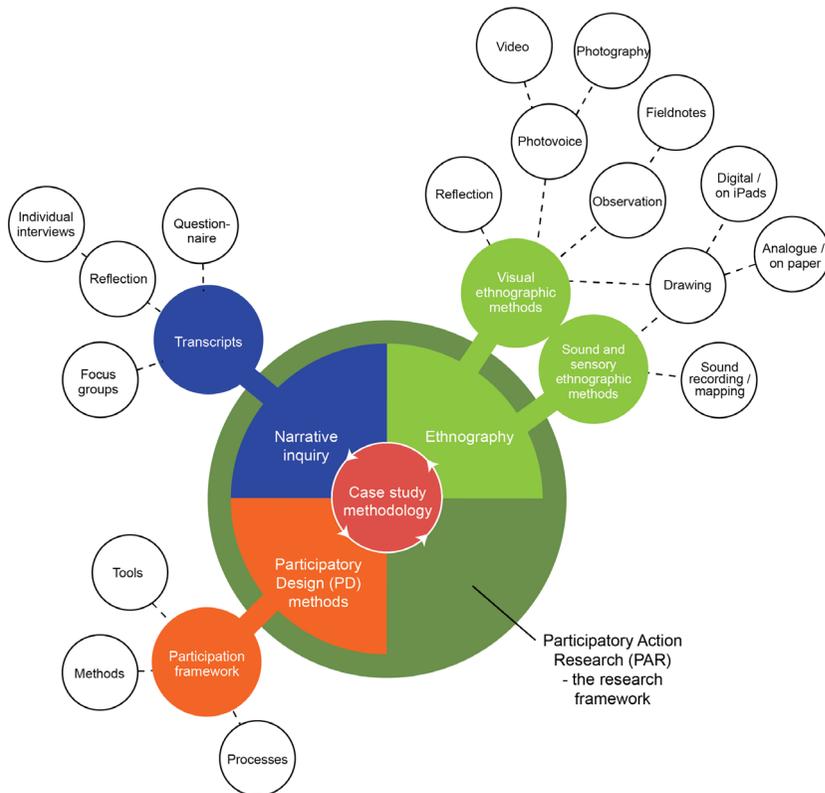


Figure 1

The selected methodologies and methods used in this study. © 2019

to be developed in a collaborative partnership with the participants (Kemmis *et al.* 2014; Marshalsey 2017). For example, participants interacted and identified patterns and variations in their behaviours and practices – they were invited to intentionally reflect upon sections of the collated data as the study progressed. This process enabled them to make sense of and reflect upon their educational experience and their engagement with learning environments in which they were situated while the data was being collaboratively gathered.

A key characteristic of PAR in this study was the emphasis on process as the participants and researchers asked questions and developed knowledge of their studio educational experiences as a form of discovery learning and awareness (Depraz *et al.* 2003). This reflection-in-action approach allowed the participants to respond and to also plan future actions in order to make continuous enhancements to their own learning approaches based upon judgements of accumulated evidence over time.

Narrative inquiry

Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful (Clandinin 2013). Therefore, narrative inquiry, which is the study of experience as story, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 375). This study draws mainly from narrative inquiry and for this reason the students' actual voices from the two case studies are intentionally woven into the discussion and analysis of this article. In each of the case studies participants developed stories of the educational environments they occupied over time: stories of the furniture, the inhabitants, the layout, the resources, the rituals and the social community of practice in each site. The case study research design was designed to be 'responsive' to the participants' stories and experiences as the students and researchers sought to understand the ways in which they interacted with each other and their environments. For example, the researchers and participants processed the data together and were open to accepting alternative ways of knowing and understanding. They sought to identify, adapt and evolve suitable creative and inventive research methods formed by experiences and personal values.

Participatory Design

Participatory design (PD) is founded upon the active involvement of people in development processes by building upon their experiences and challenging conventional approaches to designing experiences (Sanders & Stappers 2008; Sanya 2016). Recently the advancement of design research has involved the individual end user (or in this study, student) having an active role in the design and decision-making processes. It is an approach which began in the many social, political and civil rights movements of the 1970s (Sanders & Stappers 2008). During this time, people demanded a greater voice in decision-making, as they contended that they 'were not being planned "for" but planned "at"' (Nichols 2009; Simonsen & Robertson 2013).

In this study, methods from PD were appropriated into the field of educational PAR in order to research studio learning. In each case study, the participants were introduced to the social media and video-based research tools to both investigate and foreground their awareness of studio learning spaces. The participants from each case study were invited to participate, and contribute to, the design of the PD methods. The research methods were used to capture what participants said about the everyday, lived experiences of their studio environment.

Visual ethnography

According to Pink (2001, 2012) visual ethnography as a methodology and visual ethnographic methods are valuable for generating interpretative research descriptions, incorporating increasingly digital technologies with visual ethnographic practice for research purposes (Pink *et al.* 2017; Barrantes-Elizondo 2019). In educational research, visual methods can be an ambiguous term and may invest in a broad repertoire of visual procedures to produce data. According to Van den Scott (2018), there are three forms of visual techniques: visual things as data (e.g. photos or art), visual tools to gather data (e.g. photo elicitation) and visual ways to record field notes (e.g. photographs of the field site). This methodology can activate revealing visual data with, and for, stakeholders and 'stakeholder ethnography', and is key to educational research as it expands the scope of understanding educational processes. (Pink *et al.* 2017; Barrantes-Elizondo 2019).

Photovoice: video and social media

Photovoice is a form of qualitative arts-based visual ethnography in action. It elicits responses from individuals as an image-based discovery and action method of story-telling and learning (Kramer *et al.* 2012; Delgado 2015). As a method, it is often used when researching alongside under-represented communities and it has grown in popularity since its introduction in the early 1990s by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (Sutton-Brown 2014). Photovoice facilitates the use of methods such as video and photography and was a method that was embedded in the research design for both case studies in the UK and Australia. In this study, Photovoice was used to empower participants to document and reflect upon their own studio learning experiences from their own subjective perspectives (Delgado 2015). Participants critically reflected upon their dialogue using image-making techniques such as photography and video that served as prompts for reflective discussion to illuminate issues and experiences (Brandt 2014). GoPro[®] video cameras and the social media application Snapchat[®] were tools that were used to elicit subjective responses from participants.

In research studies, photography has become an active voice for participants' perspectives from behind the camera – a term Brandt (2014, 621) called 'shooting back'. This visual methodology enables a powerful expression of experiences, as cameras are placed directly into the hands of the participants (Wang & Burris 1997; Given 2008, 623; Brandt 2014; Delgado 2015). In this study, Photovoice methods expressed the participants' own experiences as captured through immediate and spontaneous image-making. Participants were asked to represent their

community or express their point of view by photographing scenes within their learning space to develop both personal and collective narratives.

The social media mobile application Snapchat®

The photo and video messaging social media mobile application Snapchat® is a well-known and playful social networking tool which the student researchers used in both case studies. Snapchat® allows users to capture spontaneous images and to layer drawings and captions onto these images and return them to other friends via the app. These short-lived images of less than ten seconds (which disappear after a designated time) can be screen-grabbed by other users. Snapchat®, as a Photovoice research method, enabled the research participants to articulate their momentary, honest experiences of studio learning from their own personal perspective (Figure 2) (Delgado 2015). The researchers received the Snapchat® images in this research activity over an eight-week period. The very short-term nature of Snapchat® as a visual ethnographic method meant the participants could not reflect on the images individually or collectively in this research activity. However, every image was screen-grabbed anonymously by the researcher and saved as data for future analysis. At the end of the study, the Snapchat® images were then returned en masse to the participants to reflect upon and to use for their own purposes. To facilitate the sharing of images, the researcher uploaded the screen-grabbed images from each case study to a private cloud storage application that was made accessible to the participants for their own use and ongoing reflection throughout the research activities. It is interesting to note that participants from the both case studies in the UK and Australia chose not to access or view the images.

When using this method, it was the intention of the researchers to encourage the participants to record impromptu and unplanned events within their everyday studio education, and to do so without a great deal of prior consideration to the visual outcome. As a result of the spontaneous nature of the image-making and the way the application was set up to send images to the researcher's Snapchat® account, it was not possible for research participants, in each case study, to reflect upon what they were sending during the research project schedule. The main disadvantage of Snapchat® was its sporadic use at times and its reliance on regular student engagement. Yet, this method was feasible since it is an easily accessible social media app to which all the participants (except one student in each of the case studies) had access on their mobile phones.

Findings from the Snapchat® method

In August 2015, and as part of the regular research activities, the researcher showed the Snapchat® images created by the participants in Case Study 1 in the UK to the Australian Case Study 2 participants. This cross-case reflection occurred within the session investigating the meaning of 'place'. The researcher was keen to review the Case Study 2 participants' initial reactions of their counterparts assigned and personalised studio workspaces in Case Study 1 – particularly as the Australian students were not assigned a personal desk space for their studies.

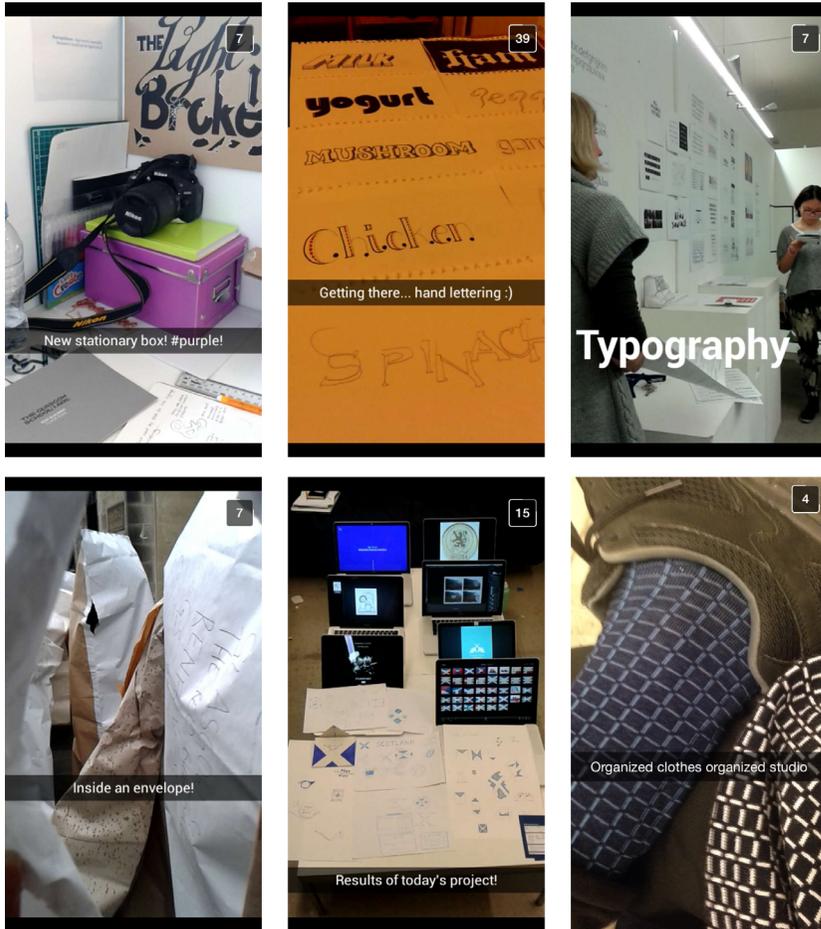


Figure 2

The Snapchat[®] mobile application allowed the participants to capture spontaneous images of studio life as it happened. © 2017

They immediately noticed the contrast in the campus buildings between Case Study 1's specialist art school and their own mainstream university buildings.

Case Study 2 student Valerie said, 'I like the fact that they've got their own station, that's what I would really like. To have your own section where you could actually have your stuff, you can stick stuff up, and leave your work there to come back to' (Marshalsey 2017, 294). The participants from Case Study 2 also liked the idea that all classes and critiques in Case Study 1 are held within the one working studio. Instead, within Case Study 2, the Australian students are familiar with a modular, fixed timetable delivered in multiple learning spaces. Realising that the Case Study 1 participants had all their lectures, classes and project work in one fluid space, Rose from Case Study 2 said, 'if you were talking about something [and] you could really be working on that something while ... that's kind of cool, I like that' (Marshalsey 2017, 287). However, her fellow student Charlie was more critical of this pedagogical practice, as he said that 'having lectures ... in different rooms it makes people get up, be on the move ... and that kind of keeps you going' (Marshalsey 2017, 287).



Figure 3
Reflections on Post-It® notes of the Snapchat® images from both case studies. © 2017

Discussion among the Case Study 2 participants became further animated when the images of the communal sofa areas within the studio in Case Study 1 were shown. In this dialogue, the Australian participants in Case Study 2 identified the need to duplicate real-life industry environments, including sofas and coffee tables within their educational environments as a means to aid the transition out of education and into industry. Rose said, 'Most clients ... you sit down at a coffee table and you have a conversation ... rather than sitting at a formal desk ... So maybe it ... mimics it' (Marshalsey 2017, 286). Nonetheless, Rose also remarked that the cramped environment she observed within the images of studio in Case Study 1 might cause problems: 'in a space like this you probably have to really focus on the person who's talking ... It's hard to be creative when you're sitting on top of each other' (Marshalsey 2017, 287). Charlie also observed the Case Study 1 studio seemed to be 'pretty claustrophobic in those spaces' in comparison to the classroom-based classrooms he is familiar with in Australia (Marshalsey 2017, 287). Responding to these observations, the researchers returned to conduct a focus group discussion with the participants twelve months after the conclusion of the Case Study 1 research activities. At this point, Case Study 2 had also concluded its research activities.

In a post-case study, focus group discussion, the Case Study 1 participants were first shown their own collated Snapchat® images for review and comment (Figure 3). The Case Study 1 participants reflected that their attitude towards their studio learning had altered over time. They had changed from being somewhat indignant about not having enough space or storage in the studio in the early stages of the research, to acknowledging the value of the community bond they shared with others in their physical, dedicated studio environment. Indeed, they began to endorse their studio space as Robyn said: 'I feel like I badmouth it but if someone else badmouthed it, I would defend it' (Marshalsey 2017, 252).

This developing insight of the value of their own studio environment grew as the Case Study 1 participants viewed Case Study 2's Snapchat® image data as a



Figure 4 Peripheral studio members in the vicinity of the GoPro[®] filming. © 2017.

cross-case reflective activity. They noted that their Australian counterparts' studio education comprised of a less visible physical community and that many of the Case Study 2 students worked in isolation at home. Secondly, having previously expressed concern that their current practice was predominantly digital, the Case Study 1 participants reflected that what they perceived to be too much of a digital focus in their work, was in fact, much less than that of Case Study 2's digital practice. The Case Study 1 participants realised they had access to a wider repertoire of non-digital resources, tools and processes than the Case Study 2 participants and said that the Australian studio looked more like a secondary school rather than a creative art school.

The GoPro[®] video method

In the UK art school Case Study, GoPro[®] film cameras and mobile phone video applications were utilised by the student researchers during Week 6 of the 8-week project. GoPro[®] is an American company that develops, manufactures and markets high-definition (HD) moving image equipment and cameras, known as GoPros. These cameras are often used in action videography and capture HD images through wide-angle lenses (GoPro Inc. 2019). They are lightweight and compact and can be worn on the chest, head or wrist. In Case Study 1, the participants used GoPro's[®] for varying lengths of time to film their everyday studio experiences from their own personal perspectives (Figure 4). The three participants each took

it in turns to film using the GoPro[®] camera while in their studio for one full day. They were invited to document their daily interactions with their studio environment in order to better understand how they inhabit the space. During this task there were no individual opportunities for reflection, as the participants could not view what they were filming as they were filming. The participants returned the recorded footage to the researchers who then edited it and returned it to participants as part of a focus group discussion.

Findings from the GoPro[®] video method

When the participants and the researchers watched the edited footage together, it often led to insights about the dynamics of a specific event and illuminated ways in which aspects of practice could be enhanced in the studio (Wells 2009, 51). The new understanding emerging from this mutual learning activity involving reflection on critical incidents encouraged participants to develop self-awareness (Wenger 2000).

As the footage was shown to the participants during the initial screening, their reactions were recorded in audio and video. They laughed and were embarrassed by their conduct at points: 'I think it's just seeing yourself on camera and hearing your voice and seeing what you do. Mundane things. Me singing' (Marshalsey 2017, 176). In viewing the recorded footage, participants became aware of their behaviours and interactions: 'it feels like I do nothing. It takes a while to get settled. You know? Like the way I'm always moving around' (Marshalsey 2017, 176). The participants assumed viewing ordinary tasks on the footage, such as making tea and tidying the studio environment, would evidence their lack of productivity as design students. From an educators' perspective, these processes (as individual and group exchanges of knowledge and ideas, familiarity, social interaction over tea and lunch, and acts of place-making) are foundational to understanding, developing and strengthening creative projects and community bonding in the studio. The strong community of practice and the relaxed, social interactions in and around the studio were clear, as the participants carried out their daily habits and rituals. As the participants encountered other people in the studio, café or en route to the library, they acknowledged and interacted with them in a friendly manner. However, as the film footage revealed, social interruptions were numerous, which may not always foster the necessary conditions for an engaged studio practice.

A discussion of the challenges of social media and video-based research methods in Communication Design education

In this investigation, participants in each case study expressed differing responses to studio learning and their community of practice when using the social media and video-based research methods. Despite the popularity of social media and its user familiarity, issues in the use of social media as a research method within education exist (Güler 2015). Townsend (2017) argues that it is challenging to apply traditional ethical practice to social media contexts as a new field of research without a definitive ethical guide. In relation to the two case studies, the first concern was whether the Snapchat[®] data should be considered to be public or private.

Despite the images generated from Snapchat[®] being sent solely to the researchers, and then reflected back to the participants in external ways, the images are still produced on a public social media application. This may create unknown risks in relation to privacy or security (Townsend 2017). Also, research participants may not submit honest Snapchat[®] data if they feel that their privacy is compromised when doing so. Furthermore, although informed consent was obtained from all participants, the original Consent Form did not specifically consider the ethical conditions of using social media applications as research methods. There is also the ethical dilemma if participants, intentionally or unintentionally, submitted inappropriate or sensitive data, of themselves and others when engaged in the research activities (Roesner *et al.* 2014).

Ethical conduct is paramount in the research process for validity and integrity, and to protect the participants from harm and distress when using creative research methods (Mannay 2016). The researchers in this study ensured correct ethical conduct in several ways. First, it was the intention of the researchers to foster mutual trust, transparency and openness with the active participants when using the filming methods (Delgado 2015). This was clearly communicated to them and to the wider studio community members who may have been unintentionally recorded in the audio and video data. The Consent Form was circulated to participating and non-participating students. All participants provided their consent to be indirectly included in the filming as they worked in their studio environment during the research activity, which is critical to the development of trust fostered between the researchers and the participants, and between the participants and the peripheral studio members, when recording data. Over time, the participants themselves began to ask permission and reaffirm with the peripheral students in the studio environment that it was acceptable for them to be recorded on camera. As the non-participants of this study trusted their studio colleagues more than the researchers – due to their familiarity and regular socialisation – this reduced the early, initial nervousness of both the participants and the studio members.

Filming their behaviours in the studio was problematic, as the participants felt self-conscious and, to a degree, acknowledged that they conducted themselves differently to their normal routine. Robyn from Case Study 1 in the UK noted that when using this method: 'you were a bit self-conscious but probably after about five minutes it was fine' (Marshalsey 2017, 256). The participants exhibited a heightened awareness of the cameras (as both camera operators and actors), with the peripheral studio members also acting cautiously or inquisitively in the vicinity of the filming. This affected how the participants filmed their footage; they felt the video recordings were not an entirely authentic representation of studio life. It is also worth noting that the participants expressed an interest to 'redo' the task once they had developed an awareness of their own, and others', behaviours.

Secondly, when analysing the video data collected by the participants, the researchers viewed the entire footage produced and subsequently edited together a sequence of activity based on location, conversations and activities. Several minutes of footage of a static viewpoint with no interaction with other studio members or resources was edited to a few seconds. The editing was an intentional intervention on the researchers' part. The edited video parts were knitted together as a continuous sequential video, with no loss to the chronological narrative, for viewing and reflective commentary by the participants. However, this may be perceived as a biased and subjective collection of key events and conversations from the researchers' own perspective of the studio activities.

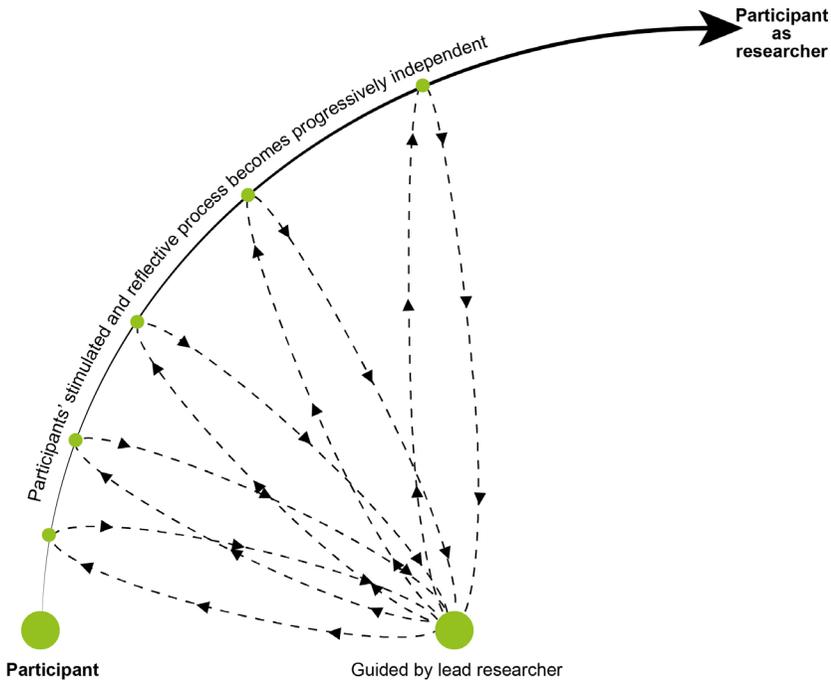


Figure 5

Diagram illustrating that the participants became progressively independent as researchers.
© 2017

Participants in Case Study 2 did not use GoPro® kits despite having access to alternative full video filming kit within their institution and they were also encouraged to use their smartphones. The researchers chose not to encourage the use of GoPros® since the Case Study 1 participants had previously referred to the novelty aspect of the GoPro® filming cameras. In Case Study 1, the participants expressed that the GoPro® method impacted on the degree of honesty that could be achieved in their filming as Toby stated: 'you did feel more like you were taking part in a test' (Marshalsey 2017, 304). On reflection, the researchers felt that by not offering the professional GoPro® filming kit to the participants in Case Study 2 in Australia, participants were denied an equality of opportunity and there was a lack of engagement in this activity. Thus, Case Study 2 participants had little input into the decision-making process for this method as a means to decide for themselves the best equipment honestly to investigate their own educational experiences.

Meaning making as active participants engaged with arts-based research methods

As reflective practitioners, the research participants became collaborative, empowered co-researchers during the visual research activities and worked towards formats of their own choosing that best investigated their experiences of studio learning. These reflective actions were stimulated by the questions, discussions

and activities that the researchers facilitated to gather the participants' views (Figure 5). For their part, the participants identified their own patterns and variations in their social behaviours and creative practices by reflecting on portions of the data. Through participation in this process, the research participants together with the researchers were able to make sense of their collective thinking. The evidence arising from these actions were collectively consolidated to support the modification of student and teaching staff behaviours towards learning and engagement in the Communication Design studio.

This study's methodological approach draws upon Wenger's notion of reification (Wenger 2000). The creation and use of artefacts arising from the methods, such as the GoPro® and Snapchat® tools, can foster and guide reflection and develop affect. These methods provided a balance between reification (meaning making into a concrete artefact) and participation. The cross-case reflection activities undertaken individually and as part of a wider group facilitated continual change and mutual adjustment of the participants' thinking processes. This duality was key to capturing the tensions emerging from the two differing pedagogical approaches to Communication Design studio education in the two case studies. This methodological approach to reflection, in and on action, provides a framework of contemplative thinking. The participants wanted to understand their studio processes and experiences and considered their new perspectives of their developing feelings, confidence and actions towards these (Schön 1984, 1990).

As a community, the participants from each case study were continuously making meaning of their contexts and studio activities, and this opportunity for participants to reflect created the data for this study. The research methods chosen for this study sought to intentionally move away from objective measurement towards reflexive meaning making of the personal stories, opinions and experiences using the participatory approach.

Conclusion

Through a process of critical thinking, collaboration in the student community, and reflective evaluation of the research activities in each case study, the researchers sought to develop an explicit exploration of the role of the studio and classroom-based learning spaces of Communication Design within an art school in the UK and the college of art in Australia. This research study has focused on students' meaning making in relation to the developing awareness of their contemporary learning spaces in studio learning; the value judgements they placed on these newly acquired insights; their evaluation of the impact of their educational environments on their engagement, learning and practice; and in terms of the future development of their own creative practice in relation to Communication Design education.

The orientation of this investigation was derived from meaning making of the critical narratives that occurred within the case studies, framed by a view of experience that is studied by 'listening, observing, living alongside each other, and writing and interpreting' (Clandinin 2007, 42–3; 2013). The language arising from the lived experiences allowed the participants and the researchers to make judgements from the stories. Representing narratives of experience in ways that show temporality, sociality and place breaks down the usual barriers between researchers and their subjects. In this way, emotional experiences are highlighted and emphasised

as the process becomes critical to the investigation (Ellis & Bochner 2000, cited in Noffke & Somekh 2009, 69).

The participants in Case Study 1 assumed a greater role as independent researchers and although the data contributions from the participants in Case Study 2 are equally valuable and insightful, the students were invested less as researchers in the study, although they sought to have their voices heard equally. The high engagement levels by the participants of the two visual methods reported in this article – the GoPro® filming and the Snapchat® mobile application – far outweighed the ethical challenges presented by these tools as research methods.

Although there is little evidence of a definitive ethical guide to using social media in education, there were significant advantages using social media and video-based research methods as data gathering tools. Data was much more readily generated by the participants in each case study in a spontaneous manner and in relation to the volume of data produced for analysis. Students, in effect, became investigators of their own practice through engagement in a rigorous set of visual methods when invited to collaborate directly with the methods which placed the tools directly into their hands.

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