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**Making the invisible visible: using visual
research techniques to explore the
workplace experiences of volunteers in a
hospice.'**

**School of Education and Professional Development
Annual PGR Research Conference – Tuesday 14 April 2015**

Liz Dixon

Overview

- Background to my research study
- Key research aims and questions
- Characteristics of hospices
- Volunteers in hospices
- Rationale for the methodological approach
- **Methods used: Challenges and solutions**
- **Emerging ideas**

Background to my research

- Year 2 of a PhD
- Research is looking at the everyday work of volunteers and paid staff in a hospice.
- Ethnographic case study
- Research methods include:
 - Observation and shadowing within the hospice
 - Attending hospice meetings
 - Formal and informal interviews
 - Metaphorical modelling : group sessions based on the principles of LEGO® Serious Play® (LEGO® Open-source).

LEGO Serious Play

The screenshot shows the LEGO Serious Play website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the following links: Home, Products, Games, Create & Share, Videos, and Shop. A search bar is located to the right of these links, along with a 'Change Region' dropdown and 'LOG IN' and 'REGISTER' buttons. Below the navigation bar, the main content area features the 'LEGO SERIOUSPLAY' logo. On the left side, there is a vertical menu with the following items: THE METHOD, LEVERAGE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EXPERTISE, BACKGROUND, FACILITATOR, MATERIAL, TRADEMARK GUIDELINES, CONTACT, and FAQ. The central part of the page displays a large image of several LEGO minifigures standing on a platform made of colorful gears (red, blue, yellow, green). The minifigures are dressed in various outfits, including a blue suit with a top hat, a white uniform with a cap, and a white shirt with a red hard hat. The background is a light blue gradient.

<http://www.lego.com/en-us/seriousplay/>

David Gauntlett : 'Making is Connecting'



- A process of discovery and having ideas *through* the process of making. In particular, taking time to make something, using the hands, gave people the opportunity to clarify thoughts or feelings, and to see the subject-matter in a new light. And having an image or physical object enabled them to communicate and connect with other people more directly.

(Gauntlett,D.2011:4)

Examples of my earlier work in other settings.



Main aims of the research

- To identify the contribution volunteers make to a hospice.
- To enhance understanding of the relationships between paid staff and volunteers
- To contribute to the development of theories of situated workplace learning.
- To inform the policy and practice of using volunteers in a hospice.
- To build the research capacity of an independent organization within the voluntary sector.

Initial research questions

- What contribution do volunteers make within a hospice?
- What is the volunteer role as perceived by volunteers and by paid staff?
- What is the nature of the relationship between paid staff and volunteers?
- How do volunteers learn through hospice work? What are the formal, informal and emotional components of their learning?
- What external factors impact on the role and learning of hospice volunteers?
- How adequate is situated learning in explicating this learning?

Development of the hospice movement

- 1967 : World's first modern hospice founded in London - St Christopher's
- Network of independent hospices developed within the UK
- Provide holistic, palliative care to people in the final stages of life
- Palliative end of life care has now developed into a complex medical specialism in its own right
- Hospices operate within the charitable sector
- Workforce has always included both volunteers and paid staff in all aspects of the service they provide

Some 'facts and figures'

- £1.6 million spent per day on hospice care
- Only one third of that cost met by government
- UK volunteer workforce approx 70 000 in adult hospices
- Economic value of volunteers in independent hospices estimated to be over £112 million per year (Help the Hospices 2014)
- Increasing demand for volunteers as hospices expand their services.

Case study : Hospice details

- Situated in North of England, opened in 1981
- Purpose built 12 bedded In-Patient Unit (IPU) and Day Hospice opened in 1995
- Currently 492 volunteers registered with the hospice
- Roles include: IPU, Day hospice, Drivers, Receptionists, Gardening, Fundraising, Charity Shops, Board of Directors
- Personal involvement : significance of dual role

Researching in a hospice

- Complexity of hospice work and the volunteer role
- Published research into volunteers and informal learning is scarce (Duguid, Slade, and Schugurensky 2006).
- Workplace learning
 - Visible : often associated with Induction training and specific skills
 - Invisible learning (DeVault 1994, Daniels, A. K. 1987).
- Whilst literature exists about formal, informal (or non-formal) and emotional aspects of workplace learning, they are often explored as distinct and different concepts, and the literature which addresses these concepts together is limited (Benozzo and Colley 2012).
- Emotional component of learning in hospices : death and dying, relationships and perceptions
- A review of research methods commonly used in end of life care research, concluded that research in this field using creative, representational methods to enable self-expression is underdeveloped (Goodman, Froggatt and Mathie 2012).

Preliminary steps leading up to the Lego sessions

- Observation and shadowing
- Attending meetings – Board, Sub-committees, Volunteers
- Interviews
- At the moment I am still working through these preparatory stages.

What is Metaphorical modelling?

- Metaphorical modelling involves participants coming together in a group of 4-6 participants and building models using the principles of LEGO® Serious Play® (LEGO® Open-source).
- An informal and unstructured exchange of ideas as opposed to a highly structured and one-way extraction of information.
(Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2006:189)

‘ ‘Playful’ approach

- ‘Playful’ approach helps to address issues of
 - ‘Top of the head’ responses
 - Inhibitions
 - Opportunity to ‘work through’ responses
 - Capturing complexity : role, workplace learning, emotion and relationships



Rationale for using visual methods

- My own prior experience using the technique:
 - Teaching and learning,
 - Other research,
 - With my supervisors as a reflective tool to discuss the research process and the role of the supervisor.
- Advantages
 - Combines individual responses as in interviews, with group interactions characteristic of focus groups
 - More considered, expansive responses
 - Hearing the stories of others – organisational development
 - Novelty – encourages participation
 - Staff gain experience of a technique which might then be used more widely in the hospice.

Explaining the approach

- Volunteers' meetings as a 'gateway'
- My role and the research
- Photos of Lego sessions
- Profile of the participants
- Participatory, fun nature of the sessions

The Lego Process



Making models : Important stages in the process

Kinaesthetic thinking

Thinking while you're doing

Thinking with your hands

Reflective conversation

Talking with a visual



Important stages in the process: Preparation



Important preliminary stages



- Playtime with the materials
- Make something simple eg a creature
- Introduce metaphor by making a change to the simple model
- Move into making more complex representations

Playing about



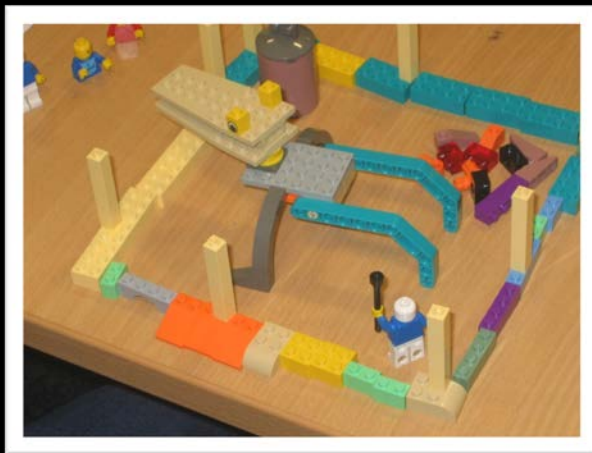
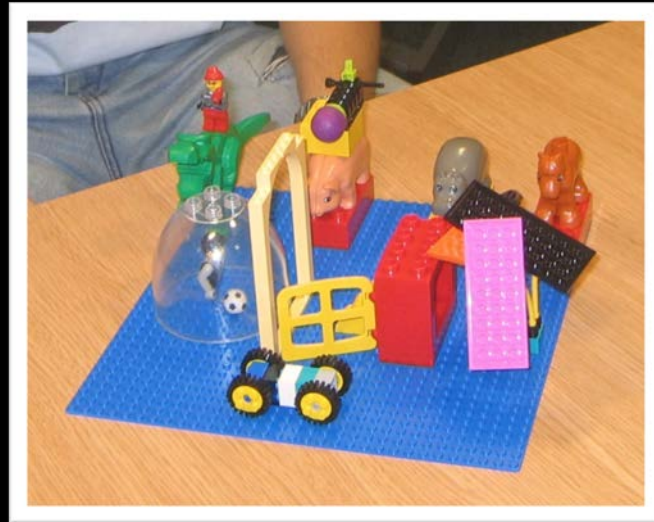
Simple models

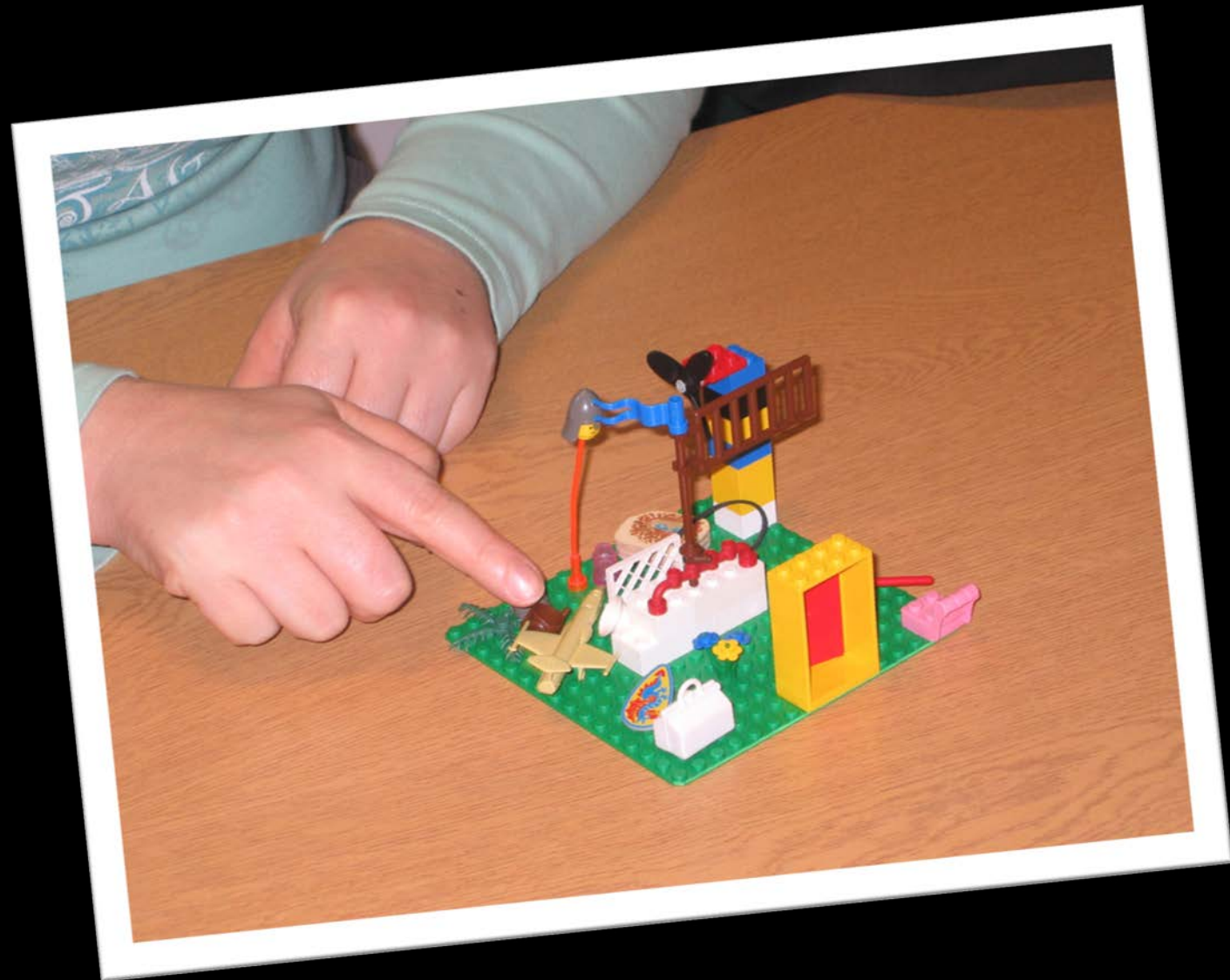


More complex ideas



Metaphors provide useful windows into participants' thinking





Focus on detail, return to particular points

Independent but Collaborative



Private becomes public

“ Stuttering interpretations ”

‘We know and discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell.

(Lieblich et al 1998:7)



Limitations and practical considerations

- Time and space available in a workplace setting
- Danger that 'style and the look' may take precedence over content, meaning and message
- Participants' response to the technique
- Group mix – volunteers, staff, mix ?
- Management of any organisational issues that emerge

Lego modelling – more pros and cons

- Not naïve in claiming that these methods allow some sort of privileged access to the participants 'inner self' Rather that for some participants the model can act as prompt to aide recall / building of ideas. Stimulus to aid discussion(Buckingham 2009).
- It will not be a panacea for all – some may find the activity challenging in the same way as some are overawed and uncomfortable in an interview or focus group. Participants who see themselves as 'not creative' might be constrained by the method.
- It does afford some possibility of sharing of ideas within the group but unlike a focus group the key points are not determined by individuals who then influence the direction of the discussion. That said it will still be influenced by the group dynamic.
- Most participants seem to enjoy the 'return to childhood' and the opportunity to play.

....' most approaches to social research requires participants to produce *instant* descriptions of their views, opinions or responses, in language.

...Most people can't really provide accurate descriptions of why they do things, or like things - let alone their identities and motivations - as soon as you ask them. But most language-based studies capture and preserve those most instant responses as 'data.'

Gauntlett, David and Holzwarth, Peter (2006) Creative and visual methods for exploring identities'.
Visual Studies, 21:1, 82-91

Next steps

Further information

Practical tips for using the technique – available at the end of the session

First of two video clips by David Gauntlett summarising his use of Lego Serious Play in representing identities

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtS24lqluq0>



Thank you for listening



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