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Crafting the Community

Claire Barber

Abstract

Purpose – Crafting the Community is a volunteering project run by the Textiles Department at the University of Huddersfield to promote and deliver textile craft activities to the wider community. The purpose of this paper is to explore how volunteering can be a powerful tool for enriching peoples' lives while deepening students' textile-related competencies through placing their learning in social and communal settings.

Design/methodology/approach – Initially the paper will articulate how the project has been developed to bring innovation to the forefront of the curriculum, equipping students with tools for playing a meaningful and constructive role in society. Subsequently the paper will investigate how volunteering can be used to affect real-life changes in homelessness, archival threats and rural transport.

Findings – The paper uses a case study approach to realise the vision of Crafting the Community that enables students to put into practice their learning while capturing the imagination of local communities.

Social implications – As active players in society, staff, students and external partners create an engaged and interrelated learning experience as an evolving process, mimicking the repetitiveness and structure of the warp and weft of cloth itself.

Originality/value – In response to emerging debates concerning the value, relevance and impact of cloth on societies today the project's aim is to share the course's own unique philosophy and insight into the importance of a practical and creative engagement with materials and processes in the wider community. This paper would be suitable for academics that who are interested in textile culture and emergent textile volunteering and socially engaged practices in the public realm.

Introduction

To date *Crafting the Community* has involved over two hundred individual student volunteers and five staff volunteers working across more than thirty projects. It includes students in a wide range of experiences of community centred approaches pertinent to textile craft practices today. The projects are intended to imbue cloth with roles in wider society, involving people who are economically, socially and/or culturally under represented. There has been a growing recognition within Higher Education of the benefits of volunteering to increase students' employability and experiences (Brewis, 2011). The resourcefulness that students develop in a wide range of social circumstances results in a range of *soft* skills that recognises the value of volunteering for bringing people together and to instigate positive social and environmental change (Index, 2012).

The first time volunteering emerged in the Higher Educational system was in the eighteenth century when religious societies were formed at universities involving volunteers visiting vulnerable people in society (Brewis, 2011:4). Since then, volunteering has developed in a number of ways within Higher Education. But it was not until the 1990s

that there was a shift from student-led community action towards an integration of volunteering into the curriculum. *Crafting the Community* emerges from the latter and a growing trend towards placing volunteering into accredited modules. It was initiated in 2002, through funding from the Higher Education Active Community Fund (Macbeth, 2011:54) and the Labour Government's (1997-2010) early commitment into encouraging more young people to volunteer.

For the first seven years from its inception in 2002 Penny Macbeth, former subject leader of the undergraduate Textile Crafts course, was custodian of this enterprise. As stated in the preface to *Outside: Activating Cloth to Enhance the Way We* Live, this seemingly simple venture, conducted in parallel with the taught curriculum, successfully removed academic boundaries within and beyond the university campus "bringing the pulse of collaboration to a contemporary textile art and crafts practice" (Barber and Macbeth, 2014:xi). The author inherited *Crafting the Community* in 2009 after twenty years' experience as an artist working on multiple projects in social contexts. It was found that working on installations with indigenous Australians or developing a workshop with wheelchair users in Wales calls for quite different abilities. Moreover, these projects depend upon expertise that is often deemed to be located outside the arts environment such as skills of administration, collaboration, public speaking, budgeting, application form writing and timetabling. Similarly, *Crafting the Community* inspired the bringing together of multiple and diverse skills that were deemed relevant to a contemporary practitioner into an academic context so that the direction of teaching and learning is commensurable with professional practice. While *Crafting the Community* sought to develop specific volunteering activities with local charities, galleries, transport systems, schools and

archives so that students could acquire their understanding through contextualising their practice in real-life scenarios, in contrast to the abstract process of making often encountered in the textiles studio.

In *Bursting the Bubble: Students, Volunteering & the Community* the report states how some students struggle to find a way to get started in volunteering (Brewis *et al.*, 2010). It found that volunteering was rarely supported by academics within their course of study and that they were unsure of the processes available to support their volunteering activity. The research into volunteering found that getting started is a significant psychological barrier to involvement at university. The report stated that "Nearly one-third of all the students who were not volunteering had not become involved at university because they did not know how to", while one student commented "It is easy to play sports at uni, it is harder to find out how to get into things like volunteering" (Brewis *et al.*, 2010:56). A number of steps take place to introduce *Crafting the Community* into the textiles curriculum to safeguard it as a feasible activity for all textile students. Firstly students are presented with a series of volunteering projects wherein the project partners come to the university to meet the students and explain their role in each project and the volunteering charity or organisation they are representing. Thereafter students and staff conduct a range of on-site visits to help students locate the places where they may be volunteering. Students are invited to compose letters of application, stating which project they would like to be involved with and why. These letters are assessed and students' choices are selected according to their personal aims and their previous experience. Finally students are allocated to a project, mirroring a real life scenario relevant to the arts and crafts sector.

The implementation of a student's volunteering-based project involves continual processes of consultation, both with members of the student's peer group and with the main project partners. The development of weekly blogs is used to discuss issues relating to their project and hurdles they may have had to overcome. Concurrently a tool kit of skills is offered during weekly workshops and seminars to support students' volunteering-based projects. It includes ways of presenting ideas effectively and appropriately, collaborative forms of engagement, working successfully with others, understanding group dynamics, issues of health & safety, ethics and compiling a written evaluation report.

During the initial stages of each project students are asked to discuss their proposed contribution to it in front of the project partners. The constraints of working within a real-life context are exploited to emphasize many aspects of participatory methods of social engagement. A lecture programme follows, helping students to position themselves as thinking and writing practitioners and encouraging them to explore how textile practitioners and artists work through socially engaged practices. This programme compliments the ongoing development of the students live volunteering projects. A written project evaluation report is then presented by students demonstrating their individual experiences of their projects. They are reflective pieces of writing that capture students' experiences within their projects and contributing a percentage of the student's final assessments.

Each project is evaluated not only on the traditional design parameters such as aesthetics and use of materials, but also on the quality of collaboration and consultation with external partners. Additionally students are assessed on their ability to articulate and contextualise their projects within a socially engaged context. They have the opportunity to

demonstrate their ability to think critically while challenging their own perspectives and assumptions within a volunteering environment.

Frances Stevenson has considered ways in which the individual creative exploration becomes a way of "finding oneself (finding meaning)" that can be embedded into a textile students' education through a practical and logical sequence involving participatory craft based activities (Stevenson 2010: 106). This is responsive to a characteristic within the British art and design educational system that observes ideas formulated at the Bauhaus that considers students' creative practice in relation to contemporary society. This is supported by one the founding Bauhaus principles which states that: "the student architect or designer should be offered no refuge in the past but should be equipped for the modern world in its various aspects, artistic, technical, social, economic, spiritual, so that he may function in society not as a decorator but as a vital participant" (Barr 1938: 6). These ideals continue to be designed into art and design educational formats today. For example, one of the motivations for the Danish Movement *Index: Design to Improve Life Education* is to bring students into real-life challenges in the development of a meaningful learning experience that is an integral part of community life (Bjørn 2012). A progressive and experimental education in public art practice is developed by Faye Carey at Chelsea School of Art, London (Carey 2009: 103-119), while Claire Bishop takes this one step further through firmly positioning experimental socially engaged pedagogic projects as art (Bishop 2012: 241-275). The University of Huddersfield, placed on the site of a post-industrial town, provides the context in which to explore volunteering within the curriculum from the author's distinctive perspective as a textile artist. Like Bishop, what is proposed encourages new ways of thinking about

pedagogue as having a social function in local community contexts. While Bishop's examination of contemporary pedagogy cannot be appreciated without considering her theories relating to participatory art, the authors thinking and investigation is indebted to textiles as a social and group endeavour to share and learn new skills. In order for *Crafting the Community* to be compatible with this community-centred approach it requires students to respond, develop and implement ideas for society in the live community contexts the project demands.

Case Studies

"I truly enjoyed working towards the final results of this project and working with such a great group. Although it was hard work and to be a professional craft practitioner within the community you have to be highly motivated to achieve the work that's best for who you're working for. If I was to go forward in life and continue this kind of work, I would want to be working for a cause or issue that I felt strongly about such as this project." Second Year Textile Crafts student, University of Huddersfield, Project Evaluation Report, 2012.

Using a case study approach the author will articulate three distinct volunteering projects that have developed over the last few years to demonstrate the application of textiles knowledge and skills to real-world scenarios encountered in the local community. They have been chosen as they present a rich juxtaposition between textiles created for traditional public art contexts alongside more private and discreet interventions created with a particular recipient in mind. Through capturing both personal insights and anecdotal evidence

the author will explore how staff and students have become shared partners, shaping their experiences in a meaningful way according to their skills, insights, beliefs and abilities. The case studies are highly contrasting and will attempt to demonstrate how volunteering can be a powerful tool for enriching peoples' lives while deepening students' textile-related competencies through placing their learning in social and communal settings.

The benefits to students are difficult to quantify. For some students it is not a popular choice as it relinquishes a personal vision for the collective, which presents an uncomfortable alternative to the predominantly self-directed model of practice they engage in the textile studio, both in its singular textile craft-based production and presentation. For other students the projects will challenge their initiative to create links with others that will develop beyond the duration of a project. While for others they consider fresh ways to consider cloth in socially engaged and participatory forms of expression:

> "My hope is that through craft practice a new audience can be introduced to the power of cloth. Working at festivals I plan to raise the possibility of a renewed society, targeting the very people who are creating waste to realise their actions and embrace the opportunity cloth offers to create positive change within society and within lives." Second Year Textile Crafts student, Project Evaluation Report, 2012.

In gathering data for this paper the author has drawn on a range of first hand experiences as an artist and lecturer. This occurred through developing the concepts for socially engaged projects with undergraduate students and through an examination of the practical constraints of working within volunteering projects in the West Yorkshire region involving a range of interviews and focus groups with external partners and community

organisations. Further issues relating to crafting in community contexts were identified through the development of social enterprise projects that were tested and analysed within a range of circumstances, situations and locations. This enabled an understanding of how students and communities would respond to a range of projects and whether they were deemed achievable within the academic constraints of a University curriculum and the real life parameters of a community project. The personal reflections that students and external partners presented during informal discussion groups assisted in formulating generalized theories about how textiles could bring visibility to the overlooked in society involving people who are economically, socially and/or culturally isolated and under-represented. This could inspire future research.

1. *The Sleeping Bag Project*

June Hill works on a range of community projects in her hometown of Bradford supporting those who are at risk of social isolation and living in the deprived inner city area (Hill, 2014:2). Hill is both a passionate volunteer and a creative and theoretical thinker. In the summer of 2009 Hill gently posed the idea of salvaging sleeping bags left at the end of the Leeds Music Festival for re-use by homeless guests at a forthcoming winter shelter in Bradford. Soon Hill and the author were talking eagerly about how the sleeping bags could provide an indication of care and homeliness through the creative processes of washing and crafting the salvaged sleeping bags for individuals they were never likely to meet. The following year permission was received for them to experience the aftermath of Leeds Music Festival while salvaging sleeping bags. In the author's essay *Outside Intervention* a range of conflicting and mixed emotions at seeing vast scale of remnants left at the end of a music festival are expressed.

The prospect of the venture raised three questions, namely: How do you inspire and motivate textile students, predominantly interested in commercial design to participate in a project with the ambition of benefiting others? How can a creative association with the material of the sleeping bag be sustained, while recognising the severity of peoples' circumstances in the homeless shelter? How can the project function and relate to the wider community, providing a sustainable lifespan beyond an academic context?

To begin to answer these questions a project brief was placed within Crafting the Community called *Customising sleeping bags for people without homes* that subsequently became known as *The Sleeping Bag Project*. In it, students were invited to personalise a salvaged sleeping bag for a guest at a homeless shelter in Bradford over the winter months. Together, staff and student volunteers visited shelters, talked with individuals who had been homeless, washed salvaged sleeping bags in their washing machines, had health and safety training in working with homeless guests in shelters and began to consider how craft skills could be applied through innovations in giving. The author worked alongside students, washing and preparing sleeping bags for craft intervention, developing art-work for local and international exhibitions and meeting curators and other volunteers. The students exhibited crafted sleeping bags at the North Light Gallery, Huddersfield and at Bradford Cathedral in 2011. Students' enthusiasm even led them to be crafting the sleeping bags in the university corridors in between their lectures.

In 2012, *The Sleeping Bag Project* at the Knitting and Stitching Show in Harrogate received over twenty thousand visitors over the course of five days. It was a bold decision by the director of the exhibition to include it within the scheduling, in view of its illustrious
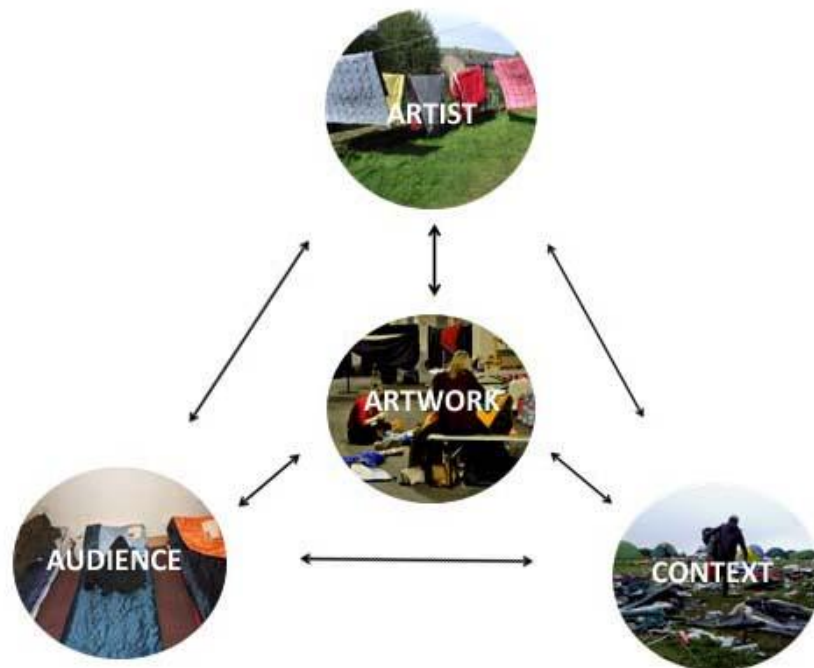
international reputation linked to designer clothes and textiles that embody the sensuality of aesthetics and form.

Occupying a vast fifty thousand square foot underground space, and in close proximity with the textiles presented upstairs, *The Sleeping Bag Project* provided a broader perception of fabric. Visitors were confronted with the smell of washing powder, the sound of washing machines, the music of buskers, rows of drying sleeping bags, and a recreation of the post-music festival grounds. Visitors were invited to participate in crafting activities at craft zones dotted around the space. Through involving others in the washing, preparing and crafting of sleeping bags, participants in the project brought something of their own identity into the object, transforming a discarded consumer good created for efficiency and low production costs into an item of tenderness and care. Those who make a contribution to The Sleeping Bag Project know very well that they can never fully solve the problem of homelessness. But this is also its potential: ethical interventions begin their life with the very smallest of empathic gestures. The sewing of a pocket into freshly laundered sleeping bag material, using embroidery to embellish personal messages, holding conversations with oneself or with others about what it might be like to be on the streets, or using a needle and thread to think outside the limits of one's own environment, are all gestures that explore the intertwining relationships between feeling and thinking through the landscape of textile craft.

Members of the homeless community who have received hand-crafted, individualized sleeping bags have commented on how important it is for their morale to receive something that is distinct and individual rather than merely second-hand, and helps give them some dignity and respect. "People in this place are doing an amazing job for homeless people. These people I tell you have a BIG heart….BIG patience honestly BIG heart" MP. "What an amazing

thing to do for us…most people walk by and turn their noses up. This has given me hope. I was worried about spending Christmas on the streets but now I don't have to. I am worried about what I will do when the project ends" DG. While some volunteers were encouraged by the contribution stating that: "We didn't need to do any of this. We could have just given out the sleeping bags, but the extra care and thought that went into personalising them meant a great deal to individuals who are generally overlooked. It was also an encouragement to the organisers as they looked to maintain the project and move it on." Volunteer, e-mail extract received 11th May 2011.

The orchestration of varying levels of social connection and interaction running through the project fundamentally increases the scale and qualitative worth of the sleeping bag.

This diagram, based on the socially interactive model of art practice by artist Stephen Willats, (Willats, 2012) demonstrates *The Sleeping Bag Project* as a model of a

practice which revolves within a cycle of interaction between artists, contexts, audiences and artwork.

As the project built momentum the author discovered that she was helping to orchestrate its presentation while watching the project evolve to become a sustainable venture beyond an academic context. For example, an undergraduate textile student received an UnLtd Social Entrepreneurship Award to develop this project at music festivals across the UK in 2011. Subsequently she passed on the brief to students at her former college in Nottingham. Recently a colleague interviewed a student who had *The Sleeping Bag Project* in her portfolio, showing the cycle of the project returning to the institution where it was formed.

Currently, a strand of *The Sleeping Bag Project* called *Beyond the Sleeping Bag: Home Starter Packs* is being developed. Home starter packs are distributed by a local charity called Inn Churches, who aim to support those who have experienced homelessness and are about to set up their new homes. Home starter packs are provided to give people the basics they will need and the type of things they may contain includes kitchen utensils, pots and pans, bed linen and towels. The brief asks students to consider inserting something to the home starter pack that isn't necessarily practical, but may help to bring a positive outlook to someone setting up a new home.

In the year 2014 a small group of students considered using their textile skills to embellish a cushion to be inserted into a home starter pack. It was recognised by the students that by involving more than one person in the incremental processes in making a cushion an object may be imbued with an even greater emotional value than one made alone. This led them to design workshops with members of Live at Home, a group that

supports older people in the local community. Through stimulating an inter-generational participation in the design of the cushions, the students demonstrated how materials can bring people together and facilitate a collective empathetic gesture through an interpretation of stitch.

The students' awareness of the needs of an older community enables the project to function effectively. However, working within the unexpected encounters of a community-based project means that inevitably things don't always go as planned, as a student reflected in her final report: "We encountered potential barriers and obstacles we had not previously thought of such as some of the male members perhaps wanting to participate in sewing of craft activity, the hindrance of eyesight and hearing problems, as well as the fairly small time frame to conduct the workshops." Her peer group documented the adjustments that took place to ensure everyone could be involved through "using as large print as possible, pre-threading needles, speaking loudly and clearly, as well as aiming to make the sessions fun and engaging by sitting and talking with the participants, were all steps we took to meet the needs of the group." The students recognised the importance of creating printed tags with each cushion, explaining who had made a contribution as a way of demonstrating through the transformative processes of making, the idea that materials and textile processes are more than simply a 'means-to-an-end'.

2. *Archival Interventions*

In the summer of 2011 the author visited the Knit and Crochet Guild (KCG) archive in the small rural village of Scholes on the outskirts of Holmfirth, Yorkshire. She was there to meet Barbara Smith, Publications Curator and Angharad Thomas, Textiles Archivist of

the KCG archive, at what is said to be the largest collection of domestic knit and crochet pieces in the United Kingdom. On entering the chill of a large warehouse, the author was confronted by a complex shelving unit straining under the weight of a diverse collection of knit magazines, implements and gadgets, and stacked banana boxes, with scribbled notes in black marker pen on the fronts: hats - toys - baby's booties - cushions - gloves. In contrast to more sophisticated archives that have been fully digitised and comprehensively catalogued, this archive provided a rare moment of intimate discovery. A further investigation of some carefully made knitted artefacts, scrolled into boxes and bags and laid out on long tables seemed to tell many personal narratives about the circumstances surrounding their making and the many hours in their production. Smith, herself a keen knitter, was wearing a jumper she had made from a pattern in the archive that she had adapted from a 1920's cardigan, developing complex cable knit in soft mohair yarn. While having a strong coffee in the warmth of their office upstairs, Barbara and Angharad recounted some facts about the KCG: that the KCG was established in 1978 and currently has approximately 500 members and that the KCG collection consists of several thousand knitting and crochet-related items in the process of being catalogued by volunteers. Later, the author visited the archive with her colleagues and then presented a brief placed within Crafting the Community called *Archival Interventions*. The brief invites students to work in consultation with volunteers at KCG having responsibilities to organise, catalogue, archive and research materials from the collection. They are also asked to consider concepts of the archive from practitioner perspectives and determine how they engage with archives, while reflecting on what constitutes an archival intervention in their own practice. So what

new reflective insights and narratives might students encounter when they make and use archival materials as part of their practice?

The impact of the *Archival Interventions* volunteering at the KCG archive has increased students' understanding of the process of archiving while enabling them to have a contemporary engagement with the past when they actively produce work in response to the materials in the archive. A group of three knit students were curious about how pieces were made and enquired about some of the techniques used. Thus, the project became as much about valuing the archive as a collection of artefacts, as about the value of sharing knowledge with an older generation of knit enthusiasts. All of the students participating in Crafting the Community are expected to maintain an ongoing journal and write an evaluation report which summarises their personal response to their live project. One students wrote: "I sat down with Ruth, a fellow volunteer, and Barbara, to talk through knit patterns that I had a particular interest in and decipher from the pattern what I would need to know in order to knit a swatch of fabric from the pattern [.....] and with doing so, learning new techniques and methods to further my own practice in the knit specialism."

For some students their active use of archiving informs how they create their own technical and research files where they organise, categorise and articulate the methods of their own practice. For other students their volunteering leads them to encounter archival themes in their own lives, through family inheritances and themes of memory and recollection. One student in particular was so enthused by the concept of hoarding that she interviewed her parents and grandfather, and included images of her grandfather's shed in her essay before probing into why they chose not to throw items away. For others, the archive has become a spring-board for new work, through its use for steering new trends;

or an exploration of the journey through yarn bombing (a type of graffiti or street art that employs colourful displays of knitted or crocheted yarn), or through deepening an exploration of the stories embedded within the archive itself.

At the start of the *Archival Interventions* project what emerged was a recognition of the sheer volume of hand-crafted textiles and artefacts presented at the archive that could so easily have been thrown away or discarded. UNESCO recognised the fear of losing archives worldwide through establishing 'The Memory of the World' Programme in 1992 (UNESCO, 1992). Through archiving artefacts from a mostly undervalued domestic craft heritage, places assumed worth in the lives of people who were involved in the making process. Viewed in isolation these knit and crochet pieces may be taken as naïve, driven by what could be termed "inner compulsions to create without reference to the marketplace, academic values or fashion" (McMillan *et al.*, 2014: 7). However, what has been revealed is not just the emergence of interesting artefacts which the archive preserves, but also the emergence of spirited relationships between older volunteers and a younger cohort of textile students that may continue beyond the completion of the project.

As a lecturer the author recognises the contribution the volunteers at KCG bring to students practice, demonstrating a wisdom, technical dexterity and expertise in knit and crochet that has been accomplished through many hours' involvement in their craft. For KCG members the archive requires a newer generation of volunteers to bring some of the dormant artefacts to life, to ensure it is a resilient collection capable of informing disparate interpretations. Conversely, student volunteers discover new connections between the archive and their own themes that enrich their textile specialisms with new meaning and purpose through contemporising the past. For example the theme of unravelling became

pertinent to a student's enquiry into unfinished knitted artefacts, where the trace of the process of knitting was left in the crimp of the soft woollen threads. She was inspired by the pioneering research of forensic scientist Edmond Locard who considers the precept that every physical contact exhibits a trace of its occurrence. This student is now working at the KCG archive to enable her to continue an exploration into the relationship between the manner in which the fragile items of knit and crochet are archived and the process of charting data within a forensic science laboratory where her parents work.

The intuitive, hands-on enquiry into the KCG archive has provided students with an opportunity to engage in knowledge acquisition through discovery, learning through making, sharing and imparting new skills, and inter-generational learning and even in experiencing the archive in a predominantly digitised world. Ultimately they realise that the archive is always at risk from the threat of disappearing through neglect.

3. *Craft on the Penistone Line*

The Penistone Line Partnership is a voluntary organisation which encourages and promotes community involvement along the Penistone railway line, running between Sheffield and Huddersfield. It provides views of Yorkshire terrace stone houses that are intermittently replaced by expansive craggy landscape featuring disused textile mills still covered in a smoky black patina from their former industrial past. Apart from providing a romantic train journey it is also a vulnerable public transport provision, and needs to increase its passenger numbers during off-peak hours so that it can introduce a half-hourly service to the communities it serves. When Crafting the Community was approached by Rowena Chantler, Community Rail Officer of the Penistone Line Partnership in 2010 to

collaborate and support a community project on trains, the University of Huddersfield was keen to promote this very special line and to extend students' experience of social engagement through tackling themes of rural public transport.

The collaboration involved students working in groups while devising and creating interactive art and craft related projects and activities involving passengers of varying backgrounds and age groups on trains and at stations alongside the Penistone Line. They developed solutions to low passenger numbers during off peak hours thereby developing techniques that re-positioned their textile practice in surprising and unexpected ways. Textiles has a long history of use in public transport, with 'moquette' fabrics for seating on rail services still in production in the nearby town of Meltham just seven miles from the University of Huddersfield campus. However, *Craft on the Penistone Line* is presenting a less orthodox use of fabric in a rural transport setting to reveal material qualities that may otherwise go overlooked.

As mentioned earlier it is often 'getting started' which deters students from volunteering. Furthermore, as stated in *The Value of Community Rail Volunteering* issued by the Association of Community Rail Partnership the majority of local volunteers who work on public trains are not of the same demographic background as our predominantly female cohort of young textile students. It specifies that: "70% are male, 68% are aged over 55, just 4% are under 35" (Independent Rail Consultancy Group (IRCG), 2009: 18). Current examples of targeting volunteers within Higher Education tend to include one-off 'blitz' events, involving the cleaning and tidying of stations. The report produced a questionnaire to find out why younger people were not volunteering. Most replied that "they were not really that interested" (IRCG, 2009: 49). Thus, in order for our collaboration with the

Penistone Line Partnership to be successful it was necessary to find a way of inspiring our textile-cohort to work on meaningful textile related volunteering within a public transport context. What is inferred as a *meaningful* education is captured within a creative learning format that equips students with abilities to think and respond to regional projects as active participants in contemporary society. Their studio based learning is reconsidered, manoeuvred and developed through their encounter with pressing social challenges in the local community to bring out the best in the students while enriching passengers' journey experience and addressing the Penistone Line Partnership's aims to encourage more people to use the trains during off peak times. An example is presented by a group of five undergraduate textile students who created a series of workshops with teenagers from the local Honley High School involving a small stretch of the Penistone Line journey. They produced drawings in response to the sound of the train, marks on paper caused by the movement of the train, and they collected vegetation from the verge sides of stations with which to stain fabric (Tavares *et al.* 2012). Targeting the future generation of train users, these textile students aimed to promote the creative potential of the train journey to the High School children, many of whom take a section of the Penistone Line to get to school.

It can also be the case that students' propositions and proposals may not elicit the response they expect, and in some cases are rejected due to the unfeasibility or logistic concerns of their project proposal. This can cause anxiety, leading to a lack of momentum and confidence in their work. Although there are undoubtedly stresses and strains involved in working in a transport context the perseverance during the three years following the inception of *Craft on the Penistone Line* was rewarded when the students from the textile

department of the University of Huddersfield were awarded Highly Commended in the Community National Rail Awards for their project called 'Stitch the Line'.

Within *Craft on the Penistone Line* students are presented with the option of following a structured brief or a self-directed approach. The example presented above at Honley High School was offered within a structured brief. This encompasses, as a project coordinator, writing a project proposal and outlining the main aims and objects for the brief, while instigating contact with external partners (in this case teachers at the school) prior to the students' involvement. In the case of a self-directed project, students have the opportunity to write the brief themselves. This can be a highly challenging and constructive process acquainting students with processes of negotiation with potential project partners from the outset, guided by their own predetermined vision for their project.

'Stitch the Line' was developed as a self-directed project in the autumn of 2012. The project involved a series of installations that were created specifically for stations on the Penistone Line. However the project was not only conceived to demonstrate students' creative responses to different stations, but was also aimed to highlight examples of textile productivity made by local members of craft clubs and knit and stitch enthusiasts living beside the line. In contrast to the rush of a commuter's day-to-day life, these collective installations, involving community quilts and various knitted artefacts, evoke a slower pace of life and bring domestic homespun activity into the damp chill of the west Yorkshire Penistone air. For one day, textile interventions 'popped up' at stations so that travellers could sit on a comfortable soft-cushioned seat at Silkstone Common, view a quilted narrative of stone buildings and rural scenes at Denby Dale, discern wisps of embroidered organza spinning on fine threads at Lockwood, and view bright versions of transport

signage translated into knit at Berry Brow. The fabrics flickered in the breeze and the train doors closed. The textiles emerged through the heavy autumnal mist at each station. At Barnsley station a metallic sculpture is wrapped in knitted scarves and hats creating a playful juxtaposition between the soft colourful textiles and the grey wrought iron of a public art commission. Through instigating a wide range of community events students brought a vivid presentation of local crafting activity acutely into view.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how the textiles team have worked hard to imbed volunteering into the textile curriculum. This process demands cooperation, trust and shared responsibility, where tasks may be explicitly or implicitly shared according to the students' skills and inclinations. It can lead to advancement in new directions; this can be an extremely positive process but it can also be limiting. When collaborators are not communicating very well an overarching vision can be lost, or disappointment can prevail and a questioning of roles and responsibilities may take place. As the well-known cultural historian Glenn Adamson writes with cautionary note on the limits of collaboration for the contemporary practitioner, "following a collaborative encounter, artists may well find new directions to pursue […] it is only taking ownership of those new vectors that most artists will really make the collaboration worthwhile. What all art requires is a sense of responsibility. And even in the best of all possible worlds that is not something you can give away." (Adamson, 2013: 249).

So why take the time and energy to form a curriculum including community-based volunteering? For students, to confront the complexities of working with communities

outside the institution is undoubtedly a harder choice to make than deciding to work in the familiarity of the university environment. For the outside partners it requires their effort and commitment to meet and work with students, often involving the skill to negotiate with a younger generation. The possibilities of technology present swift and useful research methods. It may seem daunting to participate in one of these projects. For example it is cheaper and quicker to access a world leading archive on-line than to visit the local KCG archive 45 minutes from the university campus, or come face to face with tons of abandoned camping equipment left on a post music festival field. While understanding that there are obvious benefits to new digital technologies one must appreciate that there are also risks involved (NACCCE, 1999: 22). Often concepts become isolated from actual situations, while technological presentations can be misleading and affect students' judgement in real-life encounters.

In the immediate vicinity of the university campus, a type of social exclusion particularly associated with the breakdown of the textile industry and manufacturing in Yorkshire's post-industrial towns and villages can be found. Crafting the Community hopes to engage creatively and resourcefully in this locality, through reconfiguring craft skills involving new social interactions. It can deepen students' powers of creativity as much as their communication, empathic thinking, adaptability and social skills, it puts into practice the traditions of a situated learning theory imbedded in the practical experience, rather than knowledge acquisition in the studio/classroom (Taylor and Payne, 2013: 145). As patterns of work change so do the demands of academia. With a growing emphasis on freelance work, self-employment and entrepreneurial ability an academic qualification is not necessarily enough (NACCCE, 1999: 20). In this context volunteering has major benefits

in demonstrating the student craftsperson's dexterity and creativity when applied to real-life challenges. Additionally it develops students' social aptitudes, resourcefulness and flexibility which are increasingly prioritised in the transience of the work place.

As active players in society, staff, students and external partners are all complicit in challenging Crafting the Community's aim's and vision through re-inventing new forms for the project through its interlocking social structure. Undoubtedly, the most successful impacts of the project on the students experience have included situations when they have taken ownership of projects that they have steered themselves with our external partners. The impact within the university has been confirmed by the students' enthusiasm and sophistication in building links with the community in the creation of meaningful textiles for those who engage. As Crafting the Community has progressed into an assessed and embedded component of the curriculum its importance within the institution is confirmed, helping Crafting the Community lead the way in the creation of a unique and sustainable community engaged learning in textiles within Higher Education. For our external partners it has provided a link with facilities and resources, as much as encouraging textile innovation and intergenerational learning within the community based environment. In this way an engaged learning is created, that builds new networks or deepens existing relationships in an evolving process, mimicking the repetitiveness and structure of the warp and weft of cloth itself.

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