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Playing about with method: using modelling as a tool for data collection

From 2005 to 2008, the WBL project at the University of Huddersfield researched the placement experience of trainee teachers in colleges of further education. We uncovered a polarity of experience characterised by marginalisation, perplexity and disillusionment on the one hand and integration, enthusiasm and development on the other. This diversity of individual experience defies simple classification and mitigates against a 'one size fits all' model of work-based experience. During the research we became aware of the relative power and influence of the interviewer, and in an attempt to weaken what Walford (2007) refers to as the 'classification' and 'framing' inherent within interviews we looked for a less conventional approach to enable the trainees to express themselves using a different format, offering them more choice and ownership of their stories. Drawing on the work of Gauntlett (2007), we used model building as a tool for exploring the work based experience of our trainees.

'It's an alternative way of gathering sociological data, where the expressions are *worked through* (through the process of building in Lego, then talking about it), rather than just being spontaneously generated (as in interviews or focus groups).' Gauntlett & Holzwarth, (2006)

We found that

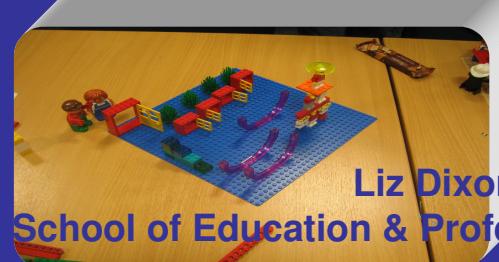
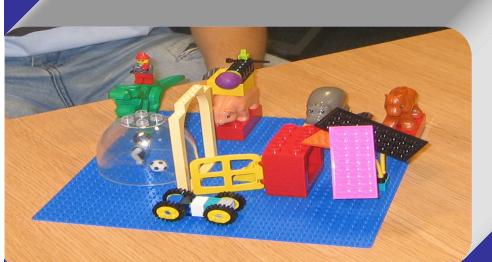
Making a model promotes reflection and allows for reconsideration by the participant.

Participants focus not just on events but feelings, relationships, aspirations, expectations and perceptions.

Producing something tangible shifts the balance of power and locus of control from researcher to participant.

Modelling promotes empowerment and ownership on the part of the participant.

The process enables exploration of the perceptions of an individual within a group.



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