

Methodological Reflections on Analysing Creative Data

Participatory research drawing on Theatre of the Oppressed

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The research:

Use of theatre based methods in research with secondary school students:

- To create a shared space for reflection with students and their teacher on their space for learning
- To engage with embodied knowledge (hooks 1994)
- "Constructing alternative ground rules for communication" (Ellsworth, 1989, p.317)

The method:

- Image theatre is one of the key methods within the critical and participatory Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1995, 2002, etc.).
- Participants critically explore their experiences through collectively created body images
- They "creatively, nonverbally, and dialogically express and develop their perceptions of their world, power structures, and oppressions" (Bogad, 2006, p.49).

Reading (analysing) the image:

- Image theatre is a tool for communication beyond words.
- It is not about understanding the precise meaning of an image created, "but to *feel* those images, to let our memories and imaginations wander" (Boal, 2002, p. 175)
- The reading happens affectively as part of the group process, through "**the multiple mirror of the gaze of others**" a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image" (Boal, 2002, p.175).
- Reading takes place at first **objectively**, "that which is indisputable, since seen by all" (Boal, 1995, p.89), which means first describing shapes, lines, colours, clearly marked identifiers, such as gender, age etc.
- Followed by the "**subjective** – remarks that are or could be prefaced by, 'it seems to me'" (Boal, 1995, p.89), which are associations and interpretations.

A girl, a boy and the teacher are standing in the middle of the room, inside the U shaped tables

Alexis looks like he is confronting his usual teaching position from within the class. The middle space, usually not used in other images or in everyday use/ Duniyah, Mustafa being in the centre, stepping into the circle.

A boy standing in front of teacher's desk, arms folded at his back, looking at class.

Dawid is taking the "engaged" teachers pose - the pleasure of guiding the whole class?

A boy is standing on the side of the teacher's desk, looking at boy on chair.

Usually this spot is where you are sent as punishment, or the SEND seat, Ahmed chose it previously as "place he learns least" - this time he seems to be in complicity with his friend standing on teacher's chair.

A girl is standing in the far corner of the room

Ruksana enjoys having the overview over whole class, space, distance.

A boy standing on teacher's chair facing the class

Sam¹ taking teacher's position however trumping him by standing on his chair, standing above the furniture barrier

Some students are sitting at their desk.

Melanie, Hamza, Saad etc. remain in their seats - disconnected from game? Making use of their right not to participate, which is empowering? Feeling powerful watching the rest without moving themselves?

A girl and a boy standing next to the board, facing the class.

Omari and Lola are standing as if teaching or giving a presentation, is this a place to be a "good" student? Are they giving a presentation? Student led learning? It is not a place out of bounds for students.

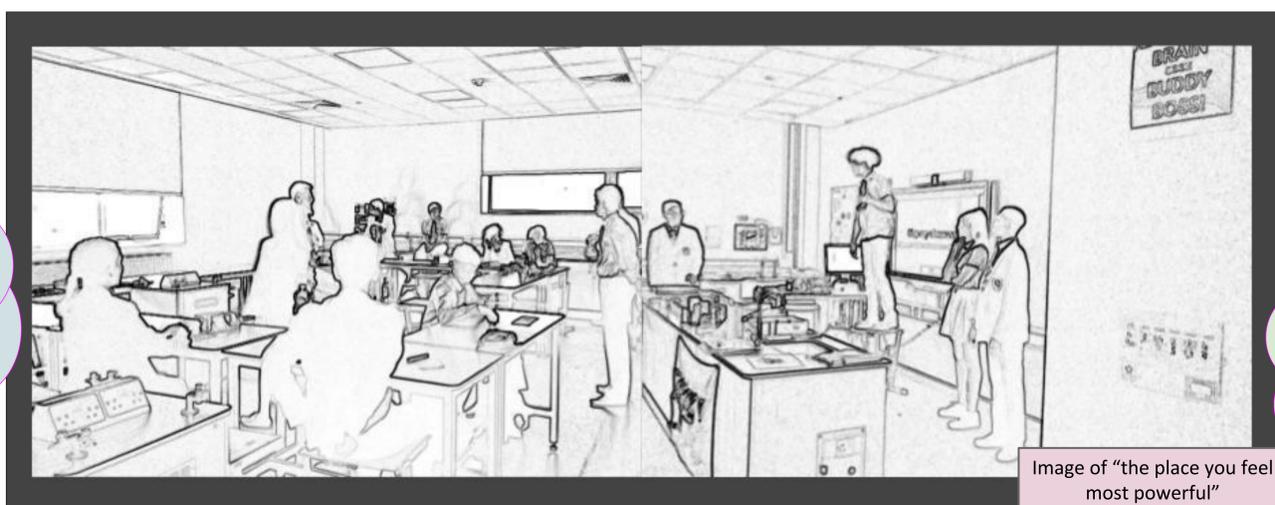


Image of "the place you feel most powerful"

What do you see **objectively**?
"that which is indisputable, since seen by all" (Boal, 1995, p.89)

multiple mirror of the gaze of others

What do you see **subjectively**?
"remarks that are or could be prefaced by, 'it seems to me'" (Boal, 1995, p.89)

Reflections:

- How do I "translate" affective and collective knowledge into academic writing?
- How can I keep the sense of collectivity and shared affect when conducting my analysis?
- What are the implications of this type of affected reading for the research?
- What ethical questions does this type of research methodology raise, for the participants and the researcher?
- Participant observations are "a site of doubt, rather than a confirmation of what exists prior to representation" (Britzman, 2002 p.32).

¹ All names are changed to protect the identity of participants



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