Transcript: Collective Writing and Dialogic Storytelling

[0:00:00]

Fabien Littel: Just by the way of a little bit of an introduction and scene setting, now I'm a third year PhD student at the University of Southampton at the Business School and Uracha and I today are going to be talking about different projects, but we're very much connected by some shared experience and some previous collaboration, so I just wanted to just share that to set the scene before handing over to Uracha. And our collaboration connection started back in 2020 when after 20 years in industry, in HR, I decided to move from industry into academia and to ease myself in I did an MSc in organisation psychology with Birkbeck and this is where I met with Uracha who was, amongst other things, leading the module on selection and assessment and leading it and designing it in a way that was quite inspiring for many of us who have been through the course in a way that is quite critical and eye-opening in relation to the usual mainstream sort of approach and also a way that is very much focused on social justice, on addressing issues of discrimination and many things that again resonated very much for many of us. And that led myself and a couple of other colleagues on the course to collaborate with Uracha on a project of collective writing, the one, well, one of the ones Uracha will be talking to you about in a few minutes. And this was a fantastic experience which then stayed with me in the way that I personally designed and pursued the rest of my research as well in various aspects, into my into my PhD, and what I'll be talking to you about a little bit later as well.

So, when Rebecca talked to me about coming to share some of my work on this seminar with this audience and asked me whether I knew somebody outside of Southampton who could be a good co-speaker, well, it kind of was a no-brainer because in a way, again, we're talking about things that we've branched into maybe some slightly different areas, but we're very much rooted in that shared experience and rooted in, I would say, an approach and values that we very much share. And I hope you'll be able to appreciate as well what kind of brings us together and how our methods that we're presenting today supplement and pair up quite nicely.

So, that's it, just as a way to start, and then I'm handing over to Uracha. Over to you.

Uracha Chatrakul Na Ayudhya: Okay, so this is the title of the talk today, Exploring Collective Writing as a Methodology and a Praxis for Solidarity and Hopeful Resistance. Very long title.

In essence, what I would like to share with you today is my journey into collective writing as a qualitative method that I have been working with and the key here is that there are many different ways to talk about collective writing, and so this is my way of talking about it because, of course, collective writing happens in a collective, not with just one person. So, if we are going to be getting experiences of using this method, it would be fantastic if for another time we could do potentially a collective session on collective writing. But for today, this is my experience and my journey.

Okay, so first, I'd like to say thank you for inviting me to speak today. Thank you to Fabien, to Rebecca, to QUEST, NCRM, SCDTP and the Work Futures Research Centre at University of Southampton. I love the opportunity to broaden my horizons, so I really appreciate the opportunity to build connections. So, thank you for having me today.

So, let's get straight to the presentation. So, this slide, I don't know if people can guess what this image might represent for you. This is a floating market in Thailand and that is where I was born. So, yeah, as you can see in the text, I am a product of western imperialism. I am Thai, yet I conduct research in the English language and my research into, my journey into doing research and more recently into collective writing is deeply personal. It's also important to emphasise it’s ongoing and incomplete. So, there are a lot of queries that I have not resolved, that I tried to address and think about through my journey with collective writing as a method.

[0:05:13]

So, I am Thai, I was born in Thailand, and spent a large part of my early childhood there. My first spoken language is the Thai language, and as I said, I conduct research in the English language. This includes my thinking, my reading and my writing. I don't do any of those things in my mother tongue.

I studied at a North American international school in Jakarta, Indonesia, from the ages of 10 to 14, and then I completed high school in Canberra, Australia, and I did one year of undergraduate studies at University of New South Wales in Sydney. And I moved to the UK when I was 19 to study for my BSc, MSc and PhD in psychology, all in Manchester. So, I'm very proud of my northern connections.

And I studied quantitative and qualitative research methods throughout the different degrees embedded in psychology curriculum and I used qualitative research for my PhD and subsequent research projects. I have taught and worked only in UK academia and I've been teaching qualitative research to MSc and PhD students since 2007, yet I don't teach about collective writing to any of these students at the moment.

Okay, so I want to start sharing my journey with you. I've started by positioning myself as a researcher who, as I've said, is very much a product of western imperialism based on my education and where I work. And this, I've chosen two quotes from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, from her book on decolonising research methodologies. So, Professor Smith says the word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary, in part because research has been a means of embedding the underlying code of colonialism across social life. She goes on to talk about Stuart Hall who suggests that the concept of the west's functions in ways which allow (1) “us” to characterise and classify societies into categories; (2) condense complex images of other societies through a system of representation; (3), provide a standard model of comparison; and, (4) provide criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked. These are the procedures by which indigenous peoples and their societies were coded into the western system of knowledge.

When we talk about research, and here I’m presenting to a group of people who are interested in qualitative research, however, I think it's important to acknowledge that in qualitative research there are variations in how that is conducted and I think Ann Cunliffe’s paper in 2022 on theorising about theory has really helped to capture some of my feelings, my queries and the struggles I have been taking note of, grappling with ever since I entered into the world of qualitative methods and in fact having a background in psychology, qualitative research was always secondary to quantitative research during my BSc, MSc, and it wasn't until my PhD that I was given permission through my research PhD supervisors, Professor Susan Lewis and Dr Janet Smithson, to conduct a study that was purely qualitative.

So, Professor Cunliffe argues that categorisation happens in qualitative research, not only in quantitative research. Categorisation is an abstraction that dehumanises experience, minimises research

participants' interpretations of their own lives and is clearly not interpretive. And Professor Cunliffe doesn't refer to only specific forms of qualitative analysis, such as content analysis, but to the majority of qualitative analysis where we adhere and conform to the practice of codifying, categorising, in order to come up with coherent themes.

So, this really does raise a query for me in terms of how can we engage with research that acknowledges the humanness of the social research that we do?

So, for a while I have been thinking about who is allowed in to research and under what condition, and as a result, who is kept out? And this has implications for knowledge production and creation. And I've been querying for a while how can I do research in a way that potentially challenges the notion of who gets counted as an author in knowledge production? And here's some other questions that I've thought about. Do you have to actively write to become an author and a researcher and who gets to make knowledge and what gets counted as knowledge?

So, all of these things connect to the work of Professor Smith, for example, and two other scholars, especially scholars who work through decolonial, anti-colonial lenses in research in terms of how do we actually engage with research and knowledge production?

This is a paper that I had the privilege of working with colleagues in Malaysia. It was published in 2019. And this study was an interview study with migrant domestic workers, women, who moved from Indonesia and the Philippines to work in Malaysia as migrant domestic workers. And it utilised qualitative methods, the study conducted interviews with migrant domestic workers, and we conducted thematic analysis.

Now, through this work we argued that we have given voice to marginalised women, women who are often overlooked in the literature, and we were basing this work on the literature on work-life balance, mainstream work-life balance research, and we asked questions around who gets counted in terms of work-life balance research, who gets to have work-life balance and who doesn't.

So, this study enabled us to engage with some critical questions around migration, about the global workforce and who are the people who enable other people's work-life balance to be achieved? However, I was still troubled by the claims that we were making and had questions on what does it mean to actually give voice?

And one of the things I thought about was were we just doing research on our participants rather than with them? And the interviews themselves were conducted in three languages, Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia and in English. They were all then translated into English by the third author, who was a student researcher. And this was all done before I became involved with producing the manuscript. So, this goes back to the point of knowledge production, you know, are we actually doing research on people rather than with people when the work is then translated into a different language and meaning is then ascribed in a different way?

This takes me to Lisa Tilley's work, Dr Tilley’s work, and her paper on resisting piratic method by doing research otherwise. Dr Tilley asks the following question. How can we work towards plural and equal epistemologies within sociology when global academic institutions are embedded within a colonial political economy? The systemic extraction of raw commodities from formerly colonised countries finds its analogue in academics, piratic practices of raw data extraction for processing into refined intellectual property to be published at prices which exclude the original contributing “knowers”. Such “piratic methods” are broadly understood here as methodologies which do not value knowledge until

processes of extraction, commodification and value addition have been applied through academic refinement, generally in the global north.

[0:15:35]

I'm just seeing the time here. I'm not doing very well with sticking to the 20 minutes. I will rush as quickly as I can.

So, now I'm going to share my personal journey into how I came into collective writing. So, what I've just talked about is generally the background, which it's still very much relevant to my practice as a researcher today. So, it's basically trying to not resolve, but to do something about understanding that research practices can be extractive and exploitative and I came into collective writing as a way of trying to explore methods that would move away from that to actually include the knowers, participants, as co-authors, as co-producers of knowledge. And I was able to come into this for the first time in 2021. I was invited by Dr Amal Abdellatif in 2021 to join a polyphonic alterethnography piece with a group of academic women, who are at different stages of their careers, to write a collective piece together.

The way in which we worked is different to how I have since developed collective writing through my own work. We wrote separately, we wrote asynchronously, and our stories and accounts were then put together into an article. And this can be seen in the paper Breaking the mould: Working through our differences to vocalize the sound of change, and that was published in Gender, Work and Organization.

So, the idea to start looking into collective writing as a research method and a practice for me, I was inspired by Dr Abdellatif's work and her invitation for me to work with her. I also came across papers on writing differently. And here I've referenced two papers by Christopher Grey and Amanda Sinclair, and another paper on writing differently by Sarah Gilmore, Nancy Harding, Jenny Helin and Allison Pullen.

And these two papers talked about how research, knowledge and writing can be done differently. So, while the Academy requires scholars and learners to engage in research as a way of expanding knowledge, it is underpinned by a neoliberal ethos that promotes individualism and elitism where research is formulated as evidence produced by experts who privileges certain ways of seeing, knowing and understanding through the act of dissemination, primarily through academic writing, to other scholars, educators and learners in the Academy. Research and research related activities thus becomes a reserve for academics partaking as gatekeepers of legitimate scientific knowledge that is differentiated from lay knowledge.

Grey and Sinclair concede that within the Academy we write to install ourselves into authority. We should be honest about this. My entry into collective writing is inspired by methodologies and practice of writing differently in management and organisation studies that actively resist against hegemonic and patriarchal scientific norms of academic writing and knowledge production. Gilmore et al edited a special issue on writing differently to invoke new political and ethical practices through challenging and changing writing norms opening possibilities for different modes of learning and changing how and what we teach.

Am I allowed to have about five or ten more minutes? Is that okay? I'm going to try and go as quickly as I can, I'm just really aware of the time.

Okay. So, we're getting to the crux of it now, collective writing and how I have come to enact it with my collaborators, with my co-authors. As I said in the beginning, collective writing is not the activity of one person. It brings people together.

[0:20:21]

So, what do I mean by collective writing and how have I enacted it? So, collective writing to me is the act of writers coming together to write our

own stories and experiences in silence in the same space and time. And the two projects I'll be talking about quickly, they took place in the same virtual space and time. And we would meet over a period of weeks and months before we would complete the project. But each time we met, we would have a common topic that we would write about individually, silently. So, when we come into a Zoom meeting or a Teams meeting, all of us are present, we leave our cameras on, we mute our microphones and we write for 30 minutes in silence on our own but still in the same space and time.

At the end of that, we share what we have written. It could be the entire section we've written or a selection of the text that each one of us has written. The act of reading aloud at the end also enables us to build on shared understanding and it's not about reaching consensus, but about talking through the experience of holding space, writing together in the same space at the same time, and then sharing what we have written before we close off each session.

So, I'm just going to now quickly talk to you about two projects. The first one is with my first collective, which Fabien mentioned at the beginning. This is a selection and assessment module, Writing as Resistance Collective. I think it's really important that we humanise the people who have taken part in this research and there are four of us. We are also co-authors of a paper that we've been able to produce through this project. So, we have Michelle Edmondson, myself, America Harris and Fabien.

So, what were we resisting and how did we build solidarity? We were resisting the act of promotion and perpetuation of white supremacist scientific racism within the Business School curriculum in the selection and assessment module that I was leading and teaching. I had to teach, and the students had to learn, that the following is evidence based practice, but this evidence based practice upholds western colonialist ideology and this is what we had to teach and learn. The inclusion and

mainstreaming of reading material and literature that condone and normalise scientific racism based on the discredited eugenics movement. The material that we had to engage with failed to problematise the promotion of general cognitive ability testing as the best predictors of future job performance and therefore the best method of assessing and selecting job candidates and argues that group based lower test scores of black test takers compared to white test takers was not due to biases in the tests, but rather due to the test takers themselves.

So, collectively, we came together, and you can see that this project expanded from the moment we came together to write until the end of the project when our paper was published, it spanned across months and years. We came together during our collective writing sessions to respond to this epistemic violence through writing our stories and reflections on how we can resist this violence together as human beings, as educator and as students.

[0:24:13]

And this is the paper. There's a reference list at the end, but I am very proud of this work because it's the first time I've engaged in collective writing with students as co-authors that challenges the way in which we bring student co-authors. You know, it's not about students collecting interesting data and then we decide to publish with them, but rather we create and co-created something together live in the moment based on our experience of seeing injustice within the curriculum. I'm so proud of this work I actually put this paper, the front page of this paper, on a coffee mug, and I gifted the same coffee mug to all my co-authors as a celebration that this project has come to fruition.

This is a second project that I'd like to share with you. This is a collective of academic and professional services women working across three different universities. Let me just quickly hide my keyboard here because I need to see what I've written. So, there are a group of us, some of us are academics, some of us work in professional services. So, what is it that we were resisting and how did we build solidarity?

We were resisting the artificial division of academic staff and professional services staff in the neoliberal university. We wrote about our experiences of office housework, the work that people get asked to do that tends to be seen as non-work, yet are necessary to keep the workplace going. And in our collective, we wrote a lot about how care work is a form of office housework. And by coming together we were able to share our experiences of not only do academic women or professional service women are asked to do office housework, in fact, we were all asked to do it. And sometimes we undertook office housework, not because we were asked, but because we felt that no one else was going to do it. So, we really queried together through writing our own stories of office housework how can we say no to doing something that is not valued by the organisation when sometimes no one is explicitly asking us to do this?

So, what we were able to do is to resist this artificial division of academic and professional services and to resist basically the convention of who gets to write. So, all of us here, Isobel Edwards, Aylin Kunter, Isabelle Habib, Sarah Molyneaux, Holly Nicholas, Kayleigh Woods Harley, Janet Sheath and myself, we all wrote our stories and we were all co-authors on an academic article. And it's called, “I know I'm not going to have to heal from this”: Women university workers’ collective writing on “office housework” as a space for building collective care, healing and hope. And this was published in Gender, Work and Organization.

We are coming to the end, you'll be happy to know. I'm really sorry I've gone over time. There's a lot more I can say about collective writing and my experiences of doing it. There are a lot of unresolved queries and struggles that I have in my mind, but I want to close on Professor Cunliffe's work where she talks about subjectivist and intersubjectivist theorising. She talks about how most of the time when we read papers on theorising about theory in management and organisation studies, there is a lack of reflexivity in how we actually approach research, in how we actually engage with theorising. So, she argues that rarely in articles on theorising about theory are subjectivists or intersubjectivist ontologies and forms of theorising address. Subjectivist theorising recognises our human interpretations as ordinary people and academics are situated, unique, fluid and personal. Intersubjective forms of knowing and theorising are embedded and emerge between us as we, all research participants, generate multiple meanings and insights around our experience of social, organisational and environmental issues. It makes no sense to talk about generalisation from subjectivists and intersubjectivist ontologies. Rather, it is consistent to talk about resonance, presenting insights that may connect, reverberate and provoke others into reflecting on an issue. And I believe resonance is far more powerful than theoretical generalisation because it is provocative, personal and allows us to interpret those insights in ways that are meaningful and significant to us and our situation in ways that are genuinely close to us.

[0:30:32]

And I hope that when you engage with some of the papers I've shared on writing differently and some of the work that I've been able to produce with my co-authors through the two writing collectives, you can see subjectivist and intersubjectivist ontologies in action.

That's it. Thank you so much for giving me time today.

Fabien Littel: Right. Thank you very much. And again, it's brilliant to be here, great to follow after Uracha's great presentation and mine is called using dialogic storytelling and visual methods to co-create visions for a sustainable future. And I'll share a bit more about the context of it and what it is about.

A lot of it, as I said at the very beginning, is rooted in the work that I've done with Uracha as well in the way that we approach working with others and that idea of co-creation. There are some clear distinctions and differences, however. The co-creation that Uracha talked about was bringing together a group in a sort of collective movement but with things that were bringing them together quite naturally, whereas my project here looks to use co-creation and storytelling to bring together people who might not otherwise engage quite naturally with one another.

And to put a bit of context into this, on this first slide you can see, so my work, my research is rooted, is situated in the oil and gas industry with the backdrop of climate change and sustainable development. And when I looked at trying to do some work to help where there are tensions, when there is antagonism, it doesn't get a huge amount worse than that than opposing oil and gas industry employees and climate activists. You can see on the right there's a little poster from a climate activist group called Yellow Dot talking about how big oil is killing you and is perpetuating production of plastic and other sort of harmful activities.

Another one that was also, that became a campaign by Yellow Dot was a tweet from Jane Fonda who said, "Don't sleep with them, don't date them, don't socialise with them. It's over. The executives, the banks, the insurance companies – all the enablers have to become persona non grata".

So, that was a call basically for everyone, for people to take their distance with anyone working in oil and gas or for big oil. And in my research I can see that obviously, and I should from a reflexive perspective point out that I worked for BP for about seven years a good few years ago now, and there's a whole other story of what brought me into working on individual ethics and sort of moral reasoning. But that probably will be for another reflexive autoethnographic paper for one day.

But in my research I did see the vast nuances when it comes to moral subjectivities of people working in the industry. You see, there's a paper already from Krista Halttunen and Slade and Staffell called “We don't want to be the bad guys,” about people making sense of their involvement in the industry and I'm trying to add to that sort of literature in the context of the industry's hegemonic practices as well.

So, there is some sort of nuance here. However, in my research as well I've included a quote from one of my participants saying I think the public opinion today are completely stupid, people as a population, as individuals who are able to think now with all this social media and these very fast cycles of news, nuances and complexities are completely obliterated from the debate.

[0:34:29]

So, the picture is a very, well, a very tense, a very polarised one, not only between oil and gas industry people, climate activists, within the oil and gas sector in itself I've come to realise in terms of people's own positions.

And so, how could dialogic storytelling, what does it do in this picture and how could it help? And a little bit like Uracha talking about collective

writing, what do I mean by dialogic storytelling because it's being used in various different ways.

Looking back at the root of the term comes from Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. It positions dialogue as an ongoing part of human existence, a way to understand the relationship to meaning, society and ourselves. So, that dialogue, those discussions and exchange between ourselves which are fundamental to us in the way we function, in the way we make meaning of things.

Then the other two quotes I've got here are from Laura Black, from the paper from 2008, which really resonated a lot when I came across it with what I wanted to do. So, she said storytelling helps participants co-create and manifest their identities in relation to one another and also enables them to imagine and appreciate each other's perspectives. These features give storytelling the potential to enable dialogic moments because they allow group members to negotiate the tension between self and other that is present in their interaction.

And then later on, part of what makes stories powerful, they're able to display values and world views that are typically not talked about explicitly, hearing stories from others who hold different values may make it easier for deliberative participants to understand the reasonableness of positions and interests that are different from their own.

So, this gives you a glimmer of, well, it gave me certainly a glimmer of hope into what might be possible through storytelling for people coming from those very polarised positions. And this first aspect I'm sharing here again goes back to what Uracha was talking about earlier about this individual position, identity, this individual sort of story. So, this is really looking back at sharing one's own position and story in relation to that particular topic and hoping to get that to resonate with others or actually generate some understanding from others.

The next stage or the next aspect of storytelling, which I then looked into and integrated was a different one, one that is future focused, that is already related to sustainability and used in sustainability studies and activities which is about co-creation of sustainable future and using storytelling to look at alternative futures or possible futures.

There's one paper I've got there at the bottom which uses it in the context of oil and gas where it asks people to envisage where we would be if we'd already reached peak oil and therefore didn't have as much oil, what would a different reality look like?

And the other one that I've got quoted here is from Harcourt et al, which just asked people to envisage stories of the future, but with various things happening, disruptive events and how people respond to them. And there's an interesting quote here from the paper saying fictional stories provide participants with a safe space in which to explore what might be, and not necessarily what they think should be, or what they would be willing to do. Stories to have an inherent priority and interpretability that allows room for negotiation which might not be available in more facts-based means of envisioning the future and stories are always ultimately an exploration of meaning and values.

[0:38:36]

So, I think I mean I've put it in bold here, what might be not necessarily what they think should be, that's going to be quite important as well in the way that I'll apply it in the workshops I'll be talking about.

And the final aspect is that I wanted to integrate or that I looked into was using visual means into this storytelling. And this relates probably more to the piece that I've just talked about just now, which is more of the future focus than visioning a different view and a sustainable view of the future.

So, what I've got on the slide here comes from a paper by Smith et al where they conducted a number of experiments where people were using various visual means. Now you've got Legos on the screen, for example, there were different experiments going on where they were asked to use those to picture different aspects of a sustainable future with regards to the energy transition more specifically, so kind of related to my own theme as well.

And again, an interesting quote here talking about being placed in a position of responsibility, even if only for plastic people on a vinyl map for under an hour helps to widen the sense of shared opportunities and dilemmas around energy futures. The emphasis on serious play in the process of futuristic story-building is conscious. This is very clearly not an invitation to participate in a decision, but rather to rehearse what it is to make decisions.

So, the end of this quote kind of resonates with what Harcourt et al were saying in my previous slide in terms of if you think about envisaging in stories of the future, this isn't about committing just to something. It isn't necessarily about solutioning something, but it is about engaging in that conversation about moving towards that solution. And this is what attracted me as well in that potential, the dialogic potential to get people to come together towards those, again, those discussions about what might be possible, not asking them to commit to doing something together, simply to have a think about what might be.

So, in the context of my study, so this is the end, well, you know, fingers crossed, this is the end of my PhD research which was made up of three different studies.

In my first study, I interviewed 30 people who currently worked in the oil and gas industry and I analysed this as well, big oil corporate documents.

The second study looked at stories of people who left the oil and gas industry to engage in climate activism.

And what I'm talking about today is the third, the final study, where we were bringing people back from those two studies, people currently working in oil and gas, and people now engaging in climate activism, into those workshops to try and get them together and co-create visions of a sustainable future.

What we had was three workshops. They were very small workshops, four participants in each, meant to be six, but because of last minute cancellations and drop outs or no shows, we ended up with four. The four actually worked perfectly in terms of timing and getting through the format that we had and really giving space for everyone to express themselves. And we remained, we managed with those four to retain a balance of activists and oil and gas employees. And because I had interviewed all of them in the past, I also knew their position and I knew that within the workshops we also had a mix of, I'll call them hardcore oil and gas employees, people who were really bought into the perpetuation of fossil fuels versus those who were actually actively conflicted about what they were doing about their role in in there.

[0:42:48]

So, next, again, this is a bit detailed. This is the actual structure of the workshop. So, how do we bring all the stuff I talked about, this individual story and dialogue around this, the collective stories, that all hangs together through, or did through the structure I've got here on the screen.

Now I should say as well as the four participants, in each workshop we had myself and Dr Ai Yu from Southampton, University of Southampton, as well who's my supervisor and co-author. Because of my experience of having interviewed all the participants and having created a report with them, both Ai and myself remained silent observers through these workshops, so we hired a professional facilitator to run and who did a fantastic job. And I thought that would make it easy for me, but believe me, staying silent and not intervening for two hours is probably one of the hardest things that I've had to do. So, but never mind. You know, we remained silent and observed and we also had a live artist, and I'll show you some of the things that they produced in a moment.

So, and this is the visual aspect that I talked about here. We were thinking about ways to give people either an opportunity to draw themselves and when we ended up having to do the workshops online because of just geographic practicalities, it became quite difficult to think about people doing that, doing some drawing, some visual work themselves. And so, this is where we came to think about bringing in an artist doing live drawing. And you might have come across that in conferences or in the corporate setting as well where it's kind of developed as a practice. So, it was an artist who was there online throughout and captured through drawings and notes some of the key themes or the key aspects of the discussions. And it was there to help that reflexive practice for participants. So, every now and then to pause, have a look at the drawings that have been produced to just remind themselves of what had been going on so that they could sort of again reflect on that and build from there on.

So, the structure, in a nutshell, very much those two parts. This individual storytelling where people were bringing their own positionality, their own stories. Again, this is very much the sort of past and present looking at an individual level. This is where we're going back to what Uracha had shared, because after an initial sort of

introduction, setting the scene, agreeing on principles for respect and working constructively, we gave people, it was only ten minutes because of the time that we had, that we gave people ten minutes to write individually in silence their individual story. In our case, it was their individual story in relation to oil and gas and climate change and they were given prompts from a storytelling perspective about the start, the twists and turns in the story, the main characters in the story and where that story got them.

And again, practically speaking, I was using my role as a collaboration tool for people to write on so that it could then be shared across the group.

People were then sharing between themselves, reading out. It was simply reading out their stories that they had written at the end of those ten minutes. And all the participants were encouraged, allowed, to ask questions, but only clarifying questions. This wasn't a space for challenge or judgement. It really was just about maybe something well, that wasn't clear, or that people wanted to ask or were just interested about.

[0:46:41]

And then finishing that first part with a little bit of reflection on how it made people feel to, well, take a moment because you wouldn't very often do that to just think about your own story in relation to this topic and hearing others already. So, just to slowly set the seed before having a break, letting everything settle for the second part.

Where in the second part to try and bring those individual stories into that collective space, giving people a chance for group reflection to start with, finding what brings them together basically from the individual stories.

Before then, giving people half an hour to work on that collective storytelling. So, people, then the group, the four participants were pretty much, they had very, very little sort of interactions or intervention. They were left with a few prompts. Again, the idea was to develop what is, you know, develop the story of a sustainable future and the role of the oil and gas industry in it. 2050 was the end of the story, a happy ending it was meant to be, and people were asked to develop basically the defining moments that would lead them to that, the main characters again in that story, etc, etc.

And then on the end of that, again 20 minutes for reflection about how that made people feel.

I'm also going fast, looking at the time. So, I'm just showing now three boards that were produced by the live artist. The first one is on the back of the first part for one of the groups, my personal story with the oil and gas industry. You can clearly see the four people, the four stories here, identify some of the drawings that came about, how they were represented with again somebody has started as project engineer as you see at this, you know, very, very high level highlights of each of the stories, but just to have a visual reminder of that because then we would come back with the participant to revisit, just refresh their memories around that.

And interestingly, what was great as well is that when it comes to knowledge production and all that, it's important to remember that this is all the work of an artist, which is also interpreting what is happening, and therefore it gave the participants an opportunity to sort of challenge that as well when the artist was writing certain words or certain things that she thought she'd picked up, but that people wanted to challenge as being sort of captured in writing. So, that in itself also helped develop the conversation.

This second board is the second part, the collective storytelling, that was the same group. Now you can see on the screen that doesn't really look like a story because if you ask four people to come up with a story, they're not really going to do that in a linear way where they're going to start with the beginning and in a very structured way. So, it's all a little bit going into different ways and the artist has then later on sort of turned that into a story retrospectively, but I kind of prefer the one that is developed there and then. And you can see, they started reflecting on the happy ending in 2050, what does that look like, what does that mean? The fact, you know, why 2050 as well? Is that too far? Does it even, will it take more time?

[0:50:21]

And back to the earlier point of this is all about envisaging what might be, what could happen, etc. You know, not all of those, you can see that some people sort of had dominant voices at some points perhaps to bring about a particular topic, a particular idea, which was perhaps built on by others. So, the idea here, the important thing is really still about the conversation, about getting them to go back and forth. And the story was their way of interacting, of speaking to one another, of basically saying that they had a view that this would happen, this could happen, this might happen. And the answer to that for people who might want to challenge was not to say, “No, no, you're wrong,” or something personal about the individual, but about saying, “Well, actually, what if this happened? What if we did that instead?”

And that final board is just a few thoughts that were captured by the artist at the start and at the end of each of the workshops. Now you've got three colours, these are for the three workshops. You know, there's some of the scene setting of the principles about being open and transparent, active listening, etc, etc, and then some from the end. And one thing to point out here is that you can see the blue and the green workshops, there's some great stuff in terms of didn't feel like they had

to hold back, plenty of things in common, reassuring, there's hope. There doesn't need to be shame, that was some from someone who worked in the industry and was deeply, deeply conflicted. But as much as the, I'll call them the blue and the green workshops, went really well and really constructive, and was just brilliant, just lovely to hear, to see how people with such different viewpoints actually came to connect at a human level and have these conversations.

The sort of dark orangey one on the right was more of, I tend to refer to it as a car crash because it was quite tricky. People remained on their sort of respective identities and struggled to make that connection at that same level. So, they were already concerned about finding common ground at the start and then ending up saying it's still challenging to have a think about different dynamics and perhaps what the artist captured here didn't go quite as far as the real sentiment that was in the room. It was one where your sort of ethical responsibility as a researcher comes back into when do you need to intervene, when does it become too challenging for people who attend? But the facilitator did a great job at sort of keeping that boundary. I would have jumped in long earlier I think, but it was really helpful for me as a researcher to understand how these dynamics were evolving and actually I learned as much, if not more, from that final workshop than from the first two because understanding what stopped people from connecting, from having a constructive conversation, will help in further developing how interventions can be built or how we can actually guide people into having better conversations.

So, very quickly, I won't spend too much, even though I love that, but that's more, that's just a way of summing up my reflection as well on those workshops. For those familiar with the Deleuze and Guattari, this is about their metaphor of the rhizome, which is the, you know, rhizome is a stem of some plants that grow horizontally, along or under the ground, and the comparison of the rhizome versus the tree because the

rhizome has no beginning, no end. It's always in the middle. The tree is filiation basically, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction and this conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be”. So, I'm not doing it justice here, but there's a lot to be said about the reflection on that metaphor of rhizome and really the rhizome is what you're trying to find and achieve with those workshops, that level where people stop being rooted in their individual sort of position where actually they start making those connections and forming a space, which is a lot more homogeneous, which will have offshoots, but does find a certain common ground.

[0:55:15]

And then finally to quickly finish, just where this is going next. I've got funding to develop these workshops for community engagement. So, we shall do for sustainable development in the Solent area. For those listening who are in Southampton, I'm running an internal workshop using the methodology on 10th March. Get in touch if you want to attend. And another help again using those workshops and that method, but as an engagement method.

Then we'll use the same method as well with Uracha and with IU in the International Critical Management Studies Conference, ICMS, in Manchester in June for anyone going there. Look out for that and please come and join us.

A completely different topic, this will be about regenerating critical management studies in the neoliberal business school. So, the question, the stories will be different, but the method will be very similar. I’ll go into discussions about exploring how we can use that for education potentially as well in the process of learning. And from a pure knowledge creation and research perspective, obviously the next step will be, you know, we haven't had a chance yet to fully analyse the

transcripts of the workshop beyond what I have already to develop empirical studies for that in particular and other workshops which will take place, and also a methodological paper which I hopefully will be able to do on the back of that.

There's a few references that were given there and details for anyone. Feel free to get in touch.

[End of Transcript]