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Sharing an Aesthetic Space of Refuge Within a School for Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities: *Golden Tent*

Jill Goodwin

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-8594-3582

Doctor of Philosophy

July 2019

This thesis has been completed as a requirement for

a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester

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Acknowledgements

I thank my Director of Studies, Dr. Olu Taiwo, for always seeing the artist in me and for never letting me “do myself down”.

I thank my supervisor, Professor June Boyce-Tillman, for setting me on this path and encouraging me along the way. Her insight and her advocacy of “subjugated ways of knowing” have taught me so much.

I thank the school that has been my research setting for this study for supporting and trusting in my work, and for their financial contribution to my tuition fees. I also thank my beloved friends and colleagues at this school who always come on board with my projects, and the pupils from whom I have learnt so much about myself.

I acknowledge the many new friends I have made over the course of this study, particularly Dr. Debby Watson who has been a steady source of encouragement and support.

Finally I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my husband, who has lived every up and down of the PhD journey with me, never doubting my ability to see it through to the end.

Thank you all.

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ABSTRACT

Sharing an Aesthetic Space of Refuge Within a School for Pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities: *Golden Tent*

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This autoethnographic and arts-based study takes place within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The research capitalises on installation art's privileging of experience over conceptual understanding to promote the value of simply 'being' together in this educational context. Anthropological and artistic frameworks are used to theorise the potential of an aesthetic environment as a space for a different type of encounter between people with, and people without, profound cognitive impairments.

The research involves three separate elements that become integrated over the course of the study. The first element is a reflexive examination of my situation and myself in relation to my withdrawal from the teaching profession. The second element is my interest in moments of connection and mutuality between staff and pupils, and the third element is my installation art practice within this school context. The research of these elements takes place in two distinct phases. In the first phase, PART I of the thesis, the rationale for the study (based on my experience as a classroom teacher and my work alongside other artists) is developed. Theoretical frameworks more congruent with my own values and experience are gradually established using an autoethnographic methodology. In the second phase, PART II of the thesis, arts-based methods are used and *Golden Tent*, an original art installation, is created as an integral part of the research process. Presentations of the tent are discussed and the feedback from staff participants who use the tent with pupils is considered in relation to themes developed in Part I of the study, particularly the idea of spaces of refuge and Victor Turner's anthropological concepts of 'liminality' and 'communitas'. Analysis of staff comments combined with autoethnographic reflection of my artistic motivations lead to the notion of *Golden Tent* as an aesthetic space of refuge.

To the Gods and Goddesses of Research

Give us then the courage
To challenge the privileged paradigm
To break the illusion of objectivity
To carry lightly the loud weight of words
For we are longing for poetry
Woven through with dance
And drama performed with music
Let us look with both eyes open
At our unexamined subjectivities
Let us crack open the categories of our thinking
And find an epistemology of the senses
Where wonder and passion interplay with reason

(Sally Atkins, 2012)

Preface

Image 1 · Inside *Golden Tent*

Golden Tent is a sensorial installation that forms an integral part of this research enquiry. The experience of being inside *Golden Tent* cannot be conveyed through the symbolic, conceptual and linear format of text. Pallasmaa (2005:44) states that architectural space is experienced 'in its fully embodied and spiritual presence' and that our sensations of it are 'moulded by hapticity and peripheral unfocused vision' (Pallasmaa, 2005:10). Such embodied experiences resist linguistic interpretation and cannot be conveyed by photographs, which is why, ideally, this thesis should be considered in tandem with direct experience inside *Golden Tent*.

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Terminology

Pupil: This study is set within a school so I use the term pupil throughout this thesis whenever I refer to a child or young person at the school.

Student: Older pupils at the school, usually those over the age of sixteen, are referred to as students, and I use this term when I refer to my previous work as a class teacher at the school, because at that time I was teaching a group of 16 – 19 year olds.

PMLD: The pupils and students I refer to in this thesis are children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, or PMLD. This is a problematic term that is discussed in Chapter Two.

Staff: I use the term staff throughout this thesis to refer to all those employed to work in a teaching capacity with pupils at the school. This includes class teachers and all levels of teaching assistants and support staff. From time to time I also refer to staff as colleagues because of my previous role as part of the teaching team.

"Being": This term is used in a very specific way in this thesis, one grounded in practice rather than philosophy. Specifically the term "being" is used to denote a still, in-the-moment presence as compared with "doing", which describes a more physically active and task-oriented mode of human activity. It was decided that an ontological discussion of the concept of being did not add value to this particular study, which is based in practical and real world application.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Chapter Introduction

An overview of the study

In this study I explore my installation art practice within a specialist educational context, a school for pupils labelled as having profound and multiple learning disabilities, or PMLD. In particular, I consider the role of *Golden Tent* - an immersive art installation created as part of the research process - in relation to the quality of encounter between staff and pupils. Installation art has a key characteristic – it places the embodied viewer centrally within the work, heightening their sense of touch, smell and sound as much as their sense of vision (Bishop 2005). This positioning of the viewer as an active embodied presence within the space is a central tenet in this study. If it is simply the *experience* of being in the space, rather than any conceptual understanding of what is presented that matters – in other words, if embodied responses supersede conceptual understanding for the installation art audience – then cognitive ability is no determinant of what people may gain from such spaces. In this way art installations can offer potentially equalising and inclusive environments that neuro-diverse audiences can enjoy together.

However, to offer an aesthetic space for simply "being" and being together within a school setting is to subvert the current educational imperative for pre-specified learning outcomes and to challenge hierarchical understandings of education. Inside *Golden Tent* staff are invited to temporarily set aside their pedagogical concerns and to experience, alongside pupils, an aesthetic space that is separated from the everyday classroom environment. O'Sullivan (2001) contends that art's intrinsic aesthetic power is through 'affects', which he defines as 'moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter' (O'Sullivan, 2001:126 italics in original). It is this intrinsic power of art on an embodied sensory level that is foregrounded in this study. *Golden Tent* is presented as an aesthetic container that highlights 'sensory-being' (Grace, 2017), thereby potentially equalising a neurodiverse audience and becoming a 'liminal' space (Turner 1969) for those who enter.

The three research strands

The research involves three separate strands that are gradually woven together over the course of the study. The first strand is an examination of my situation as a disaffected (ex-) teacher still passionate about education and trying to recover values that have become

obscured by the oppressive 'audit culture' (Adams, 2018a) which has transformed education over the last twenty years (Ball, 2005; Pratt, 2016). The second strand of this research involves consideration of the deeply rewarding moments of mutual connection I occasionally experienced in my role as a teacher of children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. I look at how these moments are theorised in the educational literature and then I apply some alternative concepts from the field of anthropology and philosophy to these encounters. The third element in the study is an installation arts practice, which is initially positioned as the subject of the research but, as the study moves into its second phase, becomes the methodology. This methodological shift is critical and results in the creation of *Golden Tent*.

Informed by my autoethnographic journey, *Golden Tent* draws the three research strands together. It resolves my predicament as a disaffected teacher by creating a symbolic space of refuge away from the pressures of the current educational paradigm, whilst also providing an aesthetic space in which staff and pupils can potentially come together in new ways. Emerging from a more authentic, less instrumental art-making process, the creation of *Golden Tent* signifies my transition from teacher to artist.

The chapter layout

In this chapter I lay out the background for the study by explaining the personal and social context, and the relationship between the two. The personal background includes my idiosyncratic role as a volunteer artist in a school where I was previously employed as a teacher. I reflect on some of my motivations for the study, in particular my search for belonging in an education system where I have gradually felt displaced by changes in the dominant values. I also explain how and why my research questions and approach have changed over the course of this study as I gradually clarify my research purpose. Next, I introduce the social context for this research, a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and discuss my particular interest in moments of connection between staff and pupils. I explain how, despite my resignation from teaching and my critique of the wider system, I remain closely aligned to the ethos and values of this particular school. I introduce 'Tingly Productions', which was the name I gave to my creative practice at the start of this research, and discuss how my approach to creating installations in this setting has evolved as the research has progressed. The on-going challenge of applying traditional PhD thesis conventions to an autoethnographic and arts-based project are then acknowledged as I clarify my research questions and aims. The chapter is completed with an overview of the layout of the whole thesis.

1.2 The Personal Context For This Study

There is a deeply personal thread running through this study that originates in my struggle to "find my place" after my withdrawal from a profession I continue to care deeply about. Like many other teachers[1] I failed to achieve a work/life balance when I was in the job due to the ever-increasing workload. I also resented performing numerous accountability duties that interfered with what I saw as the more important priorities of the role. Although my resignation from teaching felt a positive and pro-active decision at the time, I was left with unresolved feelings of failure and loss. As a passionate primary and special school teacher with experience and skills to offer, I felt pushed out of my vocation by a misguided political movement to "improve" schooling and "drive up standards". In many ways, this research follows my quest to resolve the anger, self-doubt and questioning generated by these experiences.

After my resignation, I maintained contact with my final workplace because it was a school I felt a deep respect for and connection with. I began to develop 'Tingly Productions' in this setting, my arts practice in which I made themed installations and delivered multi-sensory sessions for pupils with PMLD (I discuss 'Tingly Productions' in more detail later in this chapter). When the opportunity to study for a PhD later arose, I set out to evaluate and improve this practice. My intention was to reflexively examine what was happening in my sessions using an action research approach, and to address a key question for me at this stage: How can I articulate the value of my practice? As part of my move towards freelance practice I wanted to be able to specify the unique features of my work, particularly its unquantifiable aspects, because these were the qualities I valued the most but found hardest to put into words. I wanted to reference my work beyond the current reductive educational framework, but to do this I would need to find a frame of reference more aligned with my own values.

However, in the early stages of this research, my efforts to find alternative ways to think about my work were consistently sabotaged by an objectivist epistemology I had unknowingly accepted, with its 'gold standard' scientific model of research (Leavy, 2015:6). Concerns about legitimacy according to this scientific paradigm, were getting in the way of me finding methods and an approach confluent with my own research interests. This conflict interfered with my ability to proceed with the research and led to a period of impasse with

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[1] According to a National Education Union survey four-fifths of teachers considered quitting the profession over the past year (Adams, 2018b)

[2] For reasons of data protection I have been unable to include this film

diminished creative output (I discuss this further in Chapter Four). As these issues surfaced I began to look more deeply at the personal motivations driving my study. According to my colleagues and the school management, my work was greatly valued, but this seemed at odds with my voluntary status. As the research lens became increasingly trained on myself, my research question became a heartfelt cry:

Why, if I am doing something so good, do I feel so bad?

This deeply felt question expressed the significant mismatch between the arts as experienced and enjoyed and their relative lack of status in the education system (I discuss this issue further in Chapter Five). The articulation of this question pre-empted a methodological shift away from action research and towards autoethnography as the most suitable approach for this study.

To research oneself inevitably means describing and critiquing cultural beliefs and practices (Adams *et al*, 2015) because subjective experience offers a window onto shared cultural experience. I reflected upon my experiences as a teacher who went from being creatively fulfilled to deeply disaffected over the course of my career and sought out the sociological literature that helped me to understand why this was so. This led to new understandings that enabled me to reframe my sense of not feeling valued. I came to recognise that my move to volunteerism had been a search for refuge from the neoliberal accountability practices that had come to dominate my experience as a teacher (I discuss theories of neoliberalism and their impact on the education system in Chapter Two). Also, by adopting an autoethnographic approach, my struggles with the research process itself could now be fully acknowledged and my concerns about legitimacy examined. I discuss this further in Chapter Four.

I wanted to value artistic ways of knowing and working (Eisner, 2002), but I was struggling to overcome the dominance of objectivist epistemologies and positivist perspectives (Crotty, 1998). Despite lifelong positive experiences with the arts I found it hard to argue their value in the face of an Enlightenment view of intelligence (Robinson, 2010a) that discounts the value of aesthetic experience in favour of a certain type of deductive reasoning (Boyce-Tillman, 2012). Autoethnographic reflection allowed these issues to be brought into awareness, and this was empowering. A breakthrough occurred when I finally put my trust in an art-making process and began to create *Golden Tent,* immersing myself in an arts-based research process. At this point I was able to gain a deeper connection to the research process. It would be true to say, however, that an on-going reticence to recognise the status of *Golden Tent* as a key research output reflects my continued struggle to replace assumed

positivist models of research, and this I discuss this in the preface to Chapter Seven.

In this section I have introduced the personal context for this study. I have explained how my identity and situation became the most pressing issue early on in the study, which caused me to adopt an autoethnographic approach and position my subjective experience as key data in the study. Doing so enabled me to gain valuable insights and ultimately to move onto art-making as a method of research. I turn my attention away from the personal context for the study now and introduce the setting for this research.

1.3 The Physical And Social Context For This Study

This study takes place within a school for pupils labelled as having PMLD, a term that is discussed in Chapter Two. Approximately 60 pupils aged from 2 – 19 years attend the school, which is housed in a modern building that contains ten classrooms, a large school hall, a hydrotherapy pool, two sensory rooms, a family room and offices. Over seventy staff work in the setting, including four senior managers, five administrative staff, nine teachers and over fifty support staff and lunchtime assistants. Pupils who attend this school have profound cognitive as well as physical impairments, and many have additional hearing and visual impairments as well as serious medical conditions. Due to global developmental delay, children with PMLD are understood to operate at a pre-verbal stage of development (Simmons and Watson, 2014a) and their engagement with the world appears to be mainly based in moment-to-moment sensory experience.

I have stated that the second strand of this study involves my interest in the deeply rewarding moments of mutual connection I occasionally experienced with individual pupils. A "cultural chasm" exists between people with PMLD who inhabit the world in an embodied sensory way, and individuals like myself (and you as reader of this text) who inhabit and make meaning from the world through language. Much of the attention of staff working with pupils with PMLD in schools is focussed on bridging this chasm, and in Chapter Two I discuss the pedagogical approaches they employ to achieve this. When connection does happen, vocal sounds and movements align and become reciprocal, faces may be close, perhaps smiling or laughing. An emotional connection, an intense engagement with the other is happening within the staff/pupil dyad and mutual pleasure is evident. These are the golden moments, often playful, rich and affectionate, in which each partner is rewarded. As a teacher in this setting I wrote about this joyful connection (Goodwin, 2012) describing how five minutes of 'in-the-momentness' with a pupil could make an entire week of stressful work worthwhile. This rewarding aspect of being with people with PMLD remains of interest to

me. The two poems that follow express my experience of the more challenging side of what I have called the cultural chasm between a pupil and myself. They draw upon my experience of attempting to connect with pupils and my observations about how we manage what can sometimes feel like a challenging encounter.

Perhaps

Sometimes I feel the chasm between us
And I can't seem to cross it
We sit close to each other
Yet a gaping divide separates us

Perhaps,
if I can just withstand
the vertigo
from the edge of this precipice
the uncomfortable draught
That rattles up from the deep ravine

Perhaps,
if I can just stand the test of time
and sit tight
With you
With me

Perhaps
we might,
in time,
Reach across
And play

Survival

I don't know if you want me
Next to you
Looking
Waiting
Expectant

Often,
the time it takes you to rouse
Is the time it takes me to feel uncertain,
self-doubting
and I add to the people who knock your door and run,
not prepared to wait while you slowly come to answer.
But I guess you are used to such disappointment

What is it like
To have so many people
come and go
Adjusting you?
Clicking buckles and shifting you?
Pulling and pushing you?

What is it like to be so available
So unpredisposed
So here in this moment
that
You have to withdraw
From all this busy busy busy-ness
To survive?

What does it take
To still our noisy minds
And just be…

Alongside you?

Can we tolerate the rejection
If you do not respond?
Can we stay here,
Without hurting, joking it away,
regaining comfort in the conversation of a colleague,
the adjustment of a strap -
Back in control again?

How do we survive
In this barren, languageless space
And keep baring our souls
If you do not reward us
With a smile?

These poems express the challenge of being with a pupil who appears to be unresponsive, and sustaining our presence and openness to connect. This challenge is a central feature of this study and my focus is on staff experience within this staff/pupil dyad. *Golden Tent* is designed as a space that might support staff in sustaining their ability to be present "in-the-moment" alongside pupils. Metaphorically, *Golden Tent* aims to bathe the cultural chasm in reflected golden light, making it a space of mutual immersion where staff can connect with the sensorial and thereby more comfortably relinquish linguistic forms of engagement.

Life beyond routines and the need for new frameworks of understanding

The daily lives of children with PMLD are punctuated by on-going care routines. In my school setting these routines have been fully integrated into a specialist curriculum that staff have developed in-house over several years (I discuss how this aligns with current thinking on best practice in Chapter Two). Other schools have also adopted this curriculum to use with their pupils with PMLD and the head teacher regularly offers training to these schools to support their understanding of it. During the second year of this research enquiry, the head teacher asked if she could copy some of the video footage from my 'Tingly Productions' sessions to present at the end of her training sessions to other schools. She made this request because she wanted to convey that the routine-based curriculum training she was delivering should be seen as part of a wider picture of provision for pupils that included "out of the ordinary" experiences of awe and wonder, and joyful, agenda-free moments of connection between staff and pupils.

As a result of this request from the head teacher I made a film I called *Reflections on Life beyond Routines*[2], which she went on to use in these training events. The film conveyed my own views on this topic, and at the time I did not think of it as part of this research enquiry. However, I later came to realise that the film powerfully illustrated the position of my practice as part of an extended understanding of educational provision in school. In the film I express the view that there is more to life than progress and learning outcomes and I convey what I see as the value of simply being together in ways that feel good, without a concern for pupil "improvement" or progress, a position I uphold throughout this study. The fact that the head teacher uses the film as part of her training sessions demonstrates a strong alignment between my own position and the ethos of the school. This alignment is to be remembered when I critique the wider education system that this school operates successfully within, a

[2] For reasons of data protection I have been unable to include this film

system that fails to convey these values. Whilst I have resigned from this wider system, I have maintained my treasured contact with this particular setting.

In the film, I showed how my arts practice attempts to recognise 'a person's spirit', and feed 'the very core of their being' (Williams in Mencap, 2011) through the sharing of awe and wonder together. The value of these experiences can get lost in an assessment-driven culture that commodifies learning (Apple, 2004; Pratt, 2016). The reductionist language of educational targets and measurable progress must be replaced if the intrinsic values of the arts are to be recognised. In this study I undertake a search to find new ways to articulate the value of my practice in this context. Victor Turner's anthropological concepts of liminality and communitas have proven particularly useful for this, and in Chapter Five I discuss a unique application of these concepts to this field.

In this section, I have introduced the social context for this study. I used two poems to illustrate a challenging aspect of non-linguistic encounters between staff and pupils. My interest in moments of connection is related to my view that there is more to life than progress and learning outcomes. I have shown that my position is not at odds with the ethos of the school who recognise that my arts practice offers enrichment experiences that help to balance a curriculum based on routine and repetition. In the next section I link these general ideas to specific experiences from my previous work as a class teacher, and also from my more recent collaborations with other artists, to form the rationale for this study.

1.4. The Rationale For The Study

From "doing" to "being"

One of the issues I explore through the second phase of this research enquiry originates in my work as a classroom teacher in this setting ten years ago. In an effort to provide an inclusive environment for our non-verbal students at this time, I took steps to try and reduce the amount of spoken language we as staff used in the classroom. One of the ways I did this was through an experimental session in which the principles of Intensive Interaction (discussed in Chapter Two) were applied within a ritualised group session. Staff and pupils gathered in a close circle, and after 3 rings on the Indian chimes, staff silently watched and waited for any vocalisations, facial expressions and/or physical movements of students, which they would then respond to. A charged atmosphere was created, and there were often moments when students appeared delighted by the large and unified response they received for their vocalisations or other actions. Although Intensive Interaction practice was fully embedded into the approach of the school, this style of group session had not been

carried out before, and as a staff team we were excited by the increased levels of participation we felt we were witnessing from some of our students. Over several weeks, we came to believe that some students recognised the session as "their space", a regularly offered platform from which their actions and sounds would receive a magnified group response.

However, despite what we (the staff) saw as the success of these sessions, it was sometimes difficult to "hold" or maintain a still and watchful space, particularly during periods when pupils were *not* actively participating. This was a very different way for us to work, particularly as our usual modus operandi was that of busily "doing", administering the high levels of care necessary for students, as well as providing activities to stimulate and engage them. To simply be still and focus only on being present and responsive (especially when there was little activity to respond to) was a challenge. As the facilitator I wanted to role-model an attentive but relaxed presence, comfortable with variable levels of activity from students, in order to demonstrate my confidence in what we were doing. I wanted the environment we created for the students to demand nothing, but be fully responsive to any (or no) offering on their part. However, when not a lot was happening within the group I often felt a strong urge to become active and do or say something in order to move us away from what felt to be an uncomfortable space. In this study, I characterise this difficulty as the issue of making the shift from a "doing" mindset to a "being" one. A "doing" mindset is necessary for the usual tasks and activities staff undertake in the classroom. It is channelled towards activity and accomplishing goals and is aware of time-frames. A "being" mindset takes each moment as it comes and is receptive rather than focused on external goals. Only with this quieter and more "in-the-moment" mindset can we let go of the desire to achieve and really settle into and sustain a focused but still, quiet presence alongside pupils.

Readers unfamiliar with the type of classroom experiences I am referencing here may be unaware of how the extreme passivity of some pupils with PMLD can be disconcerting, perhaps especially within an educational setting where staff aim to gain the active engagement and participation of pupils in learning opportunities. I discuss some of the reasons why pupils with PMLD may be unresponsive or withdrawn in Chapter Two. The temptation, when a pupil appears unresponsive, is to increase the intensity of stimulus being offered, for example, trying to engage a pupil in an interaction by becoming louder, "bigger" and more active, or perhaps by getting physically closer and using bodily contact to "prompt" them. If carried out sensitively and with respect, some of these measures may be completely appropriate, successfully bringing a pupil from a distant and unresponsive state to an

engaged presence. However, because I have become aware of how extreme passivity in pupils with PMLD seems often to compel us to become more active, or as Ware (2003) suggests, more dominant and directive, I am interested in what might happen if we contain this compulsion and create spaces for pupils themselves to initiate an action or interaction *in their own time*. It is possible that in doing so, we may create a space that encourages more volitional acts on the part of pupils, acts that might be too "delicate" or unpractised to be offered in other circumstances, or indeed if offered, might not be noticed. Also, by simply accepting and respecting a pupil's inactivity we have an opportunity to join them by sharing a mutual space of simply "being" together. These experiences from my work as a classroom teacher have contributed directly to my interest in creating and exploring a space that, in its immersive sensoriality, might facilitate a mindset shift in staff from "doing" to "being".

The shruti-box drone as a holding form.

Some years after undertaking these experimental group sessions, and after I had embarked upon this research study, I was involved in a collaborative project in school with musician Ignacio Agrimbau. Working with Ignacio's considerable musical skills I chose to return to the idea of a language-free group experience. By this time, several classes in school had adopted this style of group session based on the initial pilot ones described above, and using the same principles of Intensive Interaction, I wanted to explore whether live musical responses, in addition to our vocal and physical 'replies' to pupils' behaviour/actions, could further enhance the non-verbal conversations within these valued group sessions. During the project sessions Ignacio used a shruti box, a small box-like musical instrument with a bellows mechanism that produces a continuous harmonium-like drone. It was very noticeable to me that this steady and consistent harmonic sound seemed to take on a supportive 'holding' function within the group, making it feel easier to sustain a physically inactive but fully engaged presence even when there was a lack of active participation by pupils. This contrasted with my previous experience, where periods of student inactivity left us in a sometimes-uncomfortable silence, which escalated the urge to compensate for the passivity of students. A report from this project is included at the end of this thesis as Appendix A.

Ignacio explains his use of the shruti box in music therapy terms, stating that it fulfils a 'grounding' role, operating as, 'a platform, or sounded canvas, for musical events that can easily be distinguished from it. It can also frame seemingly disconnected sounds into a common harmonic or rhythmic structure, enhancing a feeling of connectedness' (Agrimbau, 2018). I became curious about this grounding or holding function of the shruti box drone and as an installation artist I wondered if it would be possible to translate this auditory space into

a physical one. Could an aesthetic installation that appealed to the senses operate in a similar way to the harmonic tones of the shruti box? Could a 'feeling of connectedness' also be similarly enhanced by an aesthetic physical space? And could this support staff to sustain a relaxed, "in-the-moment" presence, even when the passivity of students seems to invite us to become more active and try and make things happen? These questions fed directly into the creation of *Golden Tent*.

In this section I have explained how the rationale for this study developed from experiences I had in the classroom, initially whilst still working as a class teacher, and later during a collaborative project with musician Ignacio Agrimbau. The issue of staff remaining present and "holding the space" when pupils do not appear to be actively participating was noted and connected to an ability to "be" as opposed to "do". It is my assertion that if we can be more comfortable with a pupil's passivity, we may open up spaces of possibility where staff witness, and spend enjoyable time with, pupils who are being valued just as they are, rather than how we might want them to be. Such spaces may additionally offer opportunities for pupils to show us aspects of themselves we might otherwise miss. My sessions with Ignacio demonstrated that the shruti-box drone appeared to support our ability to maintain a still presence without the compulsion to jump in and make something happen during quiet periods, and this made me curious about whether an architectural form could fulfil the same function. These issues constitute an educational rationale, which combine with personal and artistic motivations to form this study. In the next section I introduce my practice and explain the changes in approach that have been part of the research process.

1.5 Differing Types Of Practice

'Tingly Productions'

Just prior to embarking on this study in April 2014, I was creating themed environments in school, making costumes for staff and devising and running sessions that involved participants in a range of rich sensory experiences held together by simple songs and a musical soundtrack. The name 'Tingly Productions' was chosen because I aimed to produce artistic experiences that cause the senses to heighten or 'tingle'. Examples of these environments can be seen on the website I produced to promote my work at this time: www.tinglyproductions.org. I was influenced by my contact with Oily Cart and other theatre practitioners working in this field, such as Innersense and Bamboozle Theatre (I discuss the influences on my practice in Chapter Three).

Different working processes

I reference my 'Tingly Productions' work here because this was the starting place for this study, and also because it illustrates the substance of the voluntary role I had created for myself within the school. As previously discussed, I set out to evaluate and improve this practice through action research. However, 'Tingly Productions' has not ended up being the main focus of the study because my approach to creating work has changed. During a period of autoethnographic reflection I revisited a body of installation artwork I had created some fifteen years ago during my fine art degree. Here I discovered themes and working processes that were freshly relevant to my current situation. By reconnecting with this work I rediscovered a way of working that I knew to be deeply satisfying and I was keen to work in this way again. This meant moving away from an instrumental design process that capitalised on my teaching skills and moving towards an artistic process that was more expressive than rational and predictable. I did not think about what might stimulate and engage pupils; rather I entered a process of "un-knowing", allowing intuition and a sensorial imagination to guide my work. These qualitative differences in working processes are discussed in Chapter Four. As a consequence of this shift in working processes I was able to combine the different strands of the research into a more integrated whole.

Sharing the work

It is important to distinguish between the incubation[3] and making stages for *Golden Tent* (discussed in Chapter Six), which are relatively private endeavours, and the stage where the installation is presented and shared with others (discussed in Chapter Seven). The presentation stage is public, and at this point the research approach must shift again in order to include observing, listening and interpreting the responses of others to my work. During the presentation phase in school, I returned to more of a teacher's role for some presentations of the tent, and for others I took the role of an observer while participants utilised the space in their own ways. I discuss these differing presentations of *Golden Tent* and my varied role in Chapter Seven.

The feedback of participants who spent time inside *Golden Tent* became an important part of this study, although this was not anticipated at the outset. Once I began to present the installation, I inevitably wanted to understand the responses of those who spent time inside. My interest in the importance of staff mindset (as explained above) meant that my focus was

[3] The period when ideas are forming in non-conscious ways. This term is used by Wallas in his model of the creative process, as discussed by Sadler Smith (2015).

on the responses of staff, but it was always understood that their experience was relational since they were participating as part of a staff/pupil dyad (I discuss some of the ethical challenges of research involving non-verbal communicators in Chapter Four). The feedback of staff was gathered through open-ended questionnaires, audio-recorded informal interviews and spontaneous conversations. In Chapter Seven I reflexively consider the comments of staff participants and relate them to the themes stemming from my art practice, as well as to Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas.

In this section I have introduced the idea that differing types of art process and research practice constitute this study. I look next at the aims of the research.

1.6 The Research Question And Aims

> The simple word 'research' brings with it the weight of proof – investigation, study, examination, enquiry, all of these, words demanding answers. And it is mostly not answers, but *the* answer, tried, tested and proven, that is sought.
>
> (Kalmanowitz, 2013:142 [italics in original])

The articulation of definitive research questions has been an on-going and challenging feature of this research. As Kalmanowitz observes in the quote above, questions call for answers and in a traditional PhD study, especially a science-based one, the clarification of the research questions at the outset is pivotal. Such questions define the scope of the project, guide the selection of research methods and drive the research forward. For me, however, grappling with the questions behind this evolving and inductive autoethnographic and arts-based study has been an on-going process. Committing myself to a deeply reflexive approach has been more important than the early procurement of definitive questions - although my on-going battle with positivist assumptions about "proper" research has rendered this more challenging than perhaps it needed to be.

Holman Jones *et al* (2013:32) suggest five purposes for autoethnography. These are (1) disrupting norms of research practice and representation; (2) working from insider knowledge; (3) manoeuvring through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better; (4) breaking silence and/or (re)claiming voice; and (5) making work accessible. Such purposes, all present in the research presented in this thesis, do not lend themselves easily to pre-determined questions. Equally, with arts-based research, 'that which the project studies does not exist until the research project begins to create it' (Winter, 2010:4). These key features of autoethnographic and arts-based research approaches challenge the centrality of the definitive question in the research process. However, the thesis writing process is a

retrospective exercise and with the benefit of hindsight it has become possible to identify a clear and consistent purpose that has run throughout this study, despite my inability to define it at an earlier stage. This purpose can be articulated as a central research question:

> **As my installation art practice becomes less instrumental and more "authentic", what is its role within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and what theoretical frameworks can be used to explicate its value?**

This question indicates the reflexive nature of the study and the focus on my role within a specific educational context. The terms 'instrumental' and 'authentic' refer to differing ways of working with art, and with pupils, and reflect the changing nature of my practice and approach, in line with my transition from teacher to artist. I want to understand and articulate the value of my practice beyond its ability to help a pupil achieve a pre-specified learning outcome. To do this, new perspectives and alternative theoretical frameworks are required. By combining an individual arts practice with a specialist area of pedagogical practice a new area of study is opened up and the main aim of this research can be stated as:

- To explore and articulate the value of an aesthetic installation within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

This main aim can be broken down into five sub-aims that roughly correspond to the chronology of the study:

- Identify and critique the cultural beliefs and practices that have determined my subjective experience as a disaffected teacher and volunteer artist
- Identify and apply conceptual frameworks from beyond the current educational paradigm in order to theorise my practice
- Develop personal (as opposed to educational) themes in my installation practice and explore their resonance for others.
- Explore whether the auditory "holding function" of the shruti-box can be translated into a physical form
- Explore whether *Golden Tent* can facilitate a shift in staff mind-set from "doing" to "being" and thereby enhance experiences of mutuality

1.7 Chapter Summary And Thesis Layout

In this chapter I have introduced the three main strands of this research study: a reflexive examination of my personal situation in relation to my withdrawal from a teaching role; an interest in the encounter between myself and a pupil with PMLD; and the development of my

installation arts practice within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. I have stated that the motivation for the study is deeply personal in part, but also motivated by questions arising out of direct experiences in the classroom. A creative practice has been introduced as a central feature and I have explained that, over the course of the study, the position of this practice shifts from being the subject of the research to the method, in line with a move to an arts-based research methodology. The central question and aims have been articulated with an acknowledgement that these have necessarily been revealed with hindsight rather than imposed from the outset.

Thesis layout

This thesis is divided into two parts in order to demarcate the first and second phases of the research. PART I presents the phase during which my theoretical position, and the themes and conceptual framework for the study are established. During this phase the three research strands are still separate elements. Chapter Two reviews the theoretical field underpinning the study, drawing on a wide and cross-disciplinary range of literature. A link is established between installation art and a school for pupils with PMLD, and the idea of an aesthetic space of refuge is introduced. The educational literature is examined to see how interactions within the staff/pupil dyad are typically conceptualised. In Chapter Three, the field of arts practice is reviewed as I examine the work of other artists working with people with profound disabilities. My own work is positioned within this field and some of the ways in which the discourse between education and arts-based practices differs are highlighted. Chapter Four is an account of my methodological journey. I use a chronological narrative to explain the rationale for my move away from action research to autoethnography, and later to arts-based research. The challenge of recognising and overturning positivist assumptions about research and replacing them with an approach that honours artistic ways of knowing and working is discussed over the course of this chapter.

Chapter Five is where the main themes and framework for the study are established. The position of the arts in education is considered first to give further context to my disaffection as a teacher and my struggle to adopt a more artistic approach within this research study. I then revisit a body of installation artwork I created some years prior to the study in order to highlight the themes of safe, nurturing spaces of refuge that are present in the work. The resonance of these themes is discussed, and also the relevance of an artistic process that draws on notions of sensorial, preverbal experience, to my current school context. I then turn to the work of anthropologist Victor Turner and philosopher Martin Buber and consider the application of some of their ideas to the encounter between staff and pupils at the

school. These themes of safe, nurturing spaces and the concepts of liminality and communitas are then brought forward to the next stage of the study.

PART II of the thesis documents the creation of *Golden Tent* and considers its impact. In Chapter Six I explain how the tent was crafted and how its creation enabled me to move away from conscious cognitive processes as a researcher and to work with the 'felt sense' (Rappaport, 2013), thereby integrating the three research strands. The making process is discussed, including the various technical issues that arose during this phase and how I overcame them. Chapter Seven focuses on the various presentations of the tent and how participants responded to it. Links are made at this stage between the feedback from respondents and the themes and concepts identified in PART I. The idea of an aesthetic space of refuge develops out of this process. In Chapter Eight, the study as a whole is critically reviewed and evaluated and ideas for further study are considered.

PART I

Chapter Two

The Theoretical Field

2.1 Introduction

To my knowledge, there is currently no literature relating the practice of installation art to audiences that include people with PMLD. It is the combination of my individual artistic concerns and my particular experiences as a teacher that brings these two areas together to create the cross-disciplinary theoretical field underpinning this study. To structure my discussion of this somewhat diverse field I propose the following four questions:

- What is the link between installation art and a school for pupils with PMLD?
- Why is there a need for an "aesthetic space of refuge"?
- How are interactions within the staff/pupil dyad understood?
- How do we think about agency in relation to someone with PMLD?

These four questions enable me to group a disparate range of literature in a coherent way and to demonstrate the importance of this study. Searches of Academic Search Complete, ERIC, JSTOR and PsychINFO databases were carried out for this review using terms such as PMLD, PIMD, installation art, connection, interaction, relationship, and environment, but a snowballing technique using article reference lists has proved more useful. Where appropriate, some references are drawn from internet sites and non-academic literature and these are referenced accordingly. Despite the educational context for this study, the relevance of educational theory is limited, particularly because a key aspect of this research is a concerted move away from the current educational paradigm towards an arts framework. For this reason, I simply give a brief overview of the theoretical literature that underpins current pedagogical practice for learners with PMLD and then narrow my focus onto texts concerning educational understandings of interactions between staff and pupils.

Before visiting the literature that enables me to address the questions posed above, it is important to first examine the term 'PMLD' in order to acknowledge the inevitable issues involved in the categorisation of a heterogeneous group of individuals in relation to normative standards.

2.2 Definitions Of PMLD

The term 'PMLD' stands for Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, or Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. The choice of the word 'difficulties' over 'disabilities' is important for some educationists (for example Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2014; Ware, 2005) who

want to highlight the impact of multiple impairments on learning. Others (e.g. Hogg, 1991 in Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2014) argue that to describe the range of barriers faced by this group as mere difficulties is to diminish their impact on every aspect of life. Choice of terminology is dictated by perspective and a multitude of definitions for the term PMLD exist in the literature (Bellamy et al, 2010; Lacey et al, 2015), each with their own emphasis. Terms such as profound intellectual disabilities, complex needs, profound cognitive impairments, multiple disabilities and other combinations of these words are frequently used alongside PMLD for the same group of individuals. Australia, the US, and parts of Europe use the term Profound Intellectual and Multiple Disabilities, or PIMD, avoiding the term learning disabilities, which in these countries refers to conditions such dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). The term PIMD identifies the more significant clinical impairments and the magnitude of the cognitive impairment first followed by the multiplicity of the other disabilities. In the UK, despite Mansell's (2010) frequently cited report *Raising Our Sights: Services for adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities*, the term PMLD remains the most accepted and frequently used term.

PMLD is the term currently used by the UK government's Department for Education (DfE) to identify those pupils with the highest support needs and severest learning difficulties and according to the 2016 schools' census almost 11,000 children in England between the ages of 5-16 are classified in this way (Pinney, 2017). Despite several Internet searches, an up to date DfE definition of the term PMLD is hard to find. This 2009 definition by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (which is now the DfE) was found in Male (2015:10):

> Pupils with PMLD have complex learning needs. In addition to very severe learning difficulties, pupils have other significant difficulties, such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Pupils require a high level of support, both for their learning needs and also for their personal care.

Labelling a heterogeneous group of individuals according to their impairments and perceived difficulties, however, is problematic (Arishi et al, 2017). Tension between the usefulness of 'diagnostic' labels as a way to procure adequate resources and advocate for the needs of this group, versus the potential stigma and oppression caused by labels, is discussed in the literature (e.g. Bellamy et al, 2010; Jones, 2002). In using the term PMLD throughout this thesis, I situate myself within discourses that oppress and limit (Mercieca, 2013), discourses I want to resist. People given the label PMLD have no say in its use to describe them, a fact that Brigg (2013) negotiates by consistently using the phrase '(people) labelled as having

PMLD' in her writing. Refreshingly, Grace (2017) offers an alternative term - 'sensory beings', cleverly avoiding a deficit-based phrase whilst aptly naming the way in which this group of people (and she additionally includes babies and people in advanced stages of dementia in her definition) are assumed to access the world. Although still a label, 'sensory being' constitutes a friendlier and less 'othering' term, particularly because we can all recognise the sensory in ourselves. 'Linguistic beings' is offered by Grace to describe those of us who have acquired language and who thereby process the world differently to sensory beings. I additionally adopt Grace's terms in this thesis because the desire to create a space in which linguistic beings and sensory beings can encounter each other in new ways is central to this study. I do, however, also continue to use the term 'PMLD' because this remains the preferred term in the majority of the literature at this time.

The issue of labelling as a form of categorisation against normative standards is ever-present in the literature. Fitch (2002:469-470) argues that the discourse of special education 'is dominated by the power of a normalizing technology of measuring, categorizing and labelling' and therefore, 'it cannot help but produce the "not normal", the "other"'. Social constructionists argue that labels do not name an objective reality; rather they reflect a normative perspective within a constructed reality. Disability is identified as a concept, distinct from any medical condition, which varies across cultures and time in the same way as gender, class or caste (Carlson, 2010). The social model of disability takes this perspective, firmly placing the 'problem' of disability on society rather than on the individual and their impairments (Oliver 1996; Shakespeare, 2014). Consequently, whereas individual, or tragedy models of disability demand cure and normalisation, the social model demands a collective responsibility towards rights and inclusion. It was Mike Oliver and Vic Finkelstein who created the term 'social model of disability' in the 1980s (Shakespeare, 2014) but its conceptual origin was in the 1970s and the radical thinking of UPIAS (the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation), a group who identified themselves as marginalised and were the first to say that disability was about oppression. UPIAS, a Marxist group of disabled people, came together to oppose the medical perspective they had hitherto been defined by, and to develop a new understanding of what it meant to be disabled (Shakespeare, 2014). The legacy of their campaigns can be seen in positive changes in legislation and in the lives of many disabled people.

However, scholars now increasingly point out the limits of the social model (e.g. Shakespeare, 2014) as disability discourse becomes progressively more complex and nuanced over time. Essentialist views of disability continue to be resisted (Reinders, 2008) but issues inherent in

the social model are now critiqued from a variety of perspectives, with many arguing for critical realist versions of social constructionism (e.g. Barnes, 1998; Shakespeare, 2014; Klotz 2004) in which the lived reality of impairments are acknowledged, and disabled identities celebrated. Importantly, several writers point out that the discourse around intellectual disabilities differs from that around physical disabilities (e.g. Chappell *et al*, 2001; Goodley, 2001; Reinders 2008). The success of the social model of disability in terms of positive shifts in practices and attitudes have been driven by the self-advocacy of disabled people and their determination to claim their own narrative. However, it is only recently that this emancipatory movement has begun to include the voices of people with learning disabilities, but those who do not have the capacity to self-advocate remain in the margins or are excluded altogether. This is a problem, and one that requires new perspectives if sensory beings, who cannot claim their own narrative, nor engage in linguistic debate, are to be equally valued. Reinders (2008:5) acknowledges the important achievements of the disability rights movement, but he points out that rights are not the same as friendship and that focusing on the domain of citizenship and public policy causes us to forget that 'disabled people are human beings before they are citizens'. Reinders presents a complex theological argument that involves 'breaking the illusion of our own strength and accepting our vulnerability' (Reinders, 2008:14). He makes the radically inclusive proposal that people with profound disabilities be understood as 'the rule of what it means to be human rather than the exception' (Reinders, 2008:14).

Other contemporary philosophers also argue for new perspectives when thinking about people with the most profound disabilities. Kittay (1999), like Reinders, makes the case for revised understandings of dependency and care, highlighting our human interconnectedness. Vorhaus (2007) similarly presents the case that all human beings are vulnerable and dependent at different stages in their lives, and that dependency is best conceived in relation to reciprocity and indebtedness. He asserts that there is much to learn from simply attending to people with PMLD and that fully respecting individuals with profound disabilities involves making an effort to look at the world from their point of view (Vorhaus, 2016). Educationalist Mercieca (2013) invites us to redefine agency in relation to children with PMLD by recognising the ways in which in they challenge our linear forms of thinking and Carlson advises us to 'engage in a form of "loving ignorance" whereby we "accept what we cannot know"', which she suggests may be 'the space in which to best capture some of the challenges and lessons offered by persons with severe intellectual disabilities' (Carlson, 2010: 204).

I will return to some of the ideas developed by these philosophers later in this chapter because they provide us with alternative frameworks with which to conceptualise people with PMLD.

2.3 What Is The Link Between Installation Art And A School For Pupils With PMLD?

This study brings together a particular genre of the visual arts and a specialist educational institution, and in this section I identify what features of installation art lend themselves to this connection. Often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential' (Bishop, 2005) installation art's focus on direct sensory experience is what establishes its relevance to audiences of people with PMLD, or sensory beings. Art historian Jeffery Saletnik states that a participant of installation art 'need not be versed in the history of art to have a primary reaction to an installation work' (in Rosenthal, 2003:39), which I will argue makes installation art potentially equalising and inclusive, because we can all share the sensory. The term installation art covers a diverse range of indoor and outdoor manifestations, including large-scale, mixed media constructions, which may be site-specific works and/or temporal events. What unites these works under the umbrella term installation art is their placement of the spectator *within* the work (Bishop, 2005; Oliveira *et al*, 1994; Rosenthal, 2003).

In Carsten Höller's *Lichtwant* (2000) or Light Wall, for example, a wall of lights flashing at 7.8hz confronted the viewer, filling the room with heat and pulsing sound. These flashing lights, if one could withstand them, were at the frequency of theta brainwaves (usually associated with creativity, intuition and daydreaming) and were said to be capable of inducing hallucinations in the spectator (Bishop, 2005). Contrast this intense assault on the senses with Anya Gallacio's *Stroke* (2014), a plain bare room in which the walls were painted with thick plain chocolate. Whilst still connecting directly with the senses, Gallacio's work is about the mismatch between the desire and anticipation of a chocolate room, and the reality – a dull, even sinister-looking, brown empty space, which nevertheless emanates the evocative smell of chocolate (*Anya Gallacio: Stroke*, 2014). Both of these installations demand more than a detached gaze because spectators enter the artwork itself, directly experiencing its effect on and in their bodies. This is not to suggest that the conceptual is absent from installation art (as illustrated in Gallacio's interest in the mismatch between viewers' expectations and the reality of their experience), indeed installation art is intrinsically embedded within the wider conceptual art movement. However, with this particular art form ideas are transmitted through the effects of a physical space on the viewer and it is this aspect I wish to highlight when I link installation art with a school for pupils with PMLD. Throughout this thesis, when I refer to installation art I am selectively maximising its

experiential features and minimising its conceptual aspect in order to highlight its potential inclusivity for sensory beings. I believe a quick look at the history of its emergence will confirm this as an acceptable perspective to adopt.

A brief history of the emergence of installation art

Prior to the 1960s, the term 'installation' simply described the curatorial concern of how the items of artwork making up an exhibition were displayed (Oliveira *et al*, 1994). However, during this decade many artists wanted to push the boundaries of Modernist theory by drawing attention to the 'objecthood' of paintings and sculptures (Harrison & Wood, 2003), while others wanted to critique the institution of the gallery and reject the commodification of art (Bishop, 2005). In his seminal text, *Art and Objecthood* 1967, Fried condemned the new work being produced by Minimalist artists such as Judd and Morris, calling it literalist and claiming that it theatricalized the relation between the object and the beholder (Harrison & Wood, 2003; Oliveira *et al*, 1994). Fried was arguing for the purity and integrity of medium specificity, and for the autonomy of the art object independent of context, but by the second half of the 1960s his battle was lost, and artists were increasingly highlighting the role of the spectator and the contingent aspects of the contexts in which their works were encountered (Bishop, 2005; Harrison & Wood, 2003). Hence the totality of the space, and the spectator's experience of that space, became integral to the work.

By the end of this decade a range of new and diverse practices were in existence, including performance-based work (for example Yves Klein in France, Yoko Ono in New York), 'Happenings' and 'environments' (e.g. Allan Kaprow in the US, Joseph Beuys in Germany) and Environmental art (e.g. Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson in the US) many of which came under the 'installation art' umbrella (De Oliveira et al 1994; Kelly, 2011; Rosenthal,2003; Bishop, 2005). As Rosenthal states:

> 'Whereas painting and sculpture freeze time and perhaps suggest something eternal, installation abhors such an effect. The viewer is in the present, experiencing temporal flow and spatial awareness. The time and space of the viewer coincide with the art, with no separation or dichotomy between the perceiver and the object. Rosenthal, 2003:27)

Instead of *representing* texture, space, light, and so on, installation artists were presenting these elements for viewers to experience directly (Bishop, 2005) signifying a shift from object knowledge to subject experience (Kelly, 2011). Installation is said to attempt to merge art and life (Kelly, 2011; Oliveira *et al*, 1994; Rosenthal, 2003). Kristeva wrote strikingly about

this after her attendance at the 1969 Venice Biennale when this style of art was still very new:

> In an installation it is the *body* in its entirety which is asked to participate through its sensations, through *vision* obviously, but also *hearing*, *touch*, on occasions *smell*. As if these artists, in the place of an "object" sought to place us in a space at the limits of the sacred, and asked us not to contemplate images but to communicate with beings. I had the impression that [the artists] were communicating this: that the ultimate aim of art is perhaps what was formerly celebrated under the term of *incarnation*. I mean by that a wish to make us feel, through the abstractions, the forms, the colours, the volumes, the sensations, a *real experience*.
> (Kristeva, quoted in *Bann 69*, cited in O'Sullivan (2001:130) Italics in original)

Kristeva's comments explain the link I am making between installation art and people with PMLD. She highlights the aspect of installation art that is pertinent to this study, which is the idea that the forms, colours, volumes and sensations of the work are *felt* on an experiential level rather than intellectually contemplated. I interpret her term 'incarnation' to mean the rich and full in-the-moment embodiment of a sensorial experience. Kristeva suggests that such direct experience of the artworks invokes a sense of being 'at the limits of the sacred', and it is clear that she was profoundly moved and excited by this shift from contemplating objects to 'real experience'.

Many artists and critics drew upon the writings of French philosopher Merleau-Ponty at this time, and his texts on the phenomenology of perception influenced the emergence of installation art (Bishop, 2005; Harrison & Wood, 2003). Merleau-Ponty argued that the perceiving subject and the perceived object are interdependent, or 'reciprocally intertwined' (Bishop, 2005:50) since the object comes into being only through its register in a subject's perception (Crotty, 1998). Merleau-Ponty expounded the embodied nature of perception, and the way in which, for example, space is not just viewed, but 'lived' from the inside (Bishop, 2005). Phenomenological ideas of perception and embodied experience, central to installation art, are also clearly of relevance to a research context where embodied perception is assumed to be the primary mode of accessing the world for pupils.

<u>Phenomenology as a relevant philosophy and research methodology for this study.</u>

A detailed discussion of phenomenology is beyond the scope of this study, but the relevance of certain phenomenological principles make it an important area to consider. Phenomenology studies conscious experience from the first person or subjective point of view. It seeks to get behind the linguistic and conceptual frameworks we use to filter

experience and to focus on the ways in which phenomena are received by the body (Simmons & Watson, 2014; Smith *et* al, 2009) with a view to the discovery of new meanings (Crotty, 1998). Husserl, the originator of this historical movement in the early 20th century, believed that our conscious awareness was distorted and obscured by theoretical understanding and cultural pre-suppositions. His assertion was that if we want to analyse our conscious experience we need to bracket off and detach ourselves from all scientific, philosophical, cultural and everyday assumptions and get back 'to the things themselves' (Husserl in van Manen 2014:50). Such ideas are clearly applicable to a study involving the experience of an architectural space, particularly one that invites non-disabled participants to encounter the space alongside participants with profound cognitive impairments. In a phenomenological enquiry experience is examined as far as possible in the way that it occurs and in its own terms (Smith *et al*, 2009).

Phenomenology asks questions about the nature of experience, such as 'what is that experience like? and 'how did I experience it?', which van Manen suggests can help us to gain 'insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it' (Van Manen, 2015:9). Interestingly, scholars seeking a different perspective or alternative conceptualisations of people with PMLD have applied phenomenology as a research methodology. For example, Simmons and Watson (2014a) use Merleau-Ponty's ideas to rethink the awareness and abilities of children with PMLD, and Evenson *et al* (2017) apply a phenomenological perspective to highlight the importance of movement and gesture for the communication of embodied meaning for pupils with PMLD. I will return to these studies later in this chapter. Phenomenology is also a preferred method for researching lived experience and has been used by Lee (2014), for example, to study the experience of music therapists working with clients with profound disabilities. Lee suggests that exploring the experiences of music therapists may be helpful in understanding the clients' experiences because of the shared nature of the interactions. My own approach to staff experience in this study assumes a similar position, in which the experience of pupils is conceived of as contingent upon the quality of attention offered to them.

Architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa adopts a phenomenological approach to his considerations of how we experience buildings and space. Pallasmaa, like Merleau-Ponty, expounds perception as something the whole body is involved in. He wants to 'proclaim a sensory architecture' (Pallasmaa, 2005:39) and he asserts that significant architecture '…makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings' because it

'…directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being' (Pallasmaa, 2005:11). Pallasmaa argues that we experience space, not as a collection of isolated images, but 'in its fully embodied material and spiritual presence.' (Pallasmaa, 2005:44). His phenomenological perspective to understanding architecture highlights the significance of the tactile sense: 'The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral unfocused vision' (Pallasmaa, 2005:10). For linguistic beings, this sensorial lived experience has been subsumed into a symbolic language system but Pallasmaa's writing reminds us that we are all, first and foremost, sensory beings. This is an important and pertinent point when considering connection between sensory and linguistic beings and spaces that might facilitate this.

O'Sullivan and the 'Aesthetics of Affect'

I have expounded the idea that because installation art's focus is on the experiential as opposed to the intellectual, this makes it fundamentally inclusive for both sensory and linguistic beings. The views of art theorist O'Sullivan (2001) support this argument. O'Sullivan believes the dominance of semiotic and deconstructive approaches to art history have drowned out the central role of affect in art. In *The Aesthetics of Affect* he advocates their revival, asserting that art is more than a cultural object, as described through language. Whilst art is made of the world, it is also *apart* from the world – but not, says O'Sullivan, in the transcendent sense; art's intrinsic aesthetic power is through affect. O'Sullivan defines affects as 'extra-discursive' (outside discourse); irreducible to structure; and 'extra-textual' (2001:126) in that they are not knowledge-producing. Massumi (1995:88) agrees, pointing out that there is 'no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect'. O'Sullivan speaks of affects as 'moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter' which are 'not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed they occur on a different *asignifying* register' (O'Sullivan, 2001:126 italics in original). Like Kristeva (quoted above), O'Sullivan suggests that art gives us real experience, and that therefore, rather than deconstructing art objects as representational forms, we need to understand them in terms of what they do:

> Art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of *transformation*. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world' (O'Sullivan:130 italics in original).

O'Sullivan's ideas clearly link with the theory surrounding installation art. The transformational power of art is based in its ability to provoke sensory/embodied moments of intensity that are indefinable in terms of linguistic knowledge.

It is interesting that O'Sullivan's uses the word 'affect', a term also found in the literature on people with PMLD (for example, Forster, 2011). In the field of psychology the term 'affect' is used to describe the experience of feeling or emotion. It usually refers to instinctual reactions that occur before cognitive processing affords more complex or identifiable emotions that can be linguistically articulated. This is why the term 'affect' is frequently found in theories of infant development (for example in Stern, 1977), and also in relation to non-verbal interactions with people with PMLD (e.g.in Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart, 1998; Forster, 2011). Whilst specific definitions and applications of the term differ, what is common in the definitions of contemporary art theorist (O'Sullivan), educationists (Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart), infant psychologist (Stern) and speech pathologist (Forster) is the notion of affects as non-conceptual and transmittable responses and experience. I return to the notion of affect later in this chapter in relation to attunement between people with PMLD and their support partners.

O'Sullivan (2001:127) argues that the ways in which we think and talk about visual art have led to a closing down of 'the possibility of accessing the event that is art' and he proposes this can be remedied if the viewer applies a different type of attention. He contends that we are caught in 'a certain spatio-temporal register: we see only what we have already seen'. O'Sullivan suggests we need to switch this register in order to access the event that is art. His proposal is a suspension of normal motor activity, 'which in itself allows other "planes" of reality to be perceivable' (O'Sullivan, 2001:127) and 'a practice of patience, of listening – a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an experience of the event, precisely as the affect' (O'Sullivan, 2001:128). O'Sullivan's discussion is located in an art theory discourse, but if we apply it to the school context, here we have audiences (in the pupils) who could be said to already demonstrate the type of attention he is recommending. My contention is that if their supporting (staff) partners can 'suspend normal motor activity' and 'switch register', there is the potential for 'the event that is art' to be accessed together in 'new planes of reality' (O'Sullivan 2001:127-8). Mercieca's (2013) suggests that students with PMLD can make us experience a 'lack' or 'deficiency' in our thinking and living, by carving out 'spaces of intensities' and 'spaces of possibilities'. Like Mercieca I contend that people with PMLD have much to teach us, and perhaps O'Sullivan's notion of aesthetic experience is one such area.

In this section I have identified the features of installation art that make it accessible for sensory beings and linguistic beings together. I pointed out the relevance of phenomenology given the genre's focus on experience and discussed how phenomenological approaches are

also applied in research involving people with PMLD. O'Sullivan's notions of affect in relation to art were articulated as a useful way of understanding what is happening in the encounter between a spectator and art, a way that is also inclusive and transferrable to audiences with PMLD. One of the themes of my own installation art practice is the creation of safe nurturing spaces and in this study I look at the creation and presentation of one of these within a school setting. In the next section I look at the literature that supports my notion that an aesthetic space of refuge is of value in such a setting.

2.4 Why Is There A Need For An 'Aesthetic Space Of Refuge'?

To answer the question 'why is there a need for an aesthetic space of refuge?' I must link personal motivations to wider cultural phenomena within the scope of this study. In Chapter One, I introduced the idea that my move away from teaching was a desire to escape an oppressive workload, particularly the emphasis on accountability practices that had come to dominate my experience of the profession. I also briefly mentioned that themes of safe, nurturing spaces of refuge were present in my previous body of artwork (to be discussed in Chapter Five). These two areas become linked over the course of this study as I build a safe nurturing "space to be" within a school setting. But the origin of my need to escape is found beyond the personal in the ideology that pervades our time – neoliberalism. I look now at the literature on this topic and examine its effects on individuals within the education system, thereby contextualising the work of classroom staff at my school within a cultural context. I then go on to consider the labour-intensive, busy-ness of the role of staff in a classroom for pupils with PMLD in order to establish the potential value of a task-free space in which to simply be with pupils in alternative ways.

<u>The commodification of education</u>

According to Davies & Bansel (2007), Monbiot (2016) and Robertson (2007) neoliberalism is a powerful, but not explicitly named, force in modern life. Its elusive power comes from its anonymity, which Davies and Bansel (2007: online) suggest is a 'calculated invisibility' that 'works against our capacity to make a critique of it'. According to Metcalf, the word neoliberalism:

> …has become a rhetorical weapon, but it properly names the reigning ideology of our era – one that venerates the logic of the market and strips away the things that make us human. [Metcalf, 2017:online]

During the 1980s, Thatcher's government in the UK and Reagan's presidency in the US actively replaced the Keynsian economic policies of the post war decades with the neoliberal ideology of free market economy (Monbiot, 2014). Welfare and the collective were no longer worthy goals; ideas of freedom and the individual were now to be revered. Neoliberalism's market-based rationale has three central features – deregulation, competitiveness, and privatisation (Robertson, 2007) and according to much of the literature these ideas and values have become insidiously embedded in our thinking over time to form a social order that now feels like common sense (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Monbiot, 2016; Verhaeghe, 2014).

Davies & Bansel (2007) point out how difficult it is to clearly pin down the changes neoliberal policies have brought about in schools and Robertson (2007) argues that the language of economics has been so wholeheartedly transferred to the education sector that the appropriateness of terms such as efficiency, effectiveness, and public accountability is not even questioned. Meanwhile Apple (2004) claims that the marketisation of education is neutralised and naturalised by its emphasis on effort and merit, an apparent depoliticisation that renders those opposed to this model as therefore opposed to effort and merit. Robertson (2007) asserts that neoliberalism has transformed how we think and what we do as teachers. Pratt (2016) agrees, stating that the assessment-driven culture that neoliberalism has promoted takes over the lives of those working within it, dominating the ways they think and talk about their work. Education, then, has been commodified (Apple 2004; Ball 2004; Pratt 2016) such that learning is no longer conceived of as a verb describing a relational process but as a noun, a *product* that can be bought and sold like all other marketable goods, a product that is quantifiable in numbers. Since 'only that which is enumerated counts' (Pratt 2016:897) teachers have to make what they do more visible in order to make it more measurable:

> Thus, one aspect of neoliberal professional life is the changing emphasis from practice that is effective, to practice that has the hallmark of effectiveness. (Pratt 2016:896).

These ideas are important in clarifying the pressures and the culture that define the experience of classroom staff. Public accountability - in terms of planning, record keeping, assessment, efficiency and effectiveness – is awarded the highest value. The commodification and measurement of learning informs us 'what knowledge, values and behaviours should be standardized and officially defined as legitimate' (Apple, 2004:24) and

abstracted linear targets elevate the "knowable", and diminish the "un-knowable" potential of complex human encounters in the classroom. As accountability practices increase and control tightens, the need for clarity about what we are trying to accomplish becomes paramount and predictable outcomes are therefore favoured (Eisner, 2005). This promise of knowing, integral to accountability practices, is powerfully seductive and as Eisner points out, 'to aspire for less is to court professional irresponsibility' (Eisner, 2002 on-line). So this is the social and political context within which the "business" of education now takes place and whilst my research setting, a highly specialist school for pupils with PMLD, espouse a drastically different pedagogy to the mainstream, it operates within the same understandings of efficiency, effectiveness and public accountability. The importance of clearly defined targets and the continual assessment of pupil progress are thoroughly embedded in working practices, and as a consequence, pupils become 'site[s] for cultivation' (Vorhaus, 2006;322). In this context, an aesthetic space of refuge can be seen as a place free from such reductionist understandings of the relationship between staff and pupils, a place with the freedom to explore alternative ways of relating.

Care as busy-ness

Individuals with PMLD require support for all aspects of their life (Doukas et al, 2017), and in the classroom, staff assist pupils with eating and drinking, dressing and undressing, toileting, padding, washing, positional changes and stretches. They keep the high proportion of pupils who have epilepsy safe during seizures and more generally administer pump feeds and other clinical interventions essential to pupil wellbeing (Imray and Bond, 2015). With shared resources (such as hoists and changing tables), and a typical ratio of two to three pupils per staff member, the smooth running of the classroom is a logistically complex operation, relying on a staff team that works cooperatively within set time-frames. Beesley (2018) asked nine classroom staff in her school setting how much time they spent 'toileting' pupils (just one aspect of the classroom care regime), and six of them reported that they spent two hours or more daily, about a third of the school day (Beesley, 2018). The need to carry out these repeated tasks sensitively and responsively is discussed in the literature and over the last ten years or so there has been recognition that these care routines offer valuable and consistently repeated learning opportunities for pupils with PMLD (Imray and Bond, 2015; Imray and Hinchcliffe, 2014; Lacey, 2009).

Care has consequently become integrated into the educational curriculum in many PMLD classrooms, a move that demands particular skills and approach if it is to be successful. Inviting a pupil to get involved in putting their own coat on, for example, by giving them an

adequate and consistent cue and waiting patiently to see if they move their arms or lean forward in their wheelchair in order to cooperate in the process, is quite different to simply putting the coat on them. Doing *with*, rather than doing *to*, is how this process becomes educational, led by notions of increased pupil control (Imray & Bond, 2015; Imray & Hinchliffe, 2014). However, whilst highlighting this important point, the literature does not address the mind-set shift that staff must make if they are to 'do with' as opposed to 'do to'. It could be argued that such subtle but significant shifts in attitude and mode-of-being on the part of staff are crucial for these interventions to become educational in the way that Imray & Hinchcliffe (2014) and Imray and Bond (2015) promote. I highlight this point because in this study attention is paid to staff mind-set in relation to pupils and the potential of an aesthetic space to facilitate shifts in mind-set from 'doing' to 'being' is explored. Clearly there are important differences between achieving maximum involvement of a pupil in their own care, and simply 'being' alongside them in an aesthetic space free of any task-oriented goals, but I would argue there are also some important parallels too. The process of slowing down one's own actions, which may involve a temporary abandonment of time constraints, in order to tune-in and come alongside the pupil is pertinent to both.

I conclude this section by returning to the question, 'Why is there a need for an aesthetic space of refuge?'. Using the literature I have demonstrated that the excessive demands of a neoliberal accountability culture in education, and the high care needs of a class of pupils with PMLD, result in considerable pressures on staff. I have argued that these demands affect staff mind-set, and potentially thereby the quality or form of their interactions with pupils, something that is less discussed in the literature. To provide temporary refuge from these demands by offering a space where staff are invited to stop doing, and simply "be" alongside pupils, is to create a space with a different kind of potential, where encounters between staff and pupils are free from the imposition of tasks or goals.

The idea of 'quiet spaces' within schools is a growing field, as is research into 'restorative spaces'. However, quiet spaces in schools are typically geared towards emotional regulation and well-being for pupils suffering with emotional stresses, and the field of restorative spaces is more focused on attention restoration theory and the value of tranquillity or "soft fascination" for mental revival. The emphasis in this study is on the potential of an aesthetic space to facilitate a different quality of relating between staff and pupil, which is why I decided that the relevance of literature on restorative spaces and quiet spaces in schools lies outside the scope of this study.

2.5 How Are Interactions Within The Staff/Pupil Dyad Understood?

To contextualise my focus on interactions within the staff/pupil dyad I begin with a brief overview of the educational literature.

An overview of the educational literature – primary debates.

Taking a wide view, key areas over recent years have been the curriculum, forms of assessment, and inclusion for pupils with PMLD (e.g. Colley, 2013; Imray & Colley, 2017; Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2014; Lacey *et al*, 2015;). Useful insights into the issues that concern educational practitioners (rather than academics) in this field can be gained through on-line and social media forums. For example, in late 2018, a debate around the issue of inclusion arose on the on-line 'SLD Forum', with some contributors referencing Imray and Colley's (2017) book *Inclusion is dead: Long Live Inclusion!* According to Imray and Colley (who are both members of the forum), pupils with severe or profound learning disabilities require a fundamentally different pedagogical approach, not an adapted version of a curriculum designed for more able learners. These authors therefore assert that *social* inclusion is essential, but that all attempts at *educational* inclusion have failed and should be abandoned. Within the forum debate, Imray gets to the hub of the issue by arguing that as long as segregation is regarded as being morally unacceptable, then inclusion will remain an idealised goal. In Imray's view, to provide pupils with the same education, however well differentiated, is not equality. As with my earlier discussion on the limits of the social model of disability, this debate illustrates that the frameworks we use to conceptualise people with PMLD, in other words how we value and understand them, are critical for how their inclusion is understood and enacted.

In 2014, Simmons & Watson's book, *The PMLD Ambiguity: Articulating the Lifeworlds of Children with Profound and Multiple Learning disabilities*, brought something new to the table. The book proved a controversial publication because of its apparent criticism of several key writers in this field. Simmons and Watson challenged the developmental reductionism of current conceptualisations of 'PMLD', and applied concepts from phenomenology in order to offer alternative understandings of pupil self-awareness and capability. Using Merleau Ponty's theories of embodied experience, Simmons and Watson put forward the idea that pupils with PMLD have an embodied sense of self, rather than self-awareness in a cognitive/conscious sense, and therefore experience themselves *through* their environment. Using this premise, they argued for greater inclusion of pupils with PMLD within mainstream settings, in the belief that this exposes them to more opportunities to interact with different environments. The case study at the centre of the book received

criticism because of its small scale (just one pupil), a criticism Simmons subsequently sought to address through further research in this area (Simmons, 2017; Simmons, 2019). The academic and provocative style of Simmons and Watson's arguments and the critique of key scholars in this field, alienates some practitioners (including myself initially), but their challenging work provides a significant new perspective, and continues to add to the field. I move away from wider educational debates now and narrow the focus to look at the literature in relation to pedagogy.

Pedagogy for pupils with PMLD

The 1990s was a key period for new literature on the topic of education for pupils with PMLD (for example, Collis and Lacey, 1996; Coupe O'Kane & Goldbart, 1998; Coupe O'Kane & Smith, 1994; Nind and Hewett, 1994; Hewett & Nind, 1998; Ware, 1994, 1996), and the works of these authors have largely stood the test of time, remaining key texts today. Educational provision for children with PMLD is made up of behavioural and cognitive approaches to pedagogy alongside sensory and therapeutic interventions such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, rebound therapy, and music therapy (Jones, 2002). The literature produced during the 1990s documented a significant move away from previously favoured behaviourist approaches and towards cognitive theories of child development. It is these cognitive approaches that I focus on in this section.

Children with PMLD are understood to be globally delayed in their development due to extensive neurological damage (Carnaby, 2007) and their abilities are often compared to young infants (Simmons & Watson, 2015). They are described as operating at the earliest pre-verbal stages of development (Coupe O'Kane & Goldbart, 1998). Ware's important work on responsive environments (1996) built on studies showing that infants who experience a more responsive environment make faster social and cognitive progress (Ware, 1994) and develop 'contingency awareness', a term first described in the 1960s by Watson (Ware & Thorpe, 2007). Contingency awareness is awareness of the impact of one's own actions and one's ability to make something happen knowingly (with intention). It relates to both the object world (e.g. knocking something over, pushing a button) and the social world (commanding attention, communicating with others). As such, it is viewed as a key area of learning for this pupil population, and a fundamental precondition for other areas of learning.

Much attention is given to the creation of a responsive environment within the PMLD classroom. The presentation and adaptation of the physical environment so that a pupil can have an impact whatever their level of physical mobility and competence is carefully

considered. From a social point of view, the vocalisations and behaviours of pupils are conceived of as the conveyors of meaning. Ware (1996) asserts that we learn to become intentional communicators through people treating us as communicators. In practice this means staff sensitively and consistently treating what might be considered the pre-intentional behaviours of learners with PMLD as meaningful. By reacting to a pupil's expression of their internal state the skilled educator facilitates the learner's awareness of the significance of their behaviour and its impact upon others (Barber, 2001). Contingency awareness is particularly important in relation to the expression of choice (Ware & Thorpe, 2007), a key concern in relation to quality of life for people with PMLD and something I discuss later in this chapter.

The responses of people with PMLD, however, can be difficult to interpret (Atkin & Lorch, 2016; Porter *et al*, 2001). Coupe *et al*'s (1985) Affective Communication Assessment (ACA) was developed to offer a systematic way to build up a picture of each pupil's responses to different stimuli (Barber, 2001), although interpretation of responses remains a subjective process. In the PMLD educational literature generally, references to the need for sensitive, observant, intuitive, responsive and pupil-centred approaches are plentiful. Riley & Jones (2015:127) suggest that teaching children with PMLD involves 'a sophisticated interpretation of learner response and careful mediation of meaningful learning on an individual basis', and Stewart (2016) goes further by asserting that teachers themselves *are* the curriculum. In this sense, the education of pupils with PMLD is markedly different from the education of neurotypical pupils, not only because we cannot utilise a common symbolic language, but also because the sociability and curiosity of children with PMLD may not be evident. For classroom staff working with pupils with PMLD, the goal is to find out what engages and brings the learner towards sociability or object/environment curiosity, and to try and increase the frequency and meaning of these moments for them.

To summarise the literature, good educational practice for pupils with PMLD aims to facilitate contingency awareness and sociability, and staff fulfil a crucial role in this. But what approaches do we adopt to achieve these aims? In the following section I present the literature on one recommended approach, Intensive Interaction. This approach is important and relevant to this study because it is the method with which the languageless "cultural chasm" identified in Chapter One is crossed and contact between staff and pupils is currently understood.

Intensive Interaction

Intensive Interaction (Nind & Hewett, 2006; Hewett & Nind, 1998; Caldwell, 2007; Hewett, 2012a) is an approach to communication used with individuals who are non-symbolic communicators. It is a widely-used approach in educational and care settings with people who have significant barriers to verbal communication. The approach draws on observations of caregivers responding to the pre-verbal behaviour of neurotypical infants through their facial expressions, vocalisations, movement and touch, as well as through carefully attuned affective states and mood (Caldwell 2007; Hewett, 2012a; Nind and Hewett, 1994). The cognitivist theories that inform Intensive Interaction originate in the late 1960s, when new research studies on infants challenged previously held ideas about babies being 'mindless organisms driven by stimuli' (Trevarthen, 2008:25). Close observation of young babies with their caregivers revealed delicate and sensitive 'protoconversations' between them (Bateson, 1979) that were musical and dance-like, following rhythmic patterns of engagement (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). These pre-linguistic conversations were found to be bi-directional and caregivers were seen to intuitively, and often joyfully, respond to signals from the infant. Cultural anthropologist Bateson (1979) reported on the turn-taking and 'delighted ritual courtesy' exhibited by mothers and babies when they were engrossed in the flow of these interactions and Stern (1977:82) noted, 'It requires a mother with no other thought in mind than to have fun, and a baby in the mood to have fun'. The idea that there was communication before speech grew out of these studies (e.g. Bullowa, 1979) as did the view that, as social creatures, human beings are born with an 'innate intersubjectivity' (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) and are pre-disposed to communicate (Trevarthen, 2008; Zeedyk, 2008).

It should be noted, however, that there are opposing viewpoints on early development that focus on object cognition as the precursor to social intelligence (discussed in Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001; Simmons & Watson, 2014a), but I do not elaborate on these here. I find the evidence for innate intersubjectivity compelling, and assume a predisposition for connectedness in all human beings. It is these naturally playful and intuitive caregiver/infant interactions that are adapted into the practice of Intensive Interaction for individuals who have gone beyond infanthood but who remain 'emergent' communicators. For children with the severest impairments though, responses may be extremely subtle; the slight tensing or relaxing of parts of the body, or a small increase in tongue movement for example (Atkin & Lorch, 2016). These tiny behaviours may only be registered by adults who know them really well and can deeply tune into their affective states.

There is a wealth of literature about the practice of Intensive Interaction, including research studies into its efficacy, teaching materials, training courses and social media support groups. The discourse currently tends to concentrate on the finer details of the approach (for example, Hewett, 2018), or on how to embed the practice into organisations (for example, Firth, 2018; Laurie, 2017b). There are three key points in relation to Intensive Interaction that I want to highlight as important for this study. The first point relates to the advice for good practice of Intensive Interaction. Calveley (2018) suggests that the more skilful communicator needs to fully tune in to their partner and Hewett (2018:online) recommends that they patiently come alongside a pupil with a watchful and open demeanour, a willingness to abandon any agenda or task, and concentrate solely on them, 'listening with all the senses to any feedback'. Given the demands of a busy classroom context (as previously discussed), it is easy to see how such a 'coming alongside' might be a challenging proposition. The second key point from the literature is the *mutually* enjoyable nature of these interactions when they are in flow, and I will return to this area in the next section. The third key point I want to convey is the intense, focused, and intimate nature of these moments of mutual connectedness. These dyadic interactions are delicate, tender moments of communion, which is where my artistic interest in the creation of safe, nurturing spaces becomes relevant. Whilst such interactions between staff and pupils may (and do) occur in all kinds of environments and situations, it is my deep instinct to protect them and to provide nurturing spaces in which they can flourish.

One of the goals of Intensive Interaction is to improve the quality of life for people who are unable to communicate linguistically and who may otherwise suffer from extreme social isolation. In the next section I look at how quality of life is discussed in the literature.

Quality of life

The topic of quality of life is more typically found in social science studies focusing on adults, than in studies on children and young people in education, although education is generally conceived of as a preparation that directly contributes to the quality of that adult life. Quality of life is a social construct, and when applied to people with PMLD the term generally refers to factors such as levels of physical and emotional wellbeing, pain management, and social connection and leisure opportunities. In the light of much prejudice and assumptions about the lives of people with PMLD, their quality of life is a significant area for discussion. From a bioethical perspective, these individuals lack self-awareness, self-determination and the capability for reason - factors given by some as a reason to deny them the status of personhood (discussed by Hogg, 2007; Vorhaus, 2005). This reductive perspective gives rise

to widespread negative assumptions about the quality and worth of the lives of people with profound disabilities and also results in unequal healthcare provision (Mencap, online; Simmons & Watson, 2014b), or even the denial of the right to life in some cases (Hogg, 2007). This research, however, takes an opposing ethical perspective whereby people with PMLD lead valued and valuable human lives.

It is significant to note, however, that personal ability is considered 'the most powerful predictor of variation in quality of life' (Maes *et al*, 2007:163) and that those with the lowest levels of adaptive and communicative skills are seen to have less choice, and less variety and meaningful engagement in their day-to-day and leisure activities. This may be due to a lack of contingency awareness, and/or because their wishes, needs and preferences can be difficult to interpret due to the idiosyncratic nature of their communicative behaviours (Atkin & Lorch, 2016; Porter *et al*, 2001). Hostyn and Maes (2009:297) state that people with PMLD '…need supportive relationships to demonstrate their competencies and personalities, and to flourish as active partners'. What the literature confirms is that quality of life for individuals with PMLD is inextricably linked to the quality of support offered to them (Forster & Iacono, 2014; Hostyn & Maes, 2009, 2013; Neerinckx et al, 2014; Porter *et al*, 2001). But what constitutes the kind of supportive relationship and quality interactions that enable people with PMLD to flourish as active partners?

There is consensus in the literature about this, although the terminology varies. 'Sensitive responsiveness', 'co-regulation', 'joint attention', 'intersubjectivity', 'attunement' and 'affect attunement' are some of the words used to describe the observable and less observable elements present in mutually satisfying one-to-one communication and social connection between sensory beings and linguistic beings, or between young infants and caregivers (e.g. Forster & Iacono, 2014; Griffiths & Smith, 2016; Hostyn & Maes, 2009; Petry *et al*, 2007). Stern (2005, in Forster, 2011) uses the term affect attunement to describe a kind of psychological intimacy or 'mindreading' in which behaviours such as posture, facial expression, tone of voice are interpreted and responded to. Interactions between sensory beings and linguistic beings operate on this plane of emotional, intuitive connection and key to this is the disposition, attitude and approach of the non-disabled partner. Intensive Interaction is frequently named as the preferred approach for achieving this type of quality interactions. Calveley (2018:39), for example, states that Intensive Interaction is 'more than a pedagogical method, it is a practice and an ethos with a clear rationale and vision of personhood' that 'involves full engagement of mind, body and heart'.

Quality interactions are typically judged by their reciprocity and mutuality. Despite this consistent acknowledgement of the mutual nature of quality interactions in the literature, there is little discussion of the benefits for the non-disabled partner. When this aspect is mentioned, it tends to be anecdotal and is typically related to job satisfaction (e.g. Gurney, 2018; Laurie, 2017a; Leaning, 2006). Unusually, Grace (2017) does talk about the ways in which sensory beings and linguistic beings can 'exchange insight', and she stresses the two-way nature of this process: 'Sensory Beings offer Linguistic Beings the opportunity to connect and appreciate something many of us overlook: the now. They remind us that this moment is here, to be lived and enjoyed' (Grace, 2017:10). Matthews (2013) similarly points out that people with profound disabilities make sense of the world through their sensory experience and that for non-disabled people caught up in the busyness of everyday life this way of being is often neglected or forgotten. 'Staying still, being apparently passive and allowing experience to come is a profoundly human activity' (Matthews, 2013:109). This study follows Grace and Matthew's line of thinking by focusing attention on the experience of classroom staff, not just in relation to job satisfaction, but also in terms of the insights they might gain from being with people with PMLD. The implicit assumption of this perspective is that if staff are "in the moment" alongside pupils, then the potential for *both* parties to gain something from the encounter is multiplied. In the next section I look at the literature to identify the factors that can get in the way of these moments.

The barriers to connection and mutuality

People with PMLD are sometimes described as being "hard to reach". They may appear disconnected to the world around them and moments of interaction and connection can be rare. Sensory impairments may limit their perception of the surrounding environment (Booker, 2011; Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2014) and it is possible that their attention is on internal/bodily sensations, including pain and discomfort, rather than external stimuli (Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2009). Medications and/or lack of sleep may make them drowsy. With a sensory rather than linguistic relationship to the world, and memory and recall that may be unreliable, withdrawal from what must sometimes feel like an onslaught of random, unanticipated experiences must be a useful form of behaviour regulation (WAG, 2006). Clearly, the barriers to connection and mutually rewarding interactions for sensory beings are manifold.

Ware (2003) suggests that because a child with PMLD is likely to be a passive partner, less able to participate in reciprocal interactions in the way seen in neuro-typical infants, interactions for the caregiver can be less enjoyable. Potential interaction partners can be put

off by the lack of response they receive for their efforts, because someone with PMLD may not smile, make eye contact, or show any obvious signs of awareness of an invitation to connect - indeed they may not even be aware that someone is trying to interact with them, due to visual and hearing impairments. Ware (2003) concludes that this lack of response results in caregivers initiating fewer interactions, and responding less to the child with PMLD, leaving them in an unresponsive environment. Ware's studies also showed that when caregivers do initiate interactions with more severely impaired individuals, they are often characterized by a more dominant and directive style than their interactions with non-disabled infants. More recent studies by Neerinckx *et al* (2014) similarly found an increased directiveness of disability support workers in response to their more passive clients.

The findings of Ware and Neerinckx *et al* are important and relevant. In Chapter One I documented my own discomfort in relation to a lack of response from pupils, and the strong impulse to "do" something as a result. This still and languageless zone can feel deeply uncomfortable for active linguistic beings, but this discomfort must be overcome if we are to hold the space open for pupils to become actively engaged with us (or with an object/experience) in their own time. Leaning (2006) discusses staff feeling hopeless in their relationships with clients with PMLD, and Lee (2014) mentions the 'emotional difficulties' experienced by some music therapists in the early stages of their relationships with clients with PMLD. Other than this, references to the challenge of this language-less space of encounter, or the "cultural chasm" expressed in my poem in Chapter One, are scant in the literature.

Staff mindset and its effect on clients with PMLD is the subject of one relevant study by Singh *et al* (2004) who looked at the impact of training caregivers in mindfulness. Although there is no reference to any difficulties or discomfort faced by staff prior to the training, the premise of the study was that a change in mindset within the carers themselves might benefit the cared-for, which is pertinent to my own research. The rationale for Singh *et al*'s study was to see if the mindfulness training would increase happiness in the individuals with PMLD that they cared for. In their exploratory study - which the authors acknowledge has some weaknesses - levels of happiness for people with PMLD in the presence of caregivers trained in mindfulness did increase slowly over time according to the happiness indices used. Singh *et al* (2004:216) state that, as opposed to training where staff are taught new behaviour interventions, mindfulness training is about transforming 'the individual's view of themselves and others as the basis for behavior change'. Based on informal observations, Singh *et al*

(2004:217) noted that after the training in mindfulness, staff were 'more responsive than reactive' and 'more creative, flexible, and adaptable than during the baseline'.

There are some interesting cross-overs between Singh *et al*'s study and my own, although the social science approach and the use of happiness measurements keep them distinctly separate. Both studies focus on the subjective experience of linguistic beings with the premise that this has important implications for the sensory beings they encounter. In Chapter Eight I acknowledge that mindfulness is a pertinent topic of discussion, but one I chose not to include within the scope of this study.

Speech pathologist Sheridan Forster's observations of clients in adult service homes also led her to focus on the attitudes of staff (*Sheridan Forster* [on-line]). She noticed that individuals with profound cognitive impairments, who often had very few ways to engage in, or sustain, interactions with others were left alone for long periods of time. Forster's research revealed that the culture within the workplace meant staff found it difficult to simply spend time with clients. For example, rules regarding touch and age-appropriateness inhibited them and affected their ability to find ways to interact that were meaningful for the non-verbal individuals they cared for. The belief that 'spending quiet time together is what occurs after the "work" has been completed' (Forster & Iacono, 2008:142) was also prevalent. Additionally, because Intensive Interaction was understood to be an approach that requires training and can be done well or badly, staff who had not received training felt ill-equipped to find their own ways to engage meaningfully with clients, and some staff trained in Intensive Interaction lacked confidence in using the approach. As a result of her research, Forster devised *The Hanging Out Program* or *HOP* (Forster, 2008) which does not prescribe an approach, rather it invites disability support workers to regularly devote their full attention to a client for ten minutes at a time, whilst asking themselves 'how do I need to be in order to be with you?' (*HOP Hanging Out Program*, 2012:8mins 17secs). They are encouraged to find their own ways to interact and reflect upon what seems to work with different individuals. Forster's promotion of the value of simply being together is highly pertinent to this study.

In order to answer the question, 'how are interactions within the staff/pupil dyad understood?', I have looked at the educational literature to show that the development of contingency awareness and sociability are the focus of much educational endeavour. The important role of staff in providing a responsive environment for pupils has been highlighted. The difficulties of interpreting the responses of pupils, and the need for observation, sensitivity and intuition to build relationships with pupils over time are consistent themes in

both educational literature and social science studies on quality of life for adults with PMLD. I have shown that Intensive interaction is a favoured approach used by educationists, carers and families to support communication with people with PMLD, and I have highlighted the relevance of its focus on mutually enjoyable interaction to this study whilst noting a lack of discussion in the literature on the benefits for the non-disabled partner of these moments of mutuality. I have also highlighted two studies that take the same premise as my own, that the mindset of the non-disabled partner is an important factor when considering the quality of contact between them and the partner with PMLD. I turn my attention now to the notion of agency in people with PMLD.

2.6 How Do We Think About Agency In Relation To Someone With PMLD?

Simmons and Watson (2014b) point out that there are those who believe that an individual with PMLD's lack of self-awareness, self-determination and capability for reason disqualifies them from 'personhood', although the majority of people who care for this group of individuals find such beliefs abhorrent. However, even when more inclusive, non capacity-based definitions of personhood are adopted, individuals with PMLD present a significant challenge to the deeply-rooted belief in Western society that agency and progress are the essential features of a worthwhile human life. The idea of human agency is therefore an important one in the literature. As previously discussed, education for children with PMLD typically focuses on trying to increase the agency of pupils through the development of contingency awareness and communication. In this sense, although it may have to be measured in the smallest discernible units, the importance and value of agency and progress are unquestionably central to the whole educational enterprise. Some scholars in this field, however, bring different notions of agency to the fore.

Mercieca (2013) urges us to expand our notions of agency in relation to children with PMLD. He critiques respected sources, such as Lacey & Ouvry's (1998) book, and the Mencap website, by highlighting the universality, and consequently the neutrality, of their influential discourses. Mercieca (2013) suggests these texts become "how to" manuals that try to replace the complex reality of our contact with people with PMLD with the idea that we can learn what to do in almost every circumstance. He contrasts the advice given in this literature with the reality of being with someone with PMLD:

> In spite of the linear thinking that has developed around the educational contexts of students with PMLD by educators, finding oneself in front of the student with PMLD involves being grasped by astonishment that makes linear thinking impossible. Mercieca [2008:7)

Mercieca (2008) draws on the work of philosophers Derrida and Deleuze-Guattari, to (re)define agency in pupils with PMLD as their ability to make us think, or think again. He suggests they offer 'intensities', often short in duration, that provide us with opportunities to go 'beyond the territory that we are accustomed to', and 'beyond the vocabulary and grammar' (Mercieca, 2008:9) of the discourses we are familiar with:

> The children call us to engage in the intensities that they are able to produce. Engaging in this call helps us to think again and become.
> (Mercieca, 2008:6)

Mercieca's ideas on the agency of people with PMLD are significant in their contrast to most educational literature that more typically concentrates on how we, as the proficient professionals, can help to facilitate agency in our vulnerable, un-proficient pupils. Vorhaus (2006) points out that the goal of education is to "improve" pupils, but like Mercieca, he suggests that to offer true respect is to let go of our own goals and to see and accept the pupil exactly as they are:

> Pedagogy is frequently conceived as aiming at the cultivation of skills and knowledge. But respecting someone is sometimes precisely not to see her as a site for cultivation. We are, as it were, meeting her gaze and acknowledging what we see, and that is a different thing from seeking to improve what we have found. (Vorhaus, 2006:322)

However, Vorhaus's definition of respect may be a difficult proposition for educationalists, for if we give up seeking to improve, are we giving up on the potential of an individual? This would be a contentious issue in relation to pupils with PMLD who just fifty years ago were deemed ineducable, before the *1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act* (HMSO, 1970) extended educational provision to include *all* children, whatever their level of disability. But Vorhaus carefully places the word 'sometimes' in his declaration. He does not advocate that we give up on someone's potential; rather he encourages us to temporarily let go of our educational purpose in order to see a pupil in their entirety, valuing all aspects of them.

Sairah Shah, author and parent of a profoundly disabled daughter Alisa (who died in 2017 when she was 8 years old) also acknowledged the need to go beyond ideas of progress and achievement in order to recognise and respect her daughter's whole being. She states, 'the essence of humanity lies far deeper than mere development' (Shah, 2013:online). Philosopher and mother Eva Feder Kittay concurs when she tells of how she has come to understand 'development' for her profoundly disabled daughter Sesha as 'the enhancement of her capacity to feel joy' (Kittay, 1999:173). Similarly, Watson (2014) argues that recognising the capacity children with PMLD have for playfulness enables us to access their

untapped strengths and abilities, and Brigg, *et al* (2016) assert that creating the space for humour, fun and laughter with youngsters with PMLD is a powerful way to share our common humanity.

Reinders (2008) highlights the mismatch between many people's declarations that people with PMLD are "just like us" and the commonly held belief that what makes us human (and therefore differentiates us from the rest of the animal kingdom) is our self-awareness, our language and our ability to reason. He notes that "insiders", i.e. those who care for people with profound disabilities (usually family members or professionals) appear to experience no tension in balancing these opposing viewpoints. Reinders argues that if we want to understand what it is to be human, we should not look to our faculties or abilities:

> If human beings with profound intellectual disabilities are to be dignified, then the grounds of their dignity cannot be found in human agency. (Reinders, 2008:12).

Like Vorhaus and Mercieca, Reinders identifies a different type of agency - the profound effect that people who live their lives in passivity can have on the rest of us:

> Oliver's humanity was never questioned because he could not respond in any meaningful way; rather, it was affirmed because he had the power to move other people. (Reinders, 2008:11).

Vorhaus (2007:320) similarly notes that profoundly disabled people 'offer the rest of us an opportunity to learn about our humanity'. Both Kittay (2001) and Vorhaus (2016) present powerful testimonies from those who love and care for individuals with profound disabilities expressing the positive influence and immense rewards they receive from their relationships. Vorhaus also writes about how love itself can reveal capacity in others:

> Love is not only a *source* of value; it may also *reveal* what is precious in a loved one. And what is precious is not simply a capacity we hadn't seen before; it is the human being as a whole, someone who previously we may have written off as inert and devoid of personality, but whose individuality is made manifest in the presence of people who love him and treat him with respect and tenderness
>
> Vorhaus (2016:59 italics in orginal)

These writers all challenge traditional discourses surrounding people with PMLD, and they each represent a move towards relational and reciprocal understandings of capacity and agency. Simmons and Watson (2014a:16) sum this up well when they assert that a 'repositioning of profoundly disabled people needs to occur that reveals their social and cultural engagement in the world and allows for their personhood to emerge'. It is the

passivity and apparent lack of capability seen in people with PMLD that challenges some of our deepest beliefs about what makes a life worthwhile (Ware, 1994), and provides the imperative to redefine notions of agency and development. Carlson (2010:194) acknowledges the value of this process of re-evaluation when she states that 'addressing the complexities of intellectual disability holds the potential to critically revisit and perhaps change our philosophical views'. These are positive challenges that help us to examine what is important in life, and what forms the basis of our shared humanity.

Grace argues that pity should have no place in our argument for the acceptance of difference. She contends that inclusion of people with PMLD should not be based in pity but in "the extraordinariness of these lives, the brilliance of the moments shared, the unique perspective they bring" (Grace & Salfield, 2017: 5:47-5:57 mins). Grace points out that whilst many in Western society look to mindfulness practices to ease increasing levels of anxiety and stress, a great many sensory beings "lead lives of constant non-judgemental attention to the present" and "often find those lives joyful" (Grace & Salfield, 2017: 8:11 – 8:18 mins). She invites us to recognise the gifts that are available to both parties when we extend our own perspectives to include each other's. In this section I have introduced some of the literature that offers alternative conceptualisations of people with PMLD, viewpoints that have educated me and contributed to positive shifts in my own theoretical perspective.

2.7 Chapter Summary

A diverse range of literature has been considered in this chapter in order to forge a link between installation art and a school for pupils with PMLD, a link that has not previously been discussed in the literature. In doing so, this genre of art and a specialist educational establishment have been contextualised in their respective theoretical contexts. Using the literature, I have made a case for the need for refuge from the busy-ness of classrooms, and have argued that both staff and pupils stand to gain from opportunities for staff to be more "in-the-moment". My interest in connection between staff and pupils has been grounded in the theory and practice of Intensive Interaction and discussions within the literature about quality interactions for people with PMLD. A lack of academic literature on the benefits of mutually rewarding interactions for the non-disabled partner was noted. Several writers who offer alternative ways of thinking about our contact with people with PMLD were reviewed and their influence on my own theoretical stance was noted. In the next chapter I continue the process of locating this study and establishing my own perspective, this time in relation to the field of contemporary arts practice in this area.

Chapter Three

Contemporary Arts Practice with and for people with PMLD

3.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I look at contemporary arts practice in relation to people with PMLD, with a particular focus on those practitioners who have had a direct influence on my own thinking and practice. This is a small field and over the course of this study I have made connections with many of the practitioners working within it. I begin by discussing two recent projects that demonstrate how my own interest in installation and audiences with profound disabilities is an area that is beginning to gain wider coverage. I then select six different companies and individuals who work with audiences with profound disabilities and explain the specific ways in which each has influenced me and helped me to clarify some differentiating aspects of my own practice.

3.2 What Other Arts Practitioners Inform My Work?

Sinnerligt

At the start of Chapter Two I stated that to my knowledge there is no academic literature that specifically relates installation art to audiences that include people with PMLD. There are, however, pockets of art practice in this area. I will discuss two recent art projects that involved the creation of sensory spaces for audiences that include people with complex needs[4] that have important cross-overs with my own work. British artists Laura Blake and Ellie Griffiths have recently completed an exhibition, 'Sinnerligt' at the Hälsinglands Museum in Sweden for neurodiverse audiences. The stated aim of the exhibition, which was presented at a mainstream venue, was "to connect people to each other, and the present moment, through materials" (Blake, in Scen:se,2018). Blake and Griffiths work with Grace's idea of 'rich inclusion' (The Sensory Projects, 2014) in which, by considering the needs of the most profoundly disabled first, something is created that is richly inclusive for all. This approach counters the retrospective (and sometimes-tokenistic) adaptation of cultural offerings designed for neurotypical audiences to make them accessible to disabled audiences – what can be seen as the inclusion of the minority "other" as an after-thought. Griffiths has previously described this working process as keying into:

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[4] Currently, the terms 'complex needs' and 'neurodiverse' are mainly used to refer to people with autistic spectrum conditions, but these terms are also sometimes used to include those with PMLD

> ‘a more intuitive, non-verbal, less intentionalised consciousness. Starting from this place naturally seems to lead you to material that is experiential and therefore implicitly accessible’ (Griffiths 2016).

In Chapter Five I describe my own process of working with “sensorial imagination” which parallels this description from Griffiths.

The ‘Sinnerligt’ exhibition is a development of Blake & Griffith’s exploratory research with autistic audiences and some exciting outcomes were on display in the gallery, including a high intensity sound corridor, sculptural tapestries for tactile exploration, ‘choral platforms’ (a group of resonant wooden shaped boxes each playing one part of a choral harmony) and a visually mesmerising sheet of silk billowing in the breeze of a powerful fan.

> “Our work in simplest terms is about making art that does not oppress or exclude anyone. As a society we are always asking the minority to fit into the way that the majority do things. Our work is trying to do the opposite. It is not about letting ‘them’ in, or training ‘them’ to tolerate and accept our traditional models of viewing art and theatre. Instead, it’s celebrating different ways of being in the world and challenging theatre and art to reimagine what they can be”. (Blake, Scen:se, 2018)

Blake states that in creating the work they were guided by the words “belonging, shelter, comfort, simplicity and presence”. Interestingly, these are all themes that resonate with my own artistic practice.

Intersection

Another project, ‘Intersection’ had a similar aim to the ‘Sinnerligt’ exhibition. Project Art Works (PAW) is an artist-led organisation in Hastings who support people with complex needs to have positive experiences with art. In 2016/17 PAW co-commissioned an artwork with Fabrica, a gallery and centre for contemporary art in Brighton. The ‘Intersection’ project aimed to consider themes of connection and communication between people who do and do not use spoken language, and also how architecture, or constructed environments, affect behaviour.

Visual artist Peter Hudson was given the commission, which initially involved him spending time at Project Art Works to see artists with complex needs making work. Noticing how many of them looked for direct feedback from materials using expressionistic and abstract ways of working, Hudson decided that providing direct feedback from movement or sound was key to the artwork he would make for the commission. For his subsequent exhibition, the Fabrica gallery space was kept bare, and Hudson bathed the open space in unified coloured light. Three objects, one with a sound, one a movement and the third a tactile

sensor, were placed in the centre of the gallery so that visitors could interact with them through their voice, body movements or touch. The object sensors then translated these actions into changes in the hue and brightness of the coloured light within the gallery. Hudson described this as visitors expressing themselves in colour, and potentially affecting and responding to other participants.

My own experience of the exhibition was uncomfortable. I found the coloured light visually difficult, particularly when it was rapidly changing. I also found it difficult to identify the effects my own actions with the interactive objects had on the light in the gallery. For me there was no sense of expression, or of connection with anyone else. However, I did not experience the exhibition alongside anyone with complex needs, so I am unable to comment on whether the aims of the exhibition - the idea of people who do, and do not, use spoken language connecting through the work - were realised. Nevertheless, I strongly resonate with artist Hudson's description of his role:

> "I kind of see myself as a cross between an artist and a host. I'm not trying to dictate what goes on in some ways, I'm just creating a space where people can be free, and people can connect with each other, within the space and within the artwork in general" (Hudson in Fabrica Gallery, 2017)

I would suggest that Griffiths and Blake's Swedish exhibition actually answered the Intersection brief more successfully, but I applaud the ethos and goals of this exhibition.

Oily Cart

The 'Tingly Productions' work I was engaged in prior to the start of this research (described in Chapter One) is strongly influenced by practitioners from the field of theatre. My first exposure to this type of work was when I took part in a week's summer school run by Oily Cart Theatre Company (www.oilycart.org.uk) in 2006, an event that provided the impetus to work in this way myself. This summer school was an incredible 'Eureka!' experience for me in which I came to appreciate crossovers between two practices I was simultaneously engaged in, but held in my mind as distinctly separate endeavours – my work as a teacher of pupils with learning disabilities and my practice as an installation artist (having recently completed a fine art degree). Working with Oily Cart principles during the course I came to appreciate the deeply sensorial nature of my installation art practice and its potential application for audiences with PMLD and I also came to recognise my instinctive use of theatrical principles in my approach to teaching - as demonstrated by my deployment of live music, rhythm, story and my instinctive understanding of the power of atmosphere in the classroom. Since this

first contact with Oily Cart, I have seen seven different shows (two of them within my school setting), been a participant on a second summer school, and followed the company on social media. There is much I could say about the work of this company, who have inspired and influenced not just my own practice, but also the work of many others in this field. However, I will limit myself here to a few key features and comments that help to position my own work in relation to theirs.

Oily Cart broke new ground when they devised their first theatre show for young people with profound disabilities thirty seven years ago. Leaders in this field, their beautifully designed immersive and interactive sensory shows, with live music from accomplished world musicians, have high production values, despite often taking place in unusual settings. The so-called fourth wall does not exist in Oily Cart shows (Gardner, 2012), the performers are close-up and personal with their small audience (usually six young people plus support partners) in an intimate sharing of sensory delight. Their shows for young people with PMLD are not built on narrative (Gardner, 2008), they involve a series of rich sensory experiences integrated with music, song and characters. I believe there is much for educationalists to learn from the work of Oily Cart and other companies now working in this field. Independent artistic director Newell beautifully explains the features of theatre practice that are eminently transferable to considerations of pedagogy for pupils with PMLD:

> 'High quality performance/theatre is designed primarily to communicate ideas in very powerful and effective ways. It is very carefully and minutely constructed so that there is a clarity in its dramaturgy that doesn't exist in everyday life – and there's an overt and articulated desire to use a range of things (music/light/pace/etc) to create a particular mood in an audience'. (Newell in Replay Theatre Company, 2012)

Webb agrees, likening the Oily Cart shows that he co-directs to a Japanese tea ceremony in the way that nothing is superfluous and everything is done with real precision (Gardner, 2016). Newell suggests that the skillset required for good theatre-making is 'a skillset that, at its very core, is about a live act of communication that is deeply human, deeply in the moment' (in Replay Theatre Company, 2012). Theatre companies working with audiences with PMLD are positively challenged to distil key elements of communication and experience in order to engage their audiences. Newell identifies how 'visceral pleasures' that we all enjoy, for example, the soft flow of air across the face, can engage children with PMLD in ways that might also lead to 'a different sort of, more profound, method of communication' (Newell in Replay Theatre Company, 2012)

The precision Newell speaks of is evident in the work of Oily Cart, and their use of songs and performativity transform practical elements within the show into beautifully engaging events. For example, in the show 'Tube' (2013), towels are offered to go over the knees of audience members before water is sprayed onto transparent umbrellas that enclose each child and their partner. The rolled-up plush red towels are not simply handed out; the three performers simultaneously open them out with a ceremonious flick and a flourish, transforming a practical necessity into a visual spectacle. Songs are also used to turn prosaic statements, such as, 'We're going to get out of the water now ' into engaging communications (Caird, 2018: online). Shows are designed with a flexible form so that the performers can be 'truly responsive to them [the audience] within the structure of the show' (ibid). One of Oily Cart's co-directors, Tim Webb, likens the structure of Oily Cart performances to jazz music, with tightly written arrangements that become disrupted in improvisatory moments of performance, and then returned to.

Oily Cart draw upon best practice within special schools to enhance their offering. For example, they recognise the freedom that hydrotherapy provides the bodies of profoundly disabled youngsters who spend so much of their time strapped into wheelchairs, and so they produce shows that take place within school hydrotherapy pools, transforming these spaces into 'a liquid world of enchantment' (Gardner, 2012:xi). Building on the techniques of rebound therapy, they have also produced shows in which performer and an individual audience member (plus their carer) play on a trampoline, so that the child's kinaesthetic sense can be accessed in what Oily Cart's artistic director Tim Webb calls 'g-force inducing, kinaesthetically intense activities' (Webb in Brown, 2012:7). These examples show Oily Cart's commitment to go beyond traditional theatre's reliance on vision and hearing and explore the power of other senses to create innovative theatre for marginalised groups who would otherwise have no such provision. Despite the difference in scale between my own practice and Oily Cart's (they are a well-established, Arts Council-funded theatre company who employ a whole team of producers, makers, performers, administrators, etc., whereas I work singlehandedly, without funding and with no theatrical or musical training) we face similar design challenges - such as how to temporarily transform a functional school hall/dining area into a magical place, or how to make a 360-degree environment portable; 'Will it fit in the van?' (de Loon, in Brown, 2012:30). Oily Cart's influence on my own work is evident in the 'Tingly Productions' installations and sessions I was producing when I embarked on this PhD.

Oily Cart utilise trampolines and hydrotherapy pools as sites for their shows, 'not for the novelty value but because they are investigating the way the kinaesthetic, haptic and olfactory can be applied to theatre performance' (Gardner, 2016: online). Audience experience involves all of the senses. There are a growing (although still very small) group of theatre companies and practitioners now working in this field. Bamboozle Theatre Company in Leicester, Replay Theatre Company in Belfast, Frozen Light (who tour nationally), Sensorium Theatre (in Australia), and UK writer and director Gill Brigg for example, have all established different ways of working within this field. Bamboozle, Sensorium and Brigg all devise shows *and* deliver training for educators on how to adapt and develop the creative practice of theatre into pedagogy. Frozen Light have held steadfast in only delivering their work in theatres, working tirelessly to get theatres to recognise the importance of including this audience in their offer. The locations and settings for this cultural provision are significant - if it only happens in schools or day centres it has less cultural capital, compounding the invisibility of this group within society. In these ways, the work of these and other companies is political. They are 'working in an unglamorous, undervalued area of theatre-making' (Gardner, 2016: online) and they are trying to raise the public and cultural profile of their audiences.

Bamboozle Theatre Company

Bamboozle are a Leicester-based theatre company led by artistic director Christopher Davies and production and design director Sue Pyecroft (www.bamboozletheatre.co.uk). Like Oily Cart, Bamboozle create touring shows for schools and theatres, but my particular interest has been in their training for teachers and artists who work in special educational provision. Bamboozle have created a methodology that combines Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert'[5] approach to drama in education with Intensive Interaction practice and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)[6]. I attended 3 different short training courses with Christopher Davies, and also worked as a volunteer artist on one of their annual 'Multi-Sensory Magic'

[5] In this approach, drama is used as a powerful medium for learning. Participants work together on a fictional problem, assuming the roles of different characters and offering their expert points of view within the fictional context. Bamboozle successfully use this approach with groups of students with moderate to severe learning disabilities.

[6] NLP purports to work with the links between neural processing, language and behavior, and uses communication techniques to challenge individual's thinking and create changes in their behaviour. Bamboozle successfully use some of these techniques in their work with individuals with challenging behaviour, and also to establish good communication and feelings of safety that empower individuals.

week's residency at Curve theatre in Leicester, where families who have a child with PMLD attend for a week of activities.

It was during this residency, whilst performers and artists were preparing for one of the day's activities before the families arrived, that Davies posed a question that has remained with me, and holds relevance to this study. We were exploring the sensory possibilities of a bowl of wet clay and talking about how we might use it with our audience members with PMLD. After the team had contributed a range of different suggestions for how the child might participate, Davies asked, "and what if they don't?". This is such an important question and Davies' purpose in asking it was to remind us of the child's right of refusal and that this deserves as much acceptance and respect as their choice to enthusiastically participate. Davies was reminding us all that as facilitators, we may be inclined to invest what we offer with positive expectations that may cause us to miss, or disregard the volition of children whose actions or preferences don't match our expectations. This is particularly important when working with individuals whose refusal or responses are subtle and idiosyncratic and therefore hard to interpret. When, in Chapter One, I referenced my desire to remain relaxed and comfortable as a facilitator during group sessions in school, even when students were not actively participating, I was touching on these same issues. It takes self-awareness and a deep commitment to respecting others with unconditional positive regard to achieve this attitude.

Sensorium Theatre

Sensorium are an Australian company based in Perth that I searched out on a trip to Perth in 2014 (www.sensoriumtheatre.com.au). Like Oily Cart and Bamboozle they tour shows to both theatres and special schools, although they are closer to Bamboozle in their emphasis on staff training. At this time, Sensorium employed similar low-budget and low-tech working processes to my own with their sets and self-made props. Indeed it was co-director Francis Italiano who introduced me to the 'Event 14 Shelter', a gazebo frame they use to create their set, which I later adopted for the construction of *Golden Tent.* Sensorium's audiences may include children with PMLD (or to use the Australian term, PIMD - profound intellectual and multiple disabilities), but it is not focussed exclusively on this group of children. Sensorium typically have a week's residency in a special school for children with a range of learning difficulties, during which they run workshops daily to gradually familiarise the students with the characters, songs and storyline of their show. Francis Italiano explains how this is counter-intuitive to how theatre would be presented in a mainstream setting, because they reveal, show and explain a lot of things before they present the show on the final day

(*Sensorium Theatre: The JUB JUB TREE*, 2015). This approach enables the children to get the most out of the performance because they can become comfortable and familiar with the concept of the show before they see it all come together in the final performance.

I particularly admire Sensorium's advocacy of the arts in education, and how they demonstrate creative ways of working for schools to incorporate into their pedagogy. Co-director Michelle Hovane stresses how important creativity and imagination are in a context where daily routines of physical therapies and care can dominate the culture of the school, "There's all these therapeutic and medical drivers that can sometimes squeeze out imagination as a source of empowerment or knowledge, or growth, or *learning*, so its really great to come and just remind everyone, hey, this is also a really great way to learn!" (Hovane, in *Sensorium Theatre* 2018:4.48 – 5.06 mins).

Gill Brigg

Gill Brigg is a school teacher as well as a theatre writer and director. In her practice-based PhD, Brigg wrote and directed 'White Peacock' and in so doing developed a model of theatre designed to enable profoundly disabled audience members to access an emotional narrative within the theatre form (ahrcpress, 2013). Brigg's particular focus on emotional narrative distinguished her work from many others in this field (although the subsequent work of Frozen Light theatre company could be said to continue this approach). Her shows are carefully constructed to guide this uninitiated theatre audience carefully through a fictional tale that has emotional resonances beyond the theatre space. Taking powerful themes, the shows are expertly crafted to enable the audience to witness (and potentially themselves experience) an emotional journey. Framed by a beautiful micro-theatre space, different mood states within the narrative are transmitted for this non-verbal audience through performative action, changes in lighting and original music. "Breathing spaces" are built into the shows to give audience members processing time along the way. These pauses in the action give the opportunity for interactive sensory play with the props and actors, and a chance to gain additional meaning and connection with this unusual environment through close-up physical/sensory experience. Brigg's work capitalises on the idea that spoken language is not a pre-requisite for the transmission of emotion, as this can be conveyed through tone of voice, posture, muscle tension and movement, and of course it can be beautifully transmitted through music. People with profound cognitive impairments can share in the feeling states of those around them and be guided through an emotional narrative, enjoying the awe, pleasure and heightened experience of a trip to the theatre - something that most of us take for granted but is rarely available for this audience.

One of Brigg's biggest influences on me came from her explanation of Heathcote's (1995) operant laws of theatre expression, which form the basis of all theatrical experience. These are:

Darkness to light

Silence to sound

Stillness to action

These simple spectra are used in combination in the theatre to engage and excite audiences, and Brigg uses these principles in her work as a teacher too, in what she calls her "aestheticized classroom". These principles were ones that I had instinctively been following, but Brigg's articulation of them clarified their value for me. My on-going contact with Brigg has been beneficial, and her ability to span the divide between the arts and education has been particularly useful to witness.

Rebecca Churchill

Churchill is a visual artist who teamed up with The Roche Court Educational Trust in Wiltshire to bring contemporary art to audiences who typically do not access art galleries. I tracked Rebecca down after reading *The Multi-Sensory Project: Art for all the Senses* (Humphreys *et al.*, 2014). This project involved her taking a theme, chosen from the school curriculum by teachers, as the basis for an installation in school inspired by the work of contemporary artists. A large dome forms the centre of the installation, with objects set up both inside and outside this enclosure. A differently themed space is installed every term for one week with the aim of giving staff and students the opportunity to 'experience, react and respond within these environments, allowing individual expression, communication and very early play skills' (ibid, p. 2). Churchill describes the installations as offering a 'a space of intimate empathy' and says:

> '[this] is a project that honours and holds sacred all the important things; love, art and play. This project shouldn't be innovative, it should be everyday' (Churchill, in Humphreys *et al.*, 2014).

There is much about Churchill's passion, her work and her working processes that mirror my own. Meeting and interviewing her, and witnessing school groups visit one of her installations however clarified some ways in which our delivery differs, and gave me some questions to consider about my own role as artist in relation to my work.

Like a gallery artist, Churchill creates an installation and then steps back, allowing people to respond to the work in whichever way they choose. On one visit to meet with her I was present in the school hall at the start of the day. She had transformed the space with a

variety of intriguing objects, and the dome beckoned with enticing artefacts hung from the walls and placed on the floor. A soundtrack of ethereal music filled the space. After a few minutes, the school's PE teacher, bringing a class to the hall to experience the installation (rather than for the PE lesson he would normally have been leading), burst noisily through the doors. The calm atmosphere was instantly destroyed as he bounced in, enthusiastically calling out to different students behind him, with comments such as "Hey Billy, come and have a look at this!", "Here, Maisie, hold this!", etc. (pseudonyms used). Churchill was completely at ease with this teacher's behaviour, whilst I was disturbed by it, which told me something about my own desire to influence or control the atmosphere when groups enter my installations. This may demonstrate how my teaching background has continued to infuse my practice. In my 'Tingly Productions' work I created the multi-sensory environments but also led the sessions that took place within them. There is a letting go on Churchill's part (which I simultaneously admired and felt disconcerted by), whereas I sought control and influence over how my work was approached. In this way my approach is also more closely aligned to the practice of theatre (as discussed above) than fine art, although in Chapter Seven I discuss the differing levels of mediation I adopted with *Golden Tent*, and report on how a 'hands off' approach closer to Churchill's with some class groups rendered different and valuable 'readings' of the space.

In an informal recorded conversation I spoke to Churchill talks about her relationship with the staff team at the school. "It has taken years for staff to come in and not [*sic*] say, "so what do we do in here?" and for me to feel confident enough to say, "I don't know"". Churchill provides the environment but not the direction, and her comments suggest that confidence in both the value of the work, and in the importance of people finding their own meanings from it, may be crucial to allowing it to stand independently without mediation. Churchill's comments about having the confidence to be non-directive relate to my own experiences with the group Intensive Interaction sessions discussed in Chapter One, in that I too sought the confidence to overcome a sense of expectation from colleagues and "hold the space" for students to use (or not use) in their own way.

<u>Owain Clarke</u>

Owain Clarke is a music therapist who has worked with individuals and with groups at my research setting for several years. I include Owain in this section because my contact with him has also been influential, particularly in relation to how he presents his work to staff when he is leading a session with a group of pupils. The approach and attitude of staff can significantly affect whether the aims of a session are realised, as illustrated in my comments

above about the class teacher bringing a very different atmosphere to Rebecca Churchill's art installation than the one she had set-up. Owain and I have had many conversations about how to support class staff in doing less rather than more, and how to maintain an improvisatory space. In 2017 I interviewed Owain and we first discussed the guide sheet he had written to convey to class staff that direct communication between children through sound (rather than between children and the adults they are working with) is the goal of his sessions. Owain asks staff to hold back on praise until the end of the session and explains that it is the intrinsic rewards of participation that matter – "the sound of the [children's] voices and instruments constitute praise". Owain invites staff to be the audience for what he suggests is a small concert of improvised music, and to simply listen and enjoy the aesthetic experience of the sounds the children make. Owain's approach matches that taken by the other artists I worked with in school, as I discuss in the next chapter.

The issue of "holding the space" also arose during our conversation and I include a small extract from the transcript here to illustrate how Owain is similarly challenged by this issue, despite his experience and training. At this point in the conversation we are discussing the urge to "fill the gaps" when there is a lull in the active participation of students. Owain has just explained that he usually uses a guitar during the session, but in his session earlier that day both the available guitars were being used by pupils:

Owain: So I took the drum, the bodhrán … so I had the bodhrán and my voice, and I was very aware…I felt very self conscious, and I felt like I had to *(laughing)* do things on the drum that maybe weren't that relevant to the musical dynamic, and then I was using my voice - which was probably more relevant to the music - but also it was partly that I thought I've got to do something… and that showed me that normally I am doing something on the guitar. And that's okay because normally I can use the guitar as a kind of glue, you know...

Jill: Yeah

Owain: So I'm normally just listening to everything and just kind of commenting or doing a bass-line to underline it, or reflecting or …. There's different things that I do, but it's probably that feeling of 'what will people think if there's not much happening…?'

Although the context here is one of improvisatory group music-making, like Churchill, Clarke refers to confidence issues, and to his sense of having to "do something", particularly if there is "not much happening". The facilitator's role appears to be a challenging one, particularly in relation to managing the perceived or real expectations of support staff/carers whilst also

trying to hold an open space for young people with PMLD to engage on their own terms. Parallels are also evident between Clarke's explanation of how and why he uses the guitar, and Agrimbau's rationale for using the shruti box (both of which sit within a music therapy framework). In these examples, a balance between a wholly improvisational space, and the limited use of something stable and predictable seem to be adopted. As previously mentioned, Webb also talks of the 'jazz structure' of Oily Cart shows, where long periods of free improvisation are contained within 'the opening and the coda, with 'riffs' peppering the rest of the action' (Webb in Brown, 2012:22). The need for an anchoring or holding feature in these improvisatory and language-free situations appears to be widely acknowledged.

3.3 Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by reviewing two important exhibitions in mainstream gallery settings where interactive installations were provided for audiences with complex needs. I then selected six different practitioners and companies in order to contextualise my own work within a field of practice. I discussed their influence on my practice and some of the commonalities and differences in our work. Most of these practices sit well beyond my own areas of expertise but all have played a central role in developing my understanding and extending my conceptualisation of pupils with PMLD. Griffiths comments on how the language and discourse surrounding people with complex needs is typically the language of handling/managing or healing/transforming, whereas the work of companies like Oily Cart is "led by art. It doesn't attempt to handle, to heal, or to transform its audience" (in Scen:se, 2018). The young people are accepted as they are, without judgement, and the art is offered to *enjoy for its own sake.* I have been "inducted" into this approach through my contact with these and other practitioners producing work for audiences with PMLD, and I take this extended perspective forward in this study.

Chapter Four

Methodology

> In our view, good research is an expression of a need to learn and change, to shift some aspect of oneself. (Reason & Marshall, 2006:317)

4.1. Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I explicate the rationale for the methodological choices I have made over the course of this study, from action research, to autoethnography, to arts-based research. Along the way, dilemmas and challenges involved in the research process itself are also discussed, such as the struggle to define the nature of my study and justify its legitimacy in the light of deep-seated unconscious assumptions. In this way, I present a methodological rationale whilst documenting the chronological personal journey whereby I gradually identify and replace an unconsciously assumed perspective with my chosen theoretical stance as a researcher.

As stated in Chapter One, this shifting inner landscape led to an evolving research purpose and the following research question was retrospectively clarified:

> **As my installation art practice becomes less instrumental and more "authentic", what is its role within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and what theoretical frameworks can be used to explicate its value?**

The practice-based nature of this study is demonstrated within this question, and the fact that it is a practice undergoing transition. My aim was to explore how the changing nature of my practice affects its role in the school, and also to develop a conceptual framework and new vocabulary with which to articulate what the practice does. In this chapter I present a chronological narrative to demonstrate how I went about addressing my research question.

4.2 In The Beginning

At the outset, my intention was to develop and improve my existing arts practice. In my original research proposal, I stated that my main aim was 'To formulate an in-depth understanding and articulation of my arts practice, identifying key elements in its efficacy and transformational potential, with particular reference to the relationships between staff, learners and myself.' As an applied form of social research firmly rooted in real world practice, action research was the ideal methodology to achieve this aim. Robson (2002) states that the purpose of action research is the improvement of a practice of some kind, and

the improvement of the understanding of a practice by its practitioners. It is often the chosen methodology for research in educational settings, and is frequently undertaken by 'insiders' keen to effect positive change within their organisation through some form of evaluation, i.e. an 'attempt to assess the worth or value of some innovation, intervention, service or approach' (Robson, 2002: 202).

I was a practitioner, working within a social context - an 'insider' (Hanson, 2013; Labaree, 2002; Coghlan & Holian, 2007) in this school setting, with the pre-established trust and respect of colleagues. It is pertinent to note that at this time, the school had agreed to pay the tuition fees for my first year of PhD study, and anticipated doing so for the duration of the doctorate.[7] My work at the school was appreciated because it enriched and extended the provision for pupils and the senior management and governors wanted to support me to continue with it. Discussions with the head and deputy head teacher at the school had identified the apparently heightened levels of engagement shown by staff during my sessions, and this was believed to lead to greater potential learning outcomes for pupils (particularly in the light of Laevers (1994) work on involvement and engagement). I wanted to substantiate the notion that as an artist I was able to provide conditions that in some way enhanced or facilitated quality interactions between staff and pupil. I also wanted to improve my practice and share my skills. In my proposal, I flagged up the difficulties of evaluating complex art interventions and the challenges of research with non-verbal participants. I suggested ways I might measure pupil and staff 'engagement levels' using Laevers' scales of involvement (1994) and Carpenter *et al*'s engagement profile (2011) drawing on the school's Affective Communication Assessments (Coupe et al 1995) of pupils as part of my research study.

4.3 Action Research

Reason and Bradbury (2006) make a strong case for Action Research as a question-posing and practice-testing approach that benefits from collaborative relationships like those I felt I had at the school. They expound the democratic, participatory aspect of this methodology and its differing worldview, asserting that action research can be a 'systematic development of knowing and knowledge', with 'different purposes', 'different relationships' and 'different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice' than traditional academic research methods (Reason and Bradbury, 2006:1). This validated my desire to remain grounded in the realm of practice (rather than what I saw as the abstracted sphere of academia) and

[7] In fact, drastic cuts to the school budget led to this support being stopped after two years.

confirmed that my deep immersion in the setting was appropriate rather than problematic to this style of research. I was not to be an impartial observer; I was searching to understand some of the complex relational aspects of my role and my practice through joint endeavours with colleagues. Reason and Bradbury's notions of knowledge being 'a verb rather than a noun', and research 'an art' as opposed to a program of 'hard and fast methods' (ibid:2) were inspiring and I was persuaded that my research studentship could take the form of an authentic and rigorous development of my existing applied arts practice.

Reason and Torbert (2001) categorise three types of action research - first, second and third person. Third person inquiry involves the wider community and a socio-political agenda, but this went beyond the aims of my small scale study. Second person research is collaborative and team-based, something I was desirous of, but given the over-full workloads and differing priorities of colleagues I knew this to be an unrealistic aim. A first person, or 'self-study' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006:11) involving my own observations and reflection but drawing feedback from staff where possible was more suited to my situation. From within my social context, I would focus on what I do as an individual, explaining and discussing my work with others with a view to developing common understandings. I had an ultimate desire for shared knowledge and meaning making, but the enquiry itself would be first-person and centred on my own practice.

<u>The first cycle.</u>

Applying the action research cycle of 'observe ➔ reflect ➔ act ➔ evaluate ➔ modify ➔ move in new directions' (McNiff & Whitehead 2006:9) I planned and executed my next installation, *Black and White Environment* at the school. I did not start with a blank slate; I brought a complex set of assumptions, opinions, beliefs and aesthetic preferences from my prior experience as a teacher in the school, my study of many different arts practitioners who work for this audience, and my previous installations. I wanted this new environment to inspire playful interaction and connectedness between staff and pupil. I chose to remove myself as performer and session leader so that staff could be more responsive to an individual pupil and not have to keep pace with a group activity. I was also questioning what "story" meant for children without conceptual understanding at this time and consequently decided to drop the narrative element I usually included in the sessions, since this had always been more for the benefit of staff than pupils. I wrote guidelines for using the spaces (Appendix B) and these show that I was thinking about how to support maximum agency for pupils, especially those who were particularly passive due to their limited physical capacity. In terms of educational theory, Ware's (2003) ideas on the importance of responsive environments to

facilitate contingency awareness, Imray & Hinchcliffe's (2014) advice on promoting intentionality and agency, and Nind & Hewett's (1994) theories of Intensive Interaction underpinned my thinking and I was convinced of the potential for playfulness in even the most profoundly disabled children as shown by Watson (2014) and Brigg *et al* (2016).

From an aesthetic or design point of view, I wanted this installation to be very 'pared back' and minimalist, which is why I chose to work with just black and white. I built two areas side-by-side within a large vacant classroom, a black environment to contrast with white play items (or "props") and a white space for use with black props. I placed an extensive range of these props (see images 4-12 below) on tables next to the installation in order to inspire staff and to stimulate playful interactions between them and their pupils. I also provided notes next to the props with ideas for utilising the items and a guidance sheet with suggestions for how to approach their time with pupils in the spaces (Appendix B). I invited staff to choose and present just one prop, and offer a sustained opportunity for a pupil to respond at their own pace. My goal here was to increase staff awareness of the value of maintaining a focussed and engaged presence even when a pupil was inactive, rather than rushing to try another prop, thereby holding open an opportunity for them to respond in their own way and in their own time. This goal was in line with good Intensive Interaction practice, for example Hewett (2012b:56).

As with previous installations, I paid great attention to differing sensory preferences of pupils, providing a range of 'ways into play' via different sensory channels. For example, for a child who may respond best to vestibular activity, I adapted part of an old bamboo cane chair to make a padded 'bowl' that a pupil could lay in and rock (or be rocked) about on the floor (see image 3). For pupils who are particularly responsive to high contrasting visual stimuli I positioned the black side of the environment under a large UV light in the classroom ceiling so that uv sensitive props could be presented underneath. There were also smells and sound-making objects as well as items with differing weights, sizes, shapes and textures for haptic exploration.

Images 2 & 3 · *Black & White Environment*

Images 4, 5 & 6 · Displays of “props” for *Black & White Environment*

Images 7-12 · Props for *Black & White Environment*

Although my previous installations at the school did not form part of any formal research study, *Black and White Environment* can be viewed as the culmination of several prior turns of the action research cycle. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the aesthetic form and stated purpose of this installation demonstrate my growing interest in the moment of meeting within the dyad of staff member and pupil. In trying to support this moment, I was moving away from my 'Tingly Productions' richly colourful environments in which I led staff and pupils through a series of different sensory-based activities linked by a simple narrative and supported by music and song. I was paring things right back by removing many of the things that guided staff through the experience in order to highlight the improvisatory encounter between them and their pupil partner alone. The props were mainly positioned

outside of the two spaces so that each environment was visually uncluttered, and I recommended that staff made a careful selection of one prop to bring into the space. In these ways, *Black and White Environment* can be seen as a transitional piece, representative of a middle-stage between the themed and richly multi-sensory sessions I had previously delivered with 'Tingly Productions' and *Golden Tent* in which I simply present a "space to be". It was also a manifestation of my own shifting role from teacher to artist in that here I presented the environment but did not include myself as facilitator of the space.

The ideas, goals and design aims I have described above could all be thoroughly expanded. However, my focus in this chapter is on my approach to the research itself and the strategies used, rather than the content of and rationale for my creative practice. With this in mind I will not elaborate further. A consideration of my choice of language in articulating the ideas stated above is relevant though, because it is indicative of some of the tension and uncertainty I was experiencing at this time in relation to my approach to the enquiry.

How did I understand what I was doing?

The educational language used above to describe *Black and White Environment* is significant and illustrates my research perspective at this time. I specify that I want to 'encourage maximum agency for pupil', and explore 'how my work might facilitate playful interaction'. I wanted particularly to focus on interactions within the staff-pupil dyad and I was questioning my own role, stating that I want to 'remove myself as performer'. With hindsight, this decision may have been connected to assumptions about my new responsibilities as researcher and the sense that I needed to be less involved and more observant (a stereo-typical image of a white coat and clipboard comes to mind). From an educational perspective the stated goals are all valid, but as a researcher, I was not at all clear how I would evaluate such things. Whenever I considered the "how" of my research, I had the strong sense that I would not access my real research interests through the application of measurements and quantifications.

My uncertainty about my research goals and my lack of a strategic plan were symptomatic of the tension between the understandings I brought from my role as a teacher in this context, and an alternative viewpoint I wanted to establish but had yet to formulate. I wanted to find ways to establish the value of my work beyond the restrictive language of so-called 'educational' goals, but at this stage my professional background and the dominant language of the context were defining my stated purpose. In addition, as a novice researcher, I was

struggling with the question of what it actually meant to “do research”. I was confused about the difference between simply “doing” my practice and “researching” my practice.

It is clear now that part of this struggle involved crucial epistemological questions - What was knowable? What constitutes the kind of knowledge I am seeking, and how will I know when I have found it? (Crotty, 1998; Sullivan, 2005; Leavy, 2015). An objectivist epistemology, positivist perspective, and traditional, quantitative models of scientific research were unconsciously influencing my thinking. I was troubled by the notion that I needed to clarify a definitive research question that I could set out to answer objectively. Conversely I knew that my research was not about discovering an “out there” reality. Indeed I understood that the social construction of meaning, and specifically the limited ways in which education is conceptualised and practised, lay behind my desire to explore new frameworks. I wanted to identify the value of my work beyond its instrumental capacity with regard to educational goals, but I was struggling to find the research methods that would enable me to achieve this.

I have stated that at this early stage of my research the school was funding my PhD study. Although I had no formal arrangement regarding the content or expected outcomes of my research, my initial research proposal had been shared with the head teacher when I requested support with tuition fees. The resulting financial arrangement gave me a sense of duty towards the school to deliver ‘outcomes’ they would recognise as worthwhile. The school management valued my work (as evidenced by the fact that two years’ worth of University tuition fees were paid from an exceedingly tight school budget), as did my colleagues, but my voluntary status in the school was evidence of my precarious financial position as a result of deciding to work with the arts.

Trying to interrogate and improve my practice without a clear strategy, whilst also striving to address the academic requirements of a PhD through extensive reading of theoretical texts, was resulting in a drastically diminished creative output and significant doubts and uncertainty about my own direction. I began to note an uncomfortable sense of familiarity with these feelings of inner conflict. Having cut short my teaching career because of my frustration with a reductive model of education that valued and sought the measurable above all else, I was now struggling with the internalised assumptions of a positivist research paradigm that similarly discounted the values and concerns I wanted to honour whilst elevating only that which can be quantified. Reason and Marshall (2006) purport that many researchers choose topics that will bring them face-to-face with historical distress in an unconscious bid for self-realization, and suggest that undertaking research is therefore a

golden opportunity to transcend limiting patterns of behaviour through the pursuit of rigorous critical subjectivity. Could this study provide an opportunity for my own psychological development?

These issues - the influence of the educational context and my position within it; my limited understanding of research methodologies; and an inadequate strategy to get to my core interests - were all at play during this early period of my research, resulting in a lack of confidence both in my arts practice and in my abilities as a researcher. Having created *Black and White Environment* in school, my confusion about what I was trying to do with it from a research perspective resulted in me neglecting to promote and facilitate the opportunities the space presented. The written guidance I offered my colleagues could not replace my active involvement, and without adequate time investment from me, for example to role-model ways to use the space and demonstrate the play possibilities of the installation with colleagues, the spaces were not fully exploited by staff and pupils. As a consequence the work fell short of its potential and as I completed this turn of the action research cycle I felt little impetus to spiral onwards to the next.

Working with artists in school

At this time of debilitating doubt and confusion about my research, I was simultaneously involved in a range of exciting projects at the school alongside other artists. These collaborations proved influential as I witnessed different approaches to working with pupils at the school. My collaborations with musician Ignacio discussed briefly in Chapter One (and reported on in Appendix A) were expanding my definition of music with the result that I was seeing new capacity and potential in pupils. In 2014 I met vocal performer and academic Professor Yvon Bonenfant from the University of Winchester and our contact led to an arrangement for him to carry out some research and development of his vocal project 'Your Vivacious Voice' at the school (http://yourvivaciousvoice.com). Early conversations with Yvon were interesting and exciting, but when he spoke about his plans to "co-create" with pupils at the school, I was sceptical given their levels of impairment. I believed that my greater level of experience in working with pupils with PMLD gave me a more informed understanding of what was feasible. I was completely unaware that my teacher's perspective was limiting my conception of what was possible.

Before Yvon embarked on his sessions, he made a visit to the school to observe a communication session similar to those I described in Chapter One. When I talked to him after the session he spoke with real admiration about one of the pupils who he described as

virtuoso in her vocal abilities. This comment made a deep impression on me; I had never heard any of our pupils spoken about in this way. As a vocal performer, Yvon approached the students from a different perspective, simply listening to how they used their voices and recognising their vocal skills and range. This made me realise how much my own view of the pupils was limited by the frame of developmental deficit through which I, as an educationalist, viewed them.

When Yvon's R&D project took place, he and his technical team spent several days in situ at the school, working with individual pupils and small groups, and I observed many of these sessions. Watching them work it became clear that the co-creation I had been so sceptical about was exactly what was happening. Yvon began by playfully introducing himself to each pupil using his voice and sensitively taking note of which aspect of his vocal range they responded to. At the same time, microphones and a range of digital equipment captured and capitalised on the pupil's vocalisations and movements. For example, a looping echo could amplify the smallest vocalisation from a pupil whilst generating audio and visual effects (moving patterns of coloured light on a screen). For the less vocal pupils, a block of polystyrene was turned into a sensitive percussion instrument via a tiny electronic sensor so that, when placed in the optimum position, it could translate the slightest touch into sound. I witnessed playful performances and jointly created soundscapes each with their own unique tone and character that pupils were generating alongside Yvon using their voices and bodies. My limited (and potentially limiting) assumptions were resoundingly overturned, and I felt ashamed that I had misjudged the pupils' potential for artistic co-creation. What I had seen was how a positive and fully inclusive approach, sensitivity and trust in the artform, and a curiosity about what was possible led to new outcomes for pupils. Yvon had found ways to capitalise and extend whatever agency an individual pupil was able to demonstrate, thereby facilitating their partnership in the creation process.

My experiences with both Ignacio and Yvon were important influences on me and as a consequence I was clarifying some apparent differences in the approach of an artist to that of a teacher. It seemed to me that as a teacher, the pupil is the project, viewed primarily through a deficit-finding lens as someone in need of improvement. Guided by a combination of different educational theories, the teacher's job is to facilitate a furthering of the pupil's existing skills and abilities according to a hierarchical model of progressive (neurotypical) development. In my work with the highly skilled artists in school, however, I was experiencing a different quality of interactions with pupils, indeed different conceptualisations of pupils altogether. The focus in these interactions was much more in

the possibilities of the present than the future. It was on the art, and how *together* we might find ways to create (using music and sound in these particular projects). In this way, whilst an artist may hold a greater range of skills, the work is jointly produced in a side-by side relationship. The pupil – who is conceptualised as complete and without need of improvement - is operating as co-artist and bringing whatever skills and capability they have to the project. Through these experiences of co-creation, I saw pupils in new lights and began to question how the educational framework I was steeped in was limiting my conceptualisation of them. My interest in literature that challenged normative conceptualisations of people with profound cognitive impairments (such as Mercieca, 2013; Simmons, 2019; Simmons & Watson, 2014a discussed in Chapter Two) was growing in the light of these experiences.

My collaborations with artists also reminded me of the power of the arts to bring people together in an exciting, improvisatory space, a space I knew would be diminished and devalued by the pre-specification of limited targets and outcomes. The gap between my assumptions and experience of research at this early stage, which felt "dry" and unsatisfying, and my experience of working with these artists, which felt full of rich learning, was growing. I could see that Ignacio and Yvon worked within a different frame of reference, whilst I felt stuck within an educational system and an assumed research framework that felt constrictive. I wanted to make the transition over to this artistic paradigm, and I knew that to do this I would need to push through the limitations I was placing on myself. It was my attendance at an autoethnography conference that nudged me towards this.

4.4 The Move To Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that sits within the broader field of ethnography (Ellis, 2004). It emerged from the postmodern 'crisis of confidence' (Ellis *et al,* 2011) in which grand narrative claims in relation to objectivity, authority and researcher neutrality in the study of social life were challenged (Holt, 2003; Grant *et al*, 2013). With autoethnography, the self/personal experience (auto) is described and systematically analysed (-graphy) in order to understand cultural experience (-ethno). In May 2015 I attended an autoethnography conference at the University of Brighton. Autoethnography demands 'unusually rigorous, multi-layered levels of research reflexivity, given that the researcher/s and the researched are normally the same people' (Short, Turner and Grant, 2013:1), and many of the conference presenters demonstrated this, powerfully combining subjective and academic content through a variety of evocative and highly personal stories, journal extracts, film and fictional tales. I was gripped by many of the presentations, and for

the first time since I had embarked on my PhD I felt fully engaged, inspired and "at home" in an academic conference. I saw my own doubts, insecurities and difficulties reflected in the words of others - autoethnography didn't sieve these out, it honoured the whole, the messy and the unresolved. It embraced these most human aspects of life by 'leaving the blood in' (Moriarty, 2013).

From an autoethnographic perspective then, my resignation from teaching (which still felt painfully raw even after four years), my situation as a volunteer and my struggle to feel competent as a researcher, were all highly relevant to my study. Indeed, as autoethnographer Nigel Short pointed out to me at the conference, they were the essential "grist for the research mill". I had been trying to overcome these issues, or at least downplay them, because they were not the central focus of my research; I considered them to be personal issues that I needed to deal with separately. The autoethnography conference altered my outlook on this by demonstrating the value of declaring and examining personal issues as a way to gain insight into cultural norms and dominant practices. I subsequently joined an autoethnography group that met regularly in Brighton to discuss the writing of its members, and I also began to reflect upon my subjective experience with new purpose. As a consequence, I began to rethink my methodological approach to the study, deciding that an autoethnographic approach would help me to address the issues that were emerging as more pressing in my research and at this point, the focus of my research shifted from my practice and on to me.

I was feeling lost and confused as a researcher, whilst also still struggling to view my resignation from teaching in a positive light. I desperately wanted a new perspective on my situation but it felt such a challenge to summon the critical capacity to rigorously examine emotional experience that, at times, overwhelmed me. Stacey Holman Jones describes autoethnography as attempting to 'embrace vulnerability with purpose' (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015:40), and I decided that this was the principle to follow. What was the relationship between my situation, my beliefs, my emotional experience and the culture in which I was immersed? As stated in Chapter One, the question arising within me at this time was – *if I'm doing something so good, why do I feel so bad?*, and addressing this question became my new research goal.

In July 2015 I set up an interview with the school's outgoing head teacher (who was a few weeks from retirement) so that I could ask her about how she saw my work, and me, within the school. I was interested to find out how she, as someone with an in depth understanding

of the priorities and workings of the education system who had known me for several years, saw my changing role within the school. Still struggling with my identity and my voluntary status, the interview, which I audio-recorded, proved emotionally gruelling for me, but also fruitful. It confirmed that my core values were not in line with the current educational paradigm, and that my future lay elsewhere - something I had been struggling to accept at this time. My lack of interest in measurable outcomes, and my resistance to an enforced accountability-culture in education were making me unemployable by the school system.

The transcript of our recorded conversation became the basis for a piece of writing that I later shared within the Brighton autoethnography group. In discussing my writing, the group noted the conflict between the language of targets and performance and that of one-off epiphanies and magic moments. They discussed how neo-liberal culture, with its focus on normativity and measurement, is antithetical to creativity. My voluntary status at the school was affording me relief and freedom from a system I had found oppressive, and yet feelings of loss, anger and a sense of failure in relation to my resignation from teaching persisted. I spoke of how difficult I found it to think critically about my situation when my emotional response was so consuming. Alec Grant, one of the group members (and also one of the editors of *Contemporary British Autoethnography*, 2013) made the following comment to me, "If you're rejected by a neo-liberal culture, no matter how thick-skinned and bloody minded you are, it can feel like you're in the wrong, you're faulty, you're not good enough. It can trigger these kind of schemas, which is strange really because it's the organisation that doesn't measure up to the creative paradigm." It was empowering to hear such insights. The interview transcript included considerable praise and acknowledgement from the head teacher for my work, but she also made it clear that what I did could not be measured in terms of clear outcomes, and this was what made it (and me) economically uninvestable. I began to see how my position as a volunteer in school reflected the position of the arts in society - marginalised and romanticised, revered and adored but unquantifiable and therefore economically unrewardable.

As a result of sharing my writing at the autoethography meeting, I started to inform myself about neo-liberalism, a term that was new to me. The literature I found, discussed in Chapter Two, brought useful insight into the source of so many of my frustrations as a teacher. I was connecting the autobiographical to the cultural and social (Ellis, 2004) and gaining a new vantage point from which to reflect upon my subjective experience. Grant (2014:1280) suggests, 'From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses traverse, invest and colonise us, inducing emotion, purpose and knowledge in us, and cause us to act, think, feel and speak in

particular ways'. I had indeed been 'colonised' by an educational discourse that placed value in the knowable and the quantifiable and that viewed 'learning' as a product rather than a process. Despite my deep conviction that this view is misguided, it sabotaged my own perspective and operated as a powerful underlying assumption, a default position I seemed unable to reset.

Adopting autoethnography as a methodology led me to revisit important events in my life, and also some of my writing and artworks, in order to reflect upon them anew. I reviewed my feelings of failure and loss in relation to my resignation from teaching with the new understanding that "I" was not an autonomous phenomenon (Grant *et* al, 2013) and I began to re-story my own experiences in the light of my growing understanding of neoliberalism. Since qualifying as a teacher in 1983, my profession had steadily undergone a huge transformation. A business model had been applied to every aspect of the job, my autonomy had been replaced by the requirement to deliver a prescriptive, narrow, and compartmentalised curriculum, and most damaging of all, I was no longer to be trusted as a professional. I had to now "prove" my ability to do the job by undertaking a raft of accountability practices in addition to the job of teaching itself; all this under the guise of pupil entitlement (McEvoy, 2013).

My own version of autoethnography

I have explained how my methodological shift from action research to autoethnography enabled me to embrace rather than deny the issues I was grappling with in relation to my situation as a disaffected teacher and volunteer artist, and also my understanding and practice as a researcher. However, despite finding new energy and direction through the adoption of an autoethnographic approach, I had doubts about my own practice of it. Wall (2006) discusses the issue of the researcher's voice and shares her own doubts about using "I" in her academic writing. For Wall, the key issue is legitimacy because it is the objective and the general that are 'socially sanctioned'; 'real people, their lives, and their issues are seen as soft and fluffy'… 'not valuable in the scientific community' (Wall, 2006:147). Autoethnography, meanwhile, celebrates the subjective and the particular (Adams *et al* 2015). Wall also points to an additional factor that has potentially affected my own confidence in using autoethnographic methods. Quoting Clandinin & Connelly (1994:423) she states, 'For many, especially for women being educated as researchers, voice is an acknowledgement that they have something to say' (Wall, 2006:149). My self-perception as a woman, as a practitioner (rather than an academic scholar) and as a non-specialist (in the

sense that this study moves me away from my professional background and into new areas) have all contributed to a lack of confidence in the use of "I".

The use of the self as a data source renders autoethnographers vulnerable to criticism as being self-indulgent, narcissistic and introspective, and a shocking article by Campbell (2017) graphically describes the shaming, sneering and public mockery autoethnography and autoethnographic researchers receive on Twitter. Wall (2006:155) however argues that no individual speaks apart from his or her societal framework of co-constructed meaning, and Grant *et al* (2013) similarly assert that rather than being solipsistic and self-indulgent, autoethnography is actually predicated on the opposite view, because culture flows through the self and people are 'inscribed within dialogic, socially shared, linguistic and representational practices' (Grant *et al,* 2013:5). Autoethnography requires different judgement criteria to traditional methodologies and necessitates acceptance of a radically different epistemology. According to Wall (2006), the application of traditional scientific research tenets such as replicability, overtly described data analysis procedures and an audit trail, to a methodology closer to the arts and humanities than the sciences is incongruous and nonsensical.

Many impressive examples of autoethnography are written as short stories, fictional tales, and highly evocative personal accounts. They are often structured in non-linear, patchwork forms, creatively using different voices, viewpoints and juxtaposing written excerpts from different time periods alongside each other (for example, Wyatt, 2013 Short, 2013; Moriarty, 2017; Carless, 2018). My own style is strightforward in comparison. However, as Wall (2006) points out, styles of autoethnographic writing vary widely, from highly introspective through more familiar styles of personal narrative to the highly experimental. Typically, autoethnographers use a variety of writing forms to convey their research, but as an installation artist, environments are my chosen media and I wanted to get back to my practice.

The adoption of autoethnography was an important middle stage in this study that provided me with tools to reframe my experience. During this stage I revisited favourite old texts that promoted creative approaches to learning (for example Neill 1968; Holt 1984; Robinson 2014), and discovered new ones that supported my belief in artistic process and artistic ways of knowing (such as Dewey 2005 and Eisner 2002, 2005). Importantly, I also revisited the fine art practice that I had left behind some years previously, discovering key resonances and re-inspiring me to find a way to work artistically within the research. As a result of my contact

with artists in school I was questioning the conceptualisations of people with profound disabilities that I held, and discovering that they originated in medical, tragedy, and/or developmental-deficit models. I began to search for the literature that showed me alternative viewpoints. In these ways I was gradually creating a different theoretical field to underpin my study, one more aligned with my own values than the educational one that I set out with.

A new proposal

After a considerable gap in artistic output, I was keen by this stage to create a new installation, and having established that a focus on narrowly defined educational goals led me to unsatisfying process and disappointing outcomes, I wanted to approach my next piece of artwork differently. In December 2015 I presented a revised research project proposal to the new head teacher at the school (Appendix C). This proposal signalled a significant shift in my approach to the research study – in particular because I positioned myself as an artist who would be 'imagining, creating and providing for use, a variety of spaces.' My intention was no longer to evaluate the efficacy of my practice, with all of the distance and impartiality this task implied. I was now declaring that I would 'follow my own artistic process, working intuitively with ideas about intimate 'nurturing' environments that foster feelings of safety and playfulness'. I explained how Trevarthen's theories of intersubjectivity and my own experiences of groupwork in school had led me to question the nature of "groupness" as a shared experience for pupils with profound cognitive impairments. I also discussed the personal fulfilment and pleasure that can result from being "in-the-moment" with pupils, and posed questions about how the environment might play a role in helping staff switch from "doing" to "being" mode.

The generation of this new research proposal signalled another important step in my research journey. By revisiting my previous fine art practice I had reconnected with an artistic process and a body of work originating in the desire to create safe, nurturing spaces (I discuss this body of work further in the next chapter). The repeated theme in my practice is refuge, or sanctuary, from spaces I found to be oppressive in some way. This theme had resonance with my current situation – I wanted to escape both a reductive educational framework and an assumed positivist research perspective. I also felt that this type of nurturing space was more likely to facilitate presence and stillness on the part of staff members and potentially foster more connectedness between them and pupils. I wanted to provide somewhere in which they could put aside the busy "doing-ness" of their role, let go of learning objectives and simply "be" with pupils.

My creative practice at the school up until this time had involved the application of my creative skills for educational ends, and whilst the results were of a high quality, I felt that the instrumental nature of my working processes led to somewhat "predictable" outcomes. By revisiting a fine art installation practice where I was guided more by intuitive process I was reminded that working in this way often brought forth deeper and more unique outcomes. Oxford living dictionaries define fine art as 'creative art, especially visual art whose products are to be appreciated primarily or solely for their imaginative, aesthetic, or intellectual content' (en.oxforddictionaries.com). My desire to return to a practice free from instrumental or applied purpose signified my need to reject limiting external requirements and trust my own process. Leavy (2015:19) quotes Saarnivaara (2003) to explain an artist's process as one in which her experiential world is confronted 'by means of a craft' and 'without exerting any conscious conceptual influence'. This was the creative mental space I wanted to work from, to be open to the spontaneous and the unknown.

In practice of course, as a piece of research, in a specific context, carried out as part of an academic research programme, my next installation was indeed laden with purpose, but in order to free myself from the limiting constraints of working to achieve educational goals with this next piece of work, I needed to approach it as a development of my fine art practice. In this way I could allow intuitive artistic process to guide me, potentially in surprising directions. Leavy (2015:20) states that 'artistic inquiry requires openness to the spontaneous and the unknown', and I knew this was how I wanted to proceed. Now that I had returned to working with architectural ideas of space I found the literature explicating arts-based research methodologies more relevant to my process than those discussing autoethnography which focused more on written forms. Consequently I made another methodological transition at this stage.

4.5 Arts-Based Research.

I use the term arts-based research or ABR here, although several other names, including 'practice-based research', 'practice-as-research', 'art as inquiry' and 'research-based practice' are used for the same or similar approaches (Leavy, 2015, p. 5); there is no universally agreed definition. I have chosen to use ABR over other terms because this is more commonly used within the literature I find most useful, although 'practice-as-research' comes a close second. Broadly speaking, the terms 'practice-as-research' and 'practice-based research' are more frequently used for performance-based arts such as dance, music and theatre and arts-based research for the visual arts.

One of the key defining features of ABR is that the research process involves art making and the artefact created is a tangible product or expression of the research and its conclusions. This involves an integration of theory and practice and an epistemology that assumes the arts create and convey meaning (Barone & Eisner, 2012, Gerber et al, 2012; Boyce-Tillman *et al* 2012; Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2013). Clearly there are differences in both the outcomes and expectations of ABR as opposed to more scientific-based approaches. Those who equate research only with scientific approaches therefore contest the status of ABR, but according to Bonenfant (2012), its arrival on the academic scene has now been sanctioned. Leavy (2015) and McNiff (1998) position ABR as a third research paradigm alongside quantitative and qualitative approaches, and Gerber et al (2012:41) state that ABR requires a world-view that includes 'epistemologies rooted in sensory, kinaesthetic and imaginal forms of knowledge'.

The creative arts therapies have made a significant contribution to the development of ABR as a distinct research methodology (McNiff 1998; Leavy 2015). Long before the arts were being harnessed in formal research, the arts therapies recognised their potential for expression, communication, meaning-making and the exploration of human experience in ways other than through words (McNiff 1998, 2013; Gerber et al 2012; Leavy 2015). Additionally, Leavy suggests that the creative arts therapies have helped to lessen the art-science divide by building their distinctive role in areas such as healthcare, psychotherapy and rehabilitation. An arts-based approach, however, inverts some of the most fundamental principles of scientific logic based upon control and predictability because the creative process is a force from which 'outcomes emanate in unpredictable ways' (McNiff, 1998:79). It is useful, therefore, to appreciate that whilst scientific enquiry prizes reliability and predictability and is directed towards some form of knowing and explaining, ABR can more easily accommodate uncertainty and mystery and is directed towards complementary objectives such as the exploration of experience. Interestingly, McNiff (2013:111) notes the largely unquestioned adoption of social science methods in the applied arts professions, where research frequently involves 'scientific examinations of artistic questions'. He goes on to suggest, 'this mindset may be generated more from within the applied arts professions eager for justification according to conventional academic criteria than imposed from without' (McNiff, 2013:111). It seems my own anxieties about legitimacy are shared.

McNiff (1998) states that ABR involves a radical repositioning of the researcher. As previously discussed, I had already seen that the repositioning of myself to become the subject of the research (through my transition from action research to autoethngraphy) afforded new insights. Having gained these insights into my situation, I now wanted to return

my focus to the school context, but from (and with) an artistic rather than an educational perspective and approach. In line with McNiff's (1998) assertions about the purposes of ABR, I was not looking to acquire knowledge, rather to explore experience and to create and share an aesthetic space in this school context. Wang *et al* (2017:14) suggest that in using art as research, artist-researchers 'aim to gain a deeper understanding of what art, art creation or an artistic installation can do or activate'. It is through the artistic process that 'the artist researcher gains a better understanding of the potential of the form to introduce a change, either in terms of personal experiences or environmental circumstances' (Wang *et al*, 2017:14). This was exactly my aim, to better understand the potential of an aesthetic installation in this school context through my own use of art as research.

Importantly, adopting an ABR approach enabled me to access ways of working that felt liberating. I could explore my role as an artist in this setting, and my questions about being together, from a more instinctive and less rational place, drawing upon my tacit knowledge and understanding of materials, structures and spaces. Figure 1 illustrates this shift from conscious, rational thought to the more unconscious intuitive art-making process in simple diagrammatic form. The terms 'conscious' and 'unconscious' are inadequate (and probably entirely inaccurate from a neurological perspective), but they are the best terms I have to describe the distinct and qualitative difference in thinking and decision-making at these different stages in the research process.

The first box relates to both the action research phase and the autoethnographic phases in which my exploration of the issues could be said to be a rational/conscious process. The second box refers to the making phase, where these issues were ostensibly put aside as I concentrated on an intuitive and much more unconscious process in creating *Golden Tent*. Whilst rational thought processes were clearly involved in the construction and design of the work, I was guided primarily by what I would call a sensorially-based imaginative process, to decide upon the qualities of the piece I wanted to construct. The making process continues over to the third box, the empirical phase of the research, because it is through observation and trial and error that the construction is achieved. The second aspect of this empirical stage involves the presentations of *Golden Tent,* where I share it with others, observing and inviting feedback from participants. During the empirical phase there is a gradual move from the more intuitive/unconscious processes of creating the tent to the rational/conscious processes of planning the presentations, observation, and collating evidence. The final box refers to the reflective process that ensues once the presentations of *Golden Tent* have been completed.

The temporary suspension of rational research concerns and immersion in a making process that occurred whilst I created the tent brought forth a confidence and motivation that I had

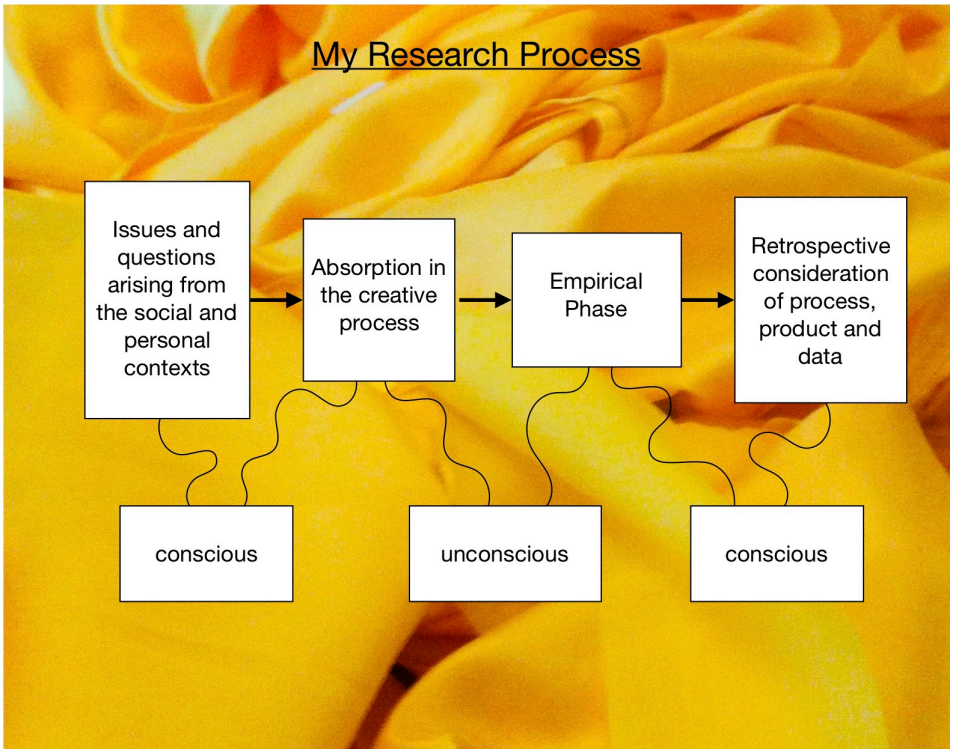


Figure 1 · Moving through conscious and unconscious research processes with ABR

been unable to access in previous stages of the research. At this point in the process I was in my element (Robinson, 2014a) and as an arts practitioner, this phase of the research was less plagued with doubts and uncertainties. I knew what I wanted to achieve and I had the skills to make it happen. Although I held onto the idea that the rational concerns of the research had been put aside during this phase, it is clear that they were not abandoned; rather they were being processed and combined at a different (unconscious) level – as part of the artistic process. Indeed, the resulting installation completely embodied them. *Golden Tent* was an autoethnographic expression, a clear development of my existing fine art practice and a space in which to explore the encounters between staff and pupils. As described in Chapter One, it was this making phase that combined and integrated the three strands of my research in a way that I could not achieve through rational thought. I discuss the ways in which *Golden Tent* addresses and combines these differing aspects of the research further in Chapter Six.

4.6 Participant Feedback

In order to learn how others experienced *Golden Tent*, I invited feedback from participants and in Chapter Seven I explain the circumstances and ways in which I did this. It was not possible to gather feedback (in the sense of linguistic responses) from pupil participants and I

discuss this further in the next section. In considering how I wanted to treat the written feedback from staff, my struggle with assumed ideas of "proper" or legitimate research was re-ignited. Did the comments require systematic analysis, and if so, what type of analysis would be the right one? The feedback itself was an added extra to the study rather than a central data source, so I did not feel it was necessary to undertake a lengthy period of systematic analysis as if it was my key research data. A grounded theory approach (for example, Charmaz, 2014) was inappropriate since I was not aiming to generate a theory or model from the data. I read up on a variety of other qualitative data analysis techniques, for example, content analysis (Robson, 2002); Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (Van Manen, 2014, 2016); thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castle & Nolen, 2018) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, *et* al, 2009) and I read and re-read the comments from participants. What struck me was the number of comments from participants that referred, or could be related, to the themes already established in the study, such as the theme of nurturing, safe spaces of refuge, arising from my fine arts practice, and Turner's ideas on liminality and communitas (to be discussed in Chapter Five). I allowed this realisation to guide my decision, and decided to use a simple deductive approach to the data, highlighting the ways in which the comments related to the themes already established in the study.

4.7 Ethical Concerns For This Study

Research involving people with profound and multiple learning disabilities involves important ethical considerations, which Scott *et al* (2006) suggest should be viewed as a path to be followed, not a hurdle to jump. In her review of the literature concerning qualitative research projects with people with communication and learning disabilities, Nind (2008:3) states that the following questions recur: how to convey abstract ideas to participants, how to enable participants to express their own views, and how to act responsibly and inclusively as a researcher. In my own study, pupils were not themselves the direct focus of the research; rather they were 'implicated in the context in which a research project takes place' (BERA, 2018:6-7). My interest was in exploring whether an aesthetic space might perform a "holding" function for staff, enabling them to maintain a comfortable presence within non-linguistic and non-directive encounters with pupils. For this reason I did not attempt to interpret pupil responses to *Golden Tent*, although staff did comment on these in their feedback. Clearly, observing and interpreting the responses of pupils would be a rich and interesting topic for research but I decided that this went beyond the scope of this particular study.

However, pupils would be entering my installations and thereby participating in my research. Informed consent with the pupils themselves could not be achieved, so after seeking informed consent from parents or guardians by letter (Appendix D) I took the view that the assent of pupils should be sought on an on-going basis. This was particularly important given the obvious power differentials. For example, if pupils were uncomfortable in one of my environments, they would be unable to verbally convey their views and also physically unable to leave of their own accord. The role of school staff in interpreting the non-verbal communications of individual pupils and in watching out for signs of distress or discomfort was therefore important, but it is also true to say that this was a standard responsibility of their role anyway. My own status as a volunteer in the school meant that I was never alone with pupils and everything I did was in compliance with school policies and procedures. School staff maintained responsibility for pupils at all times, and I simply offered experiences that they participated in together. My sessions were a continuation of the "enrichment activities" that already formed a regular part of school provision, so the issue of pupil participation in the research was not an ethically compromising one.

Informed consent was also sought from staff (Appendix E), which included a request for permission to use their written feedback in an anonymised form, and I additionally sought specific permission to quote from transcripts. Given the pupils' non-linguistic forms of communication, it was not possible for me to gain the responses of pupils in words, but I did invite staff to record their reactions on the feedback sheets. Nind (2008:11) notes that reactions are different from views, opinions, beliefs, standpoints, notions and ideas in that these require the person to be an intentional communicator rather than at a pre-intentional stage in which communicative intent is inferred by others. I was not claiming to access the views of pupils in this study, so this was not a problem. There is little personal or sensitive data involved in this study, but any staff or pupils referred to in research reports or presentations have been anonymised with pseudonyms. Specific parental permissions for video material on my 'Tingly Productions' website had been sought prior to this research. I chose not to record *Golden Tent* sessions, but some photographic and video footage was recorded by staff and kept under the school's own data protection policies.

4.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented my methodological choices via a personal and chronological narrative that incorporates my subjective experience as a researcher and my struggle to replace an unconsciously assumed perspective with something more suited to my research interests and preferred artistic ways of working. Barone and Eisner (2012:1) point out that

arts-based research 'is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable'. I wanted to use the expressive qualities of architectural form and sensorial space to convey meaning, and in the second phase of this thesis I show how I did this through the construction and presentation of *Golden Tent*. In the next chapter I introduce the key themes of the research, drawing from my previous fine art practice, and also some anthropological and philosophical concepts that provide the referential framework for participant feedback in PART II.

Chapter Five

Establishing Themes and Developing a Framework for Part II of the Study.

5.1 Chapter Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained how changing my methodological approach from action research to autoethnography early on in the study shifted the focus from my practice and onto my situation and myself. As my understanding of the culturally embedded nature of subjective experience increased, I was able to embark on a re-storying of myself (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In addition to newly acquired knowledge about the impact of a neoliberal ideology on the education system and on my own experiences, I was becoming aware that the status of the arts was a further cultural influence on my subjective experience. I begin this chapter with a very brief discussion on this topic, keeping the scope narrow and targeted on explicating how my own challenges with valuing artistic ways of working and knowing reflect acquired cultural norms. The process of exposing influences that have hitherto unconsciously diminished my confidence has been empowering and has facilitated my return to a fine art practice I left behind fifteen years ago. In the second part of this chapter I revisit this practice and identify the themes and working processes at the heart of it. In doing so I make links between my practice and my school context. Then, having examined my practice, I turn to anthropologist Victor Turner's ideas on liminality and communitas, which I suggest offer a new way to think about the purpose and value of my work in the school context, and I expound the application of these concepts. Finally, I look some of Martin Buber's philosophical ideas, that Turner cites as a way to understand his own assertions about the kinds of interaction that can happen in communitas. I discuss how Buber's ideas can also be applied to the interactive moment between sensory and linguistic beings.

5.2 We Value Science; We Adore (But Deride) The Arts.

In Chapter Two I used the literature to highlight the ways in which reductive approaches have become dominant within education as a result of neoliberal policies. It is possible to go back well before the rise of neoliberalism, however, to find ways in which scientific and industrial understandings of the process of education led to narrow definitions of intelligence and reductive and prescriptive approaches to learning. Eisner (2005) points to the field of psychology, a new and developing discipline in the early twentieth century, and its influence on the development of education. Psychologists, who were striving for their discipline to be

recognised as a science, wanted to create a science of the mind - an appealing idea for educationists attempting to make schooling a more reliable and effective practice. The notion that a science of the mind could furnish educators with 'the kind of knowledge that would permit prediction through control of the process and consequences of schooling' (Eisner, 2005:37) was understandably attractive and as a consequence students came to be seen as 'raw material to be processed' (Eisner 2002 [online]). Similarly, Robinson highlights the "production-line" mentality of Western education systems (TED Talk 2010), with their standardisation and pressure for conformity. In addition, he asserts that our education system equates academic ability with the capacity for a certain type of deductive reasoning, thereby drawing upon an Enlightenment view of intelligence. Robinson argues that schools have narrowed the curriculum in favour of this type of intelligence, '…and if you don't happen to think in that sort of way you can end up believing you're not very smart or that your ideas don't really count' (Robinson, 2014).

Boyce-Tillman (2012) argues that the origin of the constructs we have for the mind are based in the ideas of Descartes, and that these 17th century Cartesian values continue to profoundly affect current models of education. Descartes believed the perception of the senses to be unreliable, so he developed a system of knowledge construction based on deductive reasoning, thereby separating the thinking mind from the unthinking body. During the Enlightenment, when reason overturned religious faith to become the primary source of authority, this search for order and rationality led to the scientific method being elevated in status above all other ways of knowing. 'Rationality became the highest manifestation of our humanity' (Boyce-Tillman, 2012:7). Robinson (Ted Talk, 2010) argues that the wholesale adoption of this Enlightenment view of intelligence as the model for contemporary systems of education discounts the value of aesthetic experience – experience in which your senses are operating at their peak, you are present in the current moment and you are 'resonating with the excitement of the thing you are experiencing' (Robinson, 2010: online). This narrow definition of intelligence invalidates sensory and embodied experience and knowing. It separates the arts and the sciences and creates a hierarchy in which the sciences are elevated above the arts as ways of learning and knowing. As Eisner (2002: online) states:

> Science was considered dependable, the artistic process was not. Science was cognitive, the arts were emotional. Science was teachable, the arts required talent. Science was testable, the arts were matters of preference. Science was useful and the arts were ornamental. It was clear to many then as it is to many today which side of the coin mattered.

Such attitudes persist and recent moves to reform and improve education demonstrate this. Current education policies are 'deliberately squeezing creativity out of children's learning' (Norris, 2018: online) as pressure to climb league tables and reach the attainment targets of a narrowly defined curriculum mounts (Halliday, 2017). And yet, as Robinson (2018) points out, this tightening of control, increased standardisation, competition, and incessant testing has in many ways been a dismal failure. The measures we currently employ to evaluate schools tell us nothing about the quality of education within them, and as argued in Chapter One, such scientific and technological approaches to schooling reduce and distort what is a complex relational process for the purposes of accounting and control (Robinson, 2010a; Eisner 2002b).

The cultural dominance of these definitions of intelligence and the culturally constructed dichotomy between science and the arts have contributed to my own personal battle between scientific and artistic ways of working and knowing, both within this study and in a wider sense within my life. By adopting an autoethnographic approach within this study I have been able to bring these influences and assumptions into awareness and prepare the way for new choices to be made that give value to aesthetic experience. This process has led me to revisit a body of work I produced during my fine art degree (2001 to 2004) and beyond. In the next section I consider examples from this body of work alongside theories relating to childhood creativity, dens and den-making, exploring the relevance of these areas to the current study. I show how themes embedded in this practice are pertinent to the current project, and in so doing I lay the foundations for *Golden Tent*, a further development of this body of work.

5.3 My Installation Art Practice

> 'The den is the chrysalis out of which the butterfly is born'
>
> (Sobel, 1989)

> '…if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. ' Bachelard, (1994:10)

In 2001, I was a new student on a fine art degree. Encouraged to work in any media and on any project of our choosing, the freedom and flexibility of the course was exhilarating. However, the studio space we were to inhabit for the duration of the course was a vast open-plan industrial space broken up by wide-girthed concrete pillars that supported huge metal girders in an open roof structure where cables, ducts and pipes crisscrossed overhead. Overwhelmed and intimidated by the dominance of this industrial-scale space, I felt

compelled to build myself a place of safety and protection before I could contemplate making art. As my year group were relocated around the studio over the duration of the course, this process was repeated several times over until I eventually came to realise that the spaces of safety I felt driven to create *were* my art.

I have chosen to present four pieces here from my body of work - *Updated Blanket and Cushion Hideout, From Behind Mother's Yellow Petticoat, White Womb* and *A Private View* – in order to identify the themes that connect this historical art practice to my current research setting and to ground my discussion of theory in real examples. The first piece, *Updated Blanket and Cushion Hideout*, is an angular felt-covered tent with a cobbled, padded velvet floor offering a plush secretive hideaway space for two. Accessible only to those who crawl through the small opening, the work refers back to the excitement of a secret, child-sized space created from blankets and cushions. Whilst this version is more sophisticated by design, its pursuit of a small hideaway is identical.

Image 13 · *Updated: Blanket & Cushion Hideout*

Dovey (1990:13) draws from adult autobiographies to explore children's need to 'escape from the strictures of the adult world to places of refuge and peace, places to dream'.


Images 14 & 15 · Inside *Updated: Blanket & Cushion Hideout.* (room for two)

She investigates the role of special places in enabling children to 'survive and thrive', and in so doing she notices the double function of a childhood hideaway, as both a refuge and 'a release for creative imagination' (Dovey, 1990:15). Dovey concludes that the relative small-scale of these spaces is a common theme, as is the sense of being away from adult demands, in a space of freedom – 'This is where you go when you "won't fit"' (Dovey, 1990:13). This current study documents my own efforts to 'survive and thrive' as I search for escape from the dictates of a model of education that diminishes the teacher/pupil encounter to a one-sided, objective focussed interaction in order to find a place where it feels safe to release my own creative imagination. It also explores the social relevance of these personal motivations. If Dovey's 'special places' are created within education for individuals to simply "be", will they provide spaces that facilitate new ways of being together where staff and pupils might encounter each other differently? Will the 'creative imaginations' of classroom staff be enhanced or triggered by the experience of being inside a safe space or hideaway? And how might an aesthetic space of 'refuge and peace, a place to dream' (Dovey, 1990:13) be received by pupils?

In *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* Cobb (1959:538) reports that certain aspects of childhood experience 'remain in memory as a psychosocial force, an élan, which produces the pressure to perceive creatively and inventively'. From her study of 300 autobiographical recollections of childhood, Cobb concluded that there is a middle period, from around five to twelve years old, that people return to in memory in order to 'renew the power and impulse to create at its very source' (Cobb, 1959:539). Cobb's work did not focus on childhood dens specifically, she was interested in children's use of flexible materials to build little worlds, and

also in their experiences of, and relationship to, nature. Her ideas have been seminal in the area of childhood imagination and its connection to creativity in adulthood[8]. There are parallels between the connection Cobb draws out between childhood imagination and creativity, and Csikszentmihallyi's (1990) notion of 'flow'. Csikszentmihallyi refers to an optimal state of intrinsic motivation where an individual is 'at one', fully immersed in what they are doing, and Cobb talks of children experiencing 'a living sense of a dynamic relationship with the outer world' (p.539). Although not identical, these creative, or play states, involve one's whole being and are experienced "in-the-moment".

In Chapter One I discussed the intense moments of mutual connection occasionally experienced between staff and pupils and in Chapter Two I stated that I instinctively want to protect and nurture these intimate encounters. This, merged with my own search for refuge, creates the motivation to revive my installation art practice in order to build a "safe" space in this new context. *From Behind Mother's Yellow Petticoat* is another example from my previous body of work that illustrates this instinctive sense that creative or play states need protection. In this piece, a central trunk gracefully supports a saturated-yellow muslin 'skirt' enclosing a lawned interior. Once across the threshold, the vast external space can be viewed from the behind the protection of 'mother's petticoat', a place symbolic of safety. This richly coloured, vibrant cocoon has a regular organic form reminiscent of the husk of a physalis fruit. The saturated contrasting colours of the interior make it appear charged with life, and the larger dimensions of this second example offer room for several 'playmates' to escape together. In the context of the grey and white concrete studio, this installation offers an outside-in experience, as the soft lawn and golden light of the interior alludes to a summer's day in the garden.

In the title, I reference a child hiding behind mother's petticoat to find safety in a situation where they feel unsure, seeking a protective cover from which to espy the world. The contrast between the actual materiality of the flimsy yellow muslin 'walls' and the feelings of safety they induce is paradoxical, an observation Bachelard (1994) also makes when writing about the nest in *The Poetics of Space*:

> If we go deeper into daydreams of nests, we soon encounter a sort of paradox of sensibility. A nest – and this we *understand* right away – is a precarious thing, and yet it sets us to *daydreaming of security* (Bachelard, 1994:102 italics in original).

[8] Dovey (1990) later contested Cobb's conclusions, asserting that the connection is more complex than Cobb proposed.

Image 16 · *From Behind Mother's Yellow Petticoat*

The flimsy 'petticoat' then is emblematic of safety, powerful in its effect on the body and yet merely symbolic in real terms. This is the idea behind an aesthetic space of refuge in that such a space may be wholly insubstantial in a material sense, but powerfully symbolic in providing a sense of security and nurturing.

Image 17 · *From Behind Mother's Yellow Petticoat* interior

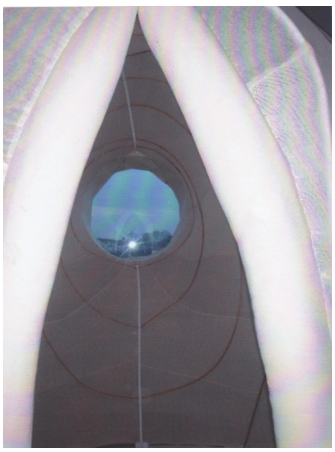
Sobel (1990) suggests that the creation of special places plays a uniquely powerful role in the evolution of the self, and like Cobb, he believes that adults often return to memories of childhood experiences to get their creative juices flowing, or to rediscover a way of thinking/feeling – peculiar to childhood. Contemporary artist Laura Ellen Bacon confirms this when she writes of the deep satisfaction of childhood den-building:

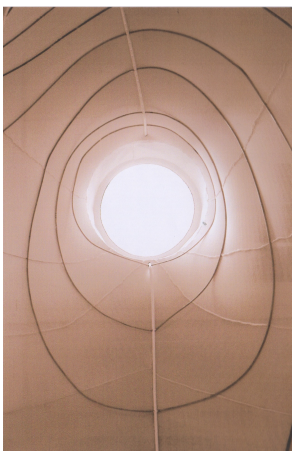
> Making dens educated all of my senses and the precious, precise memories remain a permanent fuel for ideas. Making a den of any size, robust or delicate, offers such a potent mixture of stimulating experiences. It brings forth both an inward calm and glowing enthusiasm. It's hard to say whether building the den or just 'being' in the den is the more enjoyable, it's creatively wild. To crawl or climb into a self-made den, with its crude but joyous details, surrounds a child in a sense of place and personal creativity unlike any other. (Laura Ellen Bacon, 2015: on-line)

In contrast to the previous examples of my work, *White Womb*, is a somewhat mournful, ethereal space. A porthole funnels light into a plain, organically shaped enclosure, washed of colour. Unbleached mutton cloth forms a thin soft membrane over the skeletal frame, filtering light and muffling sound, while layers of thick white tissue paper soften the floor. This piece offers a retreat in which to cleanse and contemplate - a sacred space. The theme of this piece is perhaps more adult, or less playful, than the previous two. The muted colours and soft natural materials slow down rather than enliven the senses and a natural light source is funnelled into the womb-like space, symbolising a place to 'recharge', a space in which to 'come back to yourself'. Bachelard's thoughts on spaces of solitude are pertinent here:

> …all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired uncompromised solitude,remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative (Bachelard, 1994:234)

It would appear from the writing of Bachelard (1994), Dovey (1990) and Cobb (1959) that there are strong connections between hide-aways, creativity, the need to dream and the escape from pressure. Private spaces enable creative impulses to be more readily accessed.





Images 18 – 21 · *White Womb*

Images 22 & 23 · *A Private View*

The fourth example from my practice continues the theme of recharging and reviving and is again innately connected to the idea of accessing creativity. *A Private View* is a site-specific installation made for Eastney beach in Portsmouth. This was a beach I used to go to as a troubled teenager, often to experience the buffeting winds that matched my own emotional

Images 24 & 25
Looking out from *A Private View*

landscape. This shelter for two has a camouflaged protective pram-hood that when viewed from the back merges visually with the surrounding terrain. At the front, however, a tongue of vibrant red satin spills out onto the pebbles, a richly sumptuous bed from which to ponder the seascape in private. This piece originated from a direct need to rejuvenate my creative spirit, and the work was designed as a safe cosy retreat in which to replenish the soul. On a wild and windy beach, the quarter-spherical hood provides a protective canopy from which to survey the horizon and listen to rhythm of the waves.

I made *A Private View* after taking part in a Summer school with Oily Cart theatre company, from which I came away feeling totally inspired. I then proceeded to try and create my own version of their multi-sensory theatre, but I unwittingly approached the task with a rational and instrumental approach and ultimately inspiration was lost to me and I became "stuck". Once I recognised my predicament, I realised I had brought my teacher's mind (rather than my artist's) to the project. I decided to temporarily abandon what I was doing in order to

reconnect with the more intuitive and imaginative aspects of myself. *A Private View* was the result of this decision, an expression of my need to escape to the beach and recharge my creative self. It is interesting for me to note the similarity of themes and issues at play during this time, in particular my polarised experience of rational and artistic ways of working - a consistent theme again throughout this research study.

Connecting intuitive ways of working and sensorial experience

During the period of time that many of these examples from my body of installation artwork were created I was teaching (in a different special school to my research setting) and I was regularly working with children with PMLD. At this time, however, I saw no connection between my work in school and my fine art practice, these two areas of my life were compartmentalised in my mind as unrelated pursuits. By revisiting these artworks over the course of this study, however, I have recognised many interesting crossovers between both practices. In 'artist statements' from this time – brief explanations that accompanied the exhibition of these pieces - I frequently wrote that in making the artworks I felt I was trying to access early or 'pre-verbal' memories in my imagination. I suggested that the works involved a kind of recreation of embodied sensations, manifestations of sensorial memories from childhood. Such assertions were my attempt to describe an intuitive, wordless, creative process through which I ascertained the visual and tactile qualities of the work. Of course there is no way for me to know whether pre-verbal sensorial memories did actually play any part in my creative process - as a linguistic-being, my life before language is not within my recall. I can only 'imagine' pre-reflective experience, inadequately. However, these notions of wordless experience now seem highly relevant in relation to my research setting, where the pupil population are described as being pre-verbal.

In writing about my attempt to imagine the visual and tactile qualities of what I want to bring into being, I am describing a sensitivity or awareness, an attempt to *feel* materials and *sense* an atmosphere. Pallasmaa (2005) asserts that atmosphere is an unfocussed and embodied experience based in much more than just the occular. He suggests that when artists are working they are 'directly engaged with their bodies and their existential experiences rather than focussed on an external and objectified problem' (Pallasmaa, 2005:12). He highlights the importance of the 'preconscious realm, which is experienced outside the sphere of focussed vision' (Pallasmaa, 2005:13) and he relates this unfocussed, embodied experience to ideas of atmosphere. If we focus on something visually our perspective is separated, we are outside of it, but with our peripheral vision we experience being *within* something:

> I would say atmospheric experience is a much more internalised experience than a visual one. Such an approach makes architecture definitely more embodied, and also by definition more multisensory and integrated because in an embodied experience the haptic experience is so important. (Pallasmaa in Havik & Tielens, 2013:45).

Pallasmaa's theories address ideas of non-linguistic experience and are therefore relevant to this study. The embodied experience of atmosphere, the haptic knowledge we bring to our looking, these could all be called non- or pre-verbal forms of experience, and it is this consideration of pre-verbal or non-linguistic experience that links my practice (both working processes and outcomes) with my research context.

I have discussed four examples of my artwork in this section in order to draw out the theme of safe, nurturing spaces as places of refuge and to contextualise *Golden Tent* in relation to an existing body of work. Using Dovey (1990) and Cobb's (1959) theories of childhood imagination I have linked my installations with the childhood practice of den-making and discussed how such spaces foster creativity, notions of dreaming, being and becoming. I have also shown how my attempts to explain an intuitive creative process bring me to ideas of pre-verbal, sensorial experience, and suggested that this is pertinent for research involving sensory beings. In section 5.2 above I argued that the current educational paradigm subjugates aesthetic experience by valuing rationality above all other ways of knowing. I have also previously discussed my dissatisfaction with applying only instrumental (educational) value to a practice that seeks to access areas of human experience beyond the measurable. To advocate the value of an aesthetic space of refuge in a school setting then requires a different framework, one in which alternative ways of knowing and being can be valued. In the next section I discuss how the work of Victor Turner has supplied me with one such alternative way to think about my practice and the value of *Golden Tent* within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities

5.4 The Application of Victor Turner's Ideas of Liminality and Communitas

In Chapter Two I discussed O'Sullivan's (2001) ideas about art as a function or event. O'Sullivan argues that we have learnt to understand and perceive art through linguistic discourse, which drowns out its intrinsic 'affective' power. He puts forward the idea that we need to suspend normal motor activity and apply a different type of attention in order to allow other planes of reality to be perceived. O'Sullivan's ideas support my own interest in a "being" rather than a "doing" mindset and his insistence on art as non-linguistic affect is clearly relevant for audiences with PMLD. Anthropologist Victor Turner was also interested in different planes of reality and his concepts of liminality and communitas offer an interesting

way to consider the function of an aesthetic space of refuge. Turner adopted these terms during his studies of rites of passage rituals in small-scale societies, which seem far removed from the concerns of this study. However, I intend to argue that they offer useful and applicable concepts.

Liminality

The word limen means threshold, and the idea of a liminal phase and liminality originates in the field of anthropology. In his 1909 work *The Rites of Passage*, van Gennep looked at rituals marking an individual or group's transition from one position within a culture to another (Turner, 1969, 1974). Examples of these rites of passage would be coming of age, marriage or the assumption of a new social position; the marking of a birth or death; changes in leadership; or community events such as the harvest. Van Gennep identified three distinct phases within these rites of passage: **separation**, where ritual subjects symbolically detach from everyday social relations and prevailing cultural conditions; **margin** (or limen) where they enter a transitional phase in which the structures of normative culture do not apply and everyday notions of identity, time and space are suspended; and **aggregation** whereby, transformed, they reintegrate back into structured society under their new role, or with their new understanding (Turner, 1969).

Sixty years later, Victor Turner revived and developed van Gennep's ideas in his own studies of ritual process in tribal societies. Turner was particularly interested in the specific differences between everyday structured society and what he called the 'anti-structure' of the liminal phase. He saw these as opposed, but mutually necessary modes of social life that are usually maintained in an on-going cycle. Liminality is a time and place of withdrawal from 'normal modes of social action' (Turner, 1969:156) and involves a different quality of time, indeed a sense of being '…"out of time", that is, beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines' (Turner, 1974:57). This idea of withdrawal from normal modes of social action to enter a place with a different quality of time is present in my own work. In *Golden Tent* I invite groups of staff and pupils out of the classroom milieu and into an aesthetic space in which they are invited to simply "be" together. To shift from "doing" to "being" is to experience time differently, and to be in a space with different 'modes of social action' (Turner, 1969:156).

Another feature of the liminal phase of a rite of passage is the shifting status of the participants, they 'slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (Turner, 1969: 95). I have already discussed the idea that

installation art's focus on sensory experience makes variations in cognitive abilities and conceptual understanding unimportant. I argued that this makes these types of installation potentially equalising spaces in the sense that we are all sensory beings first and foremost. By inviting participants at my research setting to simply experience a space together, the "doing" skills of staff become redundant and a different form of competency comes to the fore. As Grace (2015:online) states, 'people with PMLD are supremely good at being in the moment', and in this sense, the competence, and by association the status, of pupils is raised above many staff who, as I discussed in Chapter One, may find it challenging to simply "be". Turner discusses 'the powers of the weak' during the liminal phase of rituals giving examples of groups of people within the small scale societies he studied, who are of low status in everyday living, but who acquire power within the ritual: 'In liminality, the underling comes uppermost' (Turner, 1969:102). This breaking down of hierarchy and divisions in the liminal phase leads to spontaneous forms of interaction and community, which Turner calls 'communitas'.

Communitas

Communitas is the term used for the distinctly different forms of interaction or relating that happen during the liminal phase of a rites of passage ritual. Turner describes it as a 'communion of equal individuals' (Turner, 1969:96) who have been freed from the social structure and hierarchies that dictate their normal relations. Individuals' social identities are temporarily lost and they engage in '…direct, immediate, and total confrontation…' (ibid:132). There is an emphasis on the present moment - communitas is "of the now", whereas structure is 'rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law and custom' (ibid p. 113). This idea relates powerfully to my own experiences of "in-the-moment" connection with pupils, as discussed in Chapter One. It also relates to Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow', which I referred to in my discussion of Cobb's ideas on the creative play state. In flow an individual experiences total and unselfconscious involvement and a sense of being utterly in-the-moment and at one with the world.

According to Turner, existential communitas is necessarily short lived, because it requires an abandonment of structure that is unsustainable. He notes that some small societies have attempted to systematise or create structures with which to promote communitas in more sustained ways (for example, the Franciscan order of monks), and to these Turner gives the terms 'Normative communitas', or 'Ideological communitas'. He suggests, however, that such attempts to sustain communitas over longer periods of time are inevitably unsuccessful because of the reciprocal and necessary relationship between structure and anti-structure.

Turner also stresses that 'liminality is not the only cultural manifestation of communitas' (Turner, 1969:109) and that this form of relating can happen in other arenas or circumstances. He identifies that individuals who '(1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins, or (3) or occupy its lower rungs.' (ibid:125) can attain a simultaneously sacred and dangerous status through their resistance of the structures of organised society. He suggests court jesters, good Samaritans, hippies and members of monastic orders (amongst others) are examples of such individuals, in that they are all 'structurally inferior' whilst 'morally and ritually superior' (ibid). Whilst these marginal individuals lack social influence and political power within society, according to Turner they hold a form of mystical power.

It is possible to apply these ideas to people with PMLD if we look, for example, at the many testimonies of family members or support workers of people with PMLD who describe how they are brought into deeper contact with their own humanity, or are shown what is important in life, through their connection with a person with profound impairments (see examples in Kittay, 1999; Reinders, 2008 and Vorhaus, 2016). It could be said that this is the sacred power of people with PMLD - but can they also be conceived of as dangerous in the way that Turner suggests? People with PMLD resist/do not partake in a fundamental social structure that most of us rely upon – symbolic language - and this is what creates the cultural chasm between us that the poems in Chapter One attempt to convey. We have to find alternative ways to interact within this languageless zone. Turner states that communitas lacks a regulated form of human interaction and in this sense people with PMLD already engage in such unstructured interaction. Also, as discussed in Chapter Two, the dependence and apparent passivity of many people with PMLD challenges deep-seated ideas about a life worth living. Using Turner's framework I suggest that people with PMLD can be seen to hold the simultaneously sacred and dangerous status he identifies with marginal groups. They have the power to help us access our deepest humanity, and yet they represent a profound challenge to our structured society where achievement and progress are valued highly. In terms of aesthetic experience, O'Sullivan's (2001) plea for art to be freed from linguistic interpretation positions people with PMLD as audience member who are able to fully experience aesthetic 'affects'. In these ways, pupils with PMLD can be seen as individuals who have a lot to teach linguistic beings about how to simply *experience* sensory phenomena, in an embodied rather than conceptual way. They can show us how to "be".

I have made links between ideas of liminality and communitas arising from Turner's anthropological studies of rituals in small-scale communities. It is important to note that

contemporary use of the term liminal is much broader than Turner's original definition. He used the term liminal to describe only the processes and phenomena of specific rites of passage rituals that were a 'sociocultural necessity' (Turner, 1974: 85) in small tribal and early agrarian societies. However, Turner noted that in complex and often fractured post-industrial societies, liminality as a feature of an obligatory ritual only exists in small group cultures or sects, for example in church ceremonies. Within the wider society Turner suggests that liminal-style processes and phenomena are only now present as individualised, optional experiences more aligned to conceptions of leisure than to any collective sociocultural necessity. For these 'leisure-based', optional forms of liminal experience, Turner designated the term 'liminoid'. However, this distinction has not been widely adopted into mainstream vocabulary and the term liminal has simply been extended to include liminoid forms of experience, which is the way I have used it in this thesis.

I have described liminality as a transitional stage whereby the hierarchies and divisions normally present within a culture are temporarily dissolved and I have explained how this unstructured state leads to a different form of interaction or encounter, one that Turner calls communitas. For Turner, the relationship between equal individuals who appreciate and respect each other's uniqueness is a crucial social experience arising from the liminal state. But how is this encounter different from the kinds of interaction that happen within normal cultural conditions? Turner suggests it is a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities in the manner of Martin Buber's "I and Thou". In the next section I examine Buber's work to consider whether his perspective can reveal something new about the encounter between a person with and a person without profound cognitive impairments.

5.6 Applying Buber's Ideas Of I-Thou To The Encounter Between A Person With And A Person Without PMLD.

In Chapter One I spoke about the rare but hugely rewarding occasions I experienced as a teacher when I felt I really connected with a pupil "in the moment". Typically these moments are short-lived, often intense, and based in a different realm in the sense that they differ from our more usual language-based interactions. I have discussed how Intensive Interaction offers one theoretical framework with which to understand these brief times of connection, but in my search to understand my practice beyond an educational paradigm I have sought other ways to conceptualise these encounters. Turner's work, as discussed above, offers a way to understand the circumstances that may generate such encounters, but he uses the writings of Martin Buber in order to explain their nature. I pursue this further now by turning

to Buber's translated work *I and Thou* to see how this text might add to a consideration of the encounter between a person with and a person without profound cognitive impairments.

I and Thou

Martin Buber was an Austrian-born Jewish philosopher who died in 1965 at the age of 87. In his much-cited work *I and Thou* (originally completed in German in 1923) he expressed complex ideas about modes of being and consciousness in interaction. It should be noted that Buber's work is actually based in his belief in the primacy of the spoken word in human interaction (Mendes-Flohr, 2018), but in my view this does not render it inapplicable to the language-less encounters between sensory beings and linguistic beings. *I and Thou* is a poetic and deeply religious text, which eludes straightforward exposition and is therefore difficult to write about. However, it appears to describe the deeper form of connection that I believe I have occasionally experienced during my own encounters with people with PMLD. Buber identifies two modes of consciousness through which an individual engages with other individuals (and inanimate objects), which he calls the 'I-It', and the 'I-Thou' mode. The word Thou is a translation of the German word Du that is commonly used as the informal pronoun for you, but is also used for addressing God. In the I-It mode, which Buber says we operate from most of the time, the world around us is separate and objectified in that it is 'known' through our systems of understanding. In this mode I do not witness the entirety of the other, I engage with them as something to be known or used from my own self-centred outlook. They become instrumental to my own needs (Wodehouse, 1945; Owen, 2018; Anderson & Cissna, 1997; Mendes-Flohr, 2018).

In the I-Thou mode I encounter the other's whole being without filtering it through my 'mediated consciousness' (Mendes-Flohr, 2018: online). I do not see that individual through a raft of pre-conceptions and projections; no purpose intervenes. An I-Thou relationship is a mutual holistic encounter between two beings, where concepts and objectification of the other is replaced by a meeting in authentic existence (Buber, 2013 edn). 'The honor of the other – and not just her usefulness – is of paramount importance' (Septimus & Sabath Beit-Halachmi:online). This intimate encounter is characterised by a total "presentness" and is inherently reciprocal. For Buber (2013), it is through such encounters that a relationship with God is also revealed, and conversely, according to Buber, it is only through our relationship with God that such I-Thou relationships can exist.

Despite this crucial religious element to Buber's writing, many have applied his ideas from non-religious perspectives. For example, American psychotherapist Carl Rogers recognised

similarities between his own understanding of key moments of mutuality within a therapeutic relationship and Buber's ideas of the I-Thou relationship. In *The Martin Buber – Carl Rogers Dialogue* (1997) Anderson & Cissna transcribe a public conversation in 1957 between Buber and Rogers where they discussed the nature of man as revealed in interpersonal relationship. Their dialogue, and Anderson and Cissna's commentary on it, illuminates both Buber's and Rogers' standpoints. The discussion (and disagreement) between Buber and Rogers over mutuality is particularly relevant to this study. Rogers suggests that what Buber terms the I-Thou relationship resembles effective moments within a therapeutic relationship. At these moments he states that he is present in the relationship 'as a subjective person, not as a scrutinzer, not as a scientist…' and that he is 'relatively whole in that relationship', or 'transparent'[9] (Rogers in Anderson and Cissna, 1997:29). In my view, Intensive Interaction involves a (potentially more playful) version of the attitude and approach that Rogers is describing here, which is why I consider this debate between him and Buber interesting and relevant.

Buber however disputes Rogers' assertion, saying that mutuality cannot possibly be present in this relationship due the inequality between the therapist as 'helper' and the client who seeks help. In the ensuing discussion, Rogers' account of his perceptions of those key moments do appear to confirm a temporary loss of this 'structural inequality' between him and the client as they share a brief, emotionally-heightened encounter that is experienced with equal impact and vitality on both sides. Rogers believes that it is these charged moments within the therapeutic relationship, which could be seen as moments of commmunitas, that prompt change in the client (Anderson and Cissna, 1997). Despite differences of context and purpose, I find Rogers' descriptions of the therapeutic encounter similar to my own experiences of mutual connection with pupils. In these moments, there is no sense of 'structural inequality', and there is a sense that the encounter is experienced with equal impact and vitality on both sides. Rogers' assertion that these are the key moments of therapeutic growth aligns with educational theories about deep and meaningful learning (e.g. Laevers, 2000; Carpenter, 2010). Connection is fundamental to learning for pupils with PMLD so any moments of mutual engagement are surely significant in their lives. As with Turner's

[9] Rogers' later replaced the word transparency with the term 'congruence' by which he meant openly experiencing the feelings and attitudes that are happening, and being connected with self, client, space and time (Rogers, 1967).

ideas of communitas, both Buber and Rogers talk in terms of 'moments', acknowledging that they are a short-lived phenomena.

Buber asserts 'All real living is meeting' (2013:9) and he makes a distinction between entering into relation and having an experience. He claims that 'experience' is inward and bounded, and consequently only associated with an I-It relationship. 'Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them' (Buber, 2013:4) so there is a separation – experience arises 'in him' and not *between* him and the world. Buber alludes here to the lack of mutuality in the I-It mode, whereas a person-in-relation, i.e. someone in the I-Thou mode, extends beyond themselves to meet in a "betweenness". Mendes-Flohr (2018:online) suggests that Buber's 'Between' is an intersubjective space where two people 'coexist' and 'co-contribute' and that this is where we find 'the real sacred stuff of existence'. Turner makes a similar distinction in his use of the word flow. He suggests that communitas 'has something of a flow quality', but he distinguishes between flow as something experienced within an individual, and communitas as being *between*, or among, individuals (Turner, 1974:89). According to Turner, flow is always in the world of 'structure', whereas what he calls 'spontaneous or existential communitas', i.e. direct unmediated communion with one another, is always 'pre-structural'[10].

Although I draw upon these concepts, I do not adhere to Turner's delineation of the word 'flow' and Buber's of the word 'experience' when attempting to articulate the particular quality of experience associated with being engrossed in a moment of mutuality with a pupil with PMLD. I would suggest that flow can be felt in the shared rhythm and reciprocal nature of playful interactions, and that an experience can be more than inward and bounding. Buber's concept of 'betweenness' could be used to describe the language-free interactive space of encounter when differences across the cultural chasm dissolve and affect is transmitted between partners. Equally, Turner's idea of direct unmediated communion with one another seems to be a good description for the type of "in the moment" connection I described having with pupils, and also the kind of mutuality that Intensive Interaction aims to achieve (Caldwell, 2007; Nind and Hewett, 2006). The key point I want to take forward from this discussion is the idea of a space and time in which the normative structural inequality is temporarily replaced by an intersubjective space of communion in which the full humanity of each partner is honoured.

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[10] Nevertheless, he states that it is through flow that people sometimes seek spontaneous communitas.

5.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have brought in additional themes and concepts beyond those from the theoretical field I identified in Chapter Two. Themes arising from my (historical) installation art practice have been discussed alongside theories of childhood creativity in order to bring out the idea that spaces of refuge or temporary escape are important for creativity and dreaming. Turner's theories of liminality and communitas, and Buber's ideas of the I-Thou encounter have also been discussed in order to think about the mutuality of interactions between sensory beings and linguistic beings and their benefits for both parties. These discussions provide the foundations for PART II of this thesis, in which many of the ideas explored in PART I become materialised through an artistic process as I create and present a new installation for my research context.

5.8. Summary Of PART I Of The Thesis

PART I of this thesis has presented the themes and concepts that form the theoretical framework for the arts-based research I undertake in PART II, situating it in both a scholarly and a practice-based context. The personal and social background to the study has been explained, and also my motivation to find ways to understand my practice beyond its educationally instrumental value (according to the current limited conception of education). I have reflected on my struggle to understand my research purpose and justified my move to autoethnography, a methodology that involved examining my situation and myself. Using a reflexive personal narrative I have recorded the factors that have brought about a paradigmatic shift in my perspective during the preparatory phase of this research, including my work alongside other artists and my growing understanding of the ideological influences I have unconsciously accepted. Revisiting my previous body of installation artwork I discovered relevant themes and revived working processes that enable me to tap into more deeply felt subject matter and express meaning that is inaccessible when I work more rationally.

Some of the aims of this research have been addressed in PART I of this thesis. My examination of the impact of neoliberalism (Chapter Two) and the status of the arts in education (Chapter Five) addressed the following sub aim:

- Identify and critique the cultural beliefs and practices that have determined my subjective experience as a disaffected teacher and volunteer artist.

I have also revisited examples from my previous fine art installation practice and extracted the themes of refuge, protection, and nurturing spaces for creativity as key ideas to further

develop through my next installation in the school research context. This process has begun to address the following sub-aim:

- Develop personal (as opposed to educational) themes in my installation practice and explore their resonance for others

and this will continue in Part II. My decision to work with internally as opposed to externally generated themes, is part of my move towards what I have called a more "authentic" process.

By applying the concepts of liminality, communitas and the I-Thou encounter to my research context, and presenting this as a conceptual framework with which to examine my next installation in this context I have also addressed the following sub-aim:

- Identify and apply conceptual frameworks from beyond the current educational paradigm in order to theorise my practice

We move to PART II of the thesis now where an arts-based methodology is adopted and my art practice becomes the strategy, rather than the subject, for the research.

PART II

Chapter Six

The Making of *Golden Tent*

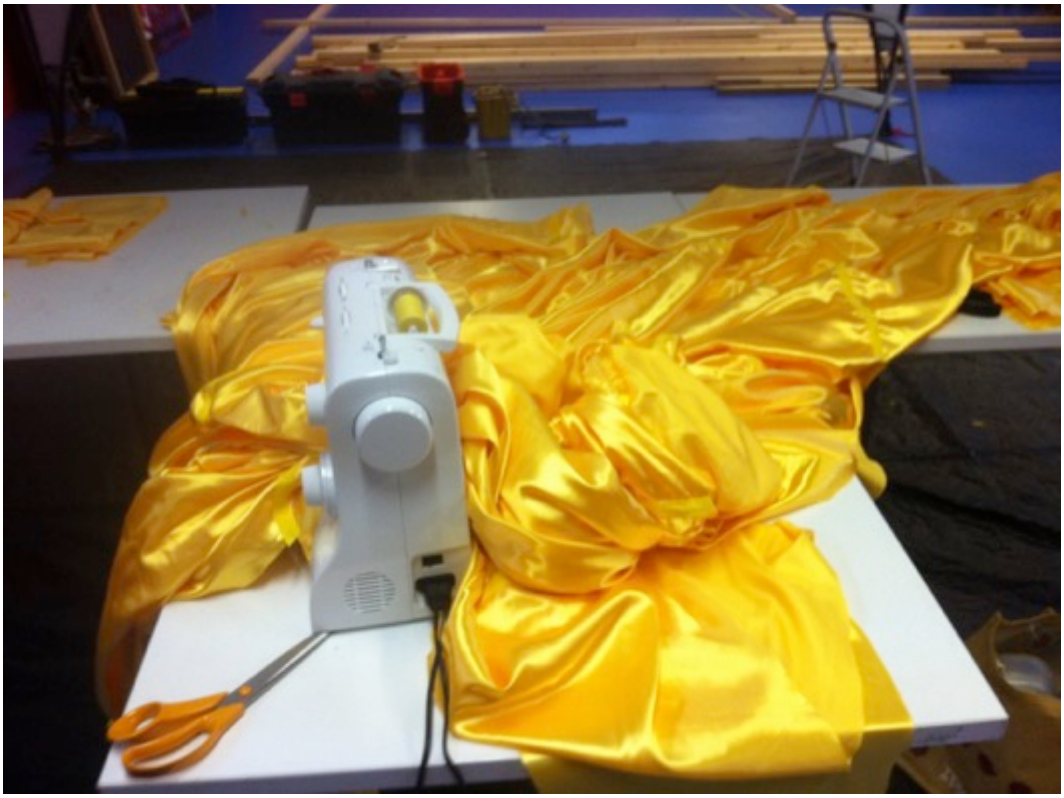


Image 26 · Sewing the yellow satin cover for *Golden Tent*

6.1 Introduction

In PART I of this thesis, the three strands of the study – an autoethnographic examination of my situation; my interest in moments of connection between pupils with PMLD and their non-disabled partners; and my installation art practice in a school context – were presented as separate elements. In PART II these strands become integrated through the creation and presentation of *Golden Tent*, and in this chapter I focus on the making stage, drawing upon Rappaport's (2013) ideas of the 'felt sense' to explain this integration of apparently disparate elements through a creative process. Prior (2013:162) observes that in our 'results-driven, outcome-focused' culture, the process of creation is made invisible and is consequently not valued as it should be. I aim to give value to the creation process in this chapter, although it must be acknowledged that the communication of tacit and instinctual understandings, especially understandings of a craft, presents a challenge. These understandings are based in, and demonstrated through, practice, and this makes them difficult to express in theoretical and linguistic terms (Barone & Eisner, 2012; McNiff, 1998; Sullivan, 2005). What

can be presented in the text of this chapter is therefore inevitably partial and limited by its linguistic rendering, for as Prior (2013:164) states, 'what a practitioner can *do* instinctively may not be what they can readily discuss'.

I begin by discussing how I approached this new phase of the research, articulating the intentions I had in mind at the outset and explaining some of the logistical constraints of the site. I then detail the physical construction of *Golden Tent*, including the technical issues that arose and how I overcame them. I finish the chapter by clarifying the way in which the creation of *Golden Tent* represents a distinctly different approach compared to my previous practice in school. My overall aim in this chapter is to explicate how the creation of *Golden Tent* constitutes a new and active phase of the research in which the topics discussed in PART I become integrated, indeed, how they become embodied within an architectural space.

6.2 My Approach And My Research Intentions At The Start Of The Making Process.

After a period of struggle in relation to both the development of my practice and my research study (described in Chapter Four), I embarked on this stage of the research project with a new confidence and enthusiasm. My discovery of resonant themes inherent in a body of artwork I had completed some years previously (as discussed in Chapter Five), and my motivation to draw on artistic ways of working, were guiding me towards the creation of a new piece. At this stage, however, the three strands of the study still felt like disparate entities I was unable to bring together through conscious cognitive processes. Rappaport (2013) recommends that when conducting art-based research we should listen to our inner 'felt sense'. This is a term she borrows from Gendlin (1981), who coined it to describe a physical experience, an internal, bodily awareness that encompasses everything you feel and know about a given situation. According to Gendlin, the felt sense is available 'all at once rather than detail by detail', like 'a taste, or a great musical chord' (Gendlin, 1981 in Rappaport, 2013:201). Rappaport suggests the felt sense must first be coaxed from its 'inner realm' with mindful, non-judgemental awareness, and then given an appropriate artistic medium to allow it to be captured all at once and expressed as a whole (Rappaport, 2013). Franklin endorses Rappaport's view that art can capture and express multi-dimensional phenomena as a whole when he states that art is a 'supremely integrative process' that 'surfaces and unifies cognitive, affective and embodied knowing' (Franklin, 2013:91),.

In retrospect, I can see that my own process of making *Golden Tent* confirms the capacity of artistic process to capture and unify a complex mixture of 'cognitive, affective and embodied knowing' (ibid). An act of trust was required as I temporarily abandoned my focused thinking

about the three strands of my research to become immersed in a very different mode of working. I engrossed myself in the creative and physical making process, focusing instead on practical issues and material qualities, and trusting that through these endeavours something of relevance would emerge. Despite this sense of abandoning a certain mode of conscious, rational thinking, I did have clear intentions in mind about what I was trying to achieve. I wanted to craft an immersively sensorial space that might facilitate 'sensory-being' - in-the-moment experiences that linguistic beings and sensory beings can enjoy equally together (Grace, 2017). I was attempting to translate the auditory "holding" function of the shruti-box into a physical form (as discussed in Chapter One) in order to create a space that might help staff to sustain their "presence" during times when pupils were inactive.

In addition to these conscious aims there was a less conscious, but possibly more significant, motivation. This was my sense of needing to establish a space of refuge in an environment where I no longer seemed to belong. It was this impulse that dictated the aesthetic qualities of the work - through a process of "sensorial imagining" (as discussed in Chapter Five) - and where tacit instinctual knowledge and crafting - the processes that Prior asserts are difficult to express in theoretical terms - came to the fore. My 'felt sense' is not transmittable through words, it is conveyed through materiality, in colour, form, scale and texture.

6:3 The Creation Phase

Practical details - the site and the structure

In Chapter Four I briefly discussed the new proposal I made to the head teacher at the school (Appendix C). In this proposal I identified an under-used outdoor area of the school as the site for a new installation. When the head teacher and I met to discuss my proposal however, I discovered reasons why this site could not be used in the way I proposed. I then spent considerable time looking for alternative sites within the limited school grounds. It eventually became clear that temporary use of an indoor space was going to be more practical, and occasional use of the school hall was eventually settled upon. This meant that any installation I made needed to be a freestanding structure with a short set-up and take down time. It had to be collapsible and portable, yet large enough in dimensions when erect to accommodate around 6 large wheelchairs plus accompanying staff. I would be constructing it singlehandedly with home DIY tools, and my budget would be a maximum of £500. These practical constraints are considerable, particularly the production of a freestanding structure large enough to accommodate a senior class, which meant enclosing roughly 20 square metres, ideally without central pillars, so that the internal space is uninterrupted. With this in mind, I originally investigated a yurt (or ger) design. These clever

structures have a self-supporting roof, can be dismantled into manageably portable components, and their soft circular shape and history as homes for the nomadic people of Central Asia appealed to me. I met with two different yurt builders and began to instruct myself on yurt building technology, as well as costing ready-made versions of these structures.


Images 27 & 28 · Yurts are clever portable and self-supporting circular structures

My research into self-made yurts revealed a very lengthy process of drilling necessary to make the lattice walls, especially if coppiced wood is used, which cannot be stacked and drilled in multiples. Some of the woodworking skills and tools required to make the yurt's circular 'crown', a crucial element that forms the top and centre of the roof, would also have challenged me. Commercially produced yurts cost from £2,000 which would have involved me in additional fund-raising and thereby a longer timescale, so I eventually decided to pursue a different route for this project.

I already owned a Coleman 'Event 14 Shelter' which I purchased after spending time with Sensorium Theatre in Australia who use one in their touring theatre work for children with special needs. When I met Sensorium's co-directors in 2014 they recommended the Event 14 shelter because of its portability, and they showed me how they had adapted theirs into a themed environment (see illustrations below). The floor area covered by the structure is 40.5 square metres - enough to accommodate a senior class at the school, and by installing my proposed enclosure inside the school building, I avoided the need to weather-proof the structure or secure it to the floor, which saved both time and money. I could also see the potential to extend the framework outwards from the arched openings, so the Event 14 Shelter also seemed to give me a wider range of options than a yurt for its final shape and covering. I began working on plans for my portable tent in early 2016.

Image 29 · A commercially produced 'Coleman Event 14 Shelter'.

Image 30 · Sensorium Theatre's adaptation of the shelter for their work in schools.

The metal tent framework gave me the foundational structure for an installation that was portable and relatively quick and easy to erect. My next consideration was how I wanted it to feel inside. I wanted the space to heighten sensorial experience for staff by immersing them in a single colour that would hopefully shift their awareness to a fuller experience of the senses. Holtzchue (2011) states 'Colour is first a sensory event. Colours are true sensations, not abstractions or ideas. The beginning of every colour experience is a physiological response to a stimulus of light'. Full immersion in the physiological sensation of colour was how I hoped to create a shift into a different state. I knew from my previous work that the feeling of immersion is best achieved when the floor and the roof/ceiling are all part of the total design because this highlights the transition from outside to inside. I also wanted the

space to feel enclosed, shielded from the external world. After considering a variety of colours, yellow persisted in my vision of the space. This felt an entirely intuitive decision, but it is interesting to note that highly saturated yellow and/or red are colours that children with cortical visual impairment (a visual processing difficulty experienced by many children with PMLD) are often particularly drawn to (Perkins school for the Blind, 2013).

During the time that my original ideas were incubating[11] I was inspired by a radio programme about yoiking (*Nature*, 2016), a unique form of vocal expression carried out by the Sami people of Norway and Sweden. A yoiker yearns to 'capture the subject in its living sense' and so their songs are not merely descriptive. As Migraciones Poéticas (2012:online) states, a yoik is 'not about something, it is that something'. In the radio programme, yoiker Andé Somby and BBC sound recordist Chris Watson traverse a steep mountain in Norway to the edge of a lake in a crater to record Somby's yoiking in this extraordinary landscape. Somby talks about connecting with the earth and wildlife through his yoik, saying, 'I want to be present in the yoik, and I want the yoik to be present in me'. This comment struck me as exactly the type of immersion I wanted to create with my new installation - that someone would be "present" in the yellow and feel that the yellow was present in them. I had an imaginative sense of the colour infusing those who spent time in the tent. Somby's statement about yoiking became an ongoing inspiration throughout the making of the piece as it reminded me of this sense of immersion in golden yellow light that I wanted to achieve. It is perhaps appropriate that a statement about yoiking, an auditory art form, should become a key inspiration for this sculptural installation given that one of research aims was to explore whether the effect of the shruti box drone could be translated into a physical form.

My reading of Buber's *I and Thou* provided a further influence at this stage. I had a sense of wanting to "bathe" the encounter between staff and pupil in reflected golden yellow light, as if to fill the cultural chasm (identified in Chapter One) or the "betweenness" with a transmissive medium. My sense of this immersive space was a kind of spiritual cave, a gem-like space that prompted notions of reflected glory and purity. The idea of reflected light between people also reminded me of a game played as children where buttercups were picked from the grass on a warm summer's day and held under one another's chins to see if a faint shimmering golden glow appeared on the chin – supposedly a sure sign of a love of

[11] The term incubation comes from Wallas' four stage model of the creative process, as discussed in Sadler-Smith (2015)

butter! Ideas gathered in these associative ways were not rational developments in my enquiry, but the artistic associations I was making as I imaginatively considered how to proceed with the form and qualities of the piece. They are representative of me gradually identifying the medium that would best capture my felt sense, as described above.

6:4 The Physical Construction

I wanted to extend the dimensions of the Event 14 Shelter in order enhance its shape and provide more space inside. To be cramped and crowded together within the space would have taken away from the immersive experience of the tent's interior. To do this, I decided that rounded canopies extending two or more of the arched openings of the framework could work well both practically and aesthetically.

Aesthetically they would incorporate and repeat the half-circular shapes of the arches in a way that was sympathetic to the existing form. Canopies also have associations with infant pram hoods, thereby suggesting a nurturing and protective space, which felt appropriate for my intentions. Practically, they would add an additional two metres each side to the floor space, and open out the internal space. I knew that a canopy would be a good way to build a quarter sphere shape and keep the construction of the fabric cover manageable due to the regular shaped segments. After many visits to fabric shops and sail making suppliers, I eventually chose a yellow satin for the framework cover. I took care to find a particular level of opacity and colour saturation, weighing up the cost implications for different options. I also found plumbing pipe that was

Image 31 · Canopies have regular-shaped segments

Image 32 · Pram hoods have associations with protective, nurturing spaces

Image 33 · Initially I worked in my garden where I had just enough room to build one canopy

bendy enough to form the curves of the canopy and I began work on building two canopies in opposite arches of the framework. However, I was soon involved in a series of frustrating technical and practical challenges, mainly due to not having a large enough workspace to keep the framework erected while it was under development. I initially used my garden on dry days where, if I squeezed the framework against the wall, I had just enough space (under a tree) to work on building one canopy. Unfortunately, the slightest wind caused the flimsy plumbing pipes to move around, and at this stage I had not worked out a way to firmly secure the ends of these pipes into position.

Image 34 · The early stages – using bricks to hold the pipes in place at the canopy hubs

Working out the construction pattern for the canopy covers proved a huge challenge, and took many weeks to overcome. I knew it should be possible to work out the measurements for the segments of a quarter sphere mathematically, but this canopy was not an exact quarter sphere. In addition, the effect of gravity on the long plastic pipes,

combined with the challenge of working at this large scale, particularly in windy weather conditions, meant that it was difficult to take reliable measurements. Each segment of the canopy was over 6 metres in length, so large quantities of fabric were required to mock-up initial patterns that could later be refined for the final design. I approached a local sail maker who kindly donated some large pieces of sail fabric that I was able to use for this purpose. However, without accurate measurements for the shape I was trying to achieve, and no 3D computer design software, I could only work directly onto the structure itself, trying to work out the shape of a single segment that could be repeated to create the whole cover. I worked on this for many frustrating days but each attempt resulted in an asymmetrical and irregular shape.

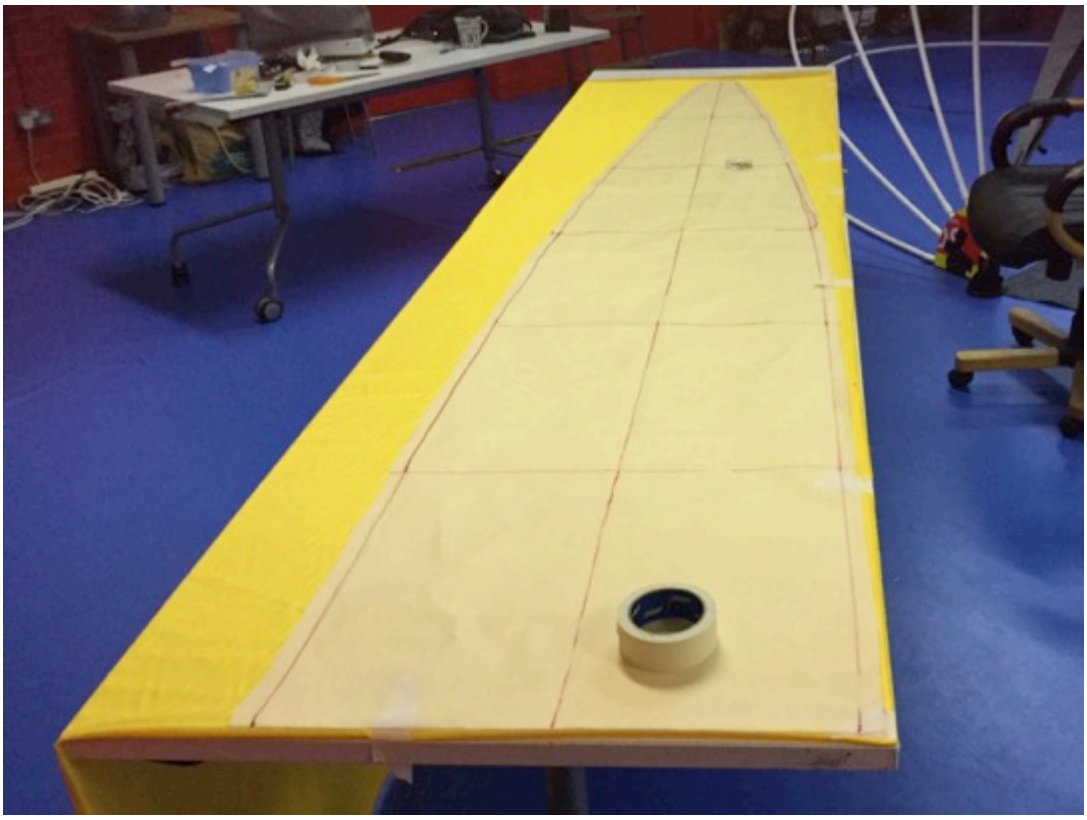
Image 35 · The canopy pattern proved difficult to resolve

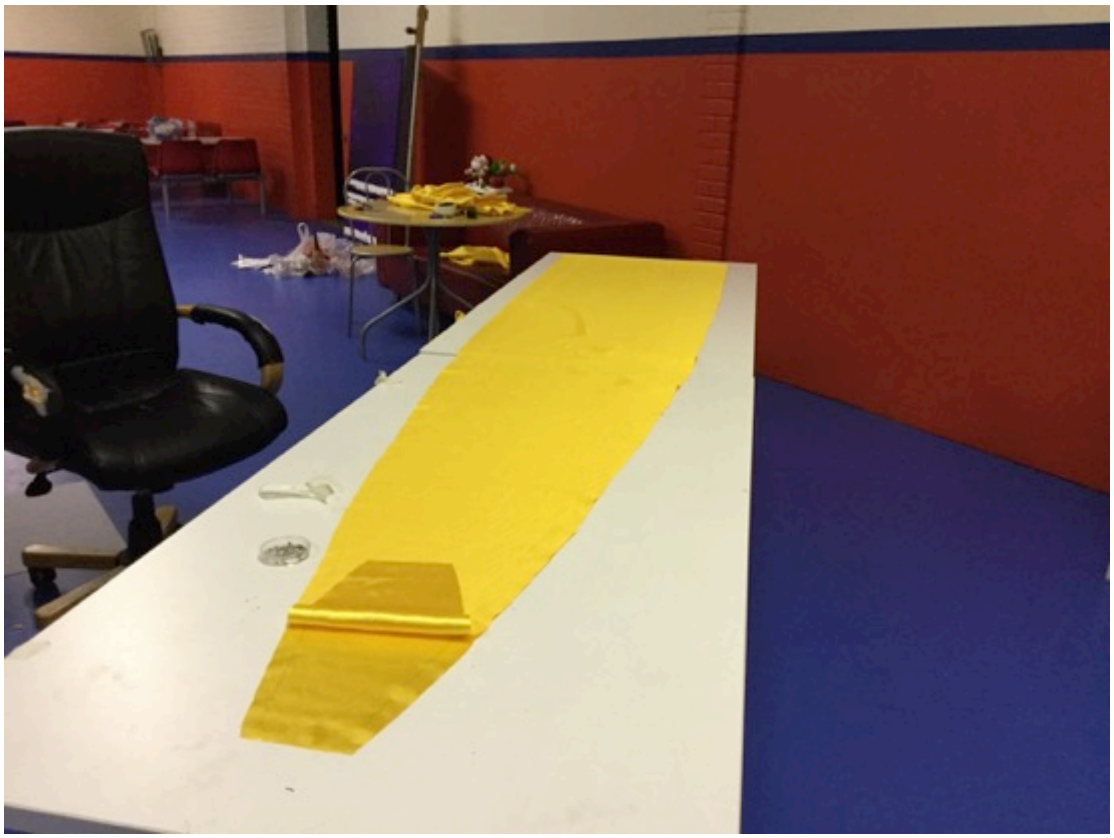
In addition to the effect of the weather conditions and gravity on the flimsy plastic piping, the metal framework of the Event 14 Shelter was progressively becoming bowed out of shape as a result of me repeatedly erecting and dismantling it singlehandedly when it ideally required two people. Doing this put enormous strain on the hollow steel poles because they had to support an uneven distribution of weight whilst I moved around the unwieldy framework fixing one area together at a time. By regularly repeating this process I was graduallly misshaping the steel poles so that the arches, which formed the guiding curve for the canopy,

were becoming skewed out of shape. I would therefore need to design a cover that could accommodate these irregularities of shape whilst not drawing attention to them. The school had graciously put aside £500 for this project and I was drawing upon these funds to cover the costs of materials, so it was important to fully resolve my pattern issues with the donated sail fabric so that none of the final fabric got wasted.

In October 2016 I managed to gain four weeks use of a studio space where I could leave the erected framework in place, and it was this opportunity that afforded me the time to work solidly on the structure and overcome some of these construction problems. No longer battling with windy weather conditions, and with time to consider the cover design in a more sustained way, I successfully resolved the segment design for the canopy covers and the hub design for the ends of the plastic piping by fixing small sections of pipe each with a female coupling at the requisite angles onto four plywood back boards.

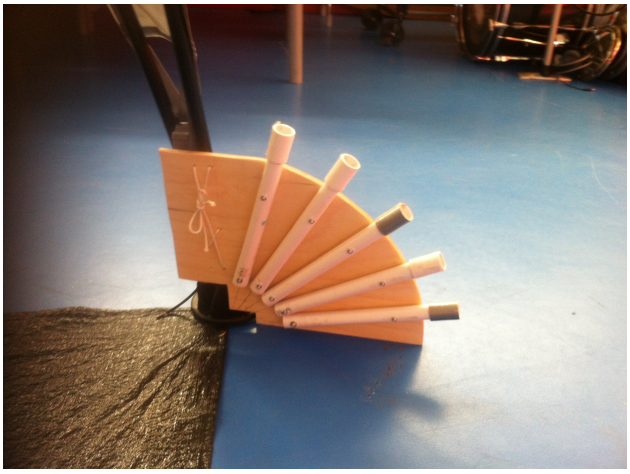
Image 36 · Studio conditions enabled me to overcome some of the design challenges





Images 37 & 38 I eventually worked out a regular-shaped pattern piece that I could replicate to form the canopy cover

Image 39 · Working on the canopy



Images 40 & 41 • The canopy hubs were made from small sections of pipe screwed at angles onto plywood backboards with female couplings to hold the canopy poles in place.

Images 42 & 43 Working out the pattern for the main cover.

I was able to make a pattern for the roof covering by copying the original cover that came with the shelter, and I painted the framework white so that it did not contrast so starkly with the yellow cover.

Images 44 & 45 • Main cover and both canopies nearly complete, floor in development.

Image 46 • Spray-painting the framework white

Image 47 Creating the floor covering

The floor covering proved my next tricky challenge. I chose a highly reflective metallic gold material that when laid out inside the tent instantly completed the space, creating the immersive effect I was hoping for. However, this fabric was thin and would not fare well under the heavy wear and tear of wheelchairs and shoes. More robust floor coverings were completely beyond the budget however, so my next challenge was to protect the material I had chosen in a way that would not diminish its reflective properties. I eventually chose to cover the golden floor fabric with 2mm thick clear PVC. This would fulfil the protective function, but this

material could only be purchased in 180cm widths, which meant I would need to join three strips together to cover the whole floor area lengthways. Joining the PVC proved my next problem, particularly because I did not want to create a striped effect on the floor with visible lines of glue or tape because aesthetically this would interfere with the rounded curves of the space. I eventually solved this problem with an iron, overlapping the edges and welding them together under a cloth with direct heat. The finished look of the transparent cover on top of the metallic gold was rather water-like as it was impossible to make the PVC lay completely flat and so the reflected light created a slightly rippled effect. Once taped to the floor around its outer edges though, the covering was flat enough not to ruck up under the wheelchairs. The thin metallic gold material and its clear PVC cover were now large mats that could be rolled onto an extended carpet pole for storage and laid out relatively quickly when required. The tent was now ready for use.

6:5 *Golden Tent* – Discovering A New Way To Work In School.

The creation process for *Golden Tent* differed from my earlier *Tingly Productions* work at the school (discussed in Chapter One) in some fundamental ways. With *Tingly Productions*, I looked outward to choose a rich theme (such as 'The Gem Mine', 'Outer Space' or 'The Nativity') to inspire the form and style of the environment, and the props within it. Influenced by theatre companies working in this field, I then devised multi-sensory sessions that took place in these themed environments. The content and format of the sessions was guided by my knowledge of the sensory pathways most likely to engage individual pupils and based upon my experience of working as a teacher with these pupils. The creation of *Golden Tent* involved a qualitatively different process. Instead of selecting an externally derived theme, I looked inward and there I discovered the desire to build a place to simply "be", a space of refuge from planning, knowing, doing, showing, proving. I was less concerned with the role of the environment as an educational tool to engage pupils in "learning opportunities", and more concerned with how it might help us explore our shared humanity given our differing ways of being in the world. *Golden Tent* manifests my search for sanctuary within a neoliberal educational paradigm (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2004; Pratt, 2016), where pre-specified targets and the measurement of progress reign supreme. The scale of the work however exhibits my desire to share this personal sanctuary with others, indeed to find communitas (Turner, 1974) in this escape. Inside the "den", we can be free of these restrictive practices and explore alternative ways to be together.

6.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explained how working with the 'felt sense' (Rappaport, 2013) enabled me to integrate the different strands of this study into a whole through the making of *Golden Tent.* I have described the aesthetic and practical considerations that dictated the form of the piece and described the physical construction process. In the next chapter I discuss various presentations of *Golden Tent* and the feedback I received.

Preface To Chapter Seven: The Methodological Struggle Continues

The next chapter has had many incarnations and has brought me face to face with some of the biggest challenges of this research. Issues such as what to include and what to leave out, what it is important to say and how to say it, have doggedly plagued my thinking. Every attempt seems unsatisfactory and I am stuck in a spiral of self-doubt. The sense that this is the chapter where I must deliver evidence to 'prove' something is a debilitating pressure. I find myself seeking a form of presentation that will 'legitimise' what I've done, even deliver propositional and generalizable knowledge. I yearn for neat conclusions, and yet I know that my research path has not led to such quantifiable results. After many angst-ridden months I finally realise that the difficulties I am experiencing are yet another expression of my on-going internal struggle between the arts paradigm I have chosen and the ever-present influence of a dominant positivist scientific paradigm that dictates how 'knowledge' is defined. Finley (2008:73) argues that arts-based research marks a 'profound breaking away from academic research orthodoxy', and suggests that, 'To claim art and aesthetic ways of knowing as research is an act of rebellion against the monolithic "truth" that science is supposed to entail'. I have not actively chosen such rebellion, but by wanting to adopt introspective, artistic and intuitive ways of working I have landed here. Such a lack of explicit or deliberate activism may explain why I keep getting caught unaware by the (largely unconscious) dominance of positivism in my own thinking, a powerful current that consistently thwarts my efforts to swim off in other directions.

As I bring this into awareness I surface, grabbing the chance to inhale a deep new breath. I see my work as it is, rather than what I need to turn it in to. I stop trying to mould it to fit a social science model and I take stock of what I have.

I made a tent, a space to be.

It is an expression of me, and my relationship with my research setting.

People go inside. They have their own experiences in it.

This is enough.

This realisation feels profound. I am at a crossroads. I want to honour my art and my chosen research path and throw off the strictures of a traditional research approach that keep pulling

me away from this. The need for confidence, in self, in my own research process and in alternative epistemologies (to the dominant) is evident, but like Scott-Hoy, 'I feel part of it, vulnerable and aware of the things I still don't know or understand' (in Scott-Hoy and Ellis, 2008:128). Golden Tent is an art installation to be experienced, not rendered discursively, and much is lost in its interpretation into a linear arrangement of words. How then to convey such experiences?

This fresh insight into my unconscious methodological battle throws light on other issues. My role in the school setting has shifted back and forth between teacher and artist/researcher, and in presenting Golden Tent in this context I adopted what I saw as a facilitator's role for many of the sessions. By 'facilitating', I mean that I mediated the space, attempting to guide participants towards certain ends. Whilst I had ostensibly clarified (to myself) that these ends were not educational goals (as typically understood within the current paradigm), I now realise that I was nevertheless working with pre-specified objectives - for example, I wanted the space to foster connection between staff and pupils. In effect, my style of facilitation was a reversion to a teacher's role, in which I tried to instrumentalise Golden Tent, losing sight of it as a work complete in itself. I forgot that the tent itself is the facilitator, and I forgot O'Sullivan's suggestion that art be understood as, '…a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of transformation' (O'Sullivan, 2001:130). In short, I interfered. Although my actions did not sabotage my research goals, when I reflect upon my experience of facilitation I notice my how anxieties about "performance" (in relation to my presentation of the sessions) interfere with my own presence and availability "in the moment" with others. When facilitating I become concerned with 'getting it right', and what others think of me, and the connectedness I seek evades me. I wonder about my hesitancy to trust that the work itself is enough.

I invited feedback from participants throughout this empirical phase, in the form of short questionnaires and some recorded conversations, and in composing this chapter I have been concerned with a need to 'legitimise' my handling of these written and audio-recorded words. How to be unbiased in my treatment of this 'data'? I read and re-read participant responses, feeling I should code and thematically analyse them, whilst steadfastly resisting this operation. Is this another unconscious act of 'rebellion'? If so, the consequences are not empowerment. Rather I feel lost and incompetent, stuck in my intransigence. What is becoming clear is a need for confidence in, and commitment to, my chosen approach. As an arts-based study, I want the artwork to be enough, to be an output that requires explicating rather than justifying. And as an autoethnographic study, it is my reflexive process that leads

the way. This must surely apply to how I make use of participant feedback too? I am not looking for generalised patterns and themes across a data set, rather I am trying to see what resonates and sheds light on my own understanding. How others perceive and experience my work is important - there is a wish that from my introspective, subjective starting point will emerge something that holds meaning for others, but I need first to honour the process of autoethnography and its requirement for rigorous self-reflexive study.

Chapter Seven

Presentations of *Golden Tent*

7:1 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter 6 I discussed the creation of *Golden Tent*, a cocoon-like structure designed with sensorial rather than conceptual responses in mind, and in this chapter I look at the tent in use. Although the main focus of this chapter will be my work with *Golden Tent* in school, I begin by discussing its first showing at an event in a very different venue - 'Space for Peace 2017' at Winchester Cathedral. This event provided an unexpected opportunity to exhibit the work just a week before I began my sessions in school. Despite being an unplanned event in terms of this research enquiry, the presentation of *Golden Tent* at 'Space for Peace 2017' demands inclusion in this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, taking part in this event significantly informed my understanding of the tent, which then influenced how I worked with it in school. Secondly, in relation to the consideration of my role shift from teacher to artist, at 'Space for Peace' *Golden Tent* was exhibited as an art installation without my further mediation or facilitation (in the same way that any visual artist would typically exhibit work), which provides a useful comparative experience for this study.

After discussing my experience of presenting *Golden Tent* at this event, and the feedback of participants, I move on to the planned presentations in school. I start with a descriptive narrative about setting the tent up in school as a way to briefly foreground my lived experience of this empirical phase of the research. I then move on to give an account of my work with the tent in school, focussing initially on the regular sessions I devised and led with two class groups. I discuss the feedback received from participants in the light of the themes of my research, and I reflect upon my observations of the class groups who interpreted *Golden Tent* in their own ways. In examining the feedback of participants I return to the concepts and themes discussed in Chapter Five, such as Turner's liminality and communitas.

7:2 'Space For Peace'

Image 48 •*Golden Tent*, in position in the nave of Winchester Cathedral ready for 'Space for Peace'

'Space for Peace' is a unique and radical musical event, devised by Rev. Professor June Boyce-Tillman, which had taken place in Winchester cathedral for nine years before my involvement in 2017[12]. It is a free public event bringing people from a range of different faiths, including Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and the Baha'i tradition, together alongside school groups and community choirs. Performers and audience gather at the start of the event to sing communal choruses, and then the audience watch as each faith group or choir leaves the central gathering in turn, singing their own piece as they head to separate locations inside the vast cathedral building. Groups are then invited to sing or chant when the mood takes them (or when requested by audience members) over the course of the evening, thereby creating a locational, and at times merging, soundscape for the audience to experience as they promenade around the cathedral. The inclusion of *Golden Tent* at this year's 'Space for Peace' meant that audience members could additionally enter a discrete space within the

[12] The following year the cathedral's new Dean decided that this radical event should no longer be held in this venue.

cathedral interior and listen to the wider acoustic environment from within. This event proved influential for my subsequent research because it highlighted aspects of the experience of being inside the space that I had not foreseen, bringing new understanding that later transferred to my work in school.

Although the cathedral was a very different setting to the planned school context, *Golden Tent* was perfectly sympathetic in both design and intent for this event. Appendix F shows the information I made available at the side of the tent for anyone who wanted to know about its origin. As a sensorial space that aims to bring people with different 'cultures' together - which in the context of my research enquiry involves sensory beings and linguistic beings (Grace, 2017) - it lent itself perfectly to 'Space for Peace', which brings people of different faiths together in a musical vigil for peace. As the first public showing of the installation, 'Space for Peace' proved a successful and rewarding event, giving me the opportunity to share my work with a large audience. In its light materiality and human scale, *Golden Tent* sat humbly in contrast to the solidity and awe-inspiring magnificence of the cathedral nave's spectacular vault. Its golden yellow covering shimmered in the evening light giving it a jewel-like presence. The contrasting floor covering enhanced the division between inside and out, making the threshold of the tent a place of decision. Although some hovered at this threshold during the event, choosing not to enter, many did go in and some spent extended periods inside the space (up to twenty minutes). Several people removed their shoes before entering, showing a certain reverence to the space. Participants who spent the longest inside the tent tended to sit or lie down (I provided two foam mattresses and some bean bags, but many people just used the floor), which suggests that it was understood by those people as a space to spend time in, rather than to simply view. As architectural theorist Pallasmaa (2005:63) points out, 'meaningful architectural experience is not simply a series of retinal images', rather it has a verb-essence in the sense that one *enters* a building or a room, (or in this case the tent) and has an active bodily encounter with the space within.

Golden Tent became a shared "den" within the vast cathedral interior within which to experience the external soundscape together. The curved form, draping fabric and dimly glowing golden floor enhanced the intimacy inside. The fabric walls of the tent provided a complete visual separation from the outside, disembodying sound from its source. Arising in different locations beyond the tent, a soundscape, layered and mixed by the unique acoustic of the cathedral walls, flowed in - footsteps on the ancient flagstones, the songs of choirs, the chants of Imam and Rabbi, and the melodies of a roaming saxophonist. I felt particular delight when a young girl of approximately 8 years, entered the tent when only two adults

were in there, laid down on a mattress and stayed absolutely still for several minutes. The fact that the space evoked such a response in a child seemed to confirm that my desire to create a safe and nurturing environment, a space to simply "be", had been successful.

Image 49 • Participants sitting and lying down inside *Golden Tent* during the event

Image 50 • The threshold of the tent – a place of decision

'Space for Peace' feedback

Although I did not undertake planned observation and recordings of people's responses at the event, I did receive a couple of unsolicited responses afterwards from people who knew me, and I then sent questionnaires to six people that I had recognized at the event and knew how to contact (Appendix G shows the questions I asked along with all of the collated feedback). Powerful contextual influences, such as the cathedral setting and the theme of the event itself will inevitably have affected people's interpretations of the space and this is a very small sample of responses from audience members who are likely to be positively biased towards me. Nevertheless, the feedback I received offers valuable information on what the experience of being inside *Golden Tent* was like for these respondents and from this I can evaluate which of my own goals were achieved.

Image 51
Some took their shoes off before entering

Image 52
Listening to the outer soundscape

The space was reported to prompt feelings of safety, warmth, comfort, relaxation, peace and reflection; individuals used words such as '*womb-like*', a '*cocoon*', a '*sacred*', '*spiritual*' or '*special*' place. Some respondents commented on its contrast with the external space, its difference in scale, and the sense of physical separation and auditory distance afforded by the installation, which engendered feelings of privacy for some, and enabled different behaviours, for example lying down, (that a respondent states s/he would not have felt inclined to do in the wider cathedral environment). Such comments support the idea of the tent being a liminal space (Turner, 1969), a place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action in which different behaviours can exist.

Several respondents also commented on their experiences of being physically separated from the wider environment whilst remaining within its auditory space, and some reported on how this separation elicited different feelings and behaviour:

- *'It provided a cocoon in which to meditate in the midst of the music all around'*
- *'Once inside I could hear what I felt was the busyness outside; voices, singing, shuffling. It felt like it was all completely away from me but yet so close. Around 15 other bodies were silent with me inside but I was in hope that they were feeling a mutual nothingness and contentment like I was. Once being outside the cathedral felt a huge cold area. I enjoyed the small space in the golden tent'*

- *'I felt like I was in a different place so unlike outside. There were no distractions and it felt safe, away from other people's scrutiny'*
- *I was able to sit, close my eyes and lose myself. It was very relaxing and spiritual'*
- *'It felt safe/wombal/more private'*

When I spent time inside the tent I noticed how the external soundscape became particularly intriguing from the safety of this intimate shared retreat because it was present (aurally) whilst absent (visually). *Golden Tent* appeared to offer a distinctly different experience of the event, due to the intimacy and visual occlusion of its enclosed space. The external happenings were being experienced from within the protection of a small shared retreat. In the light of what feels like a highly personal artistic imperative to create a place of refuge from the pressure of external expectations, it is interesting to note that when asked the question, 'Can you identify and describe how being inside the tent differed from being outside the tent?', four out of the six questionnaire respondents used the word "*safe*". Whilst *Golden Tent* manifests my own need for refuge, it seems to tap into a similar need in others. Given the relatively flimsy arrangement of plastic poles and satin, it is fascinating that crossing the threshold into *Golden Tent* can elicit behaviours that people feel unable to carry out within the outer space. In effect of course, they *are* lying down on the cathedral floor, but the symbolic safety of the tent, its golden floor and the visual occlusion afforded by the 'walls' enables them to forget this, and this is how the tent becomes a liminal space in which normative rules on acceptable behavior do not apply. There is also evidence here of the 'paradox of sensibility' (discussed in Chapter Five) that Bachelard ascribes to nests (Bachelard, 1969:102) in the sense that the 'safety' people experience is symbolic rather than actual.

The architecture of a cathedral is designed to inspire awe and wonder, symbolizing the magnificence and power of an almighty God, and causing us to directly experience our own meekness. Reverence and humility are prompted by its geometry and scale. Pallasmaa (2005:49) suggests that architecture that seeks to control offers no means of withdrawal or privacy. It moves people '…away from intimate individuality and identification towards a public and distant detachment'. He asserts that it is only in more intimate spaces that the dominance of the focused eye - which he considers to be a distancing sense - can be replaced by hapticity and peripheral unfocussed vision. 'The dominance of the eye and the suppression of the other senses tends to push us into detachment, isolation and exteriority' (Pallasmaa, 2005:19). This is an important principle for an installation designed to help lessen

the cultural chasm between sensory and linguistic beings. To offer a human-sized tent within the majestic nave of the cathedral is to offer a place for hapticity and unfocussed vision, a retreat from the overwhelming grandeur of the wider space, and it would seem that many welcomed this at 'Space for Peace'. One participant commented on her experience of being inside the tent in this way:

> *'The golden space gave a completely different experience compared to any of the other areas in the cathedral. When inside it felt like it was more about me. For me to experience what I experienced not what I was expected to watch or listen to but what my own mind and body was feeling'*

In the light of my aim for *Golden Tent* to be a site for sensorial rather than conceptual experience, statements such as "*For me to experience what I experienced...*" "*... what my own mind and body was feeling*" suggested it had the potential to achieve this response.

And what of Turner's notion of communitas? In Chapter Five I defined this as a communion of equal individuals who have been freed from the social structure and hierarchies that dictate their normal relations. As already stated, some people felt free from some of the norms governing behavior in the wider cathedral the space (for example lying down), and one person commented '*I felt like I was in a different place so unlike outside'.* The idea of communion is an interesting one, and one respondent to the questionnaire reported, '*Around 15 other bodies were silent with me inside but I was in hope that they were feeling a mutual nothingness and contentment like I was'*. Other respondents state they were able to meditate, lose track of time, feel at ease, lose themselves, due to the space feeling '*private*', '*no distractions…away from other people's scrutiny*', like '*a cocoon in which to meditate in the midst of the music all around*', or '*when inside it felt like it was more about me'*. Such comments are primarily about individual experience, and yet each respondent was inside the tent with others. Can a sense of peace and serenity, contentment, nothingness, losing oneself, or the act of meditation, be described as communitas? There was no specific mention of encounters with others or feelings of connectedness, although when asked, 'Do you have any comments about the Golden Tent in relation to the Space for Peace event?, one respondent answered, *'it added to the idea that we are all one people in one world – our world'*.

'Space for Peace' served as a useful trial for the set-up and take-down of *Golden Tent* and its ability to withstand the 'foot-fall' of large numbers of people. My own experience of being

inside the tent, and the feedback of respondents to my questionnaire, confirmed that the space offered sanctuary from the external space, whilst seeming to induce a heightened auditory awareness of it, an understanding that I took forward with me for my work in school. Many aspects of the feedback affirmed my own aesthetic goals for the piece, particularly comments about it being a 'cocoon', 'womb-like', engendering feelings of 'safety', 'peace', and 'serenity' and I was surprised by how many people spent extended periods of time inside the tent, seemingly comfortable sitting or laying down in silence within close proximity to people they did not know. On a personal level, the satisfaction I experienced through simply sharing the piece and observing how people responded to it was immense - I enjoyed the anonymity and distance of the unknown artist role, and in relation to my own understanding of a shifting role, it is useful to compare this with the sessions in school, particularly those where I acted as a facilitator of the space. I look at this in the next section as I discuss the experience of presenting *Golden Tent* in school.

7:3 *Golden Tent* In School

I begin this section with a narration of the process of setting up the tent in school. I then discuss how the tent was presented to staff, focusing initially on the weekly sessions that I facilitated.

It's an early start each Monday morning as we try and avoid the motorway congestion. Sitting next to me in the car is my husband, who rose from bed an hour and a half earlier than he would have chosen. By 6.45am the traffic is building and I glance at the queues of cars on the opposite carriageway feeling sorry that he will endure these tailbacks again when he returns home. He wants to be supportive, but cannot help letting some crankiness show and I am correspondingly uncomfortable in my indebtedness. I cannot erect the tent singlehandedly, and there is no one with an hour to spare at school. Besides, we have the procedure off pat now and will have the structure erected by 8.30am. By 7.10am we are the first car in the school car park and must await the caretaker to gain access to the building. Once in, we gather the components of the tent from borrowed spaces around the school. We collect the long and heavy carpet pole from the end of a corridor. Three floormats, rolled around it must be laid out carefully, one on top of another. First, the square groundsheet, brass eyelet in each corner, where we will tie the 'feet' of the main framework. Next, the golden floorcovering, followed by the protective PVC covering. The three-layered mat is fiddly to align and we are short-tempered with each other as we try

to do it quickly. The steel poles of the framework are unwieldy, and we need to work in partnership to connect them, him on a ladder platform in the centre supporting the weight, me moving around the perimeter, slotting the supporting sections together. His arms ache from holding the weight at height until I finally slot the last archway in place. Next we spill the voluminous satin cover from its bag onto the hall floor and as always it is difficult to orientate at first. We eventually locate the far edge of the heavy cover and begin to pull it up and over the top of the frame, occasionally yelping when a shock of static electricity hits as we slide the shiny fabric over the steel poles. Once the top centre has been tied in place, we pull the roof cover taut by fastening dozens of small Velcro loops around the roof poles. The wooden hubs that will secure the plastic canopy poles in position are fitted to each foot of the shelter next, and then we work separately, building a canopy each as quickly as we can manage. The long plastic poles are unwieldy and tricky to slot into place, and we are both a little competitive, trying to get our end built first. Dozens more Velcro strips secure the draping canopy over these curved plastic 'ribs', and then the back wall and door curtains are hung from the frame. He sets off home while I secure the floor with tape. By now the car park is full and staff are busy in classrooms. I gather musical instruments from around the school and organise myself ready for my sessions. At 8.50am the hall doors are opened and cold air comes into the warm space along with chatty escorts and pupils bundled in hats, scarves and blankets. One escort asks me about the tent, and I explain that it is simply a 'space to be'. A little later she invites a couple of her fellow escorts inside the tent, and tells them it is a place to "chill". I catch myself wincing. She has missed the engaged presence I want the space to elicit - but her interpretation of my words is noted, as is my discomfort. The school day begins and I run through my preparations for my first session with Golden Tent. I think about my goals – staff shifting their mind-sets from "doing" to "being" - what do I mean? I want to bring people into stillness and presence, in contrast with the "busyness" of the classroom. I want staff to experience a different sense of time through being inside the tent with pupils, I want them to leave "clock time" behind and enter what might be called "PMLD time". I want Pallasmaa's notion of hapticity and peripheral unfocused vision to supplant the directed thinking they are more typically engaged in, and I want them to connect with their pupils. My exposure to new ways of understanding profound disabilities through the writing of Kittay, Reinders, Carlson and others, and my work with Ignacio and Yvon have led me to challenge my own perceptions of pupils. The word

'connect' has become suffused for me now with notions of meeting and seeing 'anew'. Not already-knowing, but being present and ready to witness the other person in all their uniqueness. This is Buber's 'I and Thou' encounter - but how do I convey this to staff, or facilitate it happening? I want Golden Tent to be a space that holds the possibility of new types of encounter between staff and pupils…

Logistical concerns and the presentation of the project to colleagues.

As previously stated, the school hall was chosen as the site for *Golden Tent*. This large multi-purpose space is used for rebound therapy (trampoline sessions) most days, and utilised by various groups and organisations outside of school hours, so it was not possible to erect and leave the tent in position for the duration of my research. I negotiated use of the space for two days a week over a six-week period, although this included Tuesday mornings when the tent was in situ but not accessible due to a scheduled rebound session in another area of the hall. In total there were three useable sessions over the two days where groups could be invited to spend time inside the tent. I had the support and trust of the head teacher, who did not interfere in what I did in the sessions. Initially I sent an open invitation to teachers via a written request that was presented at a staff meeting explaining that I wanted to explore the potential of the space to help us shift from "doing" mode to "being" mode, as well as to explore the experience of being together as a group. I asked staff to indicate if they would be interested in attending six weekly sessions with their class. With my knowledge of school timetables and the complex logistical arrangements involved (working around physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and other scheduled sessions) I thought it was realistic to expect one out of the ten classes to be able to commit to a weekly session on the specified days over the research period, and that others might make use of the tent on a more ad hoc basis. However, two classes volunteered to participate regularly (I will call these Group 1 and Group 2), so we agreed on six consecutive weekly time-slots for each of them, and I left the third slot open over the six weeks for other groups to utilise on an ad hoc basis. I promoted this remaining slot to class teachers, inviting them to use the space however they chose to and requesting that they allow me to observe (Appendix H). Consent forms were then sent out to the relevant staff and pupils (Appendices D & E)

The session format

In this section I provide a brief generalised account of the facilitated sessions with Groups 1 & 2 before explaining the rationale for their format in the following section. The sessions where classes used the tent in their own way were different in nature and are discussed separately in section 7.8. Group 1 consisted of four students aged 12-15 years and four staff members, and Group 2 comprised five pupils aged 4-5 years and four staff. The sessions for each group had the same basic format: The tent was set up at the far end of the hall, taking up about one third of the floor space.

Image 53 • *Golden Tent* set up in the school hall

Each session was divided into two distinctly different parts. The first part took place in the open floor space in front of the tent, and the second part took place inside it. The group came to the hall from their classroom, arriving to the sound of me playing the djembe drum (which could be heard from the corridor as they approached). Once everyone was present (which could take around 5 - 10 minutes on occasions), I led a mixture of movement games with music. This part of the session typically lasted between 10 – 15 minutes, and was characterized by sharply contrasting movement and stopping with music, vocal calling and clapping. At the end of this noisy, active phase I played single notes at slow steady intervals on a large metallophone to signify a corresponding change in pace and to signal entry into

the tent. The second half of the session, usually around 15 -20 minutes was spent inside *Golden Tent*. Once everyone was settled in their chosen location inside the empty tent, I provided chairs so that staff could sit next to pupil's wheelchairs, and I then let the front curtain drop to enclose the space. We all sat together without talking for a few minutes before I exited the tent. I then created an intermittent soundscape around the outside of the tent (inspired by my experiences at 'Space for Peace'), using a range of percussion instruments along with my voice. I also used a large woven bamboo hand fan to silently create localised billowing and flapping of different areas of the fabric cover. For the final three sessions with each group we gathered in a tight circle around a large golden bowl and I used two hand chimes to make long resonant notes, and then poured water from a height into the bowl. To finish, the 'door' curtain was raised and staff were given short feedback sheets to complete whilst still inside the tent. I then returned to the metallophone and played slow single notes to accompany the transition out of the tent, and out of the hall. This format was developed over the course of the six weeks through on-going evaluation.

The session rationale

I played the djembe from before the groups arrived at the hall for 3 main reasons: to prompt feelings of anticipation in staff and pupils; to provide pupils with a distinctive cue for what was to be a very different session to the usual classroom sessions; and to distinguish the session from other occasions they entered the hall, such as for home-time or assembly. The purpose of the next part of the session was to arouse and enliven pupils through their kinaesthetic sense, in line with theories about the importance of 'awake-alert-active' behavior state for engagement and learning (e.g. Arthur, 2004; Foreman *et al*, 2004). It was also to heighten the sense of connectedness within each staff + pupil pair through their joint involvement in a lively fun activity. To this end, staff were asked to position themselves face-to-face with their pupil partner whenever they were stationary in order to make their presence visible and share any moments of eye contact (not something it is possible to do whilst pushing the wheelchair from behind). I included times of building anticipation with a gradually quickening drum beat, and staff chanting "ready…steady...GO!" before each burst of movement, as well as pauses in activity where staff could tune into pupil responses and share affect after each movement activity. I am referring to Stern's (1977) idea of affect attunement here in which the adult expresses the quality of the student's feeling state using emphasized behaviours. For the first couple of sessions I used some lively pieces of recorded music for the movement games, but in later sessions I relied entirely on the djembe because it enabled me to be more responsive to what was happening in the room. For one of the

games I placed some sheets of bubble-wrap on the floor so that pupils could experience making lots of noise by popping the pockets of air as their wheelchairs moved over them. The activities for each group evolved slightly differently over the six weeks, as games were developed and adapted in response to individual pupil preferences. As well as hopefully increasing alertness and connection as described above, this active, noisy, "doing" phase of the session was designed to provide a vivid contrast with the second phase inside the tent. In this way I hoped to heighten the transition from "doing" outside the tent to "being" inside the tent. My cue notes for the first session stated:

> 2 parts –
>
> 1. Doing – alerting, arousing, noisy and energetic
>
> 2. Being – maintain connection/engagement/responsiveness but do not initiate action. Permission not to do anything unless invited by partner

Part 1 was easy to convey in this context because staff are used to (sensitively) using exaggerated and lively activity to rouse pupils who have become withdrawn or disengaged. In the context of this study, this aspect of the session was purely instrumental in terms of its contrast with the potential stillness of the second phase. However, both groups reported how much they enjoyed this part of the weekly sessions, and I realized how few opportunities there are for pupils to experience this type of fast movement in their wheelchairs which many of them enjoyed immensely. These are what Oily Cart director Tim Webb refers to as the G-force-inducing, kinaesthetically intense experiences that can powerfully engage youngsters with PMLD (Webb in Brown, 2012:7). For the reasons discussed in Chapter One, Part 2 of the session was potentially more challenging, particularly the idea of doing nothing 'unless invited by partner'. On entry, staff + pupil pairs were invited to move around the (clear) space inside the tent and find a place to settle. I did not suggest a circle or group arrangement, inviting them to find their own positions within the tent, and after the first session, this required no verbal cues. My goal was that the adults would then become physically still but as attentive and available to their pupil partners as they had been during the playful activities outside the tent. I invited them to simply "be" with their partner, and I wanted to explore if *Golden Tent* could enhance their ability to achieve and sustain this by providing a shared space that was immersive and sensorial.

Inside the tent

Once everyone was settled inside the tent – I dropped down the door curtain and we sat in

silence. Reviewing my preparation and cue notes from the first session, it is clear that I wanted to shift focus onto sensory experience and I tried to guide this verbally.

> "I'd like you to focus on your *experience* of being in the tent. If you hear a sound, try not to decipher what it is and where it's coming from, just notice HOW you experience it - where in your body. Try not to wrap it up in language, but notice any sensations associated with it."

In practice however, such verbal instructions felt clumsy and interruptive, indeed rather than encouraging attention to the experience of being in the space, they inhibited it. My choice of words, as evidenced in one of my cue card notes (above), demonstrates my interest in the phenomenological - I want to explore how pre-conceptual experience manifests in the body, and I am inviting others to attempt the same. I was drawing upon Husserl's ideas about bracketing off the "natural attitude" in order to access phenomena as they actually appear in our consciousness (as discussed in Van Manen, 2014; Simmons & Watson, 2014). I did not repeat these verbal cues after the first session for several reasons. Firstly, they felt interruptive of the quiet atmosphere that the tent appears to induce of its own accord. Secondly, having tried to heighten connection and togetherness during the movement activities outside of the tent, it was counterproductive to then ask staff to pay attention to verbal instructions as this potentially severed this connection. Verbal instructions also required mental processing which was at odds with my goal to emphasise non-conceptual experience.

Making the soundscape around the tent

One of the sub-aims of my research was to explore whether the auditory "holding" function of the shruti-box drone could be translated into a physical form. Once the construction of the tent was completed, I found that for a neurotypical brain the internal space quite quickly became familiar to the eye, thereby lessening its overall effect. This fairly rapid visual familiarisation did not equal the more sustained response evoked by the shruti-box drone in the group sessions with Ignacio, and appeared to point to the conclusion that any translation of the "holding" function from auditory to physical that did occur was short-lived (I will discuss this issue in more depth in Chapter 8). I was expecting groups to spend around fifteen to twenty minutes inside the tent, so I felt that an additional auditory element would be beneficial for supporting the longer periods of stillness I was inviting staff to sustain. At 'Space for Peace' I had seen how the sounds from a visually concealed source heightened the experience of being inside Golden Tent and I wanted to utilise this learning in these sessions.

By adding the additional element of an intermittent soundscape around the tent I hoped to use a balance of sound and silence to heighten the sense of being cocooned together inside the yellow.

I used my voice and a range of different instruments from the school collection (an ocean drum, a tubular steel mobile, a gong cymbal and some boom whackers) to create sounds at intervals around the tent, sometimes close up to the fabric cover, sometimes from the other side of the hall, and sometimes moving towards or away from it. I varied the intensity and pace of the sounds, and sometimes I got involved in 'conversations' with individual pupils, 'answering' their vocalisations with my voice or with one of the percussion instruments. I could see the potential for this soundscape to be much fuller (with more than one provider) and richer (if people with greater levels of musical skill than myself provided it). To this end, I approached several music students who had requested placements at the school, but unfortunately none of these potential volunteers were available during my scheduled time slots, so unfortunately I was unable to pursue this development.

It felt really strange to create sounds for an audience that I could not see, particularly in this context where careful and close observation of students is essential to providing a responsive environment (Ware, 2003). In the first session I found this unexpectedly disconcerting and I even wondered about the ethics of creating a soundscape with no idea of how it was being received on the other side of the tent walls. I tried really hard to hear and even "intuit" responses from within the tent, although there was no way of checking these out. This issue brought up feelings of uncertainty about my role - what was I doing, and why? I wanted to facilitate an experience for the group, which implies a level of sensitive responding and adaptation according to how that experience is being received, and yet I could not gain the visual information to help me gauge this. The written feedback I received from staff at the end of the first sessions helped me to resolve this issue. Reading their comments about how pupils responded to the soundscape reminded me that they were the ones tasked with responding to pupils and I was simply providing the environment. It was *their* joint experience of being together inside the tent that was important.

<u>Ritualising the end of the session.</u>

With my original format, after completing the soundscape and leaving a short period of silence, I re-entered the tent and gave staff, who were sat in different locations around the tent close to their pupil partners, feedback forms to complete. After this, everyone slowly exited accompanied by me playing single notes on the metallophone. However, I soon

deemed this format to be unsatisfactory because it meant that the session simply "tailed off" at the end without a proper sense of completion. I decided I wanted us to come back together as a group to mark the end of the session whilst hopefully maintaining the presence and stillness of staff. I therefore devised a ritualised coming together for the end of the remaining sessions. I brought in a large (60cm diameter) golden bowl on a stand, and water in a golden bottle. After making the external soundscape and leaving a short period of quiet, I re-entered the tent, placing the bowl in the middle and playing single 'C' and 'G' notes on resonant hand chimes to invite staff and pupils to gather closely around it. Once we had resettled around the bowl, I then poured water slowly from the bottle into the large metallic dish, which made a sound and sprayed water droplets into the air. For some pupils, we lifted the bowl from its stand to bring it closer, allowing the spray to reach their hands or faces. A few further ringing notes on the hand chimes signaled the end of this 'ritual' and closure of the session. Viviers (2011:2) states that rituals, ' - these seemingly strange actions - come to us intuitively', and he asserts that although rituals do not have intrinsic propositional meanings, they are experienced as meaningful, which is why they persist in religious and secular spheres. The enactment of this short ritual at the end of the sessions provided a sense of coming back together as a group and could be seen as marking the transition from liminal space back to "normative" space.

I move on now to consider some of the issues raised and how staff responded during these facilitated sessions before looking at how groups made use of *Golden Tent* in the unfacilitated sessions.

7:4 Reflections On The *Golden Tent* Sessions That I Facilitated

A multitude of questions and issues arise out of the twelve facilitated sessions with the tent and it has been necessary to restrict my discussion of these considerably. I have chosen to discuss the issue of sleepiness that arose in the very first session and then to consider the feedback of staff participants in relation to the themes developed in PART I. I chose the issue of sleepiness in the tent because my first response revealed how much my professional background as a teacher dictates my perspective, and also because this issue demonstrates how interpretations of the tent are entirely framed by its setting. I then move onto a consideration of participant feedback, linking respondents' comments to ideas brought out in PART I of the thesis.

The absence of feedback from pupils is evident in this section, something I discussed in Chapter 4 and one of the issues involved in conducting research with people with PMLD.

Although the focus is primarily on the experience of staff, pupil experience during the sessions was carefully attended to. For example, I devoted a minimum amount of time to asking staff questions for the benefit of my research, and when I did, it was in the form of very short written feedback forms at the end of five of the six sessions (in order not to interrupt pupils' sensory experience of the tent with unnecessary verbal language) and a very brief verbal discussion at the end of the last session. The study's central premise is intrinsically inclusive and the sessions were designed to give positive experiences for all by focusing on the environment's potential for mutuality

The issue of sleepiness

In my very first session with Group 1, after we had settled and were sitting quietly within the tent, there was a palpable drop in energy levels and within a couple of minutes I had the sense that we were "losing" pupils in the silence. Two of the four pupils were already beginning to close their eyes and I became concerned that any mutual connection between staff and pupil might disappear. As a consequence, I exited the tent much sooner than anticipated to create a soundscape and hopefully regain previous levels of alertness. My decision to take this action was instinctive, even reflex - my background and experience in educational contexts informing me that sleep was not an acceptable response (unless a pupil is ill, recovering from a seizure, on medication that induces sleep, or know to be suffering from sleep deprivation). School time is for 'engagement', not for sleeping.

Afterwards, I wondered about my response and the influence of the context. I wondered about different contexts where someone feeling still, safe and quiet enough to "drift off" inside *Golden Tent* could be viewed as a wholly positive response. Maybe the reactions of these two pupils were a perfect, even rather beautiful, response to the space and one that demonstrated their complete engagement with its calming properties. In chapter 5 I quoted Bachelard (1994) on spaces that protect the dreamer, allowing them to dream in peace, and yet here it seems I provided such a space and then rushed to wake up any potential dreamer. It would have been interesting to consider the value of rest/sleepiness as a response to the tent collaboratively with staff colleagues. How about if we all 'drifted off' for 15 minutes? Neuroscientists exploring what happens in the brain whilst a person is apparently idle have discovered it is a time of rich interconnectivity between different parts of the brain (Smart, 2013), and that memory consolidation, vital for new learning, happens during resting states (Usrey, 2014). This appears to contradict our constant focus on active learning through doing. Such discussions did not occur however, due to the limited time available for discussions with staff.

Had such discussions ensued, I feel certain that there would have been understandable skepticism about using these well-staffed sessions as a time for such "idleness". The context, and the neurodivergence of individuals with profound cognitive impairments does throw a different light on these events. Most individuals with profound cognitive impairments already spend longer periods of time than a neurotypical individual apparently disengaged and unfocussed and consequently, a primary educational concern is to increase not decrease levels of alertness. To suggest that time inside the tent, when each pupil has the undivided attention of a staff member, be utilised as a time to drift off to sleep would, I feel sure, be deemed an unacceptable use of staff resources. I cannot help wondering though, what would have happened if I hadn't rushed to make sounds in the hope of re-engaging pupils? Would these two pupils have gone to sleep and remained so, or drifted in and out, if I had not provided the auditory stimulus I did? Two out of four staff members from this first session mentioned sleepiness in their feedback. One wrote, *'…it was nice to have a few minutes with no other thoughts and a clear mind. It felt like the perfect length of time, any longer and I feel [pupil's name] might have been sleepy',* which seems to affirm the timing of my actions and the value of having 'a few minutes with no other thoughts and a clear mind'. The other staff member reports, *'Very relaxing and calming for both me and [name]. Noticed that at some points [name] was very relaxed, almost asleep, but then would look up at tent and look to left and right of it with a big smile on his face.*' Here it is less clear whether the pupil being '*almost asleep'*, is considered a negative thing. Her reference to his '*big smile'* seems to suggest that she perceives the pupil as being in a blissful/dreamy state.

It is possible, of course, that one or both of these pupils were simply tired, and the quiet atmosphere inside the tent prompted them to find the repose their bodies needed. However, my own experience of being inside the tent is also of wanting to shut my eyes after a short while, and two participants in 'Space for Peace' also commented:
'I kept wanting to close my eyes…',
'I was able to sit, close my eyes and lose myself'.
Given that my focus when making *Golden Tent* was on its visual features, I am curious that these same features should prompt the desire to close sight down. The monochrome interior of the tent provides immersion in yellow, a total and singular sensory experience - why might this evoke a shutting down of sight? Is it too much to bear, or is it that these conditions promote a state of dreamy bliss? For me, the desire to shut my eyes does not seem to come from a need to shield myself from the sensory experience of the tent, rather the immersion in golden yellow evokes a sense of peace and tranquility that naturally leads me "inwards",

and closing my eyes enhances that. In fact, although I have not been able to measure such a physiological effect, I have at times been convinced that my heart rate slows down when I go inside the tent. This would prove an interesting area for further research.

I look now at the feedback of participants in the facilitated sessions. As explained in Chapter Four, I chose not to carry out an inductive content analysis because the feedback is an additional rather than a core aspect of the study. It was also striking that within the comments of respondents were many references to the concepts discussed in PART I of the thesis, and so this is what I decided to follow. I have grouped my discussion of the feedback in relation to three key themes brought forward from PART I - the notion of simply "being" and being together in-the-moment; Nurturing safe spaces as liminal spaces; and the idea of Communitas. The entire collated feedback and interview transcripts can be found in Appendix J.

7.5 "Being" And Being Together In-The-Moment

The notion of a mind-set shift from "doing" to "being" was presented in **1.4** as part of the rationale for the study and I pointed out the potential benefits of this shift for both staff and pupils in Chapter Two. These benefits include: enabling staff to sustain presence in the face of pupil passivity and the cultural chasm; respecting the personhood of pupils and recognising them as more than 'site[s] for cultivation' (Vorhaus 2006:322); and 'accessing the event that is art' (O'Sullivan, 2001:127). In the feedback from the sessions with Groups 1 and 2 several participants made reference to feeling more "in-the-moment" inside the tent:

- *'you don't think about what's gotta be done next, you're completely in-the-moment'*
- *'It's completely about what's happening then, you're not thinking about what else has to happen next'*
- *'rather than your head being in four different places'*
- *'you're completely in-the-moment here'*

For these individuals being inside the tent did appear to prompt a shift in mind-set, in particular their sense of "presence". Many also commented on the atmosphere inside the tent – the words *calm*, *peaceful* and *relaxed* are used repeatedly. Such comments express an embodied response to the space, which in effect is a change in some aspect of respondents' awareness of themselves in relation to the environment. A few staff reflected on the 'heightening' or intensifying effect of the space, for example:

- *'everything in here is heightened'*,
- *'It's intense as well, isn't it?'*

- *'heightened awareness of space/sound'*,
- *'this is a smaller space and I think that's why it intensifies everything. It's quieter than quiet. The music is better than in class because it seems clearer and more intense'*
- *'…everything is heightened it seems like, everything!'*

Several respondents identified the lack of distractions within the tent as enabling this heightened awareness:

- *'The calming, blocked-out space helped me to focus on tiny details and responses'*
- *'classrooms are so busy, if you wanted to do something similar chances are you would get people interrupting'*
- *I think it made us a little bit more aware of any little movement*
- *'being able to watch exactly everything they're doing'*

I noted that staff easily used terms such as '*relaxed*', '*calm*' and '*peaceful*' alongside words such as '*intensified*', '*heightened*', '*alert*' and '*watchful*'. This combination was what I failed to convey to the escort who explained the tent as a "chill-out" space to her colleagues. Inside the tent staff felt able to lower their levels of physical activity whilst maintaining or increasing their levels of engagement with pupils, and in so doing they affirmed a link between stillness and presence:

- *'It provides a space for watchfulness, being still, being calm'*
- *'responding to the learners is more intense and focused'*
- *'Maybe more responsive to the child I was working with'*
- *'I was aware of [name]'s breathing'*
- *'Content and relaxed. Watchful and contemplative.'*
- *'Noticed subtle changes'*
- *'Very calm but alert'*
- *'It's really relaxing, a space for being watchful as well as responding to'*

In the last session with each group I asked them what it was about the space that prompted their responses. Group 1 appeared to collaboratively work out how to articulate what features of *Golden Tent* affected them and their pupils, so I include a longer excerpt from the transcript here (pseudonyms used):

Tina: *It's a very calm atmosphere*

Michelle: *Definitely calm – I've only taken part twice with [name][13] he was very…lots of movement*

[13] This was a pupil who has lots of involuntary movements

when he came in, then two minutes later he was calm. And I noticed that his movement increased with the sounds around the tent, but he seemed to like that calmness, stillness

Bryony: *I think being in a space with no concept of time – it sounds silly – but it…almost… you don't think about what's gotta be done next, you're completely in the moment…*

Several voices: *yeah*

Bryony: *It's completely about what's happening then, you're not thinking about what else has to happen next, you can't see what needs to be done. It's just that…*

Michelle: *and you're with the child, the student, you're with them …*

Bryony: *yeah, 100%, rather than your head being in four different places…*

Michelle: *you're not with - I've got to do this, I've got to do that.…*

Me: so how is that achieved…….just by coming in here….?

Susan: *I think it's… I suppose… the closeness of the….the shape of the…*

Tina: *and also the colour as well…*

Michelle: *oh, definitely the colour!*

Bryony: *I think the colour has an amazing impact*

Michelle: *But as [Bryony] was saying, when you come in here, and shut that* [pointing to the door curtain*], where's the world?*

Bryony: *Exactly, I think that's what it is, you've shut yourself away from the norm, you can't see what you've gotta do for a start…. that helps….you haven't got a clock in your face, which helps…*

Michelle: *and you're completely in-the-moment here*

Bryony: *and you allow yourself that time to not think about anything else…*

Michelle: *that's true, and if we're like that, then that's going to …*

Tina: *impact…*

Michelle: *impact on our friends here because we're not…as you said, we're totally with them aren't we?*

Susan: *I feel sometimes like I even forget that we're in school - if that makes sense – when we're in here, it just seems like … completely different.*

It is clear from this excerpt that Michelle (and possibly other staff) believe their own state of mind and their presence and availability in relation to their pupils is important. The responsibilities and busy-ness of the classroom interferes with their ability to focus and be fully present with them. Bryony and Susan report that in the tent you're '*in-the-moment*' and Michelle asserts, '*and if we're like that, then that's going to …impact… on our friends here. We're totally with them, aren't we*?' Group 1 appeared to struggle to articulate how *Golden Tent* achieved its impact, but '*closeness*', '*shape*' and '*colour*' are cited as the contributing physical features of the tent, which seem to be equalled by its ability to obscure the outer

environment. This obscuration is experienced as more than visual, as it enables a mental blocking out of external concerns, '*when you come in here, and shut that [pointing to the door curtain], where's the world*?', '*you've shut yourself away from the norm', 'you can't see what you've gotta do*'.

Whilst three individuals in Group 1 identified the colour, closeness and shape of *Golden Tent* as being very significant, in Group 2 staff commented on the difference in acoustics, stillness, '*having something above us',* and being '*surrounded by it*'. Two respondents mentioned the contrast between inside and outside the tent as being important, and another pointed out that inside the tent we were all seeing the same:

- *'I enjoy the contrast, I think maybe that's the difference - it's like the very quiet and then the loud noises, it's lots of contrast…the busy out there and then in here is the calm',*
- '*..the fast pace outside, quiet and calm on the inside'*
- *'…we're all looking at yellow'*

It would appear that *Golden Tent* did offer a space in which to "be", and be together, in-the-moment. This notion is expanded further in the next section when I consider the tent as a liminal space.

7.6 Safe Nurturing Spaces As Liminal Spaces

I have explained how one of the driving forces in the genesis of *Golden Tent* was my personal search for refuge from a system I found oppressive. In the light of this, it is interesting to note that several participants reported enjoying a similar sense of being away from the demands of the classroom whilst they were in the tent:

- *'…no filling-in forms, no looking at I.E.P.s*[14]*'*
- *'Being in your own bubble'*
- *'I feel the calm of being inside the yellow tent more and more each week'*
- *'…also adults, we had permission just to be'*
- *'…you haven't got a clock in your face,*
- *'…and we don't have to fill a form in'*

In Chapter Five I defined liminality as a temporary phase in which the structures of normative culture do not apply and everyday notions of time and space are suspended. As shown

[14] I.E.P. is the abbreviation for Individual Education Plans/Programmes, which are a list of targets that staff are responsible for supporting pupils to achieve.

above, Bryony describes her time in *Golden Tent* as being '*away from the norm*' and '*a space with no concept of time*', free from the pressure of timekeeping ('*you haven't got a clock in your face*'). This would suggest that Bryony experienced *Golden Tent* as a liminal space. Both groups commented that being relieved of the demands of the classroom was beneficial for pupils as well:

Michelle: '*…these young people get asked a lot of during the day, to do this, you've got to do this, you've got to stand, you've got to go and…and sometimes I think they just wanna be left alone…*

(Several voices in agreement)

Me: *you've got permission..?*

Michelle: *you've got permission just to be your own in here…*

Susan: *Mmm definitely*

Bryony: *it's a little moment of - what do you want to do?…what do you…?*

Susan: *and to express themselves as well*

In the conversation with Group 1, Michelle states that a lot is asked of pupils in a normal day, whereas *'you've got permission to just be your own in here'.* To *'be your own'* is an interesting phrase, and Bryony adds to this, saying the tent provides *'a little moment of - what do you want to do?'* Susan suggests it gives an opportunity for pupils *'to express themselves as well'*, and in Group 2, as mentioned above, there was more than one suggestion that the tent gave pupils the space to *'just be'*.

- *'The children spend a lot of the day with us recording their response to I.E.P.s and in here they can just "be", which is really nice, they can just be.'*
- *'Gives the opportunity for their own reactions'*
- *'The silence was also wonderful for just allowing the children to just "be"'*

The notion of a space in which pupils can simply be, implies a different perception of pupils, one in which they have personalities to express (*'and to express themselves as well'*), and individual desires (*'what do you want to do?'*), as opposed to being subjects requiring interventions. Such shifts in perception become important when we reconsider Turner's idea of communitas in this context.

7.7 Communitas

As discussed in Chapter 5, Turner (1969) uses the term communitas for the distinctly different forms of interaction or relating that happen during the liminal phase of rites of passage rituals, when a group has been freed from the social structure and hierarchies that

dictate their normal relations. Although *Golden Tent* sessions were not rites of passage, I adopt Turner's idea of communitas as a way to think about modes of relating in these sessions that may differ from the pedagogical and care modes that typify classroom relations. It could be argued that the concept of social status and hierarchy is not understood or recognised by a person with PMLD. However, there is an embodied experiential aspect to social status that becomes manifest in relationship. At a basic level, for example, if in being with a person with PMLD, I ignore their communications, carry out their physical care roughly, not giving thought to their experience or point of view, then through my actions I am directly communicating that I have assigned them to a lower status. I am happy to report that such treatment would not be tolerated in my research setting where great care is taken to treat all pupils with respect and sensitivity. But in my observations of musician Ignacio Agrimbau and vocal artist Yvon Bonenefant in music-making sessions with pupils I felt that I had seen something that went beyond this respect and sensitivity, something I would describe as Turner's distinctly different forms of relating, and this is what I was exploring further with *Golden Tent*.

Turner argues that 'anti-structure' is necessary for communitas to occur. As already noted, *Golden Tent* sessions did not have the cultural power and significance of rites of passage rituals so the notion of anti-structure must be understood in a less radical sense. However, it was evident that some staff participants felt temporarily freed from aspects of their usual routines (such as the requirement to follow pupil I.E.P.s) in the sessions. The enclosing and obscuring function of the tent, and the received understanding about the purpose of the sessions, provided a very different environment in which class groups were brought together. I am particularly interested in the idea that the tent somehow emphasises the present moment for staff and also that, as a language-free space, it holds potential for an equality of encounter between sensory beings and linguistic beings (Grace, 2017). Turner states, 'Communitas is of the now' (1969:113) and stresses that in communitas there is a lack of regulated form of human interaction. *Golden Tent* addresses both of these elements in its emphasis on the present moment, and in its provision of a language-free time and space, and for this reason I propose it is a space that holds the potential for communitas.

Turner uses Buber's (1958) notion of the I-Thou relationship to convey the communion of equal individuals that constitutes relations in communitas. In Buber's I-Thou relationship or encounter, concepts or objectification of the other is replaced by an authentic meeting. Turner notes that Buber's I-Thou relationship 'is always a "happening", something that arises in instant mutuality when each person fully experiences the being of the other' (Turner,

1969:136) and he draws on this in his own explanations of the transient nature of communitas. In the earlier discussion of *Golden Tent* as a liminal space, I referred to staff comments about pupils being free to simply "be" within the tent:

• '*…in here they can just "be", which is really nice, they can just be.'*

• *'Gives the opportunity for their own reactions'*

• *'The silence was also wonderful for just allowing the children to just "be"'*

Such statements point to a qualitative difference in perceptions of pupils, with their unique and individual presence being experienced by the staff member. This subtle but significant difference manifests as a shift in the relationship, which could be representative of a move from an I-It to an I-Thou encounter. In describing the felt experience of coming alongside a pupil inside the tent, Michelle states, *'you're with the child, the student, you're with them'*, and again later, *'we're totally with them, aren't we?'*, suggesting greater levels of mutuality.

In this section I have considered the feedback of staff participants and discussed them in relation to themes identified in PART I of the thesis. This feedback was all received from participants in Groups 1 and 2 who took part in the facilitated sessions. In the next section I consider how *Golden Tent* was used by other groups and the feedback I received from these participants.

7:8 Observations And Feedback From The Sessions I Did Not Facilitate.

Five other classes made use of the tent in their own way and it was interesting to observe the differing ways in which they interpreted and made use of the space. One teacher set up three light-up devices (for example, a green rope light) attached to accessible switches. The tent was then used as a distraction-free workspace for staff to pursue learning targets related to environmental control technology with individual pupils. A second group had similar ideas, additionally closing the blinds in the school hall in order to enhance the effect of light devices within the tent. The arrival of this group into the hall was staggered over a period of about five minutes, and the cheerfully noisy and dominant chatter of one staff member as she entered the hall and approached the tent shocked me. Like the P.E. teacher's boisterous entry into Churchill's installation (discussed in chapter Three), my shock was a reminder that my own perceptions of *Golden Tent* are not common to all, and the 'reverence' it appears to inspire in some is not necessarily shared. The class teacher (I will call her Julie) arrived last with one of her students and immediately expressed her disappointment that the others had already entered the tent. She had wanted to give more significance to the transition across the threshold, and to watch for student responses. After a short time inside the tent, Julie commented, "*Having the lights down we've lost the glow, haven't we? It seemed like a good*

idea at the time…" Julie's session involved showing pupils a variety of lights, followed by a few minutes of "quiet time" in which they simply sat together inside the tent. In a brief discussion with Julie later, she explained that she had wanted to use the tent as a 'looking space'. She commented that the tent felt very safe to her, and that she thought this was because the edge was visible in the semi darkness, making it feel finite, as opposed to a black darkness that hints at an infinite space. In journal notes that I made whilst sitting at the edge of the tent during this session, I wrote, *'Still calming even with lights off. It feels a safe space. Quiet and immersive. Noticing my breathing. Feeling of being enclosed. Lights diffracted onto wall and ceiling. Breath. Stillness. Smell of PVC'*

A third group using *Golden Tent* in their own way involved five pupils and five staff. This group entered the tent together and then moved in a circle around the space several times. The teacher commented in her feedback afterwards, '*The sound that the wheelchairs made on the floor was very water-like and different for the learners to hear. [Pupil name] responded by vocalising as he went round the tent. He was extremely responsive and started to laugh out loud as he explored the tent. This is an amazing response for [name]'.* The group then settled in a tight circle arrangement (with staff kneeling down in the gaps between wheelchairs) and staff responded to the vocalisations of the pupils by repeating their sounds. Most of the comments from this group relate to sound, mainly pupil vocalisations, but also several commented on the sound of the floor as the chairs moved around on it. As an observer, the session felt very focused, and the teacher commented on the lack of distraction within the space, *'With no distractions in the tent I felt the learners showed more awareness of us repeating their sounds and more awareness of each other's sounds'.* For this group, *Golden Tent* appeared to be a physical/auditory space to explore and a distraction-free venue for vocal play and communication.

A fourth group used the tent very differently again. This group was led by a teacher who had previously visited *Golden Tent* at 'Space for Peace' in the cathedral (I will call her Gail). In school Gail brought three students into the space, who I will call Emily, Felix and Edward. After helping Edward out of his chair and onto the floor, Gail and another member of her staff team simply sat quietly with the students. My experience of observing this group was personally revealing because it brought me face-to-face with my own difficulties in sustaining presence and simply "being" when students appear to be passive. The students were very still and quiet and after a few minutes I began to feel the urge to "make something happen". I whispered to Gail, asking if she wanted me to create a soundscape outside of the tent. Clearly comfortable with the apparent lack of activity in her group, she declined my offer,

which was such a lesson to me – and a reminder of how we often espouse the thing we most need to learn ourselves! Gail confidently adopted *Golden Tent* as a space for her students to respond to entirely independently and without pressure from the adults around them. We discussed this later in a recorded conversation and again I include a longer excerpt of the transcript here to show how she developed her thoughts:

Jill**:** How did you perceive the space in your head and how you might use it, what purpose did it have for your group?

Gail**:** *I remember going to the cathedral and how it made me feel inside – the contrast of being outside and inside. I loved that feeling of – it was peaceful, and it felt like something inside me came outside. So I wanted to see how our guys felt, that's why I got them to pause at the door, so you've got the hall space outside, which isn't very nice, and then you've got this wonderful space inside. Edward and Emily particularly - they seemed to pause themselves – I don't know if I'm reading too much into it because that's how I feel myself. It was that coming in and, wow! - the wonder of this space! So I wanted to see how they reacted to this wonderful space, what they did. Because, I think, with our guys, if you watch, its those little parts of who they are come out, and you see them…you see the wonder in them. Emily became really peaceful, because she's such an active young lady - just that sudden peace within her. And Felix, the way he was looking around. But it had a sense like, Felix his high* [physical] *tone came down, and that was lovely to see. Because he was really aware of the changes, and where he was, and what he could see. Edward was more like 'where am I, what's going on?' because there was the floor, he was laying on the floor looking at his own reflection….so the reason I thought I wanted…the way it went was the way I hoped it would because it was so individual. It meant different things to different students.*

Jill**:** Yeah

Gail: *Because it means something different to everybody as well. And letting them go in and interpret it their way was really important to me, so to see each of them react so differently and behave so differently was ..that's what I wanted…*

Jill**:** and what I was impressed by was you didn't feel the need to do anything, and that's what impressed me, and I just think that's important…we've got so much to learn from that approach

Gail**:** *But it took….I think that's what it did as well, outside I thought this is probably what I wanted from it, if nothing happened, then nothing happened. I stopped* [support staff name] *from trying to engage a student because I wanted her to let them enjoy it in their own way. And I wanted to see them completely their own way.*

Jill: That's really interesting because that's what a lot of my feedback has been about – it's a watchful space for staff. So there's something about the space that enabled staff more…

Gail: *yeah definitely…*

Jill**:** … and to say that they couldn't achieve that in their classroom. I don't know why that is….?

Gail**:** *I was just thinking then, you know there's that thing about how we have to have plain tops and we wear plain tops because what are the pupils seeing and visual clutter….but within that space there was no visual clutter. So whatever they saw was exactly that. Not a door opening……..and it felt like a luxury as well. That time just to give permission to just observe. No pre-conceived ideas where you've got your targets out and what are they learning out of this? and…*

Jill: Yeah

Gail**:** *…do you know what I mean? Because the whole time its like…'let's talk about the learning objectives, and what are you going to achieve?, and lets' celebrate it at the end – No! Let's just be in here - What do you want to do?*

Gail's words convey her confidence to allow her students to access the tent in their own way without further mediation from staff, *'…letting them go in and interpret it their way was really important to me'* and she also demonstrates the link between this "hands off" approach, and the resulting opportunity to *see* her pupils, '*because I wanted to let them enjoy it in their own way. And I wanted to see them completely their own way'.* The idea that the space offers the potential for pupils to reveal more of themselves, if staff are ready to allow it, comes across in Gail's comments. She asserts that by providing the space and simply watching, more of a pupil's personality is witnessed: *'if you watch, it's those little parts of who they are come out, and you see them'*. It is interesting to note similar themes in Gail's comments around the idea of a space free from classroom norms, in which staff can be quietly watchful and students are offered a space free from pre-set targets or expectations. She values the opportunity not to think about learning objectives and '*what are you going to achieve?*' and to say '*No! Let's just be in here*'. At the end, Gail poses the same question of her students that Bryony from Group 1 asked, *'what do you want to do?'* suggesting that within Golden Tent there is the potential for pupils to take up the space being held open for them, perhaps even to surprise us. Her comments also add to many other comments made by staff in the facilitated sessions with Groups 1 & 2 about the (varied) impact of the space on pupil's levels of arousal, breathing, visual attention, etc. Gail comments specifically on the physical effect the space has on two students, one, an *'active young lady'* who becomes *'really peaceful'*, and another whose high muscle tone relaxes. These are significant impacts that may even enhance the availability of students for connection.

<u>Frank's group</u>

The fifth group's use of *Golden Tent* had a different evolution, and in fact this group used the space on three separate occasions. The class teacher (I will call him Frank), approached me saying he was very interested in what I had been doing with Groups 1 and 2 in my weekly

sessions, and asked if I would be wiling to offer the same to his group. My subsequent delivery of this session was a reminder of the uniqueness of different pupils and class groups, because the successful format I had developed with Groups 1 & 2 for the first part of the session proved unsuitable for this group. My initial activities involving the strong kinaesthetic experience of fast-paced wheelchairs stopping and starting was totally inappropriate; one student was using a walking frame rather than her wheelchair, which meant that she was determining her own self-controlled slow pace, another pupil was already highly stimulated, so for him, activities designed to arouse and alert were inappropriate and a third pupil with severe visual impairments was understandably disturbed by the change in routine and the echoey sounds in this new location, and needed time to quietly adjust to the transition rather than be subjected to lively movement activity. However, the time inside the tent did hold value for the group, as the teacher conveyed to me in a recorded conversation later that day:

> *"So, if that activity had happened in a classroom, I think the duration of time that we gave the learners to express themselves independently would have been shorter, you would have felt… I would have felt that things had to be moving on, that you should see progress, we should be making recordings, we should be 'bathrooming', we should be changing position……However, because your space encloses the learners, it gives a sense of purpose to more open-ended activities. It also reduces the outside stimulation for staff as well as pupils, so the staff can focus on being expectant."*

Frank suggests that the enclosing function of *Golden Tent* gives *'a sense of purpose to more open-ended activities'.* This is pertinent in the light of my questions about whether the 'holding' function of the shruti box in improvisational music sessions could be translated into physical space, something I specifically wanted to explore through this study. Frank believes the tent played a significant role in enabling staff to *'focus on being expectant'* and because this reflected a core purpose of my exploration I asked him to expand:

> *"I think that our learners work at a completely different speed sometimes to the adults that are supporting them, but by the very nature of school environments there is always a focus on….not getting things done, but ensuring the right things are happening…., and sometimes that focus can mean the learners don't get given enough time to show their maximum communicative potential. It's a bit like the concept of umm … silence if you're spending time with another adult, silence can be a very awkward period, you feel like you should fill it… …you've got to almost just grin and bear the silence for the potential that could emerge after a long period of stillness, and your environment allowed us to do it in a comfortable way, where nobody felt pressured."*

Frank refers to the importance of giving time for learners to '*show their maximum communicative potential'* and he experienced the tent as allowing staff to *'do this in a comfortable way where nobody felt pressured*'. I asked Frank if he could identify the factors that enabled this:

Frank**:** *I think one of the factors was novelty. So, the adults and the pupils could find interest in the environment, as opposed to trying to fill the environment. It definitely was the enclosure. It meant the focus was very much on the pupils, in this case on the pupils' vocalisations, and that filled the space, and the enclosure prevented any other sensory stimuli from encroaching on that space'. I think it also created a sort of pervading…. almost calm for some of your young people. I think they were reassured by the single sensory input. And that was it! That must be so blissful for some of our young people who live in a world of sensory bombardment, to come into this place where there's that single yellow sensory input and that's it.*

Jill: Yeah. And do you think yellow in itself is significant in any way – or do you think that might be similar if we were in another colour?

Frank*: I think yellow plays a very significant role for our learners who are visually impaired. The way the light diffuses through the tent, it's a very bright environment and that will support our learners who find looking difficult. I think there might be a umm… positive…..I can't think of the right word…there might be a positive emotional effect on the adults as well as the young people*

Jill: Yeah, like a mood enhancer, or…?

Frank: *Yeah, yeah. Umm its an exciting space, prior to going into it, my team were all very excited about going into it. I cannot attribute that to colour specifically, but I think because it's a very bright environment, I think that would have affected people's response. There's definitely a correlation between the yellowness and the sort of positivity and happiness, even if its on a very subconscious level.*

And later in the conversation Frank said:

"And I think also there's a lot to be said for the fact of how you've designed the space, so the very fact that it is cocoon-like, and the spaces we have at school are classrooms and rooms – square shapes – that if you were to remove distractions from them they may appear less inviting rather than more inviting."

Frank's observations about the aesthetic form of the space and its *'cocoon-like'* properties are important. He suggests that the space provides much more than a distraction-free environment and he notes that a square classroom that was distraction-free might appear '*less inviting rather than more inviting'*. I would suggest that these comments allude to the containing or holding function of *Golden Tent,* which is directly brought about by its aesthetic qualities as a nurturing safe space.

Like one of the other class groups, pupil vocalisations were a focus for Frank, and he felt that the distraction-free space enabled a flourishing of pupil voices:

"The thing I feel most positive about from the session was the young people's interplay of voices and sounds with each other in the space…. umm, and that was good, it was initiated by one particular learner, and that learner probably kept things going, but then that allowed her peers to come in and out of the conversation. Later on we introduced ourselves into the conversation as well, but I really enjoyed the fact that again no language was used, that was essential. And at the end of the session, again, we withdrew ourselves from the conversation and you could hear the dynamics of the conversation change. It became a lot calmer, a lot more muted, a lot more sort of staccato in the interactions. They were smaller and shorter, then gradually even the noisiest young lady became quieter as we modified the environment by removing ourselves. And that was the key bit for me….um, yeah - I don't think there's anything more positive you can get from an experience like that than it to be learner-led. And I really feel it was today."

Frank's identification of the value of the session being '*learner-led'* and that '*no language was used*' adds to Gail and others' comments above about the importance of 'making space' for pupils, or giving them a 'space to be', which involves freedom from pedagogical interventions. Clearly, despite staff having the awareness and intention to provide these opportunities for their pupils, the rigours of the classroom appear to work against this. It is this aspect of the feedback that demonstrates the value of an aesthetic space of refuge in this context. In Chapter Five I discussed creativity and the power of the childhood den as a space of 'becoming' (Dovey, 1990) and also O'Sullivan's assertion that we talk of art in terms of its transformational function, and its potential to explore 'the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world' (2001, p.130). Some of the staff feedback suggests that *Golden Tent* fulfils just such function in the way it enables staff to sustain an in-the-moment presence that allows pupils to flourish. Perhaps, as O'Sullivan suggests, the function of installation art might be as an 'access point to other worlds' (O'Sullivan 2001:130), and here I am suggesting that *Golden Tent* provided an access point to "being" and being together, somewhere that staff felt able to withdraw pedagogical intervention and see new potential in their pupil partners.

7.9 Chapter Summary

Various presentations of Golden Tent have been discussed in this chapter. The unplanned presentation as part of Space for Peace in Winchester Cathedral was the first, an event that provided a useful test-run for the new installation and one where I discovered that inside the tent auditory experience is heightened and intensified due to the visual obscuration of an external soundscape. Feedback from a few participants at this event confirmed that *Golden Tent* was experienced as a space that prompted feelings of safety and separation from the surrounding environment and this elicited different behaviours in some respondents.

Presentations of the tent in school were then discussed, including the logistics and format of the sessions I facilitated with two different class groups. Feedback from staff participants from these and the unmediated sessions were considered and resonance was discovered between my own search for refuge and the way that staff experienced being inside the tent and away from the classroom. The feedback of staff was closely considered in relation to the themes developed in PART I of the thesis, and the idea of an aesthetic space of refuge was developed. The implications of this in terms of the quality of relationships, and the value of an aesthetic container that can help to "hold the space" open for pupils were identified, ideas that will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

Discussion and Conclusions

8:1 Chapter Introduction

In the preface of this thesis I stated that the installation *Golden Tent* forms an integral part of this enquiry. This is in keeping with arts practice-as-research, which makes its contribution to knowledge partly by means of practice. When reviewing the success or otherwise of this study therefore, it is important to include direct experience of this installation because:

> Artistic research seeks not so much to make explicit the knowledge that art is said to produce, but rather to provide a specific articulation of the pre-reflective, non-conceptual content of art. It thereby invites 'unfinished thinking'. Hence, it is not formal knowledge that is the subject matter of artistic research, but thinking in, through and with art. (Borgdorff, 2010:44)

My own 'unfinished thinking' through art has involved an exploration of an aesthetic environment and its potential to affect human relations in a specific context. Embodied experience and presence are central to this, but these are difficult to articulate through words. Borgdorff (2010:45) states that artistic research seeks to convey and communicate content that is 'enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in creative practices and embodied in artistic products', which I find a good description of my own arts-based research process. However, despite my advocacy of this approach, in the context of a doctoral programme I have sometimes found it challenging to allow *Golden Tent* to stand-alone as the conveyor and communicator of content (see preface to Chapter Seven). By keeping my focus closely on the relationship of my practice to a specific social context, and by including the feedback of staff participants, I have adopted an approach more in line with a social science study at times, supporting my arts-based approach with additional content. Fortunately, this dualistic approach has enabled me to explicate the areas that are easier to articulate linguistically and allow the installation to remain somewhat elusive as a 'deliberate articulation of unfinished thinking in and through art' (Borgdorff, 2010:45), which could be viewed as a strength of the study.

In this chapter I reconsider the research question and each of my stated aims in relation to what has been done over the course of the study. I then reflect critically on the study overall and ask: What is the value of this study? What can be learnt from it? What are the study's wider implications? and How might this research be extended in the future?.

8:2 The Research Question

In Chapter One I explained that the articulation of my research question was only possible with hindsight. This was due to the unfolding nature of the study and the need to go through a process of self-examination before I could position my practice as the methodology rather than the subject of my research. The question I identified was:

> **As my installation art practice becomes less instrumental and more "authentic", what is its role within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and what theoretical frameworks can be used to explicate its value?**

This question can be divided into three parts. The first part refers to my practice becoming less instrumental and more "authentic", by which I mean that rather than choosing an externally derived topic as an instrument for the facilitation of educational targets for pupils, intuitive processes have been adopted and personal themes expressed. This shift in approach is generated by my move from teacher to artist with increasing levels of trust being placed in artistic intuitive ways of working. This transition has been demonstrated over the course of the study as evidenced in this thesis. Specifically, in my 'Tingly Productions' work and 'Black and White Environment' I adopted a more instrumental approach whereas the creation of *Golden Tent* followed a more authentic approach. The motivation for these changes was to free my own working methods from a limited educational framework and to articulate a wider vision for my practice.

But why is a shift from instrumental approach to a more authentic one important? Firstly, and from a personal perspective, I know that when I work more intuitively I tap into a less self-conscious aspect of myself, which can often bring forth more unique and personally meaningful results. Despite many positive experiences of working in this way with the arts, I have found it hard employ these working methods when approaching projects in school, probably because of my background in teaching where the emphasis is more instrumental and outcome focussed. In the context of this study, integrating more authentically artistic ways of working was a way of rejecting the current educational paradigm and claiming the value of artistic ways of knowing and working. Secondly, and from a less personal perspective, to adopt a less instrumental approach is to reconceptualise staff/pupil relationships as something other than hierarchical interactions in which the competent educator attempts to facilitate the progressive development of an incompetent learner. This is not to suggest that the development of pupil skills and competencies is not an essential part of education. Rather it is to recognise that the frameworks we have chosen to measure

and control this process elevate the importance of objective outcomes at the cost of the human and relational aspects of the process. Our current approach diminishes the value and quality of the complex, meaningful and potentially mutually rewarding relationships between staff and pupils. It is my assertion that to work in less instrumental ways is to open up new relational possibilities in which pupils can be viewed, not as simply 'site[s] for cultivation' (Vorhaus, 2006:322) but as equal participants in mutually beneficial, respectful relationships where they also have much to teach.

The second part of my research question asks what the role of this more artistically authentic practice is within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and the third part asks what theoretical frameworks can be used to explicate its value? These two elements of my research question will be considered as I critically review the sub-aims of the study.

8:3 The Sub-Aims

The first of my sub aims was to:

> **Identify and critique the cultural beliefs and practices that have determined my subjective experience as a disaffected teacher and volunteer artist**

This aim was fulfilled through my adoption of autoethnography, which involved an examination of my subjective experience in order to identify the socio-cultural influences at play. The outcome of this process was a new understanding about how a neoliberal ideology (discussed in Chapter Two), and the elevated status given to science over the arts (discussed in Chapter Five) have dictated my experience both within the profession and after my resignation. This learning enabled a re-storying of self (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:746) and directly contributed to my confidence and ability to move forward with the study. However, my own struggle is not unique and many teachers have similar experiences. Neoliberalism is insidious in its influence and has become so embedded in our thinking that it manifests as a social order that feels like common sense (Davies & Bansell, 2007; Metcalfe, 2017; Monbiot, 2016; Verhaeghe, 2014). My hope is that by sharing the insights I have gained, the bigger picture might be similarly revealed for others. If more people become empowered with knowledge and understanding of the forces affecting their day-to-day practices, resistance to the reduction and commodification of learning may grow, and also the rightful status of the arts in education can be recognised.

My second sub-aim was to:

Identify and apply conceptual frameworks from beyond the current educational paradigm in order to theorise my practice

Throughout this thesis, my critique of the current educational paradigm has been based on the argument that the commodification of learning results in a reductionist view where only that which can be quantified counts (Pratt, 2016). Given this, it has been important for me to find alternative ways to understand the value of my practice beyond quantifiable data and I have achieved this sub-aim in two different ways. Firstly, I have used the key features of installation art to argue that this art form provides new opportunities for staff and pupils to share a joint experience. With an installation, it is the body that is invited to participate via real experience of forms, colours, volumes and sensation (Bishop, 2005; Oliveira *et al*, 1994; Rosenthal, 2003). To place emphasis on direct embodied experience is to position pupils with PMLD as equal partners to staff because accessing an aesthetic space does not require linguistic, conceptual understanding. I have supported this viewpoint by drawing upon O'Sullivan's (2001) claim that art should be understood as being more about 'affect' than knowledge because of its ability to provoke sensory/embodied moments of intensity that are indefinable in terms of linguistic knowledge.

Having established that installation art enables us to move towards a different way of being together, in Chapter Five I additionally applied concepts derived from the anthropological study of rituals to reconsider encounters between staff and pupils. Specifically I suggested that Turner's (1969; 1974) ideas of liminality and communitas could be usefully applied to my practice in order to rethink the value of what is happening within the aesthetic space. Using this framework, *Golden Tent* came to represent a place of withdrawal from the normative culture, a liminal space where new modes of social action might occur, and where the status and perceived competence of sensory beings can be elevated. As an aesthetic space of refuge separated from the rigours of the classroom, *Golden Tent* offers the potential for a 'communion of equal individuals', or 'communitas' (Turner, 1969:96).

Following my discussion of liminality and communitas, I also brought in Buber's notion of the I-Thou encounter as a way to think about contact between people with and people without profound disabilities. Buber (1961) suggests that an I-Thou encounter is inherently reciprocal and characterised by the total presentness of both parties. The intersubjective betweenness that Buber develops in his concept of the I-Thou encounter, has similarities with the mutuality and connection that Intensive Interaction aims for. Intensive Interaction has had an important place in this thesis because it is an approach that itself sits somewhat outside and beyond current educational frameworks because its main focus is on developing

relationships and fostering social and emotional connection rather than the acquisition of skills per se. Indeed, Intensive Interaction relies upon a hierarchical shift because the usually competent linguistic partner must learn the language of the sensory being in order to find routes to connection. Although much attention is given by educational practitioners to finding ways to identify and measure the progress of pupils using this approach, fundamentally Intensive Interaction involves a deeply respectful view of the non-longuistic partner, affirming them as a unique person, another I. Using Buber's notions of the I-Thou encounter, *Golden Tent* offers a space that allows us to recognise the unique power of people with PMLD in helping us to access our deepest humanity.

My third sub-aim was to:

> **Develop personal (as opposed to educational) themes in my installation practice and explore their resonance for others**.

The autoethnographic phase of this study revealed my deep sense of displacement from a beloved profession. My subsequent reconnection with my fine art practice inspired me to build a safe, nurturing space – an aesthetic space of refuge - for myself within the school setting. Whilst I made *Golden Tent* large enough to share, there was no guarantee that my own motivations would "speak" to others. It was a surprise, therefore, to receive so much feedback in which staff commented on their own sense of getting away from the pressures of the classroom and having time to observe and focus entirely on their pupils. This feedback confirmed that *Golden Tent* was seen as a place that offered temporary reprieve from the busy-ness and time pressures of the classroom, a place where, for a short period, "…*we don't have to fill a form in*". Some respondents also saw *Golden Tent* as a space of refuge for their pupils who might "….*just wanna be left alone*" or have "…*a little moment of – what do you want to do?".* Although my study did not set out to prove any proposition, the implications of this feedback suggest that *Golden Tent* fulfilled an important function in school. This is an area that deserves to be explored further and extended to include the wider context of mainstream education given the burn-out of teachers (Tapper, 2018) and rising numbers of children suffering from mental health issues (NEU, 2018).

McNiff (2013) advises that artistic researchers should see their artistic products as data in the research process. One of the ways he suggests we do this is to give the art object a voice to see what this can reveal about the symbolic meaning of the work. I did this with *Golden Tent* and a poetic voice emerged:

I am portable and temporary, appearing and disappearing, substantial in scale yet flimsy in structure. I glow inside and out and my power is in my golden floor and saturated yellow satin cover. I embrace and enclose, shine and reflect. Come inside so I can obscure a harsh exterior and offer soft moments of golden beauty. My tight bodice will cover you from above and my voluminous skirt will drape and dance around you. Come under and be immersed in my monochrome totality - it will slow you, ease you, still you. I am a space for golden dreams.

The voice is feminine. She tells us she can appear and disappear, perhaps in response to need? Bachelard's paradox of the nest is expressed – she is substantial in scale but not monumental or permanent. She emphasises the importance of the rich colour – this is where her power lies and she embraces and encloses within her monochrome garments. This is a deeply feminine art piece designed to nurture and protect. The contrast between the tight roof cover and the draping walls is stated, the tight bodice speaking of something held in and contained, the dancing skirt of something loose and playful – there is space in there. Inside, she shines – she is a space to see oneself reflected. She invites us to enter and immerse ourselves in her colour. To allow ourselves to be stilled. She promises the ease of dreams.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, it is clear from the feedback that many participants in school did experience the stilling, calming effect of *Golden Tent*. In this context the installation was presented with an applied purpose, not simply as an artwork to enjoy. Its meaning and interpretation were framed by my discussions with staff prior to its presentations and also by the context of the school as a working environment. By giving voice to *Golden Tent* I am reminded that she is a piece with her own purpose and could be presented in different contexts. I also see that my own wavering transition along a spectrum from teacher to artist was illustrated in my varied levels of mediation, and that this can be viewed as a sign of my lack of confidence to simply present the work and leave it for others interpret it in their own ways. However, the fully facilitated sessions had their own value as almost ritual experiences that developed over time according to the responses of each group. Additionally, it has also been useful to compare the differing levels of mediation in terms of my own experience and to note my performance anxiety when taking on a facilitator's role and the satisfaction of allowing the artwork to speak for itself.

My fourth sub-aim was to:

Explore whether the auditory "holding function" of the shruti-box can be translated into a physical form

The "holding function" I refer to in this sub-aim is difficult to articulate with exactitude. In the context of this study it was the sense of steadiness and comfort that the shruti-box drone brought to an improvisatory group session where, as staff, we were trying to support the communication of pupils by holding back on our own actions and "giving them the space". This was the background to this aim and in Chapter One I discussed the contrast between the sessions (which were run collaboratively with musician Ignacio Agrimbau) and the group sessions I led previously where silence and the passivity of students often felt uncomfortable, escalating the urge to "do" something. It could be said that this aim was achieved simply through the making of *Golden Tent* because in constructing the tent, something auditory *was* symbolically translated into a physical form. But did this physical translation function in the same way?

In Chapter Seven I described how, after spending a relatively short time inside the tent, the internal space became familiar to the eye and its overall effect, in terms of visual impact, lessened. I concluded that the impact of live sound, which is temporal in nature, does not directly translate into a stable physical object. It was this realisation that led me to include a soundscape to enhance the visual experience. However, it could also be argued that the atmosphere inside *Golden Tent* provided a different type of holding function. As stated in Chapter One, Ignacio explains the tones of the shruti-box drone as providing 'a common harmonic or rhythmic structure, enhancing a feeling of connectedness' (Agrimbau, 2018). This common harmonic structure of the drone could be likened to the enclosing monochromatic space inside the tent, which meant, as one respondent stated, "*we're all looking at yellow*". Equally, the idea of enhanced feelings of connectedness can be evidenced in comments such as "*and you're with the child, the student, you're with them*", "*I was aware of [name]'s breathing*", "*we're totally with them aren't we?".*

It is important to acknowledge that being comfortable with silence and inactivity can vary enormously from person to person, as well as at different times for the same person. When I described my own difficulties with "holding the space" for students in my early groups, I suggested that the experience was commonly felt. I know this to be true from conversations with colleagues and this was also evidenced in my interviews with practitioners Owain Clarke and Becky Churchill (Chapter Three). In practice though, the point at which someone feels compelled towards action is likely to be different for us all at different times, as is our ability to feel an "in-the-moment" presence and attention. This was beautifully illustrated when

Gail used the tent with her group and demonstrated her ease with allowing her students to simply be inside the space, "*I wanted to let them enjoy it in their own way. And I wanted to see them completely their own way*" which contrasted with my own urge at the time to "do" something (create a soundscape) in response to an apparent lack of activity. In my diary reflections over the series of sessions, I regularly noted the variations in my own ability to feel "present", sometimes commenting on how calm I felt and at other times how distracted and unable to be "in the moment". The qualities of an auditory, or physical space are always experienced in combination with one's own state of mind and therefore the impact of a "holding form" is a highly subjective experience that cannot be measured objectively.

One respondent, Frank, made a specific comment demonstrating that he saw the tent as fulfilling a "holding" function. Talking about the difficulty in sustaining a sense of expectancy in the light of a passive pupil, he said, "*you've got to almost grin and bear the silence for the potential that could emerge after a long period of stillness, and your environment allowed us to do it in a comfortable way where nobody felt pressured*". Frank also identified that the enclosure of the tent gave "*a sense of purpose to more open-ended activities*", saying that in the classroom he believed "*the duration of time that we gave the learners to express themselves independently would have been shorter*", which is exactly how I experienced the music of the shruti-box. In conclusion then, whilst I have acknowledged the highly subjective nature of these matters, *Golden Tent* did perform a "holding" function for some staff participants.

My fifth and final sub-aim was to:

> **Explore whether *Golden Tent* can facilitate a shift in staff mind-set from "doing" to "being" and thereby enhance experiences of mutuality**

Many staff described feeling calm, peaceful and relaxed inside the tent and some also made reference to feeling "in-the-moment" and to being *with* their pupil partners in a different way. This was associated both with the aesthetic properties of *Golden Tent* and also with getting away from the demands of a busy classroom. Whilst such comments could be said to indicate a mind-set shift from "doing" to "being", they do not explicitly indicate that experiences of mutuality were thereby enhanced. Mutuality is defined by Oxford Living Dictionaries as 'The sharing of a feeling, action, or relationship between two or more parties' (en.oxforddictionaries.com). This might be an intense feeling of connection between two people, or a comfortable companionship, for example quietly sharing a space together. When I set out on this study, it was the intense moments of connection that I had

occasionally experienced with pupils in the classroom that I wanted to explore further. Could an aesthetic space help to facilitate these heightened 'I-Thou' encounters? However, as this study progressed, and in the light of O'Sullivan's concept of the aesthetics of affect and Pallasma's ideas of embodied experience of architecture (see Chapter Two) I came to see that experiencing an immersive sensory space together was another form of mutual experience, and an equally valuable one. This quieter form of mutual experience offered a space for pupils to express, and be witnessed expressing, behaviours that might be missed in more intense, heightened or busier interactions, and this was important. Indeed, several staff commented on the value of being '*watchful*', '*contemplative*' '*calm but alert*' and how this enabled them to '*notice subtle changes*' in their pupil partners. These are significant comments, particularly in relation to some of the most physically impaired pupils whose subtle volitional behaviours may be missed in more active environments. Kittay's statement about being with her daughter Sesha confirm the profound value of this quiet connection:

> To be with Sesha is to enter her orbit, to gain a glimpse of the world as she constructs it … In one who can scarcely move a muscle, a glint in the eye at a strain of familiar music establishes her personhood. (Kittay 2001 in Vorhaus, 2006:319)

If, as Kittay suggests, personhood can be established via this quiet witnessing and being together, then the value of a space that can support staff to simply be and be together is surely confirmed.

With regard to the notion of mutuality between staff and pupils, however, it is not possible for both parties to linguistically confirm such experiences – the judgement call is one-sided. Without both partners being able to comment, it is therefore impossible to say whether experiences of mutuality were enhanced within *Golden Tent*. With hindsight then, this part of the sub-aim appears to be inappropriate. Despite this, and as Kittay appears to confirm, there is nevertheless value in seeking such moments because it is through the sharing of experiences that relationships are developed. In my view, if a staff partner experiences a sense of mutuality, something worthwhile or meaningful has likely occurred for the pupil too - in the very least, their personhood has been recognised. Central to this sub-aim is the idea that there is greater chance for connection between staff and pupil if the staff member is not pre-occupied with tasks, goals or the development of the pupil. *Golden Tent* provided a venue in which these pre-occupations could be temporarily put aside, and many staff reported a greater sense of connection with their pupils as a result.

8:4 The Overall Aim Of The Study

The main aim of this study was to:

> **Explore and articulate the value of an aesthetic installation within a school for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities.**

Each of the sub-aims already discussed combine to constitute this over-arching aim, so in effect I have already explained how it has been addressed. I will extend the discussion further now by considering this aim in the light of the following questions: What is the value of this research? What can be learnt from it? What are its wider implications? and What further research leads on from this study?

What is the value of this research?

This study was small and particular, involving one aesthetic installation developed as the result of a personal artistic process and after a period of grappling with the method and means of enquiry. It involved an insider's perspective (Adams et al, 2015) in relation to a small specialist school. McNiff (2013) suggests that the value of research based in personal enquiry is its usefulness to other people. During the empirical phase of the study, several different groups made use of *Golden Tent*, interpreting it in varying ways. Also, in my conversations with colleagues about my research, I have found that sharing my own experiences provides a valuable source of reflection for others because sometimes I am able to articulate and make sense of their own experiences in new ways.

As evidenced in the feedback, some staff attributed value to *Golden Tent* because they perceived it as a space that allowed for a different quality of contact with their pupils, as well as a space where pupils could express themselves. It provided a welcome temporary reprieve from the demands of the classroom, becoming an aesthetic space of refuge. For some, the form and qualities of the tent performed a holding function, enabling them to sustain a quiet and watchful presence alongside pupils for longer, which was seen as valuable for pupils as well as for themselves. The application of new conceptual frameworks provides a useful way to articulate the role of *Golden Tent* beyond the current educational paradigm, opening up the potential for new conceptualisations of the encounter between staff and pupil. This aspect of the research compliments current pedagogical understandings and has important implications. It supports what we already know about high quality support for individuals with PMLD whilst also highlighting the potential benefits for the non-disabled partner.

What can be learnt from it?

My contribution to knowledge is on several fronts. I have explained the key features of installation art that make it a fruitful and potentially equalising artform for neurodiverse audiences to enjoy together. This link has not been made previously in the academic literature, but the study adds to pockets of development currently taking place in the field of arts practice (as discussed in Chapter Three). I have highlighted that these mutual experiences benefit both parties and this adds to the small amount of literature in which the agency of people with PMLD is conceived of in terms of their impact upon others (for example, Grace, 2017; Merceica, 2013; Matthews, 2013; Reinders, 2008; Vorhaus, 2016).

The demands of a neoliberal accountability culture in education, and the physically demanding care needs of pupils with PMLD in growing class sizes, can lead to pressures on staff. If, as Stewart (2016) suggests, teachers of children with PMLD are themselves the curriculum, then we need to pay more attention to the conditions that affect the quality of their contact with pupils. According to the literature, a defining feature of quality of life for individuals with PMLD is the quality of their interactions with their carers (Nakkan & Vlaskamp, 2002; Maes *et al*, 2007; Petry *et al*, 2005). A supportive relationship is said to be one that enables people with PMLD to demonstrate their competencies and personalities (Forster & Iacono, 2014; Hostyn & Maes, 2013, 2009; Neerinckx et al, 2014; Porter et al, 2001). It therefore follows that staff mind-set, specifically the ability to be fully present with someone with PMLD, could mean the difference between providing (and sustaining) a responsive environment or overriding/not noticing a small volitional action. What can be learnt from this study is the value, for both staff and pupils, of an aesthetic space in which interactions between them are less prescribed, and an educational agenda temporarily relaxed. Being in *Golden Tent* gave some staff an opportunity to witness their pupils in a different way *("you've got permission to just be your own here"; "it's a little moment of – what do you want to do?"; "and to express themselves as well"; "I wanted to see them completely their own way*") and I believe this has implications in terms of respect for them as complete human beings, as opposed to subjects requiring intervention.

What are the study's wider implications?

The important role that the arts can play in terms of personal development; in terms of the quality of relationships between sensory beings and linguistic beings; and in terms of influencing understandings of people with the most profound disabilities have been shown throughout this study. We need to recognise the unique and intrinsic qualities of the arts and award them their rightful status. To keep to the specific aim of this study, I have argued that

installation art is potentially democratising because it involves direct embodied experience, and because its intrinsic aesthetic power is through affect (O'Sullivan, 2001). These inclusive features provide a space where people with, and people without, profound disabilities can be together on equal terms. This has implications in terms of public arts provision and gallery offerings.

Medical and tragedy models of disability were replaced in this study by a perspective that recognised the agency of people with the most profound disabilities to influence and impact upon others (Carlson, 2010; Kittay, 1999; Mercieca, 2013; Reinders, 2008; Vorhaus, 2006). The value of simply "being" and being together over and above "doing" and achieving was argued, and the role of the arts in supporting this perspective was explored. These understandings have significant implications for the quality of life for all human beings and the recognition of our shared humanity. Reinders proposes that people with profound disabilities be understood as 'the rule of what it means to be human rather than the exception' (Reinders, 2008:14). In our busy, achievement-oriented, individualistic Western culture the majority of us have accepted a fast-paced and competitive existence. This study promotes the value of simply being and being together, opening up the space for new types of experience and a different quality of connection with others. If we are to recognise these values, however, a different model of education is required. Robinson's (2010b) words are relevant here:

> We have to recognise that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish.

<u>How might this research be extended in the future?</u>

The successful inclusion of *Golden Tent* as part of 'Space for Peace' in Winchester Cathedral demonstrates its potential in settings beyond the school. From this first exhibition of the tent I was struck by the heightened auditory experience of being inside. The obscuring walls of the tent seem to sharpen awareness of an external soundscape, making it intriguing and exciting. I would like to explore this aspect further, collaborating with musicians or sound artists to create a multi-sensory experience for participants who are enveloped in the sumptuous gold satin tent. Ideas at this stage involve: surrounding the tent with a live choir and/or using resonant gongs to create a "sound bath" for participants; experimenting with the use of extreme bass frequencies to create infrasonic notes below the perception of sound; and working with live musicians who attempt to communicate with unseen/unheard

audiences inside the tent. To date I have discussed presentations of the tent as an inclusive installation with two different theatre venues. One wanted me to develop it as a space for a timed performance, and the other was interested to use it as a "drop-in" space to promote wellbeing. In the literature on restorative spaces (that I excluded from the scope of this study) research has been done into the optimum balance between the soundscape and the visual composition of a tranquil space. Pheasant *et al* (2010), for example, found that the perception of tranquillity involved a complex interplay between visual and auditory components. My own explorations involving *Golden Tent* suggest that this interplay is a rich area for exploration and I will be pursuing this further.

Another area that I decided early on was beyond the scope of this study to discuss is spirituality. However, in considering areas for further research, the notion of *Golden Tent* as a spiritual space, and a place where staff and pupils can "commune" together would be an interesting path to pursue. Rebecca Nye (2009) suggests that spirituality is a non-verbal, felt-sense and she believes children have a natural affinity with it. Spirituality is also an area of the curriculum that sits outside of assessment frameworks. It would therefore be an obvious area to explore further in terms of the relationship between spirituality and an aesthetic space for being in schools.

Finally, in Chapter Two I mentioned a social science study by Singh *et al* (2004) where staff caring for clients with PMLD received training in mindfulness. The topic of mindfulness is another pertinent area that I decided not to include in the scope of this study, although I make frequent mention of "in-the-moment" experiences. Like my own research, Singh *et al*'s study recognised the importance of the subjective experience of staff in terms of the quality of their relationships with the individuals they cared for. They attempted to measure whether this had an impact on the happiness levels of the individuals with PMLD that they cared for. In Grace and Salfield's (2017) TED Talk 'Inclusion: for pity's sake?', Grace talks on a similar topic but from the perspective of the linguistic being, suggesting that mindfulness, or the sharing of in-the-moment experiences, is one of many gains on offer if we can extend our inclusion and understanding of people with PMLD. My own particular interest is in the influence of the environment in these shared moments. Although, as already stated, mutuality is a difficult concept to study (in the sense that it refers to a two-way experience that, in the case of the staff/pupil with PMLD dyad, can only be confirmed by one party) it would be interesting, nevertheless, to look into the cross-overs between an immersive sensory space, mindfulness and staff experiences of mutuality with pupils.

8.5 Thesis Conclusion

To conclude, I return to the three strands I identified as running through the study in PART I. The first strand was my personal situation as I tried to make sense of my resignation from teaching and my circumstances as a volunteer artist in the school. Over the course of this research I have gained information and new perspectives with which to understand my subjective experience. I have discovered literature more aligned with my own values and developed the language to critique beliefs that previously colonised my thinking. My developing understanding of research as a discipline has been greatly aided by autoethnography's insistence on the 'foreground[ing] of personal experience in research and writing' (Adams *et al*, 2015:26) and through this I have increased my awareness of the unconscious epistemological assumptions that have dictated my perspective. I have put trust in artistic process and been rewarded with worthwhile and meaningful outcomes. These personal gains feel considerable, although it is my hope that the outcomes of this research go beyond the personal and the many wider implications of this study have been identified.

The second strand of my research was my interest in moments of connection between staff and pupils with PMLD. I have used the literature to expound the importance of these moments in terms of quality of life for both parties, and I have explored the role of *Golden Tent* in relation to the quality of encounter within the staff/pupil dyad. These explorations have shown that the aesthetic qualities of *Golden Tent* provided an environment that enabled staff to be with their pupils in different ways and they valued this. Some staff also suggested in their feedback that they were able to be more observant and indeed that pupils reveal more of themselves in these conditions. By using the concepts of liminality and communitas, these moments of encounter were reconceptualised beyond a limited educational framework. Additionally, by arguing that art's intrinsic aesthetic power is through affect, greater status and value is given to sensory beings as partners who are best placed to demonstrate these 'moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter' (O'Sullivan, 2001:126). These frameworks offer alternative, respectful and inclusive ways to understand relationships between people with and people without profound cognitive impairments. They also enable us to challenge the commonly held view that a life worth living is about achievement and progress.

The third strand of the research was my installation art practice, and clearly *Golden Tent* is the key outcome here - an art installation that will continue to be presented in different contexts. The idea of *Golden Tent* as an aesthetic space of refuge originated when I brought my 'felt sense' (Rappaport, 2013) into the research process and allowed intuitive processes to

guide the work. It developed further when I discovered that my own aesthetic motivations resonated with so many participants. To offer an aesthetic space for simply "being" and being together within a school setting is to subvert the current educational imperative for pre-specified learning objectives and to challenge hierarchical understandings of education. Long may we continue to create spaces to be.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Report from 10 week music project with Ignacio Agrimbau

Ignacio Agrimbau is a composer and performer with a particular interest in music-making with children with special needs. He has a wealth of experience of using music with children with autism. I was lucky enough to receive funding for Ignacio to work alongside me in school for one day a week for 10 weeks on music projects of my choice. Proposals for 3 different areas of work were approved, and in this account I discuss one of these.

Intensive interaction is an integral part of the school's curriculum. In addition to one-to-one 'work' with pupils, many classes get together as a whole class group, using the principles of intensive interaction to foster a sense of group identity and to encourage awareness of others. Staff sit with students in a close circle, attending to them with a positive, playful demeanour and responding to behaviours and vocalisations with a view to encouraging "conversations" within the group.

My previous experience of leading these sessions was that I often felt 'pressured' over how long to sustain the session, particularly if pupils were not very active, and if several pupils were particularly vocal, how to ensure we were giving feedback to all students (including the less vocal ones). I had a hunch that adding some music into the mix could afford us some additional vocabulary with which to respond and create reciprocal moments with pupils, so my proposal was for Ignacio and I to work together to see if a communication/music session with a junior-aged class of 5 children who all have profound and multiple learning disabilities could be improved with his support.

My 'history' as a creative practitioner within the school is of creating quite lavish multi-sensory environments and delivering whole class sessions. There is often a 'feel-good' factor to my work because it is out of the ordinary classroom routine, and is designed to bring staff and pupils together in new, shared situations. This was to be different phase in my work and I was a bit anxious that (positive) staff expectations of working with me might not be met, since I wanted this work to be experimental and to really focus on *creating a responsive auditory environment* for the children.

I requested a meeting with the class staff - a teacher and 3 teaching assistants in order to introduce my aims for the project. Intensive Interaction practice is thoroughly embedded in the classroom ethos and they also have regular sessions where they work together as a whole group in the way I described earlier. At the meeting I described how, for me, one of the challenges of this work was feeling comfortable not actively "doing", but staying in the moment and waiting for the pupils to take the lead. I requested that we all try and sustain this high level 'presence' whilst sitting quietly, watching, listening, not 'prompting behaviours' but waiting for them. We also discussed positioning of pupils, how to support the best levels of comfort, alertness and also accessibility to others to enable the maximum sense of 'groupness' and peer to peer interaction as well as pupil/staff. Another discussion was about one pupil who regularly used his voice in a self-stimulatory way, often with loud and continuous sounds. We wondered if this would sabotage our attempts to create a responsive space for everyone, and we also questioned the value of the work for him if we were unable to 'break into' his self-occupying activity to bring his awareness outside of himself and to the group. We agreed to wait and see how he responded, and discussed the (reluctant) possibility of taking him into another

space if we felt he was unable to participate. The meeting was positive and we were all looking forward to working with Ignacio and seeing how the session would develop.

To briefly describe how the set-up is managed, pupils are in a range of positions, from out on a mat, in floor level chairs or wheelchairs according to their needs. Staff sit at the same level as their pupil partner, making a small circular group. We begin with staff holding an expectant silence as the lights are lowered to cue the start. Ignacio has shown us how to 'define the space', using hand chimes and Chinese singing bowls we sound notes around the outside of the group. This works in terms of creating a sense of 'groupness' for those within the sound, since it is resonating around and behind them. The sustained notes from the hand chimes have a purity of sound and the aim is also that this alerts pupils to listen and be aware of the space around them (which we hope will encourage awareness of others in that space too).

Ignacio is skilled at tuning into different individuals, and he uses his voice in unusual ways to respond to their vocalisations. What we heard in the first session felt new for us, and it was noticeable that he was not repeating back the sounds that pupils made, but somehow picking up on a pitch and tone and making a sort of chant from it. After a few minutes of the chimes, singing bowls and voice, Ignacio began to use a shruti box. This was another new experience, as the gentle drone "held" us in a calm and receptive space.

I felt immediately rewarded in this first session. My hunch that music could support us in our quest to use intensive interaction in a group set-up was being proven - but not in quite the way I had expected. The gentle sounds of the instruments and the chanting were all creating an expectant space, one that allowed us as staff to be still and present. My typical experience of trying to "hold" the space without music was of a multitude of questions coming into my head….. "no-one's vocalising….how long should we keep quiet?....what's my colleague making of this?....should I copy that movement?.....I think people have had enough now….", etc. I felt a pressure on me as the group leader to maintain the atmosphere, and now the music was doing this for us, so I could relax and be more aware and 'present' in the group.

The sessions generally last for around 45 minutes, a long time for such concentrated attention, but the time seems to fly by! Staff report a great sense of peace (and also tiredness!) after the session. As a group of staff we are learning how to carefully judge when to offer our support and intervention to individual pupils and when to leave them as they are, participating independently. Within the group we are witnessing some really interesting and at times delightful responses from pupils. The young lad who we were concerned might need to be withdrawn has (from week one) shown prolonged periods of active listening during the sessions. He continues to use his voice, but he has established a reputation as the "powerhouse" of the group, often leading us all in a climax of sound and rhythm.

We have a young boy who loves to bang his arms and hands down to make strong rhythms, and he can hear these reflected back from across the group. One girl, lying on her front on the mat, dances with her head when Ignacio plays his chinese reed flute. This has become a delightful game and she is playful and amused by how the sound follows her vigorous head movements, stopping and changing pace with a mischievous grin to see how she is followed. Another boy has a signature 'gutteral' sound that is part of his vocal vocabulary, and when he hears it come from another source (the chinese flute, or a staff member) he grins widely.

We still need to judge our role sensitively, and it is possible for us to 'bring' someone back into the group at times when they may be losing concentration. We are learning to follow our intuition, experiment with our voices, use our breathing and also physical contact to share the experience with our youngsters and make emotional connection. One young boy who has minimal physical strength and movement, has responded best when out of his chair and leaning on a staff partner. In this way he can experience the music via her body, for example when she rocks gently from side to side, or when the resonance of her voice is transmitted from her chest through his back.

We have begun to discuss the loss of Ignacio who has established a session that we are determined to continue. How can we create our own version of this special environment when we don't have the musicianship that he brings us? This will be an on-going process and the next stage, as he pulls out and hands over, is for him to try and coach us and build our confidence.

The musical skills are a crucial element to the joy and power of this work, but the most essential elements are the fundamental principles of intensive interaction, confidence in trusting our intuition to tune into our non-verbal youngsters. Equally important is the continuation of a supportive staff space where we can experiment and take risks together. Fears about 'getting it right', for example the fear of looking or sounding silly; being too dominant (or passive); intervening when it would be better to leave (and vice versa); making vocal sounds that we are embarrassed by or others might judge negatively are all important areas we need to talk about in order to establish trust and a non-judgemental space within which we can grow as a staff group as we build these sessions and make them our own.

Jill Goodwin

July 2014

Appendix B – Black & White Environment, Notes for Staff

Black & White Environments – Ideas for use

Safety First

Please note that the framework is not secured to the floor and although quite stable, it could potentially be pulled over by a pupil grabbing and pulling the fabric or the poles. Position pupils carefully within the space and do not leave them unattended.

My goal in creating these environments is to reduce the number of stimuli being presented to a pupil at any one time, and to provide a space for some close observation and one-to-one work. My hope is that individual pupils will be brought into the space and focus on a stimulus to one particular sensory channel at a time.

Recipe

Ingredients – the bare minimum (think 'less is more')

Method – 1 part action, 3 parts observation (unless your involvement is being positively invited by the pupil of course)

Cook – SLOW pace. Give loads of time for just one thing.

Approach – Be fully present and available, be playful, be prepared to do nothing but watch.

Challenge yourself to use just one or two items for a whole session (15 minutes?) and see how much mileage you can get from each object. Obviously this is easier if the pupil is responding, as you will have something to work with, but with pre-intentional learners or pupils who are unresponsive, try to tune into their mood, their breathing and your own intuition. Present a stimulus in the way that you might for an ACA, give lots of time, repeat the stimulus, and use your judgement about whether they are getting anything from it.

I have provided a variety of props and resources (and you may also like to bring things from your room). I've listed some potential activities below as examples, but the possibilities are endless and will be better if they come from you and follow the pupils' interests.

Please look at props and notes on the tables for ideas for use (and bring any of your own to use).

Unless you already know which area you want to use, why not start by bringing pupil into the room and see if they seem to look at one of the spaces more than another? Use this as your cue for where to take them. The hoist can be used within both spaces, just take care to lift the bar and controls over the framework carefully)

The Spaces

If using the UV RESOURCES

(Lower all blackout blinds and switch on UV light. Work underneath it)

Bead curtain – *please use these as visual resources only (sorry), not as tactile prop.*

Place pupil next to curtain, positioning them carefully in the light of your knowledge of their visual field. (Leave enough of a gap if they are likely to reach out and grab).

(i) Move curtain to one side and hold it there. Let it fall back. Repeat, giving time when the curtain is at rest before moving it again.

(ii) Use stick behind curtain to lift it outwards away from the black wall, bring over pupil's head and allow to fall off the moving stick

(iii) Hold curtain in one hand at the bottom and shake to form 'waves' up to the top

Look for awareness, interest, tracking.

Is there sustained interest when the curtain is moving or still?

Does the pupil respond to the movement?

Does s/he notice when the curtain has stopped.

The cane 'dish' chair

This can be used in either space. The black paint may come off the bottom, so if using in the white space, please place on the plastic square in the middle. (The cushion cover is washable)

Hoist pupil into the middle and use any cushions needed to support their posture. If they can move with enough vigour they may get some good feedback as the dish wobbles (but stay close to keep them safe).

The dish can also be moved around (slow spin & side to side).

Appendix C - New Project Proposal

Action Research Project Proposal for [name] School

Jill Goodwin

Introduction

This project will be an exploration of physical spaces and their ability to foster and support mutually rewarding interaction between pupils and staff. I will create and share a range of small and larger-scale environments as vehicles for the investigation of questions that have emerged from my recent experience in classrooms, and also from my reading of cognitive theory. These questions are relevant to the core practice of the school, so this action research study will be fully collaborative.

My particular role will be as an artist - imagining, creating, and providing for use, a variety of spaces. Some will be temporary fixtures, some will be portable and collapsible to aid use in multi-purpose spaces, and I will also be investigating the potential for a more permanent structure within school. I envisage the spaces being used for ad hoc occasions within the existing class timetable, as well as for sessions designated specifically for collaborative investigation of the research questions. I also want to discuss with school staff whether any of the current timetabled sessions could be candidates for experimentation with the surrounding space (for example, Rebound sessions).

Throughout the project I will follow my own artistic process, working intuitively with ideas about intimate 'nurturing' environments that foster feelings of safety and playfulness. The spaces will be utilised by pupils and staff, both with and without my input, and on-going observations and discussions about how the environments affect the quality of experience within will then feed back into the work. It is also envisaged that collaborations will take place with other arts practitioners in order to bring new perspectives into the study.

If my proposal is accepted, the project will begin in January 2016 and continue over approximately eighteen months. As part of the longer-term view of this study, and subject to school management approval, I also plan to investigate the feasibility of purchasing a yurt to be erected in the quad area of the school building.

Rationale

This study addresses the following key areas of my thinking;

1. The Application of Theory

Aspects of this study arise directly from my efforts to relate my reading of cognitive theories of infant development to some of my classroom experiences. For example, recent music sessions with Class 3 prompted questions about how group situations are experienced by the adults and pupils present. I am curious about what pupils at pre-intentional, or early stage intentional, levels of understanding gain from group settings and also how adults support them within the group. My own experience of supporting

pupils within the group music session was sometimes to feel a tension between focussing on my interaction with one pupil and maintaining the social conventions of being part of a group.

Psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen's studies of neurotypically developing infants describe two forms of intersubjectivity – primary and secondary. His research suggests that primary intersubjectivity is present from birth, and is seen when a young infant and a caregiver focus intently on each other and engage in intricate, playful social interactions using their voice, hands facial expressions and body movements. At around the age of nine months to a year this focus can be seen to extend beyond one-to-one interactions and into a more social form of awareness where infant and carer may jointly attend to their environment, and this is what Trevarthen calls secondary intersubjectivity. The complex impairments present in pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities inevitably interfere with the development of this awareness, and many of the pupils of Rosewood do not seem to show secondary intersubjectivity. My increased understanding of these theories has led me to question their implications for my own applied arts practice of delivering group sessions within large themed environments. If a pupil is still developing primary intersubjectivity, is it more valuable for me to focus on supporting the one-to-one *relationship* between staff and pupil rather than try to provide a whole group session?

I believe group experience to be a vital aspect of school life, particularly in terms of our sense of community and belonging, but does giving validity to Trevarthen's theories of infant development have implications for how we utilise group situations for the benefit of pupils? Would my experience, and that of my pupil partner in class 3 music sessions, have been different if I had freed myself from the social conventions of group behaviour? And what constitutes "groupness" as a shared experience? These are the kind of questions I would like to explore further within this project.

2. Promoting "being-ness"

We know that intensive interaction, a key approach to communicating and responding to pupils, is most mutually beneficial when staff feel free of external concerns and are able to simply "be" with pupils, and enjoy their company. I wrote about my experience of this for an article published in PMLD Link in 2012 in which I said,

> In those (sometimes rare) moments when I manage to be fully present with a child or young adult, if they choose to engage and share themselves with me in some way, I feel enormously privileged and re-invigorated. They give a gift.

I continue to feel passionately that this coming together "in the moment" is really important – for pupils, in terms of their social and emotional well being, but also for staff, in terms of our personal fulfilment and pleasure, particularly in the context of demanding repetitive care routines and busy classrooms. Training and practice in using intensive interaction is excellent at the school, but my own experience on the job has shown me that making the switch from 'doing' to 'being' mode can be challenging. My question then is, can the environment (or a particular way of using an environment) play a role in helping staff to switch from 'doing' to 'being' mode?

3. The 'Holding Form'.

During a group project at school with musician Ignacio Agrimbau I saw how the use of a shruti box drone could help staff to feel more relaxed in a situation of unknown outcomes where we were required to 'hold back' from activity and allow pupils to lead us. In addition, when I undertook "Lifemusic" Practitioner's training recently, I saw the effectiveness of musical holding forms to help people feel secure in a situation of improvised music making. Can these principles be translated to holding forms that are physical as opposed to auditory spaces?

Can the environment help to 'hold' a situation, fostering feelings of safety with freedom?

These three areas of interest form the basis of this enquiry. Through the creation of spaces and an experimental approach to their use I hope to examine aspects of developmental theory; find ways to support a shift from a 'doing' to 'being' state of mind; and explore the idea of physical manifestations of musical holding forms, in ways that will bring new insights - both to my own practice and understanding, and to the work of the school. This will be an arts-based enquiry for me as researcher, but I hope that the collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas will lead to outcomes relevant to educational practice at Rosewood as well as the enrichment of my own arts practice.

I envisage lively and valuable discussion of the topics involved in this project. Awareness of the learning environments within school is already good, and changes in lighting levels, auditory stimulus, responsive staff behaviour, auditory, olfactory and physical cues etc. are all regularly used to enhance engagement levels between staff and pupils. Research (for example into visual impairment and new knowledge about C.V.I. and the perception of colour) directly influences practice in school. I believe that my study can add to the high quality reflective practice that is already integral to the core approach at Rosewood. The school curriculum has been democratically developed in-house, is underpinned by the study of developmental theories, and is continually reviewed and updated when new evidence is shown to have implications for existing classroom practice. Through questioning, discussion and working creatively together, it is possible we may devise new spaces that positively affect practice, or perhaps we will recognise other factors that play a role in enhancing mutual engagement. I do not claim to be offering new knowledge within this project, but by exploring these areas together in new ways we may discover something of importance.

Practical Considerations

I am aware that this project sits within a reality of staff to pupil ratios, the administration of vital medical and physical care to pupils, and the logistical concerns typical of any busy organisation, such as time keeping for pre-arranged schedules and routines. I know the school to be flexible and willing to work in new ways, but full respect needs to be given to these realities. If this research project is to go ahead it requires considerable commitment on the part of the school. Time will need to be found, and motivation will be required, for the collaboration and discussions that will make the project worthwhile and of most value to everyone involved. For this to happen, school management and the teaching team will need to be convinced of the potential of this study to bring significant gains to the work of the school.

With regard to my focus on physical environments as vehicles for the investigation of the research questions, it must be recognised that responses to physical environments are individual and temporal and the interplay between the external space and a person's internal state will vary from occasion to occasion as well as from person to person. The factors affecting a person's response and behaviour are likely to be complex, and my particular focus on physical space needs to be seen within this wider picture. My research methodology will need to embrace this wide view of potential factors affecting the experience of a space, and equally I may want to extend my exploration to include other elements such as auditory, kinaesthetic, visual or even olfactory influences.

Other Practitioners

I'd like to use my links with other arts practitioners to bring differing perspectives to the study and I have already had interesting and relevant discussions with vocal performance artist Yvon Bonenfant (who is known to the school); Janet Sparkes, a Sherborne Movement specialist who has recently been involved in a baby bonding project with mothers and babies in Kenya; Ellie Griffiths a performer who has been a clown doctor and has also worked on several Oily Cart Theatre shows for PMLD audiences; and Dr Rod Paton, founder of Lifemusic method. Successful funding bids will enable me to bring other practitioners in to work with us on the project.

Yurt

One of the specific ideas I am keen to develop is the creation of a space, big enough to hold a whole class of pupils and staff and within which we can explore the experience of "groupness", what this means for pupils whose cognitive development is profoundly impaired, and also for the adult participants who support them. Suitable shared space around school is often timetabled (such as the sensory room) and/or multi-purpose (such as the hall) and there are currently no available empty spaces in the building. My proposal therefore is to seek permission from school governors for the erection of a yurt within the underused and unattractive outdoor area of the quad. A Yurt is a circular fabric covered tent, originally used by nomadic tribes in central Asia. Placed in this central position in the quad area of the school, and in stark contrast with the (necessarily) clinical corridors that surround it, this soft covered circular organic shape could symbolise the human heart of [school name] a special space where people come for communion[15].

Putting symbolism aside, there will of course be important practical factors to consider and overcome concerning location and accessibility (for example, its floor will need to support a mobile hoist and it will need to be of a temperature that keeps pupils safe), things that I will need to investigate thoroughly if the school's management team decide to back this proposal.

My vision for the yurt is that the space inside it should be given special significance within the school. I want it to be treated as a "sacred" space in the sense that it will be an

[15] Communion *n.* act of communing: spiritual intercourse: fellowship: possession: interchange of transactions (Chambers English Dictionary definition)

arena for exploring "being in the moment", and possibly entered only after a preparation period that supports the process of transition from 'doing' to 'being'. I see this aspect of the study as a development of initial experiments with small spaces, and the culmination of discussions around questions of "being-in-the-moment-ness". Although I know to be wary of early visualisations of end products, this aspect of the project (the purchase and erection of a yurt) requires significant funding and planning, hence its inclusion at this proposal stage.

In Conclusion

Considerable agreement is required for this project to be realised, and applications for external funding will need to be pursued, so this proposal is designed to open up early discussions between [name] school and myself about the next stage of my PhD research. Whilst the ideas set out here are at an early stage, they represent an important return for me to my previous fine art installation practice of creating environments that nurture feelings of safety and creativity, infused with my knowledge and experience in schools working with children with profound disabilities.

I hope [name] school find my proposal an interesting one and I look forward to discussing it further.

Jill Goodwin

December 2015

Appendix D – Parental Consent Letter

25th January 2017.

Dear Families,

I am writing to inform you about a research project that is taking place in school, and to seek permission for your child to participate in the study.

Jill Goodwin used to be a teacher at [name] School and she is now undertaking a PhD with the University of Winchester. She is interested in how the arts can help foster engagement and connection between pupils and staff. Jill is using her skills as an installation artist to make spaces for us to spend time in.

The University of Winchester's Ethics committee has approved her project and she will be working in collaboration with classroom staff.

Jill seeks your permission to use observational notes and reflections from these sessions. These notes may be used for published material in the future, but no names or identifying information about individual pupils will be included. Any video recordings and photographs taken during the sessions will remain school property and for use in school only (under your existing consent arrangement). If Jill requests use of a particular recording for her research report we will seek further permission from families and only allow its use if we gain your permission.

If you want to know more about Jill's research you can contact her at j.goodwin.13@winchester.ac.uk Please be aware that you can withdraw your consent at any time, and that if you have any complaints about Jill's work you should get in touch with the school.

Please complete and return the consent request below.

- -

Pupil's Name: ________________________________

I consent to my child being part of Jill Goodwin's research study with the University of Winchester (written reports only with no identifying information).

YES ☐ NO ☐

Signed:____________________________ Date: ________________

Appendix E - Staff Consent Letter

Jill Goodwin,

Research Student,

University of Winchester

j.goodwin.13@unimail.winchester.ac.uk

22nd January 2017

Dear Colleagues,

Many of you already know that I am currently a research student with the University of Winchester. After a period of mainly literature-based study, I am now hoping to gather data from direct observation in school and informal interviews with colleagues. This letter is to explain what I will be doing and to request consent for your participation in my study.

What will I be doing and why?

You may have seen my 'golden tent' in the hall, and I hope to be creating other installations over the next few months. I will be inviting groups to spend time in these spaces, where I may lead or observe a session and ask for verbal or written feedback about your experiences when appropriate. As a staff member, you will be carrying out your normal job role, but I may invite you to focus or reflect upon your experience whilst you do this. I may also request informal interviews with individual staff who are willing in order to get a more in-depth understanding of different viewpoints.

I am interested in the 'enrichment' aspect of the curriculum at [school name] and I am using my practice as an installation artist to explore some ideas about how we (as 'language beings') connect with pupils ('sensory beings'). My particular focus is on the role of aesthetic experience (i.e. where senses are operating at their peak and we are present in the current moment) within this encounter. My study is quite open-ended at this stage, and my research methods are arts rather than science-based, so I expect to uncover more questions than definitive answers.

If you prefer not to participate, you may still be expected to take part in sessions but I will not include any specific observational data involving you in my research.

What happens to the notes I make from my observations and the feedback you give me?

I will be using observational notes and feedback to build a rich picture that helps me to ask questions of my work and myself, and to understand the relationship between my arts practice and this specialist school context. I may be analysing common themes in what people tell me, or writing a vignette of something I have observed. No names or identifying information about individuals will be included, and I will keep my notes securely in accordance with data protection guidelines (Data Protection Act 1998). If I want to make a direct quote from a participant in the study I will seek additional consent first before printing or sharing it with others beyond school. If photographs or video footage involving staff and/or pupils are taken during one of my sessions they will remain the property of the school and I will seek specific permissions should I wish to use any such visual material in my research.

If you consent to participate in my research you can withdraw this consent at any time and if you have any questions or complaints that cannot be addressed to me directly, you can contact my research supervisor Dr. Olu Taiwo at the University of Winchester by email; Olu.Taiwo@winchester.ac.uk Please complete the consent request form below and place in the envelope I have left in your classroom. Many thanks,

Jill Goodwin

- -

Name: ______________________________ Class: ____________________

I consent to being part of Jill Goodwin's research study within [name of school].

YES ☐ NO ☐

SIGNED: ______________________________

DATE: ______________________________

Appendix F – Space for Peace Flier (Redacted)

Golden Tent is designed as an immersive experience of colour, light and form and has been produced as part of a research project at [redacted]

Installation art highlights sensorial experience - it is the **experience** of being in the space that matters, rather than any conceptual understanding of the work. As a researcher I have been considering this feature of installation art in relation to pupils at [redacted], most of whom, due to profound cognitive impairments, access the world through their senses rather than through conceptual understanding. If we privilege the sensorial, differences in cognitive abilities become unimportant and so the aesthetic installation can be viewed as an equalising and inclusive space in which a neuro-diverse audience can potentially share moments of mutual experience.

It is an honour to to be part of 'Space for Peace 2017' and to bring this installation into Winchester Cathedral. The event, and this new context, prompts me to consider inclusivity and diversity from a different perspective, and to contemplate spiritual dimensions to my work.

Jill Goodwin
j.goodwin.13@unimail.winchester.ac.uk

This work has been made possible with the support of [redacted] and the University of Winchester

[redacted]

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Appendix G – Collated feedback from 'Space for Peace' questionnaire

1. Did the shape, form and colour of the tent prompt any associations for you?

• It was womb like and inviting.

• I thought it would be a space of quiet and comfort, like being in a tent in the rain

• It reminded me of being in an orthodox church with all the gold.

• It made me want to look inside. Being in the cathedral somehow made me look for religious associations – didn't really find any as such but I do associate a golden orb type shape with something religious and 'Jason' comes to mind. I've deliberately not looked it up – oh yes now I remember wasn't it a golden fleece?!

• The colouring of the space was initially most striking for me. The warmth of the shiny golden colour made me feel comfort. It reminded me of 'summer holidays'.

• From outside of the tent in the cathedral from a distance - was positioned well and framed by pillars and windows within the cathedral itself. The curvatures of it's shape and form was incongruous with the straight lines of the cathedral itself - but the golden colour against the background of greys - made a feature of it.

2. Before you entered, did you have expectations/pre-conceptions of what it would be like inside?

• No, not really

• Not especially

• I thought it would be a space of quiet and comfort, like being in a tent in the rain

• I think my pre-conceptions were directed and/influenced by June's introduction about the Golden Space – she made me want to experience it even more – she added another element by linking it to listening to the singing and music coming from all over the catherdral. Previously it was Jill's space (that I was obviously excited about exploring) but she added more meaning and purpose to it being there as part of the space theme. I can't quite now remember what she said but it does raise interesting questions doesn't' it – about expectation, guided exploration / experience etc etc?

• I did have expectations (which may of been the reason I joined you for the 'safe space evening') seeing the tent at school being erected and taken down. That feeling of sunshine, I think it's mainly again the colour and the soft edging.

• Whilst the tent 'fills' a school hall - it took a 'mortal' size in the vast space of the cathedral - yet without losing it's fascination of difference in it's shape and colour.

3. If you went inside, can you tell me anything about your experience of being in there (including how long you spent inside, and how you would describe what you did while you were in there)

• It stimulated peace and serenity. It provided a cocoon in which to meditate in the midst of the music all around.

• The texture and sensation I felt of the floor inside was a pleasant surprise and something that I wasn't expecting. It felt comfortable and unusual all at the same time. The gold really stood out to me. I stood, I took in, I looked and I observed.

• Being inside was more peaceful and comforting than I expected. It may have been because of my association with church. It felt like a sacred place, a special place. I was able to sit, close my eyes and lose myself. It was very relaxing and spiritual. I only left because it was time for the re gathering. I could have stayed much longer.

• Think I was in there for about 15 minutes? Kind of lost track of time. Definitely made me want to move and be down on the floor – loved the sensation of being able to stretch my arms out on the floor and move them around. I would have moved more but I was a little constrained by my long sheepskin coat and a certain amount of inhibition! I kept wanting to close my eyes to concentrate on the music whilst at the same time wanted to keep them open to visually experience being inside. Makes me think of sensory overload – I ended up doing both separately as when I had my eyes open I was enjoying the space but also interested in other people and how they were exploring the space. Closing my eyes enabled me to be able to focus on sounds – and easier to move when you can't see everyone else! Interestingly lying down outside of the tent and closing my eyes wouldn't have been the same I don't think – so that kind of suggests that even with my eyes closed being in the space was significant! However of course I was able to hold a memory and cognitive understanding of the space in my head whilst I had my eyes closed so I'm not sure my observations would have any similarity or significance for people with a VI.

• During the evening being inside was actually much colder than I wanted it to be. Obviously being where it was made it colder (since being in the space during school with the sun shinning through, I much preferred this experience). I was delighted to see some comfort with the soft cushions inside. In saying that I didn't feel the need to use the cushions. I just felt at ease that other people were happy to use them and be comfortable. I spent around 20 solid minutes inside and I literally laid on the shiny floor.

• From the outside the golden hue within was inviting, yet at first, (i assume through natural human conditioning for most?) few ventured in, preferring to peek inside in the first instance of the event. However as the event continues, those who ventured inside, i assume gave 'permission' for others to follow on into the tent.

4. Can you identify and describe how being inside the tent differed from being outside the tent?

• It felt warm and light and safe

• It felt safe/wombal/more private

• Being in the tent took me away from the outside. I felt like I was in a different place so unlike outside. There were no distractions and it felt safe, away from other people's scrutiny.

• See above! And – the colour was very significant – special, as was the silky shiny appearance of it. It felt safe with the roof overhead – and safe as it was a special

designated area. Not sure I would have lain on the floor outside the tent unless instructed to or had prior knowledge that it was allowed or even expected.

• Nicer to stand outside than stand inside – I felt too big standing up inside the tent

• Once inside I could hear what I felt was the busyness outside; voices, singing, shuffling. It felt like it was all completely away from me but yet so close. Around 15 other average bodies were silent with me inside but I was in hope that they were feeling a mutual nothingness and contentment like I was. Once being outside the cathedral felt a huge cold area. I enjoyed the small space in the golden tent.

• In the end there were those who felt comfortable enough to lay out within the tent and relax, seemingly contemplating, or quietly resting within the colours of the tent that allowed the outer songs and sound to permeate easily through the thin, yet fully opaque golden covering.

5. Do you have any comments about the Golden Tent in relation to the cathedral setting?

• It was an extremely contrasting relationship and I enjoyed that observation

• It worked during Space for Peace, definitely

• Not sure it made any difference. Although perhaps because it was in a church - I felt like it was sacred

• Fitted in well – see above remarks about religious associations. Looked so small in that huge space but felt bigger inside – tardis effect!

• The golden space seemed so small in comparison to the cathedral. Once inside I felt safe and more relaxed.

6. Do you have any comments about the Golden Tent in relation to the Space for Peace event?

• A place to be reflective, where it was situated you couldn't really hear other choirs around but I don't think that mattered. It would have been interesting to experience voices singing directly outside the tent all around you while you sat inside

• No , although the peace it gave me was positive being at a peace event.

• Ditto above (i.e. It worked during Space for Peace, definitely)

• I felt it added to the idea that we can and did all share the same space connecting to the idea that we are all one people in one world – our world

• The golden space gave a completely different experience compared to any of the others areas in the cathedral. When inside it felt like it was more about me. For me to experience what I experienced not what I was expected to watch or listen to but what my own mind and body was feeling.

• Both able bodied and disabled people, and both adults (though mainly adults as far as I saw) and children experienced the space, with a few adults interested enough to ask what the tent was used for.

7. Any other thoughts or responses you could share with me?

• The size and shape made me think of where else could this sit – a green field, an industrial estate it made people around me ask questions out loud and I enjoyed hearing peoples thoughts on what it represented. I really loved it. So simple yet so effective. Thankyou.

• Well – it opens up all sorts of other possibilities for its use don't you think?! I was distracted by being able to see how it was made once up close inside – the poles and Velcro straps. From afar or outside it appeared to shimmer and be a very special shape, something almost to be revered, that was very lovely to look at and feast my eyes on – something about it being 'gold' maybe?. Up close inside, the shape was less significant but the colour was very important still – especially that it was continued on the floor! It was great to be able to be closer to the roof when you were at either end of it.

• It held its own within the cathedral space. Having hanging down curtains that you could pull to onside to go in seemed to add to the feeling of luxury, even though it was quite a bare space inside.

• Great to have the simple furnishings – they gave permission and/or suggested/prompted to experience from different places within it and whilst in different positions – sitting, lying (on one's front or back – I did both), lounging, standing all many variations on each position. Though I didn't notice many people change their place or position particularly. Think I felt like I could almost do anything having been familiar with the space during it's creation and also having used your other spaces and installations at Rosewood – also maybe that I was 'in the know' or part of your support group or something so could be more relaxed and less inhibited than I might otherwise have been. Also a different experience when just doing it for me – rather than in teaching role. Though guess maybe I should have been doing more connecting with the holocaust theme. Which also makes me think of yellow and Jews – is there a connection?!

• I don't often have the opportunity to have a quiet head space as life and day to day is continually busy. Just the 20 minute down time was super.

Two other (unsolicited) responses

• How wonderful to see your golden space in Winchester Cathedral it shone like a beacon. I hope your work continues to engage and inspire people. You have created something very special. It was lovely to come to the Cathedral and partake in a unique experience....Thank you

• I had a profound experience inside the tent.

Appendix H – Invitation to class groups for unfacilitated use of *Golden Tent*

Golden Tent is now available for anyone (individual pupils, small groups, whole class, mixed class groups) to use on

Mondays 11am – 3pm

Explore and utilise the space in any way you feel is appropriate – I am curious to see how you make use of the Golden Tent with your pupils, so I won't be directing or intervening in any way. Visits can be momentary or sustained!

The booking sheet below can be used to secure a slot, but spontaneous visits can also be made whenever the space is free.

Golden Tent forms part of my research project, and I therefore request permission to use my observations and any feedback you give me as data for my study. If you would like to make use of the space at any time over the next six weeks, please can you distribute the relevant consent forms, and deposit any completed reply slips in the envelope in your classroom for me to collect.

Many thanks,

Appendix J – Collated feedback from staff.

Facilitated sessions:

1. Group 1 written feedback from sessions

2. Group 1 transcript of conversation after final session

3. Group 2 written feedback from session

4. Group 2 transcript of conversation after final session

Unfacilitated sessions:

5. Transcript of conversation with Gail

6. Transcript of conversations with Frank

1. Group 1 Written Feedback from Facilitated Sessions

Session 1 - Monday 30 January

(The feedback sheet requested– 'Notes on your experience of being inside the tent (including behaviour and responses of pupil)'

• *Overall experience was very calm for both me and [name]. As soon as we entered the tent [name]'s eyes widened and he was looking around. He appeared to be taking in the colour yellow, as was I.*

Our breathing was both relaxed and [name] only coughed once or twice which was really good.

[Name] was clearly in a relaxed zone as he jumped when he heard another student cough, and background kitchen noise. – that was the only negative (kitchen) as distracting. When the music was played outside the tent [name]'s eyes widened and he also moved his mouth.

I feel we both really enjoyed the experience and it was nice to have a few minutes with no other thoughts and a clear mind. It felt like the perfect length of time, any longer and I feel [name] might have been sleepy. Really good experience which we would do again.

It took [name] a little bit of time to want to interact outside of the tent, but that is normal for [name].

*When we entered the tent she was very interested and looked at the yellow all around her. During the quiet, calm time she seemed very aware of my presence, She moved her right hand to be on top of my hand when I was holding her left hand which she never does. [Name] was very calm but became a lot more alert when the sounds began. She seemed to be trying to follow them. I felt that I was very aware of tiny movements that * made. I found that the calming, blocked out space helped me to focus on tiny details and responses.*

PS [Name] kept looking at me when she could not locate the sounds as if to communicate.

As soon as [name] entered the tent on the acheeva his eyes widened, looking up at the ceiling, appeared to enjoy the turning round and round. [Name] reacted by smiling.

[Name] was looking around and listening when we sat quietly. When I held [name]'s hand his breathing and mouth movements increased and some vocalisations.

When Jill was making sounds with music outside the tent, [name] was trying to follow the sounds, his eyes were opened wide and he was smiling. Jill's sounds and the food mixer (from kitchen) made [name] smile and laugh and he pushed his left arm forward, requesting more.

[Name] vocalised and smiled with laughter and was looking around for the sounds outside the tent. He responded by laughing when my fingers were gently moving around his body, vocalising as well.

Very relaxing and calming for both me and [name]. Noticed that at some points [name] was very relaxed, almost asleep but then would look up at tent and look to the left and right of it with very big smile on his face.

As soon as [name] heard the noises (music) outside of the tent he lifted his head and looked to the direction it was coming from. Very engaged and trying to track the sound. Also vocalised when hearing some of the sounds.

[name] seemed to really enjoy this experience.

Session 2 - Monday 6th Feb – second session. Very disrupted session and no written feedback obtained. See my own reflections

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Session 3 - Monday 13th Feb

(New feedback record sheets)

1. Observation of your partner's behaviour and responses during the session;

2. What was your own experience of being inside the tent?

3. Any comments or suggestions on how to develop the sessions? What should we do more/less of? What felt valuable/worthwhile about today's session?

1. *[Name] loved the movement around the hall and inside the golden tent, looking all about. We stopped near the edge and [name] kept brushing his head against the material listening to the sound and enjoying it. Lots of looking and keeping eye contact with the material. Aware of the sounds outside the tent, lots of eye flickering before falling asleep.*

2. *Very relaxed, enjoyed the pace and sounds outside. Loved it.*

3. *Because [name] was so relaxed, he fell asleep. Maybe [name] needs a bit of upbeat and louder sounds to keep him focussed.*

---

1. *[Name] was smiling when moving around the hall in different directions and also when going over the bubble wrap. Inside the golden tent [name] particularly enjoyed the chimes, ocean drum and hearing his name from outside the tent. Increased mouth movements, slight head movement and smiling*.

2. *A calm and peaceful experience – it was interesting to observe [name] in this session, seeing his likes and responses*.

3. (left blank)

---

1. *[Name] was very observant during the session. [Name] was positioned on the acheeva bed and then lowered so he could see the tent surroundings. [Name] vocalised with me during the quiet periods and also there was increased tongue activity. [Name] enjoyed the ocean drum sounds from outside the tent and vocalised during that. He also enjoyed when his and his fellow students' names were called outside the tent. Overall I think [name] really enjoyed himself*.

2. *Very relaxing. A good chance for a varied session of intensive interaction with your partners.*

3. *Feels very worthwhile to give the learners an opportunity to interact in a different session.*

---

1. *Breathing changed when entering the tent – intense sensory smelly?*

Increased breathing and depth. A sleepy morning though.

2. *Totally relaxing Own space. Bright colour. Especially with the sun shining through too.*

3. *Name calling was nice. Maybe more voices to increase intensity. Be a great intensive interaction space.*

****

Session 4 - Monday 27th February

1. *[Name] during the first part of the session seemed to be alert and he seemed to be listening. When he had to go over the bubble wrap he looked very interested (unsure if he liked it or not). When [name] went into the tent he calmed straight away and fell asleep.*

2. *I find it a calming space which enables you to block out other stimuli and fully focus.*

3. *The water aspect seemed to be very effective – [name] seemed to be fully engaged.*

(In conversation *"…never seen him move his foot like that. He really raised it both times you started with the water. Really highly engaged."* And later Irene commented on seeing [name] come down the corridor after the session that [*name] looked really alert like he'd had a really good session.)*

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1. [*Name] enjoyed being spun around with the drumming and then stopping (increased smiling and mouth movements).*

No change in reactions when his name was sung from outside the tent in different tones/voices.

Good reactions (smiling) to being pushed over bubble wrap and to water lightly splashing on his face (mouth moving, smiling and left leg raised twice.)

2. *Very calm and peaceful atmosphere. I was aware of [name]'s breathing and that he was focussing and engaged on what was going on around him – not always reacting to these changes.*

Session 5 Monday 6th March 2017

1. *[Name] seemed very interested in the drumming, he was very aware when it stopped. The fast section where we moved around the room resulted in moments of clear anticipation and a few smiles. During the part where we were in the tent listening to the sounds he was very vocal and interested. The water section was interesting as he seemed very aware of it but it was unclear if he enjoyed it.*

2. *I enjoyed the bubble wrap section as it gave a clear opportunity to see anticipation from the learners, Inside the tent learning and responding to the learners is more intense and focussed*.

3. No comments

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1. *[Name] had some quite clear responses to a few of the activities. Appeared to anticipate the popping sound of bubble wrap, looked down towards it when told "ready, steady…"*

Clear reaction to lemon smell by mouth movements

Looked at the gold sparkly bag when I held it up close to her face and followed it down to her lap. [Name] began to touch the bag and then pulled her hand away (because it was cold?) then brought hands back down to the bag again, moving her arms and legs.

Small reactions to water on face and hands but unsure if [name] enjoyed this.

2. *Very calm and relaxing.*

Enjoyed watching the reactions of all of the students to each activity presented.

Enjoyed being one to one with [name] and being able to concentrate solely on her.

3. *Really enjoyed every aspect of the session and believe the students did too.*

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1. *In tent [name]'s breathing became deeper when I copied his breathing pattern. [Name] responded by slight increase in mouth movements when tent door flapping created a breeze onto him*.

[Name] appeared to enjoy water splashing onto him – eyes widened and tongue and mouth movements

2. *Very calm atmosphere – children given the opportunity for their own reactions to different stimuli and sounds. Interesting for me to observe the children*

3. *No comments added*

My own comments;

1. [Name] eyes really active – looking around during the movement section and onto the 'popping pathway'.

[Name] - had a few seizures but active eyes and some head and hand movements

2. Not fully taking it in today. Still – when I stop and notice, the golden tent feels a special space. It has atmosphere

3. Perhaps stay separate and finish together. Prefer the listening section and then coming together afterwards.

Session 6 Monday 13th March

No written comments for this session, brief recorded conversation instead. See full transcript below.

2. Group 1. - Transcript of conversation after final session

Audio recording made 13th March 2017 (Pseudonyms used)

Jill: I'm interested to know anything about the sessions as a whole (we've had six) what you feel they were about? What the students got out of them?, what you got out of them? What the value is…or not…

Bryony: *I think it made the children really focussed, and I think it made us a little bit more aware of any little movement, every single…*

Several voices: *yeah*

Bryony: *I think they got a lot out of it*

Susan: *I think it's nice as well for them to have that complete one-to-one time with you, the interaction, and being able to watch exactly everything they're doing, their reactions to what was being presented.*

Jill: So what is it about what's here and what we've done that's provided that for you?

Tina: *It's a very calm atmosphere*

Michelle: *Definitely calm – I've only taken part twice with ** (a pupil who has lots of involuntary movements) he was very…lots of movement when he came in, then two minutes later he was calm. And I noticed that his movement increased with the sounds around the tent, but he seemed to like that calmness, stillness*

Bryony: *I think being in a space with no concept of time – it sounds silly – but it almost you don't think about what's gotta be done next, you're completely in the moment,*

Several voices: *yeah.*

Bryony: *It's completely about what's happening then, you're not thinking about what else has to happen next, you can't see what needs to be done. It's just that..*

Michelle: *and you're with the child, the student, you're with them …*

Bryony: *yeah, 100%, rather than your head being in four different places..*

Michelle: *you're not with I've got to do this, I've got to do that…..*

Jill: so how is that achieved?.... just by coming in here?

Michelle: *I think its, I suppose, the closeness of the….the shape of the… …*

Tina: *and also the colour as well…*

Michelle: *oh, definitely the colour.*

Bryony: *I think the colour has an amazing impact*

Michelle: *But as [Bryony] was saying, when you come in here, and shut that (points to the door covering), where's the world?*

Bryony: *exactly, I think that's what it is, you've shut yourself away from the norm, you can't see what you've gotta do for a start…. that helps….you haven't got a clock in your face which helps…*

Michelle: *and you're completely in the moment, here*

Bryony: *and you allow yourself that time to not think about anything else…*

Michelle: *that's true, and if we're like that then that's going to …*

Tina: *impact..*

Michelle: *..impact on our friends here because we're not…as you said, we're totally with them aren't we?*

Susan: *I feel sometimes like I even forget that we're in school if that makes sense when we're in here, it just seems like …completely different..*

Michelle: *we just wanna stay here all day* (General laughter) *can we just have the session until half past two?* (general laughter)

Tina: *that'll be good*

Jill: that's really rewarding for me because the whole aim of this was about the contrast between your busy-ness in the classroom and your presence and wanting to create a space in which it was encouraged that you just be and be present

Bryony: *you've definitely achieved that*

Susan: *yeah*

Michelle: *and I think, I mean these young people get asked a lot of during the day, to do this, you've got to do this, you've got stand, you've got to go and…and sometimes I think they just wanna be left alone…*

(Several voices in agreement)

Jill: you've got permission..?

Michelle: *you've got permission just to be on your own in here…*

Susan: *Mmm definitely*

Bryony: *it's a little moment of what do you want to do?…what do you…?*

Susan: *and to express themselves as well*

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1. Group 2 Written Feedback from facilitated sessions

Session 1 - Tuesday 31st January

Only 2 feedback sheets completed (one pupil became upset during session and was taken back to classroom with two staff members).

(My written prompt on feedback sheet – Notes on your experience of being inside (including behaviour and responses of pupil)

Increased body movement (head, legs, hands) and quiet vocalisations (x3) when voice was used on outside of tent. Breathing more prominent for a while.

*Other pupil * stilling but eyes moving left and right. Moving eyes to tent wall when sounds outside. Did not feel the need to vocalise or physically 'engage' but became watchful*.

Yellow space enclosed – able to 'blot out' busy/noisy environments so when voice was used outside ➔ very aware of it and could focus on it.

Enclosed but not oppressive in any way.

[Name] became vocal at end but when voice heard on outside again – stilled and listened. Tapping tent wall and smiling.

Contrasted with activity before going into the tent, Made inside feel more 'still'.

Peaceful inside and calm.

Loved the movements before tent, lots of smiling and laughing. Fast and spinning. Also enjoyed the fan – smiling, responding, looking towards.

Tent – very responsive, turning head as the outside sounds came near. Really concentrating, smiling after/durng sound, reaching to tent when sound came closer, again smiing, lifting head. Responded to and seemed to like high sounds. When first came in tent reached to side of tent to make contact.

Very calm (has involuntary movements) but did look at his hand and focussed and brought to face and mouth at one point.

Seemed very aware and enjoyed all experience. No vocals made, just smiles and giggles.

Session 2 - Tuesday 7th February

New format to feedback sheets;

1. Observation of your partner's behaviour and responses during the session;

2. What was your own experience of being inside the tent?

3. Any comments or suggestions on how to develop the sessions? What should we do more/less of? What felt valuable/worthwhile about today's session?

1. *Great responses to noises on outside of tent – smiles, giggles and reaching out left hand to touch side of tent.*

2. *Very relaxing and calm space to be one to one with your pupil.*

3. *[Name] loved all of the instruments and did giggle to the adult sounds so enjoyed everything*

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1. *Very alert, big wide eyes, lots of head movements and left arm movements.*

Enjoyed the big fan – big big eyes, focus on the fan. Responsive to the sounds, particularly the human sounds (more movements, more expression, small vocalisations) also enjoyed the cymbal. Did not mind the loud sounds.

2. *Very relaxed but responsive to stimuli. And maybe more responsive to child I was working with. Awareness of what was going on around the tent.*

3. *More voice sounds around the tent, different pitch.*

Lovely time just being with partner responding. [Name] seemed very aware.

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1. *Clear requesting with hand on tray repeatedly. Stilled at times and looked in direction of sound, even furthest part of tent. Lots of vocalising, smiling, bringing hands to face excitedly.*

[Name] smiling when sounds neared her, turning to sound, smiling, slapping hands on tray, vocalising. Some 'protest' at intervals but quelled when sound neared – attracted by sound rather than a request however.

2. *Really interesting to see all responses and how they differed or were similar, Watchful of how the sounds changed behaviours/responses. Relaxed and happy – gave you time to watch the children*.

3. *The development of naming the pupils and having the sound 'come to them' was positive as they seemed to be encouraged to….request. vocalise…control(?)…smile/respond*.

Session 3 - Tuesday 14th February

1. [*Name] not sure about the sound of bubble wrap on floor (expression face/brow) but continued and we kept going, just bit unsure with loud pops, no crying just her facial expression. Enjoyed movement outside the tent, and drum*.

[Name] very aware in tent of all of the sounds, even the ones that were not by (next to) her. Very alert and responsive, moving ears towards sounds,anticipation. Not much vocalisation but body movements to build up of anticipation. Enjoyed monkey sounds.

2. *Very calm but alert*

3. *Children vocalising and anticipating the sounds outside the tent was good.*

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1. *Increase in vocalisations; smiling; turning to sounds through tent. Blowing kisses (her 'content' sound). Showing much more tolerance – some protest in first session (in class chair)*

[Name] 'Big eyes' on entering and when gong sounds nearby. Mouth movement and moving arms and left hand (on acheeva). Big eyes during the moving and popping.

2. *Content and relaxed. Watchful – contemplative. Vocal sounds at end soothing and lovely 'bringing together of group'*.

3. (No comment added here)

1. *[Name] had the most amazing session. He was smiling and vocalising outside the tent especially on the bubble wrap. Inside the tent [name] started by touching and feeling the*

sides of the tent and then spent the whole time smiling, vocalising and laughing when being presented with sounds from the outside.

[Name] anticipated Jill coming over to him by watching her shadow then had lots of vocals and giggles.

When [name] arrived (in hall) he loved touching the drum as it was being played. Stayed for a bout one minute not moving his hand away.

2. *I loved it. The first session I have spent the whole time in. It was amazing to see [name], I have never seen him react so positively for such a long time. Thank you.*

3. No comments here

(verbally reported to me *"That was amazing! I have never seen [name] react like this!".)*

Session 4 – Tuesday 28th February

1. *[Name] was engaged and alert throughout the activity, She was very excited during the "run around the space" part, moving back and forth in her chair, flapping her arms , vocalising loudly and smiling broadly. She was ready and already anticipating the activity on the way down to the hall when she heard the drumming and was already waving her arms and moving in her class chair excitedly.*

The ;popping path' proved very exciting for [name], she already knew something was going to happen because she smiled when she heard "ready, steady…". As the first child progressed down the path popping, [name] became very animated, vocalising, smiling and waving her arms, When it was [name]'s turn she was very excited, and this built up as she heard "ready, steady…" and smiled as she went down, vocalising and shouting, flapping her arms as she reached the end. The sound section again caused great animation, and much arm flapping as she heard her name. Each new sound caused her to stop still and listen.

*Coming together as a group was very calming, ** was only flapping her arms but vocalising frequently. Vocalising in turn with the other children and making a very loud sound as the vocalisations increased*.

2. *Very calming, very warm, a happy feeling, like being in sunshine, the same feeling of a sunshiney day. Finishing as a group was also good, being drawn together, shared experience*.

3. *Being together as a group, communicating as a group, waiting, listening and taking turns.*

(Unsolicited the following Monday *"That was amazing last week Jill. Wonderful. I loved it!")*

4. Group 2 -Transcript of conversation after final session.

(First minute fairly silent)

Jill: There is something about the stillness of this space that helps you…or helps me…. notice the subtlest things…I don't know if anyone else experiences that…? And I don't know these children well enough….

1:22

Lily: *Its really relaxing, a space for being watchful as well as responding to*

Debra: *I put that down, and I put the quiet of being here, then maybe it amplifies the sounds and that, but because there's quiet between each one, I think it produces that calm atmosphere that you can then go…... I think our children, like [name] especially, she likes it quiet, she doesn't vocalise so much when it's busy and loud. So you can see that*

Jill: For me its hard to tell if it's the environment that brings that out or whether it's our ability to notice it that changes because we're in a different environment..

Debra: *I think it's the environment I would say for [name], because I spend a lot of time with [name] and the bathroom's another place where she really excels because its just… it's quiet…and in the classroom when it's only me and [name] it's often different, she's completely different…* (recording unclear here)….*there's lots of noise making and lots of awareness*

Jill: So one of the things I'm thinking about is what is the value of somewhere like this, in school, beyond just the session. What's the value of a space like this?.... and I don't know what your answer would be to that….?

Debra: *it feels calming. The acoustics are different.*

Andrea: *A classroom environment is different, it is a lot more calmer than being in a classroom environment*

Debra: *It's intense as well, isn't it?, you know it's a being….. being in that one place…. you know there's no external anything and that helps you…*

Jill: it intensifies whatever's happening….?

Andrea: *and for the children and for whatever we are offering*

Trish: *The children spend a lot of the day with us recording their responses to I.E.P.s and in here they can just "be" which I think is really nice, they can just be..*

Jill: *And we're with them in that.*

Trish: *And that's lovely, and we don't have to fill a form in…*

All: general laughter

Jill: So you feel you've been given some permission to just be…

Several voices: *Mmm, yeah*

Lily: *For example, I compare it with the multi-sensory room. You could say, well we do light work in the classroom, it's true, BUT, it's different if you do it in the magic room and it's different if you do it in the multi-sensory room. So you could say, we can listen to sounds, instrumental sounds in the classroom, but it's different when we do it here.*

Jill: Yeah. Can you identify how…?

Lily: *Well I think everybody* (recording is undecipherable here*)… that space for being watchful and observing… in a way that classrooms are so busy, if you wanted to do something similar chances are you would get people nterrupting or….*

Debra: *The bigger the space…this is a smaller space and I think that's why it intensifies everything. It's quieter than quiet. The music is better than in class, because it seems clearer and more intense.*

Andrea: *It would be nice to have sessions where everyone gets out on the floor..*

(some discussion follows about getting pupils out of chairs in the space and the issue of timing).

Andrea: *I'd like to see how the child moves in this space, whether they like it or….everything is heightened it seems like everything..*

Debra: *You'd have to do it all on the floor wouldn't you, because I think part of it is coming from the busy into the calm and I really enjoy that, I enjoy the contrast, I think maybe that's the difference it's like the very quiet and then the loud noises, it's lots of contrast…the busy out there and then in here is the calm*

Andrea: *It's also having something above us, and that we're all looking at yellow. We're all looking at the same basically aren't we? You know, in a classroom everyone's looking at different*

Lily: *That's a good point actually, we're surrounded by it*

Andrea: *We've all got the same, we're all surrounded by this yellow, you know or whatever colour you choose, but in a classroom everyone's looking at something different, one wall's different to another wall. It all seems very heightened, everything in here's heightened…*

Trish: *It's just the same feeling you have when you're under a tree. I love trees. Because there's that, it's a very quiet space under a tree it's lovely. It's a safe space here too, it feels really safe here.*

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5. Transcript of conversation with 'Gail' 25.4.2017

Jill: How did you perceive the space in your head and how you might use it, what purpose did it have for your group?

Gail: *I remember going to the cathedral and how it made me feel inside – the contrast of being outside and inside. I loved that feeling of – it was peaceful, and it felt like something inside me came outside. So I wanted to see how our guys felt, that's why I got them to pause at the door, so you've got the hall, which isn't very nice, and then you've got this wonderful space inside.*

Edward and Emily particularly, they seemed to pause themselves – I don't know if I'm reading to much into it because that's how I feel myself. It was that coming in and wow! - the wonder of this space! So I wanted to see how they reacted to this wonderful space, what they did. Because, I think, with our guys, if you watch, and its those little parts of who they are, come out., and you see them…you see the wonder in them. Emily became really peaceful, because she's such an active young lady. Just that sudden peace within her. And Felix, and the way he was looking around. But it had a sense like, Felix, his high tone came down, and that was lovely to see. Because he was really aware of the changes and what he could see. Edward was more like 'where am I, what's going on?' because there was the floor, he was laying on the floor looking at his own reflection….so the reason I thought I wanted…the way it went was the way I hoped it would because it was so individual. It meant different things to different students.

Jill: Yeah

Gail: *Because it means something different to everybody as well. And letting them go in and interpret it their way was really important to me, so to see each of them react so differently and behave so differently was ..that's what I wanted…*

Jill: and what I was impressed by was you didn't feel the need to do anything, and that's what impressed me, and I just think that's important…we've got so much to learn from that approach.

Gail: *But it took….I think that's what it did as well, outside I thought this is probably what I wanted from it, if nothing happened, then nothing happened. I stopped (support staff) from trying to engage a student because I wanted her to let them enjoy it in their own way. And I wanted to see them completely their own way.*

Jill: That's really interesting because that's what a lot of my feedback has been about – it's a watchful space for staff. So there's something about the space that enabled staff….

Gail: *yeah definitely…*

Jill: ….more, and to say that they couldn't achieve that in their classroom. I don't know why that is….

Gail: *I was just thinking then, you know there's that thing about how we have plain tops and we wear plain tops because what are the pupils seeing and visual clutter….but within that space there was no visual clutter. So whatever they saw was exactly that. Not a door opening,…..*

Jill: Yeah, which is also what people said. Its interesting, so one of the comments from [class name] was to do with, you haven't got a clock in your face, you know, so for the staff there was that feeling of this is a space outside of our routines and where,…it's a separation from the demands of the classroom. And it was valuable for that reason.

Gail: *and it felt like a luxury as well. That time just to give permission to just observe. No pre-conceived ideas where you've got your targets out and what are they learning out of this and….*

Jill: Yeah

Gail: *Do you know what I mean? Because the whole time its like…'let's talk about the learning objectives,??? Lets' celebrate it at the end…No, let's just be in here. What do you wanna do?*

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6. Transcript of conversation with 'Frank' 13.3.2017

Jill: You've got a very particular group, and that really comes across when you work with other classes and then you work with your class.

Frank: *Define different….bearing in mind this is my first class here*

Jill: Yeah, because you don't have your own comparison……

Frank: *Yep*

Jill: So *how* are they different…? …..Well a) because there's more of them, that makes it different, it makes the experience different with staff….. Some of the behaviour needs (for want of a better expression) ….that sense of having to watch over and prevent….

Frank: *Yup*

Jill: ….and you know mop up, all that kind of stuff, makes attention very erm…"bitty" at times….

Frank: *There are times when, from a pedagogical point of view, I want to step back from the child, but from the point of view of their care needs I have to break their isolation but the main advantage of your environment I felt for my class was it gave them a safe environment to work without overt demands… (recording was interrupted at this point as Frank dealt with a query from a colleague)*

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Frank: *So I really value giving the learners time, a lot of time, to express themselves independently, without demands or without 'chasing' a demand – "come on come on, what have you got to say….?" So, if that activity had happened in a classroom, I think the duration of time that we gave the learners to express themselves independently would have been shorter, you would have felt… I would have felt that things had to be moving on, that you should see progress, we should be making recordings, we should be 'bathrooming', we should be changing position……However, because your space encloses the learners, it gives a sense of purpose to more open-ended activities. It also reduces the outside stimulation for staff as well as pupils, so the staff can focus on being expectant.*

Jill: Mmmm, how interesting… so I want to pick up on one of the things you said which is……. well, the very origin of the tent came from when I did the group sessions based on intensive interaction principles, which initially were simply about having less language around pupils, and how could we do that, so it was purely experimental, and we found it quite magical the first time we did it, but I felt an enormous pressure to "hold" the space. So what you say is really interesting to me. I then looked at adding music as a way of holding the space, (and I did work with Ignacio and Sarah's class which I think Sarah is still doing). And then my next question, because I'm a visual artist, was 'I wonder if the physical space can achieve the same as an auditory space, can hold that….and basically you've just told me that's what it did for you. It holds that in a way that allows you to, yeah, to not be feeling that pressure of what next….I think that's what I heard you say anyway….

Frank: *yeah that's definitely the correct interpretation. I think that our learners work at a completely different speed sometimes to the adults that are supporting them, but by the very nature of school environment there is always a focus on….not getting things done, but ensuring the right things are happening…., and sometimes that focus can mean the learners don't get given enough time to show their maximum communicative potential. It's a bit like the concept of umm … silence if you're spending time with another adult, silence can be a very awkward period, you feel like you should fill it, and it's almost like the educational equivalent of that.*

Jill: …I haven't quite understood the link, how is it equivalent?

Frank: *Because I think there is always a pressure to be demonstrating – as they would say at this school – demonstrating your learning story. I would feel very nervous if I attempted that session in my classroom…*

Jill: Ah, I've got you, so not what was happening today, but what we typically do in the classroom is the equivalent of filling the silence, feeling impelled to take up the silence….ah sorry I was making the wrong link..

Frank: *My apologies*

Jill: No, no, I get you, and that's exactly what I was talking about too, because I felt that pressure when we did those group sessions initially, and I had all this negative talk going on in my head saying "what on earth are you doing?".... "the staff are all bored now"…, "that child hasn't made a sound yet"… I had a constant monologue of negative comments going on….

Frank: *And actually you've got to go above and beyond what even you think is necessary for space. Umm, there might be a hypothetical young person who has lived many years where his space has been filled with either encouragement or praise, lots of positive stuff, but actually it's limiting his or her opportunity to use their own communicative strategies, and you've got to almost just grin and bear the silence for the potential that could emerge after a long period of stillness, and your environment allowed us to do it in a comfortable way, where nobody felt pressured.*

Jill: which is to do with…? being enclosed?....what do you feel are the factors that enabled that?

Frank*: Okay, I think one of the factors was novelty. So, the adults and the pupils could find interest in the environment, as opposed to trying to fill the environment. It definitely was the enclosure. It meant the focus was very much on the pupils, in this case on the pupils' vocalisations, and that filled the space and the enclosure prevented any other sensory stimuli from encroaching on that space.*
I think it also created a sort of pervading…. almost calm for some of your young people. I think they were reassured by the single sensory input. And that was it! That must be so blissful for some of young people who live in a world of sensory bombardment, to come into this place where there's that single yellow sensory input and that's it.

Jill: Yeah. And do you think yellow in itself is significant in any way – or do you think that might be similar if we were in another colour?

Frank: *I think yellow plays a very significant role for our learners who are visually impaired. The way the light diffuses through the tent, it's a very bright environment and that will support our learners who find looking difficult. I think there might be a umm…positive…..I can't think of the right word…there might be a positive emotional effect on the adults as well as the young people*

Jill: Yeah, like a mood enhancer, or…?

Frank: *Yeah, yeah. Umm its an exciting space, prior to going into it, my team were all very excited about going into it. I cannot attribute that to colour specifically, but I think because it's a very bright environment, I think that would have affected people's response. There's definitely a correlation between the yellowness and the sort of positivity and happiness, even if its on a very subconscious level.*

Jill: Interesting, thank you…. thank you very much

Frank: *OK, it was a great experience.*

Jill: So if there was…… one of the conversations with [class name] was if there was a permanent space in school that was single colour and… you know clear - so some of the key things that people have said to me is to do with the distraction-free, cocoon-like space that separates them from the busy-ness of the classroom, could you see that being used? And if you can, what kind of purpose do you think it might take in school?

Frank: *Right, I think that for an environment like that to be used most effectively, there would have to be quite a lot of structure and expectation about what you hope the environment does. There's the potential for blank canvases to get covered in things, and I felt that one of the best outcomes of your space was the very fact that it wasn't covered in things, it was that blank canvas. I think novelty again might have a part to play…*

Jill: …mmm, so it could wear off….

Frank: *… so if you had a space that was a permanent space….I think, yeah, some of peoples expectations of it would change.*

Jill; yeah, like 'been there, done that'.

Frank: *And I think also there's a lot to be said for the fact of how you've designed the space, so the very fact that it is cocoon-like, and the spaces we have at school are classrooms and rooms – square shapes – that if you were to remove distractions from them they may appear less inviting rather than more inviting*.

Jill: Yes I can see that, and its interesting, before you were here, the Hub 1 classroom was available for quite a while and I created a black space with some white things in and a white space with some black things in, quite large spaces. That was the beginning of me deciding to pare things down, so previously I've done all-singing, all-dancing themed type stuff with songs and costumes and stuff, so this came out of my feeling that I wanted to strip some of that back, and that I wanted to look at play in its simplest form, and look at black and white. Anyway what happened was, I was just starting out on my PhD at the time and I was really involved in other things, so I set it up and made it available to school, but it was really underused, and died a death. And I felt it was because nobody was leading it. Its that kind of thing that it's a facility, but unless there's someone with a passion for it who is kind of generating interest, then these things just…yeah…. you need that don't you?…I wished I'd led sessions and I wished I'd been talking with people more about it – basically it was a physical practical facility and it was highly underused.

Frank: *yeah, because part of the appeal was we're going to the yellow tent and Jill's gonna do something magical with it……*

Jill: *(laughs)*

Frank: *I know that's not the aim or the outcome, but the fact that you're well known as a very experienced and very good practitioner and this is a really interesting project, I think raised expectations going into the setting. Whereas I think if it had been an unattended setting I think that might not have happened*

Jill: Yeah I think there's some truth in that and that's actually something that I experience as a pressure at times in terms of trying to be experimental because I think I feel that sense of expectation as well, and I also felt like last week (with your group) I felt like oh – that really was *not* a good session….. Yes it is quite hard to step back and let it really be about the pupils, because there is that sense of you gotta do something magical,

you've got make something happen, you know you want everyone to go away feeling great because they've had a great session and…

Frank: *…but I think we achieved that today and we achieved that through observing the young peoples own actions.*

Jill: Yeah

Frank: *The thing I feel most positive about from the session was the young peoples interplay of voices and sounds with each other in the space…. umm, and that was good, it was initiated by one particular learner, and that learner probably kept things going, but then that allowed her peers to come in and out of the conversation. Later on we introduced ourselves into the conversation as well, but I really enjoyed the fact that again no language was used, that was essential. And at the end of the session, again, we withdrew ourselves from the conversation and you could hear the dynamics of the conversation change. It became a lot calmer, a lot more muted, a lot more sort of staccato in the interactions. They were smaller and shorter, then gradually even the noisiest young lady became quieter as we modified the environment by removing ourselves. And that was the key bit for me….um, yeah - I don't think there's anything more positive you can get from an experience like that than it to be learner-led. And I really feel it was today*.

Jill: That's brilliant. So your perception of the session was a kind of interchange amongst students, and then students and adults. *(recording finished here)*

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Conversation over the photocopier – Monday 27th March

This was after 3rd and final session for Frank's group in the tent, in which I took no part other than to observe (and do a little filming)

Frank: *I wanted it to be a student-led as possible, and I wanted it to have the chance for a single sense work. I like the fact that we gave the students more space than we could normally afford in class. What did you think of it Jill?*

Jill: I was deeply impressed actually. You had clearly prepped staff well beforehand, I really liked what I saw going on in the pairs, and then I really liked that space that you gave them *(the staff moved away from students to observe and to write up reflections towards the end of the session)*. I totally agree with you it would be so hard to do that in classroom environment wouldn't it? It just wouldn't have happened.

Frank: and it would've been very difficult to ensure the learners gave their attention to, or shared their attention with, the adults in a classroom environment because you would have so much additional stimuli around them.

Jill: yeah

Frank: *so for example the way we started off like incredibly quiet and just mirroring breathing and hand gestures and stuff - I'm not sure that would've been successful in an environment where there are so many more…umm.. potentially stronger stimuli.*

Jill: yeah yeah competing…

Frank: *that's it! That's the word.*

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