

# Research methodologies – using family stories to create family learning materials

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# Key arguments

- Neighbourhoods are spaces that people can transform
- Family learning is a key site for these transformations
- These transformations happen in interactions
- These interactions involve stories, of migration and of identity
- Stories are often linked to objects in the home
- By hearing each other's stories, communities can change.

# Why do we need to start with family stories?

- Researchers need to understand families' ecologies
- Non-dominant communities' socio-cultural practices are not understood
- Cultural, and iterative patterns within these families are important resources for learning
- These cultural stories can then move across sites to become educational resources (Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003, Lee 2007)

# Drawing communities together: how can this be achieved?

- Challenges:
  - Diverse communities
  - Poverty neighbourhoods
  - Globalization
  - Neoliberal and individualistic models of identity
  - Audit cultures

# Identities

- Reflexive (Giddens 1991)
- Hidden Injuries of Class (Sennett 1977)
- Transformation of identities across diasporas (Appadurai 1996)
- Tied to cultural stories and artefacts (Holland et al 1998, Bartlett 2005)
- Sedimented identities in texts (Rowsell and Pahl 2007)

# Listening methodologies

- Listening to funds of knowledge within families
- Listening to local knowledge of spaces
- Listening to intergenerational narratives (Their Lives Our History)
- Role of public spaces to provide listening opportunities (Ferham Families)
- Family learning as creating listening spaces for communities.

# Listening to family stories

- .. .. He actually I believe, I'm told by others that he got up at what is now the Adelphi Theatre in Attercliffe and actually announced it 'cos they used to gather there every Sunday to watch a film, all the men in the communities, including the Arabs, the Yemenis and the Pakistani Muslim Kashmiri people, they used to gather there every Sunday and watch (Informant, Ferham families)

# Ways of linking stories to pedagogy

- Focusing on the importance of people telling their own stories ...in a place where people may be both affirmed and challenged to see how individual stories are connected in communities to larger patterns of domination and resistance in a multicultural, global society.

(Gruenewald 2003:4)

# Neighbourhood contexts as shaping cultural stories

- Context matters: contexts help to shape people and people shape contexts
- Routine practices count
- The cognitive, social, physical and biological dimensions of both individuals and contexts interact in important ways.  
(Lee 2008:268)

# Two key questions:

1. What can we understand that is unique to each community and that reflects the inside perspective of its members?
2. What can we understand that can be extrapolated across cultural communities? (Lee 2008)

# *Cultural repertoires of practice*

- Cultural resources from home and community contexts = content knowledge
- Schooled resources = pedagogical content knowledge
- Need to recognise 'points of leverage between everyday experience and subject matter learning' and create links across through cultural modelling

(Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003, Lee 2007)

# The binocular vision

- Cultural communities are communities precisely because of what they share, but at the same time there is always significant variation within communities. Thus what we need is....a binocular vision, with one lens focused on what makes communities culturally distinct and a second lens focused on the variations within communities (Lee 2008: 273)

# Key examples

- Calderdale School box exchange project (MLA)
- Ferham Families (Rotherham, AHRC)
- Every object tells a story (Sheffield KTOF)
- Burngreave Voices (Burngreave, New Deal)
- Collective conversations (Manchester)
- Belonging: voices of London's refugees (London)
- My Family, My Story (MLA Yorkshire)

# Exchange of cultural artefacts in boxes - schools in Calderdale, rural and urban

- Each school then produced, with support from museums and local artists two community boxes filled with artefacts, photographs and research about their community in the past and their community now.
- The schools were twinned urban with rural and swapped their present day boxes so that the other school could learn about their community.
- An e-mail dialogue was then set up between pupils so that they could ask questions about the contents of their boxes.
- Pupils then visited the other school to meet each other and learn more about each others' communities.

# Artefacts as cultural

- The exchange of boxes led to close examination of the artefacts by each class. These gave clues as to the interests of the children from the partner school, many of which were similar to those of the children in the class, although there were differences due to the differing social and cultural backgrounds of the children.
- Many common interests included football, dancing, pets, toys and family relationships, whereas differences included artefacts relating to farm animals and the countryside from one partner school, compared to the religious and cultural artefacts that were included in our boxes. This helped our children realise that all children are very much the same, despite difference in experiences and backgrounds.' (From report on project)

# Outcomes

- The project allowed them to showcase the important features of their culture. This led to a greater feeling of pride in the school, their homes and the local community, which they shared with confidence with those from another culture through written and photographic work and oral discussion on the exchange visit. This reinforced their belief in their own importance and further built their feelings of self-esteem.

(*Changing Landscapes* project report by Michala Watson, MLA Generic Social Outcomes)

# The boxes





# Ferham Families research project

- AHRC 'Diasporas Migration Identities' grant
- Partners: University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, Creative Partnerships, Clifton Park Museum Rotherham, Rotherham Central Sure Start, Ferham School
- Community: Ferham, focus on families of Pakistani origin
- Outputs: 'Ferham families' exhibition and website

# Research questions or problems

- What artefacts were important to families of Pakistani heritage living in Rotherham?
- How did these artefacts instantiate identity narratives?
- What was the relationship between that community and the local museum?
- How can the museum represent these objects in an exhibition and website?

# Multi-agency, participatory project

- Women's art project, based at Rotherham Central Sure Start, a family learning project
- Visual artist, Zahir Rafiq, created website for schools and families with children, funded by Creative Partnerships
- Long interviews in homes by researchers, Kate Pahl and Andy Pollard who also curated the exhibition
- Exhibition created March – April 2007

# FERRHAM FAMILIES

The Ferrham families, by their diverse interests in art and architecture, played an important role in the development of the Ferrham family.

In 1811, the Ferrham family, through their interest in art and architecture, played an important role in the development of the Ferrham family.

During the 19th century, the Ferrham family, through their interest in art and architecture, played an important role in the development of the Ferrham family.

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# 'Every object tells a story' KTOF funded project (Jan – March 2008)

- Creation of pack for use by museum educators and family learning educators through involvement of family learning practitioners from Sheffield Family Learning and Burngreave Community Learning Campaign
- Project team included Kate Pahl, project director, Abi Hackett, pack writer, Zahir Rafiq, pack and website designer, and two family learning practitioners
- Website: [www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk](http://www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk)

# Every object tells a story

## What objects are special to you?

**Aim of the activity:** to explore what significance objects have for different people

In advance of the session: ask learners (both adults and children) to bring in one object that has a special significance to them. You may need to discuss this with the group further to give them guidance e.g. different reasons that an object might be special, examples of the types of objects they could bring. However, try to avoid the learners saying specifically what they will be bringing in – the idea is to keep this a secret.

As learners arrive for the session, collect their objects from them, and keep the identity of the owner of each object a secret. Put all the objects out together on one table, which the whole group can sit around. One person around the table starts – they choose one of the objects, and guess whose object it is and why it is special to them.

The true owner of the object then stands up, claims their object, and explains the real reason it is special to them. Repeat until everyone around the table has claimed their object

# Burngreave voices

Burngreave Voices is a community heritage project designed to celebrate the history of the area and bring to life the stories of people living here.

**'The Corner Shop'** video, made especially for a new display within the Sheffield life and times gallery in Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. This illustrates the role local shops play in their community, and features many well known Burngreave shop keepers and customers. It presents a lively picture of the area, showing how the ethnic diversity of local shops really helps keep the neighbourhood alive.

- **Local exhibitions on local themes**, incorporating photographs of weddings and interesting buildings in the area like the old workhouse (now the Northern General hospital in Sheffield).
- Also a collection of **memory boxes**, made by women from St James' United Reformed Church in Burngreave, told wonderful stories of different aspects of peoples' lives.

# Website

This website focuses on the neighbourhood of Burngreave in Sheffield, England. It provides information about the history of the area and some of the interesting local places. Most importantly, however, it's about the people who live here, and the stories they tell of their lives, collected by the Burngreave Voices project.

There are over 90 memories and stories on this site from past and present residents. You can read and listen to these stories in the section headed [People](#). You can also add new stories to the collection using the [Your Memories](#).

# Collective conversations

Collective Conversations is an award winning project that makes films about people's encounters with objects from the museum's collections. The subjects of the films explore objects usually hidden away in stores and discuss the meanings they hold. You can see these films [here](#) and they will be displayed in a new space opening in the museum soon.

Since June 2004, the Manchester Museum has held 'conversations' with diverse groups and individuals including local migrant communities, researchers, enthusiasts and academics. They might be people who identify or have personal interests in the objects, people whose work gives them insights into relevant themes, or people who are simply curious.

# Handling the objects



# Belonging: the voices of London's refugees

- Being a refugee is devastating and traumatic. Refugees face huge challenges when building new lives in London and their achievements are hard won. Yet they make enormous contributions to the capital. They help to shape the city we know today.
- This website does not provide a history of refugees in London. Instead it shares the voices, memories and successes of people who have found refuge in the capital. All have certain experiences and concerns in common, but each person's story is unique. They offer different perspectives on being a refugee, on London, and on what it means to belong.

# Teachers' resource pack: Belonging

Belonging: voices of London's refugees offers a unique opportunity to celebrate London's multiculturalism. The exhibition uses personal testimonies (oral history in audio and text form), objects (including artworks and poetry), photographs, film, interactives and a historical timeline to illustrate the valuable contributions that refugees have made to the city – politically economically, socially and culturally. It also highlights the difficulties and trauma, barriers and challenges that may refugees have faced, including experiences of discrimination and prejudice.

# Possibilities of change

- Importance of creating ‘public spaces where communities can analyse, envision, and construct the meaning of development for themselves.’ (Gruenewald 2003:4)
- Schooling could contribute to positive social change by incorporating (without co-opting) compelling cultural artefacts while developing, with students, the kind of social analysis central to critical literacy (Bartlett 2005)

# Stories and Objects

- Different kinds of stories are opened up through artefacts, particularly intergenerational ones
- Artefacts are found in many places including schools, local community arts projects, libraries and museums, as well as homes
- Artefacts have a powerful role in motivating young people at risk of under-achievement in literacy.
- Building inclusion is about valuing identities

# Why artefacts?

- Artefacts celebrate diversity and create inclusive spaces for students to learn in classrooms and in informal learning settings
- The notion of artefacts offers more opportunities to access what Luis Moll and colleagues refer to as ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez, Moll, Amanti 2005).
- In forging these spaces it is possible to actually articulate identities (e.g., migrant identities) that can create inclusive spaces that honor identities.

# Family learning as site of possibility

- Using objects to tell stories
- Using an ethnographic approach and visual methods to research home cultures
- Focusing on everyday practice and translating this across domains of practice
- Listening as a methodology both in the class and in the community

# How can we listen more actively?

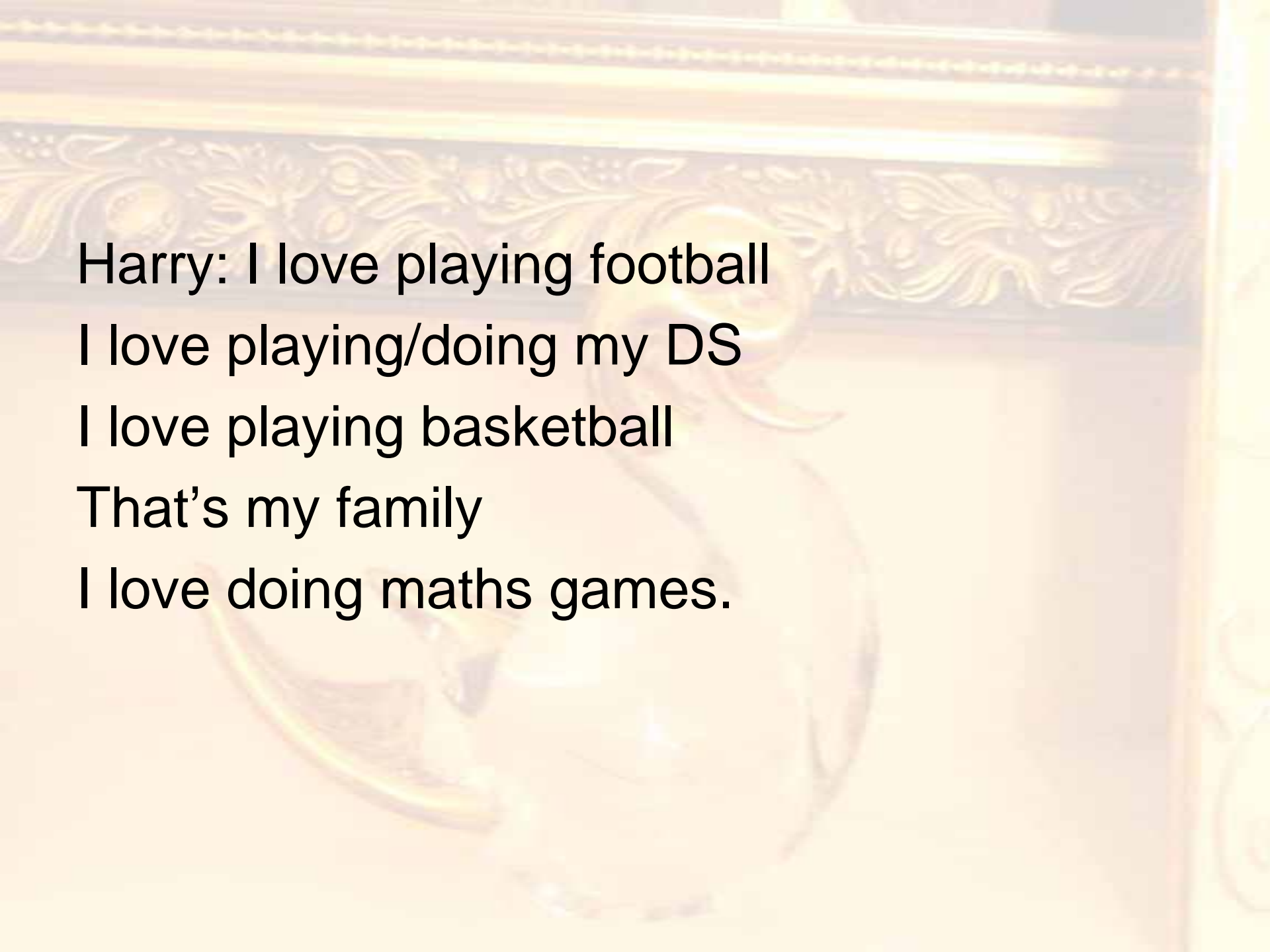
- Small scale research eg taking disposable cameras into communities
- Children taking cameras home
- Using cheap video cameras to create digital stories – FLIP cameras
- Students recording family stories
- Digital storytelling as a methodology
- Using an ethnographic perspective with families and communities

# Current research

- ‘My Family my story’ – a family learning project in a school in North Yorkshire, in partnership with The World of James Herriot museum, funded by MLA Yorkshire
- Focusing on creating digital stories of favourite objects
- Five families involved in a project which targeted year 3 children who were particularly ‘quiet’ in class

# My family, My story

- In this project the children are going to make films of their favourite objects. The children and the adults have been making shoeboxes which are filled with images of their favourite objects. The stories from these objects will be told in the films. The films will then be used within the museum and the school.



Harry: I love playing football  
I love playing/doing my DS  
I love playing basketball  
That's my family  
I love doing maths games.

# Lucy's objects

Lucy: Right: children. I like to listen to music. I love biscuits (laughs). That's me two bears

(Her daughter says) She has got a massive one

Lucy: I like to have dolls

(her daughter says) She has got loads in the house

Lucy: That's me on the phone I like to talk to my friends (image of phone) I do a lot of hovering and washing – exhausting (image of sad face)

# Lucy's photos

Lucy: I took pictures of my two birds  
of my candles

I have got a quartz stone

I took a picture of the [bar]

[my daughter] took a picture of the candle

# New research plans

- *Translating objects: displaying South Asian material culture at home and in a city museum* with Weston Park Museum, Sheffield (bid in preparation)
- *Intergenerational narratives, memory, and family learning* with the National Coal Mining Museum (bid in preparation)
- *Digital storytelling project* with Al-Muneera, Rotherham, and Ferham school focusing on year 5 and 6 children of Pakistani heritage and their special objects (bid in preparation)

# For more information

- [K.pahl@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:K.pahl@sheffield.ac.uk)
- [MA in Working with Communities:  
Identities, Regeneration and Change](#)

New publication:

- Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. (forthcoming)  
*Literacy Learning Through Artifacts*. New  
York: Teachers College Press