Participatory Design with Young People: exploring the experiential, relational and contextual dimensions of participation

Portfolio of Practice

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Portfolio submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of
The Glasgow School of Art
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This portfolio showcases the practice-based element of my PhD submission and should be read in tandem with the thesis as outlined in the Presentation of Submission. I present here a visual account of the fieldwork undertaken in this study. My Participatory Design practice is fundamentally action-based. The role of this portfolio is to evidence the experiential, relational, and contextual dimensions of participation, and critically interrogate these to make a contribution to the field of Participatory Design.

For ethical reasons I was unable to document this research visually on-site. Whilst I wrote up extensive field notes after each visit to the school, these written texts were not able to convey fully the situational and tacit aspects of the participatory process, and, thus, I felt compelled to represent visually this action-based knowledge. This led me to build a scale model box of the setting, where I reconstructed critical moments into tangible scenes. Presented alongside extracts from my field notes, the use of the model box allowed me to reify *in-the-moment* processes, as well as the positionality of the participants, the gatekeepers, and myself during critical interactions and instances of participation - aspects of the process that may have been lost if reported solely in words.

The portfolio is structured chronologically, as the events had unfolded in the field, in order to maintain an authentic flow of narrative. In this digital version, running down the left hand side of each page is a timeline that will orientate the reader through the five phases of fieldwork. Whilst not every fieldwork visit has been depicted here, those that are featured were selected on basis of their significance in relation to answering my research questions. The portfolio has been designed so it may be read page-by-page or folded out so to view longer sequences of events. Below each of the model box images is a description that relates to events described more fully in Chapter Five of the thesis. Above the model box images are the corresponding extracts from my field notes. Here the reader is also advised where to locate the field note extract in Appendix 4. Also included in this area are images of the participant-made outputs and additional artefacts that played a supporting role during the study.

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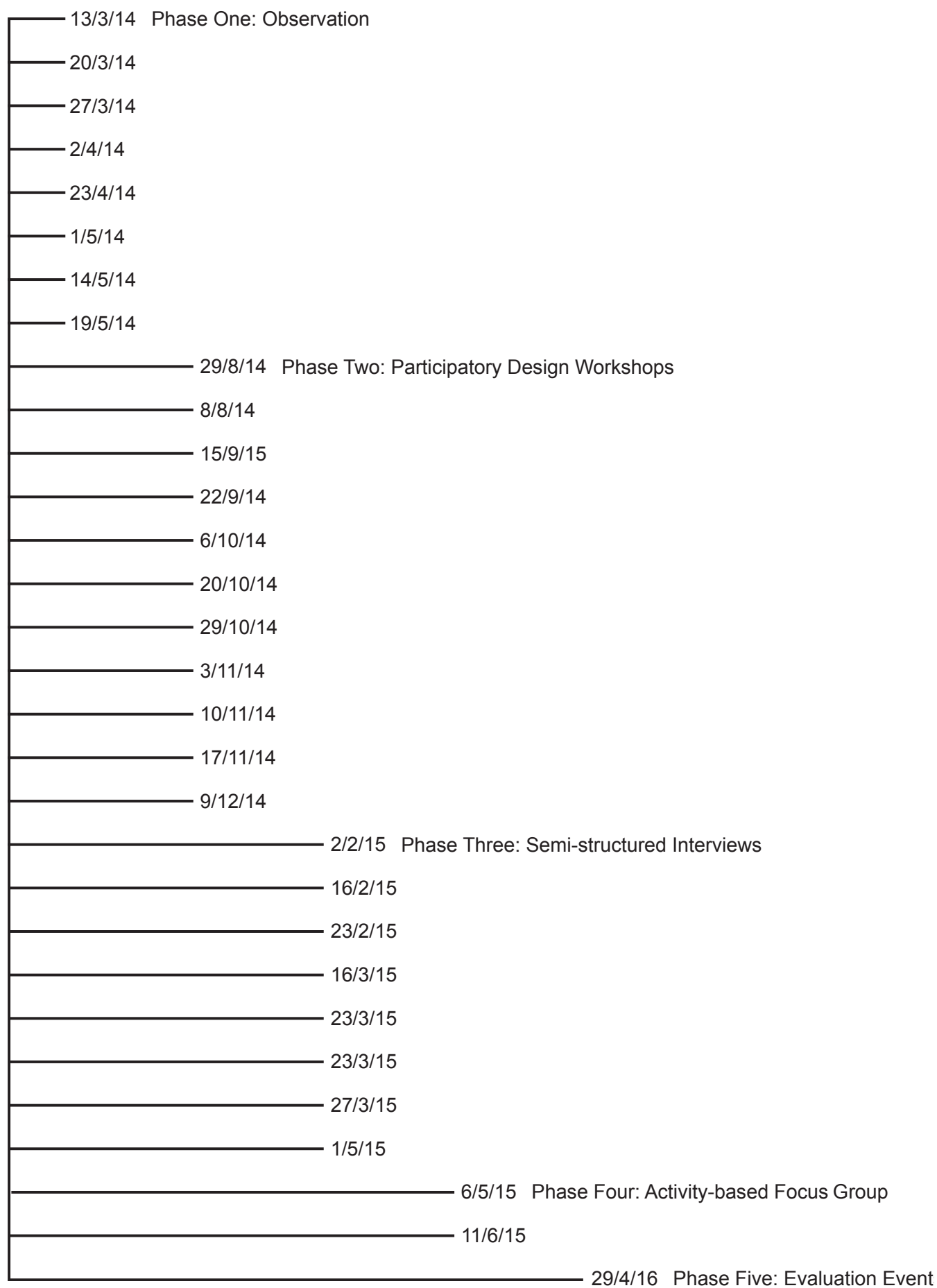
Phase One: Contextual Immersion
April - June 2014

I was allowed to participate in the class during whilst observing

13/3/14

During this time I would try and engage the young people in conversations about their work

13/3/14

Scrap Paper

Miss. Marsh insisted the documents be completed and printed within the short time frame of the period. As the pupils started printing out their finished documents, the printer began to falter, smudging ink near the bottom of each page. As the supply of white paper ran out, Miss Marsh directed Hailey to load the printer with light green paper, which I saw was scattered in what appeared to be a pile of recycled scrap paper. [...] I found it intriguing that, for the purposes of the Youth Achievement Award ring binder, Miss Marsh (perhaps unwittingly) found it adequate for the pupils to print out an entry on scrap paper, the appearance additionally spoiled by the distortion of the ink at the bottom of each page. I question what kind of message this sends out, when the pupils are encouraged to produce reflective and considered pieces of work, the value of which is completely undermined when instructed to print using materials which are considered 'scrap'.

Exert from Appendix 4: 41-43

When the printer ran out of paper, Miss Marsh instructed Sean to print his work out on coloured scrap paper

13/3/14

The ink from the printer was also smudging their work, which frustrated Hailey

13/3/14

The class were instructed to place their print outs into their Youth Achievement presentation folders

13/3/14

The participants prototyped their ideas out of modelling clay for the competition entry

2/4/14

Prototyping with modelling clay for the competition entry (detail)

2/4/14

Prototyping with modelling clay for the competition entry (detail)

2/4/14

Pride, Possession and Sabotage

At the end of the session, the pupils were asked to place their models and excess plasticine in a tray to store them over night. Standing by the tray, I noticed David, who had displayed a high level of artistic flair earlier on, place his highly detailed model delicately in the tray. He then proceeded to linger around the tray, policing other pupils as they deposited their models [...]. Sean, unaware of the security measures taken by his peer, put his model down and went to pick up the David's. Upon seeing this act of violation, David immediately and aggressively reprimanded his peer. [...] I found David's strong reaction to the threat of sabotage an interesting link to his implicit pride over his work.

Exert from Appendix 4: 58

Without realising David was watching him, Sean picks up David's model

2/4/14

David became angry and hurried over to reprimand Sean

2/4/14

David took his model from Sean and placed carefully back down on the table

2/4/14

I assisted the group in putting together a presentation on their competition design

14/5/14

The winner's medal

Final Designed Output:
a 3D printed head containing a voice recorder

A class photograph taken on a trip to the competition award ceremony

19/5/14

Phase Two: Participatory Workshops
September 2014 - December 2014

Trials and Experiments

I purposely decided not to influence or restrict the content of these experiments to any particular or guiding theme, so to afford the participants time to get accustomed to the methods and materials without feeling any additional pressure that their creations would be critiqued by myself or in comparison to each other's. I intentionally kept any demonstrations brief as a way of encouraging self-learning through trial and error [...]. On reflection, this heuristic approach runs contrary to how this class is traditionally taught.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 71-73

I demonstrated techniques to the participants as mini master classes
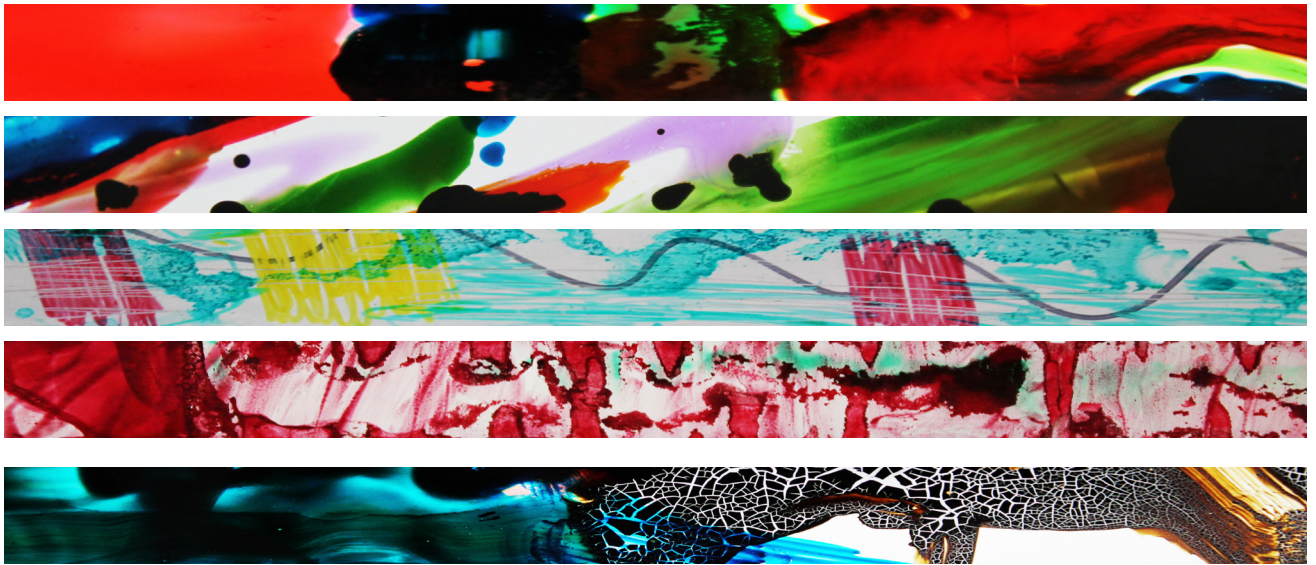
8/9/14

Examples of the participants' film designs (details)

A direct animation workshop in action

8/9/14

Examples of the participants' film designs (details)

A direct animation workshop where the participants painted film with inks

20/10/14

*Examples of the participants' film designs (details)*

At the start of each workshop, I would then show the group their completed films from the previous week

29/8/14

Ink on Film; working in the abstract

During several interactions, different participants commented enthusiastically on the artistic nature of this approach, whilst proclaiming that they 'do not do art'. Moments of such self-deprecation were iterated often. Hailey, who had displayed a great deal of resistance prior to the first workshop, and insisted on working alone on this occasion (sitting separately from the rest of the class), compared what she was doing to a nursery activity. Throughout the workshop, however, Hailey appeared eager to experiment with the inks and demonstrate such experiments to me, enthusiastically discussing her findings, and even allowed herself to be reprimanded by the teacher for having her phone out in class to take photographs of her work. However, whilst engaged and excited, she assured me that what I was asking her to do was childish 'finger painting'.

Exert taken from Appendix Four: 74-77
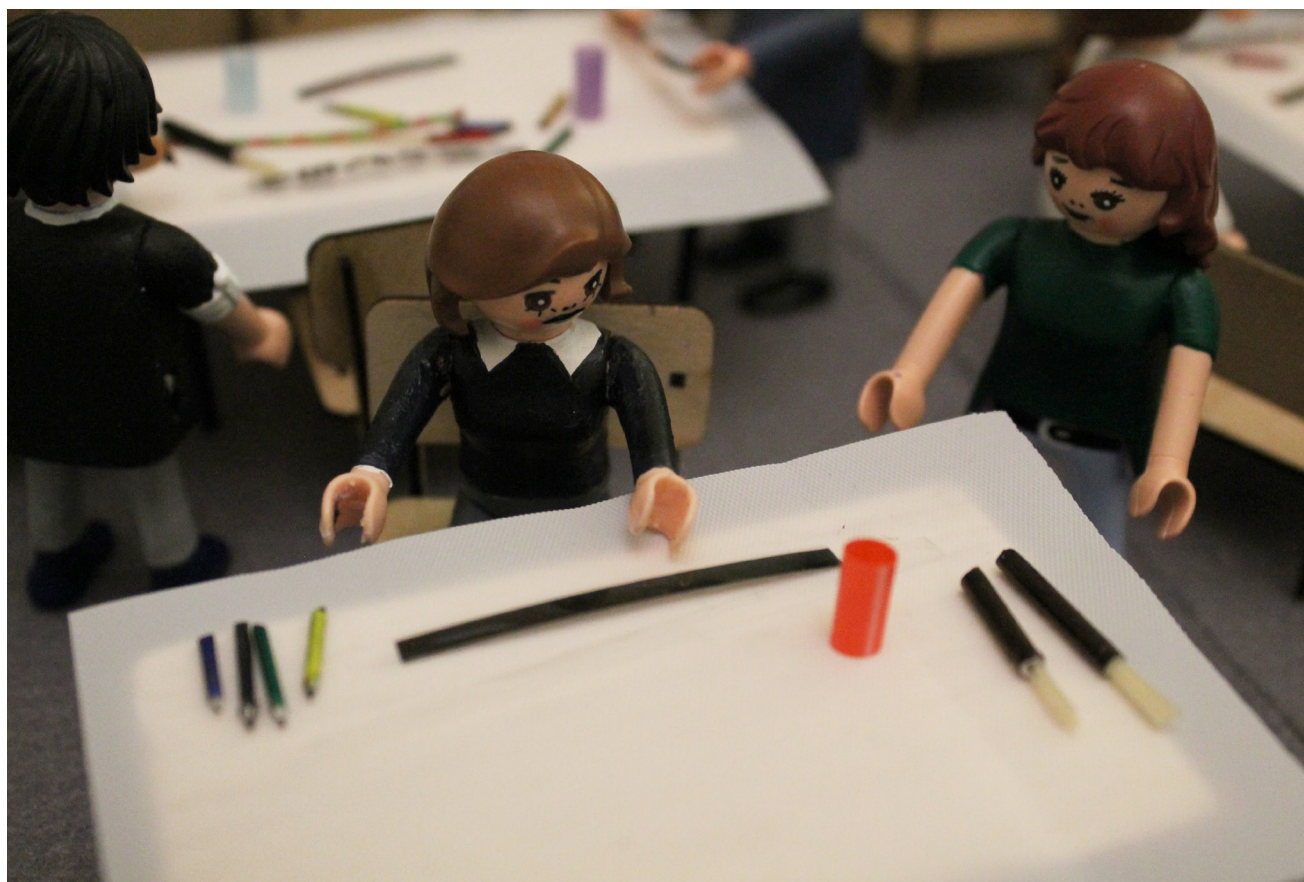
Hailey told me that she lacks artistic ability

15/9/14

Hailey proceed to participate and produced a series of highly detailed illustrations

15/9/14

Hailey risked getting into trouble for having her mobile phone out to take photos of her work

15/9/14

Personalising the Approach

Hailey confidently advised that, because of this kind of animation, we would need to work with colours instead of specific images, a piece of advice presumably based and learned from seeing the group's edited films each week. I encouraged her to explain further how this might be done. With reference to connotations, Hailey continued by explaining how colours can represent emotion, giving the examples of red to signify anger, pink to signify love, and blue for sad. I found this moment of interaction significant as this participant was plainly displaying, and furthermore able to vocalise, her metaphorical thinking. Prior to this moment, I have been anxious that the participants might have been reading the films they were creating and other examples I have shown them, which are highly abstract, too literally. [...] Hailey continued by proposing to make a film exploring the different emotional phases one goes through throughout the system of education - from nursery, primary school, high school, to thinking about the future beyond school. This idea led the other participants to enter in a group conversation considering these different stages and debating the emotive connotations of different colours.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 79


Group idea generation session

22/9/14

I introduced the concept of a creating a mood board to further explore their ideas and be used to gather inspirational images [...} The majority of the participants spent the remainder of the workshop researching images to generate their own mood boards for this film, where I encouraged them to go onto the class computers and research different shapes, colours and patterns, as well as pieces of music they think might be appropriate in translating the theme. At this point Hailey and Meghan eagerly broke away from the group to form their own sub group stating that they would create a chart outlining the definition of different colours for the rest of the group to follow when making their film.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 80

Participants creating mood boards

22/9/14

As well as this colour categorisation, Hailey and Meghan began mapping out a timeline of the different educational phases, surveying the room, asking the other participants as well as Miss Marsh, Maddy and myself, to recall memories of feelings at particular points to find an average to assign a colour to. Witnessing these two confidently taking such initiative without having to be facilitated by either the teacher or myself [...] made me feel confident that they were genuinely engaging with project. Conversations also surrounded music choices, with Hailey singing out loud at certain moments lyrics from her favourite band. Nearing the end of the workshop, I overheard plans to set up a Facebook group (an online forum) to discuss song choices with other participants who were not present at this workshop. Whether this comes to fruition or not, I was humbled by the fact that they were considering working on this project outside of this classroom and workshop setting [...]

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 81
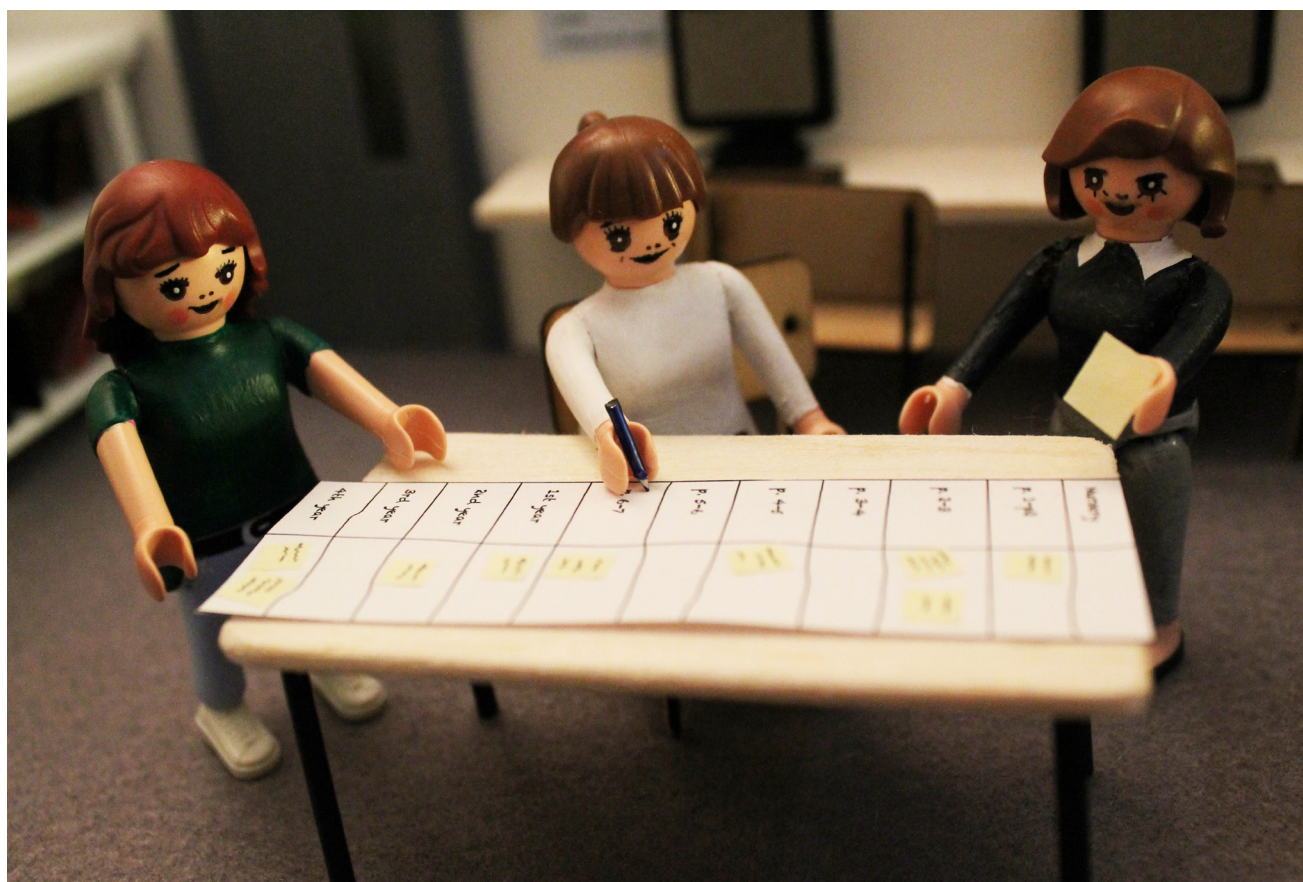
Participants conducting their own research

22/9/14

4-5
Excited Fine
Scared Aprehensive
Nervous
Happy

5-6
Happy Relaxed
Excited
Settled
Estatic

6-7
Settled
Happy
Sad

7-8 P4
Settled
Happy
Depressed

8-9 P5
Scared Bored
Annoyed
Sad
Settled
Welcomed

P6 9-10
bored
excited
Sad
happy
ready to leave

10-11 P7
Enjoyed Happy
Annoyed
Nervous
Scared
unwanted
Neglected

12-13 2nd
- Happy
- Unwanted
- Happy
- Happy Depressed
- Friday

14-15 4th
Nervous Excited
Stressed Fed-up
Anxious
Sad
annoyed
Happy

Results of the participants' research (detail)

Participants began working in sub-teams

6/10/14

Out with My Control; a turning point

On the surface, the workshop could have appeared slightly out of control [...] In fact it did become out with my control as some participants were now taking control and leading their own workshop sub teams. I was excited to forgo my status as the sole facilitator, finding myself asking participants to inform me about the decisions they were making. Others however were not so inclined and waited for my direction. [...] I noticed my facilitation style fluctuate when addressing individual participants. [...] Within these often fleeting moments of dialogue, I felt at times almost schizophrenic in trying to nurture the more assertive participants through gently challenging their assertions and encouraging their spontaneous activities, whilst with others, I was reverting to much more of a teacher-student dynamic [...] to negotiate with the more active participants roles, an invitation and a voice for these more passive participants situated at the periphery to join the others at the hub of activity.
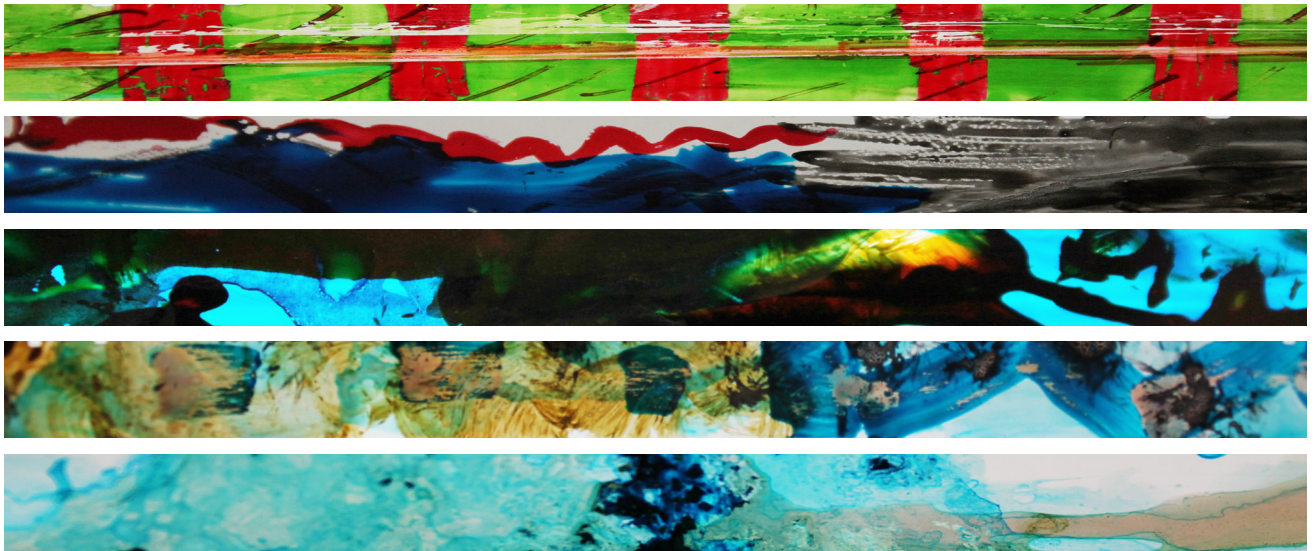
Exert from Appendix 4: 85-87
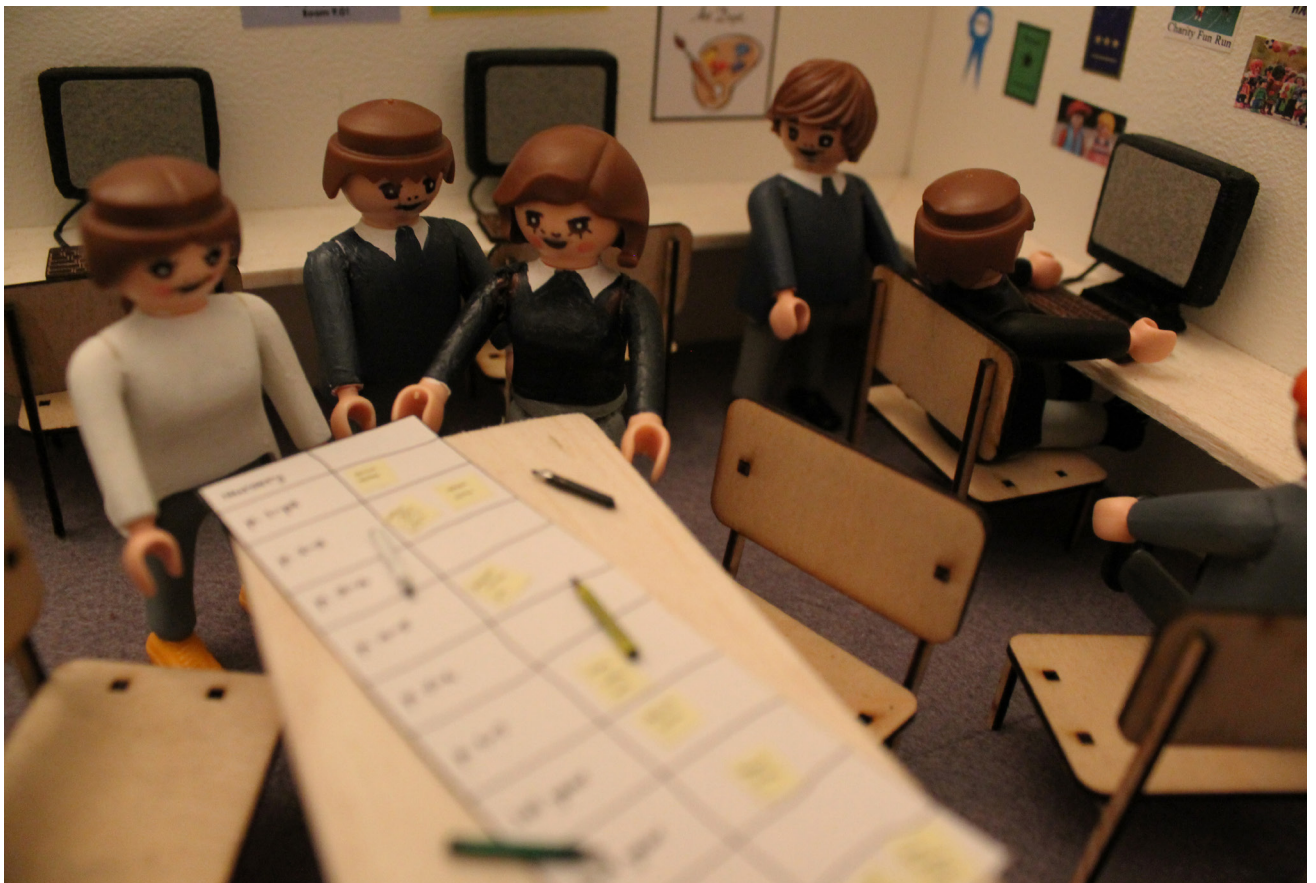
Participants working in sub-teams (detail)

6/10/14

Examples of the participants' film designs (details)

Participants working in sub-teams (detail)

6/10/14

Lynchpins

David had not been present at the later stages of the previous two sessions, which meant he had not seen this timeline before. He sarcastically inquired loudly what it was. In the background, music from the C.D began to play, which he also criticised sarcastically. Not being present at the previous two workshops has meant that key decisions have already been made and the content and production of the film already underway, and now they were required to take direction from their peers. I had already anticipated some sort of negative response from David and was anxious about the possible disruption this may cause in terms of undermining the other participants' investment in the project.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 90

Working collectively became sites for tension

20/10/14

I have noticed over the course of this fieldwork that David's behaviour in particular plays a critical role in the prevailing social dynamics of the classroom. I think of him as a gatekeeper to other participants, whereby his performances regulate those around him, elevating his status over the majority. [...] Never once has he chosen to stay on for the second period. He leaves for P.E taking four other participants with him. (I wonder how many of them would stay if he did?) As this group leaves for the second period, there is a notable shift in the group dynamic [...] He and a handful of others have become the lynchpins that either choose to hold the group dynamic together or destroy it.

Exert from Appendix 4: 90

The same group of participants would leave for another class half way through the workshop

20/10/14

Whilst mediating this particular tension, I found myself mediating another. Whilst making key decisions during previous workshops, as well as co-curating the timeline, Hailey was becoming gradually more and more frustrated with the attitudes of others. Sitting with Max [who had self-selected to be the music editor at a computer], she simultaneously kept a vigilant watch over the production of the artwork being completed by the others, occasionally offering criticism loudly. Whilst I was happy to witness her enthusiasm, I became anxious she was overly dictating the workshop [...] In response to her critique, others snapped back at her, questioning her authority and throwing personal insults. On numerous occasions she explained to Miss Marsh and I that certain pieces of film would need to be done again. Upon such moments, Miss Marsh did attempt to reconcile, reminding her that this was a collaboration, and that she would not be able to do everything. There were moments within these incidents however where I felt Hailey was looking to me for support in her assertions, seeking my approval so I would intervene. Attempting to stay as neutral as possible, but without wanting to disparage her enthusiasm, I tried to carefully handled the situation through praising her commitment whilst also reminding her of the editing possibilities at our disposal when using iMovies, and not to be too concerned at this point about particular aspects of individuals' pieces of film.

Exert from Appendix 4: 90-91
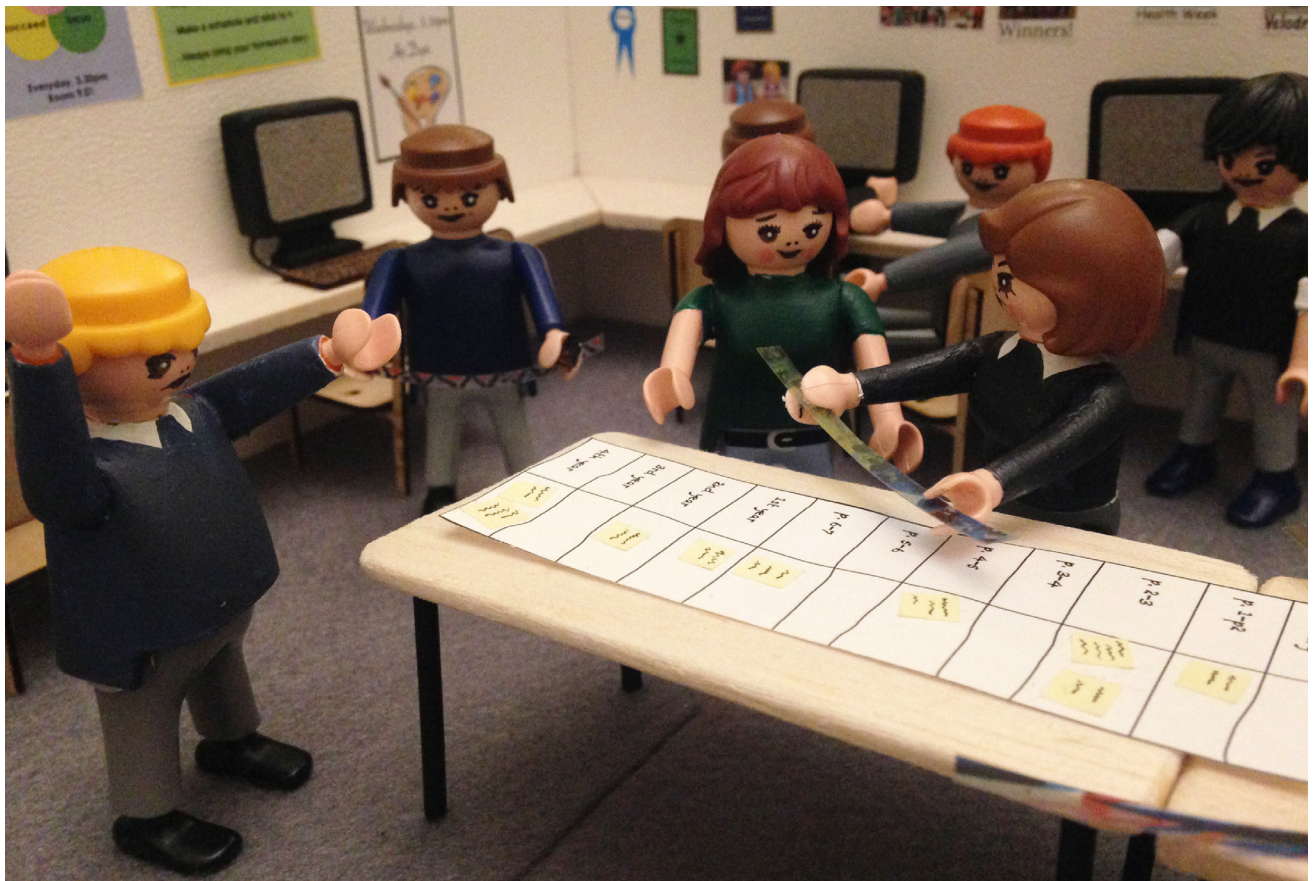
Hailey critiquing her peer's designs and David aggressively disagreeing

20/10/14

Another significant interaction that occurred during the second half of the workshop was a dialogue between Lewis, Mat, Sam and myself, where we sat and worked on pieces of film together. I began working on my own piece of film, and together we sat, crafted, and conversed [...] Whilst engaged with paining and drawing, the conversation wove in and out of personal anecdotes and discussion about the film. One of the participants experimented with dipping the film into a cup of ink, taking it out and drying it very quickly, which led to the film having a translucent dyed effect. They other used his hands to thickly spread ink onto his film, commenting on the pearlescent, almost metallic effect it was creating. Such moments of interactions, which have usually occurred later on in each workshop after the group has settled, and although not specifically on topics related to the context of this study, have nonetheless become vital in terms of building up rapport with participants.

Exert from Appendix 4: 91-92
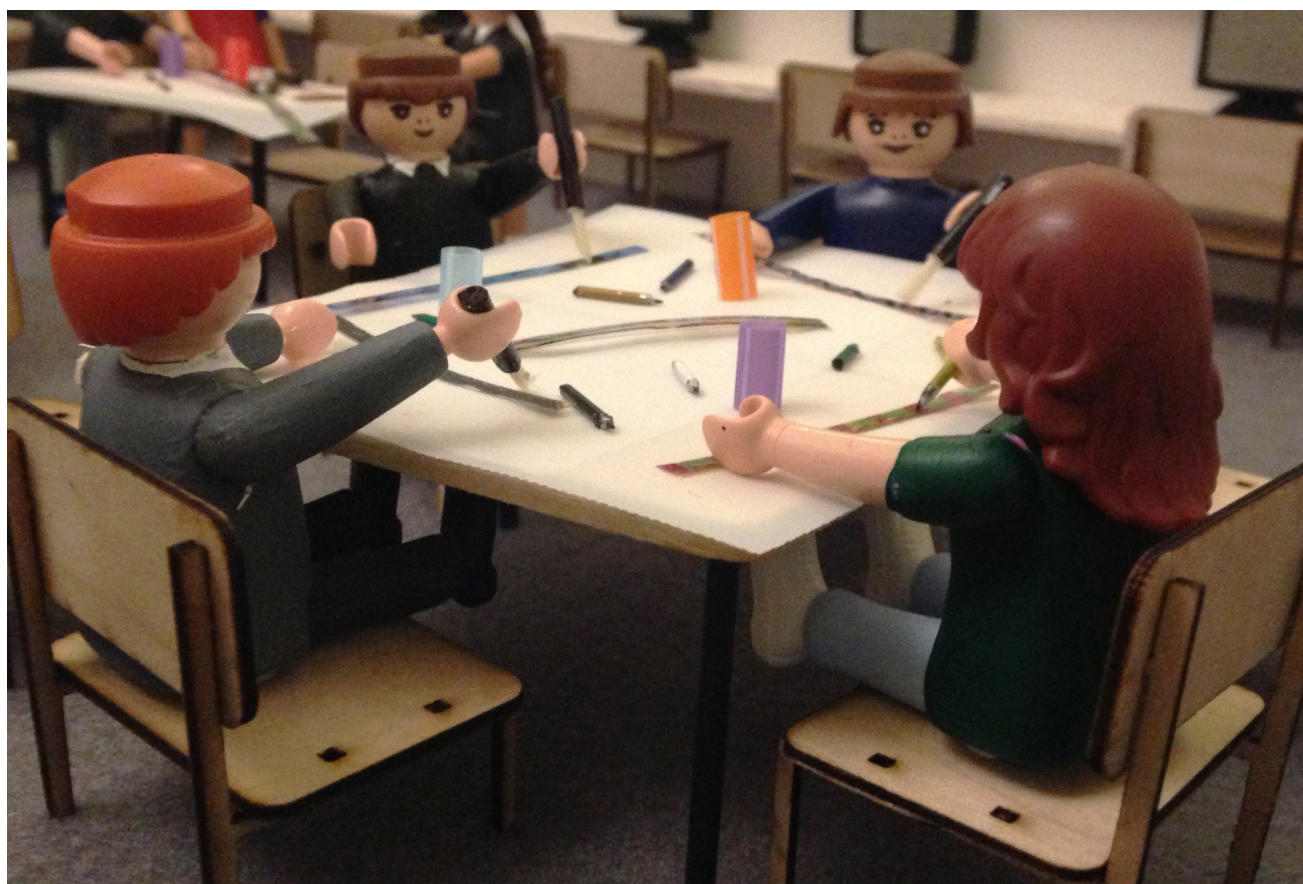
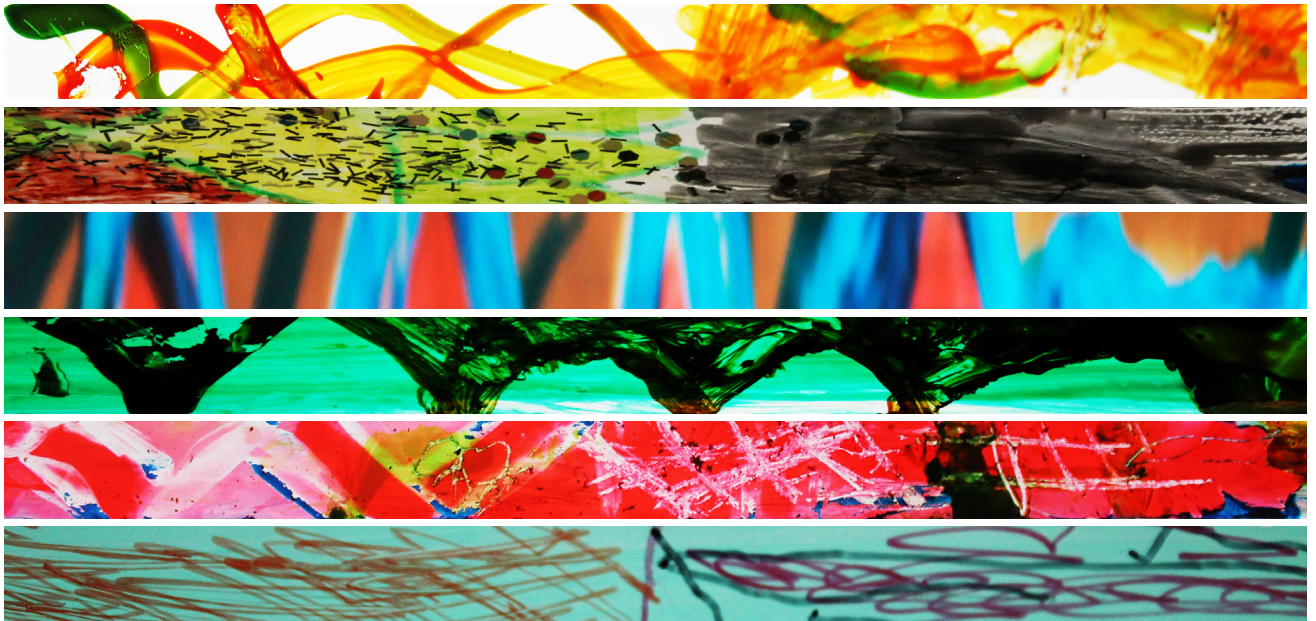The technique became a conduit for informal conversations

20/10/14

Examples of the participants' film designs (details)

The technique became a conduit for informal conversations (detail)

20/10/14

Examples of the participants' film designs (details)

The technique became a conduit for informal conversations (detail)

20/10/14

Friction, Abrasion and Appreciation

Whilst I have been trying to facilitate these workshops as collaborative events, I have become increasingly aware that many of the participants struggle to work as a genuine collective [...] Often participants have identified or specifically requested separate roles and tasks to be responsible for, seeking recognition and praise on an individualistic level. On this occasion, Sean refused to work with two other participants on designing the audience device. Positioning himself away from the rest of the class, he stated that he was the only person going to work on this activity. At this moment, I responded by suggesting the other participants sit near him (but not at the same table so to preserve some of the former participant's autonomy) and work together to produce some alternative ideas. Over the course of the workshop, Sean enthusiastically displayed and explained his creation to me.

Exert from Appendix 4: 93

Sean choosing to work alone in the design and making of the mood cards

29/10/14

Steven refused to take part in any of the workshop activity today, sitting away from the group with his arms folded. As I attempted to encourage him to join in, Miss Marsh bluntly intervened, inquiring in quite an abrasive manner as to why he was not contributing to the task. […] Clearly Steven was reluctant to take part, however Miss Marsh, whilst attempting to reconcile the situation, (thinking perhaps this was also being helpful to me as the host of the workshop), was actually making it worse. I was anxious that this participant was now going to feel forced into participating. One of the biggest challenges I'm facing throughout this fieldwork is how I mediate moments such as this, particularly when Miss Marsh is exercising her authority, which in some cases perpetuates the tension further instead of diffusing it. In other moments, such as today, her actions were actually running contrary to my ethical stance as a researcher, where I am striving to foster genuine engagement with participants, which is often extremely fragile and very easily interrupted.

Exert from Appendix 4: 93-94

In these session, Steven choose not to participate. I asked if he was okay.

29/10/14

Miss Marsh intervened and asked Steven why he was not participating

29/10/14

Steven became angry as Miss Marsh appeared angry at his non-participation

29/10/14

*Origami mood cards made by the participants for the audience*

Building upon ideas suggested for a mood card, the group made origami pinwheels

3/11/14

Tendencies

I screened the final film for the participants to see on a digital projector. Sean, who had helped set up, sat next to me by the laptop whilst everyone else sat around a bank of desks. To my disappointment, the film was met with little reaction from the participants. I enthusiastically congratulated them, and remarked on what an accomplishment their film was, to which Miss Marsh agreed, responding equally as animated. Apathetic reactions such as this have occurred frequently through this fieldwork, where the participants have acknowledged praise indifferently. It has often been difficult to gauge whether or not the participants truly do experience a sense of achievement, as they rarely vocalise any sentiments. Possibly this could be because of the pre-existing social dynamics embedded within this group, where what is said and how participants act and react to one another is policed by each other. Participants risk being ridiculed by peers if they were to express how they felt, particularly if it was a positive statement. I have noticed expressing accomplishment has almost become a social faux pas with this group, as well as the capacity to pay reverence to themselves.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 97-98
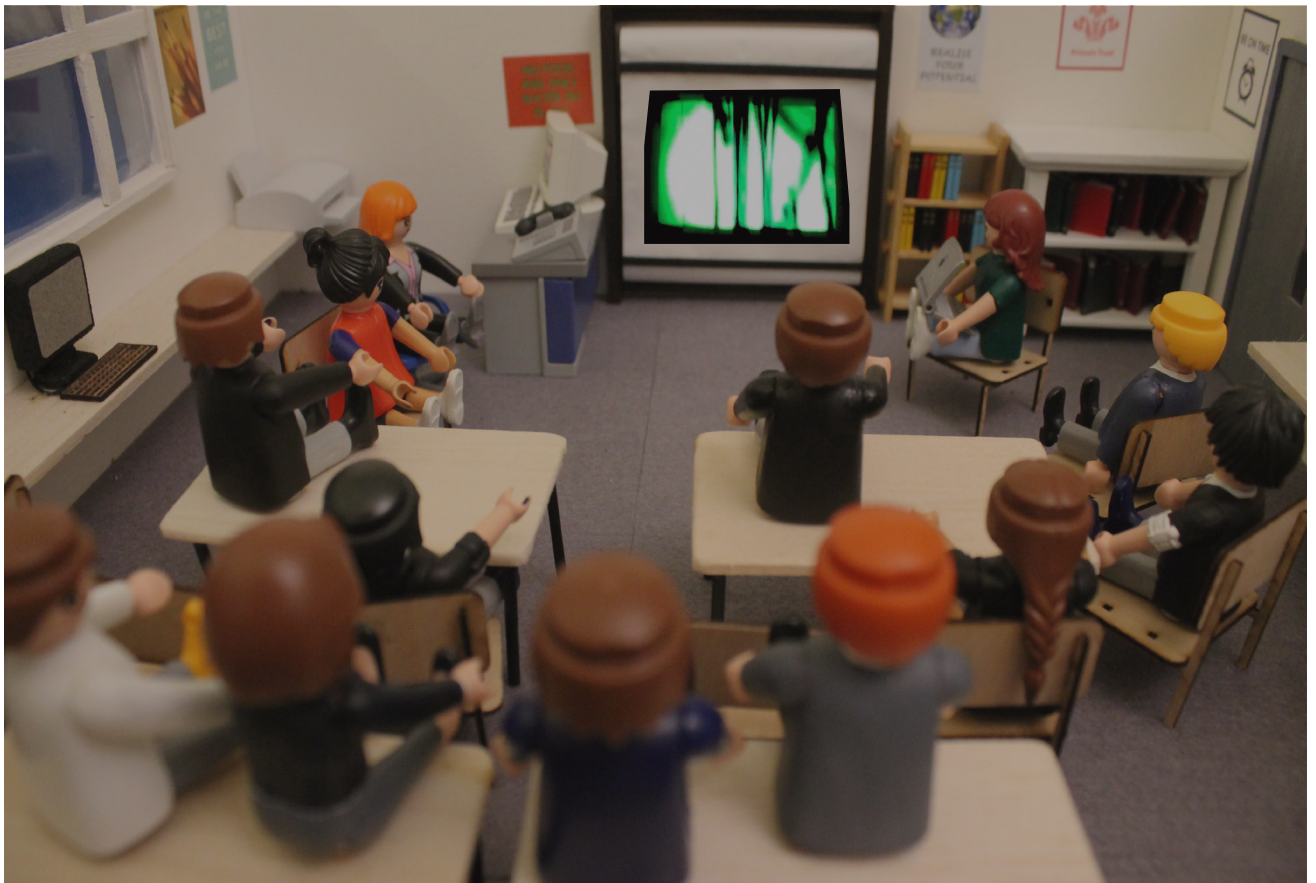
First screening of the final film with the group

10/11/14

A collective apathetic reaction to the screening

10/11/14

I enthusiastically congratulated the group on their film

10/11/14

S4 XL CLUB PRESENTS

HIGH SCHOOL

ANIMATION PREMIER

Monday 17th November 2014

VIP SEAT

To:

S4 XL CLUB
ICT ROOM 144
SHOWING: 12pm

Liam's ticket design used as an invitation to the classroom screening

Lewis's designed a cinema ticket to be used as a invitation to the second classroom screening

10/11/14

Card popcorn boxes made from images of the participants' films

In preparation for the screening, the participants made boxes for popcorn and more pinwheel mood cards

10/11/14

Performance

After the class had settled down and the register had been taken, the participants divided themselves into teams to prepare for the screening. David and Joe decanted popcorn into boxes made in the previous workshop and positioned a table by the classroom entrance, which they both sat at, as well as organising the pinwheel mood cards. Sean and Sam sat by the laptop, speaker and projector. The rest of the participants moved tables out the way and positioned chairs to form a cinema-style auditorium. Once the room and props were set up, Miss Marsh suggested we have a rehearsal before the audience were due to arrive, particularly as Hailey had planned to give a short introductory speech. At this point, David enthusiastically stood up and announced he would pretend to be an incoming audience member. He left the classroom and re-entered in character. Slightly mocking the situation, the class laughed as he jovially entered the room, showing his ticket to another Joe. Once the Hailey had rehearsed her speech, Miss. Marsh suggested someone be ready to stand up at the end to answer any questions. David confidently volunteered, quite certain he wanted this role, and stood up in front of the room. It was interesting to watch this performance, where insecurity appeared to be masked by flippancy. I suggested he present the audience with the physical film reel containing the participants' artwork.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 100

David and Joe set up a table by the door and put out the popcorn boxes and mood cards

17/11/14

47

The participants transformed their classroom into a cinema-style theatre

17/11/14

I spent time showing Sean and Mat how to set up the laptop to project the film

17/11/14

Hailey and David rehearsed their speeches in front of the group before the audience arrived

17/11/14

There was a jovial atmosphere in the classroom and a more harmonious dynamic between the participants than I have witnessed previously. The audience began to fill up, with a teacher from the adjacent classroom bringing his entire class of around 20 pupils with him. Several other teachers also joined. Once seated and calm, I quietly instructed Sean to fade out the music as Hailey stood up at the front to recite her speech. Whilst smiling and occasionally laughing, she confidently outlined the project and the work that was involved without the need for her prepared script. Afterwards, I again subtly instructed Sean on how to play the film, signalling to Sam to remove the projector lens cap. Throughout the screening, pupil audience members sang along with the music. At the end, David stood up, thanking the audience for attending, and asking if there were any questions. He also presented them with the original film reel and passed it around the room. The guest teachers enthusiastically praised the participants, commenting on the animation technique exclaiming they had never seen anything like it before, as well as the mood cards, which the audience requested to keep.

Exert from Appendix 4: 101

As the audience arrived, David and Joe took their tickets and handed out popcorn and the mood cards
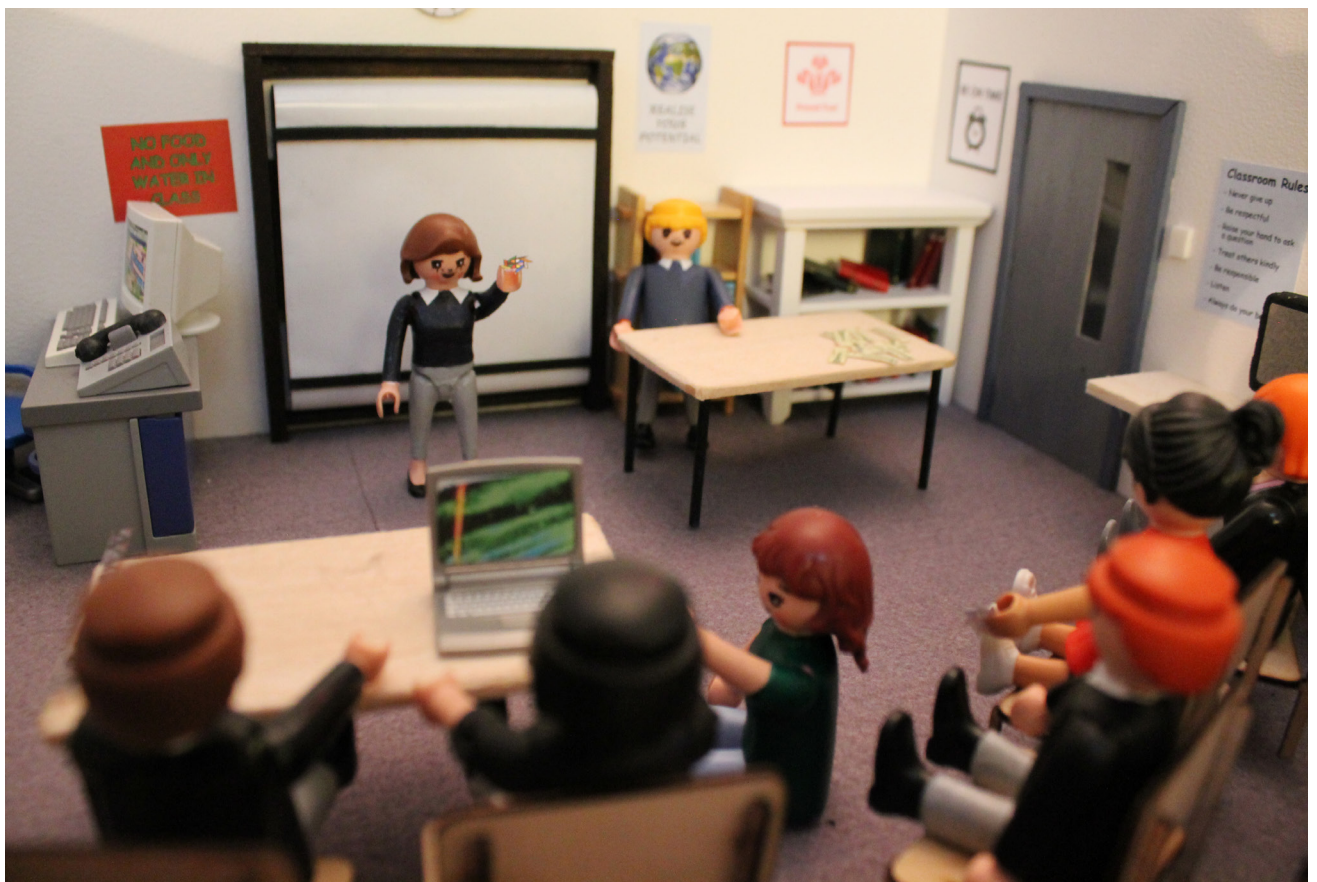
17/11/14

David and Joe taking the audience's tickets (detail)

17/11/14

Hailey stood up at the front and explained the purpose of the mood cards and how to use them

17/11/14

Once the audience were settled, I signalled to Sean and Mat to begin the film

17/11/14

Hailey turned the lights off as the film began

17/11/14

Afterwards David stood up at the front to explain how the film was made and answered questions

17/11/14

David then passed round the audience sections of the original film to look at

17/11/14

The audience members enthusiastically commented on the film and congratulated the participants

17/11/14

A class photograph taken on a trip to the iMax cinema where their film was screened

9/12/14

Phase Three: Semi-structured Interviews
January 2015 - May 2015

Interviewing Hailey and Meghan

2/2/15

Interviewing David, Sam and Steven

16/2/15

Interviewing Dan and Mat

23/2/15

Interviewing Lewis and Mat (chaperon)

16/3/15
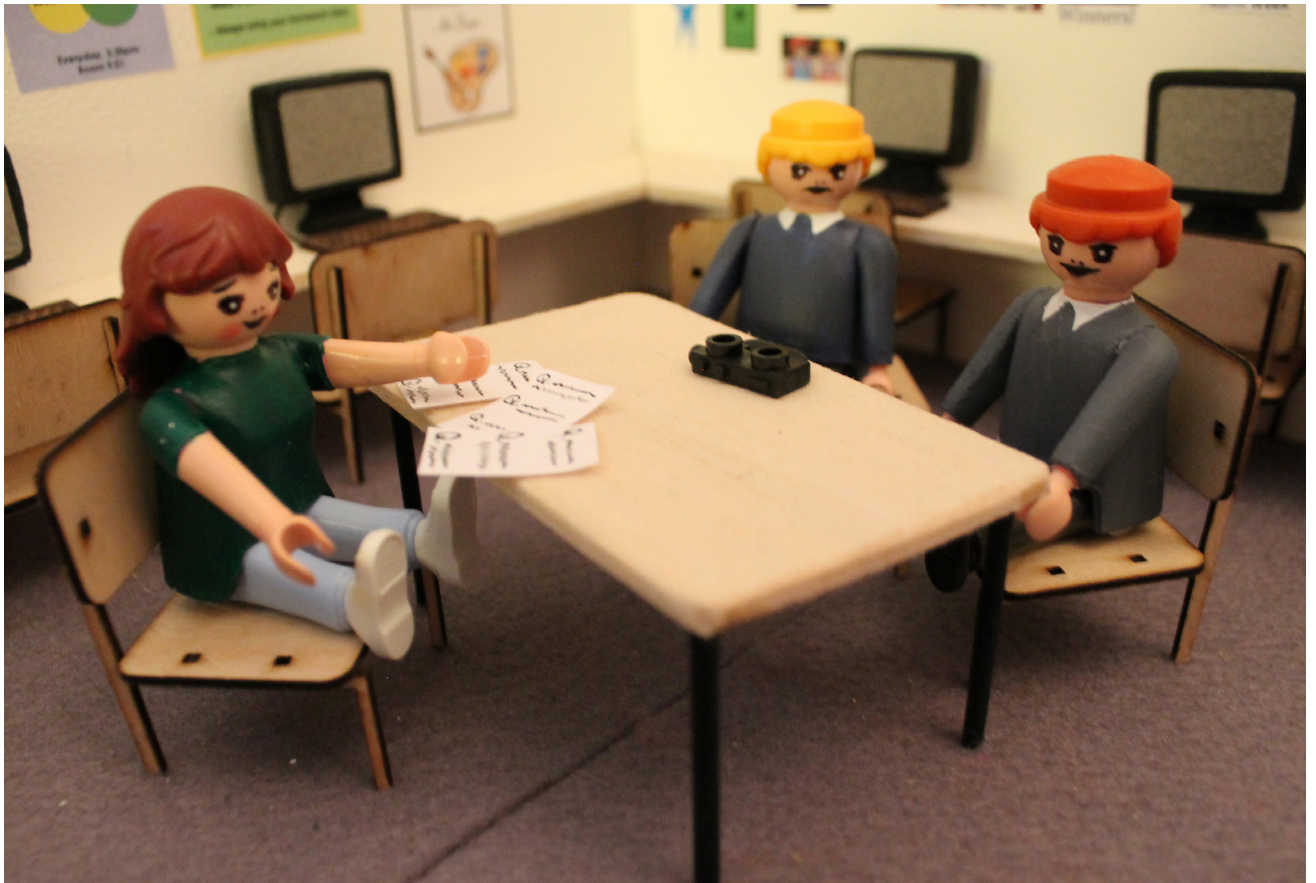
Interviewing Max and David (chaperon)

23/3/15

Interviewing Miss Marsh

23/3/15 and 27/3/15

Interviewing Maddy

1/5/15

Phase Four: Activity-based Focus Group
May 2015 - June 2015
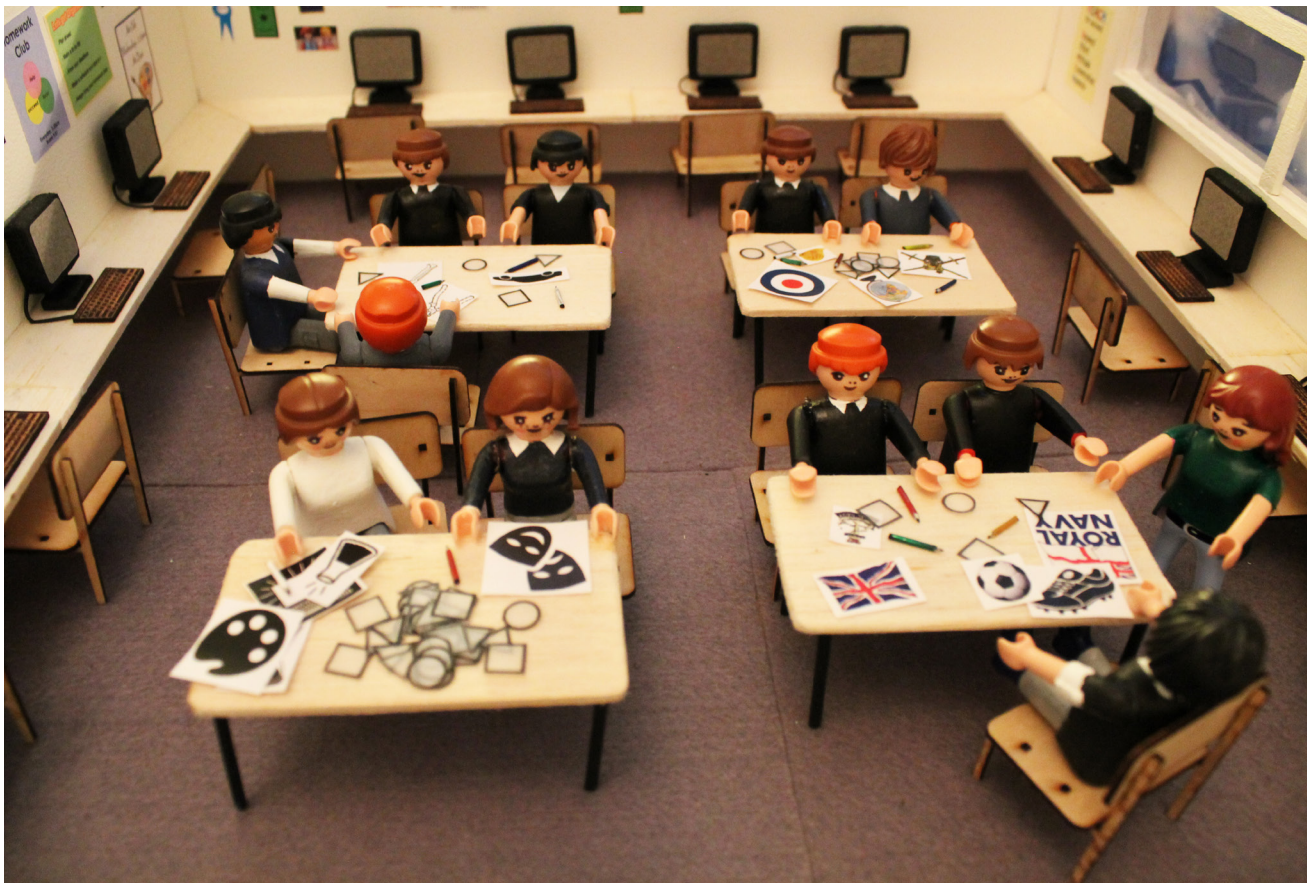
Sitting in friendship groups, the participants discussed what should be included on their flag

6/5/15

Activity-based Focus Group

We began by discussing what this class flag could contain and what message it would be communicating. The participants agreed that the class flag should display key XL Club events and achievements. Ideas shouted included images to represent their trip to the velodrome; the school disco the participants organised; winning the science competition; and representing the direct animation project. When asked for images to represent their ambitions for their future, Hailey choose comedy-tragedy drama masks to symbolise her ambition of becoming an actress; Max choose a computer to represent his desire to become a software developer; Sean choose a games console representing game design; Sam choose a car to represent his ambition of becoming a mechanic; Dan choose the Royal Navy badge and Lewis the British Army logo; Steven a football as he wants to play football professionally; Meghan symbolised her ambition of becoming a criminologist with a magnifying glass. Additional themes the participants wanted to be symbolically represent included: the change of seasons; Scotland; the world; growth; transition; kinship; looking to the future; artist flare; science; some way of representing the school's identity through a coat of arms or shield; and religion (a theme which interestingly has not come to the fore before, yet Christianity pervades the identity and manifesto of the school, with religious iconography and customs prevalent throughout the school).
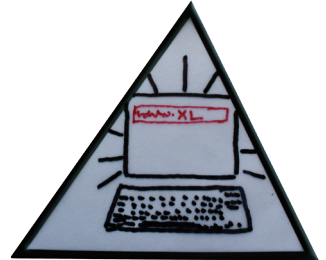
Extract from Appendix 4: 337-338

The participants used the tracing paper to make their badge designs for the flag

6/5/15

The participants' flag badges (detail)

Hailey and Meghan's badge designs for the flag (detail)

6/5/15

David and Joe's war memorial design (detail)

David and Joe sat away from the group and collaborated on a larger badge design

6/5/15

Last Return

I was disappointed that the majority of the participants were still on exam leave, only being able to see five of them - David, Hailey, Steven, Sam and Max. The time arranged for me to visit was during an XL Club period, but present was also the new cohort of XL Club members who were two years younger. Whilst showing excitement at the scale of the flag, the participants only had a short time to examine it before the new XL Club cohort filed into the classroom and sat down. I felt this was unfortunate, as their initial reactions seemed thrown whilst being witnessed by their younger peers. As I attempted to ask for their feedback, the participants' demeanour changed from one of excitement to one of indifference. This nonchalance, echoes previous moments during the fieldwork where I have presented the participants back with their work and where publicly displaying any sense of achievement is a social indiscretion.

Exert from Appendix 4: 340

The participants unpacked the framed flag together

11/6/15

Miss Philips, the head teacher, came in and excitedly asked the participants to explain the flag to her
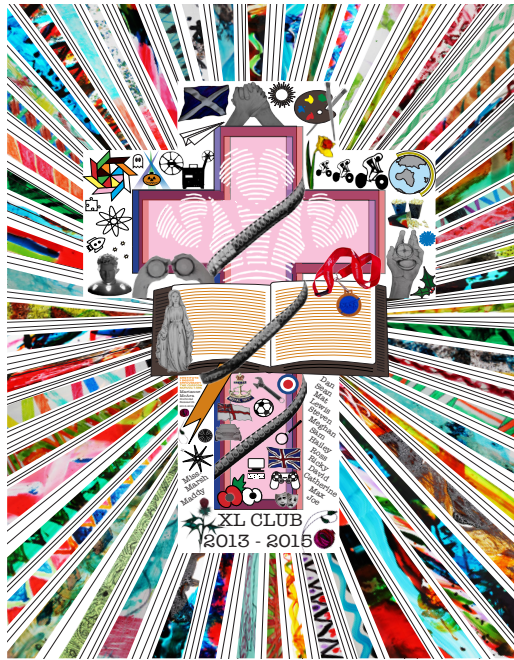
11/6/15

The participants were then asked by Miss Marsh to the address the new cohort about the class curriculum and explain who I was and the meaning behind their flag. As David began to speak, several of the new cohort female members began to whisper and giggle, encouraging the participants to maintain a degree of dispassion. This was frustrating to witness as in front of these younger peers, suddenly their investment appeared diminished. However, halfway though the presentation, Miss Philips (the head teacher) entered the room and enthusiastically inquired about the flag. I was relieved to then witness the participants eagerly responding and explaining it to her, seeking her approval whilst now ignoring their younger audience. Miss Philips then requests a photograph be taken of the participants and the flag for the school newspaper. It was reassuring to witness the participants contently posing next to the piece, alongside Miss Marsh, Miss Philips and myself, displaying signs that they were proud and had been positively affected upon receiving their celebratory flag.

Exert taken from Appendix 4: 340-341

Miss Marsh took a group photograph for the school newspaper

11/6/15

Celebratory class flag (detail)

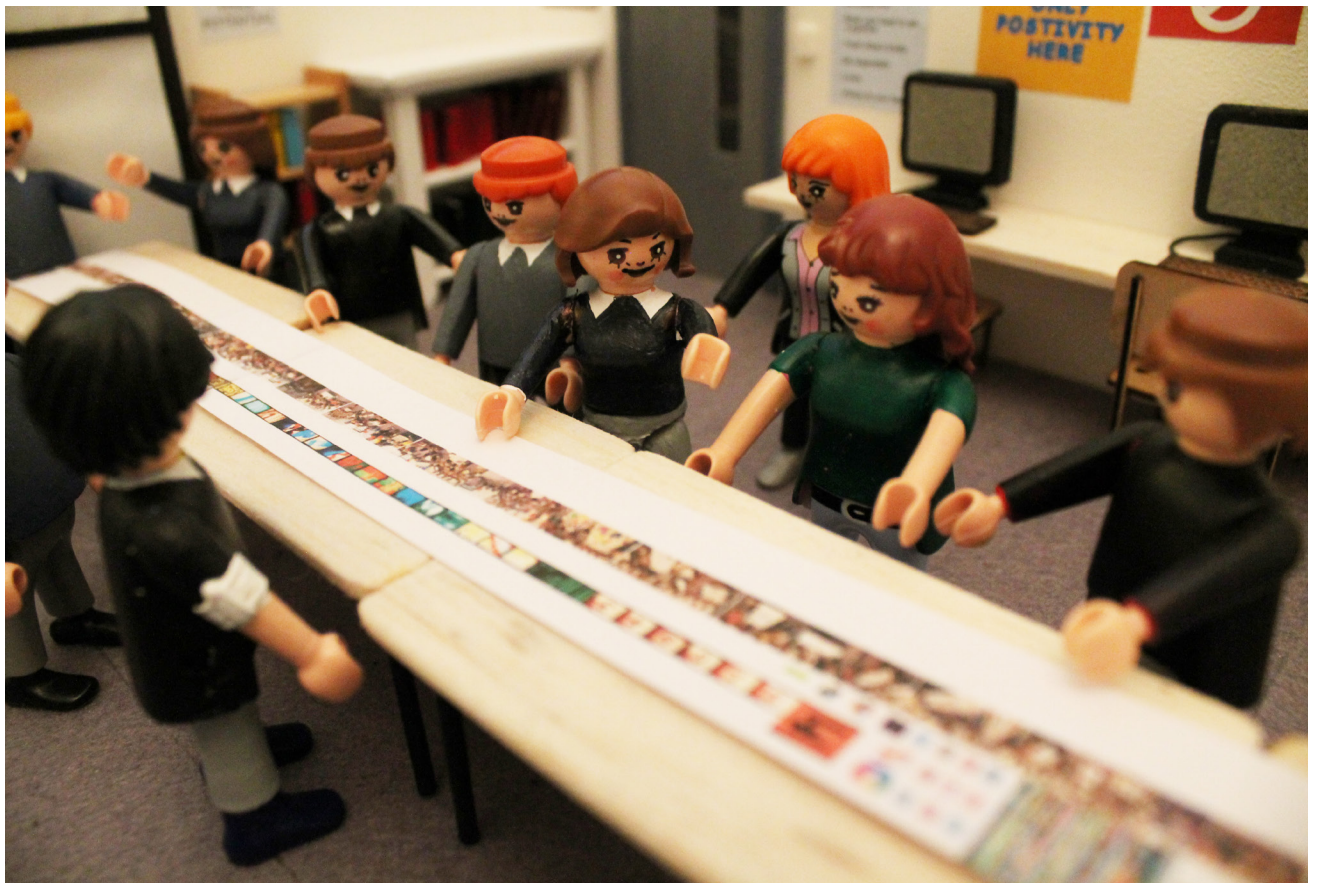The group photograph taken with the celebratory class flag for the school newspaper

11/6/15

Phase Five: Evaluation Event
April 2016

Hailey: 'Aw this is incredible. I love the little Playmobil people!' (Appendix 4: 370)


The participants enthusiastically examined the timeline and tried to identify themselves

29/4/16

Dan: 'I think when we like actually won it cause like we didn't know we were entering a competition at first and then when we like went there and like I don't think… when we were seeing the films going through everyone else's… I think… I don't know whether it was just me but I had like… I was like aw no these good like… we might not get anything out of it and then when we did actually get something… it was kinda like a big shock.'

Marianne: 'And how did you all feel seeing your film on the big screen?'

David: '[...] it was cool though because it was like […] we made it and now it's like up on this big massive cinema screen.' (Appendix 4: 350)
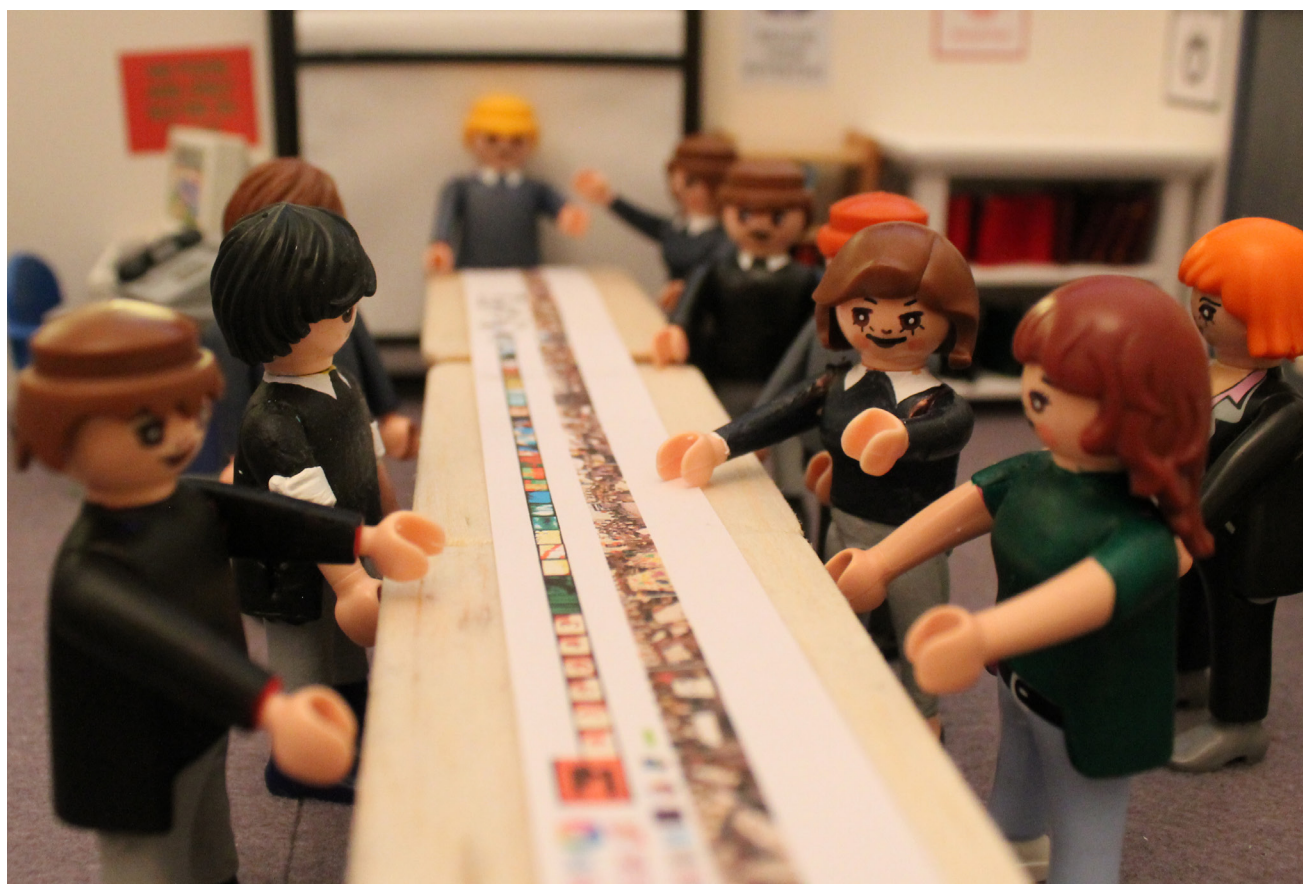
The participants recalled significant moments and memories from the timeline
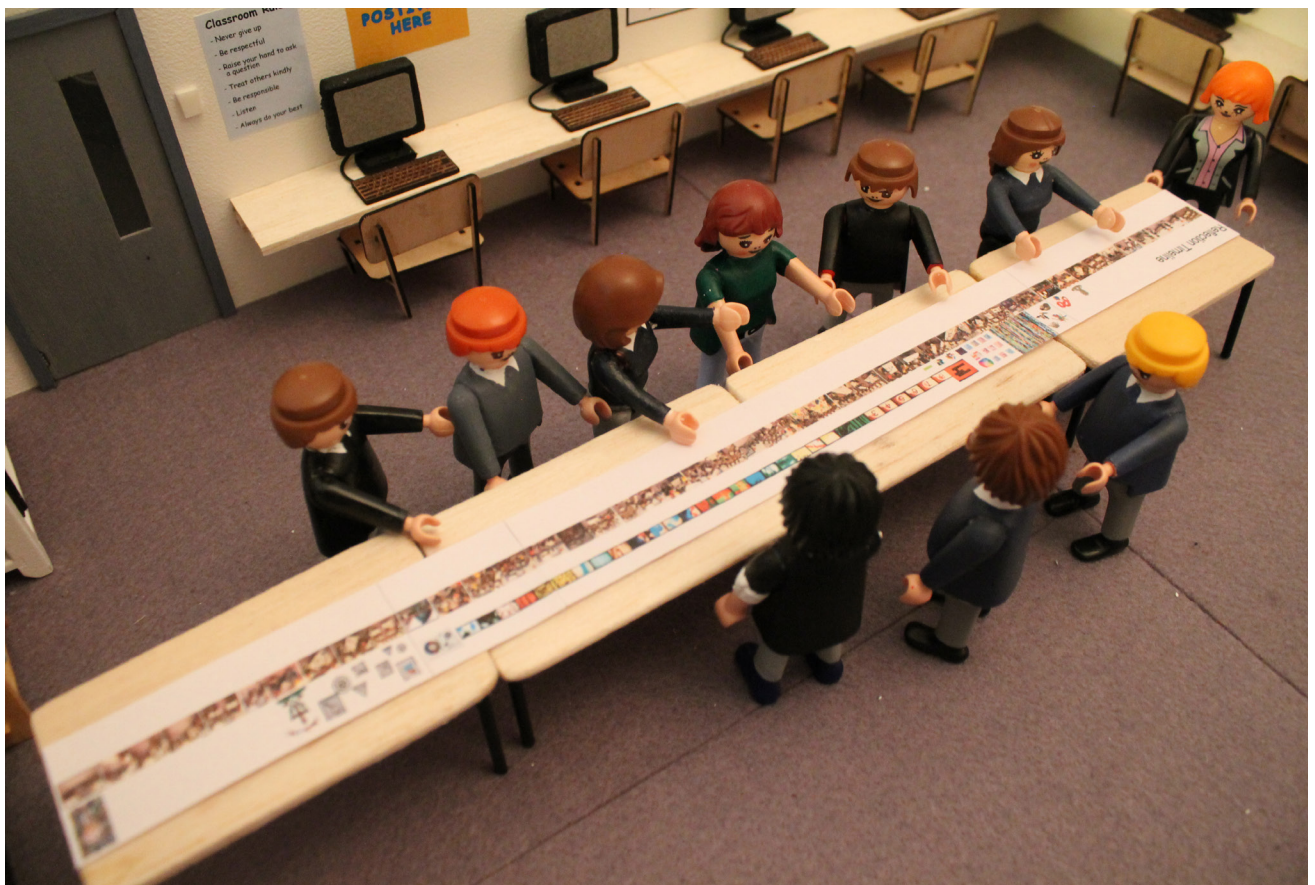
29/4/16

Miss Marsh: 'I've got the red hair?!'

Marianne: ' Aye you've got short red hair and a wee suit jacket on.'

[group and Miss Marsh laughing]

[...]

Hailey: 'You can tell which ones are me, Meghan and Catherine cause we're always together!' [laughing]

(Exert from Appendix 4: 367-368)

Miss Marsh joined in with the group in examining the timeline

29/4/16