

DESIGNING A TOOLKIT TO ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY AND MEANING-MAKING

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Abstract

In my practice I am interested in creating tools to encourage creativity and imagination that encourage participants' meaning-making in museum contexts, based on constructionist principles. My work challenges participants to both create and reflect on physical artefacts that are shared with others to open a dialogue from someone's own perspective and facilitate new ideas to emerge. This example describes a toolkit designed for capturing participants' experience of one museum space. It raises the following research question: How can the creation of tangible forms facilitate meaning making in museums, through creative practice?

Keywords creativity, imagination, making, design research, design experiment, museum space, objects

1. My work in relation to Constructionism:

Ackermann (2004) emphasises Papert's (1980) concept of learning through making, highlighting the importance of externalising our ideas into tangible forms in order to be communicated and shared with others.

This design experiment hopes to provide participants with some kind of external supports which challenge them to translate and transform both their ideas and experience into tangible forms which will give space for individuals' conversation about their own representation and "objects-to-think with" (Papert, 1980). The study looks at the process in which participants give form to meaning-making and how the creation of tangible materials can inform back their meanings. Indeed, the presentation focuses on how participants' imagination was stimulated by the Monk's Parlour Kit which in return, facilitated meaning-making by the creation of tangible materials.

2. Experiment's Context:

This design experiment is conducted at the Sir John Soane's Museum, London, in one particular room: "The Monk's Parlour Room" located in the museum's basement. The space is very specific and can be described as very overwhelming and confusing, as it displays hundreds of objects in a dark and mysterious room. Usually, visitors are not allowed to take photographs and can only sketch with a pencil.

This study is motivated by looking at how visitors can make meaning of their experience of such a space through a structured, creative construction activity, focused on elements from the space that were meaningful to them. Participants are a group of eight adults, MA and PhD students from the Royal College of Art. They were asked individually to do the Kit and the data collected was displayed at the RCA to reflect on participants' experience and interpretation of the space.

2. The Kit

The *Monk's Parlour Kit*¹ was designed to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their visit, and to challenge them to translate their experience into tangible forms. It contains different tasks and materials that participants have to complete individually during and after the visit. Indeed, the kit is composed of two parts:

1. The visit, a sketchbook and pencil were provided for participants to answer the different tasks.
2. The post-visit activity enabled participants to reflect on their experience in a different context and with more materials.

The structure of the kit encouraged participants in dwelling and stepping back from the space which are both very important in order to make sense of an experience (Ackermann, 2001:10).

Post-visit interviews were conducted with each participant in order to go through the materials they created and collected. The interviews, with the physical artefacts participants created acting as objects to stimulate their thinking, encouraged them to evoke their feelings, emotions and attachments to certain features of the space. Indeed, through using the Kit, the participants produced a diverse repertoire²⁻³ of meaning-making materials which pushed them to reflect on their individual experience and interpretation of the space:

The first thing was to look at all the bits and then it got more specific to me (participant #3).

The chance to actually go there with a focus was actually really interesting. So many things in there! It is really important to work out what things mean the most to you. It made me think about what has actually had an impact on me"(2014, participant #7).

The Monk's Parlour Kit was designed with the aim to collect participants' experience and understanding of the space. However, as the project went along I got more creative as well, as participants' responses and creations then informed my own artistic practice and meaning-making in relation to the space.

For the *Constructionist and Creativity* conference, I would like to present a detailed study of this experiment and display of the materials, but also show other examples of my work and how constructionist principles link to both my research and design practice.

References:

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¹ *The Monk's Parlour Kit* given to eight participants.



² One set of the result:

“use the five pre-cut foam board parts to build a three dimensional interpretation of the room”.



³ One set of the result: “use the container provided in the kit to capture three things from the space”.