

Using arts-based research to help visualize community intervention in international aid

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Abstract

This article discusses the advantages of arts-based research specifically for high-context, culturally diverse, power-infused, and chaotic or diffuse research settings as often found in international aid. It points to the ability of arts to concretize abstract concepts and to situate them within specific socio-cultural locations, enabling powerless groups to self-define and to adjust resilience-enhancing interventions to their own perceptions. The arts-based method as an indirect form of communication is shown to be effective in changing stands of power holders and experts, enabling a dialogue that creates culturally sustainable aid. The model used in this article is demonstrated and discussed.

Keywords

Arts-based research, arts in social work, international aid, participatory research, policy planning

Introduction

International aid in the literature

Dangers for poor and vulnerable populations after disasters include relocation, a lack of basic resources, the shattering of community support, social chaos, and extreme poverty. International

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aid addresses all of these issues, responding to both immediate physical needs and the psychological needs that arise in the aftermath of disaster. It is a vital service that saves and enhances the lives of many while expressing the highest levels of altruism and humanity. It includes professionals as well as volunteers who devote themselves to saving lives (Bhatt, 2011; Ingram, 2005).

However, like all large-scale, worthwhile, and complex social endeavors, international aid has its pitfalls. One such problem is that, sometimes, different nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) do not coordinate the types of help needed, and this provides a haphazard and broken stream of services and a void in the long, complicated aftermath of the immediate disaster. This creates difficulty for international aid in developing a culturally contextualized and sustainable resource from within the community using local people and understandings, creating potential conflict between different local hierarchies and sub-groups that make long-term cooperation within the community difficult. Overall, international aid, when given by Western countries to non-Western countries, can become a self-perpetuating system that imposes Western methods and structures that essentially leave out local leaders and culturally contextualized ways of solving problems. Indeed, international aid is sometimes critiqued as the new colonialism (Argenti-Pillen, 2003; Dominelli, 2010; Gow and Paton, 2009; Healy, 2008; Ingram, 2005; Mukherjee and Chowdhury, 2014; Svistova and Pyles, 2012; Thompson et al., 2009).

One way to help address these potential pitfalls is to monitor and improve interventions through systematic evaluation and research. However, traditional research methods are difficult to implement in the shifting context, and the victims themselves as research participants are often underrepresented.

Research settings of international aid are often improvised and changing rather than organized and controlled, and samples used are often small (Svistova and Pyles, 2012).

Verbal interviews with non-Western research participants are up against language barriers, as well as the cultural strangeness of conceptualizing behavior in abstract terms, and talking directly to strangers and to power holders (Bowler, 1997; Dominelli, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Mixed methods that combine qualitative, participatory, and contextualized research methods in addition to standardized, quantitative methods could help solve these methodological challenges (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Creswell and Plano, 2007). A phenomenological stand focuses on the research participants' perceptions, understanding, or experience of the phenomena being researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In our present case, this is conceptualized as art being used for rehabilitation in the participants' community (Huberman and Miles, 2002). This knowledge can be evaluative, but it can also be a preliminary base for creating sustainable and culturally contextualized interventions that could help create a more nuanced body of evaluative knowledge about international aid.

Arts-based research methods in the international aid setting

Arts-based methods are cited as an effective trigger for eliciting explanatory and indirect narratives from nondominant members of poor, non-Western populations. Arts-based research is cited as helpful in clarifying intercultural concepts and perceptions of nondominant groups, and in this way, including the phenomenological experience of the participants (Freire and Macedo, 1987; Huss, 2012; Knowles and Cole, 2008; Mason, 2002; Sclater, 2003; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). For example, the single word 'house' can be a tent, a hut, an apartment bloc, a village, or a home; it can have different social and emotional meanings (Huss, 2009; Pink and Kurti, 2004; Piquamel, 2005). Images also help to contextualize participants' experiences within a social reality, enabling a subjective phenomenology of the experience in a specific social context (Eisner, 1997; Foster, 2007; Harrington, 2004; Sclater, 2003).

When creating such images, new constellations of compositional and symbolic elements are grouped together. This helps to define an abstract concept such as ‘resilience’ in more concrete terms and to shift to new perceptions of the issue (Huss and Sarid, 2011). Western culture shows more strength in verbal and mathematical skills, while other cultures, such as nomadic cultures, show strengths in kinesthetic and visual skills (Gardner, 1993). Cultures that do not stress verbal skills may be better able to express themselves through visual methods (Harrington, 2004; Huss, 2012; Joughin and Maples, 2004; Wang and Burris, 1994).

In addition to cultural differences between researchers and participants in international aid, there are also oftentimes differences in power since the local community receiving the aid is totally dependent upon it and cannot readily express criticism. Arts-based research claims that those with power use language, while those without power often express themselves through metaphors and symbols that do not create direct confrontation (Emerson and Smith, 2000; Huss, 2012; Lippard, 1990; Pink and Kurti, 2004; Wang and Burris, 1994). Thus, using images enables those without power to express criticism in a way that does not endanger themselves. Landry et al. (1996) describe that the place where marginalized ‘speech acts’ can be heard is not in historical, academic, and political writings that are based in words; rather, it is in the areas of symbolic self-expression where resistance is removed from reality (p. 207). This is also described in participatory research methods.

Indeed, symbolic and metaphoric forms of expression are cited as more common among poor and rural communities who do not use confessional or abstract narrative styles (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012; Sclater, 2003; Wang and Burris, 1994).

These theoretical explanations point to the potential usefulness of arts-based research within the culturally diverse, unstructured, and power-infused context of researching international aid. Based on this, the following research will utilize arts-based methods as a preliminary method of defining needs and perceptions of local people, community workers, and external international aid experts concerning an international aid context.

Literature review of art therapy and community art in international aid

Art use is a socially constructed language that presumably has different roles, definitions, and locations within different communities (Bhabha, 1994; Cancellini, 1996; Lippard, 1990). For example, within non-Western cultures, art is often understood as crafts, as a way to decorate and to make needed objects (Mahon, 2000; Rose, 1988). Conversely, religion uses art didactically as a way to impart dogma and values to illiterate people. These culturally embedded uses of art locate it within different arenas of everyday community life rather than as a psychologically encapsulated activity within special spaces, as it is within Western art and therapy paradigms (Hansen, 2001; Huss, 2012; Lai and Threlfall, 2012; Lippard, 1990; Pink and Kurti, 2004). Art is also seen in the Western world as a product, something to be purchased and taken home. At the same time, despite these dangers, the arts were shown earlier to have the potential to be cost-effective, sustainable, and effective within international aid rehabilitation. The use of preliminary research to learn local people’s uses of arts as rehabilitation can help overcome these problems and utilize this potential. This methodology is outlined in the following text. The current research study focuses on the methodological implications of using arts-based research in disaster research, while additional and ongoing studies into this project have focused on additional elements (Huss et al., in press).

Methods

In this study, an international NGO, ‘Tag’, donated a grant to a major NGO in Sri Lanka, ‘Sarvodaya’ (Sarvodaya, 2015; Tag, 2015) for the development of an arts-focused community project. The

project goal was to enhance community and psychosocial resilience after war and natural disaster in Sri Lanka. Both NGOs decided to start with a research project to explore the usefulness of arts for the community as a base for setting up the project. Existing uses of arts in the area were researched, and a group of local villagers, their community workers, and their community leaders were interviewed using arts-based methods. The aim was to create a culturally contextualized dialogue around the role of art within disaster aid.

Field site for current research

The current case study took place in eastern Sri Lanka in Batticaloa, an area affected by war, tsunami, and flooding. Over 500,000 inhabitants of these regions were displaced from their homes and had to flee to 315 provisional refugee camps or to the homes of relatives due to tsunami floods and heavy rains (Argenti-Pillen, 2003; Ingram, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2006). Participants in this study were from Batticaloa and were solicited through the mediation of Sarvodaya.

Research design

The design first explored existing instances of art use for rehabilitation within the community from an ethnographic perspective. It then explored how the villagers and their community leaders defined art use as rehabilitation from a phenomenological perspective, using arts-based research workshops.

The two researchers were part of a group of international experts that came to Sri Lanka to promote the project. As such, they are positioned as participant observers in this project. Participant observation is cited not only as reducing objectivity, but also as enhancing understanding and involvement (Smith, 2002). The researchers were not invested in showing the effectiveness of their techniques, as they were preliminary to any intervention, and we feel that this enhanced the reliability of the findings (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Smith, 2002).

In the villagers' workshops, the villagers were asked to create collages that would depict how they thought art could help their community. The villagers created collages with natural materials that were gathered beforehand. This was reported by the community workers as a familiar use of art for the villagers. There were 30 participants, 15 men and 15 women who were recruited by their community workers. A bus picked them up from their village to reach the Sarvodaya community center. The workshop was part of general training and enrichment activities in the center, in which the villagers participated. The villagers were young and middle-aged people. The workshop lasted for 2 hours.

In the community workers' workshop, the same questions were asked, but the workers were asked to use oil pastels on paper rather than collage because of their perceived familiarity with drawing. There were 10 community workers, six men and four women, between the ages of 20 and 30 years, who worked in the same villages. The workshop lasted for about 2 hours, and was part of the community workers' regular supervision and training meeting.

In both of these workshops, translators were used to translate the explanatory narratives of the villagers, and community workers' art work.

The final workshop was an interview with three community leaders (all men), who stated that they did not have time to draw but were prepared to be interviewed. They were the leaders of the community center run by Sarvodaya. This session lasted for about an hour. All workshops had a translator who spoke Tamil and English.

Data sources included the following: interviews with and about local artists and existing art projects; research diaries (of two researchers); video of an arts-based workshop with the villagers

(images, verbalizations, and overall interaction); video of an arts-based workshop with community workers; video of the interviews with the community leaders; 20 photographed images and their explanations by their creators (see the 'Ethical issues' section).

Analytical strategy

The first aim of the analysis of the case study was to capture the phenomenological definitions of the village's community workers and community leaders and of the connection between art and community rehabilitation. The second aim of the analysis was to understand these different conceptions in the context of culture and social class or, in other words, to understand according to an ethnographic analysis (Huberman and Miles, 2002; Mason, 2002; Smith, 2002). In order to achieve these aims, the workshops and interviews were analyzed each in their own context as a single case study. Each case study was then discussed comparatively as in a multiple case-study design described by Yin (2013).

The analytical prism of the workshops was arts-based, using a phenomenological prism to analyze the participants' explanations of their images (Amadeo, 1997). The use of images and their explanations was cited as intensifying the participants' phenomenological voice; the images and their explanations by their creators provided a dual set of phenomenology (Huss, 2012). The verbal narratives of the participants explaining their art were transcribed, translated and thematically analyzed (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012). The overall themes were analyzed in the context of each group, in relation to the theoretical background outlined in the literature survey concerning the use of art in international aid (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). An additional analysis focused on the process of the art-making as observed in the videos of the workshops by the researchers. In arts-based research, the process of art production is included in the analysis as part of the data (Huss, 2012; Mason, 2002).

Trustworthiness was built into the research design in that the villagers, community workers, and community leaders were defined as the experts, and they self-defined their use of arts for community rehabilitation. As stated, each group was separated so that internal power relations would not affect the group. Other elements that enhanced the trustworthiness of this design were the long-term and repeated nature of the research and the creation of multiple perspectives and multiple forms of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Mason, 2002). The authors were also part of the study, and shifts in their positions have been described. This has the advantage of creating a dual insider and outsider perspective, which is important in a new area of research. However, it also reduces objectivity (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Huberman and Miles, 2002).

Ethical issues

The project went through the authors' departmental ethics committee, and participants signed consent forms in order to take part in the study. The study did not probe into personal information but explored how participants conceptualized the arts as a rehabilitative medium in the community. Anonymity was preserved in the thematic analyses, as were personal details of villagers.

Additionally, the research was a complementary aspect to the community development project targeted at providing a response to the community needs. It aimed to enhance understanding of how to provide a culturally relevant arts intervention, and therefore the research was participatory. The participants' ideas were implemented by the end of the study; for example, the community received money to repaint the temple. The inclusion of researchers and evaluators in projects is cited as effective in helping to monitor and adjust international aid initiatives in real time, thus enhancing the outcome (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Huberman and Miles, 2002). Additionally, art

materials were divided among the villagers for their children directly after the workshops, as appreciation for their participation.

Data presentation and discussion

Each of the above-mentioned elements of the research method will be presented as themes for data presentation, and the analyses of each part will directly follow.

Existing art projects

The researchers mapped out and visited existing arts and rehabilitation projects in the Batticaloa area. These are outlined here as a map of what is happening in the area, but they are not thematically analyzed, as they are more of a general description of the context of existing art use.

Third eye. This is a group of local artists and actors who use traditional Tamil ethnic art forms such as street theater and murals in public places to teach illiterate villagers how to, for example, avoid land mines. The local artists involved in this group searched for funding from different NGOs (ThirdEye, 2014).

From this exploration of existing projects and local art uses, we observed that art was already used within the community. This is apparent by the use of traditional art forms but with connection to modern problems of poverty, land mines, and other such difficulties.

University theater. The second project included the local university student theater group, the Centre for Performing Arts in Batticaloa (2009). This group addressed local social issues such as war and conflict within their theater group (Centre for Performing Arts in Batticaloa, 2009).

This use of arts to convey conciliatory and anti-war messages, by the local students, demonstrates the relevance of the use of more Western art forms of self-expression to envisage a better future and to deal with the war experience.

Butterfly garden for art therapy. The third project was a psychological endeavor for child-soldiers and for children who had lost their parents in the wars. The Batticaloa Peace Garden aims to provide psychosocial help to children who underwent violent war-related experiences (Chase et al., 1999). These activities are led by local members of the community skilled in one or more artistic disciplines from within the culture who have experienced psychological wounds similar to those of the children who come to the garden.

This project is the closest to traditional art therapy, but interestingly, it is based on traditional art practices and characteristics, using local artistic youth who had also undergone traumatic experiences, rather than externally trained therapists.

The landscape of the village. While this is not an organized project, it is a realm of art that already exists within the community. Religious shrines are a part of the landscape of the whole of Sri Lanka. The Tamil shrines (the population of this study) are richly colored and decorated with a variety of visual depictions of gods with different attributes. These include images of gods, pictures, flowers, food, and other decorations and can be either large or small. In front of many houses, a mandala image is chalked into the ground. Thus, visual spiritual elements are dominant within the landscape.

This overall observed dominance of images of shrines and gods, and the metaphorical meanings and strengths that each god provides, forms a visual 'culture' that is everywhere and creates a type

of visual and spiritual resilience that is readily available to everyone at all times (Hansen, 2001). In the village studied in Sri Lanka, the visual intelligence seems dominant, as seen in the level of decoration and color of houses, cars, and people (Gardner, 1993). This encourages the use of an arts-based project for resilience but points to the lack of relevance of the 'expert' knowledge of the authors in terms of shifting Western art uses directly to Sri Lanka.

In sum, the traditional art group, the university students, and the art therapy project all show that art use is different in different parts of the same culture and township.

Arts-based workshops with villagers, community workers, and community leaders

In each of the three workshops, the verbal interaction was transcribed, and this, together with the art work, was analyzed thematically. The themes from each workshop are presented next with an accompanying quote and image that illustrates the theme. Each workshop has a summary of the thematic analyses at the end.

Villagers' arts-based workshop

It was explained to the group of villagers that there was potential funding for an arts project in their community. They were asked to create a collage of an image of their most important needs with which they thought arts could help, using local materials such as twigs, stones, and shells. Each group then explained and presented their image to the other groups. The following themes are descriptions from the arts-based villagers' workshops according to their small groups.

The first and second women's groups created images surrounding wedding ceremonies and asked for sewing materials that would help them put together a dowry to enable them to marry. The third women's group created the goddess, Kali, a symbol of destruction so as to create new strength. The women explained that they had to learn to depend on themselves and not on the men, and so they needed the assistance of Kali. The first and second men's groups created images of temples. They explained that most importantly, they needed building supplies and art materials to rebuild and paint their village temples which were ruined in the war and floods. They needed to paint the temples as well as the various gods that decorate the temple so that the gods could save them from



Figure 1. Male villagers creating a temple.



Figure 2. Female villagers creating a wedding.



Figure 3. Female community workers discussing their image.

further disaster and so that they had a place to pray. The third and fourth men's groups created images of sports grounds and sports equipment. They explained that they needed to rebuild the cricket grounds and to have clothes and sports equipment for the team so that the youth could compete with teams from other villages. This was seen as a way to bring pride back to their village, as well as a way to keep busy because there was no agricultural work.

In general, we can see that art was defined by the villagers as a religious and communal ritual, as sports, and as a way to enable family transitions such as marriage. Art as crafts, sports, and religion



Figure 4. Image of woman crying due to husband's violence.

was given very high value and a clear role in community rehabilitation and development. The villagers did not define the arts as a discrete area of activity, but rather, they experienced it as a culturally embedded phenomenon that takes place in temples, sports grounds, and crafts rather than in discrete art galleries or therapy rooms. The villagers did not use abstract concepts, such as community 'resilience' or 'rehabilitation'; the aim of their art use was to enhance community safety, pride, coherence, and resilience, as in the earlier literature survey (Dokter, 1998; Frankel, 1985; Hass-Cohen and Carr, 2008).

The second theme is how the villagers experienced and reacted to the art-making process: from the videos of the workshop, it is clear that the villagers were very quiet at the verbal introduction to the workshops and did not suggest any art uses verbally. However, when asked to work in small groups and to visually represent what they thought, there was much active, animated talking in the small groups. Each group selected a representative to explain the art work to the whole group; these representatives took time and care to explain the works, and others from the group joined in to add additional points.

In terms of the process, the shift from passivity to animation when creating art corresponds to the aforementioned literature on arts-based research. The process specifically points to the ability of art to enable the creation of a distanced, metaphorical, nonthreatening space. It enables experience to be connected to concrete elements rather than defining it through Western abstractions. This is relevant when working with non-Western groups dependent on external international aid. The art enables a more distanced element (Huss, 2012; Landry et al., 1996; Wang and Burris, 1994).

Local community workers' workshop

The long-term repercussions of disaster were described by the community members as their central challenges when working with the villagers. The work with the community workers raised the following social problems with which the villagers were dealing: violence and drinking among men of the village, multiple childbirths at an early age and poor nutrition of women, and people with disabilities who were stigmatized by their own society.

The community workers, on their own initiative, drew posters of these themes and continued to draw posters for the villagers that were a didactic tool to solve these problems. These posters addressed the above problems and aimed to utilize art to encourage teaching positive safety: teaching health enhancing activities, teaching moral behaviors, and making a film with all of these positive social messages to influence the villagers because of the villagers' love of films.



Figure 5. A poster that the workers had made with the funds to discourage drinking alcohol.

Summary and analysis of community workers' workshop

Interestingly, the community workers pointed to a completely different use of arts, based on their role as teachers for the villagers and in dealing with the villagers' problems. They focused on the ability of arts to change perceptions and to influence people. They also focused on art's ability to impart new information needed for dealing with the changing reality for illiterate people. This use of art to change perceptions and to influence people is the most basic of art roles, as seen in advertising. Wall pictures are a traditional way of doing this in Sri Lanka (Butler, 2001; Shank, 2005).

Community leaders' workshop

In this meeting, the leaders of the community organization, in the presence of the external experts, were asked to define their central concerns and to determine whether they thought that the arts could help with these issues. They stated that they did not have time to draw, but were instead shown images made by the villagers and community workers and added their responses. Their themes are as follows:

Theme 1 – Lack of incoming funds: 'We have the problem of lack of incoming funds because international aid always moves on to the next disaster.'

Theme 2 – Creating sustainable solutions: 'We have the challenge of creating sustainable solutions to the villagers' ongoing community problems.'

Theme 3 – Art as mobilizing action: 'From what I see, art becomes a tool to channel and to mobilize the energy of the community.'

Theme 4 – Arts are visible and can pull in donors and create interest in the community: 'Because instead of being helpless and passive, they are actively creating something. Also, they do not demand large amounts of external money.'

Theme 5 – Art as emotional rehabilitation after war: 'The problem with the world is that we give undue importance to the head, to intellect and science, and a less important place to love – there is no better way than art to reawaken the heart of our people after the brutal war.'



Figure 6. Rebuilt shrine with NGO funds after the research project.

Theme 6 – Setting up a peace museum: ‘I think that a peace museum could be set up that becomes a place to attract tourists and to teach traditional crafts and theatre. It could also sell crafts and create different projects and meetings based on the arts between the conflicted Senegalese and Tamil groups.’

Theme 7 – Using villagers’ ideas as a base for art projects: Based on the villagers’ and community workers’ images, the leaders decided first, to use the money to fix the temples, as suggested by the villagers, and second, to set up a sports ground for the youth. It was also decided to use the money to enable the community workers to create didactic posters and possibly a film.

We see above that the community leaders, from their macro-oriented stance, focused on the energizing and communicative elements of art as a way to energize the villagers into action. Similar to the villagers, the resilience-enhancing element of art as a spiritual recourse was also understood by the leaders. Another direction that the leaders understood from their position as fundraisers and as those connected to global media was the potential of art to draw public attention and funding toward the community.

Most interestingly, in terms of arts-based research, we see that the villagers’ and community workers’ images enabled the leaders to ‘see’ the art uses suggested by the villagers and to implement them.

It could be that the time spent defining and talking about ideas in separate groups enabled a clear message from each group to be created and then conveyed to the leaders, in a way that did not make either side, leaders or villagers, feel threatened in terms of power relations. On this level, the arts-based research, as stated in the literature review earlier, fulfilled its role of giving voice and agency to the most powerless groups, enabling them to influence policy and to bridge the divide between class and power within the same community.

At the same time, power relations were exhibited in that the leaders themselves refused to use images, stating that they had no time to undergo a full workshop. This strengthens the literature survey above, pointing to the fact that those with power can afford to use words directly. It also points to the lack of power of the researchers over the community leaders, as compared to the villagers, situating the researchers as part of the power system while trying to transcend it through art.

Themes from the authors' field diaries: From expert to learner

The leading researcher, a social worker and art therapist, was called into this project as an 'external' expert from outside of the culture. The two stages of data gathering, exploring existing projects, and setting up workshops are shown in the author's research diary as a shift in understanding of how to use art in the international aid context. The experience and the themes emerging from interviews and meetings showed how art can only be understood within the cultural context. Community art, such as that used in Israel, can be used to activate actual social change by destabilizing existing perceptions and policies (Butler, 2001; Shank, 2005; Smith, 2002). However, this use of art was not relevant to the villagers or community workers who had no power to change policy in their country and had too many other immediate problems. The use of art, as part of a religious context and as a didactic tool, was a new understanding of the possible role of art within community development after disaster. Similarly, art therapy was defined as stigmatizing and as a strange activity when encapsulated within community uses of art. Thus, while the villagers also defined art as rehabilitating on emotional levels, the location of art is not entrapped in a therapy room, but rather as part of community life and community education (Betinsky, 1995; Hass-Cohen, 2003; Silver, 2001).

This presented a shift in the 'expert' to 'learner' and destabilized the 'expert' knowledge. The villagers, community workers, and community leaders, while each having a different understanding of art, all became the 'experts', and new knowledge was created (Ben-Ezer, 2002; Hiscox and Calisch, 1998; Lahad, 2008; Zelizer, 2003). This shifted the preconceptions of the 'experts' or power holders (both group leaders and the external experts), showing that they needed to 'unlearn' what they previously knew and to learn collaboratively, turning the research participants into the 'experts'. This is in keeping with the literature survey on arts-based research methods, showing that the researchers themselves had to shift stands because of the results (Huss, 2012; Lund and Brun, 2010; Pink and Kurti, 2004; Smith, 2002; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This is further discussed in the next section of the article, the discussion of the findings as a whole.

Conclusion and implications

The data presented and its analyses show how art, when culturally contextualized into everyday life and defined as religion, sports, crafts, industry, and education, can be perceived of by all sectors of the community as very relevant to rehabilitation. While the villagers did not use abstract concepts such as community 'resilience' or 'rehabilitation', the aim of their art use was to enhance community safety, pride, coherence, and resilience, as seen in the earlier literature survey (Dokter, 1998; Frankel, 1985; Hass-Cohen and Carr, 2008; Levine and Levine, 2011). Overall, the data showed how the concept of art has different roles and uses even within the same community. All of these uses of art were shown to be different from Western conceptualizations of art in social change and in therapy in terms of the location of the art in the community.

The practice significance of the arts-based methods was that it enabled communication between different sectors and power levels within the community itself, as well as between community and external experts. This destabilized dominant global 'expert' knowledge. The concrete element of 'showing' within arts-based research enabled access to these different locations of the same abstract concept of 'art' within the community – as spiritual resilience, as playing or sports, as making things, or as productivity, and as teaching and conveying information and changing moral stands and behavior (Knowles and Cole, 2008).

The emphasis of arts as resilience within specific activities provided a blueprint for policy that was indeed implemented. This had direct implications for policy. We saw that the community

leaders and external NGOs provided support to activate the redecorating of the temple, didactic posters, sports grounds, and fundraising for a peace museum. These projects are very different from the art therapy and community art orientations that the 'expert' would have initiated without this prior exploration.

A limitation of this research is its single case-study design. However, the study is preliminary and aims to be phenomenological rather than evaluative in its character, as is appropriate for exploring new social phenomena (Huberman and Miles, 2002). A further direction could be to enter into more dialogue with the groups, creating co-knowledge through teaching the Sri Lankans the ways that art is used in Western countries. However, the point of this study was phenomenological rather than transformative and to be used as a base for further dialogue.

The project, however, beyond its immediate policy implications described earlier taught the general lesson that community projects in different cultures cannot be learned from static anthropological definitions of the culture. They demand a phenomenological, community-embedded exploration of how people conceptualize their problems and solutions within their specific cultural reality. This goes beyond a superficial adoption of a few external visual characteristics of other cultures, as used in notions such as 'celebrating' different cultures on the most external of levels. It demands incorporating a socially embedded understanding of where, how, with whom, and for what reasons art or any other type of community intervention is used within international aid (Huss, 2012; Lai and Threlfall, 2012).

Arts-based research was clearly shown in this case study to be an effective tool in enabling villagers to influence community leaders and, subsequently, policy. It created a safe, indirect symbolic space for those without power to define their needs (Ben-Ezer, 2002). On this level, it shifted power relations between the villagers and their community workers, and between the community workers and the international aid experts. The art enabled destabilization of existing universal knowledge about rehabilitation, which creates a shift in power between local and 'expert' knowledge, as discussed in the literature survey (Emerson and Smith, 2000; Huss, 2012; Lippard, 1990; Pink and Kurti, 2004; Wang and Burris, 1994). This in turn enabled the building of a culturally contextualized, sustainable program for international aid. Implied here is the use of arts-based research within international aid that aims to bridge extreme cultural differences and to establish a decolonizing or indigenous research method that shifts away from the abstract terminology of Western culture (Dominelli, 2010; Smith, 2002; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

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