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32 Applied Improvisation and Visual Methodologies in Priority Identification with Asylum Seeker Women in Direct Provision

Introduction

This chapter reports the experiences of a critical community psychology class that aimed to bring together fifteen graduate students and thirty members of a migrant women's group composed mainly of asylum seeker women living in direct provision in Cork, Ireland. It aimed to create a reflective, experiential, trusting space in which students and asylum seekers could engage in an inquiry process of understanding action priorities for asylum seeker women. This was conceptualized as the first step of a process that Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) could then take forward to seek solutions to some of the priorities raised. Research has found that asylum seekers are significantly more likely than those with refugee status to report symptoms of PTSD and depression and anxiety and are more frequent users of GP services (Toar, O'Brien and Fahey 2009). A Working Group report on Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers in Ireland noted the propensity of asylum seekers to suffer from depression which related, in part, to the uncertain nature of their status in Ireland and also from the living conditions associated with direct provision. The conditions of life in accommodation centres was found to foster boredom, isolation and social exclusion, obsolescence of skills and creation of dependency, and negative impacts on physical, emotional and mental health, impact on family relationships and ability to participate in society (Fanning, Veale and O'Riordan 2001; Nwachukwu, Browne

and Tobin 2009; Department of Justice 2015). O'Reilly (2018) found that marginalization, surveillance and control over everyday activities are part of daily life in the direct provision system. Poor mental health resulting from isolation, uncertainty and powerlessness, with stress and anxiety are common place (Ní Raghallaigh, Foreman and Feeley 2016). Mothers, babies and toddlers have been identified as an at risk group, in particular with respect to appropriate nutrition (Arnold 2013).

Critical community psychology is oriented to social change and a critical questioning of assumptions in dominant policies, practices and ideologies including psychology and its allied disciplines (Burton and Kagan 2015). Methodologies aim to critically question the social origins of psychological difficulties in particular as experienced by marginalized and disempowered populations. Burton and Kagan (2015) define the approach as follows:

So, we work in ways that develop innovations, anticipating a better world, we will not be immediately creating it: instead we are experimenting (in partnership and solidarity) with change and learning from the process in a systematic way, while also collectively learning about what it is we are struggling for. (Burton and Kagan 2015: 186)

They introduce 'the edge concept' borrowed from permaculture, whereby 'the edge' is a useful way 'to think about how to maximize available resources for social change'. Strategies for maximizing resources include

the creation of settings (temporary, for example workshop events, or longer-lasting, for example ... the construction of a new organization or gathering space), the facilitation of interactions between different groups (for example by identifying projects or campaigns where there is a common interest), or by maximizing the time that different groups are in contact (for example by situating projects and events at the physical edge between distinct neighbourhoods). Working at such 'edges' facilitates relationship-building, learning and respect between different social groups, increasing the prospect of social change. (Ibid.: 191)

This chapter aims to present a case study of how applied improvisation and visual methods were used to engage graduate students and members of the CMC women's group in an experiential community-based learning process that would facilitate asylum seeker women to develop a vision

of their priorities for themselves and their children which could then be taken forward as social actions by the CMC.

Applied Improvisation and Visual Methods as Community-Based Learning Methodologies

We improvise all the time; to be human is to improvise. Rather than operating from a script, we are constantly looking at options, evaluating them, making decisions and acting spontaneously in our lives. Sometimes we can plan ahead but, even when we plan, we are often caught by unexpected circumstances and need to improvise. We get surprised. We adapt. We get creative. Improvisation is about using our existing skills and knowledge with whatever resources we have at hand. Needing to act in unexpected circumstances that arise means using the expertise, knowledge and skill we have developed over time and applying it in the moment. Tint (2015) argues that in a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) such as that faced by refugees and asylum seekers, a key skill in fostering and maintaining resilience, in a need for comfort and dealing with ambiguity, is to be able to quickly develop a vision, communicate it in simple ways and act in the moment.

Applied improvisation emerged from theatre studies and has now moved into humanitarian and psychosocial practice. Literature on improvisation offers a myriad of descriptions of these principles and skills they support (Gesell 1997; Halpern, Close and Johnson 1994; Johnstone 1992; Koppett 2013; Poynton 2008; Ryan-Madson 2005; Spolin 1999; Tint 2015). Applied improvisation is a training and facilitation modality that uses the principles of improvisational theatre and applies them in other contexts to develop people's capacity to improvise, adapt, move without a script and be effective in the unknown. The ability to confidently improvise – use existing skills and knowledge with available resources to respond in the moment – is a capacity worth developing in community contexts dealing with uncertainty and change. According to Lewis and Lovatt (2013) it brings

together body awareness, mindfulness, interpersonal attentiveness and trust. The improvisational mindset is rooted in an open, positively responsive and flexible attitude, based on a set of fundamental principles. These principles provide a basic understanding shared amongst improvisers of how to engage and respond when working collaboratively, spontaneously and in the moment. The most commonly known form today, seen in theatres and on television, is comedy improvisation, creating the impression that all theatrical improvisation is about humour. While humour can certainly be a part of improvisation, it is not necessarily its intended goal or outcome. Rather, applied improvisation is focused on honesty, authenticity, spontaneity and creativity (Halpern, Close and Johnson 1994). Johnstone (1992) added a focus on dynamics of status and power in interactional scenarios, drawing attention to their role in human interactions. Applied improvisation enhances experiential training by providing skill building in mental agility, decision making; adaptability, flexibility, comfort with ambiguity, focus and confidence.

Applied improvisation may be perceived as just playing, yet the playful activities themselves are a vehicle for learning and developing vital skills and understanding the improvisational principles. Trainers will use the activities with different goals in mind. These activities are sometimes used for icebreakers. In most applied improvisation work, however, activities are used intentionally to explore multiple dimensions of experiential learning through three stages of preparation, participation and debrief. For participants, this opens up possibilities for different ways of engaging, thinking and feeling.

Applied improvisation was chosen as a suitable approach for this course as the methods are excellent for creating connection between disparate groups (graduate students and asylum seekers). The approach fosters a receptive, safe space where problems faced by asylum seekers can be named and explored; it does not seek to focus on negative emotion but creates holding and develops a positive, playful space; the approach is not intrusive by asking details of personal stories that people may not want to reveal but allows sharing of what wants to be shared; each individual's contribution matters and is acknowledged and recognized by the group. It is important to create a climate of unconditional positive regard (Bermant 2013) in which

there is unambiguous and complete support of performing partners for each other in creating and sustaining an unscripted space.

In addition to applied improvisation, we used a visual method of ‘body maps’, which uses the drawing of a body to capture perceptions of a group of individuals and how they experience a particular situation (Skovdal and Cornish 2017). Using pages of flipchart paper taped together, one of the group lies on the flip chart paper and someone draws an outline of their body, or the shape of a body is drawn on the page. It is explained that the body represents a typical person in their community (in this case, an asylum seeker woman living in direct provision) and the group is facilitated to use body parts as metaphors to explore and record aspects of their experience. Combined with the embodied experiences of applied improvisation, the methodologies used captured elements of experience often not captured by traditional methods.

Background and Context: Cork Migrant Centre and MA Applied Psychology Class

Cork Migrant Centre is a local charity in Cork which is engaged in creating safe spaces for asylum seeking children, youth and mothers in Cork and its environs. CMC utilizes a strength-based approach whereby migrant individuals’, children’s and families’ knowledge, skills and experience are acknowledged through participatory working methods.

CMC programmes and activities are conceptualized within a psychosocial framework which pays attention to migrant’s individual, family and collective risk and resilience processes, in relation to ways in which migration (pre-migration, migrating, post-migration), social, cultural, structural (migration policies and practices) and institutional (health, education, political, economic and religious) processes shape their lives. The centre aims to promote healthy psychosocial functioning by addressing risks and nurturing strengths and/or resilience in these levels. A guiding principle of CMC’s work is to facilitate organically developed programmes.

One of CMC's programmes is the Mothers and Babies/Toddler Coffee Mornings. This activity involves creating a safe space for mothers and babies/toddlers to give them an opportunity to create social bonds, to network and engage in health promoting activities. Currently, this group has a membership of fifty migrant mothers (90 per cent are from direct provision centres in Cork city and county) and ten to eleven babies/toddlers attend weekly also. In these coffee mornings, mothers participate in capacity building activities, facilitated by skilled psychosocial practitioners, while the babies/toddlers are engaged in play, in the form of developmentally appropriate 'music for babies' sessions, facilitated by music therapists. In a collaboration with UCC MA Applied Psychology students, thirty women took part in the community-based learning partnership. The country of origin of the participants was as follows: Nigeria, nine; Democratic Republic of Congo, eight; South Africa, three; Pakistan, three; Albania, two; Zimbabwe, one; Somalia, two; Sudan, one; Jordan, one. Participants were between 25 and 35 years of age. Their average stay in the country was three years. They had been coming to the Cork Migrant Centre for approximately one year. The MA in Applied Psychology students were fifteen graduate students, most of whom were Irish and aged 22–45 years, the majority between 22–27.

The Community-Based Learning Process

The module was implemented over the course of one teaching semester of twelve weeks. Five of the participants from CMC's women's group attended the full twelve-week module in UCC and participated fully in class exercises and discussions. Their role was to have the opportunity to avail of a learning opportunity but also to act as 'key informants' to the class as we co-developed a methodology for engagement with the CMC women's group. They were offered a choice of completing the module assessment but choose not to. Instead, they requested a certificate of participation in recognition of their contribution to the class and this was provided.

Core module participants were fifteen MA Applied Psychology students, five CMC women's group members, the UCC facilitators (Veale, Robinson) and the CMC Psychosocial Specialist (Masheti). At the core of the module were three three-hour long workshops held at CMC with the MA Applied Psychology students and all 30 CMC women's group participants. These workshops were interspaced with classroom-based planning and preparation and post-workshop debriefing, reflection and further planning with the core group.

Week one of the module involved a two-hour Applied Improvisation classroom workshop with the core group (fifteen students and five 'key informant' CMC women) on Creating Connection. In the following weeks, this group read and presented on key readings in Critical Community Psychology and participatory action research to develop their understanding of key theoretical approaches, principles, and methods. They were exposed to the writings of Paulo Friere, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Isaac Prilleltensky, Brinton Lykes, Michelle Fine, Meredith Minkler, Mark Burton and Carolyn Kagan and our own learning. Over the course of the module, the aim was to develop and implement a participatory problem-posing methodology to identify the action-oriented priorities of members of the women's group that could be taken forward by the CMC.

The three workshops at CMC with the entire group (students and CMC Women's Group) were structured as follows.

Workshop 1: Creating Connection, Problem-Posing and Free-Listing of Problems for Action

This workshop involved paired introductions (CMC members and MAAP student introduced each other) and methods developed by Viola Spolin such as space walks, extended sound, 'Kitty wants a Corner' and an improvisation game called 'Yes and ...' (see <<https://spolingamesonline.org/games/improv-games/>>). The second part of the workshop involved getting into mixed groups to undertake a free-listing of problems

experienced by members of the Women's Group that they would like to see taken forward for action my CMC. This involved dialogue, questioning, naming and writing on flip chart.

Workshop 2: Ranking Action Priorities

The second workshop involved presenting all the issues raised in the free-listing exercise of the first workshop. Participants were divided into three mixed groups to engage in a priority ranking of problems that emerged the previous week. In the second part of the workshop, we used bodymaps to deepen the exploration of the issues that emerged as part of the problem-posing exercise.

Workshop 3: Further Exploration and Closing of Engagement Process

This workshop began with an exercise called 'Magic Box' to create a safe, focused space and collaborative relationships. The Magic Box is an imaginary box, stored overhead, which contains anything that the group wishes, as well as the contents of all previous sessions. According to Johnson (1986), the Box is always treated with great reverence. The group members bring it down by raising their arms slowly towards the ceiling and giving a loud hum in unison, as they lower their arms. Then the lid is slowly unscrewed by the group. Following this, the group is encouraged to look over the edge of the Box and peer into it. For our purposes, the suggestion to members of the group was to take something that was needed out of the box – a feeling, an object, a wish, and to put into the box something that was not needed for the time of the workshop.

The core activity of the third workshop was the use of an applied improvisational methodology called Playback Theatre (PT) created by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas. PT is an improvisational theatre form, in which individuals

recount personal experiences that actors immediately enact, or ‘sculpt’ on stage, with the aim of encouraging dialogue and creating connection between people. According to Feldhendler (2007) the intention of PT is:

to recreate events, experiences, and lived situations told as stories by spectators – then to immediately translate them into scenes on the stage set up for that purpose, acted out in an abbreviated form and, so-to-speak, ‘played back’ (hence ‘*Playback*’) ... Through the sharing of biographical moments in narrative form and through their immediate transformation into a dynamic mirroring, what is shared becomes incorporated into one’s resource for self-knowledge or perception of oneself and others. The method becomes a medium of communication – both magnifying glass and megaphone at the same time – between the individual and the group ... While voicing one’s own story in this way means, on the one hand, discovering one’s story anew; it also means being seen and heard. (Feldhendler 2007: 47)

Feldhendler (2005) argues that playback theatre is particularly suited to intercultural communication as it enhances skills of listening, emotional openness, mindfulness of self and others, empathy through the flexibility in adopting roles, appropriate responses and spontaneity. We utilized one element of PT, that of ‘sculpting’ whereby people offer words to the collective group and three people jump in to offer a visual/bodily representation of those words. The body ‘sculpts’ created in this way were photographed. At the end of the workshop, the magic box was filled again and participants were invited to leave something behind (a feeling, an object, a wish) and take away something that they wished to keep from the workshop, before the box was replaced in the ceiling.

In addition, classroom content was added to the curriculum as the module developed, such as on ethics in community-based participatory research (Banks, 2013) and reflections on ‘power and voice’.

Results: Problem-Posing and Priority Setting

In their reflective writing assignment for this module, a common sentiment among students was an initial sense of shyness and even anxiety about what would be expected of them. Although it had been clearly

explained that the purpose of the class was to engage in a learning experience of implementing a problem-posing participatory methodology, many students felt that there was an onus on them to bring about positive change in the CMC women's lives.

I was worried about the perception the women would have of us; that we would be inconveniencing these women, that the problems they faced would be too large for us as a group to address. (Rebecca Egan, MA Applied Psychology student)

I felt apprehensive, uncertain- what could I bring to the table? What were we here do? How would our presence inform policy and improve the lives of people we didn't even know. (Paul Walsh, MA Applied Psychology student)

As psychology students, they were unconsciously being trained (and expected of themselves) to take on an 'expert' role. A challenge of this module, therefore, was that it demanded that they position themselves differently, in a place of listening, learning and of '*not* knowing'. This was a key point for debriefing discussion and learning.

The applied improvisation exercises in the first class of the module put the fifteen students and the five CMC core group members at their ease and created a positive atmosphere, a sense of trust and equality of participation.

This experience was very interesting to me and made me remember my university days. I engaged in all the playing methods and exercises with the 'Psychologist to Be' (the students' group of psychology). (Arife Daci Hysaj, CMC women's group member and core module group member)

We recreated the applied improvisation exercises from class one in the first workshop at CMC with the whole group, i.e students and CMC Women's Group members. As in the class, this had the same impact of creating a sense of fun and peer engagement:

To my knowledge, I had never engaged in conversation with any immigrants before, so before our [CMC] visit, I felt nervous. The 'Yes lets' game – that definitely took me out of my comfort zone – it garnered a sense of equality as we all had to do the same actions in front of each other and there was no feelings of embarrassment, reluctance or shyness between us. (Jennifer Carolan, MA Applied Psychology student)

This was followed with a free-listing exercise. Many issues were raised in the free-listing exercise that sought to identify the priorities for action, as identified by the women. These included social isolation, lack of sports activities for the adults and children, lack of money, a need for social support, lack of childcare, the poor quality of food and accommodation in direct provision, lack of halal food, and barriers to work and education. In the second workshop, all participants were divided into three groups and asked to rank the priorities and then the groups were brought together to create a final ranking. The ranking exercise provoked much discussion, but the final listing of priorities for action were to seek to address:

1. Barriers to work and, fundamentally related to this, barriers to childcare;
2. Food/accommodation;
3. Mental health.

The bodymaps deepened the exploration of these issues. Through discussion, it quickly emerged that there are gendered dimensions to the right to work, that are not part of awareness in the public domain.

Gendered Limitations to the Right to Work: 'Locked Doors'

The first bodymap shows a female body (see Figure 32.1). The right foot indicates the possibility of mobility, to have connection and meet new people. The left foot represents new adventures. However, her legs are wrapped in rope and a lock, a metaphor for stifled hope and feeling locked in. The women talked passionately about how their dream of getting a job and starting work which they hoped would be realized with the introduction of the right to work for asylum seekers quickly. For them, it felt like banging against a 'locked door'. They came up against

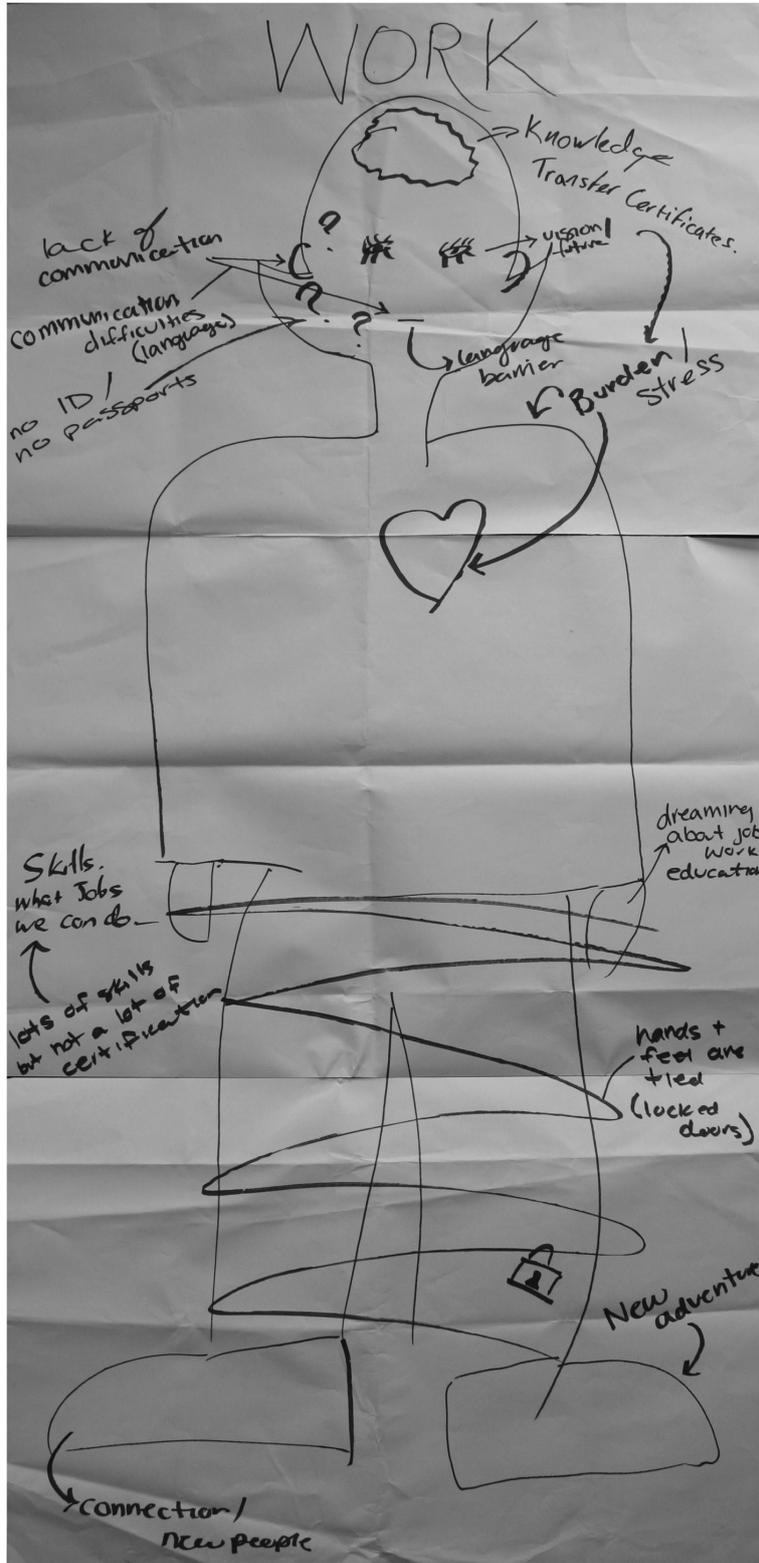


Figure 32.1. Bound feet

insurmountable barriers to the realization of that right; ‘Your hands and feet are tied’, they explained. They found childcare in Ireland was expensive and, in many cases, unaffordable. People living in direct provision are not permitted to obtain a drivers licence, so without transport it was difficult to get babies, toddlers and/or children to a crèche and also to a work location. The hands represented women having ‘lots of skills’ ... but not a lot of certification, as many of their qualifications, including third-level qualifications, were not recognized in Ireland. No ID and no passport, presented a practical difficulty when seeking work, as it put employers off. While the eyes were a metaphor for having a vision of the future, and the brain represented knowledge, the mouth represented language barriers and difficulties in communication for some women. The heart carried the burden of the stress and frustration experienced as a result of these limitations. One of the biggest sources of stress was a feeling that these constraints or locks were not visible – that people would say, ‘Oh, now you have the right to work’, but in practical terms, they experienced this right as unachievable.

Food and Accommodation in Direct Provision: Food Not as a Comfort, Homesickness and Helplessness

The second bodymap explored the importance of food and accommodation as priorities for action (see Figure 32.2). In conditions where there was no choice of own food or variety of food, food was not experienced as a comfort. The discussion about food triggered talk of emotions of homesickness, feelings of helplessness, of thinking about home and of a concern for family at home. The right and left arm served as a metaphor for sources of strength; faith and religion, children and family, school and education, friends and roommates. In this context, the hands represented skills of baking, cooking and serving food – but the everyday experience was of barriers to using these skills. The heart at the centre of the body registered the emotions of feeling alone, scared and uncertain for the future.

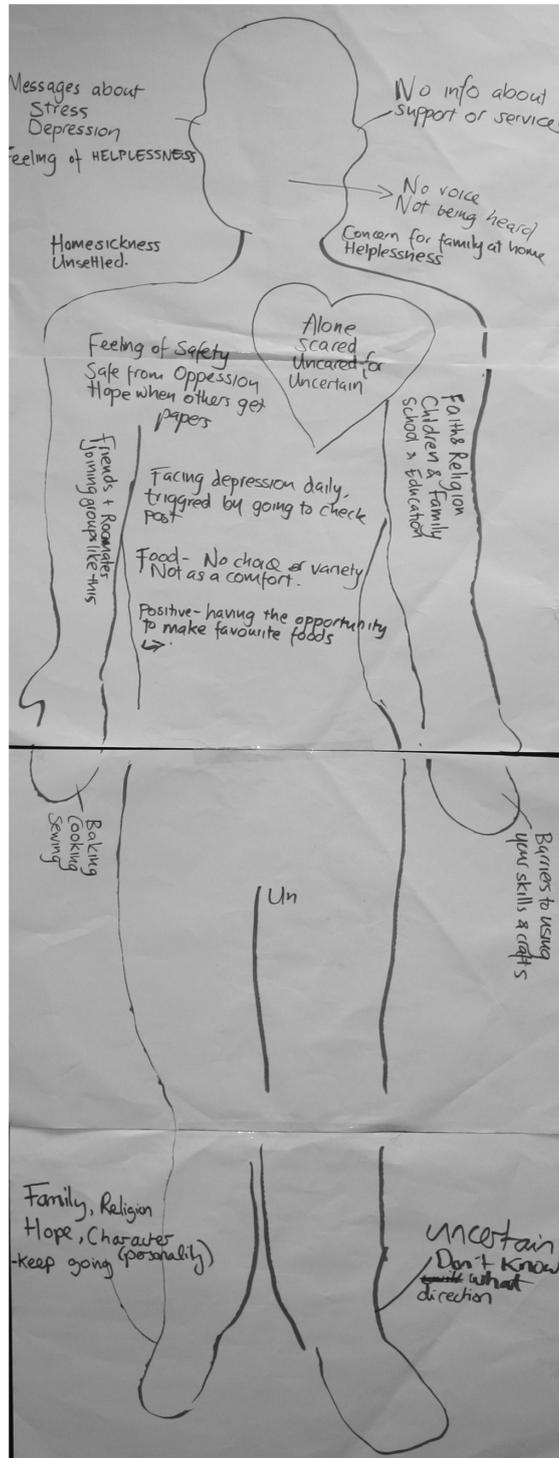


Figure 32.2. Stomach

The right foot captured hope, strength of character and the motivation to keep going, while the left foot captured the sense of uncertainty and of not knowing life's direction.

Mental Health: 'Weight of the World on Your Shoulders'

The third bodymap captured the impact of the conditions of women's lives on mental health (see Figure 32.3). Again, this is a female body. The heart is a central metaphor and it represents the importance of the women's group, because of the bonds they have formed together as mothers, but the heart also represents disconnection and a lack of an experience of social solidarity; 'it is as though they [Irish society] have no feelings for our problems'. The mouth represents the notion that it is hard to communicate and be heard while the ears represent an experience that no one listens. This bodymap also uses the arms and hands to indicate their strength and how they could work, if childcare was available. The feet capture the same image as the first bodymap; the feeling of 'being stuck'. In this map, the head is filled with thoughts of feeling unsafe and unprotected, and it is the shoulders that carry the burden; a feeling of worry and anxiety, like 'carrying the weight of the world'.

According to Sibusisiwe Mhlophe, core group and CMC women's group member; 'women from the Cork Migrant Centre had an opportunity to express their views and opinions about life in the direct provision centre in particular'. Some of the students reported feeling overwhelmed by the nature of some issues that were brought up and feeling extremely helpless towards the women:

I had the urge to do more to help but felt that it wouldn't be sufficient to combat the issues they face. On the other hand, I felt relieved, excited and motivated ... I felt like I connected with some of the women I spoke to in such a small space of time, and was a feeling of warmth that I kept with me through the course of the module. (Jennifer Carolan, MA Applied Psychology student)

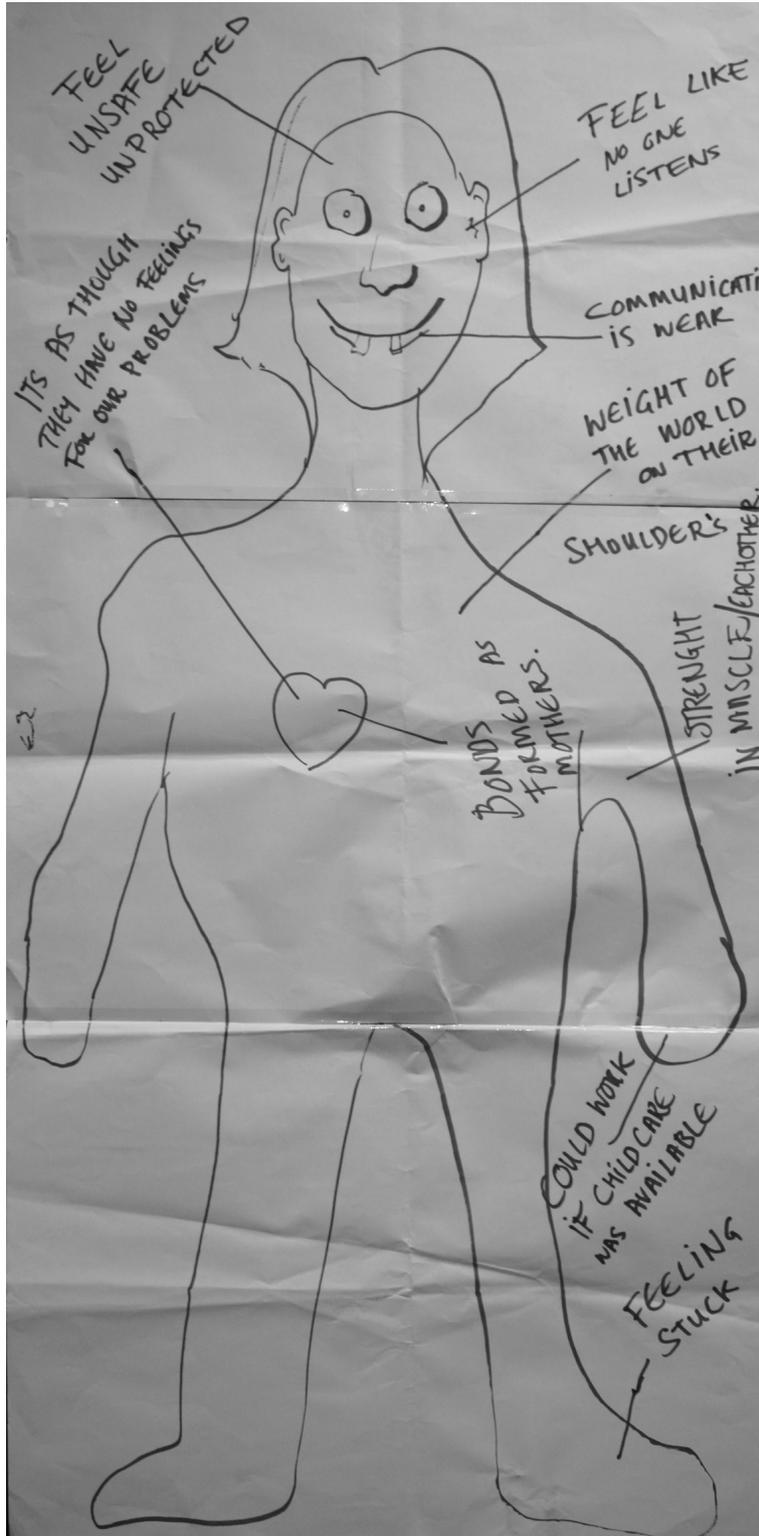


Figure 32.3. Shoulders

For the third and final workshop, the Magic Box exercise brought a care-free, relaxed atmosphere to the room. CMC women's group members chose to put some troubling aspects of their lives in the box while students put in assignment and exam stress. Individuals took out words like 'to have fun' and 'to enjoy together'. It created an 'as if' playful space and got into the imaginative realm.

The Playback theatre methodology involved a sculpting exercise. Students and CMC women's group members formed a circle and someone would shout out a word. Three people would spontaneously jump in to 'sculpt' the word and students and CMC women's group members got involved. It was a lot of fun and much laughter, even though what was being modelled were very powerful images of emotional situations and constraints. It was a way of bringing powerful feelings and ideas into words. Sculpted words included 'loneliness', 'barriers to work', 'refugee decision', 'letter-getting', 'letter in post', 'missing family' 'togetherness and friendship'. The words started with more negative emotion words and moved to words representing hope and thinking about future. In this sculpting exercise, the CMC women took the initiative, led the exercise and seemed very comfortable with it. It had a playful quality. Students and facilitators came in only in a supportive way to sculpt or support 'sculpt' of the words – but the CMC women were the ones that took the lead.

After an intense twelve weeks, it felt that the end of the course and the relationship with the CMC Women's group came too quickly. The third and final workshop marked the end of the contact between the two groups. For the students and the CMC women's group participants, there was a sense that the end was sudden. In his reflective writing, one of the students commented 'I felt that I had not got the opportunity to speak to some of the women I had built up a bond with' (MA Applied Psychology student, Paul Walsh). The CMC women's group co-coordinator reported a similar sentiment from the group. This was an important lesson to take forward into the future.

The core group of CMC women said their experiences of participating in the module were as follows.



Figure 32.4. Workshop participant: Arife Daci HySaj

Arife Daci HySaj (Figure 32.4):

Psychology is one of the most beautiful sciences in my opinion, or even the most important (even though I have studied chemistry) because everything starts from the thoughts everyone has. It was very enjoyable and I would love to go through this experience again. Thank you to anyone who made it possible for me to join the Critical Community Psychology students.

Uzma Shanheen (Figure 32.5):

Community Psychology helped us to understand our social issues better. Also helped me to understand that 'alone we can do so little; together we can so much'. When I attended the class, I was holding many things inside of me. But when we discussed about our situation at the centre and I shared my experience I felt there was something very relaxing about people interested in listening to you.



Figure 32.5. Workshop participant: Uzma Shanheen



Figure 32.6. Workshop participant: Sibusisiwe Mhlophe

Sibusisiwe Mhlophe (Figure 32.6):

Taking part in the Critical Community Psychology with the UCC students brought an amazing experience about life in general especially problematic circumstances faced by communities. As a person in the asylum process, there are so many limitations especially when it comes to academia but I realized that there are some opportunities that most people are not aware of, like the sanctuary scholarships. I learnt that there is affinity and connection when I can take any opportunity to involve myself in any community, social activities and workshops like CMC. Students had less knowledge about the direct provision centre and we got to know each other, our culture and more. [For the students] seeing women in hard situations in the direct provision centres but they still have positivity in them, [how] they still manage to put on their make-up and be well groomed, that there is motivation. I really appreciated each day I attended the classes and all the knowledge I gained.

Tanweer Al-dagamin (Figure 32.7):



Figure 32.7. Workshop participant: Tanweer Al-dagamin

I feel grateful that I had a chance to participate in the psychology course at the University College Cork. It was an incredible experience for me in which I acquired a great deal of knowledge and skills. For instance, I learnt how to work in a group of students from totally different cultures and nationalities. This helped me a lot in making me more tolerant and open-minded and broadening my mind in general.

Furthermore, I developed my problem-solving skills from the cases that we were studying. In other words, I realized that every problem in our life has a solution. We have to be patient and have a big heart to deal with our challenges and difficulties. Finally, I would like to describe my experience when we studied and discussed cases about people who come from conflict or poor countries. I felt emotional and really sad for those people who have come from those awful situations. I felt it is everyone's responsibility to provide help and support to them and we have to try our best to empathize and listen to them. All in all, it was a great experience and it had a considerable impact on my way of thinking.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presented an example of a community-based learning module with graduate psychology students and a women's group in a migrant support organization. The purpose of engagement was to provide a learning opportunity for students in critical community psychology through the implementation of a problem-posing methodology with the women's group. For CMC and the women's group, the purpose of engagement was to identify priorities for social action with the intention that the CMC would work to address these priorities where possible. The module outputs gave a nuanced, gendered insight into the barriers facing asylum seeking women and mothers in obtaining work, in implementing their skills and role as providers of nutritious food for themselves and their children and challenges to their in mental health.

In their reflective assignments, many students reflected on their feelings of a sense of powerlessness during the process in the face of the experiences they heard and learnt about from the CMC which resulted in uncomfortable feelings of 'we can't change this'. Students were coming from a traditional psychology background. This was their first encounter with critical community psychology and it disrupted their dominant ways of being and knowing, which included taking responsibility and being the one to have the 'expert' position. Furthermore, they had no previous experience of talking with people from countries and backgrounds such as

those of the CMC participants. In class debriefing sessions, we discussed the importance of students taking an active listening and witnessing role. One of the challenges they had to deal with was their internalized expectation that they were expected to 'do something' to alleviate the difficulties experienced by women, which included traumatic experiences in the past and severe constraints in their lives in the present. As psychology students, it was a valuable experience for them to step back, to listen, to learn about different cultural meaning systems (such as around halal food and the cultural importance of food), to acknowledge what they heard and *not* to be the active members of the relationship, and *not* take on responsibility for the outcome. That said, a number of students reflected on what they could contribute that would be appropriate and supportive to CMC. On their own initiative, a number of students approached the CMC psychosocial specialist, Dr Naomi Masheti, and offered to volunteer at the centre and this was welcomed as an unintended positive outcome of the module. The CMC women's group participants reported that the engagement with the students was a positive experience. All participants were presented with Certificates of Participation, which had symbolic importance as a form of social recognition and as a recognition that their contribution mattered (Prilleltensky 2008). It also had practical importance, as part of the documentation for seeking formal status is to show evidence of social integration.

Following up on the module, CMC implemented follow-up social action strategies. On behalf of CMC, Dr Masheti successfully applied for funding from the Cork Council Community Arts department for a 'mapping and gapping' exercise to identify work-related knowledge, skills and experience as the next step towards getting the women back to work. Crafts-related skills were identified and prioritized by the women and the Council provided further funding for a skills development programme facilitated by Cork City Printers with income generating potential. The activities will be based at Cork Migrant Centre during the weekly coffee morning sessions, so there will be provision of childcare, which was identified as a challenge. CMC has also partnered with Dell Technologies on Dell's diversity and inclusion programme, therefore, offering the potential to set up work as an activity, as opposed to the traditional conceptualization of work as a place. Through webinar workshops CMC women's group

members can work from their homes or direct provision centres and even draw on expertise from their diverse cultural backgrounds back home. It is envisaged that their printed products will be sold to local, diasporic and even transnational communities through a website.

A limitation in the implementation of the module was the short learning time imposed by a twelve-week semester. As facilitators, we needed more time to debrief with students and CMC women after each workshop and at the end of the module. It would also have been important to have more time to work towards an ending to the relationship, such as through a follow-up social event. We did attempt to organize this once the issue was raised, but students had moved into the exam period and so other priorities took hold. For future implementation, it would be important to think more about a phased ending of engagement.

A final reflection, based on discussion with one CMC participant, is that asylum seekers can feel that the responsibility is on them to educate the host Irish community about the issues they face. After a while and across multiple groups, this involves energy and is a form of work. CMC women's group participants said they gained from participation in the module. Yet, we critically acknowledge there is a cost or demand to that participation. This is a challenge we take into the future development of the module, in particular, to reflect on whether student learners could or should be encouraged to advocate in their own lives and ways to act on the action priorities identified by the CMC women's group. This would involve a shift in position from learner and listener to activist.

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