

Nourishing Multiculturalism

Cultivating empathy among students with embodied play

by

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MASTERS OF DESIGN

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Abstract

This thesis project explores the potential of embodied play to cultivate empathy among students in multicultural classrooms in the western educational context. In a progressively mobile and intermingled world, with greater net flow of immigration from poorer to richer countries and higher birth rate of immigrant population in their new domiciles (Grayling, 2012), I deem the questions of identity, social cohesion, assimilation have become more pressing. Students in multicultural classrooms face new challenges every day. In order to establish an environment in the classroom which is favourable for learning and growth, it is important for students to learn to function cohesively despite the cultural differences between them. This research endeavours to mitigate cultural differences using the vehicle of spices. When students in multicultural classrooms acknowledge that the flavours they enjoy are a result of someone else's labour, then they become aware of the interdependence of people on one another. Spice growers are largely from the global south. Learning about them through sensory play with spices develops awareness of cultural differences. This can lead to higher acceptance of the many different cultural backgrounds of fellow students. The design outcome of this research are a series of artefacts that use game design as a structured tool to explore embodied play in order to cultivate imagination and empathy among students. The design is targeted towards students who study at university level in multicultural classrooms in privileged western societies. Subjects such as mindfulness, gratitude, pedagogy, sensory design and imagination were explored throughout and have contributed in the journey of this research.

Keywords :

Inclusivity, multiculturalism, mindfulness, empathy, embodied play, spices, critical pedagogy, social justice, relationality.

Glossary of terms

Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy as developed by critical literacy elements in the classroom invites and encourages students to question issues of power. These issues include multiple indicators: socioeconomic status (SES), race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001).

Heuristic methodology

Heuristic methodology attempts to discover the nature and meaning of phenomenon through internal self- search, exploration, and discovery. Heuristic methodology encourages the researcher to explore and pursue the creative journey that begins inside one's being and ultimately uncovers its direction and meaning through internal discovery. (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non- judgmentally. (Kabat-Zinn, in Purser, 2015)

Multi-sensory design

Multi-sensory design make use of multiple senses like touch, taste, sight, smell to create a desired experience.

Empathy

The ability to understand and share the feeling of an other.

Inclusivity

The practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of minority groups.

Imagination

The faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses.

Embodied cognition

Embodied cognition is the theory that many features of cognition, whether human or otherwise, are shaped by aspects of the entire body of the organism.

Haiku

A Japanese poem of seventeen syllables, in three lines of five, seven, and five, traditionally evoking images of the natural world.

Culturally inclusive classroom

A culturally inclusive classroom is one where students and staff alike recognise, appreciate and capitalise on diversity so as to enrich the overall learning experience.

1.0 Introduction

This thesis project explores the potential of embodied play to build empathy among students in multicultural classrooms in the western educational context. In a progressively mobile and intermingled world, with greater net flow of immigration from poorer to richer countries and higher birth rate of immigrant population in their new domiciles (Grayling, 2012), I believe the questions of identity, social cohesion, assimilation have become more pressing. Students in multicultural classrooms face new challenges every day. A culturally inclusive classroom may mitigate issues like low academic achievement, self-esteem issues, less communication among students etc and can lead to higher student satisfaction. In order to maintain an environment in the classroom which is favourable for learning and growth, it is imperative for students to learn to function cohesively despite the differences between them.

This research addresses this broader topic by creating empathetic opportunities for students through embodied play in university level multicultural classrooms.

Empathy is a state of mind where one deliberately makes the attempt to understand another person's perspective and how their life experiences would have impacted their world view. This thesis explores embodied play with spices and stories of spice harvest to shed light on the stories of underrepresented people in our food systems. It illuminates the interdependence of people on one another in an increasingly capitalist world economy.

I begin this thesis by reflecting on my own and others learning about multiculturalism, healthy classroom communities, and the potential of embodied design. This is interwoven with my heuristic research with play, my learnings from shifting to a new neighbourhood and my experiences with embodiment. Then I describe workshops and several game design iterations that probed the potential of embodied play with spices.

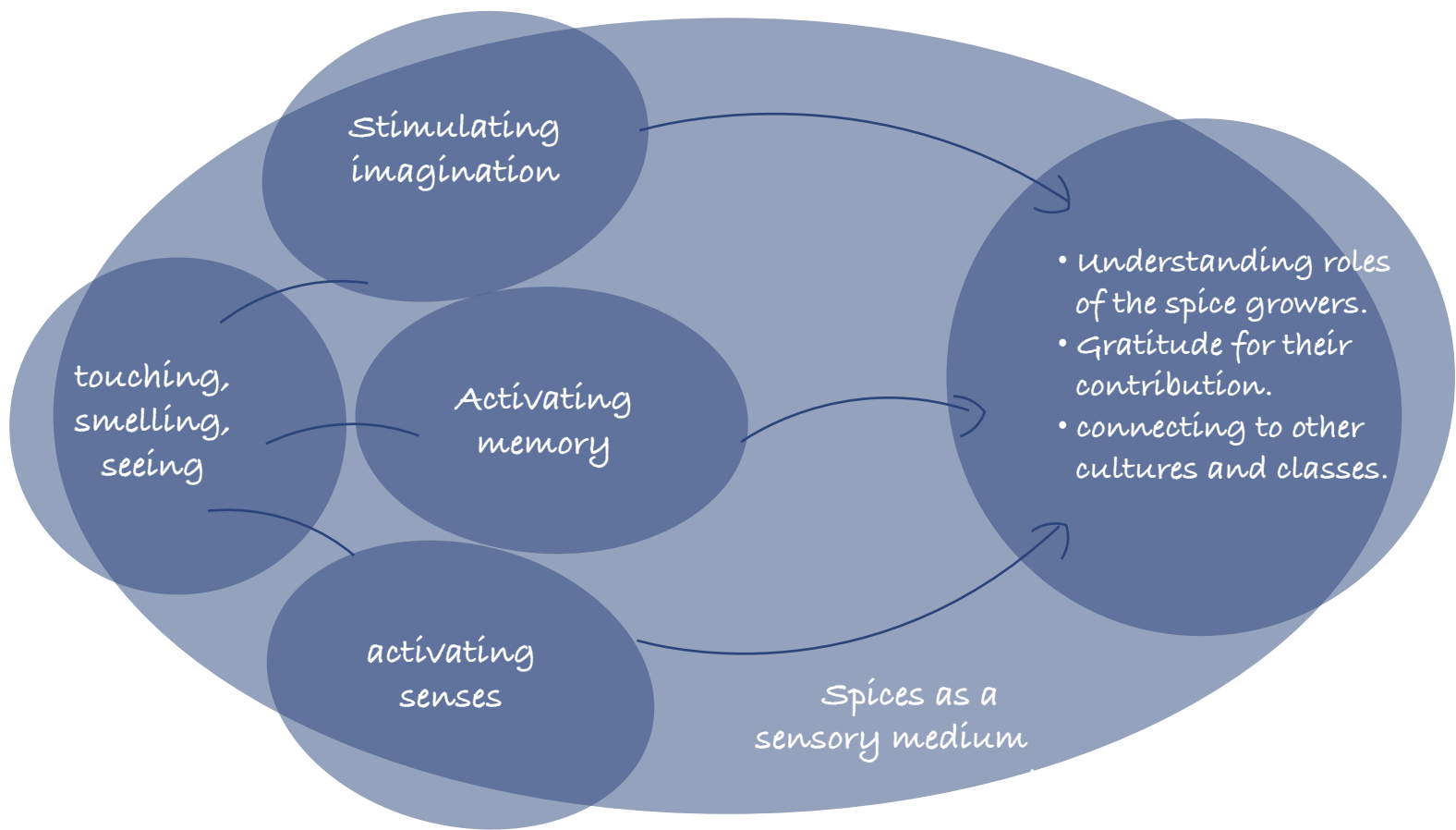


Fig 01 Spices as a sensory medium.



Fig 02 Picture of a spice market in Bombay.

2.0 Context and framing

- 2.1. Reflections on multiculturalism : Being who I am
- 2.2. Communities, differences and empathy
- 2.3. Embodiment and sensory design
- 2.4. Embodied ways of knowing

Reflections on Multiculturalism

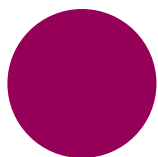
During the summer of 2019, my personal experiences began informing this research and giving it a context. Shifting to a new neighbourhood created opportunities for me where I could explore my identity wherein I began to grow conscious of my ethnicity as an Indian. In this new neighbourhood, I discovered a Persian grocery store selling saffron. I was intrigued to find that spice in the market and it aroused a curiosity within me to explore spices and the connection between food and identity in general. The way I perceive saffron was very distinct from the way my roommates, who are all of different ethnicities, perceived it. This was because of my history with saffron growing up in my home country, India.



Fig 03 Me and my roommates in the new neighbourhood I shifted at Commercial Drive, Vancouver.

One of the main things that divides and unites people is the allegiance they feel to an identity- a national or religious minority or something on similar lines. We characterize ourselves unavoidably by our national identity and position it on a pedestal to the exclusion of all other identities we may have (Grayling, A C, 2014). Canada has the highest per capita immigration in the world. As a result, especially in the education sector, the dialogues around multiculturalism have gained momentum (Grayling, 2010), thus making Canada a compelling ground to base this research on.

Sen says that to describe others or oneself in terms of a “choice-less singularity” (2006, XV) is a mistake. To substantiate that, Sen says identity not only diminishes individuals but exacerbates differences between them. The aim of his argument is to acknowledge that a person is not just one thing – not only and solely a Muslim or a Jew, or an Arab or an American - but many things : a parent, a chess player, a Frenchman, a sociologist, a grandson, all at once, a multiple and complex entity whom the politics of singular identity reduces to an empty symbol.



“a choice-less singularity”

Fig 04 A visual representation of Amartya Sen’s quote.

Compelled by the above narrative, I decided to look into cultural integration in multicultural classrooms, not by adoption of the behaviours, language or norms of each other’s culture but by encouraging students to be able to identify and acknowledge each other’s cultural differences. This could then potentially reflect positively on the classroom atmosphere and student learning. My curiosity about the complexity of identity amplified gradually over the summer, which I describe in later sections of this thesis. It offered a context to the ongoing research on play and mindfulness.

Communities, Differences, and Empathy

To be able to understand the context of this research and identify design opportunities, I looked into the definition of a community in the context of a school. While schools can become communities in many different forms, the need for them to become purposeful communities is paramount. These purposeful communities are “places where members have developed a community of mind that bonds them together in special ways and binds them to a shared ideology” (Sergiovanni 1994 p. 72).

Cultivating empathetic opportunities among students can positively impact the school environment. According to the Journal of the American medical association “The school environment makes a difference in the lives of the youth, [What] matters is the students sense of connection to the school they attend. If students feel they are a part of the school and treated fairly by teachers, they have better emotional health and lower levels of involvement in risky behaviour. Feeling that other students are not prejudiced is also protective for students in some cases” (Resnick, et al 1997, p.32). As mentioned in this quote, it is evident that the relationship between a teacher and students is of significant importance. It contributes tremendously to the feeling of inclusivity that students experience in the classroom. Hence, I was compelled by the thought of experimenting and designing a pedagogical tool for this context.

Embodiment and Sensory Design

Ellen Lupton in her book, *The Senses: Design beyond Vision*, defines sensory design as “Sensory design activates touch, smell, taste and the wisdom of the body, It supports everyone’s opportunity to receive information, explore the world, experience joy, wonder and social connections. Hence sensory design enhances human diversity, is inclusive and enhances well being” (2018, p. 9).

Research conducted by Natalia Gomes Franca (2017) explores the potential of playful dialogic artifacts as a means for building empathy. Her design of “Sensory cards” aids in supporting empathy in human interactions. She designed a set of visual and tactile sensory cards to facilitate communication of feelings and emotions in community groups. The positioning of dialogic artefacts to successfully cultivate empathy is relevant to my research. It allows me to confidently navigate the territory of physical playful objects by acknowledging the role of different tools to foster empathy in varying degrees. Her theories of sensory connection and empathy underlies the ethos and purpose of the games I have designed.

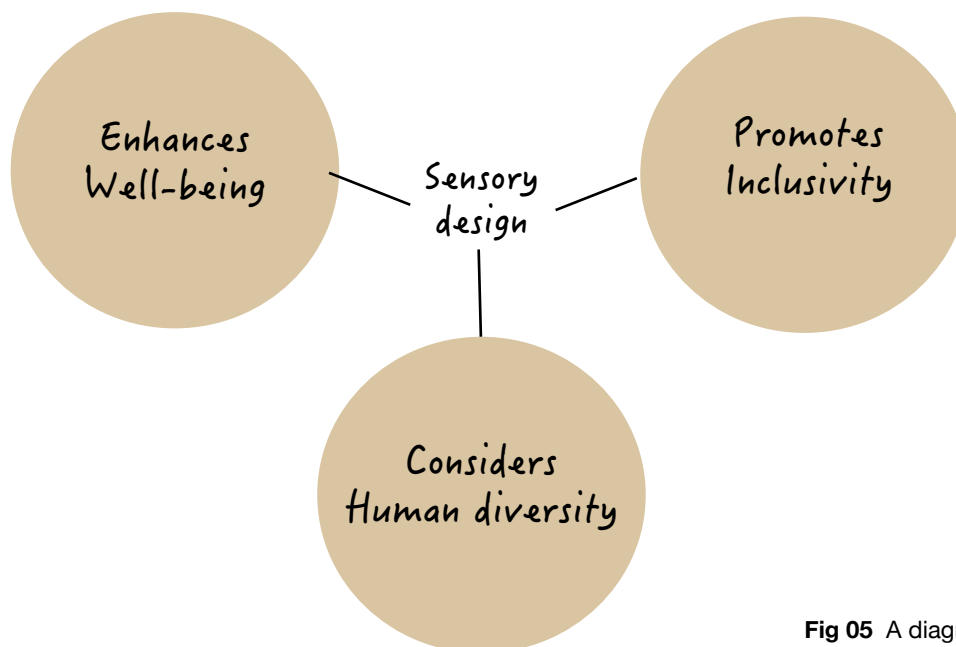


Fig 05 A diagram of sensory design and its various facets.

I was further inspired by my observations of a food and ritual workshop (Yazdani 2019). When students in the workshop interacted with the food, it appeared to me that they experienced something deeper and more meaningful than simply eating food to satisfy their appetite. Yazdani designed a multi-sensorial experience to interact with the food. Our senses invariably do a great job of bringing ourselves to our bodies. When we bring ourselves to our bodies, we are connected not just with ourselves but also with nature. There is an innate visceral realization that we are not separate from nature. We are nature ourselves and not alienated from it (Nhat Hanh, 2013). This way of seeing food transcends the scientific modernist lens.

This insight led me to investigate spices as a vehicle for sensory engagement. Spices are powerful carriers of memory through their fragrance alone. They also hint at stories due to the many ways that they flavour our meals, past and present.



Fig 06 Students at Yazdani's workshop.



Fig 07 The salad that students made at Yazdani's workshop.

There are two main reasons for the investigation of spices in my research. Firstly, based on my experience, spices have strong sensory tendencies which can trigger memories, and then through that to our emotions. Secondly, the purpose of my research is to address interdependence of humans on one another by shedding light on the stories of people in our food systems. In the case of spices, these people are in majorly marginalized communities in eastern countries. Communities that are marginalized are usually confined to the lower or peripheral edge of the society and are denied involvement in mainstream economic, political, cultural and social activities due to their living conditions, lifestyles or exclusion. According to statistics, 90 percent of the total production of spices in the world are primarily from southern developing countries like India, Srilanka, Pakistan, Iran, Columbia, Nepal, Bangladesh etc (2011, UN Food and agriculture organization). These two factors make spices a perfect medium for my research.

“ According to statistics, 90 percent of the total production of spices in the world are primarily from southern developing countries like India, Srilanka, Pakistan, Iran, Columbia, Nepal, Bangladesh etc”

In the book *A Natural History of the Senses* (1991), Ackerman discusses smell as the mute smell, the one without words. She mentions ways in which smell helps us to make sense of the world around us by exploring the cultural and physiological commonplaces of smell, dealing with themes such as the lack of a proper odor vocabulary, the immediate emotional response triggered by olfactory perception, and the link between odor and flavor. According to Ackerman “A smell can be overwhelmingly nostalgic because it triggers powerful images and emotions before we have time to edit them... When we give perfume to someone, we give them liquid memory. Kipling was right: “Smells are surer than sights and sounds to make your heart-strings crack”(Ackerman, p.11). One thing that she notes is the use of metaphors to describe smells that we feel emergent. Metaphors are a great way to come as close as we can with language to relate to that sense of smell.



Fig 08 A hand drawn illustration of a cup of tea.

The smell of saffron is a significant ingredient in the Kashmiri traditional tea called Kahwa. It takes me back to the waters of the Dal lake, my impetuous 21 year old self, the literature of Urdu language, the incomprehensible yet familiar language of Kashmiri people, and the intricate carvings on the surface of the boat where I consumed that tea for the first time. One smell can trigger multiple memories. Those memories can be pleasant or unpleasant but the wisdom of our body is such that it remembers it. It is available at our disposal so we relive that experience again. Spices and especially saffron does that to me. Through smell and our other senses, we can develop that relationship with our body. This is a relationship with our body that goes beyond treating our bodies just as a mere container to fill and empty out information but an intimate relationship that is more visceral and more emotional. In this research I endeavoured to design sensory playful games that evoke this kind of relationship with our body.

Embodied ways of knowing

Batacharya and Wong (2018) also look at how embodiment and learning through our senses helps to shift us away from Modernist ways of thinking. The field of embodiment theorizes bodies as knowledgeable in ways that include but are not solely cognitive: “Ng became interested in how we know and make sense of the world. She began to integrate her understanding of the material world with a focus on embodied experience and on how our interpretation of the knowledge that comes to us through our bodies shapes our actions—our way of being in the world and through an exploration of how experience, in this case, bodily experience, participates in enabling, limiting, and mediating the production of knowledge—what I call the inside-out approach” (ibid, p. 8). To investigate this, I explored my material practice by developing a playful pedagogical tool grounded in embodiment.

The research I have conducted and the game that I have designed explores the territory of embodiment and sensory design based on this inside-out perspective.

Fig 09 Me and my cohort practicing yoga at the University of Amsterdam campus,





Fig 10 Spices laid out in my studio at Emily carr university of Art + design, Vancouver

3.0 Research questions

Primary question

How might embodied play with spices help cultivate empathy and gratitude among students in university level multicultural classrooms ?

Secondary question

How might embodied play with spices elicit feelings of empathy and gratitude towards the people who work to grow and harvest the spices ?

4.0 Scope and Limitations

For the artefact :

The target audience of this game are students who are studying in the western educational context and in multicultural spaces. The ideal age group could be 17 years and above as this is usually the age when students begin their university journey.

Another limitation is the place where this game could be played. Every classroom in a school is of a different nature faced with unique challenges and time commitments. Teachers decide when to use this game most effectively in their class.

Further, this game must take advantage of the basic things a school provides its students. In most classrooms, the students get a chair to sit on, decent lighting, a table to work on, paper and pens, and sometimes a white board with markers, and most importantly, an instructor.

5.0 Research methodology

- 5.1. Design for “being”
- 5.2. Initial exploration of play
- 5.3. Mindfulness in Amsterdam
- 5.4. Peeling a layer workshop
- 5.5. Cultivating Gratitude, extending Empathy
- 5.6. Artefact making as a method of investigation

My research practices include case study research, heuristic inquiry, embodied practice of mindfulness, exploratory workshops, gratitude practices, and the development of a series of artefacts. I used these artefacts to **“investigate the phenomena to be studied and [some] individual users, at the same time picking up signals useful for future work”** (Mattelmäki 2006). This next section of this document details my research practices.

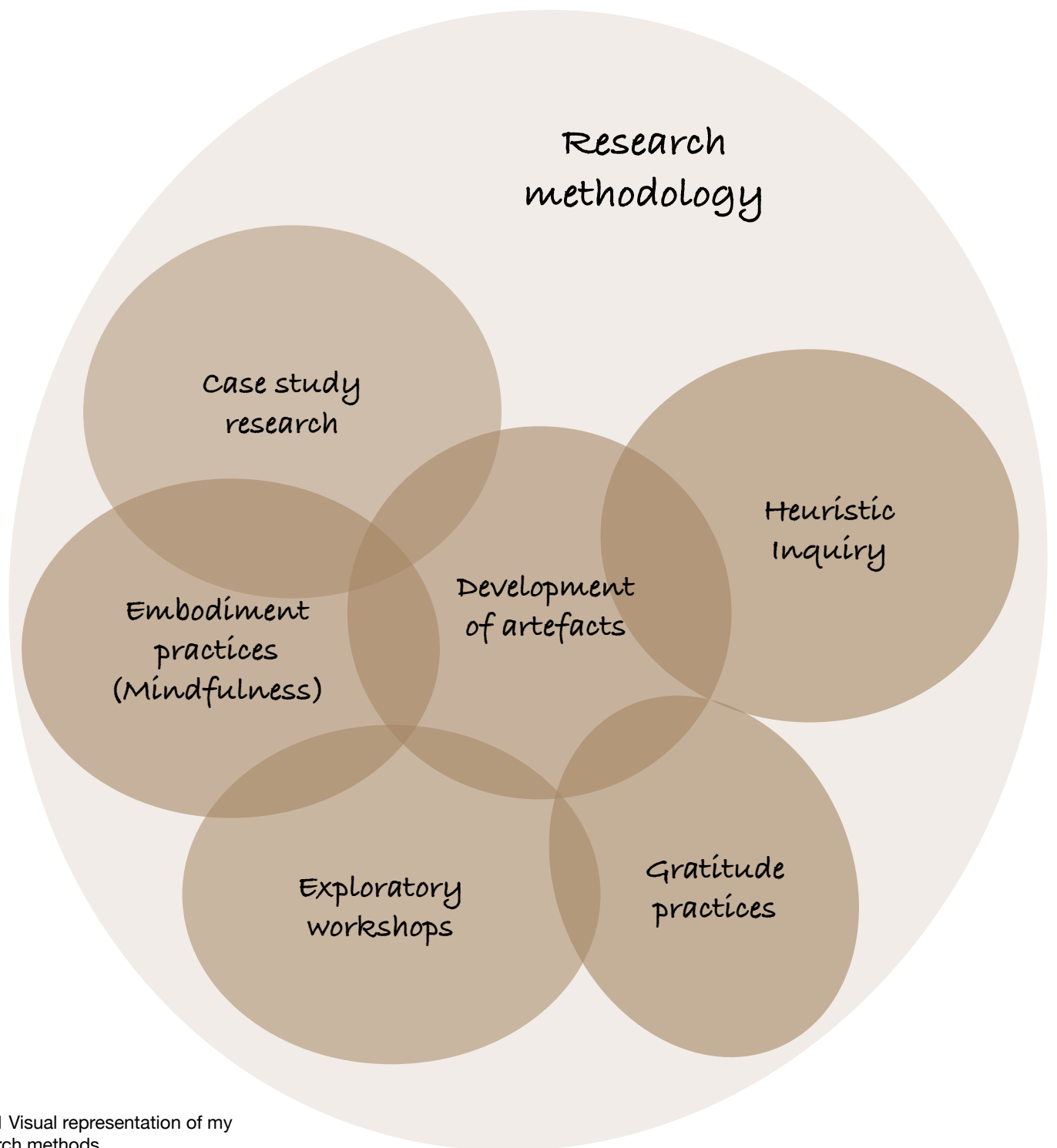


Fig 11 Visual representation of my research methods.

Design for “being”

Educational Theories

My literature research was very intensive and highly critical in nature. Various philosophies informed my research and my making process as a result. The method of investigation at this stage was highly generic and the focal point was to look into how scholars in the field defined education. To name a few, I looked into theories of Lev Vygotsky, Bruno Munari, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, Paulo Freire and others.

For a general viewpoint on education, I conducted case study research on the pedagogies of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1953) and Rudolf Steiner (1919). These pedagogies have an interesting point of commonality. One common aspect that stood out for me is the “being-ness” of a human. These pedagogies tap into developing the body, mind and spirit by being sensitive to the basic human feelings of joy, sadness, love, fear so on and so forth. This very sensitivity is reflected in the curricula they each designed. They focus not just on acquiring skills and knowledge to get a good job but they also encompass the beauty and the finesse of learning to allow the child to develop into “a whole individual”. In my view, these educators designed ‘for being’.

Russian Intellectual, Lev Vygotsky (1978) proposed the theory of *the zone of proximal development*, and *scaffolding*. The zone of proximal development is “The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). Students can be in this zone of proximal development, when they are provided with the appropriate assistance and tools to accomplish the new task or skill. These activities, instructions, tools, and resources are known as scaffolding. Eventually, the scaffolding can be removed and the student will be able to complete the task independently. Using this theory as a vantage point of my research, I tried to connect this theory to the insights I gathered and tried to find possibilities of where I apply scaffolds.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1953), an Indian philosopher had some strong views on holistic education and the role of interdependence. He criticized the compartmentalization and fragmentation with which those of us in modern society view our life. Based on my interpretation of his thoughts, Krishnamurti felt that education is simply considered as one of the compartments which caters to learning a particular technique and profession. Our inability to see relationships and interconnectedness has led to a lot of problems we face in the modern world.

For Krishnamurti (1953), self-knowledge, or “awareness of one’s total psychological process” was another important aim of education (p.39). To equip the student with self knowledge, according to me, would lead to self introspection and the student would then be able to analyze their values and the relationships they hold with the world around. Altogether, the theories of these scholars form the ethos of the artefacts that I have designed.

Critical pedagogy

In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire challenged the traditional pedagogical system which he called the “Banking model of education” (ibid, p.71). The banking model of education is a practice of education which focusses on depositing information from the teacher to the students. By following this model, the students merely become passive recipients of information. This runs in opposition to the concept of critical pedagogy.

“Critical pedagogy challenges our long-held assumptions and leads us to ask new questions, as the questions we ask will determine the answers we get. Change is often difficult, and critical pedagogy is all about change from coercive to collaborative; from transmission to transformative; from inert to catalytic; from passive to active. Critical pedagogy leads us to advocacy and activism on behalf of those who are the most vulnerable in classrooms and in society” (Wink, 2005, p. 165).

I believe the philosophy of critical pedagogy is significant in my research. It encourages the students to exercise their agency and challenge the conventional relationship between the student and the teacher. The world is evolving in a rapid manner and in the future the students would have to face many new challenges. I believe critical pedagogy would equip students with a healthy attitude towards looking at subjects like empathy, social equity, power structures and community building to be able to face such new challenges in a more refined and a thoughtful manner.

Initial exploration of play

Abram (2012), reminds us, “The scientist does not randomly choose a specific discipline or specialty but is drawn to a particular field by a complex of subjective experiences and encounters, many of which unfold far from the laboratory and its rarefied atmosphere” (p.33). Hence, my motive initially was to enquire the reason why I picked play and how I experience play as an adult.

**“
How might play stimulate me as an adult
to be present and in the moment ?**

This was the first stage of my research. It hovered around an embodied space where I deliberately explored the experience of playing as an adult in order to rediscover my relationship with it. I played games and was being “mindful” about every single action and feeling. Subsequently, I reflected on the learning from that experience. Rediscovering play through an adult lens was invigorating and refreshing. I could find myself repeatedly being reminded of playing as a little girl in Bombay and this experience brought back those childhood memories to life.

As I continued to explore play as an adult, one thing that stood out for me from these subjective experiences is the realization of the interconnectivity between play and ‘being,’ or mindfulness. Mindfulness, according to American researcher Jon Kabat Zinn (1979) is “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally, in the service of self understanding and wisdom.” After immersing myself in the activity of playing games, the question I asked myself was “What did I feel during these experiences?”. The answer every single time managed to sound like these words - happiness, satisfaction, alive, excitement, refreshing so on and so forth. The way I experienced play would be the convergence of these feelings that one senses “during” and “after” the activity. These experiences strengthened my inclination towards embodied play. Embodied play enables one to be present with their bodies in the moment whilst playing. Being present in the moment with the body nourishes a realization that everything is connected and generates a feeling of compassion and empathy.

Cultivating compassion, which includes empathy, is one of the main aspects of the Buddhist traditions from which mindfulness arose (e.g., Feldman & Kuyken, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Scholars have raised the possibility that being aware of the present moment enables humans to be aware of the experiences of others – that is, to empathize with others (e.g., Andersen, 2005; Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007; Kristeller & Johnson, 2005)

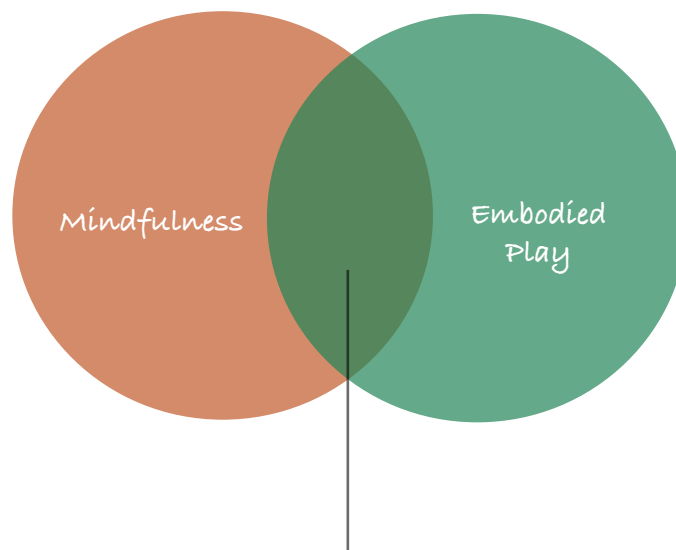
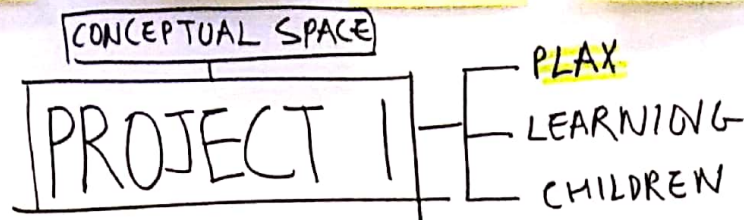


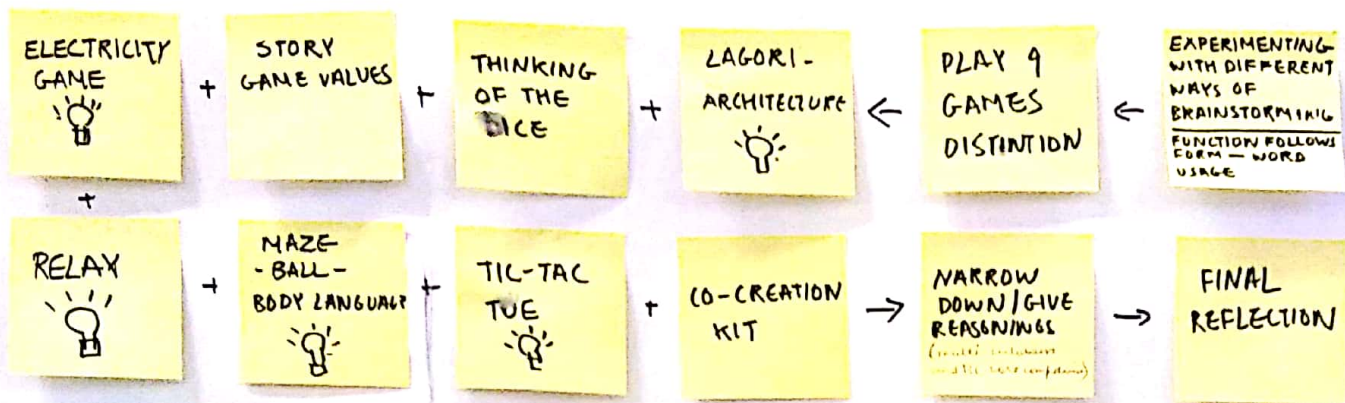
Fig 12 Awareness of the senses, being present.

Awareness of the senses, being present



FAMILIAR INTERACTION WITH UNFAMILIAR PRODUCT (VICE-VERSA)

IDEAS - CONCEPTUAL 3D - 2D, VIDEO GAME PHYSICAL TO BOARD MATERIAL SHIRT INTERVENTION IN EXISTING GAMES - MOCKUP MODELS



GAME 1
TA-STUDENT DESIGN
FOOTPRINT & GALLOPES

GAME
TA STUDENT DESIGNED
STEPPING ON CLOTH & ROCK PAPER

TAG

YOGA & MYTHOLOGY (MINDFULNESS) STORYTELLING

GAME 4
PLAYGROUND

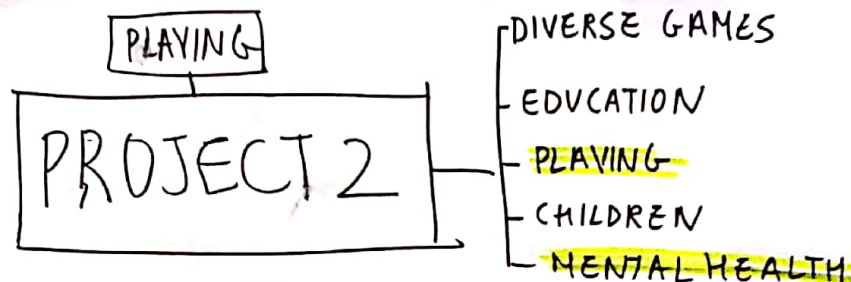
GAMES
JUGGLING

CHES

GAME 7
MYRIORAMA

GAME 8
HIDE A SEEK

REFLECTION ON CO-CREATION KIT



AGE
10 - 15 years CHILDREN
(5 years of learning) (social) (personality)

SCHOOL SETTINGS
↓
CHILDREN

MINDFULNESS BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY

MINDFULNESS

EXTERNALIZE
HYPOTHETICAL / INDIRECT



REFLECTION
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
DELIMITING

Fig 13 Process chart of my playing experience

AGE
25 - 30 years YOUNG ADULTS
(5 years of learning) (social) (personality)

WORKPLACE/UNIVERSITY
↓
ADULTS
(Participation)

SHEDDING A LAYER

PLAY BASED LEARNING
↓
PLAY AS A WAY OF HEALING

22 STRESS DEPRESSION PEER PRESSURE LONGINES



Fig 14 Me playing a game with the students of KGMS school.



Fig 15 Myself playing.

This interconnectivity between pedagogy for play, embodiment, mindfulness and empathy provided a strong ground for my making practice and informed my thesis in a substantial way

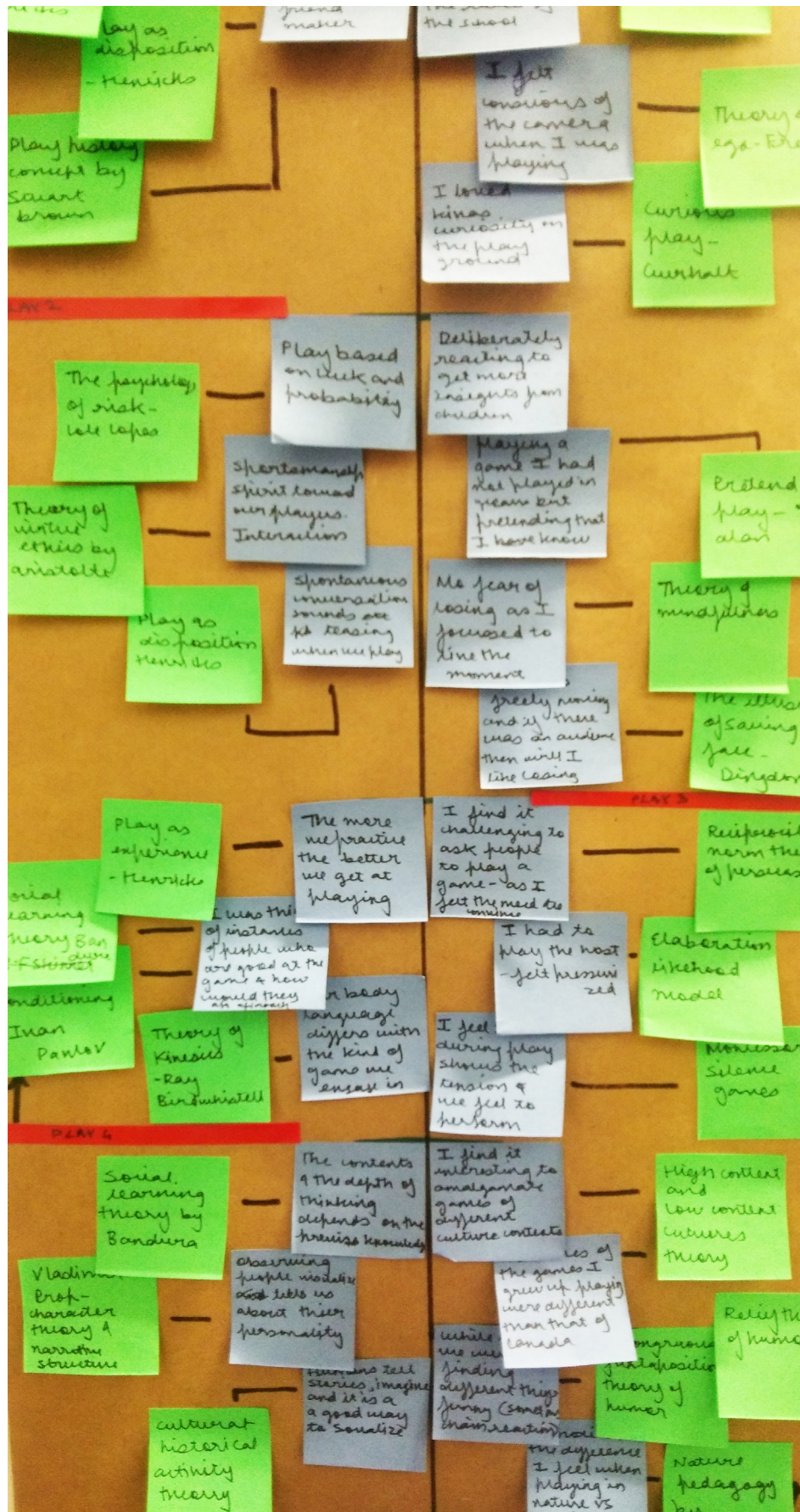


Fig 16 Chart representing my research on play and educational theories.

Mindfulness in Amsterdam

To further my research into mindfulness, I attended a program at the summer school in Amsterdam called *Mindfulness and Compassion based Practices* (2019). This experience deepened my connection with my body. During the program a 'silent day' was observed where the students were not allowed to speak or use any gadgets. The purpose was to bring our mind from the 'doing state of mind' which is action oriented and externally driven to the 'being state of mind' where we constantly try to bring our awareness to our five senses and stay grounded in our body.

Constantly coming back to how our skin is feeling, noticing the sounds around the classroom, how the food comes in contact with our tongue and feeling it travel all the way down to the stomach, I became very aware of my senses. Through these experiences I made connections between sensory design and mindfulness, both of which are based in the practice of awareness.

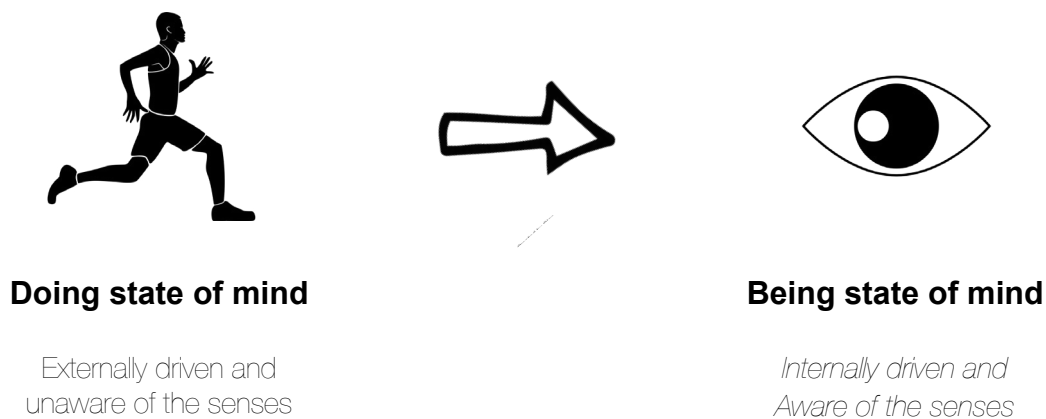


Fig 17 Visual of the “Doing state of mind” and the “being state of mind”



Fig 18 Me and my cohort, University of Amsterdam.

Peeling a layer Workshop

When I designed this workshop, I was thinking primarily about “human connection through empathy using senses” and how I could attempt to cultivate that in the classroom. I derived insights from my readings and mindfulness experiences in Amsterdam.

For Peeling a Layer workshop, I teamed up people in pairs sitting opposite one another. One person in the pair was blind-folded and was asked to explore a spice using their senses beyond vision, ie. taste, touch, sound, and smell. The other person, who was not blind-folded, simultaneously wrote a haiku (5-7-5) based on their intuitive understanding/perception of reading the other person’s interaction with the spice. None of them were allowed to speak in the process. There are two reasons why I did not want to not use sight. Firstly, I wanted to focus more on the other four senses, as we unconsciously pay a lot of importance to our sense of vision and our experience is dominated by that sense. The blindfolded person is more able to be present in their bodies and focus on the other four senses. Secondly, I felt the blindfold added an element of mystery, surprise and play.

I had hoped the writer of the haiku would actually “empathize” with their partners by watching their body and making an assumption about their experience through a spice. When we try to understand and feel what the other person would be going through in a particular situation, we naturally connect and it makes us more sensitive and kind. Like how a mother is to a toddler. The toddler doesn’t speak but the parent still understands by reading the toddler’s body.

Fig 19 Peeling a layer workshop



Fig 20 Workshop sheets that were distributed to the participants at the peeling a layer workshop

(For the blindfolded person)

Your name :

Your partners name :

Reflecting back, which one out of these 4 senses – touch, taste, smell, sound, did you yourself exploring the most when interacting with the spice ? Tick the numbers below (1 for least, 5 for highest)

Touch : 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Taste : 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Smell : 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Sound : 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

How were you feeling when you were blindfolded ? Anxious, conscious, curious, at all, nervous, bored or anything else ? Did you feel safe ?

Did you feel reminiscent of some personal memory while doing the activity with spice ?

Did the blindfold enable you to pay more attention to your body and you (except for sight) ?

(For the observer and the writer of the Haiku)

Your Name :

Your partners name :

You have to write a Haiku.

Time : 15 minutes.

You may observe first and then write or you may write as well as observe simultaneously. Please do not speak with your partner till the task is over. Thank you.

What is a Haiku ?

- Haiku is traditionally a Japanese poem consisting of three short lines that do not rhyme.
- A Haiku basically communicates to the reader a gist of the experience in just a few words. Like imagine writing an abstract for a lengthy paper.

The structure of a Haiku to keep in mind while writing :

First line : 5 words

Second line : 7 words

After the workshop, I realized I was mistaken to deliberately push people to try to discover a feeling of empathy. I began to understand that it is very tough to cultivate such a feeling without the participant's willingness to actually tap into something deep and personal in them. How does one peel that layer and discover that character in them? That is the biggest challenge I faced at that time. This became explicit when one of the blind folded participants, who was supposed to play with the spices, decided to disengage from the activity and stayed still waiting for the instructions to take the blindfold off.

Based on the insights from this workshop, I thought of an idea to shift my research focus from cultivating empathy directly towards one another in the classroom to cultivating empathy towards the people in the food systems. This would then impact the level of empathy in the multicultural classroom indirectly. This led to my second research question about cultivation of gratitude towards the people who harvest our food.



Fig 21. Fig 22. Students at the peeling a layer workshop

Cultivating Gratitude, extending Empathy

I took inspiration from the Zen practices of gratitude. Mahinda Wijesinghe writes in *Gratitude in the Buddhas teaching* : “Gratitude ... is an uncanny and positive attitude of appreciation or thankfulness in acknowledging a benefit that one has received or will receive from others. It is often accompanied by a wish to thank them, or to reciprocate in kind, thinking: This wasn’t achieved by me alone, but by the help and support of this and that good person”(2008, p.2). The paper The importance of gratitude - Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being: Cultivating Gratitude for a Harvest of Happiness (2009), talks about how gratitude can lead to overall well being and happiness. At the same time, research also shows that deliberately trying to create opportunities to enhance gratitude is not likely to be an easy process. Just like farming, the cultivation of gratitude takes time, focus, and effort—one does not simply slide into a disposition of gratitude.

On a personal level, my connection with gratitude has been very intimate and it has helped me to heal. When we see things from an ordinary eye, we see everything ordinary but when we see things with a lens of gratitude it transforms us. This transformation is significantly related to our happiness and how we interpret the world around us. “Practicing gratitude is transformative and can change the way we look at ourselves and the world.” (Loori 2008: p.7).

Growing up in a country like India, I was frequently exposed to poverty. The number of people below the poverty line is far greater and the context is much harsher in developing countries than in developed ones. Physical distance, according to me, plays a big role in how we relate to marginalized communities. When things happen closer to us then we are naturally more affected by it. While growing up in Bombay, my neighbourhood consisted all sorts of people from different backgrounds, but primarily people who lived difficult lives. These were the people who fought every single day with bankruptcy, debt and starvation. I have seen these people being thankful for every single morsel of bread. I believe I am a very grateful person but it is not something that is inherent in me. I have developed it over a course of time by consistent exposure to impoverished people. The imbalance in the world is deeply disturbing to me and the world as it seems to me, is far from egalitarian. One of the reasons the subject of gratitude is incorporated in my research is because it is personally very important to me.

It is not uncommon to hear about the stories of people who are deprived and live on the fringes of mainstream modern society. We are habituated to sad stories every day but at the same time, we feel helpless and perhaps even detached. Through this research, I want to address this detachment between absorbing information and our ability to empathize with that information.

5.6 Artefact-making as a method of investigation

5.6.1. Artefact first	Rituals and story-telling
5.6.2. Artefact second	Imagination cards
5.6.3. Artefact third	Role-playing board game
5.6.4. Artefact fourth	Moving board pieces
5.6.5. Artefact fifth	Spices cart
5.6.6. Artefact sixth	Mindfulness and imagination bits

“In the practice of research through designdesigners explore new problem spaces, codifying understanding through the construction of artifacts. Instead of having the intention to produce a commercial product, design researchers focus on how the application of design practice methods to new types of problems can produce knowledge. By practicing research through design, design researchers can explore new materials and actively participate in intentionally constructing the future, in the form of **disciplined imagination**, instead of limiting their research to an analysis of the present and the past.” (Zimmerman et al., 2007)

Each of the following iterations explored the complex aims of my research, in different combinations of focus. I will describe each iteration briefly in light of my research. The integration of actual spices like turmeric, saffron, rosebuds, cinnamon etc were consistently a part of all the artefacts.

Rituals and story telling

Cards with snippets of rituals for sensory play.

Keywords :

contemplative practices, play, spices, pedagogy, rituals and story telling

What was I exploring ?

Empathy between students.

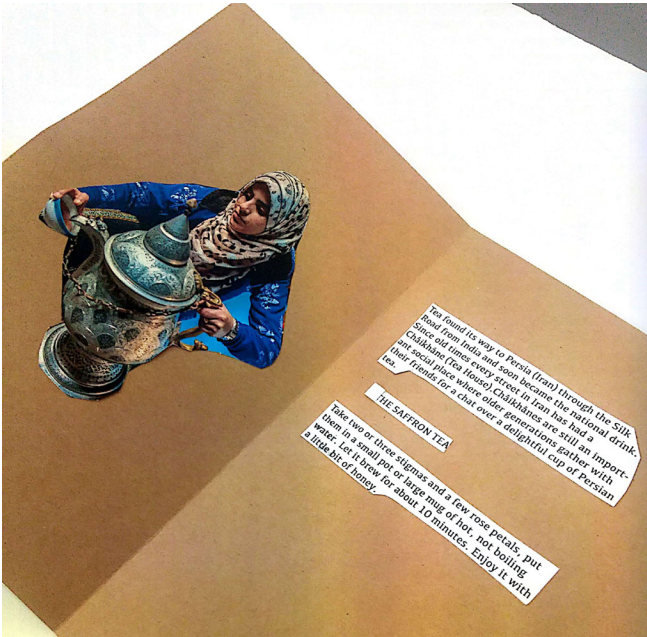


Fig 23 A rough mock-up of the card describing a Persian ritual.



Fig 24 Mock-up of the game with spices (rosebuds, rosemary, cinnamon and turmeric).

What did I do ?

Based on the insights from my Peeling a Layer Workshop and the conversations that followed (read earlier section for reference), one thing that was mentioned frequently by the participants after the workshop was the lack of opportunity to share their stories and experience with their partner. They felt that could have possibly helped them develop an unique connection. The idea at this stage was to reclaim the lost narratives of the stakeholders of the food (spices) we cherish everyday. Whenever we eat something or think of food, we usually fail to acknowledge that we are savouring the fruits of someone else's labour.

This game play was structured so that every person in this group activity would read aloud a story of the stakeholder to the entire group. After having done that, they are encouraged to share any personal story which they are reminded of based on the content of that story. Example, the story of a farmer reads how he has to spend long hours in the sun etc and the player can then talk about his experience of going to a desert which was hot and how he longed for a bottle of water so on and so forth. Touching and feeling the spice simultaneously was a part of the play.

Imagination, story telling and sharing personal experiences are time tested methods to connect people. I decided to take this approach forward by cutting down on the information and adding more "imagination" and containing them into smaller cards in the next iteration.

Imagination cards

46 Cards

Keywords :

Empathy, imagination, mindfulness

What was I exploring ?

Using imagination to connect with people from marginalized communities.

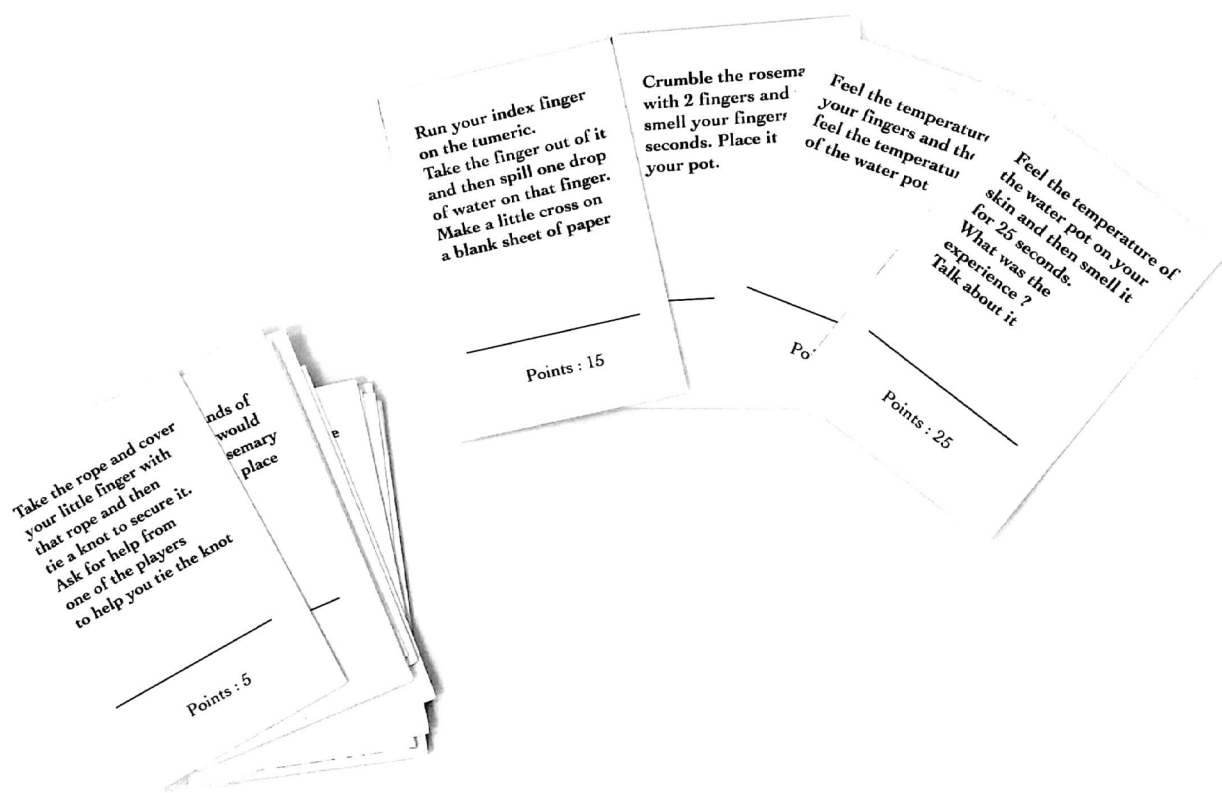


Fig 25 46 imagination cards game

Take a rosebud & throw it on the ground and then ask one of the participants of your choice to crush it with their feet and then pick it up with (either a picker or with your hand) and place it in your pot

Points : 25

Close your eyes. Notice your heart beating and count till 10 beats out loud. As a group, make a silent prayer in your mind to be grateful for the body given

Points : 25

Pick up one spice of your choice and write a little prayer of happy thoughts to the labour of the farmer for growing this. Then pick up the chit and place it in your pot

Points : 5

Fig 26 Imagination cards

Relate a thing that you see in the natural environment to the colour of the tumeric spice before you

Points : 15

Make a tea bag with rosemary and offer it to the role player and explain why are you offering it to that role player

Points : 40

Bring your awareness towards the sole of your feet and visualize yourself with that feet walking into a farm and having the wet soil touch this feet

Points : 15

Fig 27 Imagination cards

Run your index finger on the tumeric. Take the finger out of it and then spill one drop of water on that finger. Make a little cross on a blank sheet of paper

Points : 15

Pick up one rose bud and scrap out 3 dried petals and place it into your sheet. Observe the sound when doing it.

Points : 40

Speak about a memory with water

Points : 15

Fig 28 Imagination cards

Visualize the house of the farmer who could harvested the saffron. How does it look like according to you ? Speak about it to your participants

Points : 25

Feel the temperature of the water pot on your skin and then smell it for 25 seconds. What was the experience ? Talk about it

Points : 25

Take the rope and cover your little finger with that rope and then tie a knot to secure it. Ask for help from one of the players to help you tie the knot

Points : 5

Fig 29 Imagination cards

Pick up 2 big pieces of cinnamon and scrape the surface of one piece using the other till the powdery texture of the cinnamon turns a little shiny. Pass it around for everyone to smell and notice the change in the surface

Points : 15

Take a pinch of rosemary and leave it on any surface. Count the pieces of it loudly and then place them in your pot

Points : 40

Take a white paper and place a pinch of rosemary and one little piece of cinnamon in a way that you find visually appealing then talk about it. Place it in your pot after the activity.

Points : 15

Fig 30 Imagination cards

What did I do ?

The content of the 46 cards were as follows :

- 1) “Imagination” cards, (majority of them).
- 2) “Making/doing something with the spices” cards.

This game explores the use of imagination to cultivate empathy. Rabinowitz and Heinhorn (1985) in the paper “Empathy and imagination” studied the relationship between empathy and imagination among 141 tenth and eleventh grade Israeli boys and girls. The hypotheses were: a) the greater an individual’s imagination, the more empathy the individual will show, and b) individuals instructed to imagine themselves in another’s unfortunate situation will show greater empathy than others not similarly instructed. In the case of my research for example - How does the hands of an old muslim spice farmer living in a very small town of Kashmir look like ? Why is this question even important to ask? To answer this question, the respondent requires tremendous imagination and the answer can be heavily influenced by the stereotypical attitudes and information that the respondent has. However, the purpose of the research is not to address stereotypes of this nature but it is to simply shed light based on their imagination. The beauty of imagination is such that it allows us to break free from such constraints and enables us to become the narrator of our stories.

I realized after I tested out these cards with several people that it is a very a powerful tool. It enabled the participants to feel and imagine things which they otherwise did not in a normal day to day setting. This realization also coincided with the fact that it is important to be inclusive of other people’s opinions.

People who were engaged and excited about the cards, spoke to me about their imagination and how that managed to invoke certain emotions in them as a result. People who did not seem so keen to engage with the cards, had very limited or no outcome from the activity. This insight was a powerful one and I decided to design an activity with these cards in a manner that is more engaging.

At this point, I quickly realized the importance of game-like activity. The tried and tested game-like elements would make the activity engaging. I decided to add gamification elements like strategy building, the dice, points systems, board and also introduce the idea of roleplaying in the next artefact.

5.6.3. Artefact three

Role-playing board game

A board game with 3 role players

Keywords :

Empathy, imagination, mindfulness, roleplaying, gamification

What was I exploring ?

Using imagination and role-playing to connect with people from marginalized communities through gamification.



Fig 31 Rough paper mock-up model of the role playing board game.

What did I do ?

A board game of 3 people with each assuming a certain role - farmer, merchant, customer. Each role-player will have his own dedicated route and has to reach the finish line. The person with the highest number of points wins the game.

Adding gamification made the game successful in terms of its engagement. This design pushed me to explore the concept of inclusivity in relation to the number of participants in the game. At this point in my making, I realized that if it were to be a successful pedagogical tool then it should have the potential to engage as many students as possible at once. Although, this is not required, as students can engage in the board game whenever they wish to, but the involvement of all the students in the game at the same time might aid classroom solidarity. I hoped that the tendency of students to connect to people of marginalized communities would heighten as well.

In the next artefact, I endeavoured to achieve that flexibility in the number of students engaging in the game and refine the gamification.

5.6.4. Artefact Four

Moving board pieces

A moving board game with the capacity to include a classroom of 15 students.

Keywords :

Empathy, imagination, mindfulness, roleplaying, gamification

What was I exploring ?

Using imagination and role-playing to connect with people from marginalized communities through gamification.



Fig 32 Moving board pieces game



Fig 33 Role playing cards in the game.

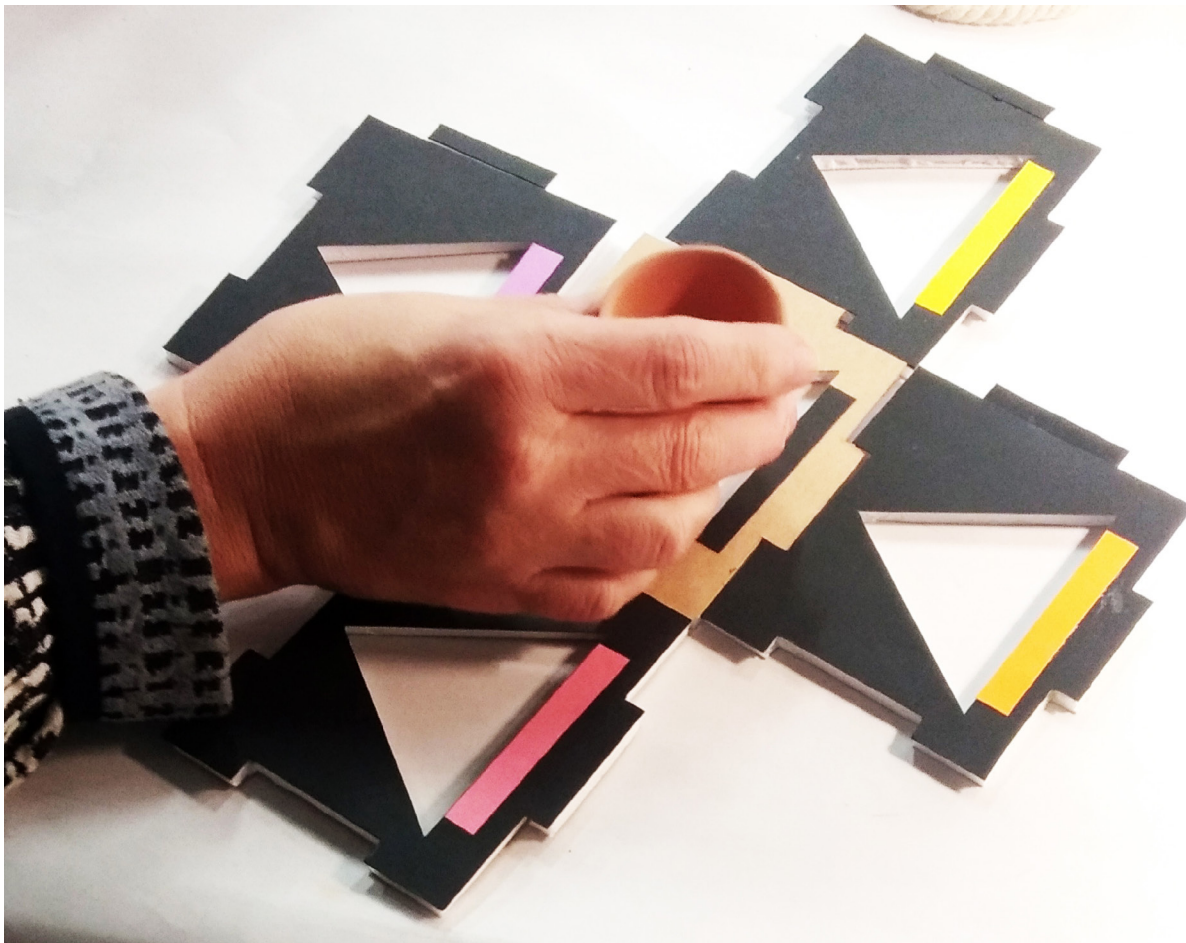
What did I do ?

I added moving board pieces to increase the number of participants in the game. The dice dictated the movement of the board pieces. I kept the cards and the points system consistent in this artefact. I tweaked the permutations and combinations of the game to make it into an effective role playing game. I introduced role playing cards wherein a student would have to assume that particular role based on what they picked up.

Breaking free from a static and a gridlocked board was a deflection point in my making. Whilst working on this artefact, I arrived at the following two reflection points :

- a. The points system of the game
- b. The role playing cards

Fig 34 Moving board pieces game



a. The points system

The idea of having points is rooted in the fact that one has to build up a strategy to win the game. This system not only runs in opposition to the purpose of the game which is to connect people through empathy but a strategy game with points also disturbs the experience of mindfulness and being present in the moment with the spices. It makes a person more concerned about beating other people to be able to win and less about being aware and empathetic towards the people of marginalized communities. The need is to alter the points system in a manner that would aid the purpose of the research and not something that functions in contradiction.

b. The role playing cards

The nature of the role playing cards offered the opportunity to switch roles instantaneously almost after every round. Possibly a farmer for one round, then a merchant for next, then a customer in the next one etc. Though there seemed to be nothing particularly wrong with that, I felt that if a student were to submit to a particular role-play in order to empathize, then assuming a role which offers them to linger in it long enough would nourish the feeling of empathy towards the people in our food systems.

5.6.5. Artefact Five

Spices cart

A structured and an open ended role playing game with multiple game elements.

Keywords :

Empathy, imagination, mindfulness, roleplaying, gamification

What was I exploring ?

Using imagination and role-playing to connect with people from marginalized communities through gamification.

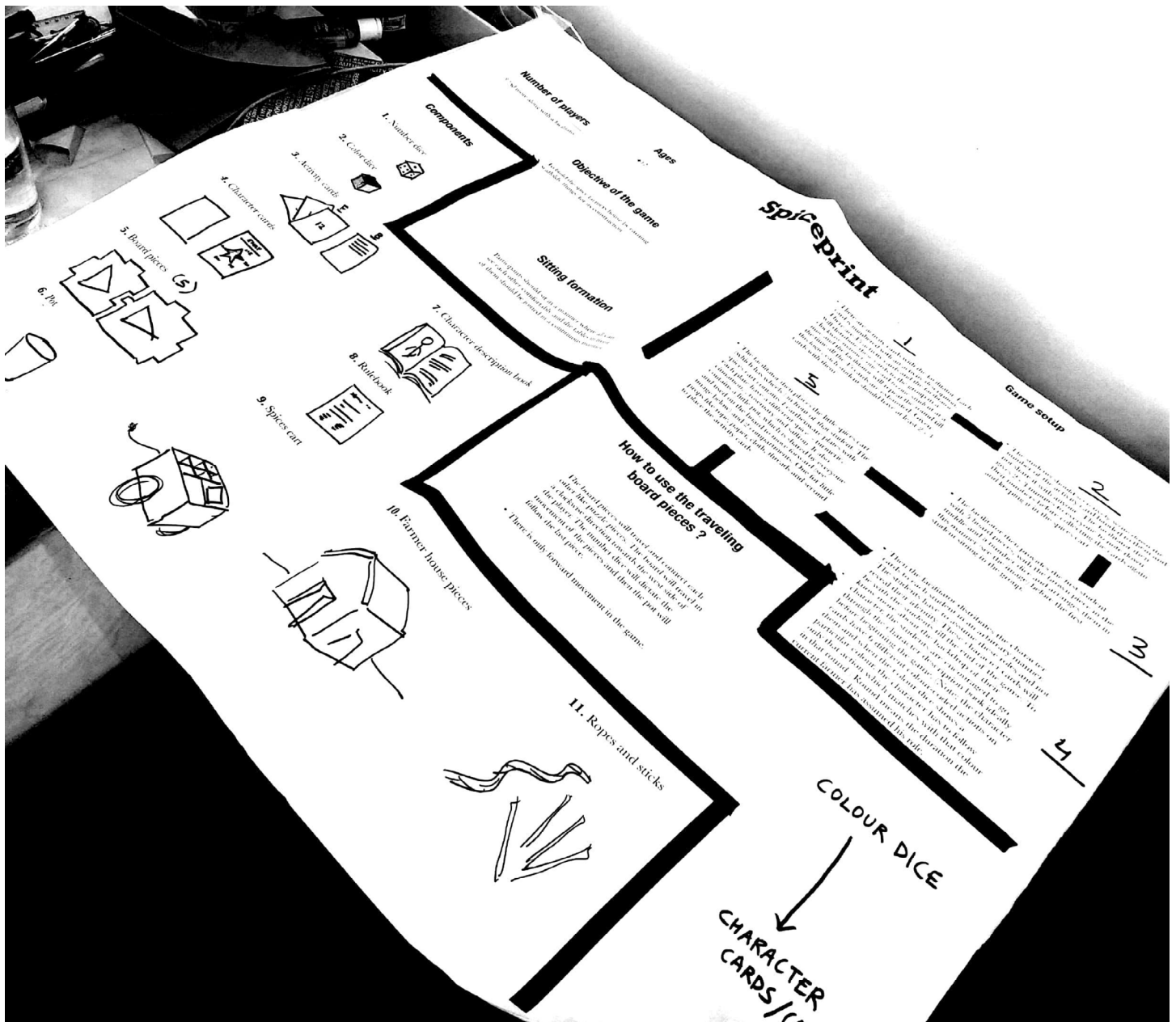


Fig 35 Spices cart game details

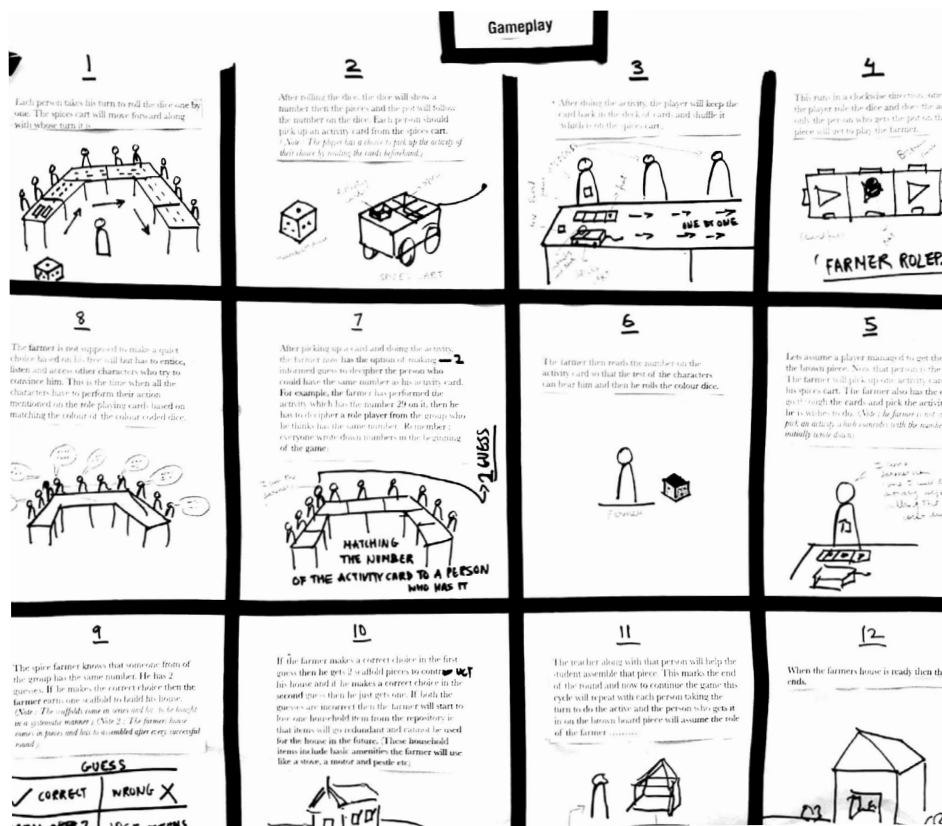


Fig 36 Spices cart game play step by step

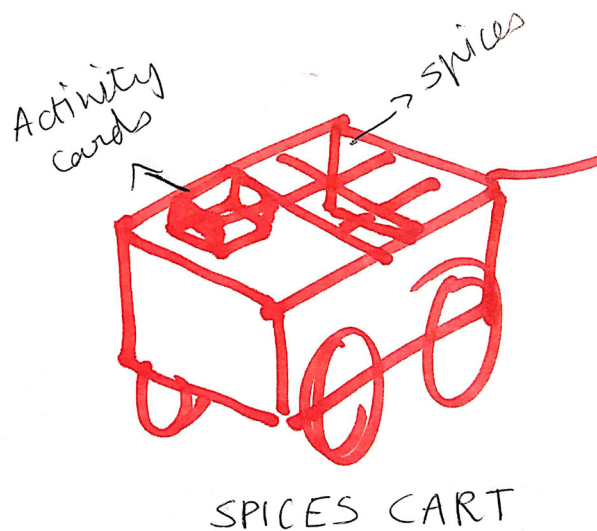


Fig 37 Spices cart rough drawing

What did I do ?

I discarded the points system and instead I used a story with a noble overtone. The story was to build the spice farmers house by earning scaffolds (things) for its construction.

The idea of this artefact came to me when I discussed the project with a few friends who started talking about the role playing games they have played like Werewolfs, Dungeons and dragons etc. I wanted to deepen the participants imagination and mystery in this game to add more engagement and to heighten the level of empathy towards people in our food systems. I introduced something like a spice cart which would hold the spice and can be moved. The idea of a spice cart was inspired by the traditional bullock carts I have seen growing up in my hometown of Goa. The crude rawness of the cart represented very eastern aesthetics and is very unlike the aesthetics we see in the developed countries.

As a pedagogical tool, I positioned and added the role of a teacher as a contributing facilitator of the game and not just as a passive observer of the activity.

This artefact has a long extensive game play. I examined gamification in relation to shedding light on the stories of marginalized communities. It was necessary to develop this artefact to assess what could be done in terms of gamification. There was also a need to simplify it. Making a game without loopholes and building gameplay is a challenging task requiring years of improvisation. I felt the need to simplify it without necessarily compromising on the intention of designing the game.

I began to see the need to make this artefact less of a game and more of a playful sensory ritual. Gamification although very engaging might deflect from the purpose of the artefact. There was very little opportunity to be present with the spices and our bodies.

Imagination & mindful bits

A card game with spices

Keywords :

Empathy, imagination, mindfulness.

What was I exploring ?

Using imagination and mindfulness to connect with people from marginalized communities.



About 90% of the world's saffron is grown by small holding farmers in the hilly forests of Iran.

Activity

Step 1

Connect to your head. Take a few deep breaths and close your eyes to avoid distraction. Bring your attention to your head, observe very carefully how your scalp is feeling, try to imagine the texture of your hair, release tension from your forehead.

Step 2

Imagine. Try to imagine the same for a saffron farmer in Iran, What would be the colour of his hair, would it smell a certain way, does his skin has wrinkles ? What would be be eating for dinner everyday ? Try to imagine as many details as possible.

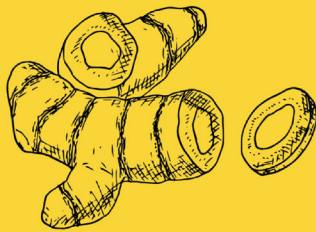
Step 3

Release. Acknowledge and then gently let go of any stereotype that you think you addressed in the process.

Fig 38 Front and back of the Imagination bits card

Turmeric

Mindfulness Bits.



Time : 7 - 8 mins.

Sit in silence with your feet flat on the ground and with your eyes open. Bring your awareness to the quality of your breath. Is it deep or shallow ?. With every breath try to inhale deeper.

Begin by connecting to your breath and body, feel your feet on the ground and notice your experience in this moment. With your awareness in this moment, notice any thoughts, sensations or emotions you are experiencing for a few minutes.

Now, pick up a pinch of turmeric and bring your attention to the item in your hand and imagine that you are seeing it for the first time. Observe with curiosity as you pay attention and notice the color, shape, texture, and size. Is there anything else that you notice, sense or feel?

You may end by practising the following breathing exercise by Thich Nhat That :

Breathing in, I'm aware of the many conditions that brought this food to me.

Breathing out, I feel grateful.

Fig 39 Front and back of the Mindfulness bits card

What did I do ?

This iteration is one of the simplest version of the series but at the same time fulfilling the purpose of what I was exploring. I considered a few markers that I had learnt from my earlier iterations before designing this game. They were as follows :

1. Engagement :

The game should be flexible enough that it can be played by all the students in the classroom at once.

2. Portability :

The game should be easily portable which makes it low maintenance.

3. Easy gameplay :

I found it important to reduce the steps so that it is easily understandable by students. An extensive gameplay takes away from the purpose of the design.

4. Non-competitive and no points system :

Like I mentioned in the earlier iterations, I wanted the game to be non-competitive with no strategy. The purpose of the game is to cultivate empathy and being present with being grounded in the body. Making participants compete against one another takes away from the purpose.

5. Widening the context :

I noticed in my earlier iterations that it is important to widen the scope of context in the game so the participants have some reference/scaffold which can trigger their imagination. Hence, I added direct quotes, pictures of people, and some general information.

This game uses techniques like deep breathing and body scan meditation. According to scientific research, deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system of our brains which is responsible for manage our stress responses to help decrease anxiety, fear, racing thoughts.

I introduced something similar on the lines of body scan meditation. Body scan meditation involves paying attention to parts of the body in a sequential manner to release any tension. In this game, I used body scan mediation in a manner that helps you imagine the body parts of the people from marginalized communities. For example, imagine the feet of the saffron farmer in Iran.

The game consists of 2 types of cards - a) Mindfulness bits b) Imagination bits. It also consists of the actual spice which contributes to the sensory effect. The students in the classroom would be asked to get into smaller groups based on the spice card they get. Thereupon, they get the opportunity to interact with the spice peacefully.

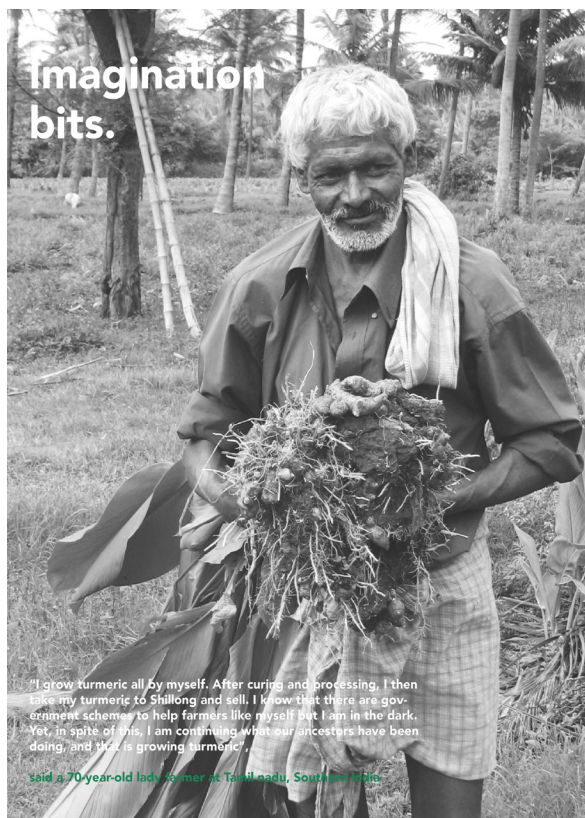


Fig 40 Front and back of the imagination bits card



6.0. Conclusion

The research endeavoured to understand how embodied play with spices might elicit feelings of empathy and gratitude towards the people who work in our food systems. I speculate that this might also increase empathy among the students themselves. This thesis conducted research on various pedagogies, heuristic research with play, mindfulness and the making of artefacts as a method of investigation.

My research contributes to a model of education which emphasizes relational ontology and demonstrates a dense network of interrelations within the world we inhabit (Escobar, 2016, p.18). This approach towards education takes into consideration the larger picture of the world and discovers new relationships with the world. In my view, a relational outlook to education would have a myriad range of benefits for the learner. Not only would it promote higher acceptance and empathy towards people from different cultures but it would also make students sensitive and open minded towards subjects like poverty, social inclusion, interdependence and so forth.

Throughout the course of this research, I have also come to realize the significance of different states of mind and how that impacts the experience of the artefacts that I have designed. The *doing* state of mind refers to a state which is mostly driven by external events, unaware of the senses, and the *being* state of mind is a state of awareness that can arise when we make the effort to deliberately focus on the sensations of our body like touch, taste, smell and sound. The latter allows us to stay grounded and present in our bodies and opens us to a feeling of empathy. As a result, an innate realization that we are not separate from the world and the people around us may arise. For me, this is compelling ground to cultivate the being state of mind, a state which nourishes and supports empathy.

Through my making practice, it gradually became apparent to me that imagination plays a great role in generating empathy towards people we haven't met or have very little context of. Imagination coupled with embodied play can help generate awareness and empathy towards the people in our food systems. Spices offer a potent sensory medium for this.

The final artefact consists of imagination cards and mindfulness cards with spices. I believe that such an activity would gradually and positively impact the interpersonal relationships among multicultural students. It might potentially sow seeds of greater acceptance in the minds of the students and may alter the lens through which they view the world and their peers.

My hope is that, in the future, if the tool that I have designed is used consistently to support inclusive pedagogy in university level classrooms, then it may help to mitigate barriers that arise from cultural differences. It might also elicit feelings of gratitude in students by influencing their worldview. A possible future direction for this research is to test the impact of this tool over a course of period and assess its long term impact.

The artefacts that I have designed enables the students to be present in the moment for a period of time in the classroom, and hopefully cultivate empathy. In the future I would like to see the practice of mindfulness as an integral part of education and not something that we practice for a short period of time. I believe a holistic approach would be much more beneficial in this context. One pivotal step towards the implementation of this would entail demystifying the common myths about the secular practice of mindfulness by engaging more with the ongoing scientific research in that area.

Fig 41 Rose buds



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Fig 36 Spices cart game play step by step

Fig 37 Spices cart rough drawing

Fig 38 Front and back of the Imagination bits card

Fig 39 Front and back of the Mindfulness bits card

Fig 40 Front and back of the Imagination bits card

Fig 41 Rose buds

9.0 Appendix

9.1 Game play and rules of the artifacts

9.2 Letters to Louise St Pierre

9.3 Experiments

Gameplay and rules of the artefacts

- Role playing game
 - Moving board pieces game
 - Spice cart game
-

Role playing board game

Game of 3 - Farmer, merchant, user

Who wins ?

Each role-player will have his own dedicated route and each one of them has to reach the finish line, but the person with the highest number of points in the end, wins the game.

Idea behind the game

- To create opportunities for embodiment by interacting with the spices in a vivid manner
- To generate active empathy towards the stakeholders of the food we consume
- To generate a feeling of gratefulness towards the food we eat.
- To help us get grounded in our body by using our 5 senses
- To create opportunities for the participants to interact and connect with each other
- To educate participants by reclaiming the lost narratives of the stakeholders of the spices

Steps :

1. Each one of the 3 players should decide which role they want to assume - farmer, merchant, user
2. After assuming your roles, each player should pick their own little pot which they should use throughout the game and use it on the board to move forward.
3. Each role player has their own dedicated route.
4. Decide which role should begin first - the farmer, the merchant or the user. Decide and discuss the sequence and then start. Example - lets assume for the sake of this rule book, that the farmer has been decided to go first and the sequence is farmer- merchant - user. The game will run in multiple rounds in series of three.
5. To begin playing on the board, use the dice sack, each dice means something, the dice will control your movement on the board.

6. The dice should be picked in an incognito manner from the sack. It will decide your movement on the board.

7. As you move forward, there are numbers on the board and those numbers are linked to a deck of cards and each card has a unique activity which you need to execute in order to earn the points.

8. The person with the highest number of points, wins.

Moving board pieces game

Number of participants : 2 or more

Action steps to play :

1. Sit in any orientation, linear or square.
2. Match the five puzzle pieces in front of you, with the brown piece in the middle.
3. Place the empty pot on the brown piece.
4. Roll the dice and only when the dice shows up the play symbol, then start the game.
5. Each player will take the turn to roll the dice one by one and the person who gets the play symbol on the dice first will begin the game. The game will run in a clockwise manner.
6. The next step is to pick up one activity card in an arbitrary manner and perform the activity given in the card and add the score mentioned on the card in your personal bank.
7. After completing this activity, pick up one of the role-play cards and then read aloud firstly, the top side of that card and then the back side, but only the part which is relevant to you based on the colour of the board piece on which your pot is resting.
8. There are points which will be deduced or added based on the colour, as mentioned on the card. These points will be deduced or added from your personal bank.
9. After finishing all activity cards, the game ends. The person with the maximum points wins the game.

How to use the dice ?

There are six symbols and each symbol signifies an action step :

1. 2L move two steps towards the left
2. 3R move three steps towards the right
3. Begin the game (to be used only once)
4. 2R move two steps towards the right
5. stop and remain on the same piece
6. R move one step right

Note : The dice dictates the movement of the pot and the travelling pieces.

How to draw the cards ?

- Both the set of cards - activity as well as role play need to be drawn in an arbitrary manner. Do not read or disclose the cards to yourself or to your players when drawing the card.(The activity card once used by you should not be put back in the deck of cards. It must be kept with you)

What is a personal bank ?

- It is your collection of points. (on your score card) . It keeps adding up as you play.

What is a travelling board ?

- The board is designed to travel either in a linear / square / or in an L shape manner.
 - The movement and the subsequent placement of the pot will be dictated by the dice. When you run out on the pieces to place your pot then you pick up first piece and attach it and it will keep going.
-

Spices cart game

Number of participants : 6 or more

Age group :

12+

Sitting formation :

Sit in any fashion as long as all the players can see each other comfortably and have the tables connected in a continuous way so there is no space between them.

Levels :

The game runs in levels 1 to 4 levels.

Objective of the game :

Working together as a group to replenish the crop yield of the spice farmer

Elements of the game :

1. A normal dice with 1 - 6 numbers
2. Board pieces
3. A spice cart with wheels (consists of 4 earthenware plates with spices in them, a pot, a rope, a place for activity cards)
4. Role playing cards
5. 3 teller of lies role playing cards
6. Rule book (consisting of gameplay instructions and character description)

Setting the scene :

- There are activity cards with the facilitator. There are numbers on the front side of the cards and there is an activity on the back side.
- There are 45 activity cards and the teacher will distribute these cards to the group in a clockwise manner, one card to one student at a time and the teacher will repeat the round till the time all the 45 cards are exhausted. Given this logic, each student should have at least 2 - 3 cards with them.
- The students should secretly write down the number on the activity card and not share it with anyone. The teacher then gives 2 - 3 minutes to everyone to note down their numbers before collecting the cards again and keeping it in the spices cart.

- The teacher then provides the first student with 5 board pieces, with the brown piece in the middle and a dice which looks like this and arranges them before the first student sitting in the group.
- The teacher then places the little spices cart (which has wheels) in front of that student. The spices cart contains 4 earthenware plates with each plate have a different spice - tumeric, cinnamon, , rosemary and saffron. It also contains a little pot, which is shared by everyone and used on the board to move forward (see image below) and a compartment for little props like rope, paper, cloth, threads.

About role playing cards

There are 2 types of role playing cards.

1.Stakeholder cards- the activist, the transporter, the merchant, the chef (Note: there is no role play for the farmer)

2. Opposition team cards - Teller of lies

The numbers on the card signify the level number with a role play attached. The player will assume that role based on the level they are playing. Each role has unique aspects but only one common objective

Before distributing the role playing cards, the teacher should make sure that she mixes up at least 2 opposition team cards in the deck of supporting team cards and then shuffles the deck.

The number of opposition team cards in the supporting team card deck will vary on the number of people playing. The teacher gets to decide how many cards she feels appropriate for that group.

Once when the student will get the role playing card that role will remain with them till the fourth level.

The role of the supporting team is to support the farmer to achieve his objective to reach the highest crop yield. The person with the spice cart is the farmer at that time. The farmer is not supposed to pick up the card of his number.

Letters to Louise St Pierre

- *15 August 2019*
- *23 August 2019*
- *1 September 2019*
- *16 September 2019*
- *6 November 2019*
- *7 November 2019*
- *9 November 2019*
- *5 December 2019*
- *20 December 2019*
- *5 February 2020*

15 August 2019

Hello Louise,

Greetings ! I hope you are doing well.

The conversation we had the other day was really helpful. Thank you so much for your feedback ! I have managed to make a few more connections after that discussion.

I am very excited about my work at this point. I thought about mindfulness and how can I integrate the experiments with myself (heuristics) into something tangible without exploiting/or more ethically using mindfulness without demeaning its value and concurrently leading up to a pragmatic eventuality at the end of my thesis.

I tried to investigate this and stayed with this thought until I stumbled upon this book called the "The senses : Design beyond vision". It is published by Princeton architectural press and describes an exhibition based primarily on sensory design.

It was an interesting read and very insightful. After thinking a bit, I realised that the experiments I did with mindfulness and mental health connect with sensory design and there is a strong correlation between mindfulness and sensory design as they both endeavor to focus on our senses and towards the being-ness of a person. There are many small nuances to it which we can discuss in detail as well.

I can see myself designing a product/tools based on this narrative by taking the weight off my shoulders that I am working on mindfulness. It can be called a paradigm shift at this point because I changed the lens from "mindfulness" to "sensory design" but the underlying base or the essence of the experiments remain the same.

Sensory design is an inclusive, multisensory design practice which activates the touch, smell, taste and the wisdom of the body and gives one the opportunity to receive information, explore the world, experience joy, wonder and social connections regardless of our sensory abilities. (this is from the book) It also talks about how the field of design is just focussed towards designing around "vision" and there is a need to open up and embrace all our senses. They back this up with a few examples.

We can discuss more about this if you like :) I also tried to narrow down and rephrase my question to make it more pragmatic.

So this is what i came up with :

Designing sensory and playful tools based on mythology to address multiculturalism at university level classrooms to enhance interpersonal communication.

All the things that I researched last semester still stands. Products as scaffolds in a system, mental health, education and playfulness.

As for my summer work:

Paradigm shifts could be :

Mindfulness to sensory design

Education for children to education at university level.

Connections could be :

Multiculturalism to mythology (based on joseph campbell work)

I can back each one of the newly added concepts like mythology, multiculturalism, sensory design etc with succint experiments/experiences I conducted with myself and back it up by science/theory inorder to justify what compelled me to make those decisons for my summer presentation. I just added a new and a narrow dimension to the project as it evolved during my summer. I also tried to stick and follow the recommendations given to me by the committee during my interim thesis presentation. At this point and as suggested by you, I am now thinking of starting with material experiments like one experiment each day and then seeing how it evolves. I tried to not force any connections. I wanted to give my amorphous research a bit of a definite shape.

I have also made a list of the readings i did throughout the summer so I can refer it when i am presenting.

I also brainstormed a few points about the scope and the limitations of my summer work so the committee can understand better.

I made a list of all my infatuations (hahaha!) that I experienced throughout the summer and why i chose to not go ahead with those ideas as a pert of my process.

Please feel free to make offer me any kind of feedback on this. Its always helpful to embrace our ignorance and then work on it. I am sure that there are a lot of glitches at this point that i am unable to see. Looking forward to your reply,

Thank you so much,

Siddhi p

23 August 2019

Dear Louise,

I hope you are doing well.

I wanted to update you regarding my research work. There is so much to share Louise. I think this will be a long read for you :). Thank you for your patience. The reason I am writing everything to you is because sharing helps me to organize my thoughts and make more sense out of it.

The subject that I have considered for my summer presentation is “Spilling Saffron” Let me explain why.

Spilling

Verb

- cause or allow (liquid) to flow over the edge of its container, especially unintentionally.
- (of a number of people) move out of somewhere quickly
- (with reference to the contents of something) empty out or be emptied out onto a surface.

The previous email I sent you regarding my project work spoke about using mythology to make sensory tools for multicultural classrooms at university level.

Multiculturalism and mythology are humongous subjects and there is so much of literature available. I found the need to narrow it down even further and I was stuck with it. If I select a particular subject/ aspect in mythology then what should it be ? And why did I select that particular subject in the first place ? How can I link it with multiculturalism with forcing connections ? At the same time, I wanted some material hands-on task. I felt an increasing need to select a distinct subject in mythology whilst answering the “why did I select this in the first place?” to know where it is emanating from.

Instead of delving very deep into the literature bit of it at this point in time, I consciously decided to tap into my experiences as a child growing up in my parents home and I felt so reminiscent. I remember the smell of my house, the chattering sounds of my neighbours, the kind face of my loving grandfather and his ritual of eating fish and rice everyday like a quintessential coastal man from Goa... (haha...there were a lot of things, just named a few).

In order to simplify things, I settled to stick to a one exclusive thing and to something that I can connect to on a personal and a creative front. If I don't connect with the subject then I cannot work with excitement :). I planned on analyzing it from a viewpoint of mythology, sensory design and multiculturalism without trying to interweave these concepts together. In a way letting the process inform me to maybe make some connections later. I hovered around in this fluid space in my mind for a while.

One thing that was revered at home while growing up was "saffron". Saffron is an exotic, very ancient and a precious spice painstakingly hand-harvested from the *Crocus sativas* flower by small communities in the breathtaking valleys of Kashmir and Iran. (though there are more places but these two are one of the most ancient as there are generations of the same family which work on harvesting them). The spice is also called "red gold" because it extremely expensive (of course depending on the quality you buy). It also has a plethora of other health benefits as well.

After shifting to commercial drive this summer, I started frequenting the Persian market store which is just steps away from where I live. I was almost intrigued to find some saffron in the store. I bought some at once like 4 grams of it and decided to soak it with milk and drink every morning before I leave for school. I was so excited and I started doing this ritual every morning. One day, I offered it to my roommates. They are both Canadians, very adorable and pretty honest in their opinions. I offered them to try it and their reaction was very unpleasant. One of them said " Hey what did you just give me siddhi, its not very nice" I was a bit hurt with this reaction because growing up I had always viewed saffron being positioned at such a high pedestal among my family and the community members. I felt very attached to it. Just a few days back, I came across this poetry named "Saffron" written by an young Iranian immigrant and a poet called Amir Safi who now lives in America and it really struck a chord with me. I felt that there were some pieces of the poem that articulated what I just felt.

I couldn't manage to download the audio but below is the link of the poem. When you get to the website you would see the portal where you can play it and the transcript is right below the poem if you incase you want to read while listening to it. You may start from 5.30 minutes (to help you save some time:)). The link : <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/series/voices-and-verses/2019/04/22/329686/national-poetry-month-saffron-by-amir-safi/> What intrigued me about the poem is that it opened up new tributaries of thought for me. Firstly, this person from another distant country, to a certain extent, shares the same feelings as me. It made me realize that immigrants from anywhere around the world have a sense of shared experience that they undergo. This could be just one example. The line in the poem "how borders can make the most valued feel worthless" really made me think and circumstantially, connect to my experience. Immigrants, from what I have observed and read, try to maintain a balance between their cultural disintegration and at the same time, endeavour to adapt to a new culture. This could be one stepping stone to my research in investigating multiculturalism. The title "spilling saffron" made sense to me at this point.

I decided to start working on saffron not knowing where exactly this could possibly take me. The spice looks like small pieces of red thread and when dissolved in water or milk emits a very powerful yellow hue making beautiful textures in the background. I was intrigued with this intelligence of the spice and maybe I could use this strong yellow in a visual manner for future inspiration. Who knows !

When saffron spills out yellow hue in hot milk, it creates an enchanting texture on the medium it spills. Metaphorically, it may represent integration of communities in a new land by blending almost characteristically, naturally and also along with its usual vicissitudes every now and then

I gathered that “food” is not just mere matter that we consume but it is an all-encompassing story. A story full of nostalgia, cultural connotations, memories, struggle, politics, diversity, symbolism, borders etc. Its literally like the buddhist people say “Its not just the tea that you are savouring but its the entire universe that is in your hands”. Throughout the summer, I read and re-read the book that you gave me. “Love letters to the Earth”. I have to thank you for that. Its truly been the most gratifying experience and gave me more that I thought it would. One piece of the book speaks about “non-duality”. It lies within the realm of ontology I assume as it questions reality in many ways. Experientially, it is incomprehensible to me as I lack that personal encounter with it but I was swayed with the entire narrative which speaks about the oneness of all beings by reaching our higher consciousness. If one reaches that state, then the manner in which we view our earth and this universe could alter radically. :)

Humans and without implying a blanket judgement, usually perceive things through a lens. When it comes to people who are immigrants, then we subconsciously view them through the lens of some stereotype attached to that community and that to an extent, defines their position in the society at large. If we start to look at people as “beings” and retire from our stereotypical lens then our society would be much more well-integrated. Thats the essence of multiculturalism in my opinion. It boils down to that fundamental quality of “humaneness” in us. This can be one way to think about multiculturalism.

I have decided to conduct some experiments on saffron and soak it with milk or hot water to spill out its yellow colour (on a canvas or maybe just pictures) but very zoomed. The reason I endeavour to do that is because I was thinking about biomimicry. Mimicking from nature (in this context could be saffron) could be one way to help me design tools. Mimicking based on the inherent intelligence of nature could be productive. I could observe in detail the textures saffron creates when soaked in hot water, the way it spouts out smell at the same time, the gradation of the spilled yellow and so many other things. I believe this exercise could give me insights on sensory design as well. (or it will not give me any insights at all, lets see where the process takes me!) But it would be a learning experience nevertheless. There could be ways biomimicry can contribute- maybe I could emulate the form or the process of it.

Another is saffron as mythology, this is where I add more texture to my research. I have been reading about saffron. I was so astonished that there are so many ancient myths written on this spice. The greeks, the Indians, the Persians all talk about it at great length. There are poetries written on it and there are stories written in the greek mythology about the inception of saffron. One tale, (very briefly) talks about how saffron came into existence when Crocus got cursed by the gods for falling in love and the gods then turned him into the crocus flower. (Crocus sativas is what makes the saffron). This below poem is from that tale.

Crocus and Smilax may be turn'd to flow'rs,
And the Curetes spring from bounteous show'rs
I pass a hundred legends stale, as these,
And with sweet novelty your taste to please.
— Ovid, Metamorphoses

A lot of history and myth encompasses this marvellous spice. I still have to make connections with mythology though.

There is still a lot more to share with you Louise but I will end here for now. Thank you for reading and I would love to get your feedback :)

Warm regards,
Siddhi P

1 September 2019

Hello Louise,

I hope you are doing well.

I wanted to run you through some ideas I was thinking of. :) I am thinking about so many things. It might be a long read. Some of the ideas I am talking about here are just narratives which might not be actionable immediately but can still be helpful in the future.

I had a conversation with Christian regarding my project. I think it was a constructive conversation. It revolved mostly around finding opportunities to “make” in my project which could be doable in the next one month. He got me thinking about the importance of the physical in my making practice.

Louise, I feel a bit concerned about my project and I am unable to take risks because I keep thinking about the limited time I have to the candidacy review and I don't want to end up doing things that could be very ambitious and not relevant. However, I try to not let this thought deter me.

The idea that we discussed last time about designing my studio space into a contemplative and a collaborative space for people to interact with the spices is really great. The manner in which I wish to execute that is by beginning from a very small scale and then gradually adding pieces and expanding the idea. I began with taking a cloth and spreading out 5 types of spices onto that cloth, simultaneously, becoming cognizant and recording pieces of reactions when people interact with it or comment on it when they pass by my space.

I want to gradually, based on these little reactions I get from people, design the collaborative and contemplative space we were thinking of. How will I do that ? Like for example, Helene was passing through my studio and she instantly commented that Star anise has such strong smell and she loves it and it made me think about how certain spices are more evocative to our senses. Star anise certainly has a strong smell and it is pretty dominating in terms of smell. The impact spices can have to influence our mood is pretty interesting too. Like smelling cinnamon, makes me feel really good. I don't know how else to describe the feeling though. Smelling cinnamon doesn't make me feel happy, sad, nostalgic, peaceful etc, it just makes me feel good.

It also got me thinking about “speciesism”. We are so self centred, for the most part generally, we are only aware of how the human senses react to the evocations of spices (in this example) without ever thinking that the spice itself, was a living plant once and would have undergone certain sensory experiences itself. I think it boils down to how we connect with the natural world. The conceptual idea takes over the empathy.

I can slowly start to add elements in the space based on the insights I find the most compelling. One way is to directly ask people one on one to maybe taste, smell, and touch the spice and record insights I find the most compelling for my research investigation. Hahah..it has been interesting so far. I am making people around me taste tamarind and I am getting such vivid reactions each time.

It is also encouraging me to have conversations about spices with different people. I was talking with Harley about turmeric spice which is used a lot in India and then I ended up telling her that how turmeric is traditionally mixed with milk and mothers used to encourage their daughters to drink it because it is believed as a brown skin remedy and how being fair (white) is considered more beautiful in Asian countries than brown skin.

Even the simple act of having the spices laid out in front of me and watching them is helping me think of ideas. I was curious about how spices age. They are highly resilient and have a long lifespan. It led me into thinking about the buddhist concept of impermanence of our life and to an extent what is our relationship with time in our day to day life. Are we witnessing time or we using time ? I feel that there is a difference here. The act of witnessing is so distinct from the act of using time. Mindfulness requires us to witness time rather than operating on autopilot which uses time to think about something to keep us externally focused. Doing my workshop a lot of people said that they were bored after sometime which made me contemplate about our relationship with time and how it affects the way we look at things around us. (in this case - spices)

So, my idea is to design a playful activity using the insights I get from doing these little experiments. Design a game like how a game designer would design but chiefly, in this case, letting my little experiments (that I mentioned earlier) aid this process to make a game. At the back of my mind, I am still thinking about potentially converting this activity into a ritual and seeking opportunities through instances I experience. Like we discussed, I will be looking into space, body gestures and storytelling.

I am also reading some interesting things. Of course, the paper and the books that you gave me. Thank you for that. They are very helpful :)

The fundamental idea of the game is to develop our relationship with the earth (which enables us to connect with ourselves and hence through that with others around us) through senses using spices. I feel the need to keep repeating this so I don't digress too much. Designing a game satisfies my need to make something physical which I really want to as I enjoy doing it. :)

I have a very simple idea, beginning with just designing simple cards that can be played by 4 people. The cards will be instructive, fun and propelling our empathy for the natural world and bringing us back to our bodies and senses, but not competitive in nature. I have worked on card games earlier and I enjoyed doing it. Right now, I am just using the game as an instrument to get insights for my research investigation rather than perfecting the game strategy

I am thinking of paper cards, only as of now, but as it advances I want to expand it out by making use of different materials like paper mache, wood, maybe even ceramics etc. I don't know yet. This sounds fun and exciting to me.

There are some more things but I will end here for now. T

Thank you so much for reading Louise! Looking forward to get your feedback or any suggestions you may have.

Warmly,
Siddhi

16 September 2019

Dear Louise,

I hope you are doing well.

I worked on further building on that idea that we experimented last Tuesday by adding and eliminating a few more elements. I remember you asked me to “gamify” and I thought of just that. I was thinking about play and how to make this activity more fun. I tried to simplify it as well.

What I wanted to do is to team up people in pairs. One person in the pair would be blind-folded and will be asked to explore a spice using their body ie. taste, touch, sound, smell (beyond vision), the other person, who is not blind-folded, will simultaneously write the haiku (5-7-5) based on their intuitive understanding/perception of reading the other persons interaction with the spice. None of them are allowed to speak in the process. Maybe 20 minutes for this activity then a 10 minute discussion based on their experience of the activity and how they felt performing it.

I was also thinking about sharing with the writer of the haiku, a little segment (not the entire page) of the immersive reflection document. Especially the part of using concrete language and paying attention to the little actions and perceptions. That would give them an idea what to observe and how to perceive.

Just one spice for everyone to avoid some confusion.

The reason why I wanted to not use “sight” is because of 2 main reasons. Firstly, I wanted to focus more on the other 4 senses and we pay a lot importance unconsciously to our sense of vision and our experience gets dominated around that sense. It will enable the blindfolded person to be in their bodies and with the other 4 senses. Secondly, because I feel it adds an element of mystery and surprise and hence “gamifies” it.

I feel this activity would make the writer of the haiku to actually “empathize” with their partners by watching their body and making an assumption about their experience through a spice.

When we try to understand and feel what the other person would be going through in a particular situation, we naturally connect and it makes us more sensitive and kind. Like how a mother to a toddler. The toddler doesn't speak but the parent still understands through their body.

Based on one of the lectures I attended at my course in the University of Amsterdam, there is some connection between empathy and compassion but it is also contestable. Consciously evoking our empathy could make us more compassionate/perceptive towards the other and could help build some level of connection. This could be one of my experiments to explore human connection in multicultural classrooms using spices.

I am sure there are glitches in this experiment but like you said last time that a workshop is just one of the many ways to investigate and I should be ready to entertain the possibility that it might not turn out the way I want it to but nevertheless could a learning.

What do you think of this idea ? Would you like to offer any feedback or recommendations ? Thank you!

Warmly,
Siddhi

6 November 2019

Dear Louise,

Hope you are doing well.

I was thinking of sharing my daily reflections with you. I feel I am clearer in my message when I write with the intention of sharing with someone. I have decided to be very detailed so you may speed read if you feel like.

Yesterday I couldn't work on my making as I was teaching but I did squeeze in some time in the morning to think of ideas. I went to the workshop yesterday afternoon that you suggested me about designing rituals. It was very interesting and made me understand what you meant when you mentioned rituals to me. I had a very different idea of designing rituals in my mind.

I have to admit, yesterday for like 3 hours, I was trying to think of ideas on paper, using sketching and other visual methods and I was stuck for the longest time. Oh my goodness! Although I enjoy the process of ideation, I was a bit stuck. I kept looking at the questions and the research method that we had discussed together. I really pushed myself mentally to think of ideas till the time I couldn't take it anymore but I still came up with not so formulated ideas. I made a mental note to go head with those 7 - 8 ideas nevertheless because I wanted to start. I also spent some time changing the way my studio looks, like the table orientation, reducing the things from the table, just to make space for my new interventions and changing the vibe of the studio. I started to wear my sport shoes rather than heels, which motivates me to move around and be active.

Today morning, I was very excited to finally start making and I convinced myself in the morning (before beginning to make) that I will be consciously experimental because that makes me unafraid to fail and takes the weight off my shoulders that it needs to be a certain way. It makes me feel less stupid.

I thought about the ways in which I can be experimental in my making ? I feel at times my mind functions in a rigid manner, very myopic and constrained. When I thought of "an experimental making process", I thought of experiments primarily in regard to material usage like using vivid materials to come up with a new outcome, which is one way to look at it but still very confining. Being experimental could permeate into every aspect of making. From the materials to the approach I take.

I made 2 things today.

Today, I saw a dream about my studio space. I saw that my studio space is webbed with strings (not a fully formulated idea that I had thought of yesterday). I don't know why, when I reached school today at 7.30 in the morning, I instantly decided to start with that and started webbing my studio with strings.

The idea behind webbing was :

1. Attracting attention. I think big things attract attention instead of a small artefact that can be hidden in my drawer. So why did I want to attract attention ? Because I wanted the artefact to interact with people passing by my studio as much as possible and be a conversation starter in some way.
2. Living. This idea right now has no purpose behind it. I wanted the artefact to be a living piece and open to deleting/adding pieces to get to the research investigation I am aiming for.
3. Low-fidelity. I didn't want to spend time making a finished product which looks good.

Toady, when I was making it early morning, there was no one in the entire industrial design studio. There was silence and I enjoy making in silence. As I was making, I intuitively started tying knots. I felt that the artefact itself was directing me. It took about one hour and I was in no hurry to rush. I enjoyed the movement, from climbing on the table to sitting down on the ground. I kept tying knots and making a web. Looking back, it was a peaceful process and I was listening to music very softly while making, I played songs which I hadn't listened to in years. They are melodious, very simple old songs in my native language called Marathi.

There was this one particular song that I kept listening to on repeat called "Mi Raat Taakli" which translates to "I have let the night go, I have cast off my old skin which was of no use to me" . The song is so liberating. It shows a tribal women singing and walking alone in a forest as she frees herself from her social compulsions which tied her to her drunkard husband and prohibits her from seeking sexual pleasure with another man she was in love with. It is really a celebration of the feminine and the skin.

I kept thinking a lot when I was making this piece, not incessant thinking but pleasant thinking mostly memories. I had a faint thought that maybe I should tie cinnamon to the strings and it suspend it but I didn't go ahead with that idea maybe because I thought it holds relevance but lacks novelty. I might still do that, I don't know. I was surprised as the day progressed, many people glanced at my studio space, some asked me what I was doing and some just glanced curiously. I felt a bit stupid in the afternoon today as I had no good answer to explain my artifact. I began questioning myself "Am I wasting material?" "Maybe I could do something more productive?" "Is this design or is it art ?" How will I tie it up with my investigation ?" .Questions like that.

I used sellotape to stick the ends of the string to the wall but it kept coming out. I grew tired of doing it but I kept fixing it for some reason. When I sat inside I felt caged and I thought of shelters and how man started building shelters to protect and comfort him. I also thought about the juxtaposition in terms of a modern built architecture like our school. How modernism is so functional, clean, finished and rational and I was doing something not so functional, abstract and maybe irrational.

I thought about “slow design” too and its connection to sensory design. I didn’t read anything long (like you said) except for a little passage on my phone. Slow design basically is a criticism towards the quick nature of modern products. Like a coffee machine where we wait for 30 seconds and then we get our coffee impatiently. We have prevented ourselves from experiencing the little things in the process that makes us more aware, stop and think about things (in this case, the coffee beans etc etc). This might be linked in some way to my research, I am not sure but it sounds compelling.

As I kept progressing in the making, I thought of a few ideas. I could maybe use this as an exploration of body gestures, or perhaps it could be a game, or a mirror, or just a curtain, or maybe even a metaphor with no function.

As I kept re-sticking the sellotape throughout the day, I started to notice my frustration with the repetitive, frivolous act of sticking the tape again and again. I expanded that to how we live in the modern world and even now and then we face with a plethora of frustrations because a lot of actions are repetitive with a low level of awareness. Just a fleeting thought.

I made a second thing along with the web. I don’t know what to call it, still very not fully formulated. The idea was to make a game which can be played by two people. The concept was a push-pull game and there will be spice in between which can create sound. I sketched a rough idea and made the artefact in wood and then used yarn to cover it. It was a good activity. I was reminded of days of my undergrad while I was using the glue and the clamp, the way the wood and dust felt on my skin, the texture and even the smell of it. I completed the sketch and finished the model but I am afraid that it turned out to be something I didn’t expect. Maybe I can develop it further by brainstorming.

I have a few more ideas that I will like to try but I was curious louise, what do you think about this way of working ? I was also thinking about the workshop on rituals and it gave me an idea to use only the spices that I have a history with. I made a list of spices. The list contains turmeric, cardamon, fresh basil leaves, cumin, clove, saffron. I was thinking about writing a short story about each one of them based on the stories I have experienced, some are cultural and some have religious connotations to it.

I can write a very simple story on each one of them and then share it with people. Writing a story will also enable me to make meaningful connections with the spice that can guide my making in some way.

Please feel free to offer me your feedback.

Thank you so much for reading and your patience,
Siddhi

7 November 2019

Dear Louise,

Thank you for the conversation and the direction you gave me. It took me some time to digest the shift.

But now, I am very excited about it. I think its a great idea and it affords me the possibility to design things I always wanted to explore. I even thought of a few exciting ideas. If I make a book or a playful card activity then I can explore character design, typography, writing etc. It provides me the opportunity to wear the hat of a graphic designer and balancing it out with tactility. I love illustrating, if you remember I worked on character design as one of the actions in the first semester.

The key words that i kept in mind so I dont digress are : contemplative practices, play, spices, pedagogy, ritual and story telling.

I was thinking about series of workshops buiding up to the one I already conducted 2 weeks back. i am aiming for 5 - 6 workshops (either with a large group or a smaller group of 4 - 5 people). I could do one for my next teaching class as well. One workshop will build on the next. Simultaneously, I will also conduct case study reseach on reyanhs workshop and other projects I find compelling and relevant.

I also like the idea to make use of the educational theories I have already researched to help me take a deeper dive into my studio practice. Let me tell you the first idea. I will try to keep it to the point.

Based on the first workshop I conducted and the conversations that followed, one thing many people mentioned after the workshop and I agree, is the lack of providing them the opportunity to share their stories and experience with their partner because that could have possibly helped them develop an unique connection.

The idea I am thinking of right now, which is at a very rudimentary level, is to reclaim the lost narratives of the stakeholders of the food (spices) we cherish everyday. Whenever we eat something or think of food, we inadvertently fail to acknowledge that we ae savoring someones fruits of labour. What are the elements of this play ?

1. Cards - with an illustartion and a very simple hypothetical story conveying the experience of the stakeholders (farmer, trader, a sales person in a spice bazaar etc) of one particular spice.
2. Doll - whose body parts can be assembled.

Thats it.

Why the doll ?

In my therapy yesterday, we were discussing loneliness and my therapist said something really beautiful, though I am not sure if it has scientific evidence to it. She was elaborating on how people connect with each other through the commonalities we possess. The more we have in common and the more we share it then the stronger our bond becomes. To show the connection, she started pointing at the body parts. One thing in common and our feet are connected, another thing in common and then our legs are connected, another thing and our bellies are connected and when we keep sharing and when it finally reaches our head and our bodies are connected. I like the metaphor of the body.

The gameplay:

Group of 4 (maybe)

The game will work in rounds, Each round will have one spice. (not the actual spice but the story of stakeholder of the spice)

Each person is given a card which shows an illustration of the stakeholder and besides that reads a simple story of their experience with the spice at that stage.

Every player in the group will read aloud the story to the group. After having done that, they are encouraged to share any personal story which they get reminded of based on the content of the story. Example, the story of a farmer might be about how he has to spend long hours in the sun etc and the player can then talk about his experience of going to a desert which was hot and how he longed for a bottle of water so on and so forth.

Each person in the group will do that and when they finish the round then they will connect one body part of the doll together. This will follow for 5 rounds till they make a complete doll.

This activity will make them talk and encourage them to share their stories in a very beautiful manner. Even doing things together makes us bond like in this activity they are making a doll together.

This was one idea. I have also thought of a few more exciting ideas but I am curious what do you think of this one for now ? Please feel free to offer me any feedback. before i start to make a rough prototype. I like to receive criticism. :) I was wondering if it is possible to meet you before monday to have a little chat. Let me know if you have the time. I will be very grateful.

Warmly,
Siddhi

9 November 2019

Hello Louise,
Hope you are doing well.

I wanted to run an idea through you which I am very excited about. I just thought about it this morning. Thank you for giving me the suggestion of conducting a small workshop with my teaching class. I asked Cameron, who is the supervisor for my fellowship and he is also very supportive.

The idea goes like this.

You mentioned in the previous mail that one aspect of my thesis could be about being grateful about the food we eat. I found that so very interesting Louise. I tried to think of ideas that are simple, relevant and hold a degree of novelty as well. I started to think about the space my students sit in and how could I possibly organize it in a way that supports my activity. I want the atmosphere and the artefacts to be simple, earthy and meditative. I was inspired by the ceramics exhibition downstairs and how they used sand to make a circle surrounding the artefact.

For this workshop, I want to create a “pot of gratefulness” .

I want to open up the workshop by giving my students a very short context of my work. Like why am I doing this ? What am I enquiring etc ?

Then I want to maintain 5 minutes of silence in the classroom. Silence because I feel it is very effective in clearing all the clutter in the mind and being a bit more present than usual. It also gives them the opportunity to feel the atmosphere in the class.

Then, I will narrate a compelling, simple story of a farmer of one particular spice. (I still have to write it).

In the middle of the classroom I will place the pot of gratefulness and give each student a small blank chit and after listening to the story, I will invite them to write out a small prayer offering gratefulness to the person. A small piece of writing which sends out happy thoughts to a person who they have not seen, don't know who he is and lives thousands of kilometres from them.

I will then ask them to fold the chit and place it in the pot of gratefulness.

There will also small bowl and a spoon besides this pot of gratefulness and it would hold the spice example cinnamon powder and as they place the chit in the pot, they will also offer a spoon of commendation to the farmer as they empty the spoon in the pot as a gesture of gratefulness and respect.

The reason why I thought about doing the particular ritual is because I have grown up seeing this ritual in my home. Hindus, as a marker of respect to the god, offer little things to the fire, which intensifies the fire even further. It is also done as a marker of respect to the elements of the earth.

This was one way I was thinking of a designing ritual with spices keeping all the things in mind we were talking about.

As an instructor who is thinking about designing pedagogy, I will also think about ways in which I will introduce/demonstrate the ritual to the students so that they all follow.

If this turns out to be effective, then I could expand it and use it with different people so I can have a pot filled with good thoughts which could possibly be a good conversation starter or something just demonstrative in nature. I don't know at this point. This workshop might inform the card game I am designing.

What do you think ? I am curious to know what you think about this and if you would like to offer me some feedback to make it better. I also have a few more exciting ideas. I feel like I am overflowing with ideas and I am excited to do all of them.

Thank you for reading!

Warmly,
Siddhi.

5 December 2019

Dear Louise,

I hope you are doing well. Thank you very much for your prompt reply on my case study.

I wanted to inform you that I will fly home for 15 days and I leave on the 11 Dec but I will love to keep in touch with you regarding my project as I want to keep working during the vacation as well. I was thinking about discussing and charting out a list of things to do during those 15 days.

I am a bit sad about the term ending as I was enjoying my iterative making practice and I wanted to continue working on it without a break. :(

We also need to discuss about who my internal supervisor should be. I was thinking about Justin Langlois, I checked his work and he has some interesting projects like the float school. I thought he might be a good internal for me and he absolutely doesn't know anything about what I am doing. Let me know what you think.

Thanks for playing the game with me. It was very helpful and I reflected on that experience and the dialogue we shared. I thought about making the fourth version of the game and I wanted to share the idea with you. I brainstormed this idea with a few people. Game design is pretty challenging and I am finding it difficult to make people understand what I am doing and why I am taking particular design decisions. It is something that people really have to invest time and energy to understand what this game is about. There is just so much to think about and it requires systems thinking. I want to map it out on my wall using post-its.

I think that this might be the case for all of you: understanding a thesis project takes hard work.

It is so much reading for you :(but I feel all the points are highly relevant. Thank you for taking the time to read Louise. I am very grateful for your support and the effort you take to give me suggestions. You were so right about the effectiveness of writing letters to you.

Looking back at these letters. I can see the evolution of my thought trajectory right from the summer till now and I can also pick up bits and pieces which will be a part of my thesis document. I was thinking of printing these letters out next semester to analyze them.

I have 5 distinct reflection points that I wanted share with you :

1. Like I mentioned to you that I want to increase the number of participants so all of students in the classroom can play at the same time but I realized that there is less engagement between the participants. If we consider a class of 10 students and one person is engaged in the activity card then rest 9 students have nothing to do but to wait for their turn. That does not make for a very good gameplay. While designing the next idea I wanted to keep the engagement of all the participants in mind.

2. Another thing that stuck out to me was the nature of the cards. I classified the cards based on the nature of the activity and they are :

- 1) "Imagination" cards,
- 2) "making something with the spices" cards
- 3) "Sensory" cards which are heavily grounded in mindfulness.

I am a bit skeptical about the third category. There is something unconvincing about it although it aids my research intention of bringing forward the stories of marginalized communities. The idea of "sensory design" is important to my project but I am not convinced the use of them in cards is effective enough. Like I told you before that I want the card element of my game to be consistent in all my future iterations but the content of these cards can be modified. I was thinking about developing more of the first two - imagination and making cards and the way I want to do it is by providing scaffolds. For imagination cards, the scaffolds could be frame of reference like stories and props like a farmers sleeve I made etc and the for making with the spices cards, the scaffolds could be providing materials like ropes etc. I will iterate more on these lines. Additionally, if I increase the interaction of the players with the spices as much as possible through the gameplay then they will inadvertently indulge in that sensory experience with spices. So in a way letting the "imagination" and the "making" cards direct the sensory experience.

3. Thirdly, is the points system of the game like we discussed and I completely agree with your suggestion. So I decided to completely discard the element of points and money from the game but instead making the participants engage by working towards fulfilling a purpose. This needs a good story.

4. Fourthly, about the 3 role playing cards I designed. I feel that they are not effective in serving the purpose. One person needs to be in the same role play deeply enough that they feel some level of empathy for that person. If your role play keeps shifting with every turn then I am not providing the opportunity to the player to engage deeply enough with that particular role. Hence, one person needs to assume one role for a long time.

5. Fifthly, I think I mentioned to you before about my concern with the dissemination of the game. I feel that we live in such a day and age which offers us various possibilities to disseminate things. Just an example, the player-sheets of the game “dungeons and dragons” is easily available online for usage. People who are interested in playing the game can print the sheet out and use it.

I was thinking of breaking free from the idea of developing a “kit” and instead think of other ways to assemble the elements of the pedagogical tool by keeping up with the times. My game can potentially be a set a guidelines with bare minimum components like the board pieces and the cards.

Analyzing existing games of the same nature :

I looked at other existing games for inspiration. Mostly the game of “Dungeons and dragons” which is heavily based on imagination, role-playing and fantasy and the game of “Werewolf” which is a very fun role playing game. Both these games have a strong element of embodiment.

When I started reading the rule-book for dungeons and dragons, I noticed the beautiful writing especially for setting up the scene for the players. The genre is fantasy but writing really aids our imagination. I can explore writing as well.

I am also taking references from this one book that I got from the library named “ Food for the city” It mostly consists of pictures with minimum text but depicts food from different perspectives and the future of food for the metropolis. The perspectives vary from how does the curator thinks of food, to the chef, rural sociologist, architect, farmer, technologists, activists, artists etc.

A lot of the content is grounded in sustainability and ethics in food and shows the pivotal movements and philosophies in food world over right from 2050 BCE to 2050 CE, predicting the future of the food in our world. Its interesting and I think I can gather some data from this book for my project.

About the age group :

I was also thinking about the age factor. In this case, it will be students approximately between the age group 18 - 25. What kind of games will such an age group like to indulge in ?. Also, how this game/pedagogical tool I am designing will age ? With every generation there are new needs, new problems, new concerns, new mindsets and how can this pedagogical tool age gracefully enough in a way to provide that open space for flexibility and improvisation ?

About educating through the game :

Should I educate the participants about the elements used in the game or open up a possibility that if they don't understand the meaning or the name of a spice then they should have the tools available to them in school to learn it.

The game educates very subtly already, and you don't need to overdo it... yesterday I put cinnamon in my cereal and wondered about the people who had harvested it. This is true success !!!!

It could be tools like asking the instructor, access to wifi or just talking to their peers in the classroom etc

Sitting formation of the group and affordances that a school provides :

I also want to think about the sitting formations of the players and how that dynamic impacts the experience and taking advantage of the affordances of what the basic things a school provides its students. In our school, in classrooms, the students get a chair to sit on and the table to work on with opportunities to use the projector and the white board with markers, with decent lighting.

Forefronting the role of the teacher :

In this particular game that I have designed, I have paid particular attention of the role of the teacher in discharging the game by positioning the teacher on a higher level in terms of hierarchy with more responsibilities.

I think that this game should work easily without a teacher...

I will send you a separate document with sketches and details of the fourth version I am designing based on these reflection points. I just need some more time to finish it but I am very excited. It also needs some more making.

Thank you for reading ! Looking forward to hear from

Warm regards,
Siddhi

20 December 2019

Hello Louise,

I hope you are doing well.

This is regarding my making practice and I wanted to update you with my progress.

Based on the last conversation we had previous semester, you mentioned to me that I need to simplify my game and cut down on the game components. At first I was a bit resistant to that idea as I worked so hard to develop it and I felt that I have figured it out but now that I am in the midst of writing my methodology I am realizing that this elaborate gameplay that I have designed is in actuality contributing very little to my research objective.

I want to simplify it. I was thinking about Andys work and how simple, effective and pragmatic his idea is.

I am thinking about using just 2 components.

1. The activity cards
2. Spice cart (with spices)

Thats it. I feel this in itself will be sufficient. I can work on refining the content of the activity cards and how to make it more effective for students. Like rehyans ritual design, I can think about ways in which this should be set up to create an atmosphere of awareness, tranquility and peace within the classroom to perform this particular activity effectively. The orchestration of the atmosphere of the classroom will enable students to slip into that mindset.

One thing that I have learnt with my personal practice of mindfulness is that it is fruitless to force or to impose something on yourself and the activity should be effortless enough that you do it gently, naturally and with ease. I will try to keep this I mind when I am developing the ritual. Students should be encouraged to listen to their own body and mind and engage or disengage from the activity based at their discretion.

I was reading the book that you have given me - "Bringing the sacred to life". The title itself is so compelling. A part of the book talks about how transformative gratitude is and how it can change the way we see the world. I was thinking about using the name "service" instead of calling it an activity. I feel the terminology affects the quality of experience. I want to know what you think bout this.

Looking forward to hear from you

Warmly

Siddhi

5 february 2020

Hello Louise,

I hope you are doing well.

I have no qualms regarding the internal reviewer selected for me by the grad office. I trust your judgement :). However, I would definitely try to reach out to Sophie for her advise.

I was thinking about my making practice and I am planning to make a very rough mockup of my idea using corrugated sheet and paper to test it out roughly before making it in the final material for the defence and the grad show.

I asked a few of my peers whether they would participate when I finish the paper mockup, I was surprised when one of them replied "Yes, of course! As long as you don't make me do the chakras and the mediation thing."hahaha...! It got me thinking about the misperception about mindfulness to the general public. Mindfulness according to Jon Kabat Zinn is very secular practice without any overtone of spirituality and religion. People misunderstand it. I think it is necessary for me to keep reiterating that my activity is secular and inclusive.

So this idea is just an extension of the earlier one. Just added a few steps.

I see it as a communion between 2 people with a bit of playfulness added. Check out the sketches. Sorry

for the terrible quality as they are really rough For the final design, I was thinking of using ceramics. I thought about the north-south aesthetics and the use of modernist design for the cards that you mentioned in the previous email. I looked into Japanese tea ceremony and the kind of pots and the resting surfaces they use. I love the simplicity of those forms. There is a high level of precision and attention to detail. The use of colours is very sophisticated and the shape of the forms and the overall composition of all the elements is well balanced. I would love to see my final design somewhere on these lines. I would start sketching for some form exploration.

I like the idea of north-south aesthetics. I read up a little bit about product semantics for that reason. According to the the journal of the Industrial Designers Society of America.

An object's form says three things:

1. Something about the object itself
2. Something about the larger context of its use
3. Something about the user who interacts with it and develops a conceptual connection.

It also talks about communication, that objects gain meaning through user interaction and their individual interpretations.

I would want the design to be minimal with neutral colours and environmental friendly and I also like the idea of the design being fairly modern as it might fit in with the purpose of my research to be all-inclusivelike the well established modernist principles of the bauhaus.

My design/research would critique modernism in various other ways but I am not sure about aesthetics. There is also the risk of excluding aesthetics from certain regions and including some. It might be a catch 22 situation. What do you think ? I am open for discussion here.

I could suggest one gameplay but the participants should feel free to create their own play I think. I would like to suggest things like the sitting posture, cleaning up after the activity maybe etc. etc I feel this sensory ritual entails just the right amount of playfulness needed.

Let me know what you think. I would love your suggestions. Thank you for reading.

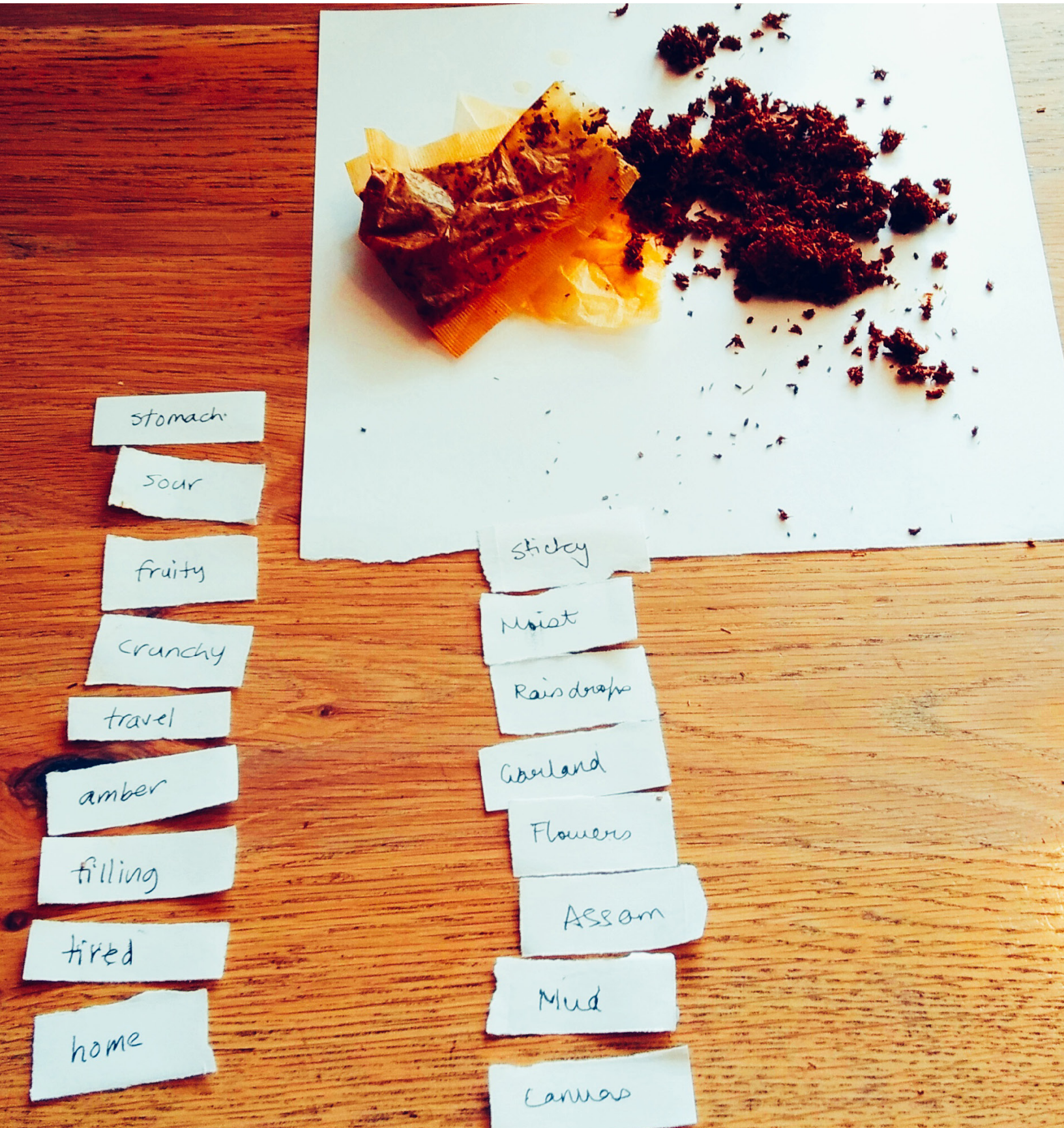
Thank you

Some experiments

Experiments with saffron spice



Brainstorming activity for the Peeling a layer workshop



Mindful making activity



Thank you