

BIBAC 2016 Conference - Abstract Submission template

Title of presentation:

An interdisciplinary exploration of 'who I am': using visual-creative-arts to understand intercultural personhood

Type of presentation:

Paper

Symposium

Workshop

Poster

Themes:

- (i) The politics of what we do in intercultural and interdisciplinary spaces in terms of the entanglements of power, privilege and people
- (ii) Creativities, collaborations and the intersections of Arts and Science
- (iii) Intercultural voices from research, practice, and theory
- (iv) Transformations through Music Neuroscience Research
- (v) Innovations in Sonic and Digital Arts Practice
- (vi) Cultural, Relational and Intercultural Musicology practices: reframed and redefined
- (vii) Sound, Sight and Movement in Performing Arts Education
- (viii) Rituals of Cultures as sites for learning in and through the arts

Authors + affiliations

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Bio (No more than 150 words)

Zhuomin Huang is a PhD student of Education at the University of Manchester (UoM). She uses a variety of visual methods which are embedded in her main doctoral study - 'Mindfulness in Intercultural Communication: Understanding Mature Students' Intercultural Experiences at an Internationalised UK University'. She has experience of studying and living in different countries, such as Mainland China, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK. She was trained to be an English as a Foreign Language Teacher in Hong Kong, and at the University of Edinburgh; and also, certificated to be a Chinese as a Foreign Language Teacher at Beijing Normal University. She has explored 'outside of the box' of Language Education by undertaking an MBA in Switzerland. Whilst undertaking her doctoral study, she works as a teaching and research assistant (e.g. supervising undergraduates, teaching MA students and working in a research-film project) at UoM.

Abstract: (Your abstract should be 800 - 1000 words)

Students at The University of Manchester (hereafter, UoM) are participants in an increasingly internationalised Higher Education campus which is embedded in a multicultural urban setting. Both the internationalised and multicultural character of this context provides students with opportunities, which they may or may not embrace, to live and study interculturally (or at least have some intercultural experiences). Given these opportunities, and the experiences they encourage, in this paper, I discuss what living in such an interculturally-rich context might mean for the personhood of the individuals concerned, and how visual-creative-arts (VCAs) can be used to explore this question.

By 'intercultural personhood', following Kim (2008, 2015), I mean an individual's perspective on how they see themselves in this interculturally-rich context. My use of this term intentionally distinguishes my focus from research into '(cultural) identity' in two ways. First, 'personhood' emphasises first-person meaning-making regarding the developing sense that a person has about 'who I am' (Glas, 2006; Splitter, 2015), whereas 'identity' more usually emphasises the qualities that a person shares with a group of other people thereby distinguishing them from others (Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Glas, 2006). In other words, 'personhood' offers a developmental perspective regarding how individuals see themselves, while 'identity' describes them in relation to group characteristics. Second, my focus is on the 'intercultural' rather than the 'cultural' aspect of personhood because I see each person as a culturally-complex and culturally-unique individual (Singer, 1988) interacting with other such individuals, and, for the purposes of the study on which this paper draws, doing so in an interculturally-rich context. In this way, I want to develop my understanding of students' intercultural personhood by looking into their instrumental (Glas, 2008) and constructive (Kim, 2015) views about their intercultural experiences. In other words, I hope to learn from students' reflective and reflexive accounts (i.e. an instrumental view) of their intercultural experiences, and what meanings they develop (about and from these experiences) as relevant for their sense of 'self' (i.e. a constructive view).

The study in question is my on-going doctoral research which, through the lens of mindfulness (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998), attends to insights from mature students about their intercultural experiences at UoM and in Manchester. The students in question are not drawn from any particular group(s) or nationality/ies (e.g. international or domestic students, Chinese, or Japanese) as has been the case in many previous studies of internationalised university-life (e.g. Holmes, 2004; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Grayson, 2008). Given my aforementioned understanding of the culturally-complex and culturally-unique individual (Singer, 1998), and my characterisation of UoM (i.e. increasingly internationalised) and Manchester (i.e. significantly multicultural), I could have included each and every UoM student. In addition, I do not seek to identify problems, challenges and/or critical incidents in students' intercultural experiences, nor to promote strategies for (re)solving such problems or improving their intercultural practices (as has been focused on in many existing studies) (e.g. Bamford, 2008; Leask, 2009). Instead, I view the students as active thinking-agents who can, to a great extent, autonomously make sense of their intercultural experiences, and from whom I can learn about their individual understandings regarding who they are as they live and study in this interculturally-rich context.

However, the primary focus of this paper is methodological – in it, I outline the eight VCAs-based methods (such as ‘Blind-portrait’, ‘Digital-edited Photography’, and ‘Free-style Painting’) I am using to explore intercultural personhood. By ‘visual-creative-arts’, I mean the visible media, created or found by students (Reissman, 2008), which provide a means for students to make sense of their experiences in this university-and-city context, and to share these understandings with me. The visualised nature of these understandings enables me to look into students’ invisible and fluid mind-worlds (Håkansson et al., 2003; Reissman, 2008). In this paper, I give examples of my use of VCAs-based methods and the kind of insights arising from their use. I discuss how such methods can provide an open and creative space (Sullivan, 2008) for students to think, and to make meanings of their intercultural experiences (Pink, 2001). I also illustrate how they serve to be powerful tools for supporting students’ reflective processes (Lemon, 2006), and for presenting their communicative products (Tversky, 2011) of meaning-making. By using VCAs to explore how students take meaningful ownership of their intercultural experiences through VCAs, I offer a methodological contribution regarding the use of VCAs-based methods in, for, and as research.

My discussion of using VCAs for understanding mature students’ intercultural personhood bridges the arts, intercultural communication and psychology. I explore interdisciplinary questions such as: ‘What are the cognitive, psychological and communicative powers of the arts in understanding one’s ‘self’ and the meanings of one’s experiences?’; ‘What do intercultural experiences mean to the ‘self’?’ and ‘How can the arts be used to illuminate one’s understandings about being intercultural?’ By considering such questions in the paper, I begin to map out a new territory – that of understanding the meaning of being intercultural (i.e. intercultural personhood) through the use of visual-creative-arts (VCAs).

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