Big Blue Ball – Pictures, people, place

Connecting the world through creativity

Book 3
An international arts-based research project that explores the nature of meaning-making and the role of creativity in providing innovative sites for sharing understanding about intercultural existence.

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Big Blue Ball – Pictures, people, place: Connecting the world through creativity
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in fulfilment of the requirements for
the higher research degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place is a practice led research project that investigates the making of meaning in a contemporary intercultural lifeworld, where global cultural flows are increasingly interconnecting and transforming our societies. Through the development of a practice-based research strategy that draws on the visual and creative arts, Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place has aimed to build on our understandings of both the nature of meaning making and the significance of creativity and creative practice in setting up sites that can support innovative thinking about contemporary cultural issues of a globally interactive world.

The project’s research findings are documented and presented as a three-part publication series. **Book 1** takes the form of an exegesis which puts forward the research framework, including the key focus of enquiry, the theoretical foundation, disciplinary and wider contexts, and the methodological principles, processes and outcomes. **Book 2** presents the intercultural interpretations collected during the course of the research from over 100 project participants representing more than 65 nationalities. This is **Book 3** of the series and is designed to be viewed in conjunction with the exegesis – Book 1; and the participants’ responses - Book 2. It reproduces 170 hand-painted miniatures that emerged as a consequence of a creative interchange between myself as artist/researcher, and participants’ interpretations of the project’s primary cultural texts.
About the project

Big Blue Ball – Pictures, people, place actively engages dialogue with a diverse range of cultures through individuals responding to pictures. The project has creatively explored how meaning can be reconstructed through cross-cultural exposure and intercultural exchange. Through a process of cooperative engagement with cultural diversity and assisted by the communication tools of the visual and creative arts, the project has allowed for the emergence of hybridised interpretations brought about by the collision and/or interaction of different meaning spaces already formed in project participants by embedded cultural memory codes.

Participants in Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place have been drawn from a broad cultural cross section of the global community; over 100 young adults from more than 65 nationalities have taken part in the research to date and it continues to regularly engage new members. A selection of eight specifically adapted images, referred to as primary cultural texts, are provided to project participants for interpretation. These selected images have been modified through digital editing and traditional painting techniques, lifting them out of their original semiocultural context, thereby increasing uncertainty and ambiguity in meaning generation. Because of the heterogeneous nature of cultural conventions the project’s aim has been to activate the creative function triggering negotiations of meaning during the interpretation process. The project therefore exploits creative processes so that fresh ideas about how meanings are negotiated in a contemporary lifeworld can emerge.

The selected primary cultural texts are supplied to participants as A-4 colour reproductions and in digitised electronic format. Project participants are asked
to freely search out and locate their preferred meanings by drawing on their familiar cultural systems, social practices and language structures. Encouraging the use of the communication technologies developed within the creative and visual arts has given participants the opportunity to expand interpretive possibilities, dynamically activating creative processes, and allowing for a diversity of representation that might more adequately serve to illustrate their ideas. Project members have responded by writing descriptives, poetry, narratives and free word associations; in English and in their first language. Paintings have been produced, digitised images have been created, images have been hybridised and other pictures and photos have replaced them. The project’s collection of interpretations is presented in Book 2 of this publication series.

The project is then extended by way of a continued interchange of ideas through visual discourse between myself, as researcher and artist, and project members. Making specific use of the communicative method of hand-made picture making, my own creative reflections of negotiated interpretations are recorded as hand-painted miniatures on small, magnetic-backed, wooden blocks, 100x100x10mm in size. As interpretations are collected from around the world visual components are dialogically explored and associations made through the intertextual relationships between the original texts, creative responses from project members, and myself as researcher and artist. Over 170 of these miniature imagetexts have been produced and are made publicly available at various exhibiting sites. Arranged as an interactive semiotic playground, interlocutors have the opportunity to continue the communication process by engaging with the blocks, moving them around on the table and up the wall, reflexively constructing new configurations and allowing for fresh ideas and meanings to emerge and re-emerge as an ongoing creative dialogue.
Each painted block has been finished with high grade varnish so that they lose the preciousness of an exhibited artwork ensuring that a participating audience can engage enthusiastically with the collection. After all, the paintings have been produced to be handled, scrutinised, moved around, and repositioned in order to present multiple narratives from an engaging audience. The blocks can be formed and reformed, facilitating a dynamic discourse that connects the player by association to the original primary cultural texts, the intercultural interpretations, the individual participants, and therefore to the cultures represented in the project.

The collection of hand-painted blocks are also incorporated into the project’s dedicated website, www.blueballproject.net. Set up as a puzzle, the user, making individual choices from this collection, can physically drag each selected picture into a gridded canvas, thereby assembling new visual configurations that may allow for the emergence of unexpected ideas. These creative reconstructions by an unknown, participating public can be saved and stored on the website’s database, and can be printed out by the player, providing an intertextuality that can extend and enrich the communication process.

With the project’s collective approach to broad based transcultural engagement a variety of creative interactions have encouraged continuing discourse towards deeper understandings about our global community. Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place is an ongoing, cooperative, international exchange that creatively moves itself onto new paths, transforming and evolving dynamically and dialogically from the ground up. It is the creative practice in collective action, stimulating, informing and engaging with emerging intercultural narratives of the many-way flows of a global lifeworld.
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A practicing visual artist for over 18 years, Donna Wright has been educating adults for 15 years, working in the areas of contemporary arts practice, community development, Australian Indigenous adult education, communication, cultural studies, and visual culture.

Wright’s specialization is in intercultural communication, visual culture and visual arts practice. *Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place* is a PhD research project which has been carried out under the direction of Southern Cross University, Australia. Through the use of the creative and visual arts Wright has explored how meaning can be reconstructed through cross-cultural exposure and intercultural exchange. Her ongoing research investigates the nature of meaning-making and the significance of creativity and creative practice in setting up sites for shared understanding in a contemporary and globally interactive world.
Big Blue Ball: Pictures, people, place is an educational research project being carried out by Donna Wright, under the direction of Southern Cross University, Australia. This three-part publication and all materials contained therein are copyright protected by Donna Wright. No material may be copied or reproduced without the prior permission of Donna Wright. Information regarding use of individual participants' contributions to the project must, in the first instance, be directed to Donna Wright at blue_ball_project@hotmail.com. Every effort has been made to acknowledge cited information, including visual and written textual data, and wherever possible, cited information has been duly referenced. However, as the nature of the project is exploratory and visual based, the author cannot guarantee acknowledgement of all textual data. The author welcomes any information that may strengthen the integrity of intellectual property rights. Relevant information can be directed to Donna Wright at blue_ball_project@hotmail.com.

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