
12

Kim Wan & Annie Morris:
Games and Learning

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Games and Learning ~~Being Together Is Not Enough~~

Which of us is truly 'together'? With ourselves, with others, with whom? What does it mean? How can we possibly know? 'Who' has the social capital (Bourdieu) in any gathering or group: is it equally shared or is it a contest, vying each against the other(s) for a tiny fragment of self-regard, status, learning? Is it real? Those are some of the questions we considered in interpreting the original brief. How can this all be simply explored in a small practical setting? We recognised immediately that this is not something that can be grounded in good artistic or research practice in the space of one hour, in one small intervention, so there is no claiming this to be valid, reliable nor generalisable / reproducible (Denscombe).

Using Kim's rugby experience as a premise, we decided to gather random but self-selecting participants (anyone who walked through the doors and wanted to join in, plus ourselves) and use the gallery space as a playground / recreation. Simply by placing a selection of rugby balls and a basketball on the ground, we asked participants to split into groups, not determining their sizes, with choice of the basketball or a rugby ball, or to demur from the task and even form a third neutral group.

Kim then taught the individuals / groups ball skills, such as passing and tricks, followed by short practice sessions of 'correct' procedures (practise). When the individual groups had sufficient confidence to be independent they were asked to document their activities using smartphones and cameras, which were intended to be uploaded onto social media.¹

Materials and equipment used: Rugby balls, basketballs, space to play (ground-floor gallery), mobile phone cameras (participants); social media.²

What was achieved by this? The harnessing of an existent skill / interest by us was the conceit to explore the elusive nature of being together, yet not together, to being together through a shared experience or activity: did the participants move outside the Super Ego (Freud), for example? How would we know? It simply is not possible. However, through recollection and feedback, we collated information with the intention of developing the project for the future. Beforehand, we had imagined what may occur;

Positive/negative...Competition...Friendship...Rivalry...
Group/individual... Knowledge/belief...Despondency...
Emotions...Dynamics.... failure/the nature of success...

During the exploratory activity in the space, we had decided to have as little influence or direct input as possible, apart from instructions and practical help, in order to study the outcomes of the session, although that was soon thrown aside when Annie could not resist trying out new ball skills and interacting with others in the group informally, which would have skewed the data of a formal research project but did not impede the natural flow of this artistic one. No-one was really supposed to be a 'subject' in the formal sense, so the fact that the hour was more spontaneous and inclusive in practice suited our own personal and professional practices and preferences well and appeared to also engage the participants.

On reflection, some participants took on the role of 'leaders' informally and unasked. They had taken on the skills and activities involved with some ease and apparent enjoyment, absorption in the tasks and interaction with others in the group, watching, talking, laughing, picking up balls for others and swapping strategies. Others were initially shy and needed encouragement. After a short while, however, the group became autonomous and from this symbiotic

1 Some of those photographs are now on the *Five Years* website. www.fiveyears.org.uk

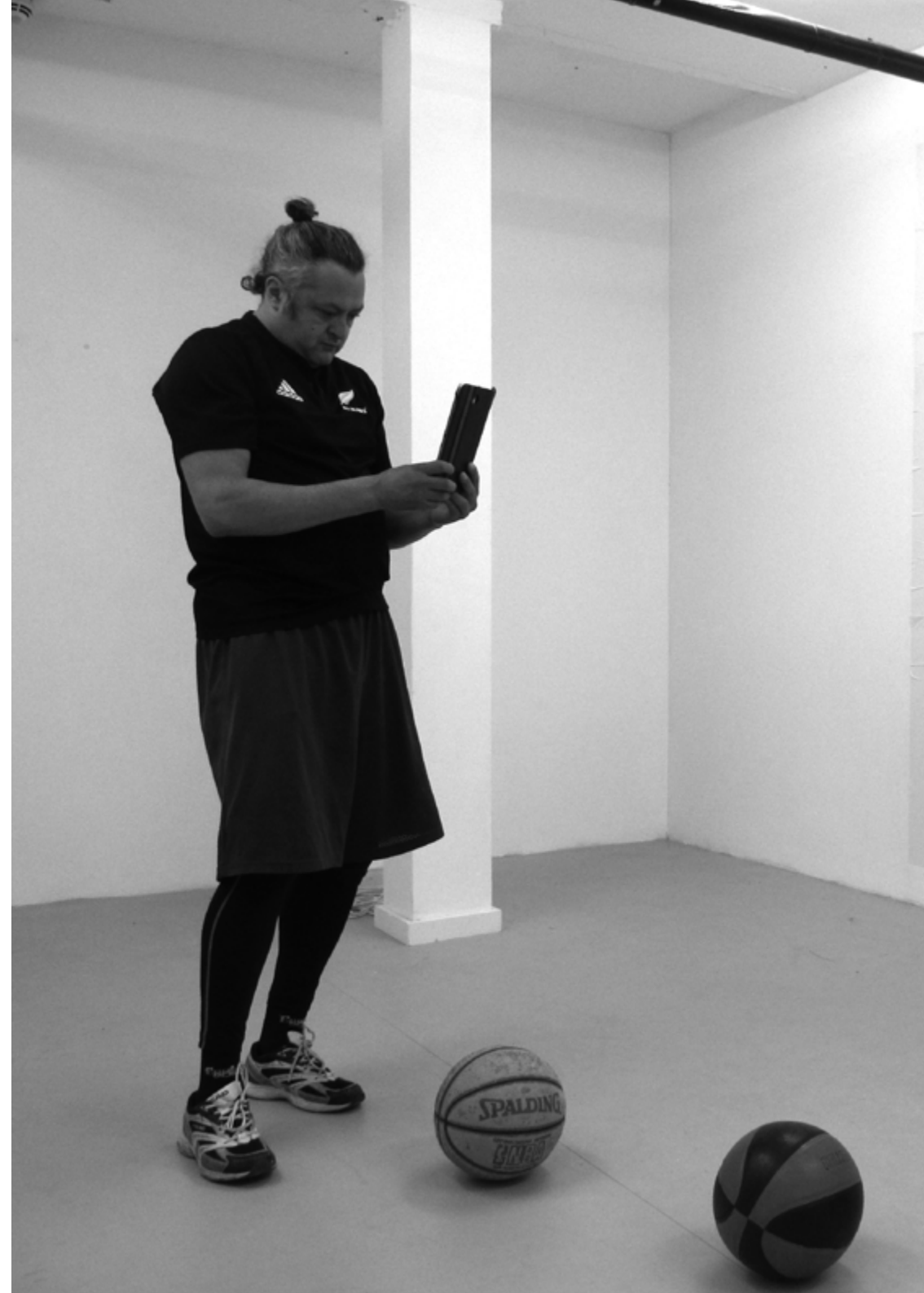
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relationship new forms of interaction and play were created by the members in the groups. The energy of the group changed from the initial period before 'the ice was broken' to a fully-fledged team – or group – effort and interactions. We believe from just this small intervention that there may be a case to argue that if one takes a group of people and give them a set of instructions and a common goal that it is fairly likely that members of the group will largely bind together and form an association, however fleeting or superficial (Tuckman). So, was this an anthropological exercise in considering how human societies can be shaped and enhanced, even? A big statement with little evidence except our own underpinning belief that we are, as a species, hard-wired to co-operate and achieve for the bigger goal. Some members became vocal and expressed their opinions during the session, using phrases such as;

“sport can be brutal and psychotic in its nature”; and

“competition is ruthless in who ends up the winners and the losers”.

It became clear that members of the group chose to become largely either adaptive or observant: they self-determined their roles, whether that was to act and/or to comment. Commenting appeared to be related to school-day experiences of PE. The feelings aroused and expressed on some participants' experience of sport were strong. Afterwards, as we reflected on the intervention, Annie also recounted her distaste of engaging in sport at any level – based on being 'useless' at school; reflecting further on the almost sadistic and unjust PE teachers and their pitting of one person against another or the entire class / team to humiliate and isolate those not considered 'prime material' for their attentions: the concept of 'winners and losers' firmly set in early years and internalised for life. Competition rather than co-operation: bringing people together in a group for a simple (to some) sports training set of tasks clearly confronted some participants' negative experiences and their after-effects. This is the major theme for further exploration.









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