

Ruler-skirt risings: being crafty with how gender and sexuality education research-activisms can come to matter

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Citation:

Renold, E (2019) Ruler-skirt risings: being crafty with how gender and sexuality education research-activisms can come to matter, in T. Jones, L. Coll and Y. Taylor (eds.) *Up-lifting Gender & Sexuality Study in Education & Research*. Palgrave.

Abstract

Enlivened by queer and feminist enactments of new materialist, posthuman and affect theory, this chapter explores what has become possible with speculative pARTicipatory activist encounters with young people, educational practitioners and politicians in the field of gender and sexuality education in Wales (UK). Sparked by a throw-away comment of how some boys use rulers to lift up girls' skirts, the chapter maps what else a ruler can do through a series of five 'ruler-skirt risings'. Each rising provides a glimpse into the agency of 'd/artaphacts' (arts-based research objects) across micro-resonating moments to macro force-fields of change. From fashion activism to curriculum and national policy, every rising takes form and shape to in-form and re-animate how sexism, sexual violence and sexuality education might be felt, noticed and engaged with differently, but never in ways known in advance and always on the move.

Key words

Sexual Violence, Sexuality Education, Activism, Posthuman, Participatory.



Figure 1. Ruler-skirt

Some boys use rulers to lift up our skirts

Ruler touching

Up her skirt

Between her legs

Ruler

Rule Her

Rule her with your ruler

Normalised

Ignored

Silenced

Some experiences are ruled out

Sexual harassment in school

Can be one of those

experiences

Something to get used to

A getting used

to being used

in this way.

Over-ruled?

Skirted over?

#metoo

What else

can a ruler do?

Ruler-skirt risings and d/artaphacts



Figure 2: Ruler-skirt image pArTicipating at the Merthyr Rising Festival

“Art is about constructing artifacts – crafted facts of experience. The fact of the matter is that experiential potentials are brought to evolutionary expression” (Massumi 2013, p. 57).

In the spring of 2015, myself and a group of 15 year old teen girls made a graffitied ruler-skirt (Figure 1) to raise awareness of routinised sexual harassment and violence in school, online and in their community, a post-industrial semi-rural Welsh valleys town in Merthyr

Tydfil (UK). 'The girls' (as they often referred to themselves) took up our invitation to work with some of the transcribed interview 'data' on gendered and sexual violence that was generated in the first phase of a research engagement project¹ (see Renold et al. 2019) in ways that might influence political change and lend support to the education amendments of the new Violence Against Girls and Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) bill which happened to be progressing through Welsh Government at the time.

Unplanned, the idea to create a ruler-skirt arose from a throw-away comment by one of the girls: 'boys lift up girls skirts with rulers' (see Libby et al. 2018). It was one of those moments where an affective 'snap' (Ahmed 2016) meets creative 'runaway methodologies'² (Renold, Ivinson and Angharad 2017) and "things in the making cut their transformational teeth" (Massumi 2015, p. ix). As soon as the words were voiced into the space another girl scribbled in bold black capital letters: 'RULER TOUCHING' and an explosion of ruler-talk erupted about how rulers are used to sexually assault (e.g. up-skirting) and shame girls (e.g. measuring skirt length), how experiences of sexual violence are often ruled out (e.g. normalized and silenced) and how gender norms are used to regulate who you can be and what you can do ('rule her, RULE HER, rule her with your ruler'). In a flash, the ruler seemed to become what Erin Manning (2016, p.1) calls a 'minor gesture' - an "always political (...) gestural force that opens up experience to its potential variation". Across two further lunchtime sessions, the girls began re-writing the rules and outing practices that sexually shame girls on printed paper rulers. These paper rulers were turned into paper 'shame

¹ The ruler-skirt and its ripple out effects started life in the 'Relationship Matters' project. This was a partially funded spin-off research-activist project from a larger multi-phased project, 'Mapping, Making and Mobilising: Using Creative Methods to Engage Change with Young People' (Thomas 2016), inside a five year ESRC/AHRC programme, Productive Margins: Regulating for Engagement (ES/K002716/1). Our aim was to invite young people to come together and co-produce new forms of research, engagement, decision-making and activism on issues related to safe and unsafe places in their locality. The full research team in the Mapping, Making and Mobilising project included Eve Exley, Eva Elliott, Gabrielle Ivinson, Emma Renold and Gareth Thomas (see Renold et al. 2019).

² The concept of the runaway methodology was inspired by the girls' own analysis of the unanticipated twists and turns of our research activism ("not knowing where our project might go to next", and how "our ideas were always running away from themselves", see Libby et al. 2018). The concept also connects directly to Erin Manning's notion of an old medieval definition of art as "the way". Art, she says, is a process, not just something to behold. To conceive of art as the manner through how we engage, helps us glimpse "a feeling forth of new potential" (Manning 2016, p. 47). In-acting a runaway methodology requires a careful attention to the ineffable proto possibilities of ideas as they roll, flow and are transformed through words, artefacts and new events.

chains' to communicate how different aspects of sexual violence are inter-linked and how sexual violence restrains them. They then graffitied over 30 bendy acrylic rulers with similar messages that hurt and abuse, but which were interspersed with messages for change (e.g. 'respect us'). As ideas about assembling the rulers to create a wearable piece of fashion activism were in full swing, the proposal for a ruler-skirt struck a chord. Each graffitied ruler was clipped to a belt and the skirt began to take shape.

The ruler-skirt has been activating and making ripples and waves in and across policy, practice and activist spaces that none of us could have predicted three years later. I have begun to theorise this process as the making and mattering of *da(r)ta*; using art-ful practices to craft and communicate experience, such as the paper or acrylic graffitied rulers and *d/artaphacts*; the art-ful objects that emerge, detached from the environment they are created in, and mobilizing a politics in the making as they carry experience into new places and spaces (Renold 2017). Mixing data with art to form the hybrid *da(r)ta* is an explicit intervention to trouble what counts as social science data, and to foreground not only the value of creative methodologies, but also the speculative impact of art-ful practices. In *d/artaphact*, the 'ph' replaces 'f' to register and treasure the posthuman forces of art-ful objects as potential political enunciators and to encourage a move away from fixed, knowable and measureable social science facts (see also Renold and Ringrose 2019).

The making of the ruler-skirt was one of those rare moments when research 'data', art-ful methods, girls' change-making desires, supportive school cultures, place-based historical legacies of revolution, national policy development and researcher expertise intra-acted (Barad 2007) in ways that enabled us to do something with the 'something doing' (Manning and Massumi 2014). In dialogue with a rich history of experimenting with what else our research on gender, sexuality and schooling can do (e.g. Allen 2018; Allen and Rasmussen 2017; Osgood and Robinson 2018; Talburt 2018), this chapter explores some of the unanticipated ripples and waves. It is a mapping that I am beginning to theorise as a collective of *ruler-skirt risings* to speculate and suture how the past folds of Merthyr's political history (i.e. the Merthyr Risings of 1831, and the queer political activism of the

Rebecca Riots³ 1839-43) entangles to re-source the making and matterings of the ruler-skirt as one of many activist risings that have surfaced through time and across the globe to address the intersectional socio-structural manifestations of sexual violence.

Collectively, each 'ruler skirt rising' has been selected to provide a glimpse into how they have become a series of 'minor gestures' puncturing, shaking-up and re-orienting the field in some way. Crafted to capture their transversal nature, I have taken inspiration from the early formations of the fugue⁴ with the ruler-skirt operating as the tonic⁵ key, and the risings, a series of variations on what else the ruler-skirt can do. It's a tentative cartography, a 'skirting' process, that remains 'on the edge', on the 'outskirts'. It is an affective process 'that does not yet recognise itself, inventing as it does its own way' (Manning 2016): a way of stilling (see figure 2 above, the chained ruler-skirt clipped to the gates of the town square in the annual Merthyr Risings festival), embodying (ruler-fashion), law-making (ruler heART activism), resourcing (the agenda.wales young people's guide), imag(in)ing (ruling the new sexuality education curriculum) and sounding (ruler-rattling for a feminist government).

from time to time

as discourse

as image

as object

as sound

as movement

as pedagogy

³ During the Rebecca Riots of 1839-43 agricultural workers and farmers joined forces to oppose the enforcement of increased road taxes imposed by The Turnpike Trust and was part of a wider series of protests on the despised Poor Law. Blockading the toll gates, "the men donned women's clothes as a signal to outsiders that they wanted to avoid violence in their protest" (Peakman 2013, p.163)

⁴ A fugue is a composition of multiple voices built upon a subject (e.g. the ruler-skirt) which, in the Renaissance, unfolds and recurs in improvised form (e.g. the ruler-risings), where each variation can contain a 'melismatic' (e.g. runaway methodology) component. As Manning (2016, p.25) states, "The unfolding affects us, moves us, directs us, but it does not belong to us".

⁵ In musical terms, the tonic carries the main register, pitch, or tone of a piece. In addition, its Greek roots in Tonikos ('of or for stretching') and its connections to well-being, ('something with an invigorating effect', Oxford English Dictionary) aptly connect with the multiple modalities of the making and mattering of the 'ruler-skirt'.

as policy
the ruler-skirt
s(w)ings
up-skirting
the promise of the not-yet
each movement
a minor gesture
calling out
the status quo
slapping us
to attention
and sometimes
into action

Ruler-fashioning



Figure 3: Touching/touched by the ruler-skirt

The ruler-skirt had modest intentions - to pARTicipate with the other d/artaphacts in the girls' school assembly to raise awareness of abusive sexual banter and invite students to

take part in their creative activism (see 'ruler-heART activism' below). Gifted by the girls to share their process and story, the ruler-skirt has since been touched, read and heard by hundreds of people, of all ages from all walks of life: policy makers and politicians, social workers and police officers, teachers and students, and members of the public, from toddlers to great-grandparents. Fashioning the political, I have worn it along school corridors, up and down shopping-mall escalators, on public transport, on arts-cuts protests, suffragette celebratory parades, at sexuality and gender youth conferences, in creative methods and pedagogy workshops, in government and National Union Teaching (NUT) events. It even travelled to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, with the first minister for Wales' on a panel to share how Wales' is advancing gender equality. With each outing its discursive-affective-material qualities seem to intensify. Actively politicising each environment it enters, wearing the ruler-skirt never ceases to move me to move with the more-than of how it can affect.

Defying normalisation, the ruler-skirt demands to be heard, seen and touched. Its sonic and sartorial presence is alarming. You can often hear it coming before it comes into view. Siren-like, it slaps its way through space, making sonic agential cuts that interrupt stilled and stuffy conference atmospheres. Visually striking, this more-than-skirt asks 'how' and 'why'? For more intimate interactions you have to get up, close and personal which often require bodies to kneel or bend over. Requests for a closer inspection are almost always accompanied with the words, "Can I?", a process of becoming-consent, sorely absent in the practices inscribed on many of the rulers and the ruler-skirt lifting assaults. However, even up close, it is a struggle to read what's written. As the girls say in their Ruler HeART story, "the messages on the rulers are hard to read, just like girls' experiences of sexual harassment are hard to talk about and hear" (Renold 2016; p.55).

Through sound, discourse and materiality the ruler-skirt exceeds meaning, its 'queer life' (Harris and Holman Jones) making itself force-felt with each touching. Experienced via an 'immediate relation' in ways that reveal but keep secure and private personal narratives or identities, the ruler-skirt has become an ethical-political object, making researcher response-ability matter (Barad 2007, Renold and Edwards 2018). Transindividual, non-representational, more-than-human, it fashions the political, hanging raw experience from a

belt. Embodied and on the move, its stiff strips of pain, shame and hope become com/motion. Buzzing with 'extra-beingness' (Massumi 2013, p.133), what was once a phallic object that sexual assaults now swing-slaps as an agent of change, pARTicipating and stirring up a series of future ruler-skirt risings.

Ruler heART activism



Figure 4: making our heART activism matter

"It was really important to us that these were real comments, not photocopies, not typed up. They were personal. They were messages from the heart – messages that would swing out when the card was opened. But would they swing the politicians into action?" (Libby et al. 2018)"

"Politicality, is always on its leading edge, affective" (Massumi 2013, p.173)

Writing on paper rulers became a central da(r)ta- gathering activity when the girls invited 300 students (age 12-14) during their school assembly to take-part in a piece of direct political action. Each student had the opportunity to complete the sentence, 'we need a healthy relationships education because ...'. The plan was to push the affective buttons of

policy makers in a last ditch attempt to turn around a national bill which was failing to respond to the voices and experiences of young people. I shared our activity with two other secondary schools collecting over 1000 annotated paper rulers in total. We then invited 40 other young people from urban and rural south wales, with the help of Citizens Cymru, to join our 'Relationship Matters' campaign and our HeART Activism.

The heart became a refrain in the early da(r)ta making sessions (see The Tagged Heart, Renold 2017) and its intra-action with Valentine's Day celebrations sparked the initial idea to send every assembly member a Valentine's Card. Each card was carefully crafted (see figure 4). Three paper rulers were hand-pasted inside a cut-out heart of a tri-folded red card, so "the messages would swing out as the card as opened" (Libby et al. 2018). The card also included a poem with lines written from each of the three participating schools - sessions that I facilitated over a series of weeks with over 30 young people in the lead up to the direct action. The cards would arrive one week after Valentine's Day (14th Feb) but crucially one week before the final ammendments to the bill, which inspired the title, "It's not too late". The last line of the poem transforms the dominating and often divisive 'healthy relationships' discourse of 'respect' and 'consent' to the policy-making process itself ('policy-making is about respect and consent too'):

It's not too late

Roses are red,
violets are blue,
it's not too late,
for me and you.

To change the law
that can change our lives,
and end the violence,
so we can survive and thrive.

We need pupil champions,

we need proper teacher training,
we need a real relationships education,
to stop girl shaming & boy blaming.

So when it's time to vote,
please think of our ode,
we NEED YOU to take action,
because you're in control.

Roses are red,
violets are blue,
respect and consent,
are about policy change too.

The card included a clear message listing our education recommendations and four postcards from the Speak Out research (Renold 2013) – the only comprehensive qualitative Welsh research study on children's experiences of gender and sexual cultures. Each card was sealed with a lipstick kiss. This idea originally came from the director of Citizen's Cymru and immediately struck a chord with us, as it connected our local action to the global Violence Against Girls and Women campaign, *Red My Lips* (www.redmylips.org). This activity was a powerful reminder of what else a kiss can do (see Holford et al., 2013). A number of young people, youth workers and teachers, across the gender spectrum, took it in turns to red their lips and plant sticky kisses on the seal of each envelope. Indeed, hanging the hand-written messages from the heart and marking each card with the physical intimacy of a kiss, not only continued to keep the vital human and more-than-human affects of each card lively, but turned a proto-romantic/sexual gesture into a political act (a gesture that later informed the primary school Kisstory project exploring the re-animation of consent, see www.agenda.wales).

The personal-political post-human HeART Activism seemed to be a hit. Every assembly member (AM) in Wales (60 in total) received a hand delivered valentine card in their office

post boxes the next day. I also tweeted each AM’s professional twitter account to see if they received their card. This led to a flurry of images and accompanying tweets from all the political parties with comments that supported both our recommendations and their creative delivery (see Libby et al. 2018). While it’s impossible and futile to ‘measure’ (see Laing, Mazzoli-Smith and Todd 2017) how the Ruler HeART activism directly affected the dramatic u-turn in the policy-making process at the ninth hour, personal communication with one of the assembly members, Jocelyn Davies, (chair of the ‘Violence Against Women and Children’ cross-party group) suggested that it did make a difference, a “real buzz”. The bill was passed on Tuesday 10th March 2015. It included many of the Relationship Matters campaign’s education amendments for better teacher training; a whole education guidance for practitioners and a national advisor to oversee the implementation of the Act.

Agenda-Rules



Figure 5. Agenda

“Plan, but plan lightly. It’s always good to make space for the unpredictable. Sometimes the most exciting things happen when you least expect them (www.agenda.wales, p.69)

Resource;

Latin : Surger; to rise

Old French: Resourdre; to rise again, recover, a source, spring

Following the passing of the VAWDASV Act, I was actively looking out for research-engagement assemblages that might allow new openings to take this emergent work on its way. Wales was buzzing with promise and possibility. Acutely aware that the VAWDASV Act hadn't quite achieved the educational measures set out in its preventative aim of addressing VAWDASV, there was an opportunity to exploit this gap, and tap into the policy assemblages being created with the development of the new Welsh Government practitioner's whole-school guide to healthy relationships.

It all started with a tweet! I seized the moment during a minister-led twittersphere thread celebrating the potential new guide and Act. I boldly tweeted: "how about a guide for young people"? An immediate affirmative response by the minister was tweeted back, and I spent the next 24 hours carefully crafting a highly speculative proposal for developing a Young People's guide. Within two months, the work was once more on its way. A flurry of emails between Welsh Government and key agencies (Welsh Women's Aid, NSPCC Cymru and the Children's Commissioner for Wales) garnered enough support to secure a 'real time' secondment from a new Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 'impact' funding stream. Aptly named the 'impact accelerator' scheme, the speed with which this new phase could get going, matched the fast-forward pace of policy and practice cycles – something which research grants very rarely make possible. Over the next 8 months, I facilitated the stARTer project (Safe To Act, Right To Engage and Raise) with an advisory group of 12 young people from three different schools (including two of the members from the Relationship Matters project). In total, over 50 young people participated in the development of *'AGENDA: A young people's guide to making positive relationships matter'* (Renold 2016, figure 5).

AGENDA is a free to download, bi-lingual, 75 page activist resource addressing gender-based and sexual violence co-created with young people for young people. Its focus takes forward the 'new rules' of Welsh Government's practitioner's guide on whole school

approaches to healthy relationships education and its explicit encouragement for schools to 'support young people to campaign and raise awareness of gender and sexual violence' (Welsh Government 2015, p.10). It opens with the story of the Ruler HeART Valentine Card activism, and emphasises the Latin origins of activism (actus: "a doing, driving force, or an impulse") to invite young people to learn and do something about what matters to them on these issues in the context of social justice, rights, equalities and diversity. From equal pay and poverty to misogynoir, street harassment and LGBTQI rights this national resource lifts the silence on issues so often skirted over or silenced in schools with over 30 examples of creative change-making practices sourced from local and global youth activist stories and local case studies. Each case study incorporates dArtaphacts made, found or hyper-linked to, including the ruler-skirt!

A kind of anti-guide, AGENDA resists any definitive statements on what constitutes a 'healthy relationship'. AGENDA is all about creating art-ful encounters that make space for young people to learn about gender-based and sexual violence in relations/hips through the rule-bending and rule-breaking practices of others. Carefully designed, it connects fields of practice together that are often estranged through divisive curricula (e.g. arts, science, humanities) or policy terrains (e.g. anti-bullying, children's rights, VAWDASV). Click on 'consent' in the word-cloud assemblage of the issues AGENDA includes and you are hyper-linked to the case study, Under Pressure? that explores coercion and control through movement, physics concepts on 'forces', sound and a glitch-art app. Click on 'diversity' and you are greeted with the Rotifer Project, a youth-led staff workshop on gender diversity via a game of gender-snap pairs created from pictures of gender diverse and creative cartoon characters, celebrities, historical figures and the rich queerness of the animal kingdom, from the Slipper Shell to the Rotifer bacteria. Each case study includes a pull out DIY, so that the process can be easily adapted, making its own way in the world beyond the resource (figure 9). Matter-realising (Braidotti 2013) entanglement is also central to the design process. There are no straight lines. Edges are rough and jagged. Blocks of content over-lap and encroach on each other's territory.

Creativity, transformation and affirmation are the heart-beat of the resource – processes that have risen up from the making and mattering of the ruler-skirt d/artaphact and the

Relationship Matters project. '*Creativity*' in AGENDA puts emphasis on the art-fulness of making what matters matter, and keeping what matters lively and open to change.

'*Transformation*' attunes to the promise of the process, focusing on what happens along the way, rather than the outcome of any activity or campaign. '*Affirmation*' explicitly calls out the shame and blame pedagogies that often shape healthy relationships education by noticing or creating new feelings or practices in ways that "neither predict nor (de) value in advance of its coming to be" (Manning 2016, p.201). Notions of good or bad are kept in movement.

Anchored with sponsorship from Welsh Government and multi-agency support, and enhanced by the rising tidal waves of the global #metoo movement, AGENDA's affirmative approach to risky, radical and overtly political content continues to flourish. Schools are reaching out for support, and AGENDA (via our outreach team⁶) is responding. D/artaphacts co-created with young people at the first AGENDA conference are becoming use-ful, intra-active pedagogical objects, transporting ideas and experiences for others to intra-act with. And with each site visit new d/artaphacts are made to matter, and with permission, they are gifted and shared to in-form future pedagogy, practice or policy from the micro to the macro.

Landing tentatively but always in a field of possibility, we have seen the impact of AGENDA fly in how it has touched young people and their adult allies in ways that seem to open up new lines of political possibility (see the activities of the welsh Valleys WAM, We Are More group and the development of www.agenda.online). Lifting the silence, however, on many of the issues in the resource always brings risk, and in each case there are moments when an activity or project will *fold*, where lines of flight are temporarily blocked, restrained or re-routed. The process and the d/artaphacts, however, live on to in-form and inspire new ways to notice, feel and understand the impact of gender-based and sexual violence and in the context of wider inequities and injustices in the world.

Ruling the curriculum

⁶ Matthew Abraham, Siriol Burford, Victoria Edwards, Kate Marston and Sarah Witcombe-Hayes.

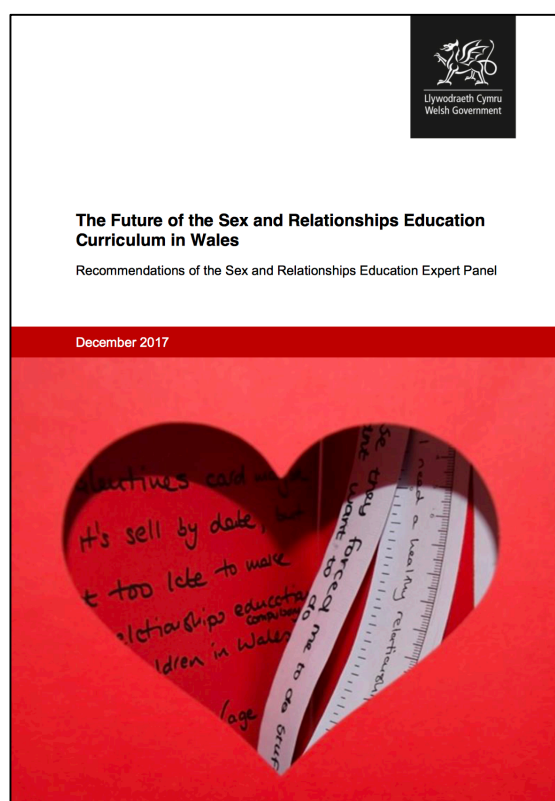


Figure 6: Cover HeART

In-forming policy and policy formation takes time. It is 3 years since the Valentine Card activism. Some rules were changed, some re-assembled. Mandatory sex and relationships education (SRE) however was shelved and slotted into future developments for the new Welsh curriculum. In March 2017, I was invited by the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, to chair a panel of experts to examine the current and future status and development of the Sex and Relationships Education curriculum in Wales. The panel met five times. Each meeting was carefully crafted to enable the group to re-imagine what else SRE could become, using the power of d/arta and d/artaphacts to accompany and enrich traditional research reports and papers (see appendix 6, Renold and McGeeney 2017a).

Only a short briefing was expected (40 pages), but we drafted a much longer 160 page sister report (Renold and McGeeney 2017b) to gather together and signpost all the possible promising practices across Wales and internationally. Primary and Secondary school case studies from the AGENDA resource (developed and designed with the new curriculum in mind) also populate the sections which gesture towards what a living curriculum might look

like, with its underpinning principles to be 'creative and curious', 'experience-near and co-produced' and 'transformative and empowering'. The da(r)ta generated in the original ruler heART assemblies are carefully placed alongside the published international research on youth voice, a significant minor gesture, making young people's voices matter, in a process given limited capacity to meaningfully consult with children and young people:

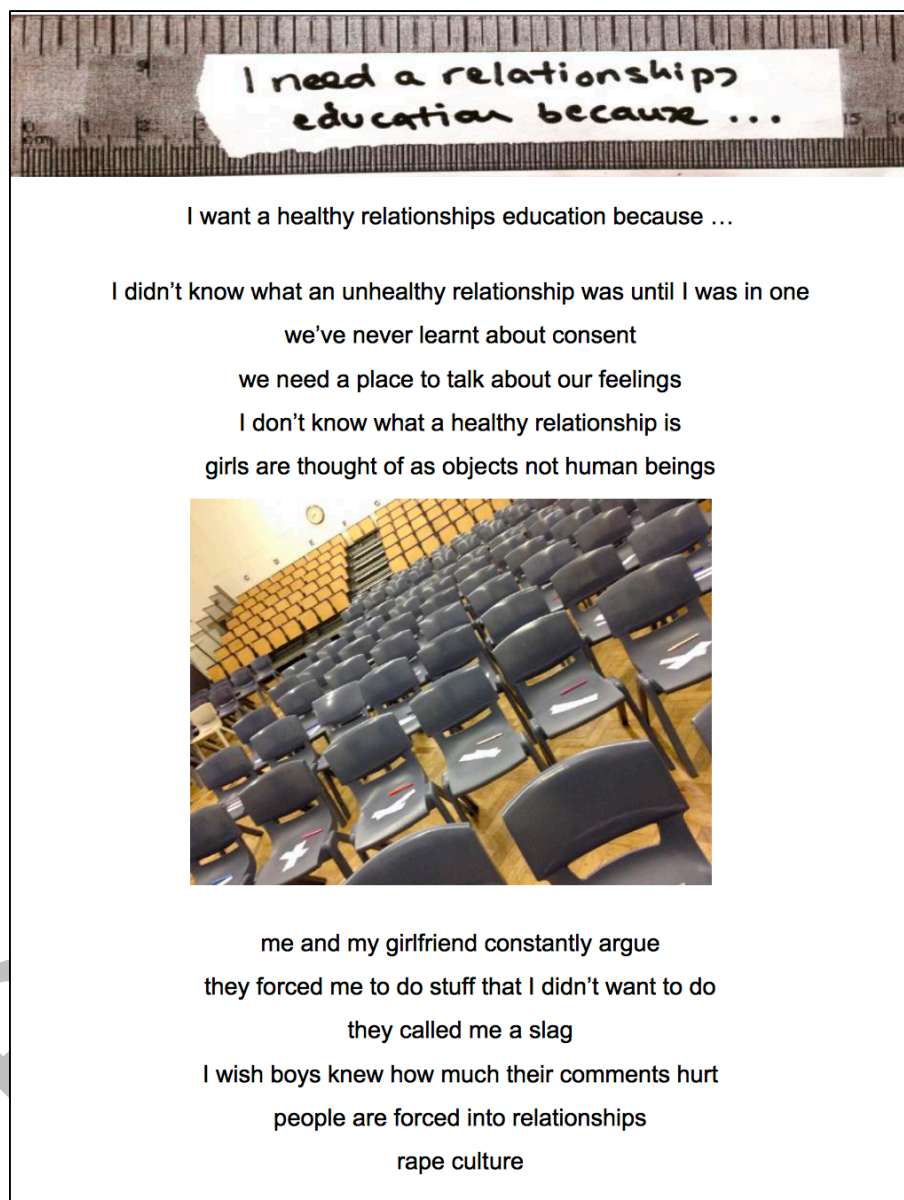


Figure 7: Creative Audits

Research reports can be d/artaphacts too. Explicitly signalling the making and mattering of the ruler heART activisms, the valentine card takes centre stage as the image for the title page of the panel's vision for the future of a new relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

curriculum for Wales (Renold and McGeeney 2017a, see Figure 6) – a vision in which all of the recommendations from mandatory inclusive, holistic, empowering and rights-based RSE (age 3-16). A footnote registers the connection and matter-realises the legacy. Web search engines tasked with sourcing the document connect you directly with this image. Sometimes, d/artaphacts and their extra-beingness endure, re-surface and re-route.

Ruler-Rattle



Figure 8: Ruler-Activism Relfie

“The artful is the event’s capacity to foreground the feeling-tone of the occasion such that it generates an affective tonality that permeates more than this singular occasion” (Manning 2016, p.61)

The ruler-rattle brings this series of risings to a temporary close and returns to the discursive-material matterings of the rulers, and specifically their proto-political sonic qualities and the ‘feeling-tone’ that surfaced in a group activity we designed for Wales’ first Gender Equality Youth Assembly at the civic City Hall in Cardiff on June 2018. Over 200 young people, from schools and youth groups, including young carers, LGBTQ youth groups and young asylum seekers participated in a series of workshops each set up to explore the intersectionality of a range of gender inequalities. Knowing that the Welsh Government were undertaking a rapid Gender Equality audit in Wales, at the end of the day I invited all young people and their teachers and support workers to write on rulers what they thought

was needed to be changed to make Wales a more gender fair and gender equal place to live. In 10 minutes over 180 rulers had been graffitied (see figure 8).

Volunteers lined up to have their 'ruler selfies' taken. This activity was inspired from a recent AGENDA stARTer activity, "Raging Relfie" as a way to politicise selfie-culture and create a safe space for expressing anger and rage). Connecting to the listening theme of the review 'audit' with the sonic clap-slapping of the ruler-skirt I had been wearing throughout the day (the making of which I shared to everyone in my morning keynote) we completed the ruler activism by making as much noise as we could muster with our rulers for 30 seconds (1/2 a second for every assembly member). The plan was to record the raucous and use it as a background soundscape to the vimeo of the ruler selfies. This vimeo would then be tweeted to the first minister and other relevant organisations with the hashtag #thisiswhatafeministassemblysoundslike, because earlier that year the minister had declared that he wanted to establish a feminist government

Sometimes it's possible to intuitively feel that a session might take off. This was one of those times. It had been a lively day and many of the young people were energised by the workshops they were participating in. I had not, however, expected the activity to become quite so active, and ignite such a glorious riot. Conducting the potential commotion with a familiar opening refrain, "ready, steady GO", the rulers started to rattle as soon as 'ready' left my lips. By the time I voiced 'GO' they were hammering tables and chairs, and rising into a crescendo with a rhythmic roaring racket that seem to make our hearts beat faster. It felt like the entire room was shaking, like an aeroplane preparing for lift-off, and our ruler-skirt runaway methodology metamorphosing into a sonic boom, transporting us all in a barely perceptible time-space-mattering moment to a universe where anything is possible. Some young people were beating their rulers with such force that they cracked under the pressure and splintered. Shards of ruler pieces were flying into the air as if their hopes and dreams for a better world were too much to bear, or couldn't be grounded. Stilled and moved simultaneously, this was a moment that will stay with me, and perhaps others for a very long time. And while the vimeo⁷ capturing this ruler-rising did not become click-bait, activating a twitter response from those with decision-making powers this time, the following week its potentiality was gathered in a new stARTer activity for the AGENDA website to inspire others to 'Re-assemble the Rules'. 4 months later, the ruler-skirt rises again when those 150+ rulers were turned into eight new ruler-skirts, for a ribbons and ruler body-workshop inviting young people to move with the fixity and fluidity of gender norms⁸. They were also used as pedagogical political enunciators to support third sector stakeholders and Welsh government officials to connect with how 'gender equality' is

⁷ To watch the video go to : <https://vimeo.com/276544847>

⁸ See some of the workshop here: <https://vimeo.com/300026336>

matteing for young people - each skirt crafted carefully to demonstrate and encourage engagement an ‘intersectional’ approach to gender equality and equity.

Reassembling the Rules!

What you'll need:
Lots of rulers, preferably with holes in the top
Permanent marker pens
Digital camera

- PICK A RULE** In groups, discuss what rules you want to change to make the world more gender equal and gender fair place to live. Or choose any topic you feel strongly about where the rules need changing!
- GRAFFITI** your ruler with one or more message for change.
- LINE-OF-ACTION** Volunteers from each group (or everyone) form a long line.
- RULER RELFIES** Hold two rulers in front of your face, and have your Ruler Relfie photo taken.
- RATTLE THOSE RULERS** Fill the space you are in and choose an object (e.g. a chair, a radiator, a table) to rattle your rulers. Make as much noise as possible. Record the sound!
- TWEET** Make a short vimeo and share with other schools, youth groups or people and organisations you want to listen with the hash tag [#thisiswhat<insert your message>soundslike](#)
- CREATE** How might you share your rulers? Make a cape? String up to form a line of action? Use your imagination! And check out the Ruler-Skirt!

A **RELFIE** is a relationship selfie.

A **RULER RELFIE** is your relationship to the change you want to see in the world

Rules can be, laws, policies, social norms and stereotypes – anything you want to change about the way things are, that reinforce or create inequality

Like the ruler idea but need an alternative?

Print out paper rulers. Lay them on every seat in an assembly hall or classroom space. Invite others to write on the backs of the ruler-slips what they want rules they want to change. Collect them up, and deliver them to the organisation who holds the decision making powers on your chosen issue.

Read the **Ruler HeART** story for inspiration.

Watch Unity's Gender Equality Youth Assembly ruler-activism [#thisiswhatafeministassemblysoundslike](#) [vimeo.com/276544847](#)

Figure 9: Reassembling the Rules

Coda: the rise and rise of the possible

“A Choreographing of the political sees minor gestures everywhere at work, and it seizes them. Choreographing the political is a call not only for the collective crafting of minor gestures but for the attunement, in perception, to how minor gestures do their work” (Manning 2016, p. 130)

In dialogue with what is becoming known as post-qualitative inquiry (Lather and St Pierre 2013; MacLure 2014; St Pierre 2017; St. Pierre, 2018), and in debt to and inspired by a growing scholarship of new material and posthuman feminisms in educational studies (e.g. Taylor and Ivinson 2013; Taylor and Hughes 2016; Osgood and Robinson 2018; Ringrose, Warfield and Baradisi, 2019), this chapter has attempted to share in words and images what was possible in becoming crafty through art-ful processes in research-activist scholarship

and practice in the field of gender and sexuality education in Wales. Taking inspiration from the musical fugue, I structured the chapter through a series of five ruler-skirt risings. Each rising involved ‘choreographing the political’ from the get go where the d/artaphacts were reassembling the rule(r)s in some shape or form. Always on the move, their material-discursive-affective qualities exceeding any narrative description or image with a feeling-force that continues to disrupt and propel what matters forward. In outing some of these ruler-skirt risings I hope I have begun to offer a glimpse at how affirmative, experimental pARTicipatory AGENDAS, rooted in, yet dispersing the feeling-force of local and global revolutionary risings took shape to in-form a route that carried the work on its way, and always with the post-qualitative shavings of events and inquiries yet to come.

While it’s all too easy to over theorise the process in ways that dilute, or detract from, the heART of the matter (Holmes 2016), I have found, as I set briefly set out at the beginning, Erin Manning’s notion of the ‘minor gesture’ particularly compelling and generative to make sense of and conceptualise and communicate the risings beyond the performative in-the-moment ness. Manning (2016, p.75) states how,

“The minor gesture pulls the potential at the heart of a process into a mobile field replete with force-imbued material that is capable of making felt not only what the process can do but how the ecology of which it is part resonates through and across it”

In many ways, each rising did seem to operate as a minor gestural force, drawing out ‘the potential at the heart of a process’, through ‘force imbued material’ that made itself felt across a range of fields, in micro-resonating moments (e.g. the up-skirting comment, the ruler-rattle) and macro force-fields of change (e.g. the making and mattering of the AGENDA resource). I have tried to share how the ruler-risings have ‘done their work’ are still doing their work and specifically, how art-ful processes in the making of darta and dartaphacts, as ethical and lively objects, have opened up new avenues for researcher response-ability by becoming crafty in registering and sharing ‘what matters’ – re-assembling the rules with “particular practices of engagement”, which in and through other places, spaces, relationships and bodies may have been “disinvited or ruled out as fitting responses” (Barad 2007, p.). Working in and creating conducive contexts to exploit the ‘margins of

manouverability' (Massumi 2015) have been key in this journey (the process of which I hope to elaborate upon further in a forthcoming book, Dartaphact: Making Post-Qualitative Inquiry Matter).

I have come to sense each rising as an affirmative process that enacts a 'speculative pragmatism' (Debaise and Stengers 2017) insofar as every rising has carried a feeling that it can go somewhere and do something. Yet while its immanent directionality might be intuitively felt (e.g. the 'ruler rattle'), it is impossible to predict in advance what might emerge. It's often all about aligning to the inflections, those flashpoints, in events and assemblages that might mobilise the more-than of a moment or in some cases a resource or a policy. However, this intuition and alignment, and the ability to rise to the occasion and mobilise its potential in the ways I have gestured towards in this chapter, have only been possible and will only be sustainable through collaborations which support specific practices of engagement – collective practices and ethico-political assemblages that have taken years to trust in and forge.

In a post-qualitative, post-evidence, post-truth world when research data no longer seems to matter, and inquiry after inquiry, policy after policy seem to unfold as hollow or unsustainable grand gestures, sucked and spat out by vampiric media headlines, I draw this coda to a close with a question: how can the 'minor gestures' in our research choreograph the political so that how our research matters can be seen, felt and heard, differently?

ruler-skirt risings

assemble and #reassembletherules

with ethical response-ability

and heART as the way

they materialise an affective politics

making d/artaphacts for the not-yet

marking lines of flight

with lesbian rule⁹

a tiny thousand minor gestures

beyond measure

of what relationships and sexuality education

might be

and become

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⁹ According to Wikipedia, a lesbian rule was historically “a flexible mason’s rule made of lead that could be bent to the curves of a molding, and used to measure or reproduce irregular curves” and alluded to by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (bk V, ch. 10) as a “metaphor for the importance of flexibility in equitable justice”.

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