



The Day Centre: A Site for Relational Practice

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Introduction and background

Findings from a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study in collaboration with a day centre in the Northeast of England.

Introduce the value of generalist day centres as 'sites' for 'relational practice'.

Explore the challenges and opportunities of applying PAR in collaboration with a day centre.

What is Participatory Action Research? (PAR)



PAR is “an umbrella term covering a variety of participatory approaches to action-oriented research” (Kindon et al., 2007).



PAR is an orientation to the world, **not a research method.**



It is a process that aims to be participatory, empowering and democratic.



Those whose lives are affected by the issues being researched are involved in **all** aspects of the research process: its design, the conducting of research, analysis and dissemination as a way to instigate change.

Applying PAR in the Day Centre setting



Co-researchers included older members of staff (n=3), volunteers (n=1), clients (n=9) and carers (n=4) of clients



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Starting point: recognising the existing practices meaningful to day centre members.

Research methods

- Five research methods used to develop the ‘mosaic of continuity and change’ central to social life (Schatzki, 2016: 40) and harness the diverse perspectives made available through PAR:
 - Semi – structured interviews
 - Life Story Work
 - ‘A’ walking method
 - Photovoice
 - Focus groups



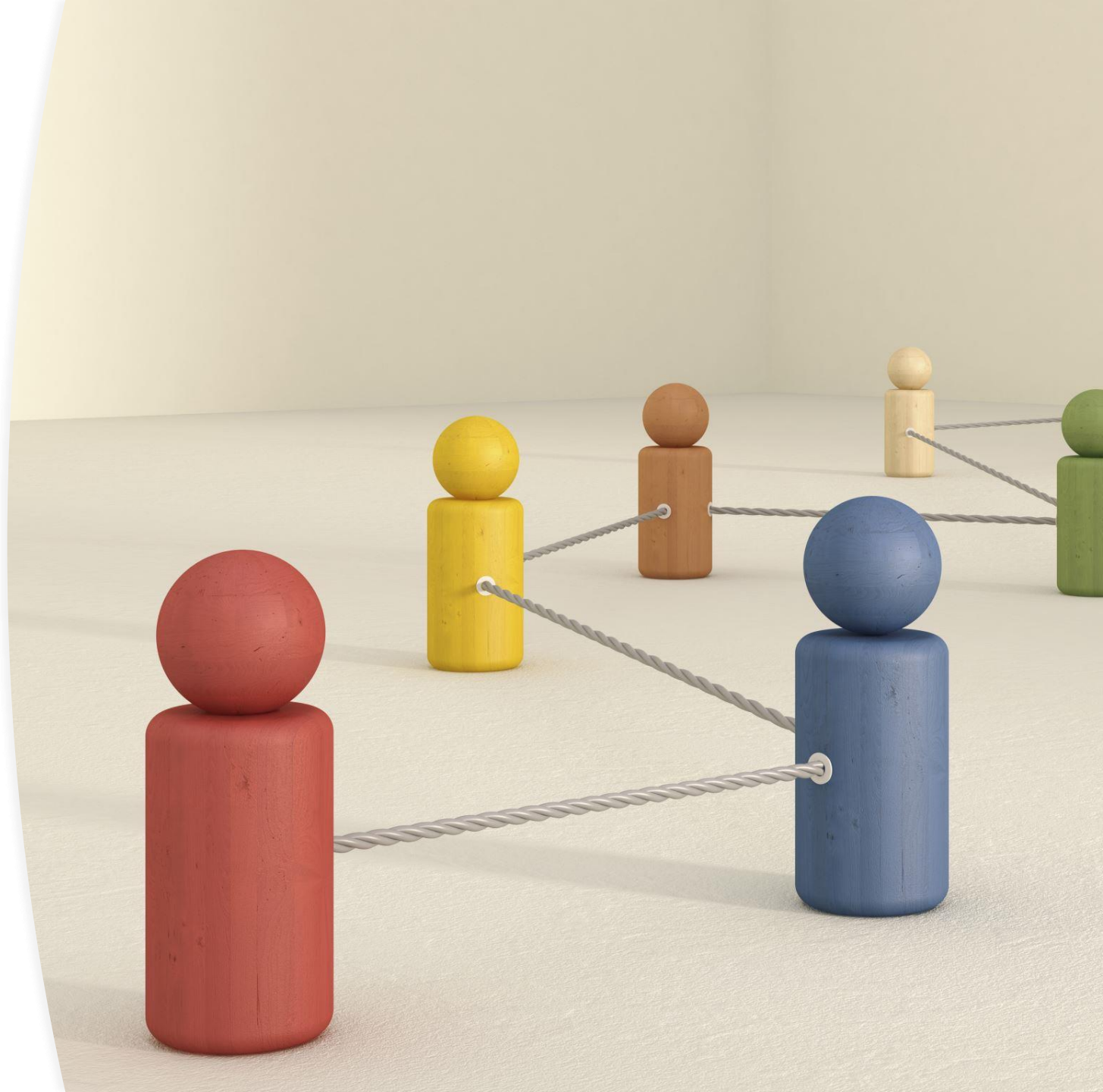


The day centre 'site'

- Schatzki's (2001, 2016: 32) framing of site as 'a mass of linked practices and arrangements'.
- It encompasses both the physical space of the day centre and the more figurative site which incorporates the context of 'human coexistence', a place where social life inherently occurs (Schatzki, 2001).
- Rather than attempting to measure or monitor the centre's effectiveness, we chose to learn about those practices and arrangements that were considered impactful by co-researchers.

The value of generalist day centres as sites for relational practice

- Relational practice: genuine engagement and rapport building that generates trust.
- Relational social work: aims to strengthen the resilience of individuals facing challenges by leveraging existing social networks to address social challenges that often lack complete solutions.



Findings on the day centre as a 'relational site'

01

i) **Person-led, not person centred** – service adaptations, consistent reasoning and reflection when responding to major life events and changes.

02

ii) **Demonstrating care** – clients learnt from staff and volunteers to practice inclusivity.

03

iii) **Encouraging participation** – practices of care and ownership.

The transformative impact of relational practice: the case of Major Tom

- 'When I first met him ...**he hadn't been out the house for over a year** and he didn't feel comfortable getting on the minibus ... we had a hell of a job so I said right, for the first couple of weeks I'll come and get you in the car but he said I don't think I can get into your car ... the tactic I used was to start telling him a story at the front door, get him onto the step then I locked his door and gave him his keys, **continued talking the whole time** ... and talked to him until he was sitting in the car and I said see you got in the car no bother! (Jen, manager)
- And then he ended up coming on **holiday** with us, didn't he? (Louise, staff)
- He went from a little bent over man to a man who **stood up tall!** (Sarah, staff)
- I've never seen anybody change in their personality so much. I mean, he was the **life and soul of the holiday**. He joined in with everything! (Jen, manager)'
- 'I was greeted by **very warm hospitality and a cup of coffee by Jen**, I'll never forget. Two of us sitting down there, complete strangers, come from a different part of the city all together but nobody said what are you doing here' (**Major Tom**, client)



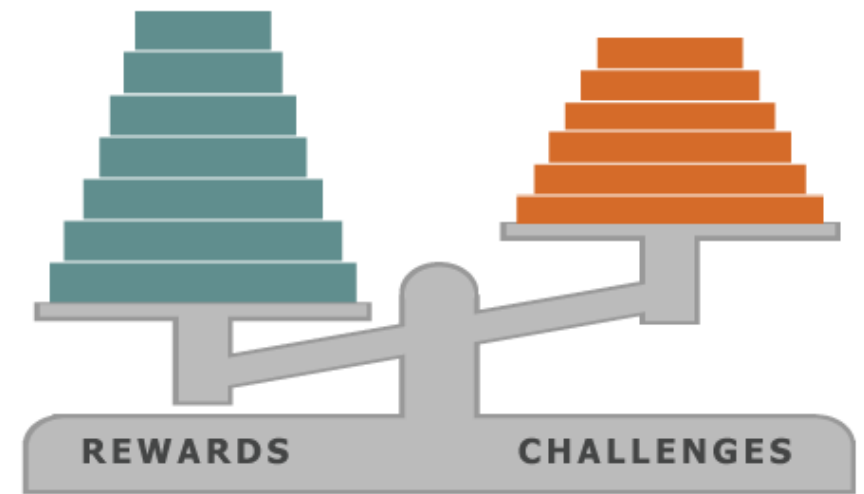
Implications



- Questions around responsibility and the authenticity of relationships.
- Subsequent questions around what methods or approaches enable sufficient explorations of dialogue, relationships, change and collaboration.

Challenges and Opportunities in Day Centre Settings

1. Blurring the boundaries between the researcher and the researched:
 - Understanding evolving relationships and responsibilities beyond the intention to not do harm (Gilligan, 1982).
2. Fluctuating dynamics:
 - Draw on the principles of participation to reflect on fluctuating power dynamics and a shared ethical commitment to creating conditions for social change (Kesby, 2005; Kothari, 2001).
3. Ownership and dissemination of findings:
 - A commitment to unfolding layers of risk and emotion to reframe ethical commitments – ‘slow ethics’ (Banks, 2021).





Final thoughts

- Relational practice has historically been undervalued, but the pandemic highlighted its importance in the lives of older people.
- More in-depth, collaborative research is needed to explore the potential of such practices in day centres, ideally drawing on a PAR approach.

Thank you!

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References

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