



EXPERIENCES OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INFANT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

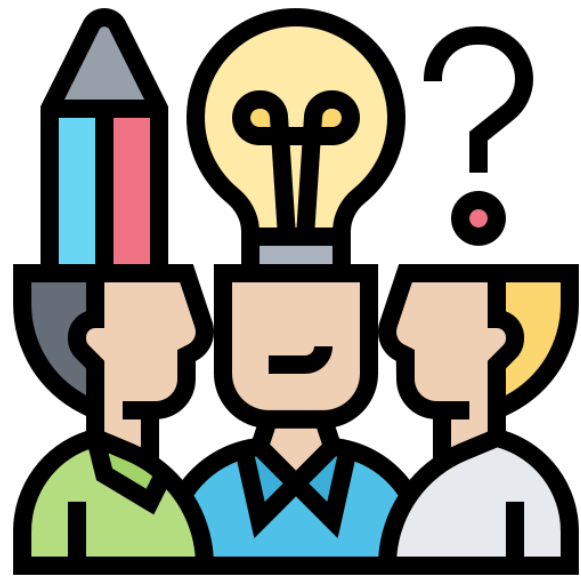
Dr Mary Tobin,
Clinical Psychologist

Infant Mental Health in Ireland:

Early Relationships Matter

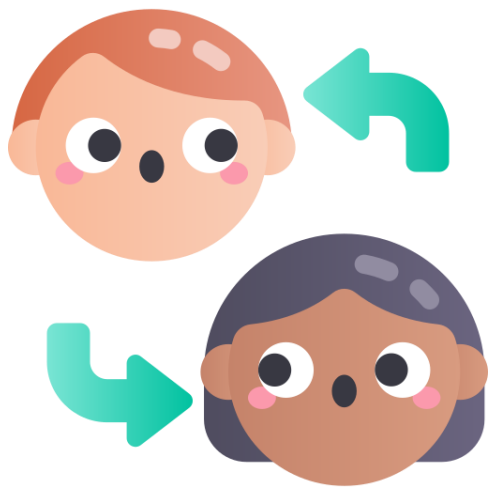
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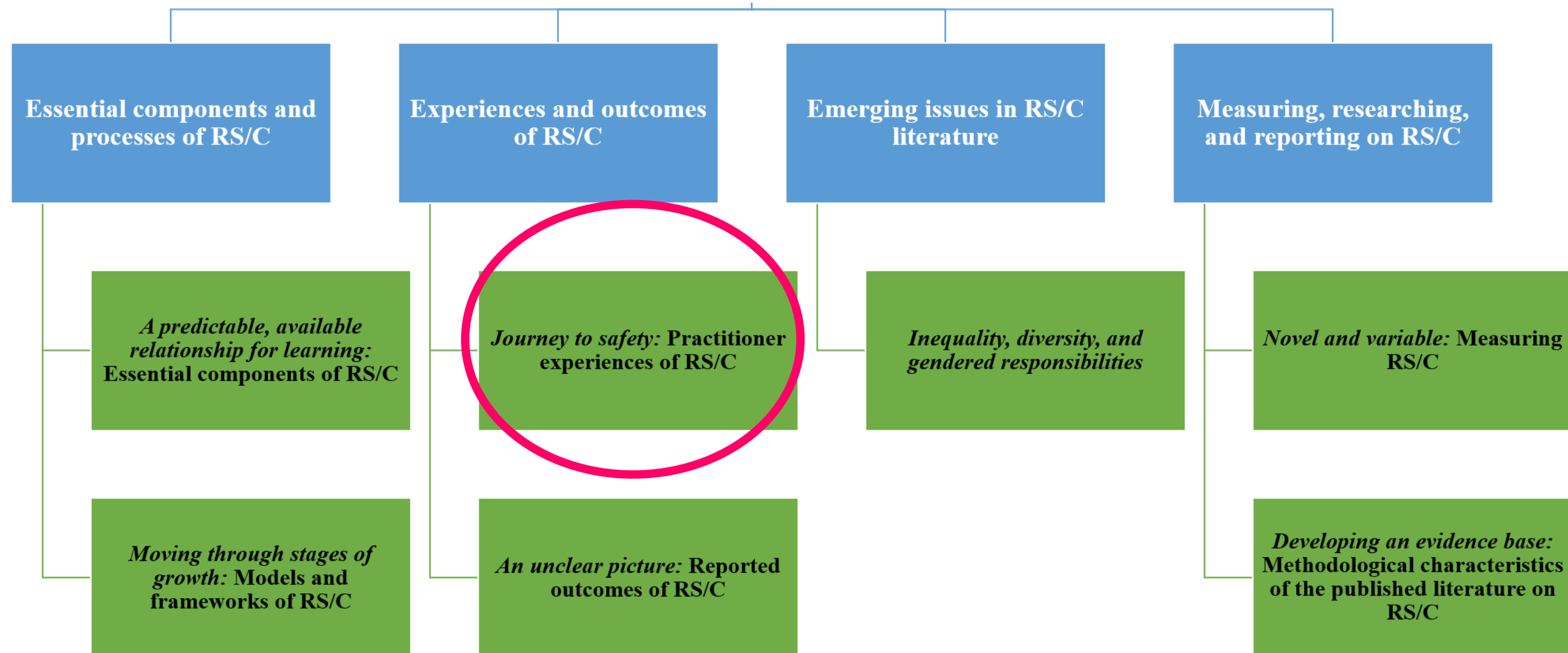
Reflective Practice in Infant Mental Health

- Learning and improving practice by focusing on experience – particularly situations which are not easily solved and which elicit uncertainty and strong emotional responses
- Core component of IMH training and work in the form of reflective supervision or reflective supervision/ consultation (RS/C)
- A relationship for learning where strengths are supported and vulnerabilities are partnered (Gilkerson & Shahmoon-Shanok, 2000).
- Collaboratively explore infant and family work through relationships and the emotions elicited in relationships (Weatherston & Barron, 2009).
- Dual aims: emotional support and continuous professional development



Research on Reflective Practice in IMH

- **Systematic Scoping Review** (Tobin et al., 2024): 35 published reports on empirical studies of reflective practice or reflective supervision/consultation in IMH
- **4 studies exploring practitioner experiences of reflective supervision/consultation**



Current Study

- **Research question:** How has reflective practice in its various forms been experienced by IMH practitioners working in an interdisciplinary child and family service?
 - **Setting:** Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships Area Based Childhood (ABC) Prevention and Early Intervention programme, based on the Northside of Cork city (formerly known as Young Knocknaheeny)
 - Reflective practice through individual reflective supervision, IMH Network Groups, and Work Discussion Group (Rustin, 2008): structured model of professional reflection which originated in the Tavistock Clinic





Participants & Design



- **Participants:** Practitioner staff members of Let's Grow Together (infant parent support workers, oral language development officers, clinical co-ordinator, public health nurse)
- **8 participants in total: 7 in focus group and 7 individual interviews**

Professional disciplines	Speech and language therapy; early years and childhood studies; nursing and public health nursing; social care; and community development
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Time in current role	15 months – 7 years
Years working with children and families	7-27
Years engaged in RP	1-6

- **Multimodal qualitative design:** Participatory arts-based focus group and separate **qualitative semi-structured individual interviews**



- **Visual and verbal data integrated and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Creative Research Method Design



- Reflective practice as intrinsically emotional, cognitive, embodied, and a meaning-making process
- The work of IMH home-visiting happens in various modalities: conversation; song & rhyme & movement; sensory experiences
- **Multimodal approaches:** using both verbal and nonverbal forms of data (Dicks, 2020)
- Creative research methods: “Making the familiar strange” (Dawn Mannay, 2010)



Dwelling: On the design, implementation and analysis of 'Story Houses' as multi-modal research method

Figure 5. Silvia's Story House, view of inside.

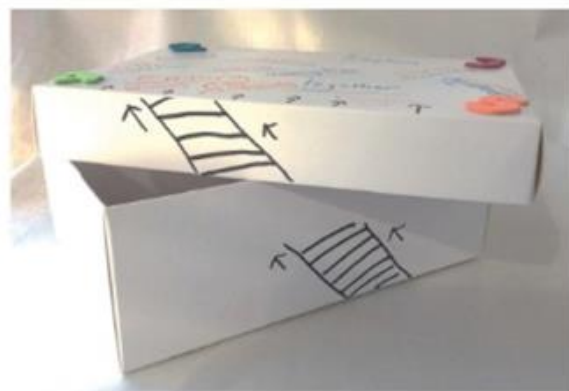


Figure 6. Silvia's Story House, side view.



Figure 1: Lisa's identity box



Figure 2: Cathy's identity box



Figure 3: Kate's identity

Identity boxes: using materials and metaphors to elicit experiences

Creative Research Method Design



Developmental and Experiential Process of Learning in a Reflective Practice Space

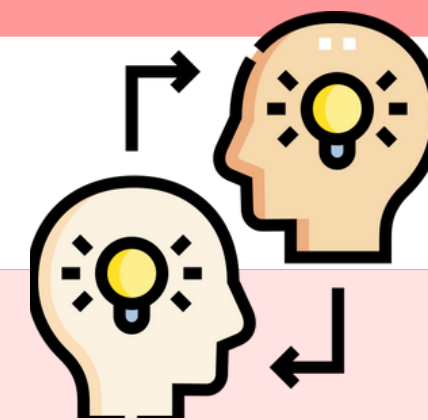
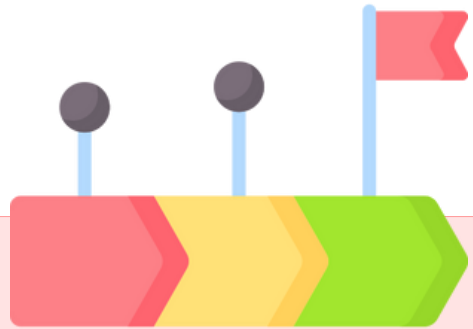
Just get on with it

What should I be bringing to this space?

Who are my 'hands'?

Taking a step back

You go in heavy and you come out light



Influences of prior experiences on reflective practice

Challenges in adjusting to a reflective practice space

Containment in a shared safe space

Learning through reflective practice

Personal-professional transformation through reflective practice

Developmental and Experiential Process of Learning in a Reflective Practice Space

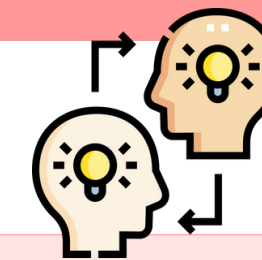
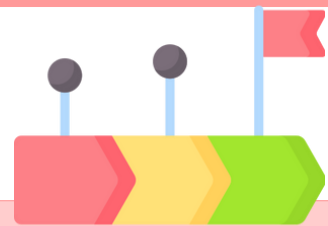
Just get on with it:
Influences of prior experiences on reflective practice

What should I be bringing to this space?: Challenges in adjusting to a reflective practice space

Who are my 'hands'?:
Containment in a shared safe space

Taking a step back: Learning through reflective practice

You go in heavy and you come out light:
Personal-professional transformation through reflective practice



- Previous experience of supervision
- Previous experience of reflective practice
- Disciplinary and professional norms
- Stage of practice development

- Novelty
- Uncertainty
- Chore
- Anxiety
- A mountain

- Felt safety: Containing; holding; boundarying
- Threats to safety
- Trust and vulnerability
- A shared safe space

- Expanding practice skills
- Developing professional use of self

- You go in heavy
- Wow moments
- Filling up your cup
- A wave

Just get on with it:

Influences of prior experiences on reflective practice

- That's typical [professional discipline] head like. So like, you don't praise – [...] you just get on with it. [...] You know, it's your job, you're getting paid to do it, get on with it.
- I think you would have bottled it a lot more – [...] like I would have not been able to maybe felt comfortable telling the team, "jeez this work...". I would have felt a bit like it was a weakness.

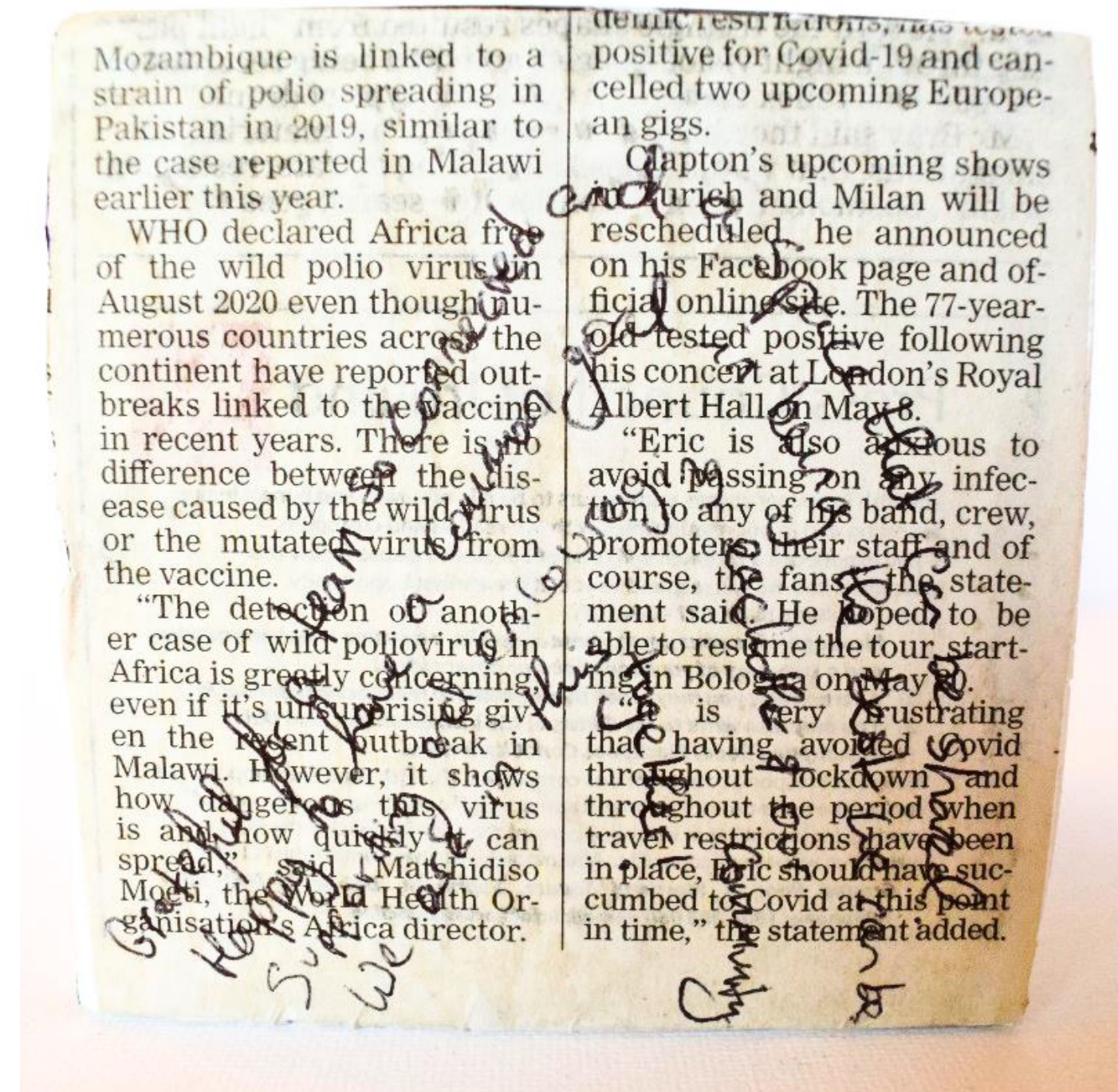


What is it like when you are not supported?

What should I be bringing to this space?:

Challenges in adjusting to a reflective practice space

- I was definitely unsure. It was a grey area. It was something new. I didn't understand it fully. And I definitely was conscious of maybe bringing a right answer into reflective space.
- Every month is a bit of a mountain – I always have a little bit of dread before I go. I don't know why. It's just setting time aside or...among the busyness. But it's like when you get there and you do your reflective practice group, you're at the top, and it was worth the climb.



Who are my 'hands'?:

Containment in a shared safe space

- It's really well organised and it's like this really constant, consistent, dedicated, held space [...]. So we just show up [...]. We know the time. We know it's predictable. And there's kind of a real held, contained sense in the space.

- It's important that you're with a team that you trust, like it's often very emotive and there's tears and there's laughing and there's anger and we kind of explore it all together. So I think it would be very difficult if you had – if somebody ever left whatever was mentioned in the space leave the space, it could cause a lot of upset in an organisation.



What is it like when you are supported?

Taking a step back: Learning through reflective practice

- If I'm met with something with a family that I'm just not sure of, I'm more confident taking a step back and being able to take the time to think about it, look into it a bit further and not feel like I have to run in and save all the time.
- To look inward as to why I'm feeling a certain type of way with a family and kind of bring that to the forefront, rather than kind of saying "jeez, you can't think that".



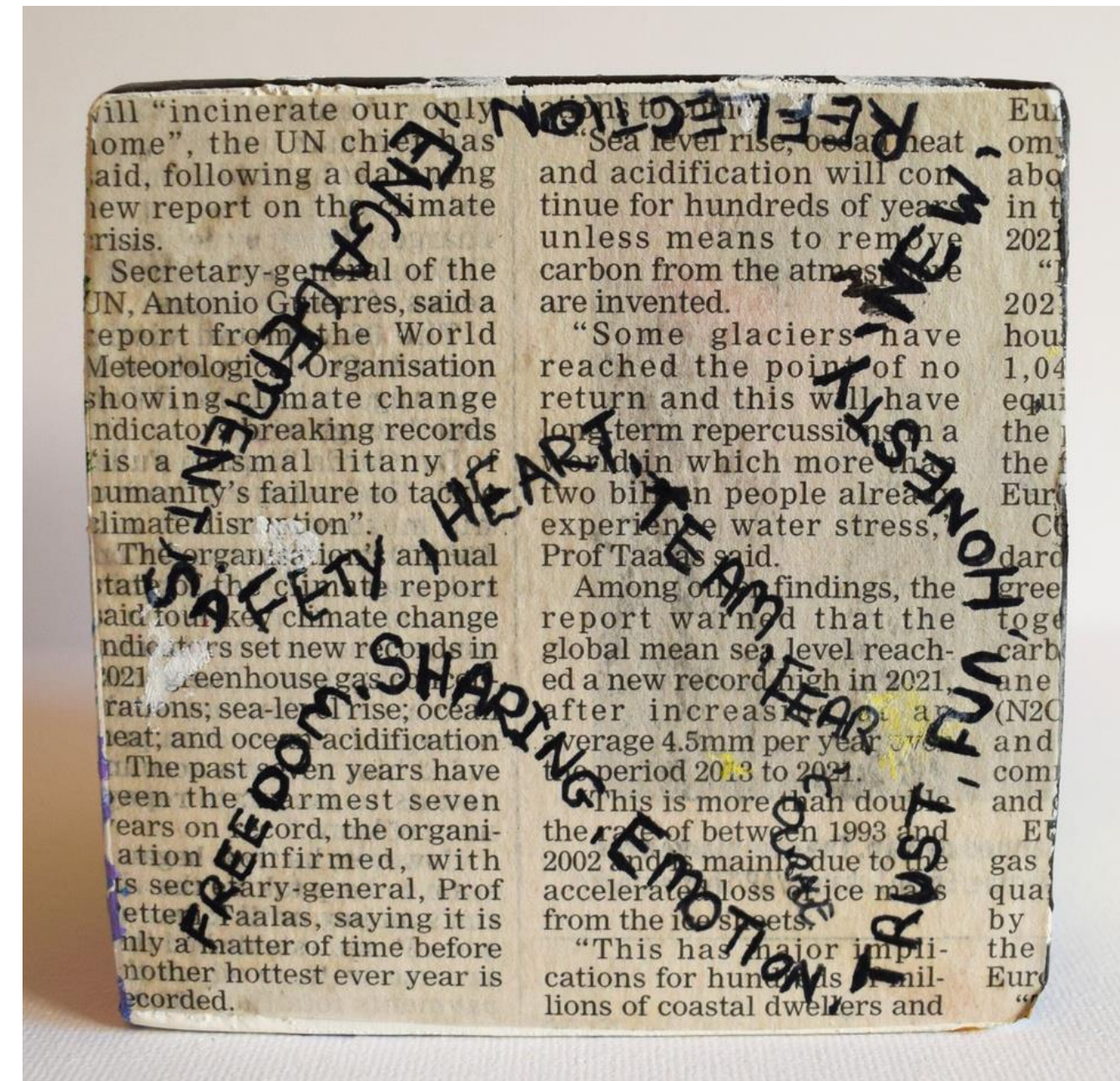
You go in heavy and you come out light: Personal-professional transformation through reflective practice

- You go in heavy and you come out light. Or I find that anyway, you know that it's going to be this cathartic, nurturing space.
- It's this kind of mixing and moving of thoughts around the room that creates a lot of 'wow' moments in those spaces. A lot of revelatory moments where you're kind of going, "Wow, that's so interesting", [...] looking at it from that perspective, and because it's linked to something from practice, it can be transferred back into practice.



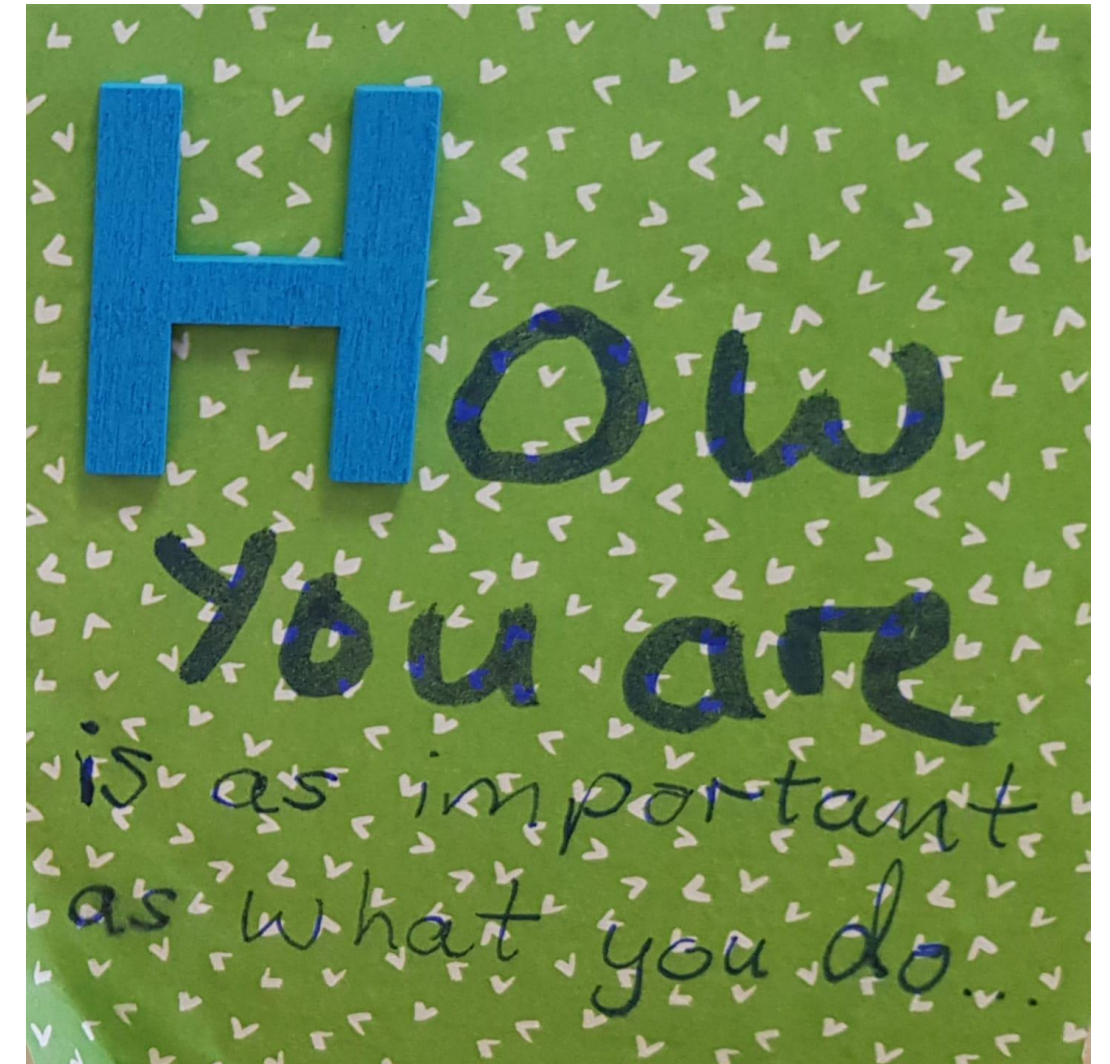
Implications for Research and Practice

- Contributed to the international IMH literature on reflective practice (one of a very small number of non-US-based empirical studies and innovative research methodology)
- Address unspoken disciplinary norms/personal schema about experiencing and expressing emotion and uncertainty early in engagement
- Acknowledge potential uncertainty and anxiety and reassure that it is part of this type of learning, and that it will change, as a way of sustaining engagement beyond the early stages



Acknowledgements

- Let's Grow Together! Infant and Childhood Partnerships CLG
- Research participants
- Research supervisor,
Dr. Elaine Rogers
- Expert subject matter consultant,
Dr. Nicola O'Sullivan
- Focus group co-facilitator,
Colette Mulholland
- Icons from freepik/flaticon
- All other artwork from research participants



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