

In our co-mentoring relationship we wanted to explore our different textual and visual experiences from business, fine art and childhood. Our focus was to explore the processes involved in the integration of visual and textual languages - "visual thinking". Collage became our medium of conversation.

"our experiences and ideas tend to be common but not deep or deep but not common. We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses. Concept is divorced from percept, and thought moves among abstractions. Our eyes have been reduced to instruments with which to identify and to measure; hence we suffer from a paucity of ideas that can be expressed in images and an incapacity to discover meaning in what we see. Naturally we feel lost in the presence of objects that make sense only to undiluted vision, and we seek refuge in the more familiar medium of words"

Rudolph Arnheim – Art and Visual Perception 1974

## Creative Partnerships National Reflect Programme Case Study: Linda Jane James & Sally Appadu

# COLLAGE CONVERSATIONS

(as a form of co-mentoring)

Max Ernst **described collage** as

**"the principle of accepting as valid whatever occurs on the support during the process".**

Political commentary, shock, anti-art, revealing the unconscious. Revolutionary and reactionary. Cutting, pasting, drawing, obliterating and reforming, making a mark. The mind can go in every imaginable direction, tapping into what you know, revealing what you don't know. Infinite possibilities for transformation played out on paper. Ordering and re-ordering, confronting and breaking free from the limitations of the rectangle, the A4 page, the confines of the chair and the screen. The hands and the unconscious modifying, adapting and working with the possibility for change that always exists. Finding deeper meaning beyond the visual image by taking things out of context, seeking out ambiguity and creating new viewpoints. Direct engagement with unfamiliar materials and unformed thoughts. Making ideas visible outside of time without specific outcomes in mind.

Testing ourselves to invent our own integrated visual/textual language we randomly selected two books to use as private journals. We modified, enhanced and destroyed the pages. Stimulated by odd juxtapositions, new thoughts and visual practices would begin to surface. The published book is held in high regard, cutting and modifying it means negotiating with the nature of image making, ideas and thoughts in a wider social context, reflecting and mirroring back who we are and how we think visually and textually. Images, thoughts and ideas are not fixed, not to be idolized, they help us to evolve and grow, and like people they need to be challenged, given space and time and experienced in a nurturing environment. Learning and our ability to reflect has been enhanced by direct intervention in the pages of the book and thoughts are richer. The tactile quality of the pages provoke continual engagement and reflection, developing confidence and understanding of the self in relation to others.



'preferences and peculiarities can be discerned... a faithful companion', an object that you would want to return to again and again. Benjamin saw the notebook as 'a relationship of exchange.....a medium that connects author and work. A stage where thinking and writing could take place, quarries, fields for experimentation, on which thoughts can be gathered, structured, discarded, formed a new creatively and sometimes chaotically.

Walter Benjamin – The Notebook

**Spaces of equality, playful, unbounded and fluid. Co-mentoring collage conversations are simultaneously simple and complicated. From the private landscape of the book, to the collaborative, public landscape of a large roll of paper, languages merge into one another, expressing different histories, imaginations and viewpoints. Always present is the possibility that a new kind of reality will be invented, not limited by an ability to communicate ideas coherently or the need to explain. What happens on the page is ambiguous, silent, open to interpretation. With a desire to be seen and heard and an openness to share, explore and reflect, collage conversations open up the potential of emerging ideas, develop confidence to engage with the unknown and communicate without fear of ridicule.**



**IN TOUCH WITH THE CHILD WITHIN  
FOR A FEW HOURS THE WORLD OUTSIDE DISAPPEARS**

As the painter Philip Guston, put it, 'first, you have to forget your family, then you forget your friends and finally you forget yourself' and when you have done that you are free to paint'.

## **COLLAGE CONVERSATION**

A definition collaged from Wikipedia and the **CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS REFLECT HANDBOOK** and [LINDAJANEJAMES.BLOGS.COM](http://LINDAJANEJAMES.BLOGS.COM)  
March 2008

A **COLLAGE** conversation is the **INTEGRATION OF VISUAL AND TEXTUAL** concepts **UTILISING** abstractions and concrete objects which make up the world we live in.

A **COLLAGE** conversation (**AS A FORM OF CO-MENTORING**) **AIMS TO DEVELOP A FLEXIBLE RANGE OF LANGUAGE REGISTERS IN ORDER TO FRAME APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS, RESPOND TO DIFFERENT PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND COMMUNICATE MEANINGFULLY, SEEING WHERE YOUR CO-MENTOR IS COMING FROM. INFORMING THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO OTHERS COLLAGE CONVERSATIONS** strengthens a person's sense of identity and deepens their self-awareness and understanding of their personal motivation, values and emotions. **COLLAGE** conversations are the ideal form of communication in some respects, since they allow people with different views of a topic **AND A MIX OF VISUAL AND LANGUAGE SKILLS** to learn from each other.

**COLLAGE** conversation includes mutually interesting connections that **HELPS EACH PERSON TO SHIFT THEIR PERSPECTIVE, CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND DEVELOP A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORSHIP FOR THEIR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN A WIDE RANGE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS.**

Mary Kelly in her famous work, Post Partum Document (1973-1979) observes that in a child's deciphering of parental desire 'actions, gestures and even silences are as formative as spoken language'. This work was a seven year process of reflection and visualisation which 'fused aesthetics, politics, psychoanalysis and radical formalism', 'you complete the work by anticipating rather than judging or deciphering it'. Working in this way is liberating.

I get the feeling I'm in motion – a certain sense of liberty  
In a world that's so demanding

Brings me near to the childhood I lost replaced by fear

New Order, True Faith '94 (re-ordered)

Self esteem and identity are challenged, it might be the first time thoughts have been made visual, seeing what you think. Visually working on a thought is powerful. Having confidence to make changes, to transform and to move forward encourages growth. Re-shaping, crossing out, obliterating, re-enforcing, building up or taking away layers, thoughts and identity/ideas are not lost as they often are in the hubbub of conversation. They remain on the page. Throwaway thoughts and serious thoughts become equal. Meanings emerge through interconnections, re-working and varied interpretations. They become stronger, richer and deeper. Highly visual, always alluding to an unfinished state, the collage conversation and the practice of contemplation is possible long after the memory fades.

Linda Jane James. March 2008

