



MODULE CODE: ECPT6009

**ASSESSMENT COMPONENT: 1 –
Action Research Project**

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ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Memory in Motion. Feminism, Ecology and Care Networks through the Lens of Format Agency Photographers at Greenham Common.

Introduction

The current teaching setting for this action research project is UWTSD at Dynevor campus where I teach a range of subjects across undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD Level. I have been in this lecturer position for four years now. One of the advantages of teaching across different levels within the same institution is that it gives me an overview of the skillsets that students need to develop across levels. This is key when thinking strategically about the tools that students need to build to move across degrees.

Within the teaching there is an emphasis on a practitioner-led research approach towards developing the content of the curriculum and responding to learners' needs. One that aligns with the principle of knowing the students. As a result there is an ongoing adjustment on the curriculum based on taking a reflective attitude towards teaching and addressing gaps that need to be covered in the classroom. In that sense aligning research interests with the development of student curriculum. Using the latest scholarship and research on the subject which feeds directly into the teaching. This relates to the following teaching standard: A5 Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/ disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices.

Taking all this into account, one of the modules that I find most challenging within my teaching is the contextual studies modules for Level 4 for both Fine Art and Photography students. There are two modules that are taught within the Contextual studies umbrella which are Ways of Thinking in semester one and Ways of Perceiving in semester two. Both are connected, since the critical framework explored in the first semester is applied to the context of developing an exhibition in semester two. In semester one learners need to write an essay where they analyse, evaluate and reflect about an artwork introduced in class using critical theories related to the Anthropocene. One of the main challenges is that students lack knowledge around the conventions of writing an essay, but the main issue is around developing a critical framework around the Anthropocene. Throughout the teaching I have identified that the main topic, the Anthropocene, is initially an 'abstract' idea. So to build a bridge between the Anthropocene and the critical framework I have decided to

explore through the teaching a key historical reference related to ecology and feminism that took place in Wales in 1981. Therefore learners can make the connection across time and related it to their close environment in Wales.

Literature Review

One of the learning outcomes of Ways of Perceiving module is that students need to apply a range of critical theories to the analysis of an artwork related to the Anthropocene. So, to establish a proximity between an 'abstract' concept, the Anthropocene, and the learners immediate environment, Wales, we will use a key historical reference that explores questions around ecology and feminism in Wales. The focus of the case study is from 1981 to 1985 and the idea is to establish a link between that time period and how ideas related to ecology and climate change were prevalent at the time as well as their connection to the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene can be defined as a geological epoch shaped by human activity having a clear impact on the earth's climate amongst others, (C. Ellis, 2018).

In 1981 the Welsh Feminist Movement *Women for Life on Earth* marched from Cardiff to Greenham Common. Inspired by the significance and role of this march in the constitution of Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (1981-2000) we will use this historical example to expand on some of the key areas of the module which are the intersection between activism, feminism and care-giving networks in the context of the Anthropocene.

Within this context the emphasis will be two-fold. Firstly, we will examine the relevance of Welsh grassroots movements, in this case *Women for Life on Earth* and its connection to the society and political context of the time.

Secondly, we will discuss how around a similar time frame in 1983 a group of eight women founded Format Photographers Agency, which was the first women's only photography agency in Britain. Members such as Raissa Page, Maggie Murray or Brenda Prince had a key role at Greenham as both photographers and activists. Within this context, there will be an emphasis in examining the relevance of Raissa Page, who was based in Wales. Page's archival material about Greenham is at Bishopsgate Institute in London and Richard Burton's archive in Swansea University. The idea is to put into dialogue some of those ideas with our present context and in that way reactivating it.

The term ecofeminism was first coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Feminism or Death: How the Women's Movement Can Save the Planet* (2022). This

book was first published in French in 1974 and establishes that the main focus of the feminist struggle is one against a patriarchal system that claims nature as a resource (2022). D'Eaubonne's famously claimed that the main struggle was one about life and death for humans and the planet, in that sense ecofeminism is 'a socio-political theory and movement which associates ecological concerns with feminist ones' (2022). Nowadays, thinkers such as Françoise Vergès echoes some d'Eaubonne's ideas. For instance Vergès states that one of the feminist's task is 'taking into account the challenges faced by a humanity threatened with extinction' (2021, p.5). Therefore we can established a link between those initial ideas from the 70s as proposed by d'Eaubonne with contemporary concerns. Furthermore, Neimanis and Mae Hamilton in their book *How to Weather Together: Feminist Practice for Climate Change* make a call for a 'embodied politics of solidarity', one in which there is a clear link between feminist social justice and environmental justice (2026, p.5).

Initial ideas around ecofeminism such as the struggle for life on earth proposed by d'Eaubonne in 1974 were a key component of the Women's Liberation Movement which was a grassroots feminist movement that began in the late 1960s and lasted through the 1970s (Hesford and Corbman, 2017). This movement emerged in the United States but 'quickly became a transnational movement, with countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and West Germany' (Hesford and Corbman, 2017).

As stated in the People's Collection Wales' website *Women for Life on Earth* was founded by Ann Pettitt and a group of friends in 1981 (2017). Influenced by the spirit and ideas of the *Women's Liberation Movement* and in protest against nuclear armament they organised a march that departed from Cardiff on 5 September 1981 to Greenham Common. The participants walked 120 miles to show their 'opposition to the nuclear weapons stored at the RAF bases and to raise awareness of the issue' (People's Collection Wales', 2017). This action challenged directly the decision to house 96 nuclear missiles at the site and proved to be foundational in the establishing of the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common which was active from 1981 until 2000.

To understand the social and political context of the time we will use the *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK* exhibition organised by Tate Britain in 2023. In that exhibition they showcased the work of around 100 women artists exploring 'the relationship between art and the women's movement' taking the 1970 National Women's Liberation Conference as a starting point (Tate, 2022).

There are two key texts that underlie the main issues explored in the exhibition and both were written collaboratively between Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker. The first one was *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985*, first published in 1987 which was a foundational text introducing art and the women's movement in the UK (1995). The second one was *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* in which the authors argue against the narrative that there have not been women artists, (Pollock and Parker, 2020). In this latter book Pollock and Parker not only demonstrate through historical examples the existence of female artists but they also argue how the lack of visibility is tied to the sexism of art systems in which female artists were not allowed to have education within the arts, display their work and have the same opportunities as their male peers (2020).

To explore the aforementioned issues and their nuances the exhibition was divided in different rooms. For example: the first one had the name 'Rising with Fury' and in there they addressed the fact that in the early 1970s, women were considered second-class citizens and the Equal Pay Act was not enacted until 1975 (Tate, 2022). Room 2 had the title 'The Marxist Wife Still Does the Housework' in which they explored the society upheaval of the time and the fact that most care work was still done by women (Tate, 2022). Room 4, which is the most significant for this action research project was one with the title 'Greenham Women Are Everywhere'. This room was composed mostly of photographic images taken at Greenham Common by members of Format Photographic Agency. Format Photographic Agency was founded in 1983 by the following photographers: Anita Corbin, Sheila Gray, Pam Isherwood, Jenny Mathews, Maggie Murray, Joanne O'Brien, Raise Page and Val Wilmer (Bishopsgate, 2026).

All founding members were already practising photo-journalists that had difficulty in getting commissions as female freelance photographers. They founded the agency with the purpose of getting commissions, but also as a platform to 'develop their creativity', support each other and 'enhance their careers' (Bishopsgate, 2026). Therefore, the idea of care and care-network was running through the way they operated as as a group. Format's focus was on documenting underrepresented issues that got little coverage in the mainstream media (Bishopsgate, 2026). Members such as Raissa Page, Maggie Murray or Brenda Prince had a significant role in Greenham Common not only as photographers but also as activists. It is significant to highlight Raissa Page who was born in Canada and was later on based in Wales. It is important to mention that Page had a background as a social worker and she embedded aspects such as care and empathy throughout her

photographic practice (Johnston-Smith, 2026). Page's archive is open to the public and is currently held at Richard Burton's archive in Swansea University.

With all this information we can establish a link with our present context. For instance, with this case study we can see how there was a precedent here in Wales of a grassroots feminist movement that organised a march against nuclear armament, and that a clear position in which ecology and the future of planet earth were one of their concerns. We have also seen the example of a first female photographic agency in the UK, specifically the photographer Raissa Page who was based in Wales and had an important role in documenting the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. By drawing this connection to our present moment to a certain extent we are setting memory in motion in a way that reactivates the past within our present time. One in which urgent matters such as climate change and the impact of humans on planet earth are at the centre of questions that deal with the Anthropocene.

Methodology Used

Throughout this action research project the *Women for Life on Earth* march was used as a starting point and a key historical reference to address questions around ecology and feminism in Wales and their connection to the Anthropocene.

The methodology used for the development of the action research project is a mixed one that has elements from practice-based research defined by Candy, Edmonds and Vear as 'a principled approach to research by means of practice in which the research and the practice operate as interdependent and complementary processes leading to new and original forms of knowledge', (2022, p.2). The way in which this practice-based methodology relates to the action research project proposed is due to the fact that this project began as an invitation from Ffotogallery, which is the leading photographic gallery in Wales. The invite was to lead one of the sessions that are part of their Feminist Library, in which a range of both practitioners and researchers propose a topic that is addressed in a public event. As part of the process of thinking through the type of event and content a decision was made of using Ffotogallery's archive as a starting point. After visiting and looking into their archive I identified a research gap. In this case a lack of representation of women photographers in their archive, this gap lead me to research grassroots movements and photographers in Wales. Therefore at this stage there was alignment between the practice of looking into the archive and how that led to doing further research.

After that initial stage I also recognised that the topic was valuable in the context of the contextual studies module for level 4 students. There was an opportunity of integrating that practice-research element directly into the classroom as Candy, Edmonds and Vear state the basic principle of practice-based research is the fact that 'practice and research operate in tandem' (2002, p.2). This was the case in the development of this project since the research done for the activity was integrated in the practice of teaching in the classroom.

At the same time the project has elements of action research as established by Mary McAteer's in her book *Action Research in Education* (2013). For instance, 'reflecting on and learning from our practice' (McAteer, 2013, p.8) in this case it can be seen by the fact that throughout the teaching it was identified that the Anthropocene's framework addressed as part of the contextual studies module was too abstract. Parallel to this and as part of the practice and research in progress for the preparation of the Feminist Library's session, it was established that elements of that practice-research could be applied as a case study. This aligns with an action research methodology that 'requires not only the critical reflection on practice and theory-practice conversation, but also it designates ongoing and evolving action as part of the process' (McAteer, 2013, p.12). According to McAteer one of the main characteristics that differentiates action research from other methodologies is that it 'explores and theorises practice, changes, evaluates and develops practice, provides a platform from which to critique' elements of the existing work' (2013, p.14). From this we can draw that action research as a methodology is a tool in which to apply a critique of the teaching framework, and this is an invaluable strategy to take onboard as part of an evolving pedagogy that can be applied into the classroom.

In summary, within the context of the development of the *Memory in Motion* project there was an application of two methodological approaches. Therefore and as briefly explained there were elements of practice-based research as well as action-research methodology.

Results/Discussion

There are several factors to take into account when discussing the impact of this action research project. For this analysis a reflective approach will be taken, one that will reflect on the lecturer, learners's engagement, and the module's subject matter. It is worth noting that this is not a linear interaction and the way it unfolds within the classroom is in a fluid way. In addition to this, within the reflective circle is important to take into account that the classroom setting is shaped by different factors and amongst them we have the

institutional context, the pedagogical approach, the diversity of learners and the interpretation of the material.

In Schön's book *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* finding value through practice is at the centre. Schön's makes the argument for a theory of the reflective practitioner, making a distinction between what he calls 'reflection-in action' and 'reflection-on-action' (1983). This framework will be used to address the process of developing the action research project.

Beginning by 'reflection-in action' we could argue that it took place during the archive's visit at Ffotogallery since a decision about the direction of the research was made 'on the spot'. That decision was based on making a quick analysis of the material it contained, drawing conclusions from it and deciding the direction of the research according to those. In this sense, this was not a case of having a set of pre-determined ideas that were going to be explored through the archive, but rather making decisions based on the findings that the visit to the archive provided. This experience was new to me, the way I have been working before was having a plan before visiting the archive or the collection that I wanted to respond to. This opportunity to work differently was a bit frightening at the beginning, since I initially had the impression that I did not know what I was looking for within the archive. But at the same time it offer me a learning opportunity of having the 'confidence' on being able to make the decisions by analysing the material. We could argue that this process exposed some of my working assumptions to critical questioning, which is one of the characteristics of action research (McAteer, 2013). Overall, this is an aspect that I would like to take onboard for future projects.

We can locate 'reflection-on-action' as part of the practice of developing and applying changes in the curriculum for Level 4 module Ways of Thinking. These changes were related to the umbrella topic of the Anthropocene, and were based on a reflection on action. For instance, as part of this module we were developing a critical framework to understand the Anthropocene. I realised that the students were interested in the topic, especially the aspects related to climate change, and overconsumption. I started to think that one of the reasons why they were drawn to those two aspects was because they have certain familiarity in terms of lived experience and news information. This made me think that the research I was doing at Ffotogallery around feminism, ecology, grassroots movements and protest could be used in the class since it was an historical precedent. Not only that, I thought as well that students were finding the concept of the Anthropocene too

abstract and using the example of *Women for Life on Earth* made it more concrete, and closer to their immediate environment. Based on this, through a series of sessions I introduced the topic within the classroom and overall the experience was a positive one, learners were engaged, interested in the topic, and the geographical proximity of it.

However I think the way the content was delivered can be improved. For instance, there was an attempt to tackle too many issues within a short period of time. This approach can be a bit overwhelming, especially for level 4 students who are only starting at their studies. In the future I will take a scaffolding approach, and break down aspects in smaller sections. For instance, one that is about the socio/political context of the time, another that focus on Women's Liberation Movement and its impact in Wales, the third one how the fact that nuclear weapons were stored in the UK opened up a protest and conversation around ecology and the future of the planet.

To summarise both practice and reflection were interconnected processes that impacted the development of the action research project. Overall, the development of the action research project was 'driven by a desire to understand practice, to questions and critique it' (McAteer, 2013, p.151) and the points learned such as making the content close to the students experience and scaffolding will improve my future teaching practice.

Conclusion

Through the development of this action research project I have identified two main areas to take forward into my teaching practice.

Firstly, the need to adjust the curriculum to the learners and hence the importance of student-centered as well as joy-centered education (Camfield, 2025). Therefore and following on that rather than having a fixed curriculum that keeps unchanged throughout the years is key to bring to the classroom societal and political issues of the time. This requires having a proactive and flexible approach towards the material that is presented in the class. This is in line with good practice and establishes a clear link with the following professional standards: A4 Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance; A5 Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices; K2 Appropriate methods for teaching, learning and assessing in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme; V3 Use

evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development.

Secondly, and related to the previous point making the content of the curriculum relatable for the learners. In this case one of the learning outcomes was to develop critical thinking about the Anthropocene, and the approach taken for this action research project was to avoid dealing with the subject in an 'abstract' way. The strategy deployed was one in which there was a mixture of a theoretical framework within the context and immediate environment that most learners are familiar with which is Cardiff and South Wales. In that way there is a sense that the questions addressed in the class are not only for the purpose of getting a degree but rather that they have a significance within their lived experience . Helping students to acquire a critical framework that they can use both within their immediate environment and beyond. Again this aspect is in line with good practice, one that demonstrates a commitment to learners. A link can be established with the following professional standards: K3 How students learn, both generally and within their subject/ disciplinary area(s); V1 Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities; V3 Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development.

Overall, the practice, research, development, reflection and implementation of the action research project has been a key learning experience in terms of finding strategies to apply the research into the classroom in a significant way for the students. In that sense, this is an approach that it will be taking onward in future teaching at UWTSD.

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