

**DEFINING MOMENTS: Leadership and Learning Disability
Theatres**

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Abstract

This thesis is written from a practitioner–researcher perspective and explores leadership within Learning Disability Theatres, focussing on a series of moments captured within the education and outreach programme of DIY Theatre Company, Salford, UK. The researcher presents a dialogical view of research within which knowledge-production is viewed as dynamic and processual rather than mobilised by the search for a single ‘truth’ or one prescriptive method of working. Emerging from research undertaken as ‘political activity’ the thesis engages with, and attempts to disrupt, dominant, normative agendas of power and knowledge which limit our notions of leadership and result in people with learning disabilities all too often being viewed as ‘too disabled’ to carry out leadership roles.

The thesis highlights the challenges and potential for research undertaken collaboratively with disabled co-leaders to be viewed through frameworks of Applied Theatre, Critical Disability Studies and Critical Leadership Studies and articulates a methodology-in-the-making with the potential to inform future research, practice and policy within all three disciplines. Methods include observations, arts-based Inclusive Research and interviews. Descriptions of moments of practice, written from a phenomenological perspective, offer insights into the highly relational nature of leadership practice in Learning Disability Theatres. The researcher suggests it is in such moments of practice, only visible and present ‘in the making’ that new ways of thinking about and carrying out leadership in participatory theatre can be located.

A critical and relational perspective opens up alternative ways of negotiating and describing leadership by and with performers and theatre-makers with learning disabilities. The term workshop-in-the-making has been coined to introduce a view of the drama workshop as an extension of improvised artistic practice within which improvisers work with ‘light structuring’, are heedful, generous, able to accept offers and to respond in the moment. Development and research of dialogical leadership are political acts which challenge normative, ableist perspectives and offer significant opportunities for development of practice, research and policy within and beyond Learning Disability Theatres. This thesis does not seek to define a single model of leadership, but highlights the value of a relational perspective in exploring the nuances, shifts and complexities of roles within leadership-in-the-making and, as a result, reveals the rich range of leadership practices often masked by more hierarchical approaches.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction

The Provocation

In 2006, DIY, a Learning Disability Theatre Company based in the North West of England, was invited by Creative Partnerships to deliver a substantial project in a Special School. Creative Partnerships was at that time the UK government's flagship creative learning programme, established to develop young people's creativity through artists' engagement with schools (2002-2011). A group of five, including three performers with learning disabilities and myself as Artistic Director, attended a meeting with school staff to clarify a timetable and outline for the project. We had tea and biscuits in the staff room, looked around the school, set dates and left, expecting to return the following term. Two days later, we were phoned by the creative producer at Creative Partnerships who was apologetic and embarrassed that school staff, having met three company members for about twenty minutes, had decided that the actors were 'too disabled' to provide positive role models to the young people, some of whom, staff had asserted, 'do not even see themselves as disabled.' School leaders insisted Creative Partnerships partner them with a non-disabled company instead.

This incident represented a significant turning point for DIY. Members of school staff had met company members for approximately twenty minutes and had not seen them performing or facilitating but had made a judgement on 'face value' that DIY members had nothing to offer the school. There was not only a perception that DIY would not be able to deliver, there was also concern that members would somehow harm pupils with learning disabilities by being 'too disabled'. The notion of being 'too disabled' is central to this thesis. Bringing together 'people with learning disabilities' and 'leadership' creates for some an oxymoron; a combination of elements that appear to be contradictory. People with learning disabilities are defined all too often in terms of what they cannot do; they are seen as dependent, lacking agency and power. Leaders, on the other hand, are often defined precisely through their ability to act independently, taking responsibility and make important decisions. In many respects, the idealised notion of the leader epitomises notions of power and agency. In saying DIY members were too disabled to do drama

leadership, school staff presented a viewpoint that the combination of people with learning disabilities and leadership would not and could not work.

This experience mobilised DIY into action and since 2007 the company has sought to meet the provocation of the phrase 'too disabled' head on. The company's education and outreach work has focussed on Special Schools for a number of reasons. In the UK, whilst most children and young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) receive their education within mainstream schools, many are still educated in segregated education settings. This may be a separate Special School or College, a specific unit or segregated courses within mainstream education settings. Special Schools with pupils aged eleven and older can specialise in one of the four areas of what is termed 'special educational needs': communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; and sensory and physical needs. The combination of ableist beliefs and practices that result in this labeling and segregation will be discussed within this thesis. DIY sees it as a priority to work with children and young people with learning disabilities within these settings, who are all too often viewed in terms of what they cannot, rather than what they can, do.

At that time, DIY members had run workshops in schools, colleges and conferences, but had never undertaken long-term developmental work with schools. We felt strongly there was something distinctive that a company of performers with learning disabilities could offer young people with learning disabilities, so we approached another Special School to work in partnership on a ten-week project. Since 2007, DIY has been researching, through practice, what happens when people with learning disabilities are involved in leadership and exploring what leadership by performers with learning disabilities can look and feel like. In 2017 DIY's education and outreach team, The Friday Group, has developed twenty-seven partnership projects with Special Schools and informal education organisations, worked with over three hundred young people with learning disabilities from across the region, and used the case studies to develop training for a range of organisations. This Professional Doctorate complements DIY's very practical response to the original provocation with a focussed research study, drawing on frameworks from a range of disciplines and discourses.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study was to explore the nature and potential of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. Key objectives were to:

- Investigate models of practice of DIY Theatre Company as a case study; focussing on DIY's education programme.
- Include performers with learning disabilities as co-researchers in some elements of the research and explore participatory and inclusive research methods to enable this to happen.
- Identify key features of leadership by performers with learning disabilities, including the extent to which embodied experience and knowledge developed through performance practice can relate to development of effective models of leadership.
- Develop and describe frameworks of leadership within the context of Learning Disability Theatres.
- Consider the research in the context of Learning Disability Theatre practice nationally.
- Explore the relevance and potential of leadership by performers with learning disabilities within Learning Disability Theatres, Applied Theatre and other academic disciplines.

DIY Theatre Company

This section combines a written description, images and three short videos to offer a sense of DIY, its origins and its practice. Before reading the next section of text, I refer the reader to the following appendices:

Appendix A: The span of DIY performances presented by founder member David in 'David Remembers' www.diytheatre.org.uk/picking-up-the-threads/

Appendix B: An example of DIY's devising processes in 'The Sycamore Project' www.diytheatre.org.uk/sycamore-project/

Appendix C: A flavour of performance work created during the latter period of this research (2016) in 'Following the Thread Tour' Tweet.

<https://vimeo.com/165711248>

Appendix D: A further flavour in 'Delamere School Tweet'

<https://vimeo.com/165711455>

I have been Artistic Director of DIY since 1994 and have seen the company develop from a two-hour workshop to an independent theatre company meeting three days a week. As well as twelve performers and myself as freelance Artistic Director, the company comprises an Education and Outreach Officer, Administrator and Support Worker, and employs freelance artists on a project-by-project basis. Image A below is a section from DIY's 3 Year Plan (2016-19), which offers an overview of who is involved:



David Austin

David has been with DIY since 1994. He comes to DIY every Tuesday because he likes doing shows and performances. He likes being the narrator in "Don't Call Me Babe!" David performed with Martin as a sparky holiday rep for FAB Travel. They asked people where they would like to go on holiday.



Sue Caudle

Sue is DIY's Artistic Director. She has been involved with DIY almost from the beginning and has directed or co-directed all of DIY's performances. She works with members and artists to plan what DIY wants to achieve and to turn these visions into reality.



Angela Chadwick

Angela is a founder member of DIY and a Friday group member and on the board. She works in schools and also in the sessions which DIY leads at Lungeorby Community on Thursdays.



Robert Chadwick

Rob is on the DIY Board and helps with policies. He is part of the Friday group as well as a member of the main company. Rob is glad he decided to work with DIY because he believes in what DIY does. He thinks everyone at DIY can make a difference to the people they work with. Robert says "If you're scared of failing you're never going to succeed!"



Mark Dennison

Mark joined DIY Theatre Company in 2002. He is also a member of DIY's board. Mark likes drama. He liked the scene in "Don't Call Me Babe!" when he was the waiter putting the tablecloth on the table. He likes films like James Bond and Robin Hood. His favourite actors are Clint Eastwood, Steven Seagal and Jean Claude Van Damme.



John Doyle

John is DIY's administrator and the company secretary of the board. He does the company's paperwork and keeps track of the money.



Alex Glenn

Alex is the newest member of DIY and also the youngest. Her first show with the company is "Following the Thread". She likes our song "Follow the Thread and Woolly!"



Jenny Harris

Jenny is the Education/Outreach officer at DIY. She loves working with the Friday group and is learning from them all the time. Jenny is a board member too. She thinks DIY are great to work with.



Debbie Kelly

Debbie supports DIY on Tuesdays and Fridays. She thinks DIY are hard-working, professional and committed. She gets a lot of joy from seeing the company's achievements.



Carol Kubicki

DIY's Treasure; Carol oversees the finances, providing advice and help with budgeting and financial planning. When Carol isn't at work she can usually be found touring in her campervan, walking or cycling. Carol enjoys playing her part in making DIY Theatre the excellent company it is.

continues

Image A: DIY – Who's Who



Image A: DIY – Who's Who [continued]

At the time of writing there are three main strands of DIY's practice. Firstly, a company of actors with learning disabilities creates and tours high quality devised work. Secondly, DIY's Friday Group of leaders with learning disabilities designs, delivers and evaluates an education and outreach programme comprising projects with young people with learning disabilities and weekly workshops for adults with learning disabilities. Thirdly, DIY delivers Arts Award training and support at all five levels and is one of three organisations nationally delivering Arts Award adviser training to people working with young people with learning disabilities.

DIY receives no core funding and exists on a project by project basis. All paid roles are freelance – the Artistic Director, Administrator, Education Officer and Support Worker all work between two and three days per week, for thirty to forty weeks of the year. DIY receives funding from a range of sources including trusts and foundations and earned income. During 2017, for example, different strands of DIY's work have been funded through Lottery sources (Grants for the Arts, Awards for All, Peoples Health Trust) and commissions for training and courses (Trinity London, Curious Minds and Salford Community Learning Trust) as well as earned income through touring and training.

DIY actors and workshop leaders are not paid but are reimbursed all transport and other expenses. To date, owing to a lack of core funding, DIY has never been able to offer extended employment opportunities or security of employment to artists with learning disabilities. Within the climate existing in 2017, offering payment can cause significant disruption to people's benefits and can lead to withdrawal of any financial support from the state. Issues of payment for artists and how this relates to notions of 'professionalism' and 'quality' are of key concern to the company and will be explored in depth in Chapter Two of this thesis.

As will be explored within this thesis, DIY has similar origins to many Learning Disability Arts organisations. In 1994, two Day Centre Officers contacted a Local Authority Officer who agreed to support the group by offering rehearsal space and engaging myself as a freelance drama practitioner. Our work together began by using mainly physical, non-verbal approaches to building basic skills and a positive group dynamic. After a year, the group created a short devised play called *Open Day* (1995). The structure and presentation were simple and direct, but the approach reflected the ethos of the company today: leaving plenty of time and space to gather and explore ideas; devising and performing as an ensemble; focussing on physical performance skills; incorporating mixed media approaches; and developing work strongly influenced by members' ideas and experiences. Over time, DIY has developed from an inward-focussed, community-based group concerned to develop drama skills, confidence, group-dynamics and self-esteem, to a semi-professional company with a strong aesthetic, which undertakes a range of touring and educational work. DIY has always described itself as member-led and is now constituted as a Community Interest Company and run by a voluntary Board, over fifty per cent of which are people with learning disabilities. A copy of DIY's Three Year Plan (2016-2019) is included as an appendix (see Appendix E: Three Year Plan).

At the core of DIY is an ensemble of twelve performers with learning disabilities, which develops performances. Initially, plays like *Open Day* and *Salford Streets* were simply structured, involved actors to a large extent 'playing themselves' and were mainly performed in community venues and day centres. As actors' skills and knowledge grew, DIY began to develop productions with strong music and visual elements designed for mainstream audiences. DIY collaborated

with professional script-writers on *Ellie's Story* (2011) and *Don't Call Me Babe!* (2013), which were both for young people with learning disabilities. *Following the Thread* (2014 – 2016) was DIY's first show for young audiences with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD), which toured schools and colleges across the Greater Manchester area, and at the time of writing the company is developing a second show for PMLD audiences called *Give me Space!*

DIY's Friday Group

My main collaborators in undertaking this research have been members of DIY's Friday Group, who meet weekly to develop DIY's education and outreach programme. Membership of the group in 2013 is shown below, in Image B, a screen shot from DIY's *Leading it Our Way* publication.

DIY Theatre Company Meet the members of
the Friday Group

Tracey
 I like the key game, which is my favourite. It feels good when I get the game right.

Joan
 I did workshops at a school. The best part was that I liked the children who I worked with. I enjoy myself when I am leading. It's nice working with children. The teacher was nice too.

Sandra
 I like helping the students by gluing photos into their portfolios.

Cathy
 I am sometimes the leader. It makes me proud. I like to be the leader. People have to watch me so that they feel comfortable.

Angela
 I've learnt to use the camera more. To keep a record, it's important for the evidence. I like helping the students with their portfolios - it gets them thinking.

Anna
 I help to run workshops. We all sit round together. We do filming. I led the mirror game.

Joanne
 I enjoy being in the Friday group and being part of the team. We all stick together and we all work together.

Rob
 I am glad we started the Friday group. Fridays give us time to plan properly. I get a lot out of it. I like knowing we've helped a young person, made a difference to their lives. It's not about what you can't do but what you can do.

Image B: DIY – The Friday Group

A timeline of DIY's education and outreach work is included as an appendix (see Appendix F: DIY Education/Outreach Timeline). From 2009 to 2011, DIY developed a range of Bronze Arts Award projects with young people from throughout Greater Manchester. The success of these pilots led to the establishment of the Friday Group and built the foundation for an ambitious *Leading It...Our Way!* programme, funded through the BIG Lottery Reaching Communities Programme. During the period 2011 to 2013, DIY's Friday Group ran ten Arts Award projects with young people with learning disabilities and created a guide (see Appendix G: Leading it Our Way Publication). DIY's education and outreach projects are planned and evaluated by the whole group, and delivered by a small team comprising a non-disabled drama worker and one or two Friday Group members. Most are linked with achievement of an Arts Award. Arts Award began as a Young Arts Leaders Award in Langley School, Solihull and was subsequently developed into a qualification by Arts Council England who launched it throughout England in 2005. Qualifications are accredited through Trinity College London, the international exam board for the performing arts and English language (www.artsaward.org.uk). To date, DIY has never delivered Gold Arts Award but has extensive experience of developing projects at all other levels as follows:

Discover is an introductory award, available for anyone up to 25, in which participants take part in different arts activities, find out about artists and share discoveries with others. It is designed to be accessible to any young person.

Explore is an Entry Level Three qualification, which encourages participants to take part in different arts activities and record what inspires them, experience the work of artists and arts organisations, create art work and present their exploration to others. Discover and Explore are particularly appropriate for immersive, sensory approaches and DIY uses them primarily with children and young people with PMLD.

Bronze is a Level One qualification available for anyone between 11 and 25 which involves exploring the arts as a participant, reviewing an arts event, researching an arts inspiration and sharing an arts skill. DIY offers Bronze with young people with learning disabilities in a range of settings including Special Schools and Youth Theatres.

Silver is a Level Two qualification. The first unit focuses on arts practice and young people undertake an arts challenge, review arts events and undertake arts research. Unit two involves planning, carrying out and evaluating an arts leadership challenge. DIY uses Silver primarily working with young people with learning disabilities in transition to adulthood.

The Thesis: Overview and Structure

The above summary positions the span of this research (2011-2017) within an ongoing education and outreach programme. My thesis does not aim to present an exemplary period of development, nor a series of case studies as to 'how to do' leadership, but rather, a series of moments of reflection on a longer journey towards more open understandings of what leadership shaped with people with learning disabilities can and could be.

Chapter 1 Setting the Scene comprises a review of literature that has informed this research. It draws on Critical Disability Studies to explore the marginalisation of people with learning disabilities in society and culture and uses the lens of Michel Foucault to explore the ways in which concepts of 'normalcy' and 'individualisation' impact on performers with learning disabilities. The chapter establishes a focus on Critical Leadership Studies, which problematises traditional, heroic models of the leader as a charismatic individual and offers a framework for viewing and describing leadership as processual, shared and relational.

Chapter 2. Methodology in-the-Making opens with a consideration of the political issues inherent in developing research both with and about people with learning disabilities. It goes on to describe the practice-based and mixed methods approach adopted, including phenomenological reflections on moments of practice, arts-based Inclusive Research methods, semi-structured interviews and live drama workshops. The main impetus has been to quilt together different voices; my own as the practitioner – researcher, the embodied knowledge of DIY workshop leaders and the views and experiences of others working within Learning Disability Theatres. Research conducted at the interface of, and drawing on, the analytical lenses of three academic disciplines – Applied Theatre, Critical

Disability Studies and Critical Leadership Studies – opens up a new ‘methodology in-the-making’, which has potential to inform future research within all three disciplines.

Chapter 3. Leadership in-the-Making positions our research within the context of the learning disability arts sector. It draws on semi-structured interviews with representatives of eight learning disability arts organisations to identify three dominant forms of leadership: organisational, pedagogical and artistic. Moments from the first Creative Minds conference, a major national initiative coordinated by learning disability arts organisation Carousel (Brighton, 2014), offer a focus for considering the performative nature of leadership by artists with learning disabilities and moments from a residential course with Oily Cart Theatre Company (Ashford, 2014), offer a starting point for considering the complex inter-relationship of heroic and relational perspectives on leadership.

Chapter 4. In the Moment focuses on a series of defining moments from outreach projects co-facilitated by adult performers with learning disabilities. By adopting a relational and dialogical perspective, the challenges and potential of stretching leadership are considered and the particular synergies between relational perspectives on leadership and applied theatre are explored. The chapter concludes with observations and reflections from two live workshops, which were co-led by a small group of adults with learning disabilities working with a group of young people with learning disabilities.

The Conclusion offers an overview of each chapter and a summary of the main findings of the research. It outlines some of the key limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research, practice and policy in this area.

The thesis explores what happens when we extend our view beyond normative traditional notions of the ‘ideal’ leader and consider leadership from a relational perspective. What emerges is a broader perspective on leadership, which includes shared, dialogical models based on inter-dependence and collaboration. The reader is invited to reconsider their notions of what drama facilitation is or should be and to open up new ways of viewing and creating drama leadership.

Chapter One: Setting the Scene

Introduction

The overall picture of Learning Disability Theatres in England at the time of writing (2017) is varied and wide-ranging, comprising a small number of high profile companies with national and international reputations, a range of semi-professional companies and several community-based organisations. The term Learning Disability Theatres is itself contentious. Whilst it potentially offers a useful sense of shared identity, values and practice, historically, the label of 'learning difficulties' has been viewed as almost entirely negative. In this thesis I have chosen to use the term Learning Disability Theatres, and at the same time to critically examine the 'norms' this term sets up in relation to theatre made by performers with learning disabilities. In doing so, notions of difference and diversity are presented as affirming and positive as opposed to expressing lack or deficit. As Colin Hambrook, in his review of the Ipswich Creative Minds conference (2015) in *Disability Arts Online* notes:

Some of the conversation was about wanting to do away with the disability context: to see an equal playing field. These discussions seemed to mirror some of the work presented, aspiring to traditional forms of dance and theatre. But why aspire to being "normal"? As poet and stand-up Allan Sutherland says "Why lower your standards?" (Hambrook, 2015).

This chapter comprises a review of the literature that has influenced my thesis and introduces key concepts that form the foundations for later chapters. The first section offers a brief historical overview, which contextualises key debates and issues within Learning Disability Theatres in England at the time of writing. The second part draws on Critical Disability Studies to explore the marginalisation of people with learning disabilities in society and culture, drawing on aspects of Michel Foucault's work to explore the ways in which concepts of 'normalcy' and 'individualisation' impact on the identities of performers and theatre-makers with learning disabilities. The third section adopts a Critical Leadership perspective to focus on non-traditional, post-heroic leadership models and relate these to leadership development within the cultural sector.

An Introduction to Learning Disability Theatres

Some of those involved in Learning Disability Theatres believe the label brings with it a perception of low quality that they wish to avoid, whilst others see it as an important part of their identity and something they choose to signal overtly in publicity and marketing. Jon Palmer and Richard Hayhow identify Learning Disability Theatre as an out-dated and potentially negative term, which ‘does little to encourage audiences to seriously engage with these actors’ work’ (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 3). Matt Hargrave describes theatres of learning disability as ‘suggestive of a club to which few of its members wish to belong – or at least, of a club in a perpetual tension about how to refer to its membership’ (Hargrave, 2015: 22). This is by no means a new debate. In 1997, Hayhow prepared a report for Arts Council England on the training needs of those involved in Learning Disability Theatres and noted that whilst most interviewees said they would value the sense of mutual support that being part of a theatre and learning disability movement could give, others argued it could be counter-productive and encourage stereotyping (Hayhow, 1997).

This debate cannot be considered without referencing the ways in which people with learning disabilities have been labelled, classified and categorised throughout history. In her publication *The Faces of Intellectual Disability* (2010) Licia Carlson explores some of the tensions that have existed in early descriptions of people with learning disabilities, which persist to the present day. She identifies the label of learning disability as inherently heterogeneous, unstable and prone to generating prototypes or generalisations (for example the idea that all people with Down syndrome are ‘the same’ rather than unique individuals). She states ‘Perhaps it is precisely *because of*, not in spite of, its heterogeneity, instability, ability to generate prototype effects and its place within various constellations of power that it survived for so long’ (Carlson, 2010: 101). Carlson describes how, at times, learning disability has been viewed as *quantitative* (for example, moderate or profound) and at other times as *qualitative* (i.e. there are different ‘types’ of learning disabilities) (ibid: 28). At other times, learning disability has been seen as *organic* (in terms of nature) and sometimes as *non-organic* (in terms of nurture) (ibid: 34). Learning Disability has been viewed as *static* (something which cannot be improved by external influences or treatment) and at other times as *dynamic*

(something which can be changed through medical intervention, therapy or education) (ibid: 36). Lastly, Learning Disability has been viewed both as *visible* (something which can be seen in people's appearance) and as *invisible* (for example, IQ tests may result in someone being labelled as having learning disability) (ibid: 46). Carlson's descriptions illustrate the multiplicity of frames of reference used in 'naming' learning disability and how they are inextricably linked with the ways in which people have been, and continue to be, treated and viewed within society.

Carlson's analysis serves to remind us that people with learning disabilities are not an homogenous group and they do not all have the same experiences. Similarly, Learning Disability Theatres comprise very different artists, practices and objectives. The label of 'learning difficulties' has historically been used to stigmatise people in terms of lack and deficit, so it is not surprising that many cultural organisations are reticent to use the term. However, labels and titles can also offer a way of signifying shared concerns and values, and bringing together those affected by problematic definitions and their associated discriminations to network and to lobby. In the current absence of another appropriate phrase, I have used the term Learning Disability Theatres throughout my thesis, to identify what I consider to be a distinct field of practice and a significant body of shared knowledge that needs to be explored and articulated. Carlson states that it is possible to be critical of existing ideas and assumptions about intellectual disability, while at the same time maintaining the category itself. She observes that to argue against *classification*, does not remove the need for the label to exist and warns that if we do not distinguish between disabled and non-disabled experience, 'there is a danger that the other is obscured, that the intellectually disabled lose face, or disappear' (Carlson, 2010: 193). The term Learning Disability Theatres, acknowledges the particular experiences of many people with learning disabilities and locates the research within the context of difference and diversity. Through acknowledging and valuing difference, understandings of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres can make a significant contribution to understandings of diversity, which are of central importance to the cultural sector and society as a whole.

The use of the plural Learning Disability Theatres echoes Hargrave's term 'theatres of learning disability', and his assertion that 'theatre is an art form both supple and robust enough to admit all forms of human variation' (Hargrave, 2015: 14). That said, much published research to date has focussed on a small number of better known, more-established companies like Mind the Gap (Bradford), Shysters (now folded but formerly based in Coventry), Dark Horse (Huddersfield, formerly Full Body and the Voice) and Back to Back (Geelong, Australia). This literature is crucial in developing understandings of Learning Disability Theatres but does not fully reflect the complex, wide-ranging and inter-connected nature of the sector, as I will explore in Chapters Three and Four.

The Origins of Learning Disability Theatres

A brief history of Learning Disability Theatres in the UK reveals a combination of social and artistic influences. In the early 1980s, the introduction of Community Care, the British policy of moving disabled people from institutions into their own homes, coincided with a period when a number of artists and arts organisations were developing socially and politically engaged practice. As Dave Calvert states 'long-stay hospitals were virtually obsolete, previously incarcerated people with learning disabilities were returning to their communities and the Care in the Community Act was on the horizon' (Calvert, 2009: 75). People with learning disabilities had been segregated for decades with very limited access to creative and cultural opportunities. Increased availability of funding for creative work tackling social inequalities offered exciting opportunities for theatre practitioners interested in developing participatory practice with this marginalised group. Calvert quotes Allan Sutherland's *Chronology of Disability Arts* (2005) in *Disability Arts Online* to suggest that the emergence of theatre and learning disability in Britain dates from 1982, with Strathcona Theatre Company's first public performance. Strathcona was based in London and began as a project in Strathcona Day Centre, but grew to become a national theatre company of performers with learning disabilities, devising and touring physical theatre pieces. The company folded in 2005.

In order to further understand this point in time and to position it socially and politically, it is useful to consider a longer history of those with learning disabilities in the UK. The Langdon Down Museum of Learning Disability website (<https://langdondownmuseum.org.uk>, accessed June 11th 2017) offers an informative timeline for Learning Disability history. The following paragraph summarises key points on this timeline to give a sense of the ways in which people with learning disabilities have historically been viewed, labelled and treated in the UK, from the 1880s to the 1970s

In 1886, for the first time, the 'Idiots Act' made a clear distinction between 'lunatics' on the one side and 'idiots' and 'imbeciles' on the other. In 1913, the Mental Deficiency Act required Local Authorities to maintain 'mental deficiency' institutions, using the terms 'idiot', 'feeble-minded' and 'moral imbecile' to describe people with mental health issues and people with learning disabilities. Through the 1930s and 1940s the Eugenics Movement was at its height, which sought to remove all social and physical 'deviants', including 'mental defectives' from the gene pool through voluntary sterilisation. Eugenics was discredited after World War Two but a Eugenicist agenda was still in evidence in local and national policies throughout the 1940s. By 1953 nearly half of NHS hospital beds were for those with mental illness or 'mental defect' and until the 1970s the majority of people with learning disabilities were segregated in Mental Handicap Hospitals. In the late 1960s and early 1970s scandals at Ely, Farleigh, South Ockendon and Normansfield hospitals exposed the ways people with learning disabilities were being treated in the UK. There was public outrage and pressure increased to close the Mental Handicap Hospitals and re-house people in communities. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970) set down specific provisions to improve access and support for people with disabilities and placed responsibilities on Local Authorities for the provision of welfare services and housing.

The 1980s were therefore a time of tremendous change for people with learning disabilities. Calvert identifies Mind the Gap, Strathcona, Lung Has, The Lawnmowers and Heart n Soul as 'among a wave of companies in the early 1980s to adopt the social model and extend the concern with identity politics to people with learning disabilities' (Calvert, 2015: 128). On its website Creative Minds (<http://creativemindsproject.org.uk>, accessed 11th July 2017), a national learning

disability arts organisation based in Brighton, adds Amici Dance Company, Carousel, Corali Dance Company, Firebird Theatre Company and Drake Music Society to the list of companies emerging during this period.

The majority of organisations started with a community arts ethos. The community arts movement emerged in the UK during the 1960s and was woven, according to Owen Kelly, from three distinct strands: a passionate interest in creating new forms of creative expression, the movement of groups of fine artists out of galleries into the streets and the emergence of political activists who viewed creativity as an essential tool for political struggle (Kelly, 1984: 11). Some community arts companies had a highly politicised agenda, as expressed by Another Standard's publication *Culture and Democracy*, which stated that 'We believe that socialism is built through a process of deepening and extending democracy. Movement towards cultural democracy is its core' (Another Standard, 1986: 12). The community arts movement raised questions about the role of art in society and saw cultural democracy as a means of empowering those who did not usually have access to the creation of art. To cite Another Standard once again 'The ideas that constitute cultural democracy both enable and depend upon direct participation, and take as their aim the building and sustenance of a society in which people are free to come together to produce, distribute and receive the cultures they choose' (Another Standard, 1986: 40). In general, community artists sought to be participatory and democratic and develop projects in partnership with participants from geographical communities and communities of interest deemed to be disadvantaged or disenfranchised (Heddon and Milling, 2006: 131). People with learning disabilities, many of whom had lived for decades in institutions, represented a marginalised community of interest, and a number of projects sought to introduce new skills and enable people to express ideas and experiences through theatre. Strathcona, for example, evolved from a drama group in a North Wembley Day Centre (Strathcona Day Centre) in 1982. The two drama tutors, Janet Lyth and Joan Green, applied for funding and subsequently formed an independent company (Bird and Caudle, 1998: 13). Carousel, an arts organisation based in Brighton, was initially set up in 1982 by a group of artists who had been at college together and started small scale workshops in Day Centres (Bird and Caudle, 1998: 16). Tim Wheeler, co-founder and former Artistic

Director of Mind the Gap describes his first engagement, as a student, with a long-stay hospital that was closing down and ‘decanting’ people into the community, as follows:

What linked the artist and the patient was that they were outsiders, but with one important distinction: the artist was in the hospital by choice, the patient by force. At the time the only way that learning disabled people could engage with theatre was as a therapy. This felt inadequate. I became fascinated with how to use theatre as a means of raising the voice of learning disabled people (Hargrave, 2015: Foreword x)

Offering an alternative historical trajectory for this emerging practice, which maps with the concept of the ‘outsider’, Palmer and Hayhow locate the origins of Learning Disability Theatre within devised and experimental theatre traditions (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 6). Devising, as defined by Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling, is a process of ‘creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script’ (Heddon and Milling, 2006: 3). Heddon and Milling explore the emergence of devising within the identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s, with the arrival of a number of collaborative companies with an anti-establishment and anti-hierarchy ethos. For marginalised groups, collaborative devising was a means of ‘wresting the mode of production from the grip of dominating institutions and dominant ideologies – as an appropriate model of agency for self-representation and a process by which to make visible that which had been previously unseen and unspoken’ (Heddon and Milling, 2006: 17). Devised, experimental theatre offered an opportunity for people with learning disabilities, who had been silenced in institutions, to express and validate their own perspectives and experiences. However, whilst Learning Disability Theatres emerged from the overlapping legacies of community arts and experimental theatre practices, they developed significantly later. Learning Disability Theatres are absent from Heddon and Milling’s *Devising Performance* other than for a short reference to the beginnings of Australian company Back to Back (Heddon and Milling, 2006: 135). As Palmer and Hayhow comment, this means that Learning Disability Theatres have always, to some extent, existed outside the frames of reference of devised and political theatre:

In the greater scheme of radical theatre, learning disability, then, was the last-comer, with the most politically active companies all but abandoned by

the time learning disability was publicly acknowledged, and with the political impetus to bring theatre to the people now channelled for the most part in the community and therapeutic work (Palmer & Hayhow, 2008: 26)

Developments in arts funding in the UK during the mid-1990s contributed significantly to the growth of existing Learning Disability Theatres and the establishment of new companies. A range of Lottery programmes introduced by Arts Council England shifted funding priorities from capital development to promoting access and participation (Tomlin, 2015: 29). Among the first beneficiaries of significant awards were Mind the Gap and Strathcona (Tomlin, 2015: 29). Calvert identifies a second wave of companies that emerged during the late 1990s, including The Shysters, Full Body and the Voice, No Limits and Blue Apple. Invisible within the limited published literature is the range of smaller groups that grew alongside the larger companies during the 1990s. DIY was one of these, formed in 1994, as collaboration between a day centre and a Salford Local Authority Arts Officer. DIY, like many similar groups, was successful in achieving support through Arts Council England's funding schemes such as Arts for Everyone, Awards for All and Regional Arts Lottery Programme. As Hargrave highlights, Learning Disability Theatres were part of a shifting political context as 'New Labour's cultural policy made explicit the social job that art should do: to become a weapon against social exclusion; theatre and learning disability benefitted as art became both a cultural symbol of, and a practical tool with which to tackle, social inequality' (Hargrave, 2015: 82). The emergence of Learning Disability Theatres during the 1980s and 1990s was influenced, therefore, by a complex combination of social, economic and political factors, which provide the background to an exploration of some of the key issues and debates considered in the following section.

Scoping the Sector

Whilst little was published about Learning Disability Theatres in England during the 1980s, 1990s and the early part of the twenty first century, a number of unpublished scoping exercises were undertaken during this period. Although the topic of leadership is notable by its absence, recurrent debates that emerge from this 'grey' literature are very relevant to a consideration of leadership in 2017. In particular, the balancing of concerns for both aesthetic quality and social benefit,

feelings of isolation and vulnerability of the sector emerge as strong themes. These are considered below and will be revisited throughout this thesis.

In 1997, Richard Hayhow of Open Theatre (at that time Artistic Director of The Shysters) undertook an evaluation of the training needs of theatre companies working with learning disabled actors (Hayhow, 1997). Companies involved included Acting Up, The Ark, Carousel, Fountain Theatre Company, Heart n Soul, In the Boat, Kaleidoscope, The Lawnmowers, Mind the Gap, Other Voices and Strathcona. The stances and starting points of companies differed greatly; some concentrated on everyone's right to a voice, others on exploring issues and others on enjoyment and entertainment. Most companies rejected the idea of theatre as therapy, emphasising that they wanted to produce work that was as professional and artistically interesting as mainstream theatre. Working methods had much in common with community arts and were often inspired by experimental theatre. For example, most work was devised and multi-media and productions were often inspired by personal experience, myth and legend. Hayhow identified there was little opportunity for networking as most organisations had developed in isolation with limited resources (Hayhow, 1997).

In 1998 a piece of research entitled *Above the Parapet* was undertaken by myself and Jude Bird with Blue Eyed Soul, Independence, North West Disability Arts Forum, Masque Theatre Company, Strathcona, Carousel/High Spin, Jabadao, Mind the Gap, Anjali and Full Circle Arts. The report identified that organisations tended to be driven by one person, often a freelance practitioner, who worked largely in isolation and had overall responsibility artistically, managerially and administratively. There was little networking amongst companies and no clear national voice or lobbying organisation. There appeared to be a general lack of understanding or support for learning disability performance within funding structures and even relatively established companies struggled to achieve core funding (Bird and Caudle: 1998). In 2005, I undertook a further piece of research entitled *Taking Ourselves Seriously* with The Shysters, MENCAP, Full Body and the Voice, Mind the Gap, In the Boat, Lung Ha's and Oily Cart, which identified definitions of quality and professionalism as key concerns. Opportunities for vocational training for people with learning disabilities, particularly in higher education, had historically been extremely limited and theatre training was seen as

a priority to increase and validate the skills of performers with learning disabilities. A number of companies were exploring possibilities for collaboration with mainstream companies, as a way of increasing professionalism and being taken seriously by the theatre industry. Collaboration with professional writers was seen as opening up new opportunities to established Learning Disability Theatres as well as to professional playwrights (Caudle, 2006).

In 2005, Jo Verrent undertook a mapping exercise in the North West of England, commissioned by Arts Council England. This found over a hundred groups and organisations working solely or predominantly with people with learning disabilities – a surprisingly high number, even to someone who works in the region. The dominant art-form was drama but artistic standards were varied and opportunities for progression limited. Verrent asked: 'What are the processes, structures or interventions available to enable those with a desire and talent to move forward and gain skills, experience and opportunity?' (Verrent, 2005: 37). Few groups were fully independent; most had a hosting organisation within the statutory or voluntary sector. Key issues were lack of sustainable income, lack of defined artistic vision, limited training for staff, limited capacity and lack of networking. Of particular note in terms of this research, Verrent identified that disabled people involved in many of the groups demonstrated control over artistic product and were involved in some way in developing artistic vision, organisational structure, forward-planning and governance.

The picture that emerges across these scoping studies is of a diversity of practice combining concern for both aesthetic quality and social benefit. Feelings of isolation, vulnerability and lack of networking were apparent in all studies, reflecting the dislocation of the sector and the lack of an effective regional voice. Verrent identified that artists with learning disabilities were having a strong influence on artistic products within a number of organisations, but leadership in relation to governance was identified as a major challenge. The lack of attention paid to leadership within these scoping documents is notable, particularly in light of its prominence in the sector at the time of writing. Whilst training and professional development were recurring themes, this did not include leadership training for, or workshop facilitation by, people with learning disabilities. Of particular interest is the fact that governance structures expected by funders were perceived to be

preventing people with learning disabilities from taking an active part in management committees. In *Above the Parapet*, one of the main questions asked was regarding governance. No examples of organisations led by people with learning disabilities were identified and whilst a number of organisations expressed interest in involving people with learning disabilities on their Boards, representatives identified that traditional models of governance were inaccessible to people with learning disabilities. The report noted

a conflict between the board structures presently expected by funders and other organisations and the nature of Learning Disability Arts companies. The legal accountability and other requirements placed on Board members actively discourage people with a learning disability taking an active part in a management committee (Bird and Caudle, 1998).

It is worth noting that DIY has always been a member-led organisation and it is possible that a number of other smaller companies, which would describe themselves as following a disability-led model, were not included in these reports. Issues of governance and the notion of 'disabled-led' are now prominent in Learning Disability Theatres in the UK, and the complexities and opportunities offered by the term will be considered later in this chapter.

Therapy and Advocacy

Most published literature regarding Learning Disability Theatres to date has emerged from therapeutic or advocacy perspectives. This literature reflects a very different ethos from that expressed by representatives of Learning Disability Theatres included in this study. Writing from a therapeutic perspective, Anna Chesner, for example, refers to people with learning disabilities as 'a client group' and describes her practice as 'clinical work'. Her language reflects a medical model of disability, as opposed to the predominantly social models adopted within Learning Disability Theatre. For example, assessment is described as 'an opportunity to begin to explore how the client presents, what her needs may be and what therapeutic goals would be appropriate. Second, it aims to establish whether dramatherapy is an appropriate treatment for the client' (Chesner, 1995:15).

Although writings from a therapeutic perspective are of limited relevance here, literature written from an advocacy perspective is of particular relevance to

this research. Advocacy seeks to ensure that those who are most vulnerable in society, are able to have their voices heard regarding issues that are important to them. Reflection on a specific publication undertaken by the Psychology Department of Bolton Institute, highlights the limitations of some research into Learning Disability Theatres undertaken from a social sciences perspective (Moore and Goodley, 1999). In the report, commissioned by Salford and Trafford Local Authorities, Michelle Moore and Dan Goodley articulate many ideas of relevance to this research. They note the extent to which theatre offered a space within which company members could offer instrumental (practical) and expressive (emotional) support to each other, and described how 'numerous shows of encouragement and positive feedback between performers highlighted the emotional support that was offered through Company membership' (Moore and Goodley, 1999: 163). Their report suggested that performance could offer actors a new identity, which was not reduced by societal preconceptions and highlighted the role of physical communication within theatre, stating that 'dramatic actions are immensely accessible, enabling quick comprehension and reaction, whereas words are often difficult, slippery things that fail to capture thoughts, experiences, aims and ambitions' (Moore and Goodley, 1999: 145).

From the outset, however, a gap existed between the aims of Local Authority representatives who commissioned the report and those of the researchers. I was a member of the steering group formed to guide the research, comprising Local Authority representatives and practitioners. When the researchers were critical of some of the power relations observed and argued that the rigour of the research, both in terms of process and dissemination, would be compromised if these criticisms were not included in the final report, members of the steering group argued that their inclusion would threaten an already under-valued area of work. In the end, the most critical sections were removed, but later appeared in a book published by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD), the introduction to which highlights the researchers' frustrations and signals a perceived difference in values between themselves and the commissioners. The researchers commented that 'we accept that our findings push forward a particular social theory that is about agitating for change. We wanted this tension in our work because we place high value on promoting the

rights of people with learning difficulties and our research sponsors argued that they did too' (Goodley and Moore, 2002: 26).

The experience described above took place several years ago but I have included this detailed example to offer an historical context to some of the limitations of previous social sciences research undertaken into Learning Disability Theatres. DIY is included in the BILD publication under the pseudonym *On Our Own Theatre Company* and a brief consideration of the narrative is illuminating, in the perspectives on research practice and Learning Disability Theatres it reveals. In this publication, the core activities of DIY/On Our Own Theatre Company were identified as relating to advocacy. Whilst Learning Disability Theatres often do increase self-advocacy, to view them as if it were advocacy groups significantly simplifies and misrepresents the complex processes and negotiations involved in making theatre. At the time DIY was still part of Social Services and the chapter raised concerns regarding the 'disturbing' element of a project that included training Social Services staff in drama-based approaches. It identified 'A real need to avoid any practice that potentially subverts the priorities of people with learning difficulties and reinforces provider dominance over group members and their activities' (Goodley and Moore, 2002: 152). Goodley's and Moore's observations of power relationships amongst disabled and non-disabled participants are enlightening but limiting. For example, an understanding of the high levels of discipline, skills development and ensemble-working involved in creating a piece of devised theatre are totally absent from their analysis, presumably because they are social scientists and not creative practitioners. Goodley and Moore seem aware of this when they acknowledge that they 'spent a great deal of time anguishing over the inadequacies of our ability to convey, through this report, a picture of the rich world of performing arts which we were to encounter during the research journey' (Moore and Goodley, 1999: 5). They state 'it is quite impossible to put into written words the obvious enjoyment of playing and commitment to getting into roles that were displayed by performers' (Goodley and Moore, 2002: 143). This story is not unique – many arts organisations contract academics to validate their practice and this can be a frustrating process, often because researchers are not able to take sufficient account of creative processes. Sometimes, theatre practitioners overcome this frustration by becoming actively

involved in research themselves (Smith and Dean, 2009: 42). Practitioner-researchers are in an ideal position to combine practice and analytical research approaches to the study of Learning Disability Theatres. I explore my own response to this challenge in the following chapter, through a description of the methodology-in-the-making developed to support my own practitioner research.

Beyond Binaries

During the past decade, a small number of writers have highlighted the imperative to consider and articulate the nature and value of Learning Disability Theatres in terms of aesthetics. Palmer and Hayhow identify an historical lack of literature about Learning Disability Theatres, observing that although there is a growing body of literature on drama therapy and other therapeutic applications of drama, 'professional theatre made by actors with learning disabilities seems barely acknowledged, indeed invisible' (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 2). Hargrave similarly expresses frustration regarding the limited discourse to date and seeks to initiate 'a new critical space in which the learning disabled artists and their collaborators can be evaluated and appreciated as art, rather than advocacy or therapy' (Hargrave, 2015: 6). Whilst these publications share a conviction that greater understanding of artistic practices is needed, consideration of the writings of Palmer and Hayhow and Hargrave reveals a juxtaposition between a view of aesthetics based on 'authenticity' and one based on the primacy of theatre as 'craft'.

Palmer and Hayhow set out to describe the unique character and qualities of Learning Disability Theatres. Their premise is that good theatre requires authenticity and that professional actors with learning disabilities have a particular capacity for achieving this feature within performances. They characterise an actor with a learning disability as having a particular kind of authenticity, which comes from 'a lack of self-consciousness on the performers' part; a lack of overt technique; a sense of being truly in the moment' (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 44). According to Palmer and Hayhow, performers with learning disabilities are particularly able to perform in a way that rings 'true' for audiences, owing to an ability to successfully merge actor and role. Training is essential to enable actors to access this authenticity within performance. Palmer and Hayhow assert that

'The theatrical material is already there within the actors, lying in wait as impulses and emotions in their imaginations and physicality, which we aim to creatively convert into gestures, characters, stories and images' (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 108).

Hargrave similarly asserts the need for a new aesthetics of Learning Disability Theatres and highlights the reductive nature of research that focuses on instrumental value: 'theatre, like other art forms, resists the kind of displacement that occurs when it is applied to achieving tangible social outcomes' (Hargrave, 2015: 7). In particular, he highlights the limits of Disability Arts and Disability Studies as frameworks for considering the aesthetics of Learning Disability Theatres. However, he specifically juxtaposes the 'authentic' model offered by Palmer and Hayhow with his own poetics and warns of the dangers of concentrating on a singular performance style, which does not reflect the complexity, range and diversity of practice taking place. He asserts:

This 'authentic' model represents a desire to replace other models, such as the social model of disability, which reduces the aesthetic dimension to a by-product of political justice. In doing so it reduces the disabled artist to a representation of cultural authenticity – an absolute Other – who can only create certain types of work (Hargrave, 2015: 227)

In contrast, Hargrave offers a view of the performer as a trained theatre labourer and craftsperson and argues for a poetics of theatres of learning disability that is supple and reflexive, values cognitive diversity as a form of human variation and encompasses a full range of theatrical forms. He asserts that by introducing a more responsive aesthetic, researchers and audiences are able to re-examine the nature of performance and the actor, stating that 'Disability undercuts, doubles, hijacks, or slips a veil around a performance so that one's expectations are turned upside down: the familiar made strange; the strange familiar; the commonplace uncanny' (Hargrave, 2015: 212).

I am wary of the potential essentialism of Palmer and Hayhow's 'authentic' model, which threatens to characterise actors with learning disabilities as having an underlying and unchanging 'essence' which can be accessed through theatre. My own perspective, however, is that the tension between these publications is as much about different types of writing and audiences as it is about ideological

differences. Palmer and Hayhow speak primarily about their own experiences as theatre-makers to other practitioners. The central section of their book focuses on techniques introduced within *The Shysters* and *Full Body and the Voice*, and through describing a journey from forming an ensemble, to creating a piece, to entering a studio as professional performers, they offer insights into specific approaches they have developed over several years of practice. In contrast, Hargrave is speaking to an academic audience and his writing is therefore framed by complex philosophical and theoretical frameworks which are largely absent from Palmer and Hayhow's mainly descriptive writing. These writers are at the vanguard of writing about Learning Disability Theatres and as an increasing number of academics and practitioners engage with debates around the aesthetics of Learning Disability Theatres, the range of perspectives and literature on this subject will increase. Practitioner-researchers, speaking to both practitioner and the research communities, have the potential to make an important contribution to this increasing body of work.

Another binary established within writing on Learning Disability Theatres in the twenty-first century is that of amateur versus professional. As identified within the scoping literature reviewed above, Learning Disability Theatres have always balanced concerns for social benefit and aesthetic value. Writing in 2015, Hargrave describes the journey Learning Disability Theatre company Mind the Gap has made, from emphasising social benefit to focussing on aesthetic judgement. The company has developed from running workshops in day centres to a high profile company with an international reputation, which tours mainstream theatre venues. Hargrave characterises this journey as demonstrating 'a shift in ideology from a community theatre company concerned with participation by a marginalised sector of the population to a company concerned with the creation of art' (Hargrave, 2015: 162). The view presented here is that as the company has grown and developed, its social agenda has receded as its aesthetic agenda has become more prominent.

In her report, *Separate Doors*, Vanessa Brooks makes the distinction between community activity, which 'gives a forum for issues and experiences, offers learning opportunities, is social and enjoyable and provides all the positives of performance without the many pressures', and professional work, which is

defined as 'work adhering to known high quality standards as a consequence of skills acquisition, reflection and learning and / or experience' (Brooks, 2016: 21). Brooks considers it essential that professional performers with learning disabilities are seen on our stages and screens in order to reflect the diversity of society and identifies the key role of a small number of established theatre companies and directors to make this happen. According to Brooks it is important to distinguish between professional and amateur work because 'The label "professional" contradicts crushingly when misplaced' (Brooks, 2016: 9). Like Brooks, Hayhow and Palmer associate the concept of the 'amateur' with 'low quality' and the notion of 'professional' with 'high quality':

an inauthentic or "poor" performance from an actor with a learning disability risks the actor, the entire cast and their work as a whole being dismissed as a charitable event or public spectacle better left to the drama therapy room – in effect barring actors with learning disabilities from professional status and leaving the audience completely unchanged" (Palmer and Hayhow, 2008: 54)

The concept of professionalism is highly complex within Learning Disability Theatres. The majority of performers, by dint of their social position, the complexities of the benefits system and unpredictability of employment opportunities, remain unpaid or are paid at a lower rate than their non-disabled peers. In the absence of clear distinctions, it appears that companies seek to set themselves apart, by establishing binaries of 'professional' and 'amateur'. However, these terms are, in fact, much more complex and inter-connected within Learning Disability Theatres than much existing literature indicates. Hargrave problematises the professional/amateur binary and describes it as 'the parallax gap that haunts the poetics of theatre and learning disability' (Hargrave, 2015: 218). He highlights the close affinity and inter-dependency of the terms professional and amateur in the context of Learning Disability Theatres, stating that 'both are the uncanny double of the other: the amateur envies the professional her status, while the professional needs to distance herself from those who are performing her function, potentially as effectively' (ibid: 219). My own view is that whilst some practitioners seek to distance themselves from others by using binaries like 'social' versus 'aesthetic' and 'amateur' versus 'professional', such binaries do not fully reflect the current complexity and inter-connectedness of

Learning Disability Theatres in the UK. These binaries have dominated discussions within Learning Disability Theatres for decades, as evidenced by the scoping studies cited above. My thesis acknowledges the importance of debates around quality and professionalism within Learning Disability Theatres, but shows how these become problematised once considered in relation to issues and practices of leadership.

Firstly, it questions the notion of a movement from social to aesthetic as a linear, progressive journey. An example that counters this perspective is offered by Mind the Gap Theatre Company. When Hargrave described Mind the Gap's journey from 'social benefit' to focussing on 'aesthetic judgement', as quoted above, the then Artistic Director of the company had worked for many years to establish its professional touring work, based predominantly on Classic plays and novels. As Hargrave highlights, aesthetic concerns were to the fore and social concerns were less prominent. In 2017, working with a different Artistic Director, Mind the Gap is touring two productions involving casts of performers with learning disabilities – *Mia*, which considers people with learning disabilities and parenthood and *Contained*, which is structured around the lived experiences and stories of a particular company of actors with learning disabilities. As will be explored in Chapter Three, most Learning Disability Theatres balance social and aesthetic concerns and the nature of this balance changes over time and according to funding, policy and staff changes. Research into leadership within Learning Disability theatres similarly needs to consider both artistic and social perspectives and to recognise that these perspectives shift over time.

Secondly, notions of low and high quality as being synonymous with 'amateur' and 'professional' respectively are over-simplified, and divisive. In this respect, my thesis draws on the framework provided by Francois Matarasso in his essay 'Creative Progression'. Matarasso explores the meaning and assessment of quality in relation to the focus on 'excellence' within British cultural policy discourse. He challenges the tendency for arts organisations to use the term 'high quality' as if it were an objective term:

The problem with these statements, and similar ones found in the grant applications, evaluations and annual reports of many arts organisations, is that they use an objective term, 'quality', in place of a subjective term,

'good'. In doing so, they obscure, however unintentionally, the need to define the criteria against which a subjective term must be assessed. In philosophy – and it is impossible to talk about the value of art without recourse to philosophy – quality is a characteristic of things: it does not determine their value (Matarasso, 2013: 4).

Matarasso argues that because the arts are subjective, the quality of projects can only ever be relative and defined in relation to a project's stated goals. In problematising notions of quality, I do not deny that they are of crucial importance within Learning Disability Theatres. I am however concerned that restrictive notions of quality can serve to exclude rather than include, and I challenge the notion that only those companies that label themselves 'professional' are developing valuable, important practice. This relates to leadership within Learning Disability Theatres, as much as it does to other areas of practice within this complex and diverse sector.

Finally, this thesis questions the over-simplification of the amateur/professional binary. Published literature to date has tended to focus on larger, better funded organisations, which masks much of the theatre practice taking place. In particular, a range of 'semi-professional' companies comprising skilled performers and a 'paying public' are not included. Semi-professional companies often work with a more diverse range of people than professional companies, who tend to work with performers with moderate learning disabilities. Through including a wider community of practice, I highlight the learning that can emerge from considering practice involving a greater diversity of performers with learning disabilities.

Learning Disability Theatres, Knowledge and Power

Much of the literature reviewed in the previous section asserts the transformative nature of Learning Disabilities Theatres. Hargrave, for example, highlights its potential to challenge perceptions of actors with learning disabilities because 'It blurs boundaries between "disabled" and "non-disabled". It forces us to put these terms in quotes and it shakes our understanding of terms such as good or bad, normal or abnormal' (Hargrave, 2009: 53). My thesis aims to explore the potential for leadership within Learning Disability Theatres to shake our understandings of what is 'normal and 'abnormal', and asserts that to challenge

these notions requires an awareness of the social and historical context within which Learning Disability Theatres are located. The issues raised by the Langdon Down Museum of Learning Disability timeline summarised above, were not resolved by 1970. The timeline continues to 2011, with the Winterbourne View Hospital scandal, when a review prompted by a BBC *Panorama* investigation revealed severe neglect and abuse at Winterbourne View in Gloucestershire. Staff were filmed slapping residents, soaking them in water, pulling their hair, trapping them under chairs, taunting and swearing at them. Workers at Winterbourne View had raised concerns to South Gloucestershire Council nineteen times before *Panorama* filmed there. The timeline continues by signposting the publication by MENCAP of *Death by Indifference: 74 deaths and Counting* (2012), which describes continuing inequalities in NHS health care for people with learning disabilities.

The following section therefore explores the social and political contexts within which the work of Learning Disability Theatres takes place. It begins by introducing some of Michel Foucault's central ideas and moves on to explore how these have been applied within the contexts of philosophy and Critical Disability Studies. Foucault's studies of social institutions such as the prison and mental health hospital offer insights that are highly relevant to the way people with learning disabilities have been, and continue to be, viewed within our society. Firstly, his notion of 'the norm' is central to this study. People with learning disabilities are viewed all too often in terms of loss or deficit in relation to an idealised idea of what is 'normal'. This thesis acknowledges the pervasive nature of the 'norm' against which most performers with learning disabilities are deemed 'too disabled' to lead, and asks to what extent leadership in Learning Disability Theatres can offer alternatives to aspirations for normalcy. Secondly, Foucault's notion of 'individualisation' offers a way to understand how people with learning disabilities are judged lacking in relation to an idealised concept of self-sufficiency and independence. This thesis explores how leadership within Learning Disability Theatres can challenge this viewpoint by recognising and valuing relational models of leadership built on inter-dependence and collaboration.

The Norm and the Individual Case

According to Foucault, before industrialisation power was mainly exerted overtly through force and sanction but since then, power has worked in more subtle ways, primarily through language and discourse. What we generally call ‘a truth’ or ‘common sense’ is shaped by socially constructed rules and changes over time. For Foucault the ‘norm’ is all-pervading, describes what is typical and asserts how things ought to be. It is what we are all measured against by others and by ourselves:

The power of the Norm appears through the disciplines. Is this the new law of modern society? Let us say rather that, since the eighteenth century it has joined other powers – the Law, the Word (Parole) and the Text, Tradition – imposing new delimitations upon them’ (Foucault, 1991: 184).

The norm is established within social institutions through surveillance and testing. School exams, medical examinations and psychiatric tests are all examples of ‘examinations’ that establish how ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ we are deemed to be. Testing enables professionals to judge, classify and compare people: ‘It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchises in terms of value the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals. It introduces through this ‘value-giving’ measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved’ (Foucault, 1991: 183). Foucault highlights the individualising effect of this process. Through examination and documentation the individual is made into a describable, analysable object and introduced to a range of ‘normalizing technologies’ that seek to normalise them through correction or therapy. Thus, the child who does not reach the ‘normal’ IQ is segregated in special schools and those who are ‘abnormal’ in their behaviour are placed in specialist institutions. As Foucault comments,

The examination as the fixing, at once ritual and ‘scientific’, of individual differences, as the pinning down of each individuality in his own particularity [...] clearly indicates the appearance of a new modality of power, in which each individual receives as his status his own individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the ‘marks’ that characterise him and make him a “case” (Foucault, 1991: 192).

Licia Carlson adopts a Foucauldian perspective to explore how learning disability has been understood and discussed within philosophy. In a detailed overview of the institutional world of intellectual disability in North America, she

draws on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The Birth of the Prison* to map how, just as notions of 'delinquency' have been constructed through institutional practices and expert discourse, so too 'within the complex institutional world, intellectual disability was both found and made, knowledge was remade and reported, patterns were recognized, invented, imposed' (Carlson, 2010: 2). Carlson maps the ways in which developments within institutions for the 'feeble-minded' changed notions of 'idiocy', 'feeble-mindedness' and learning disability and how they have been constructed, named, understood and 'treated'.

The various instruments and techniques that were applied to the individuals within these facilities (called "schools", "asylums", "institutions") generated new typologies and classification schemas from which the "idiot", "imbecile", and "moral imbecile" emerged as distinct kinds. With the birth of mental testing in the early twentieth century, the understanding of "feeble-mindedness" changed again and the "moron" emerged in connection with this new way of gathering and organizing knowledge (Carlson, 2010: 22)

Carlson references Foucault's perspective on 'historical ontology', which asserts that historical analysis is essential to recognising the limits imposed on us by history. However, recognising these limits does not preclude the possibility of resistance, in fact, it is essential in order that we can resist. As Carlson states:

Foucault's characterization of historical ontology is not simply a form of critique in the negative sense; it suggests that through this labor we may imagine ourselves to be other than we are, to move beyond certain limits unmasked by these inquiries (Carlson, 2010: 17).

Disability activist Michael Oliver also draws extensively on some of Foucault's ideas to describe the impact of the label 'abnormal' as applied to disabled people. Disabled people are measured and tested by professionals at all stages of their lives and are found to be 'failing'. Pedagogical and medical professions are geared up for 'fixing' people and to seek to correct their abnormalities through normalising technologies and segregation. As Oliver states:

society had to do something about disabled people and it did, not being shy about using all the forms of exclusion [...] However, it needed people to sanction and carry out these exclusionary practices and it found the increasingly powerful medical profession and the newly emerging ideology of individualism willing supporters (Oliver, 2009: 159).

Oliver is generally credited with developing the Social Model of Disability, which argues that the main cause of exclusion is how society responds to disabled people, not disabled people's impairments. In contrast with the medical model, the social model 'seeks to move the focus away from the limitations of impaired bodies and to look instead at the difficulties caused for disabled people by disabling environments, barriers, attitudes and cultures' (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 10). Rebecca Mallett and Katherine Runswick-Cole identify the key elements of the social model to be rejection of the medical model, a challenge to individualised approaches to disability, valuing the direct experience of disabled people, addressing marginalisation, oppression and discrimination and identifying and removing barriers produced by social and cultural institutions (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 11). The social model has been criticised by some for not going far enough, for being hostile to medicine and failing to take account of multiple oppression, of largely ignoring the experiences of disabled children and being too closely associated with a Western model of disability (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 11). Critical Disability Studies acknowledges the importance of the social model but recognises these limitations and sees it as just one tool of analysis. Scholars and practitioners in this field seek to change the study of disability by challenging the dominance of the global North in disability writings, moving away from binary understandings (e.g. social versus medical models) and welcoming ideas from other disciplines. A Critical Disability perspective identifies the need for research to make connections with other transformative agendas such as class, feminist, queer and postcolonial studies:

While critical disability studies might start with disability, they never end with it, remaining ever vigilant of political, ontological and theoretical complexity. And in order to analyse disability we need to be mindful of the complementary hegemony of ableism. Critical Disability studies contest dis/ableism (Goodley, 2011: 155)

This thesis adopts a Critical Disability perspective in locating Learning Disability Theatres within a much broader cultural context and adopting an interdisciplinary approach. In challenging the norms that devalue people with learning disabilities as lesser and lacking, it seeks to offer an alternative view of performers and theatre-makers with learning disabilities as leaders, as shapers of leadership and as leaders of research. In challenging the pathology of the 'individual case' and the norm, leadership in Learning Disability Theatres potentially presents a view of people with and without learning disabilities as inter-connected and inter-dependent. It is not only people with learning disabilities who are affected by society's idealised notions of what is normal, and what a productive individual looks and sounds like. Rather than conforming to an aspiration for the 'normal', this research highlights the value of human diversity and difference, not just to people with learning disabilities, but to society as a whole.

Leadership and Learning Disability Theatres

In this final section of the chapter, I offer a critical overview of selected material from leadership literature that is of relevance to this study. In particular I focus on Critical Leadership Studies and relate this to the specific context of leadership in Learning Disability Theatres. Traditional leadership approaches have been heavily critiqued by scholars and practitioners in Critical Leadership Studies. They highlight the limitations of traditional models and encourage researchers to 'rethink leaders, followers and contexts as well as their dialectical interrelations' (Collinson, 2011: 191). In adopting a Critical Leadership perspective my thesis aims to add to conversations about leadership as a shared, dialogical process. As identified above, many Learning Disability Theatres have historically been driven by strong charismatic leaders who play a crucial role in raising the profile of the sector and ensuring creative work is recognised and valued. However, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this heroic perspective, and explore the potential of more relational ways of looking at and talking about leadership.

In their publication *Studying Leadership*, Doris Schedlitzki and Gareth Edwards (2014) offer a comprehensive analysis of leadership studies since the beginning of the twentieth century. Up to the end of the twentieth century,

leadership studies were dominated by large-scale quantitative research predominantly generated in US universities. Initially this comprised a range of theories considering personalities, traits, skills and styles of individual leaders. Various frameworks emerged detailing what a leader should be and do in order to be most effective. In the late 1960s and 1970s Contingency and Leader Member Exchange Theories recognised that situations have a major impact on leadership and introduced the centrality of the leader/follower relationship, seen generally in a hierarchical context with the focus on the leader as the active agent. In the 1970s, more Charismatic/Transformational leadership models emerged, where the focus was on the visionary aspects of the individual charismatic leader. Once again, the focus was on top-down leadership *of* rather than *in* organisations. As Schedlitzki and Edwards identify, the traditional perspective remains dominant in the UK and most literature, models and training continue to focus on how leaders contribute to organisational effectiveness and how individuals can develop the skills and competencies to become better leaders. Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, particularly within European research and writing, there was 'a shift towards relational, social constructivist views of leadership and a distinct move away from studying the individual leader towards considering leadership as a social process' (Schedlitzki and Edwards, 2014: 5). Keith Grint warns that, whilst some may identify a genuine move towards more collaborative styles of leadership, this progressive, linear image of developments within leadership research and practice may be misleading. He notes:

The more scientifically inclined amongst us might be inclined to see greater rationality in leadership styles across time; the more liberal amongst us might see the spread of collaborative styles as proof positive of their deeply held antipathy to individual leadership manifest in heroic men; the more cynical amongst us might perceive none of these patterns but just an accumulation of historical detritus strewn around by academics and consultants' (Grint, 2011:12).

Nevertheless, the emergence of Critical Leadership Studies has prompted a growing critique of traditional leadership models and literature on three main grounds, which have relevance to this research. Firstly, they problematise the focus on traits and qualities of individual, heroic leaders. Secondly, they highlight the exclusion and prejudice perpetuated within traditional leadership models.

Thirdly they highlight the power asymmetry of traditional leader-follower relationships.

Scholars in Critical Leadership Studies critique the concept of leadership as dependent upon individual, inspirational individuals and their competencies. As Grint highlights 'we appear to have an amazing capacity to attribute organizational success to individual competence on the basis of virtually no evidence at all' (Grint, 2011: 9). Such mainstream approaches reflect a Foucauldian perspective on the idealised 'productive' individual. David Collinson identifies the dominant white, male, middle class image of the successful leader prevalent in Western countries and analyses the ways in which dialectics of leader/follower, power/resistance, consent/dissent found within traditional leadership models 'are shaped by gender, class, race and age *et cetera*. They demonstrate that leadership dynamics are inescapably situated within, and reproduced through multiple, intersecting and simultaneous differences and inequalities' (Collinson, 2011: 190). It perhaps goes without saying that disabled people are included in the *et cetera* of Collinson's list. Collinson also identifies the need for Critical Leadership Studies to 'examine the interrelations between multiple inequalities and to show how these intersect and / or contradict' (Collinson, 2011: 190). Most DIY leaders, for example, are women and socio-economically disadvantaged. My thesis acknowledges the multiple identities of those involved and identifies the need to locate our research within broader discussions around difference and diversity.

Finally, scholars in Critical Leadership Studies problematise the power asymmetry of the normative leader/follower relationship. As Collinson identifies, individuals are, within many settings, 'expected to act as both leaders and followers, either simultaneously or at different times and circumstances' (Collinson, 2011: 191). Critical Leadership moves away from hierarchical leader/follower models to consider 'the shifting possible constructions of leadership located with their complex conditions, processes and consequences' (ibid: 183). This opens up the possibility of viewing leadership not as a 'fixed' model, but as something fluid and processual, within which people with and without learning disabilities can both lead and follow.

In terms of my thesis, it is notable that public debates regarding leadership within the cultural sector have been prominent during the first part of the twenty-first century. In 2002, for example, Robert Hewison and John Holden identified a crisis in cultural leadership in Britain, which was related to low morale produced by government underfunding, low pay, loss of status, ill-defined career paths, over-regulation and reluctance to address issues of leadership training. The need and potential for new models of leadership to emerge within the cultural sector was identified (Hewison, 2004). The report produced by Hewison and Holden resulted in the development of the Clore Leadership Programme, which continues, in 2017, to have a significant impact on the sector. In *Arts Professional* (July 2016) Sue Hoyle and Robbie Swale of the Clore Leadership Programme identify the features of an effective cultural leader, stating that 'They should have their feet firmly on the ground, be rooted in ambition (for their projects, not just for themselves) and have an energetic sense of purpose' (Hoyle and Swale, 2016). Hoyle and Swale also highlight the need for effective leaders to share power and work collaboratively: 'They aren't selfish. They are generous and compassionate, accepting of difference and keen to look for synergies' (Hoyle and Swale, 2016). Despite the focus on collaborative leadership, these comments continue to emphasise the traits and capabilities of individual, heroic leaders who, even at times of crisis, will prevail. Nevertheless, they also signal an emerging questioning within the cultural sector about the extent to which traditional models and theories of leadership 'fit' the sector. As Katie Venner states in the introduction to *A Cultural Leadership Reader* 'practitioners have noticed the absence of literature that speaks directly to them of *their* experience of leadership. A literature on cultural leadership is emerging, but it exists in the main in occasional articles, practitioners' private journals and academic essays' (Kay et al, 2010: 6). One response to this is a shift towards practice-based learning within the cultural and creative sectors. Suzanne Burns and Kerry Wilson welcome an increase in the robustness of practice-based research suggesting that 'it is this notion of reflection on practice that must now inform the cultural and creative sectors as we move forward in developing our own theoretical frameworks of leadership' (Burns and Wilson, 2010: 93). This is something to which this thesis seeks to contribute.

In 2017, there is growing recognition that leadership within the cultural sector does not reflect the diversity of the UK population, and a number of initiatives have been established to support disability-led projects and organisations. The notion of 'disability-led' in relation to organisational structures and processes is particularly prominent and it is useful to consider the specific context of recent cultural policy in England in more detail. In 2015, Arts Council England published an Equality Analysis, which considered its funding decisions in relation to its *Creative Case for Diversity* (<http://www.creativecase.org.uk>, accessed 11th July 2017). The analysis identified that 'ethnicity and disability remain the protected characteristics most significantly and persistently disadvantaged by the current profile of our arts investment' and identified a need for research into 'the barriers that might be currently preventing the development of a dynamic arts and cultural sector that enables diverse talent, both managerial and artistic, to assume positions of leadership across the sector' (Arts Council England, 2015). Arts Council England has supported a range of specific schemes including the *Unlimited* programme, which offers commissions to disabled artists to develop, produce and show ambitious and high quality work, and *Elevate*, which seeks to increase the diversity of applications received for Arts Council funding. Both require that work be 'disabled-led' and a consideration of what Arts Council England means by this phrase is important here.

In the past, Arts Council England's definition of disabled-led was that 51% of members of an organisation's Board were disabled people. This has been a contentious approach for three main reasons. Firstly, whilst inclusion of more people with learning disabilities in formal decision-making is essential for power-sharing, representation on a governing body is a blunt instrument. A group of three non-disabled people may dominate a group of ten people with learning disabilities, who are tokenistically invited to sit on a board. Secondly, traditional boards tend to focus on individuals' status or expertise rather than viewing a board as an inter-dependent group. Thirdly, traditional boards tend to privilege certain skills and abilities that can be seen to emanate from an ableist model such as confidence in formal meetings, verbal communication skills and financial competence, which are all areas in which people with learning disabilities may be seen as 'lacking'. Indeed, Vanessa Brooks in her *Separate Doors* report argues that the requirement within initiatives such as *Unlimited* for work to be disability-led excludes a number

of Learning Disability Theatre companies because 'For most actors and performers with moderate learning disabilities, cognitive difference makes project and conceptual management challenging, in effect, denying access to these opportunities' (Brooks, 2016).

Traditional Board structures are inaccessible to the majority of people with learning disabilities, and indeed to many people, who find formal meetings intimidating or difficult to understand. If organisations follow a corporate model of governance and see Boards primarily as a series of procedures and processes, many people with learning disabilities do not 'fit' their requirements. If, on the other hand, organisations adopt a relational approach and recognise the value of developing boards that comprise a diverse group of people, they will explore appropriate approaches and structures for involving those people. Encouraging a wider diversity of people to become involved in governance requires a re-appraisal of the structures and *modus operandi* of traditional governance structures. As will be considered in Chapter Three of this thesis, leadership within Learning Disability Theatres has the potential to create new forms and ways of doing things. The 'catch 22' is that companies will only adopt these approaches if they are validated within a cultural 'establishment' that is based on traditional notions of power and authority. In exploring more inclusive forms of governance, Learning Disability Theatres are taking a risk, but it is a risk that needs to be taken if change is going to take place.

In the FAQ section of the *Unlimited* website (<http://weareunlimited.org.uk>, accessed 11th June 2017) the definition of disabled-led appears much more flexible than the 51% rule described above. It states that 'we expect applicants to clearly demonstrate how the creative elements are led by disabled people. The key is your articulation – you need to explain how 'disability-led' applies to your organisation'. My thesis contributes to the articulation of what leadership within Learning Disability Theatres is and can be and highlights the imperative for those involved in Learning Disability Theatres to develop and articulate notions of leadership that include people with learning disabilities.

Conclusion

Until recently there has been very little published literature about Learning Disability Theatres and, even within more recent research, the extent and depth of discourse around leadership within Learning Disability Theatres is extremely limited. As will be outlined in Chapter Two, I view practitioner-researchers and their collaborators as being ideally placed to make significant contributions to this wide-ranging and under-researched area of practice. This thesis offers new insights and knowledge which are largely absent from the literature to date.

A critical perspective opens up possibilities for viewing leadership as shared, processual and inclusive. Limiting notions of leadership continue to prevail within the cultural sector which means that the practice and research of Learning Disability Theatres has an important role to play in broadening perspectives on what leadership means and challenging the notion that people with learning disabilities are 'too disabled' to do leadership. This research has the potential to influence leadership practices within Learning Disability Theatres but also within the cultural sector more broadly, where a lack of diversity in leadership is widely acknowledged.

It is imperative to acknowledge the complex social, philosophical and political contexts within which Learning Disability Theatres are located. In this chapter I have explored how the socially constructed notions of the norm and the productive individual have had significant, and persistently negative, impacts on people with learning disabilities. To believe that the practice and research of Learning Disability Theatres exists outside this history is unrealistic and unhelpful. Carlson draws on Foucault to assert that whilst an historical perspective is essential to understand how discourses and power structures have developed over time, we must not allow ourselves to be constrained and limited by this sense of history. It is only by reflecting on the historical context of learning disability that we can 'imagine ourselves to be other than we are, to move beyond certain limits, unmasked by these inquiries' (Carlson, 2010: 17). An historical perspective enables us to better understand and challenge the norms that devalue people with learning disabilities and offers a foundation for understanding how theatre practice and research can offer alternative views of performers and theatre-makers with learning disabilities as shapers of leadership and as leaders of research.

To articulate this aspiration is to identify both my practice and research as 'political' activities. In Chapter Two of this thesis, therefore, I move on to explore the notion of research as a 'political activity' and to explore the questions and challenges this poses in

terms of who is involved in making research, how they are involved and to whom the knowledge gathered through research can be relevant or useful.

Chapter Two: Methodology in-the-Making

Introduction

The practice-based methodology outlined in this thesis has emerged from, and largely reflects, my unique position as Artistic Director of DIY Theatre Company. This has offered invaluable opportunities to observe the practices of the organisation, to develop research collaboratively with performers with learning disabilities and to view the work within the wider context of Learning Disability Theatres in England. As will be explored in this chapter, in order to create this thesis, I have drawn on data and perspectives that have emerged largely through ongoing collaborative, practice-based processes. I have struggled with my position of power as the person who eventually shapes the thesis and decides which 'story' is told. In this iteration of the findings therefore, I have chosen to distinguish between: the *process* of ongoing research involving a number of collaborators, which is referred to as *our* research; and the thesis, as one of a number of products of our research, which is referred to as *my* thesis.

The choice to submit a practice-based submission emanates largely from two key aspirations; to position our research as an integral extension of practice and to include the perspectives of performers with learning disabilities centrally within my thesis. Robin Nelson describes 'Practice as Research' as activity in which 'practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice [...] is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry' (Nelson, 2013: 9). Hazel Smith and Roger Dean describe it as a relatively recent phenomenon that is 'creating a transforming environment within academia' (Smith and Dean, 2009: 35). Baz Kershaw identifies a paradigm shift, 'through which established ontologies and epistemologies of research in arts-related disciplines, potentially, could be radically undone' (Kershaw, 2009: 105).

Angela Piccini and Caroline Rye highlight the underpinning principle of practice as research, that creative practice itself is a form of knowledge and 'knowledge may be produced and disseminated via arts practices that do not necessarily require discursive explication' (Piccini and Rye, 2009: 37). This has particular relevance within research involving performers with learning disabilities,

who are often not confident writers or speakers, but are often able to present knowledge in physical and embodied forms, and has enabled me to foreground ways of knowing which might be absent or excluded from a more traditional approach. However, the focus on research as an extension of practice brings a number of challenges, which reflect the complex inter-relationship of practice and theory. In particular, it often remains an expectation that doctoral submissions include a substantial written thesis, potentially undermining the central concept that practice can be a valid and rigorous communicator of knowledge. This thesis poses the questions ‘How can we as a practitioner-researchers balance practice and theory in a way which does not present theory as superior to practice?’ and ‘How can we ensure that written information is not viewed as superior to embodied forms of knowledge, nor indeed vice versa?’

Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson highlight the emergence of methodologies that resist the ‘unhelpful dichotomies and fixed binaries which separate embodiment and intuition from intellectual practices, emotional experiences and ways of knowing’ (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011: 2). They encourage researchers to ‘establish imaginative uses of methods that trouble the boundaries between creative practice and critical analysis, between epistemology and ontology’ (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011: 2). Jenny Hughes, Jenny Kidd and Catherine McNamarra propose the notion of *practised* methodology to describe ‘methods that combine overlapping tacit, embodied, discursive and theoretical processes’ (Hughes et al, 2011: 193). Such approaches recognise the complex relationship of creative, social and political aims present within many participatory arts processes and view theory, method and practice as inter-dependent. Our response to this challenge has been to combine a range of methods and perspectives within a methodology that incorporates arts-based methods, semi-structured interviews, phenomenological descriptions of moments of practice and a live drama workshop. Hughes *et al*/ highlight the improvisational nature of much arts-based research, where improvisation refers to ‘actions that take place during a research process that are spontaneous responses to unpredictable events and venture beyond the confines of predetermined design’ (Hughes et al, 2011: 188).

In referring to the epistemology of this thesis, I would now describe it as social constructionist; based on the notion that society is created by people

through inter-actions and inter-relationships. However, I would not have been able to articulate this at the beginning of my research journey. Nor would I have been able to describe the theoretical lens of my thesis as critical theory or to identify a key element of my methodology as phenomenology. These are all 'labels' which have emerged during the research journey and writing of this thesis. We began wanting to understand what was happening in moments of leadership and this concern for moments of practice, how they could best be described, more fully understood and how they relate to a bigger social picture has led me to phenomenology as a philosophical framework and methodology, which in turn has led me to a relational perspective which links with relational perspectives across disciplines. The practice-based, mixed methods approach developed through the research represents a similar series of 'spontaneous' responses, which is why I have termed it a methodology in-the-making.

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln observe that qualitative researchers are like 'bricoleurs' or 'quilters'. There is no hierarchy of different types of data, which complement and illuminate each other in a creative montage: 'The quilter stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013: 9). The quilt metaphor is useful in positioning both our research and my thesis-building as creative processes. In compiling the thesis, I have been moving pieces around, taking out sections, adding others to compose a piece to present to a wider audience. Throughout the process, I have struggled with my position of power as the person who eventually shapes the quilt; who decides what is included and what is left out. I am much more comfortable in talking about the 'we' rather than the 'I' of participatory creative practice but have also come to recognise that this power is tempered by vulnerability. The process of engaging with the philosophy of practice has been an emotional as much as an intellectual one; I am exposing my own values, moral purpose and ways of seeing the world to others for discussion, scrutiny and critique. The quilting metaphor acknowledges the high level of subjectivity in drawing together a particular thesis; other people would use the materials to create quite a different story and now that the quilt in its current form is 'finished', hopefully it will be taken apart, reassembled, extended and used by myself and others for different purposes and audiences.

The first section of this chapter, *Research as a Political Activity*, places our research in the context of Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson's call for Applied Theatre research to be considered 'first and foremost a political activity' (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015: 6). It discusses the particular political issues involved in developing research with, about and for performers with learning disabilities and explores the imperative, identified within Disability Studies Literature (Oliver, 1990 and Goodley, 2011), for the research itself to represent the perspectives of, and be of use to, disabled people. Paulo Freire's notion of 'dialogue' is introduced as a lens for describing both research and leadership as dialogical processes. The naming of research as political is highly problematic, not least, in terms of whose agendas are driving the research, and the section explores the complexities and challenges inherent in developing Inclusive Research with people with learning disabilities.

The second part, *Binocular Vision: Phenomenological Description and Reflective Practice*, introduces the phenomenological focus of the research. First-person accounts of moments of practice 'in-the-making' have emphasised descriptive and embodied responses and foregrounded the knowledge residing in interactions occurring in-the-moment. Bert O. States' concept of 'binocular vision' (States, 1987) has been useful in articulating the need to balance descriptive and strategic modes of thinking within this quilting process.

The third section, *Making Practice Count*, describes the arts-based methods utilised to ensure that elements of this research could be shaped by people with learning disabilities. The combination of Image Theatre and photo elicitation is outlined, which ensures that research processes and products reflect a range of voices, perspectives, styles and registers and that at least some products of the research are accessible to a broader audience. The live workshops are described and the challenges and limitations of Inclusive research approaches are explored.

In line with the 'improvisational' approach advocated by Hughes *et al* and cited above, the order of sections does not reflect a linear chronology. The first strand of enquiry to be introduced was research with other companies, comprising interviews and observations, the second was art-based methods with Friday

Group participants and the third was observations of DIY's education programme. However, the responsive nature of this research has meant that strands have overlapped, joined together and parted at different stages in the process. Arts-based methods were introduced at an early stage, for example, but were then revisited and developed in the latter stages of the research period as a basis for the live drama workshops. Interviews were carried out at the very beginning, but opportunities to interview and observe the practice of other companies emerged at a much later stage. This more fluid approach reflects the improvised, responsive nature of the methodology-in-the-making and was only possible because of my ongoing relationship with the company.

Before moving on to a detailed description of the methods used, it is worth outlining the ethical considerations of the study. Two key ethical issues were identified in the ethics form submitted to the University of Manchester Committee on the Ethics of Research in 2012; informed consent of DIY members and informed consent of young people. It was essential to discuss my dual role of Artistic Director and researcher with DIY members and make it clear that I would be researching the project for academic purposes. DIY members gave their consent to use photographic images in research processes and outcomes. A pictorial consent form was used and each person was guided through this form to check understanding. In school and youth theatre settings, I was strongly guided by staff and internal policies regarding informed consent. I provided an information sheet for all participants and their parents/carers, written in Easy English and supported by symbols, which described the research elements of the process. I went through this verbally with pupils and liaised closely with school staff and parents/carers to ensure understanding. It was stipulated that although images from projects could be used as part of the research process they would not be used in outcomes and it was agreed that anonymity would be preserved at all times in any written record or published outcome of the project. For this reason, no names or images have been used, unless permission has specifically been granted.

Research as a Political Activity

Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson highlight the need for research as a political activity and as a collaborative catalyst for change. The value of such research is not dependent upon its publication in elite journals but, rather 'whether it is vital, and whether it gives back to the communities from which it springs (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015: 4). Our research, as an extension of practice and with its aim to be useful to Learning Disability Theatres is, in itself, political. Dan Goodley states:

the very doing of disability research that is aligned with a social model of disability requires researchers to take a stance – most obviously to be on the side of disabled people and so to document their perspectives, experiences and challenges to disabling conditions (Goodley, 2000: 74).

As an Applied Theatre practitioner-researcher, I am overt in my commitment to working with a specific sector of the community and 'the desire to make a difference to the lives of others' (Nicholson, 2005:16). I align myself with James Thompson's description of 'theatre practice with an explicit intent' (Thompson, 2003:199). However, the value driven nature of Applied Theatre is complex and controversial. Helen Nicholson articulates her own reticence to use the concept of transformation, asking whose values and interests such claims are likely to serve 'If applied drama is socially transformative, is it explicit what kind of society is envisioned? If the motive is individual or personal transformation, is this something that is done *to* the participants, *with* them or *by* them?' (Nicholson, 2005; 12). As she highlights in her use of theories of the gift in the work of Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida, the 'gift' of theatre is something that is potentially both welcome and unwelcome to participants, bringing with it obligations and expectations:

What do we, as practitioners expect in return for our labours? Artistic satisfaction? The participants' acquisition of skills or abilities? Do we ask participants to adopt new ways of thinking or different political values? Do we expect them to change their behaviour in particular ways? (Nicholson, 2005: 161).

My role as Artistic Director places me in a position of power and influence. I am motivated both by artistic satisfaction, my own sense of moral and political

purpose and a commitment to making a positive contribution. I have expectations of DIY actors (for example, attendance at rehearsals, development of theatre skills) and involvement in the company involves adherence to certain ideological values (for example, there is no right or wrong in theatre). However, it is important not to misrepresent levels of politicisation within the company. Most people join DIY because they want to perform, and that remains their main motivation, so whilst some express a commitment to making a difference in society, most just want to make theatre. Like most Learning Disability Theatres we combine artistic and social aims, and it is important that the balance of artistic and social imperatives is reflected in this research and continues to be maintained in practice.

The notion of transformation is made additionally complex by the values of funders who contribute to the work. In his journal article entitled *The Politics of Intention: looking for a theatre of small changes* (2009), Michael Balfour critiques the 'transformative principle' that leads to dependency of much participatory arts practice on the demonstration of specific impacts. According to Balfour, donors often require organisations to promise 'transformative' outcomes, which coincide with their own social and political agendas and significantly impact on how work is evaluated, defined and described. He suggests that applied theatre practitioners need to be wary of being used as an 'adjunct to social policy' and crucially in relation to my thesis, identifies the need for better articulation of the interdependence between the aesthetic imperatives and the possibilities of social engagement (Balfour, 2009: 347-359).

Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) offers a useful framework for considering the values brought to both Applied Theatre and Practice-Based Research. Nicholson refers to numerous examples of practice influenced by Freire's ideology, which continues to inspire practitioners in applied theatre (Nicholson, 2005: 42). O'Connor and Anderson describe Practice as Research as 'building on the Freirean concept of naming the world so as to transform their own lives' (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015: 21). Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who worked in the field of adult literacy and critical pedagogy. His writings have had a strong influence on my own thinking and practice and his articulation of dialogical processes is particularly relevant to my thesis. Freire's notion of problem-posing education challenges a traditional 'banking' model where knowledge is deposited

from one person (the teacher) to another person (the student). Education is 'not carried out by "A" for "B" or by "A" about "B", but rather by A *with* B, mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it' (Freire, 1972: 66). My thesis presents knowledge as something which emerges through the exchange and synthesis of different perspectives, rather than a fixed set of outcomes defined by the single expert. The concept of learning as an ongoing process, which takes place through dialogue, requires some translation here. The emphasis it places on the spoken word appears inappropriate for a number of people with learning disabilities, for whom speech is limited. However, Richard Paul's definitions are useful in this context:

Dialogical and dialectical thinking involve dialogue or extended exchange between different points of view or different frames of reference. Both are multi-logical (involving *many* logics) rather than monological (involving *one* logic) because in both cases there is more than one line of reasoning to consider, more than one 'logic' being formulated (Paul, 1990: 310).

If we interpret the phrase 'extended exchange' to encompass different forms of communication, we broaden our definition of dialogical to include other forms of self-expression that are physical and visual as well as verbal. In introducing arts-based methods our research seeks to include embodied articulations and understandings of leadership, which emerge through collaboration and exchange and are multi-logical in nature.

Freire's thinking has been critiqued over the years by Paul Taylor, among others, who criticises him for presenting a world view based on the over-simplified polarities of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed', 'liberators' and 'liberated' (Taylor, 1993: 54). Taylor accuses Freire of 'cultural invasion', which exactly counters the ethos and values presented in his writings: 'What in fact he has created through this invasion of non-literate culture is not a pedagogy of liberation but a pedagogy of assimilation, enculturation' (Taylor, 1993: 118). Taylor's main target here is the gap he perceives between Freire's 'espoused values' and his 'values in action' (Bolton, 2014). Freire was a revolutionary, who made forceful arguments about the transformative potential of critical pedagogy for poorer communities in Brazil. As an idealist, his practice was never going to match his ideology – his work did not eliminate poverty in Brazil - and yet the impact of his philosophy across the world

has been immense. Arguably, within the 'real world' of participatory arts practice, there will always be a need for pragmatism. In this respect, Freire's writings provide what Thompson describes as a 'flexible point of departure' rather than a fixed point of reference (Thompson, 2008: 110). Thompson highlights the dangers of an ideological influence being represented as orthodoxy and warns that 'the explicit intent of practice should never be viewed as the same as the outcome' (Thompson, 2008; 138). My thesis utilises the lens of Freire to identify some of the gaps between philosophy and action, explore the decisions that are made within these spaces and open up rich areas for exploration and study.

From a dialogical perspective, the practitioner-researcher role is problematic, as by naming myself as researcher I potentially set myself up in the role of expert. As stated above, whilst – as the named author of this thesis – I take responsibility for this particular iteration of our research, the research processes themselves have sought to challenge the normative notion of 'expert' and present perspectives of performers with learning disabilities as central within knowledge-making processes. Dan Goodley describes the imperative of 'making research more inclusive, theoretical ideas more accessible and fully representing their activism as it is enacted in the international self-advocacy movement' (Goodley, 2011: 30). According to Goodley and Michelle Moore:

the extent to which disabled people and their allies have an opportunity to have their say, be listened to and have their views taken seriously within the research process is now regarded as probably the most important indicator of the validity of any piece of disability-related research (Goodley and Moore, 2002: 23).

Disability activist Michael Oliver states that much research to date has failed to reflect the experiences of disabled people from their own perspectives. It has generally made little contribution to the lives of disabled people, has failed to recognise disability as political and to acknowledge the struggles of disabled people to bring about change (Oliver, 1990 and 2009). Oliver proposes emancipatory research as a means to support disabled people to become empowered and take control of their own research agendas. Participatory and emancipatory research are described by Melanie Nind as complementary approaches to achieving meaningful social change through research (Nind, 2014:

10). However Nind, whilst highlighting the benefits in involving participants in research, also warns of the dangers of claiming that disabled peoples' participation in research can be transformative. Echoing Nicholson's warnings regarding the adoption of a transformative agenda, Nind comments that whilst active participation in research 'has expanded the horizons of those individuals and enriched their lives, as well as sometimes changing things for other people with learning disabilities; nonetheless, structural barriers to their active citizenship and to careers in research remain immense' (Nind, 2014: 27). Nind questions whether, just because a research process is described as inclusive, it is necessarily ethically superior to research with similar aims that uses more traditional approaches. She identifies the tension that often exists between the perceived quality of participation and the perceived quality of research:

Criteria for what makes research good quality from a traditional social science perspective are unlikely to be the first things that come to mind when service users / lay researchers talk about what makes research good from their perspective (ibid: 88).

Just as we need to be wary of offering the gift of applied theatre, so we need to be realistic about the potential for empowerment through collaborative research. The challenge is to strike a balance between values and a pragmatic approach, so that research can be viewed as both valid and rigorous from an academic perspective and accessible and useful to people with learning disabilities. We have introduced methods that actively involve people with learning disabilities in the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, and, in doing so, have sought to access understandings which would not otherwise have emerged. Nicholson states that 'questions of where knowledge is situated, what forms of knowledge are valued, and how knowledge is shared, remain a major preoccupation in the range of practices which constitute applied drama' (Nicholson, 2005: 38). My thesis will not overcome the many barriers and challenges facing performers with learning disabilities, but by foregrounding perspectives of performers with learning disabilities it aims to contribute to discourse and practice more widely, and to raise questions about where knowledge of Learning Disability Theatres resides and how it might be accessed.

Binocular Vision: Phenomenological Descriptions and Reflective Practice

A central element of the methodology 'in the making' described in this thesis was the observation and description of moments of practice from a phenomenological perspective. Moments from two national events are included in Chapter Three and a series of moments from four DIY educational projects are included in Chapter Four. Phenomenology offered a framework for describing practice as it occurred, placing practice at the centre of the research and reflecting both knowledge-building and leadership as comprising felt, embodied experiences, as well as intellectual, theoretical phenomena. Bert O. States' notion of 'binocular vision' has been particularly useful in offering the opportunity to turn both a 'descriptive' and a 'strategic' eye to the leadership observed in process. By turning a descriptive eye to observations, I have been able to offer a sense of an experience 'in the moment' of its unfolding; and by turning a strategic eye, I have been able to locate new understandings of leadership within social and theoretical contexts from these descriptions. I have incorporated complementary viewpoints into the research 'quilt' in different formats. Descriptions of moments from a phenomenological viewpoint are included in text boxes, whilst more analytical text is included in the main body of the thesis. In this way, neither approach is more or less significant than the other and descriptions of leaders with learning disabilities remain prominent. This is crucial in exploring embodied understandings and emphasising people's shared experiences with the reader.

Hargrave identifies the actor with learning disabilities as being 'semiotically encumbered from the start, any "characterisation" is smothered by the fact of his disability. He may perform but will always perform one thing: as in the phrase 'these actors will only play themselves' (Hargrave, 2009: 48). Like the disabled actor, leaders with learning disabilities are 'semiotically encumbered'. In 2017 in the UK, we so seldom see people with learning disabilities as workshop leaders, conference presenters or trainers that we are in a sense always aware that they are people with learning disabilities. Only by analysing and contextualising the meanings of their leadership in these situations can we understand the significance and potential of their challenge to conventional, normative notions of

leadership. However, leaders with learning disabilities are, to borrow the phrase from the self-advocacy movement, 'people first' and a phenomenological perspective offers one way to temper the reductive nature of the semiotic approach and emphasise shared experience. States describes the reverse-gaze that exists between actor and audience, and emanates from their shared humanity. The audience member shares a 'creatural bond' with the actor 'who stands before us in a vulnerable place' (States, 1987: 119). By including phenomenological writing in my thesis, I seek to highlight the 'creatural bonds' that exist between and amongst people and to emphasise, from a relational perspective, the centrality of human relations within the making of leadership.

The Descriptive Eye

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that attends to and investigates objects and events as they are experienced in our consciousness, without the pre-determined assumptions or values that threaten to distort how those experiences are understood. Edmund Husserl is acknowledged as the founder of Phenomenology. He makes the distinction between Phenomenology as a 'descriptive' science and other 'exact' sciences (Husserl, 2012; 143). According to Husserl, exact scientific theories that supposedly offer certainties are in fact always based on assumptions and bias. The rigour of the phenomenological approach is achieved through faithfully describing what we see in front of us and 'bracketing out' or actively ignoring, the assumptions and prior knowledge we bring to objects and events:

We start out from that which *antedates* all standpoints; from the totality of the intuitively self-given which is prior to any theorizing reflection, from all that one *can* immediately see and lay hold of provided one does not allow oneself to be blinded by prejudice, and so led to ignore whole classes of genuine data (Husserl, 2012: 38).

If I approach situations from an exact scientific point of view, a range of assumptions and theories will limit what I see. If I enter a drama workshop with Foucault in mind, for example, I will focus on power relations. If I enter looking for 'advocacy' I will focus on those instances when people are speaking up for themselves or are blocked from doing so. In contrast, in adopting a

phenomenological approach, I have sought to bracket out my knowledge of leadership theories to see in vivid detail what is directly in front of me, working from the knowledge and meaning evidenced in that moment. My observations do not seek to identify the benefits of the workshop, but rather ask ‘what is happening?’ and ‘what does leadership in this context look and feel like?’

According to Husserl, a range of phenomena is constantly available to our consciousness, but it is only through the intentional act of turning our gaze towards an object that it is perceived (Husserl, 2012; 53). Our perception is always incomplete because any object may be viewed by different people, in different lighting conditions, imagined or remembered. I might focus on a particular interaction between a young person and a member of the DIY team but I do not see it fully, nor does anyone else in the room. My own perception will be different from that of others, but everybody’s perception will be a perspective on the ‘real’ event. When I make notes in the corner of the room seconds afterwards, when I remember it as I drive home, when I write up my notes a week later, when I select which moments I will include in my thesis, when my supervisor reads the section, when my examiners read about it in my final submission, all of these are part of the original event that remains ‘true’ and ‘intact’ in the past, whatever may happen in the future. As Husserl comments:

The tree plain and simple can burn away, resolve itself into its chemical elements and so forth. But the meaning – the meaning of this perception, something that belongs necessarily to its essence – cannot burn away; it has no chemical elements, no forces, no real properties (Husserl, 2012: 187).

In some descriptions that feature in this thesis, I am on the side-lines and my focus is on what I see. Other descriptions reflect a phenomenological approach more in line with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the ‘lived body’. According to Merleau-Ponty, body and mind are not separate entities, as for Descartes, but rather part of a single system. Merleau-Ponty introduces the idea of a ‘body schema’ to describe the body’s ‘being-in-the-world’: He describes how ‘I engage myself with my body among things, they coexist with me insofar as I am an embodied subject, and this life among things has nothing in common with the construction of scientific objects’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 191). My own more

embodied descriptions reflect moments in which my own presence as a practitioner-researcher is more obviously prominent. On these occasions I describe what an event or interaction felt like, and how I responded.

Phenomenology has offered a starting point for considering moments as spaces where leadership is made. Consciousness is ever present in the 'now' but as soon as we focus on a particular event, it is already past. No matter how soon after an event I scribbled my notes, I was already describing something that happened in the past. By the time I wrote up detailed notes, the event was hours in the past; and by the time the examiners read my thesis, it will be years in the past. Merleau-Ponty contributes to this understanding by describing time not as a flow but rather as a conscious act of perception. He states 'I do not think about the passage from the present to another present, I am not the spectator of this passage, I accomplish it' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 444). Present and future all exist simultaneously:

there is not one present and then another one that takes its place in being, nor is there even a present with some perspectives upon the past and upon the future followed by another present in which these perspectives would be overthrown [...] Rather there is a single time that confirms itself (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 444).

Isolating moments from workshops and presenting them as individual entities is an artificial process that perhaps undermines this sense of interconnectedness and flow, however, my acceptance of Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the moment here is important to the conceptual contribution of my thesis. My descriptions are, arguably, like photographs, which solidify moments and present them in a frozen, 2-D format that could never be experienced in reality. However, it is only by isolating and describing moments in detail that the complexity of interactions can be explored and a deeper sense of the leadership practices, and their fluidity and flow can be communicated. In *Performance and Phenomenology* Maaïke Bleeker highlights both the artificiality of identifying individual moments within a performance, *and* the potential of the phenomenological approach to contribute to understanding as follows:

Movement never *is* at any one moment. It exists in continuous transformation and must be lived through in a succession of impressions.

Yet to become an object of perception, movement has to be abstracted out of the succession of impressions in which it is experienced because movement is always more than the individual impressions (Bleeker et al, 2015: 36).

A phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate for reflecting on and writing about performance, because both performance and phenomenology 'engage with experience, perception, and with making sense as processes that are embodied, situated and relational' (Bleeker et al., 2015: 1). Sondra Fraleigh, for example, uses a phenomenological framework to challenge dualistic understandings of the human body in the context of dance. According to Fraleigh, movement is not something which is first thought about, then accomplished by the body as a 'servant' of the mind, because 'Embodiment is not passive; it is articulate' (Fraleigh, 1987: 13). Notions of embodiment as articulate and of the lived body as a valid and expressive communicator of knowledge are particularly important in relation to performers with learning disabilities who are often seen as having little, or nothing, to contribute to academic research. Anna Catherine Hickey-Moody illustrates the importance of this perspective when applying a phenomenological lens to her consideration of dance work with people with learning disabilities in Restless Dance Company (Adelaide, Australia). For Hickey-Moodey, dancers with learning disabilities can be viewed 'in terms of what they produce rather than by reference to what they are not' (Hickey-Moodey, 2009: 2). By bracketing out preconceptions or assumptions of what performers with learning disabilities could or should be able to do, researchers are able to move beyond deficit models of disability to new understandings of knowledge and knowledge-production. To turn again to Hickey-Moodey:

Embodied experiences and the ways we think about and refer to bodies need to be understood as constituting valid and powerful sites of knowledge production. This consideration allows embodied experiences and the ways bodies are thought about and referred to, to constitute sites of contestation, surrounding, interleaving, disrupting and reworking ideas of intellectual disability (Hickey-Moodey, 2009: 41).

Embodied experience and knowledge are of central importance within my thesis. Phenomenological descriptions of moments of leadership practice, combined with arts-based approaches and live drama workshops emphasise the validity of non-

verbal understandings and knowledge within the methodology in-the-making and ensure that practice remains an integral part of the generation, presentation and dissemination of new knowledge.

The Strategic Eye

In his study of phenomenology in theatre, Bert O. States expresses concern about the limitations of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, as a way of understanding theatre. According to States, phenomenology challenges the reductive nature of the focus on semiotics and 'its implicit belief that you have exhausted a thing's interest when you have explained how it works as a sign' (States, 1987: 7). However, rather than rejecting semiotics as an approach, he advocates the view that semiotics and phenomenology are best seen as 'complementary perspectives on the world and on art' (ibid: 8). He advocates a kind of 'binocular vision' whereby theatre is viewed through one eye as phenomenological and through the other in terms of its significations, resulting in a tug-of-war between the delightful and the useful: 'Usefulness implies the image's transitivity, its sign-ness, or convertability into social, moral or educational energy; delight implies its 'corporeality' and immediate absorption of the image by the senses' (ibid: 10). Stanton B. Garner develops States' idea of binocular vision to describe his own phenomenological approach to presenting understandings of theatre as both descriptive and strategic:

While it isolates the set of variables and principles fundamental to a phenomenology of the theatrical body, its descriptions also engage in dialogue with descriptions and analyses provided by other theoretical approaches (Garner, 1994: 15).

Phenomenology has enabled me to focus on practice, to validate the knowledge of performers with learning disabilities and to present performers with learning disabilities as people first. However, as outlined above, this research is also positioned as a 'political activity' with a specific social change agenda. It was therefore important to complement understandings that emerged through observations with contributions from a wider social, philosophical and political

context. This was achieved through a combination of semi-structured interviews and reflective practice.

The first 'strategic' strand was a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives of other Learning Disability Arts organisations. This method was introduced in order to frame DIY's very specific experiences of leadership alongside broader issues within leadership and Learning Disability Theatres. I emailed twenty organisations, and visited six organisations that responded positively to my initial approach. In five of six visits I met non-disabled Artistic Directors and on most occasions I also interviewed disabled representatives. The structure of each interview was similar, but I adopted a relatively fluid approach. In her chapter 'Narrative Enquiry', Susan Chase describes the way in which narrative researchers transform the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener. This requires a shift from asking research participants to generalise about events to inviting them to describe their specific experiences. It also moves away from the conventional practice of treating the interview schedule as a structuring device, to viewing it as a guide (Chase, 2013: 61). I was deliberately open in my questions, as I was keen to see what emerged from conversations rather than being prescriptive about how leadership was being defined. When interviewing Artistic Directors, this approach was relatively straightforward and resulted in some clear note-taking. In contrast, when interviewing company members, people would often start talking about one show and finish talking about another. I was sometimes confused but certainly gained a rounder view through meeting the people at the heart of the company rather than just the professional representatives. Other in-depth interviews included those with Tim Webb and Mark Foster from Oily Cart, Mark Richardson, former coordinator of Creative Minds and Gus Garside, coordinator of Creative Minds. I also interviewed staff from three DIY projects observed: the Youth Theatre's Artistic Director, staff at the Further Education College and DIY's Education and Outreach Officer. Across a number of interviews, I was able to identify key strands of leadership development and central issues and debates, which informed Chapter Three of this thesis.

Reflective practice was introduced in order to identify and be explicit regarding the dialogical values and social change agenda behind the research. Gillie Bolton states that 'reflection and reflexivity are moral and principled practices

based upon ethical values' and asserts that 'firm foundations are essential in order to develop our work and ourselves' (Bolton, 2014: 21). Donald Schön emphasises the importance of a consistent value system or 'appreciative system' to the reflexive practitioner.

Constancy of appreciative system is an essential condition for reflection-in-action. It is what makes possible the initial framing of the problematic situation and it is also what permits the enquirer to re-appreciate the situation in the light of its back-talk (Schön, 1983: 27).

Reflective practice has enabled me to consider the leadership observed within its social and historical context. It has also offered a framework for considering the inter-relationship of values and practice. The terms 'espoused values' and 'values in action' are introduced by Bolton to describe critical reflective practice that enables professionals to recognise their own implicit knowledge and values-in-practice and acknowledge dissonance between these and their explicit knowledge and espoused values (Bolton, 2014: 22). Reflective practice offers me a framework for considering some of the gaps that exist between espoused values and values in action described in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Reflective practice is relevant to this study because it reveals a perspective on knowledge-production as processual and 'becoming' rather than a series of truths. Bolton describes how such practice 'helps us to accept uncertainty which is the route to effective learning and professional artistry. It enables us to say 'I don't know what is going on here, and I want to find out' (Bolton, 2014: 5). Reflective practice is also particularly relevant by dint of its strong focus on the inter-relationship of practice and research. Schön highlights an historical division between practice and research, whereby 'practitioners were supposed to furnish researchers with problems for study and the researcher's role was usually considered superior to the role of the practitioner' (Schön, 1983: 26). In contrast, according to Schön, the practitioner researcher combines research and practice as part of a dynamic and emergent process:

There is no question of an 'exchange' between research and practice or of the 'implementation' of research results, when the frame- or theory-testing experiments of the practitioner at the same time transforms the practice

situation. Here, the exchange between research and practice is immediate (ibid: 309).

Our research is located in and emerges from practice and at the same time is constantly feeding into the work. This approach is in line with Freire's articulation of praxis, which sees action and reflection occurring alongside each other and inter-dependently (Freire, 1972 : 60) 96: 48). My thesis therefore presents practice and research as inter-dependent elements, which feed off and into each other as part of an ongoing process.

Making Practice Count

In this section I describe some of the arts-based methods utilised within our research, including Image Theatre (Boal, 1979, 1992), photo elicitation (Harper, 2002) and live drama workshops. Arts-based methods were used for two main reasons. Firstly, they were relevant to the group who have all been members of the theatre company for several years. A number have limited speech but are very used to expressing perspectives and ideas through theatre, and an art-based approach therefore built on prior experiences and competencies. The ongoing nature of my relationship with the group meant processes could stretch over a number of months, which made my research quite distinct from that undertaken by many other researchers who are more likely to be constrained by timescales and therefore less able to develop research collaboratively and responsively.

Importantly, dialogical art-based processes were incorporated in response to the aspiration to be inclusive. As highlighted above, historically much research has been criticised for failing to reflect the experiences of disabled people from their own perspectives and making little contribution to their lives (Oliver, 1990, 2009; Goodley, 2011). Oliver proposes emancipatory research as a way of supporting disabled people to become empowered and take control of their own research agendas. He advises this 'does not mean that researchers have to give up researching but that they have to put their knowledge and skills in the hands of the research subjects themselves' (Oliver, 2009: 115). I have chosen to use the term 'Inclusive Research' to describe the art-based methods utilised (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003; Nind, 2014). Inclusive Research is an umbrella term to include

emancipatory, participatory, partnership and user-led research methods ‘all of which reflect a particular turn towards democratization of the research process’ (Nind, 2014: 1). It has been particularly prominent within learning disability research, where people with learning disabilities become ‘researchers playing an active role as instigators, interviewers, data analysts or authors’ (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 62). Walmsley and Johnson offer a history of Inclusive Research. Up to the mid-1980s, the majority of research involving people with learning disabilities followed a medical model, whereby a researcher described and analysed the behaviour of disabled people. The introduction of normalization as a policy, which placed agencies and non-disabled people in the position of working for the interests of disabled people, the development of the social model of disability and creation of the disabled people’s movement shifted research from looking at the ‘problems’ of impairment to bringing about change in society (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003; 59). Nind summarises the core ideas within Inclusive Research. Firstly it aims to disrupt the hierarchy inherent in much traditional research between researcher and researched. Secondly, it aims to maximise the power and competence of people who are not generally deemed competent enough to be actively involved in research. Thirdly, it is based on the idea that knowledge will be more authentic and therefore more valid, because it comes from an ‘insider’ viewpoint. Lastly, it presents the idea of research as ‘empowering’ and ‘accessible’ to people who would not generally be able to engage in research. According to Nind, these core ideas will be present in any piece of Inclusive Research, but specific approaches will depend on the contexts within which particular pieces of research take place (Nind, 2014: 31).

Photo Elicitation

Nind identifies a lack of detail in most studies regarding how Inclusive Research projects optimise participation (Nind, 2014:86). With the aim of highlighting process as well as product, this section comprises a description of the methods used. The first stage of Inclusive Research spanned a series of six sessions across a two-month period and involved myself and seven members of DIY’s Friday Group exploring the theme of leadership through Image Theatre and

photo elicitation. At an early workshop, group members were shown projected images of previous educational projects and asked to identify where the photograph was taken and what they could see. Speech bubbles were used to gather all suggestions about what the leader in each picture was saying and thinking. Photo elicitation is described by Douglas Harper as 'based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview' (Harper, 2002: 13). Jon Prosser states that reliance on methods like semi-structured interviews and sample surveys favour articulate people and exclude those with communication difficulties and learning disabilities, whereas the introduction of photographs and drawings can make research processes more accessible:

Despite the long-standing trend toward inclusive research and working 'with' rather than 'on' participants, the voice and agency of the least able in society is often missing [...] Visual methodologists can make a major contribution here by adopting an egalitarian stance and by working alongside the most vulnerable, underrepresented, and least researched and understood members of society (Prosser, 2013: 200).

Photographs of past projects were something to which everybody in the group could relate. A photograph does not only elicit more information, it also prompts a different kind of information because it 'mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do word-alone interviews [...] That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk' (Harper, 2002: 22-3). By using photographs group members could draw on past experiences and relate these to the theme of leadership, but at this initial stage, responses were predominantly verbal. Combining photo elicitation with Image Theatre, offered opportunities for group members to respond physically as well as verbally and communicate different kinds of embodied knowledge.

Image Theatre

Image Theatre comprises a number of physical approaches, based on the ideology and techniques of Augusto Boal (Boal, 1979 and 1992). Following on from activities described above, for example, members worked in pairs to mould body images of 'leader' and 'follower', which were placed together. The group

commented on the dynamic between them and speech bubbles were used to thought-track what each character was thinking and feeling, before developing a series of short improvisations. Boal's ideas and techniques have a particular relevance in relation to Inclusive Research. Firstly, Boal's emphasis on physicality and the senses chimes with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'lived body' and positions the body at the centre of the individual's experience of the world. This makes the approaches accessible to people with learning disabilities for whom physical expression is often a more powerful form of communication. Secondly, Boal builds on Freire's work and his view of theatre as a foundation for social change correlates with a view of research as a 'political activity'. Thirdly, his techniques are founded on dialogical processes and are therefore highly appropriate to this study.

Boal's writings and practice have been increasingly criticised over recent years. David Davis and Carmel O' Sullivan, for example, accuse Boal of lacking grounding in Marxist theory and of focussing too much on dealing with individual problems. Like Freire, the dissonance of his 'espoused values' and 'values in action' are highlighted as 'the very principles he aspired to in his theoretical origins are shown to be contradicted by his practice. The focus is almost exclusively on the protagonist and the realisation of his / her individual wants / needs / desires in isolation from his / her social and material objective reality' (Davis and O'Sullivan, 2000: 293). Whilst I share this cynicism regarding the individualism in Boal's later work, his ideas and techniques are very relevant to Inclusive Research. Image Theatre offers an accessible way for people with learning disabilities to share personal experiences and create shared understandings, using their bodies as well as their voices. As Boal states 'great general themes are inscribed in the small personal themes and incidents' (Boal, 1995: 40). A range of Image Theatre techniques introduced in our research, enabled individuals to present their own perspectives, share these with others and reach shared understandings.

For Freire and Boal, the link between individual experience and an understanding of oppression is made when people realise their experiences are shared and the consequence of social forces. From this realisation comes politicisation and a commitment to change. The idea of social change has particular relevance within Inclusive Research, the aim of which is to bring about

positive change in the lives of people with learning disabilities. However, the level to which some people with learning disabilities are able to theorise around abstract ideas is often limited. As a result, Inclusive Research has a tendency to 'privilege concrete applied research over more theoretical or abstract topics and to privilege more able people with learning disabilities' (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 176). Walmsley and Johnson highlight, a lack of awareness on the part of many people with learning disabilities of being 'labelled' although they have first-hand knowledge of the impacts of labelling on their own lives. Leadership is a similarly abstract concept, but whilst a number of members of the Friday Group would find it difficult to theorise about leadership, they all have personal experience of leadership and it was essential to include this in the thesis.

Walmsley and Johnson identify the need for inclusive researchers to change the way they think about theorising when working with people with learning disabilities as co-researchers, stating that 'if inclusive research is about anything, it is about changing the way research, including theorizing, is conceptualized' (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003:141). They assert that Inclusive Research is not only about gathering data, but should also include ordering and analysing that data. In my role as practitioner-researcher, I could have placed the photographs and Image Theatre into the frameworks of Foucault and Freire and 'translated' them into a format that was more academically acceptable, thus placing myself in the powerful position of the 'expert' once again:

The ally has a lot of power [...] It is she who names what is going on as 'research'; it is she who identifies the theorizing. Print is possibly the most difficult communication medium for people with learning disabilities to control, yet print is pre-eminently the medium by which ideas are shared in the public arena (ibid: 162).

The combination of images and words provided by the formats of Comic Life and PowerPoint were introduced as ways of ordering and analysing the data, which would support more dialogical processes and offer more accessible formats for dissemination.

Comic Life and PowerPoint

Comic Life was initially introduced as a means of recording, analysing and presenting the knowledge that emerged through photo elicitation and Image Theatre. One activity, for example, involved a series of images from DIY workshops being projected onto a wall and Friday Group members offering suggestions as to what leaders and followers were saying and thinking. A series of Comic Life images were created by overlaying the original photographs with suggestions made by group members in speech bubbles, as illustrated by the examples below.



Images C and D: Comic Life – Example 1 and 2

Comic Life presentations were then used as a spring-board into an Image Theatre technique, the 'human machine'. Each member chose the idea they thought most important and found a sound and action to illustrate that idea. One by one group members joined the machine, repeated their sounds and actions and froze. The completed human machine of the 'good leader' was then animated. This example highlights the way in which art-based methods were used in a complimentary way, feeding into and off each other within the methodology-in-the-making. Within our 'improvised' methodology-in-the-making, we were creating a research methodology as we went along. For example, when group members reflected that the Comic Life presentations contained too much information and

had too 'finished' a feel to create different ordering and titling, we were able to introduce PowerPoint as an alternative format for dialogical data analysis.

Photographs of individual elements of the human machine were taken and I ordered them within a PowerPoint format. At the next session the PowerPoint was shown as incomplete and group members suggested headings, captions and identified ideas they thought belonged together. The order and titles were amended a number of times over a series of sessions, and in this way all group members played an active part in grouping the data. The processes were at their core collaborative and dialogic. As in devising, group members were re-framing the question and selecting and ordering material throughout the process until a final format was agreed. A second PowerPoint was created through a similar process asking the question 'What does leadership mean to DIY?' a slide from which is shown below (see Image E).



Image E: PowerPoint – Example

The Live Workshop Event

Another inclusive element of the research was the live workshop event, which took place on 23rd May 2016. The concept of the live workshop event developed over the span of the research. Initially, I planned to include a rehearsed presentation or training event as part of my thesis submission, but was concerned that this would be neither reflect the reality of the practice, nor comply with the

politics and ethics of the research. Instead, I decided to invite examiners to two 45-minute drama workshops run by Friday Group members, Angela, Anna and Jenny with two groups of Aspire Youth Drama Group members. In doing so, I was drawn to the implications of what Nelson highlights as the openness and unfinished nature of practice-based research: 'PaR typically affords substantial insights rather than coming to such definite conclusions as to constitute "answers"' (Nelson, 2013: 30). Examiners were provided with background information regarding DIY (see Appendix N: DIY Background Information) and the Aspire Youth Drama Group in advance (see Appendix O: Aspire Background Information). The live event offered an opportunity to present practice and research as inter-dependent. Secondly, it foregrounded the embodied experience and knowledge of performers with learning disabilities and presented them as shapers of some parts of the research. Thirdly, it offered examiners a live experience of DIY's leadership activities, unmediated by myself as a practitioner-researcher. The live experience and its documentation were not offered as a model of good practice or a summary of our research to date, but rather as points of reflection on an ongoing journey. Documentation of the event includes my own observations written from a phenomenological perspective, images and documents provided to examiners and a video filmed and edited by Wynter Productions. As Nelson comments, such complementary formats support the live event and seek to 'enhance the articulation and evidencing of a research enquiry, the work itself constituting substantial evidence but not the only evidence' (Nelson, 2013: 20).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the notion of a 'methodology in-the-making' which draws together a range of perspectives on, and understandings of, leadership and Learning Disability Theatres. This thesis is only one iteration of the research undertaken and necessarily will be limited in its audience – very few performers with learning disabilities, for example, are likely to read the thesis in its current form. However, the body of work developed through ongoing practice-based research has been extensive and the significant learning generated from this process has the potential to contribute to an agenda for change. Therefore the challenge to myself and collaborators at DIY is what happens not only to this document, but also the range of materials and data collected, to ensure it will be

useful to DIY Theatre Company and to others. Moving forwards, how can it be used to influence positive change for people with learning disabilities?

Art-based approaches have offered opportunities to develop research in an inclusive way but, as Walmsley and Johnson suggest, the researcher who is driven by values of social change 'carries the burden of social injustice' (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 88). The complexity and range of issues facing people with learning disabilities in contemporary society will never be overcome by a single piece of theatre or any individual piece of research. Practitioner-researchers need to acknowledge and challenge notions of transformation, but we also need to develop a 'political' practice which contributes to positive change. In this respect Balfour's notion of 'little changes' is useful as a way of re-orientating what is possible within applied theatre. This shifts the practitioner's focus away from proving outcomes and impacts and towards the need for 'theory generating' research (Balfour, 2009). In thinking about the political and ethical implications of this kind of research we might also look to Nicholson who suggests that rather than claiming to 'give people a voice' practitioners might perceive it as their role 'to create spaces and places that enable the participants' voices to be heard' (Nicholson, 2005: 165). This thesis, seeks to offer a space in which the voices and perspectives of performers with learning disabilities can be seen, felt and heard. In pursuit of 'little changes' it might prompt a reader to question their own ideas of what leadership is or can be, it might encourage a drama practitioner to consider different ways of working, or it might encourage a practitioner-researcher to explore more collaborative ways of developing research. Chapters Three and Four of the thesis offer one story of the research journey to date, but this thesis is only one way of arranging the material gathered. In the spirit of dialogical enquiry, I invite the reader to pull it apart, reassemble it, extend it, criticise its weaknesses and create your own stories for the future.

Chapter Three: Leadership in-the-Making

Introduction

This chapter considers a range of leadership practices encountered during a series of visits and interviews, which took place during the period 2012 to 2014, and explores some of the complexities and potential of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. The idea that people with learning disabilities are 'too disabled' to do leadership is based on normative notions of the traits and abilities of the idealised individual leader, against which most of us, but particularly people with learning disabilities, are all too often deemed lacking. In contrast, a relational perspective offers the opportunity to explore how all those involved in Learning Disability Theatres have the potential to continually re-think and re-make leadership in each moment of practice.

The first section of this chapter, A National Perspective, identifies three strands of leadership encountered during the first stage of my research: organisational, pedagogical and artistic. In some organisations artistic processes such as creating and touring performances are seen as separate from pedagogical activities like running training sessions or organisational processes such as making decisions about how a company is managed. In others, strands of leadership are viewed as inter-connected, overlapping and inter-dependent, leading to a view of leadership as potentially running through all aspects of Learning Disability Theatres.

The second part, Performativity and the Shared Stage, focuses on moments from a national conference run by Creative Minds in 2014. Creative Minds is a national project coordinated by Carousel (Brighton) which seeks to create a shared voice for learning disability arts organisations across the UK. This section explores relationships amongst disabled and non-disabled people who are engaged in making leadership practice and highlights the performative nature of an event which invites us to re-assess accepted notions of heroic leadership and how a conference *should* be.

The third section, Relationality and Soft Self-Other Definition, focuses on moments from a training residency run by Oily Cart Theatre Company in 2014. It

adopts a phenomenological approach to explore relationships amongst disabled performers and disabled young people in the making of leadership.

A National Perspective

This section is based on a series of visits and interviews with representatives of eight learning disability performance companies; Dark Horse (Huddersfield), The Lawnmowers (Gateshead), Movers (Leicester), Twisting Ducks (Newcastle), Magpie Dance (Bromley), Open Theatre (Birmingham), Oily Cart (London) and Creative Minds (Brighton). Research indicated that performers with learning disabilities were involved in a range of leadership activities including running drama workshops alongside touring productions, making inputs to higher and further education courses, delivering training to social workers, dentists, doctors and housing associations, and yet, as highlighted in Chapter One, little published research on the subject of leadership and Learning Disability Theatres exists. It is important to note that interviews and observations took place between 2012 and 2014: since then, the UK participatory arts sector has, up to and including at the time of writing, been significantly negatively impacted by funding cuts arising from the UK government's economic policy of austerity. Dark Horse, for example, lost its National Portfolio Organisation status (core funding from Arts Council England, the agency responsible for disseminating state funding for the arts in England and Wales) in 2014 and Vanessa Brooks left her role of Artistic Director there in 2015 after seven years of service. The information in this section spans a time when a considerable amount of change was taking place and offers an overview of discourses and practices at a very particular point in history.

Some interviews reflected a relatively traditional perspective on leadership. Vanessa Brooks, for example, then Artistic Director of Dark Horse, expressed the view that theatre is intrinsically hierarchical and the job of an actor is 'complex enough' without the requirement of also taking on leadership roles. Brooks' interview reflects an hierarchical model of leadership, as she states that 'in training, the tutor is the leader. In the rehearsal room, the Director is the leader. Artistically, the company is led by the script and the desire to serve an audience' (Vanessa Brooks. Interview with author, April 2013). Brooks expresses concerns

that a 'disabled-led' agenda is strongly located on the 'social benefit' side of the aesthetic/social binary discussed in Chapter One. In her view, a focus on collaborative forms of leadership detracts from the imperative for Learning Disability Theatres to articulate their value in aesthetic terms:

Why does it always have to be about issues? It's self-perpetuating and entirely negative. It's all about the voice of the disenfranchised and being "authentic". It's too inward – people are being therapied within an inch of their life. The idea of serving an audience is anathema to the Learning Disability sector – it's all about educating and offering opportunities for people with learning difficulties to participate (Vanessa Brooks. Interview with author, April 2013).

My own perspective is that to view leadership purely in terms of social benefit is reductive and can perpetuate an aesthetic/social binary which is both negative and divisive. As highlighted in Chapter One, much discourse around Learning Disability Theatres has become entrenched in such binaries. Companies certainly need strong individuals, with artistic vision, commitment and an ability to negotiate the different languages required to survive in a volatile cultural sector. They also need to be able to look beyond normative notions and models of leadership to understand and value the contribution people with learning disabilities can and do make to leadership in Learning Disability Theatres.

The notion of 'disability gain', attributed by Ann M. Fox to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, describes disability as a creative force 'from which we all have real things to learn beyond simple inspiration or affective response' (Fox, 2016: 130). 'Disability gain' builds on the notion of 'deaf gain', developed by H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray, which challenges negative perceptions of 'hearing loss' and highlights 'the unique cognitive, creative and cultural gains manifested through deaf ways of being in the world' (Baumann and Murray, 2014: xv). Baumann and Murray note that disability has been slower to make its way into diversity discourses than race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and economic class because of deeply rooted assumptions of normalcy and they emphasise the contribution deaf people and communities can make to society. They state:

Placing deaf studies within the frame of biocultural diversity provides a frame of reference that predates the frame of normalcy by some tens of thousands of years; it also expands the frame of biocultural diversity, which

has yet to consider the epistemological and physical diversity inherent in the wider spectrum of minds and bodies in order to encompass the full range of human flourishing (Baumann and Murray, 2014: xx).

Echoing their question ‘How can hearing people come to appreciate deaf gain?’ my thesis raises the question ‘How can the wider community come to appreciate what people with learning disabilities contribute to society?’ Through detailed examination of existing practice in this chapter and the next, I aim to expand the frame of reference by engaging with a range of leadership practices within Learning Disability Theatres.

The first strand of leadership identified through interviews was *organisational leadership*, a term I am using to denote making decisions about how a company or an event is managed. Interviews with representatives of The Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company (Gateshead) and Creative Minds (Brighton) offered an opportunity to reflect on this aspect. The Lawnmowers is an established organisation, included in the Arts Council’s National Portfolio. When I visited I participated in a warm-up, which was led by a group member, and during the lunch break I interviewed group members individually. A long-standing company member showed me his thick lever-arch file with sections on politics, political parties, government, rights and Boal. He described his role at The Lawnmowers as follows:

One of the main assets I bring is being good with words. I always have been. If Gerry is doing a document or a funding bid, she’ll ask me a more interesting way to say it. We all bring our different things together. Like G has an angelic voice – a really good voice. Lots of people talk well. People play instruments or do drumming. We all bring skills [...]. The most important thing is that we are ourselves and we bring ourselves and what we enjoy into the building (The Lawnmowers. Interview with author, March 2013).

The view of leadership offered here is very different from that presented by Brooks at Dark Horse. The interviewee presents organisational practices as complementary to, rather than separate from, artistic skills and mentions fundraising alongside singing skills with no sense of hierarchy. He expresses a clear sense of himself as a leader, and the skills and attributes he brings to the organisation. The company’s website (<http://thelawnmowers.co.uk>, accessed 11th

June 2017) states that ‘members of the Company place themselves alongside the daily struggles faced by people with learning disabilities. All of our projects are working towards a future, just and equal society’. This statement, as well as evidence from interviews, suggests that for The Lawnmowers, organisational leadership is as much a part of a social change agenda as an artistic one.

Creative Minds describes itself as being ‘led by learning disabled artists and performers’ (<http://creativemindsproject.org.uk>, accessed 11th June 2017) and their work is therefore interesting to consider in relation to organisational leadership. Creative Minds is a national project coordinated by Carousel (Brighton, UK) which seeks to create a shared voice for learning disability arts organisations across the UK. A series of regional Creative Minds conferences took place in Brighton (2014), Bristol (2014) and Ipswich (2015) and at the time of writing further events are planned in Manchester (2017) and Birmingham (2017). Interviews with Mark Richardson, then artistic director of Carousel, and Gus Garside, coordinator of Creative Minds, described how artists involved in Oska Bright, an international film festival run by people with learning disabilities and coordinated by Carousel, were frustrated that their work was being placed in a therapeutic rather than an aesthetic frame. In response, Carousel brought together a steering group of seven artists and performers with learning disabilities representing four organisations (Carousel, Corali, Rocket Artists and Action Space) to organise the first Creative Minds conference (Brighton, 2014). The website states their aim was to look at:

What makes our work good? What words can we use to tell people that we know our art is good? How can we get more people to see our work? How can we get more venues to show our work? How can we get newspapers to talk about our creative work? [...] How can we get universities to take us seriously as artists, performers and film-makers? (Creative Minds, 2017).

The steering group met monthly over the two-year period leading up to the conference. Richardson described how, when the process began, the two non-disabled co-ordinators had more experience in coordinating events and therefore took on the main coordination roles. According to Richardson, as confidence increased, the power dynamics shifted: ‘We had ideas of how it might go but these were blown out of the water. The group make it their own. They made it different’ (Mark Richardson. Interview with author, March 2014). The format of meetings

was adapted to enable decisions to be made democratically. For example, a 'talking stick' was introduced, so only one person could talk at any time and decisions were recorded with flipcams and on social networking site Tumblr to increase accessibility. Richardson's description highlights the centrality and changing nature of relationships amongst disabled and non-disabled people in shaping leadership, and the need to adapt forms and structures to ensure leaders with learning disabilities, and indeed a greater diversity of non-disabled people, can contribute to committees.

The second strand of leadership identified in this phase of research was *pedagogical leadership*, a term I am using to denote practices which involve performers with learning disabilities as trainers and educators. This element emerged in interviews with representatives of Twisting Ducks (Newcastle). The company creates shows for health professionals, housing associations and others. In response to my questions about leadership, one company member described a performance presented as part of a training session at the Freeman Hospital:

At the start I get a letter – it tells me I have to go to hospital, but I don't understand it. There are too many long words. Mark plays my dad – I give it to him. He doesn't really explain. I'm left in the dark. Staff talk to my dad instead of me. My thoughts are shown in the voice-over. It gets the message across about how someone might feel when their parents leave them in hospital (Twisting Ducks. Interview with author, March 2013).

I asked members of Twisting Ducks why they thought this approach was effective. One company member stated:

It's better for us to show it. It's better if it's someone with a learning difficulty in the role, because it really happens to us. We're not just acting – we know it ourselves (Twisting Ducks. Interview with author, March 2013).

Here, the performer is viewed as an 'expert' who combines knowledge of theatre practices with expertise in presenting experiences of people with learning disabilities from the 'inside'. Pedagogical leadership is a strand of leadership with a significant history, and Emma Brodzinski highlights the historical influence of the 2001 UK Government White Paper (Department of Health 2001) in encouraging Local Authorities and other Health and Social Care providers to include people with learning disabilities in policy. She describes how Mind the Gap and The

Lawnmowers have used Forum Theatre (Boal, 1979) and Legislative Theatre (Boal, 2005) extensively in training health professionals (Brodzinski, 2010: 118). Indeed, during my visit to The Lawnmowers, one of the members described one of the Forum Theatre pieces he'd performed in:

They are seeing a scene of somebody being bullied then we ask 'how could you change it?' We ask them to come up and show their ideas. There was a scene where somebody was being bullied. They leave the centre and some nasty people are hanging around outside. They steal his money and his phone. The audience come up with solutions – he could ring someone to walk with him, he could ring a taxi (The Lawnmowers. Interview with author, March 2013).

The third strand of leadership identified in interviews was *artistic leadership*, comprising such elements as choreography and drama facilitation. Magpie Dance, founded in 1986 by Artistic Director Avril Hitman, is a contemporary dance company for learning disabled and non-disabled dancers. Hitman described a choreography project in which six adult dancers with learning disabilities worked with mentors to choreograph work for public performance. As Hitman explains, the experience was quite different from the company's usual choreographic processes:

There was a great level of trust and mutual respect which was important. Magpie choreographers do not come with "baggage" or traditional training that other artists have. So the work is fresher - they created pieces which were born from their own experience and their experiences at Magpie (Avril Hitman. Interview with author, April 2013).

Hitman identifies relationships amongst disabled choreographers and both disabled and non-disabled dancers as central to the choreographic process. Accessibility was not just about including a niche group of artists, but about opening up a new aesthetics and new ways of making leadership. Another example is offered by Stopgap Dance Company, based in Farnham, which creates dance productions for national and international touring. Their website (<http://stopgapdance.com>, accessed June 11th 2017) states that 'we employ disabled and non-disabled artists who find innovative ways to collaborate. Stopgap value a pioneering spirit and are committed to making discoveries about integrating disabled and non-disabled people through dance'. Stopgap

choreographer Chris Pavia became the first learning disabled choreographer in the UK to create work for national touring with his piece *The Awakening* (2014, Outdoor). At the Creative Minds conference (Ipswich, 2015) Chris described how the film *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials* (2015) had inspired his work and explained how he used mood boards to teach dancers the structure of the piece:

you have to know what your beginning is, what the start is and also the middle. It's like when you read a book, it's like chapters. You've got chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, chapter four- and it goes right all the way through the book to the very end' (Chris Pavia. Presentation at Creative Minds Conference, Ipswich, 2015).

A number of dance companies have been developing choreography with dancers with learning disabilities over several years, and in doing so have introduced innovative approaches to creating dance and new performance aesthetics. It is notable that few Learning Disability Theatres have concentrated on developing the skills of aspiring directors with learning disabilities. In order to do so, like dance, companies, they will need to challenge and adapt the accepted ways of doing things and open up new creative opportunities and forms.

Having identified leadership as an important consideration in relation to organisational, pedagogical and artistic practices within Learning Disability Theatres, the following two sections focus on observations from a conference and a training event, both of which took place in 2014. A series of moments, described from a phenomenological perspective, offer insights into the relationships of those involved in making leadership and further illustrate some of the complexities, challenges and potential of leadership created through the interactions of disabled and non-disabled collaborators. These moments are recorded in boxed bold text.

Performativity and the Shared Stage

The following moment was captured at the opening of the first Creative Minds conference (Brighton 2014) and introduces an exploration of 'performativity' and leadership within Learning Disability Theatres.

The introduction to the Creative Minds conference takes the form of a play. The first presenter starts to open proceedings in a formal manner but is interrupted by an angry artist who enters holding a newspaper, complaining that their work hasn't been reviewed.

No sooner has the compere begun again with 'Right, back to the conference' when another member enters holding an empty picture frame, angry that a gallery has refused to show his work.

'Right, back to the conference...' the compere begins, but yet another interruption comes from a member with an empty box, complaining about lack of funding.

'Right, back to the conference...' the compere tries to continue but is yet again interrupted by someone complaining that there is no audience 'Where are they?' she asks, gazing into the full auditorium. The question is met by the whole auditorium with a roar of laughter.

One perspective on this moment is that the 'normal' conference format has been adapted to make it more 'accessible' to people with learning disabilities. A disability gain perspective, on the other hand, reveals how increasing accessibility can have much more far-reaching implications. Kirsty Johnston identifies the pursuit of accessible space and staging as a 'foundational aspect of disability theatre practice' (Johnston, 2016: 59) and highlights the 'aesthetics of access' of Graeae Theatre Company, the leading Disability Theatre Company in the UK, which creatively embeds elements such as audio description and sign language within artistic processes (Johnston, 2016: 87). Carrie Sandahl, in her article *Considering Disability: Phenomenology's Role in Revolutionizing Theatrical Space* explores how layouts of traditional theatres create hierarchies of value and exclusion. She offers the example of a traditional conference:

one body faces another body with an imaginary line or boundary dividing the two into a performing space and an audience space. Communication is usually bi-directional, with one person speaking and the other listening with the option of reversing this dynamic. Even when groups of people occupy either side of the line, the communication remains bi-directional with messages being sent across the divide visually and orally (Sandahl, 2002: 25).

Accepted formats of conferences are based on an ableist paradigm, uphold certain power structures and maintain a status quo. It is still generally accepted that

certain kinds of voices and those with a certain kind of education will 'fit in' and as a result it is not only people with learning disabilities who find formal conferences intimidating and inaccessible. In contrast, the layout created within disability contexts is often more fluid and collaborative. As Sandahl goes on to comment:

The line between performance and audience space becomes more fluid, intermediary people or devices sometimes collaborate with those on both sides of the divide to channel messages, and language becomes multidimensional. Those of us who are unable to use our mouths to speak may use an interpreter, alphabet board, or computer voice. Making sure that everyone receives the message is just as much a priority as who is allowed to be in the performance space (Sandahl, 2002: 25).

If we consider disability as an aspect of human diversity rather than a loss or a deficit, we open up new ideas and possibilities for creating spaces and events. Another example comes from my own experience at DIY. The company's AGM was planned by Board members. A number of visitors were expected, so it was agreed that DIY's Vice Chair, Cathy, would open the meeting by sending a 'welcome' sound and action around the circle. When everyone had arrived I turned to Cathy to say 'shall we welcome everybody to the meeting?'

Angela says "We could sing our welcome song". The welcome song has been created as part of DIY's "Following the Thread" show for PMLD audiences.

I feel nervous when Angela suggests the song. Will we come across as unprofessional? Can you really start an AGM with a song?

We go with Angela's idea and Rob introduces the song. At first the newcomers seem a bit nervous, but Rob starts at one end of the circle where people are familiar with the song, so everyone is smiling by the time their turn comes round.

By the end I'm convinced that every AGM should start with a song. It creates a real sense of a group, it relaxes everyone and it gives visitors a sense of who DIY is and what we do.

The introductions to the Creative Minds conference and DIY's AGM offered entertaining, accessible ways of opening an event and disrupted the structures we expect for such events. They also offer a challenge, in action, to normative pre-conceptions of people with learning disabilities. In the Creative Minds event guide,

accessed via the Creative Minds website (<http://creativemindsproject.org.uk> accessed 11th July 2017) the steering group states that it was important for disabled people to give the keynote speeches at the conference 'because it showed everybody that we were in charge'. In considering the performative nature of the conference introduction, it is useful to reference the writings of Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that feminism has historically reproduced a binary view of gender relations. In contrast, gender for Butler is not fixed but based on a series of performative acts and as such, 'gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*' (Butler, 2007: 19, emphasis in original). Because identity is constructed, Butler asserts, we can contest social norms by choosing to act differently. She comments, 'the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself' (ibid: 202-3). Carrie Sandhal and Philip Auslander extend Butler's notions of performativity to argue that disability identities, like gender identities, are constructed through repetitive acts. Sandahl and Auslander argue that manipulating and transforming stereotypes are important tactics for disabled people because 'the available "scripts" of disability – both in daily life and in representation – are frustratingly limited and deeply entrenched in the cultural imagination' (Sandhal and Auslander, 2005: 3).

Viewed through a performative lens, the actors who opened the Creative Minds conference were presenting a different 'script' which disrupted normative notions of learning disability and leadership at the same time. Garland-Thomson describes how disabled people are constantly being observed and refers to the 'illicit' stare of non-disabled people which conjures a sense of disability as 'unexpected, hidden or uncanny' (Garland-Thomson, 2005: 33). By taking to the stage at a performance or conference, people with learning disabilities are able to take control of, instead of being subject to, the 'stare' of their audience. Of course, a single conference which presents people with learning disabilities as confident and competent leaders will not 'transform' deeply entrenched and embedded normative paradigms. However, with reference to Balfour's notion of 'little changes' (Balfour, 2009), the more often we see people with learning disabilities

making presentations at conferences the more opportunities disabled people will have to challenge accepted scripts and become active shapers of their own identities.

In order to fully understand the performative power of the opening presentation, it is also important to consider its collaborative nature. Instead of the usual keynote address delivered by an individual 'heroic' expert, it is notable that this was a group effort. Indeed, collaboration amongst disabled presenters was reflected in several moments throughout the event:

One presenter is standing too far from the microphone, so that it can't pick up his voice. His co-presenter prompts him "You need to talk into the mic" so he moves forward, smiles, and repeats his sentence.

Another presenter is having difficulty reading a company name on the slide. She asks her co-presenter for help with the name. A bit of banter ensues and then the two presenters carry on reading from the list of companies.

The inter-actions amongst presenters might have appeared uncomfortable or unprofessional in another context, but instead were theatrical moments which were enjoyed by delegates. There was lots of dialogue amongst disabled co-presenters which created a relaxed, conversational tone. The image presented was of inter-dependence rather than independence, with each presenter supporting the other in a mutual fashion.

In addition to the partnership of disabled leaders, the conference opening also represented collaboration amongst disabled and non-disabled protagonists, as described by Gus Garside, Creative Minds coordinator:

The ideas genuinely came from them. S, when she walked on and said 'We've got no money' that all came from her. 'We don't get to go to university'- all of that came from them. But it was Mark and I that had to direct it and rehearse it [...] I could just see what was needed, you know? Where were the nuances, the bits that had to be highlighted and the energy? (Gus Garside. Interview with author, July 2015).

Garside's commentary indicates that preparation for the presentation required an outside eye to provide direction, in this case provided by a non-disabled artist. In

common with much theatre work the presentation was created through a partnership of performers with learning disabilities and non-disabled artistic directors. In a detailed exploration of the work of Jez Colborne, associate artist at *Mind the Gap*, Hargrave highlights the level of support actors with learning disabilities often receive in order to mount a professional performance (Hargrave, 2015: 12). Although Colborne's one man show *On The Verge* offers the illusion of a single creative agent, Colborne actually worked with writers, directors, sound and lighting technicians. As Hargrave comments, 'He makes work out of his own experience, that demands to be judged aesthetically; and he can only do so with the close support of various authors' (Hargrave, 2015: 12). Hargrave highlights a dissonance which emerges between the image projected of the actor as an autonomous, self-directed individual and the reality, which is that the actor is supported by a number of professionals.

Of course, any solo performer, disabled or not, requires the support of others to mount a professional performance, but notions of autonomy and agency are particularly complex in relation to performers with learning disabilities. Normative perceptions of people with learning disabilities as dependents, make the presence of the non-disabled director problematic. Many non-disabled collaborators are likely to be highly sensitised to the possibility that observers will infer that non-disabled protagonists are really 'in charge' and performers with learning disabilities merely 'pretending' to lead or being manipulated in some way. Non-disabled collaborators may feel they need to make themselves 'invisible', not only because this offers the space for disabled collaborators to lead, but also because it signals to others that disabled people are in charge. In contrast, if we view leadership as relational (based on inter-dependence rather than independence) and fluid and processual (rather than based on rigid roles), we open up the possibility of viewing disabled and non-disabled collaborators as both leaders and followers – moving forwards and backwards at different times. We can then gain a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of the inter-relationships and negotiations involved in shaping collaborative leadership.

A relational approach acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of power relations inherent within the inter-actions of those creating leadership. Dian Marie Hosking draws on Mikhail Bakhtin and Edward Sampson to describe a view of the

self as a relational construct. She describes a relational approach to leadership, as being participatory and open to multiple self-other relations, to the voices of others, and to 'ongoingness' (Hosking, 2011: 460). Instead of assuming that a 'hard' self-other definition (for example fixed notions of leaders and followers, disabled and non-disabled) is how things really are or should be, she suggests that what she terms 'hard differentiation' should be seen as a construction made in language-based processes rather than in practice. This invites consideration of how ongoing relational processes could construct what Hosking calls *soft self-other differentiation* and she reflects on how leadership might emerge and contribute to such processes (Hosking, 2011: 460). This relational perspective is illustrated by consideration of another moment at the same Creative Minds conference discussed above when S, a presenter with learning disabilities, was working with a non-disabled coordinator, R:

S is fronting the Q & A session as compere with the microphone and R is standing behind her, quite literally 'in the wings'. S is a great communicator - she reads from a crib sheet but is also able to improvise. She is great at encouraging people to speak and directing the microphone around the room 'to the lady with the nice smile' she indicates as one woman puts up her hand with a question.

At one point the conversation wanders off task and R intervenes to try to refocus the discussion. He appears out of the wings and hands a card to S, then stands behind her as she starts to read: 'To the audience – how do they know it's good quality?' She looks confused and looks back to R for clarification, which he gives in repeating and elaborating on the question for the audience.

R's appearance from the wings makes me feel uncomfortable mainly I think because he himself seems so uncomfortable in stepping forward.

The discomfort in this moment appeared to come from the dissonance between the message being projected that S alone was in charge and the reality, which is that R was also in charge. As in Colborne's show, although designed to create the impression of a single creative agent, the presentation revealed a number of agents involved. Throughout the conference Mark Richardson described himself as feeling wary of 'constricting' disabled leaders. As he notes:

I need to be as invisible as possible. Handing over to people with learning disabilities to answer in their ways – they answer in a different way from how you would. There are different details. I need to let go otherwise I'm still there leading – having a presence. I have to take myself out – so I don't feel like I'm constricting people (Mark Richardson. Interview with author, March 2014).

Richardson felt he needed to make himself 'invisible' because he believed it was important for people with learning disabilities to genuinely lead the conference, and it is certainly true that unless space is actively made available for people with learning disabilities to lead, opportunities for genuine collaboration will be limited. However, trying to 'hide' power relationships by making non-disabled contributors 'invisible' does not engage with the complexity of the negotiations required for genuine collaboration. If we view leadership as a process, rather than a fixed allocation of roles, we recognise the fluidity of roles involved in this exchange; S was in charge facilitating the general discussion – her inter-personal skills and confidence as a presenter were exceptional – and where conversation needed to be provoked, deepened and interrogated, then R's skills in interrogation and provocation came to the fore.

It is an overt aim of this thesis to place leaders with learning disabilities 'centre stage'. However, the adoption of a phenomenological frame has opened up a rich seam of reflection on relational practice which, in turn, leads me to resist focussing purely on the actions of leaders with learning disabilities. The above moment describes two people engaged in 'working out' in the moment what the inter-relationship of disabled and non-disabled collaborators is and what it could be. Viewed through a relational lens, each time those involved in Learning Disability Theatres become involved in making leadership, they engage in the complex and constantly shifting power negotiations involved in our relationships with others. It is this constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation which makes new kinds of relationships and new ways of making leadership possible.

In concluding this section, it is relevant to acknowledge the extent to which this analysis has lent itself very readily to theatrical metaphors. Phrases such as 'centre stage', 'changing scripts', and 'in the wings' have appeared throughout this chapter. To some extent this is reflective of my own applied theatre background,

but it also indicates a level of synergy between leadership and applied theatre practices to which I will return in Chapter Four.

Relationality and Soft Self-Other Differentiation

The Oily Cart *Dream: the Joy of Creating* residency (Ashford, 2014) offered an opportunity for me to experience leadership as an active participant in a week-long training course in Theatre for Children and Young People with Complex Disabilities. Oily Cart Theatre Company is one of the foremost companies in the UK creating theatre specifically for young people with PMLD (Brown, 2012). I was one of sixteen delegates on the residency, which was led by Tim, Claire and Max, the three founding members of Oily Cart and Mark Foster, a performer and workshop leader with a learning disability. Moments from the residency offer an opportunity to explore the tensions and contradictions that exist in balancing traditional and relational perspectives on leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. The following moment comes from the first day of the residency:

A small group of children are sitting behind desks eating their mid-morning snack of biscuits. The Oily Cart Team are having a discussion with a teacher at the front of the class – presumably explaining something about how the week ahead is going to be organised. Sixteen of us line the walls in this small space and watch the class – I feel out of place - unsure what we're supposed to be doing here - so I stay pressed against the wall, feeling like a giant, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible, watching the children eat their biscuits.

The only person amongst us to approach the young people is Mark. He bends down next to one of the boys and asks him his name. The boy responds with a smile and Mark responds 'My name's Mark – you remember me?' One by one Mark asks each boy in the row their name and offers a gentle high five along the line. He appears totally at ease. He makes a reciprocal connection with the young people, with his easy, friendly manner and they respond with smiles.

The rest of us remain uncertain, observing, watching. Mark is connecting with the children, developing relationships with the young people in the room.

The moment described above was my first experience of Foster's leadership. In sharp contrast with myself and the other adults in the room, who remained observers and thinkers, Foster moved towards the children, made eye contact, knelt beside them and spoke with them gently. Two interviews with course participants at the end of the residency highlighted the extent to which Foster's actions in this moment constituted a form of pedagogical leadership. The interviewees both, independently of each other and with no prompting, cited the same moment in the classroom as having had a pivotal impact on their learning. The first contrasted her inclination to stand back and observe with his impulse to just jump in saying 'He just went straight forward and started talking to the kids and they all just lit up. And that to me it's such a brave act to do that. That bit of modelling was so neat' (Course Participant. Interview with author, October 2014). A second interviewee described a similar experience:

I immediately thought wow he's teaching me here. I'm learning. Because I was studying how he was interacting with these children and thinking: that's it, that's the way. My view this week would be, that is the way to go. That there is somebody fun and brilliant to meet, so let's go and meet them and interact and play (Course Participant. Interview with author, October 2014).

Observations from delegates highlight the embodied nature of Foster's leadership. He was modelling through what he did rather than what he said, and as a result delegates gained a sense of what engaging with young people with PMLD looked and felt like, rather than just gaining theoretical knowledge. Tim Webb, Artistic Director of Oily Cart, explained that often the best way to learn how to facilitate theatre with young people with learning disabilities is to watch a skilled facilitator:

Anybody who watches Mark in action is going to learn really quickly what's effective and actually why you need to do this work and how you need to do it. Because if you're competently able and you've been educated, your head is full of all sorts of ideas which are not necessarily that useful. And it's the directness of Mark and get down to their level. Listen to my voice. I'm going to listen to your voice. You know, I'm going to watch the moves you make, you're going to watch the moves that I make (Tim Webb. Interview with author, October 2014).

Interestingly, the comments from course participants and from Webb draw on traditional discourses of the individual, heroic leader in presenting Foster as an

expert, with specific traits and abilities. Just as we need to see individual performers with learning disabilities on our stages and screens, so we need to see facilitators with learning disabilities delivering courses and running workshops and Foster's interventions in this context challenge pre-conceptions and offer affirming perspectives on leaders with learning disabilities. However, it is also important to recognise that this traditional perspective is particularly pervasive and resilient within Learning Disability Theatres (as it is within society more generally) and can prevent us from seeing or valuing other forms of leadership. Whilst it would be possible to develop a phenomenological analysis of this moment as demonstrating traditional, heroic leadership, I am more interested in exploring the implications of Foster's intervention from a relational perspective. Viewed in this way, Webb's use of such phrases as 'Listen to my voice, I'm going to listen to your voice' and 'I'm going to watch the moves you make, you're going to watch the moves that I make' describe a particular kind of engagement with young people which is highly responsive and reciprocal. Foster himself describes a strong sense of connection with the children with learning disabilities with whom he works. According to Foster this is a two-way process; he understands them because he had similar experiences as a child, and for the same reason they understand him. As he explains:

They recognise me. Like at the school this morning [...] Like that girl this morning. Like all those people at school, and these children. And like that boy that was walking. He likes football – he laughs and says 'I like football' like that. I can read their minds (Mark Foster. Interview with author, October 2014).

Foster's descriptions of his ability to 'read their minds' blurs the boundaries between himself and others and resonates strongly with Hosking's notion of 'soft self-other differentiation' and her suggestion that 'open-ness' to the voices of others and to the 'many levels of mind' creates a very particular form of relating (Hosking, 2011:460). Foster's words echo those of other performers with learning disabilities interviewed as part of this research, like J from Movers, a learning disability theatre company based in Leicester, who describes a similar sense of reciprocal understanding with the young people with whom he is working:

Some people I can relate to, because some people I met at college. I used to be shy and unconfident. There was this guy in a workshop who was

afraid to do any talking. I knew how he felt (Movers Theatre Company. Interview with author, January 2013).

For Andy Reeves, formerly Artistic Director of Speakeasy, J's words introduced a new way of thinking about the relationship between adult facilitators and young people with learning disabilities:

I'd spent a lot of time thinking of the impact of the work on participants – whether they felt a connection with older performers with learning difficulties, if they saw them as role models, if seeing them in action raised awareness of theatre and drama as something you could still do once you left school, that sort of thing. Yet somehow I hadn't thought so much about the two-way potential of this empathetic process (Andy Reeves. Email to author, February 2013).

It is beyond the scope of this research to explore to what extent adults with learning disabilities have a particular capacity for shared and reciprocal understandings with young people with learning disabilities. What comments above highlight however is the centrality of the core relationship of one human being with another. A consideration of the concept of empathy from a phenomenological perspective is useful here. Sigrid Merx identifies empathy as 'the human capacity to engage inter-subjectively with others, to understand others, to be able to relate to their feelings and experiences' (Merx, 2015: 205). For Merx empathy constitutes 'the embodied act through which we not only make ourselves present in a world but also present to others' (Merx, 2015: 220). Dan Zahavi describes empathy as 'a distinctive form of other-directed intentionality, distinct from both self-awareness and ordinary object-intentionality, which allows foreign experiences to disclose themselves as foreign rather than as own' (Zahavi, 2010: 138). This perspective of empathy as a form of 'other-directed intentionality' is illustrated through a moment described by Foster. He was introduced to a young girl with Batten disease; a rare, fatal recessive neurodegenerative disease that begins in childhood. Over time, affected children develop seizures, loss of sight, speech and motor skills. The girl was in the latter stages of the disease and had become nocturnal. Foster walked into the room where she was lying, began singing to her and reciting improvised poetry. Foster described the moment in such poetic language that I have chosen to present his words in the form of a poem.

**I read her mind.
In that classroom.
Something's wrong.
Wait a minute.
I know what happened to that girl.
That poor girl she's got a disease.
Never mind, I can make her smile
With this deep voice.
Then I just did it.
Did this poetry sound
Start the deep voice.
Take her to another forest.
Lifted her into the forest.
And I made her smile.
I made her back to life and smile.
In her skin.
This rich powerful voice.
Make her come alive and smile.
And her teachers, I made them all cry.
This voice, this deep powerful voice.
Make everyone smile.
She awake.
Eyes open up.
Smiling.
She was smiling.** (Mark Foster. Interview with author, October 2014).

Foster's rich description offers an insight into the embodied nature of his experience. He combines thoughts such as 'something's wrong' with actions 'then

I just did it', reflecting a response which is neither pure thought, nor pure action but a combination of the two. Hosking identifies two key elements of relational leadership, which are strongly reflected in Foster's interview. The first is the capacity of being in the present which Hosking calls '*being in the now* rather than the know' (Hosking, 2011: 463). His moving first person narrative offers a strong sense of the immediacy of the experience. He alternates between the present and the past tense, giving a strong sense of being 'in the moment'; totally immersed within the time and space of the encounter. The second key element introduced by Hosking is listening, which need not be about listening 'for' something, but rather 'listening as a form of 'participatory knowing' whereby 'listening then becomes sensing and feeling or 'being with' the phenomenal world; listening is heart-felt, engaged relating' (Hosking, 2011: 463). Although the girl is non-verbal, Foster is engaging and communicating with her through 'heart-felt listening'. In Foster's own words, quoted above, he is 'reading her mind.

Conclusion

Phenomenologically informed observations of practice included in this chapter have revealed leadership in a range of forms and highlighted the impossibility of defining a single model of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. The complex inter-relationship of heroic and shared leadership models indicated by observations prevents me from establishing a simple binary of heroic versus shared leadership within a sector which, from my perspective, is already rife with binaries. Having critiqued the dominance and pervasiveness of traditional perspectives on leadership, I acknowledge their usefulness in describing the performative acts through which disabled people can challenge normative notions of themselves as lacking capacity for leadership and reposition themselves as leaders. A relational view, on the other hand, enables us to explore the nuances, shifts and complexities of roles within leadership-in-the-making and to include a wider range of leadership practices often masked by more traditional approaches.

In this chapter I have described moments of both heroic and shared leadership practice at different stages within individual events, and even at different times by individual leaders. At the Creative Minds conference, for

example, leadership was made both through the performative acts of disabled artists *and* created on a shared stage by disabled and non-disabled collaborators. At the Oily Cart residency, leadership was observed in the actions of an inspirational individual *and* found in the intimacies of that same individual's one-to-one encounters.

Nevertheless, I assert the need for definitions and descriptions which recognize and value a wider range of leadership practices within the sector. For this reason, Chapter Four will focus on shared, collaborative models of leadership viewed from a relational perspective. My role as Artistic Director has offered me opportunities to observe the practices of the organisation over an extended period of time and to work collaboratively with performers with learning disabilities in ways which are not generally available to researchers. In focussing on shared leadership models I am not advocating for a specific form of leadership, but rather highlighting the need for a broadening of perspectives on leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. As highlighted above, the notion of 'disability gain' offers a way of framing and valuing the contributions people with learning disabilities bring to society. If we view leadership in Learning Disability Theatres through the frame of biocultural diversity, what can we learn which will support DIY Theatre Company and others to do leadership differently?

Chapter Four: In the Moment

Introduction

This chapter moves from the overview of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres introduced in Chapter Three, to focusing on the leadership practices of a particular group of people, DIY's Friday Group. As outlined in the introduction, DIY's Friday Group are actors, drawn from the core company, who meet weekly to develop DIY's education and outreach programme. The phenomenological approach introduced in Chapter Two and used in Chapter Three will be extended and deepened in this fourth chapter through consideration and analysis of a series of moments from DIY's education and outreach programme. The chapter builds on the relational perspective introduced in Chapter Three in two main ways: through exploring and applying, in the analysis, a Freirean notion of dialogue (Freire, 1972) and by examining the particular synergies between shared leadership and applied theatre. According to Hosking, a relational perspective positions leadership as simultaneously social (participants construct a sense of identity in relation to a context), cognitive (involving sense-making) and political (supporting particular local-cultural valuations) (Hosking, 2011: 456). This chapter will consider the particular contribution that leadership within Learning Disability Theatres can make to these three constructions of leadership. Within this context, the social nature of leadership provides a territory in which to construct a sense of identity for both disabled and non-disabled leaders, the cognitive aspects refer to the knowledge-making and new understandings of leadership which emerge from leadership in Learning Disability Theatres, and the political import of the exploration relates to the challenge it poses to ablest, normative notions of what a leader can and should be.

I have chosen to focus exclusively in this chapter on the notion of shared leadership, but as Shawn Burke, Deborah DiazGranados and Eduardo Salas state, shared leadership is a term applied by different people in very different ways: 'The construct itself is still fairly messy as some refer to shared leadership as co-leadership, whereas others define it as the leadership role or function switching between members based on needs and capabilities' (Burke et al., 2011: 343). It is therefore essential to clarify how this term is being used within my

thesis. Shared leadership is used as a generic term to describe leadership created by a number of people which, from a relational perspective, may shift and take on different forms, including delegation, co-leadership, distributed and dialogical leadership, across different moments of practice. In line with definitions offered by Burke, DiazGranados and Salas I use the term 'delegated leadership' to describe a 'top down approach' where one person is in control and allocates roles and responsibilities to others, and I use 'co-leadership' to describe leadership which is shared on a less hierarchical basis but within which roles remain fixed (Burke et al., 2011: 342). I use the term dialogical to describe leadership in relation to Paulo Freire's notion of dialogue, which is of central importance to this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it complements a view of relationships and knowledge as emergent rather than fixed; secondly because it supports a perspective on practice and theory, body and mind, as being interdependent rather than separate; and thirdly, because it emanates from both a relational and a political foundation.

Freire describes dialogue as an 'act of creation' (Freire, 1972: 62) which is not only about naming and understanding the world, but is also about making a difference. When the essence of dialogue, the word, is not accompanied by action, Freire warns: 'It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action' (Freire, 1972: 60). Freire's notion of 'praxis' (Freire, 1972: 60) comprises the combination of action and reflection, and is relevant to two of the central propositions in my thesis: firstly that practice is a valid form of research and vice versa and secondly, that change can occur in moments of practice. Freire identifies the possibility of creating new kinds of power relations with those who are generally disenfranchised and oppressed within society, but this can only happen in encounters based on mutual respect and humility. As Freire states:

How can I enter into a dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I enter into dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from other men – mere 'its' in whom I cannot recognise other 'Is'? How can I enter into dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of 'pure' men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are 'these people' (Freire, 1972: 63).

Freire's language is of course highly idealistic and politicised and I have already problematised the notion of 'transformation' so central to Freire's writings (Nicholson, 2005, Balfour 2009). However, Freire's assertion regarding the importance of dialogic practice as a form of knowledge creation strongly links with my concern with the 'norm' in relation to people with learning disabilities. From a relational perspective, any view of disabled people as 'other' or 'a case apart' blocks opportunities to develop dialogical leadership or to identify and understand such leadership in practice. In contrast, when we recognise and work from a sense of shared relation, new forms of dialogical leadership become possible, identifiable and knowable.

Finally, the term 'distributed leadership' refers to a framework for viewing practice, rather than a specific form of leadership. It provides a vocabulary for describing moments of shared leadership practice and notions of 'heedfulness' and 'stretching leadership' are particularly useful in the analysis that follows. However, its limitations within this context must also be acknowledged. The focus of distributed leadership to date has been on professional leadership in formal education settings and I am therefore applying this concept in a very different context. In addition, in contrast to my own politically engaged research approach, distributed leadership does not necessarily denote leadership as a phenomenon with progressive political or ethical implications. As Spillane comments 'A distributed perspective on leadership is neither friend nor foe. It is not a prescription for better leadership but a description of how leadership already is' (Spillane, 2006: 10). In this respect, a Freirean perspective, with its introduction of dialogic principles (that is, knowledge as produced and shared in relation) is key in highlighting the connections between distributed leadership and a social change agenda.

This chapter also explores the synergy which exists between applied theatre and shared forms of leadership and in it I draw on selections from applied theatre literature, improvisation and dance theory to help develop my analysis. From a relational perspective, both applied theatre and shared leadership are created through the in-the-moment inter-actions of protagonists and both present the possibility of knowledge-making emerging from doing rather than theorising. In Nicholson's words 'knowing the world comes from enactment as well as (or rather

than) cognitive forms of meaning-making' (Nicholson, 2016: 253). In addition, both applied theatre and a relational view of leadership engage with the possibilities for social action to occur within inter-actions in the moment. According to Nicholson, a relational framework therefore re-situates the ambition of the applied theatre practitioner/researcher:

it acknowledges that life is constantly improvised and constantly in flux and that social change happens not only through challenging institutional structures of power but also through the relationality of experience, and in the unreflexive practices of everyday life, as enactment, embodiment and inhabitation (Nicholson, 2016: 252).

The written element of this chapter comprises three sections, each exploring aspects of DIY's leadership practice. The opening section, Images of Leadership, is based on inclusive arts-based research in which Image Theatre was combined with photo elicitation to explore the perspectives of Friday Group members. This section includes descriptions of processes and findings, in an attempt to offer a sense of, and to validate, the research analysis which took place with Friday Group members.

The second part, Moments of Practice, comprises phenomenological observations from three education projects with young people with learning disabilities during the period 2012 to 2014. Projects are not presented as case studies, but rather a series of specific moments, analysed in detail, located within the timeline of an education programme which began formally in 2007 and continues at the time of writing (2017). Observations took place at the beginning, the middle and towards the end of each project. The first was a Bronze Arts Award in a Special School, the second a project with Post-16 learners with PMLD in a Further Education College, and the third a Silver Arts Award project with a Voluntary Sector Youth Theatre. The third section, Relinquishing Control, is based on observations of a live drama event, which was co-led by Friday Group members with a theatre project for young people with learning disabilities. Two drama workshops were attended by the examiners of this thesis, offering a 'lived experience' of DIY's leadership practice. In addition to the written thesis, a number of film and visual documents are referred to as appendices and readers are invited to consult these at appropriate points in the text as indicated. These are:

Appendix H: *A Good Leader is...* PowerPoint

Appendix I: *Good Leadership is...* PowerPoint

Appendix J: *Leaders & Followers* Comic Life

Appendix K: *What Makes a Good Leader?* Comic Life

Appendix L: *Leading the Way* video <https://vimeo.com/167783603>

Appendix M: Video of the live drama event.

Images of Leadership

The following section seeks to highlight the view-points of members of DIY's Friday Group who are at the centre of all the moments of leadership described later in this chapter. Before reading the text, I refer the reader to the PowerPoints and Comic Life documents attached as appendices (see Appendices H, I, J and K).

Consistent with a view of research as an extension of practice, dialogical processes were introduced across a two-month period from 2012 to 2013. A combination of Image Theatre (Boal, 1979, 1992) and photo elicitation (Harper 2002) was used as a basis for research methods, which ensured people with learning disabilities, instead of being merely the subjects of this research, could play 'an active role as instigators, interviewers, data analysts or authors' (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 62). This section of the thesis comprises descriptions of processes and findings in order to provide the detail necessary for analysis later in the chapter. Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking emphasise the value of retaining a multiplicity of different texts and narratives within what they term a 'Relational Constructionist' approach to research. They state:

The varying voices and stories are not explored for purposes of selecting the best or the 'right' one, nor are they explored in order to merge them into one narrative. Rather, the purpose of opening dialogue among varying stories is to give space to each local coherence and, for example, open up possible re-storytelling (McNamee and Hosking, 2012: 52).

I have kept theoretical analysis in this section to a minimum for two main reasons. Firstly, because I am wary of subsuming the 'local coherence' of the

voices of Friday Group members in scholarly writing and proposing the single 'correct' analysis of the supposed expert; and secondly, because I do not believe the documents require scholarly analysis in order to be understood. I invite the reader to consider these findings on their own terms and to re-construct possible analytical narratives and 're-storytelling' themselves.

In the initial stages of the arts-based research, Comic Life was used - a comic desktop publishing computer programme designed to create comic pages using digital photos. Participants highlighted four main areas as important in leadership (see images F and G below and appendices J and K). Firstly, personal traits (for example friendly, helpful, encouraging); secondly, communication skills (for example explaining, demonstrating, showing, giving examples); thirdly, performance skills (for example, being a good actress, imagination, focus, concentration); and fourthly, planning (for example, she has a plan, she practised it, she knows what she's doing). The fact that personal traits such as friendliness and communication skills such as explaining were so prominent supports a perspective on leadership within DIY as relational and dialogical.



Images F and G: Comic Life – What Makes a Good Leader

Comic Life provided an effective way of documenting and recapping but was less successful in facilitating the shared *analysis* of data. Participants reflected that Comic Life Images were ‘fun’ and ‘looked good’ but included a lot of confusing information and a ‘polished’ feel which made it difficult to add or amend information, so we introduced PowerPoint as a simpler format for participatory data analysis. Photographs and scribed suggestions were combined to create an unfinished PowerPoint which was refined over a number of sessions; headings were chosen, captions suggested and the order changed until a final version was agreed (see appendix I). The three headings chosen were teamwork, supporting each other and being part of an organisation. Images ordered under the heading ‘Leadership at DIY is ... teamwork’ show groups and pairs involved in a range of activities. Leadership is presented as relational and dialogical including sharing ideas, planning and working together (see images H and I).

LEADERSHIP at DIY is...Teamwork



Planning Together

Leadership at DIY is...Teamwork



Working Together

Images H and I: Comic Life – Leadership at DIY is...Teamwork

The second series of images, ordered under the heading ‘Leadership at DIY is ... supporting each other’ presents images of friendship and social interaction. Photographs and captions highlight examples of inter-dependence and mutual support on both a physical and an emotional level. For example, in Image J, Cathy is depicted being supported by another DIY member to hold something. In Image K, Cathy is offering support to the same group member, who is upset. The message offered is that we all both need and offer support in different areas

and shared leadership therefore needs to be open and responsive to the strengths and vulnerabilities of others.

Leadership at DIY is... Supporting Each-other



“Cheering Each-other up”

Leadership at DIY is... Supporting Each-Other



“Helping Cathy”

Images J and K: Comic Life – Leadership at DIY is...Supporting Each Other

The third series of images is organised under the heading ‘Leadership at DIY is ... being part of an organisation’ and includes a picture of participants doing a group ‘shout’ which members call the ‘DIY logo’. An image of DIY members holding up their T-shirts reflects the importance of company identity (see Image L below). Participants were keen to include John, DIY’s administrator, in another picture, which shows DIY members using the phone and typing in the office (see Image M below). The images highlight the importance of the ‘bigger picture’ of DIY. The perspective offered is that both disabled and non-disabled people are involved in the creation of leadership within DIY.

Leadership at DIY is...Being part of the Organisation



“Wearing our ID so people know who we are”

Leadership at DIY is...Being part of the Organisation



Images L and M: Comic Life – Leadership is...Being Part of the Organisation

The use of arts-based inclusive methods highlighted themes which echo throughout this research. In particular, the sense of leadership as a shared, collaborative process contrasts with the heroic notion of individual leaders reflected in traditional leadership literature. Linked with this, the sense of people as inter-dependent rather than independent challenges the individualisation and the 'individual case' highlighted by Foucault (Foucault, 1991) and Critical Studies literature (Goodley, 2011).

In considering the extent to which the arts-based methods outlined here could be considered 'Inclusive Research' it is worth referencing Walmsley and Johnson's definition (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 64). According to Walmsley and Johnson: the problem should be one that is owned (not necessarily initiated) by disabled people, it should further the interests of disabled people, and be collaborative. People with learning disabilities should be able to exert some control over process and outcomes and lastly, the research question, process and reports should be accessible to people with learning disabilities (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003: 64).

Regarding the requirement that the problem be 'owned by disabled people', I brought the topic of leadership to the group so, whilst it emerged from practice and had relevance to members, it was not initiated by them. This was somewhat mitigated by the timeframe involved and the relatively long time-span of two months was crucial in ensuring that the process became more directed by the group over time. In relation to collaboration, the combination of Image Theatre and photo elicitation resulted in a dialogical approach which was extended to participatory data analysis. Collaboration was evident in the creation of PowerPoints, as group members negotiating which images would be used, agreed an order and selected titles. In relation to disabled people exerting some control over process and outcomes, the decision to switch from Comic life to a more effective format, PowerPoint, was initiated by the group and had a significant impact on the process and outputs of the research. In terms of accessibility, Comic Life and PowerPoints are much more accessible to people with learning disabilities, many of whom find academic language challenging. However, whilst images are more effective than written descriptions in offering a sense of the people involved in this research project and their perspectives, it is important to

acknowledge that both the image work and the written output of this thesis are limited in terms of what they are able to convey. A complementary approach which combines both goes some way to overcoming the limitations of each, but as will be considered in the conclusion of this thesis, the written content generally retains its higher 'status' within the academy and beyond. The aspiration that different kinds of research output will be equally recognised and valued within cultural and academic settings, continues to present an ongoing challenge to practitioner-researchers seeking to make practice count.

Finally, at the point of writing, it is unclear to what extent this research will further the interests of disabled people. In the short term it has enabled individual members of DIY to gain a clearer understanding of what leadership means and a stronger sense of themselves as leaders. PowerPoints and Comic Life presentations, have already been, and will continue to be, used as stimulus materials within DIY's ongoing educational and outreach programmes. Arts-based approaches to Inclusive Research open up a number of opportunities for further practice-based research in the future, as will be discussed in the Conclusion.

Moments of Practice

Having described the foundations for arts-based Inclusive Research methods, the following section focuses on a selection of moments observed within DIY's education and outreach programme in order to explore these particular leadership practices from a relational perspective. Before reading the text, I refer the reader to the *Leading the Way* video (Appendix L) which shows examples of DIY's education and outreach work.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, my approach comprised both descriptive and analytical elements, as expressed in Bert O. States' concept of 'binocular vision' (States, 1987). A descriptive phenomenological approach led me to document what I saw, as far as possible in the moment and in the first person. The approach was similar to a photographer who, rather than focussing on moments which illustrate a particular viewpoint, takes pictures throughout an event and only later gains a sense of what has been gathered. A 'strategic' eye was introduced

later, when particular moments were selected and analysed in greater depth so that a particular story emerged.

This section is divided into five sub-sections; Challenges of Sharing Leadership, Workshops in-the-Making, Stretching Leadership across Organisations, Stretching Leadership across Young People and Relinquishing Control. It explores terms from a theatre-based vocabulary in order to relate and translate the notion of relational leadership within the particular context of Learning Disability Theatres. Spillane describes shared leadership as taking place 'in between' leaders, and uses the metaphor of a two-step, where the dance is created in between partners and the music (Spillane, 2006: 16). The concept of leadership as dynamic and emergent, has led me to introduce the notion of the 'workshop-in-the-making', which emerges through the interactions of different leaders, followers and situations. This is a complex process, and the chapter explores both the challenges and the opportunities which have emerged during this period of research. Throughout this section, I have used first names of all DIY members, who have given permission for their names to be identified within the thesis. Full names are used for any person who appears in interviews, according to academic convention, in which case the surname is in the main body of the text. The exception is Jenny Harris, who is referred to by her first name throughout, as to refer to her by her surname would create a distinction between herself and other group members which counters the ethos of this thesis. Where permission has not been given to identify people by name, an initial is used, to protect anonymity and comply with ethics procedures.

Challenges of Sharing Leadership

The first series of observations took place during a drama project with a Special School in Greater Manchester in 2012. The project was co-facilitated by Jenny Harris DIY's Education and Outreach Officer, and Joan an actor and co-facilitator with learning disabilities. It spanned ten weekly hour-long sessions attended by seven young people. The structure of Bronze Arts Award involved young people taking part in drama, reflecting on what they had enjoyed and learnt, leading a short drama game, decorating a shoe-box for a chosen artist and reviewing a performance by DIY. The project offered an opportunity to consider

the ways in which shared leadership can challenge even highly experienced drama facilitators in shifting power and control and navigating a fear of making mistakes. Jenny works in many other contexts as a freelance practitioner and describes a conflict between her usual facilitation style and the way she is striving to work with the DIY team as follows:

Usually when I go into a drama session on my own I'm using tried and tested ways of doing things. I'm in control. I'm working in a way which encourages pupil voice, but I'm still the person at the 'top' – it's a cynical way of putting it. As a company we are trying to flatten that out - trying to create less of a pyramid and more of a flat structure (Jenny Harris. Interview with author, September 2014).

Jenny's interview acknowledges that issues of power and control pose particular challenges within shared leadership. Development of dialogical leadership requires recognition of power inequalities which can be deeply ingrained in existing approaches and represent a default position for many drama practitioners, including those working in participatory settings. Jenny has the power of her position, as a paid employee, as a non-disabled person, as someone with drama qualifications. In addition, she fits our expectations of a drama facilitator; she is a skilled, confident, charismatic individual, with strong communication skills. Doris Schedlitz and Gareth Edwards reference Steven Luke's third dimension of power in describing the power which comprises 'the ingrained and taken-for-granted values shared by members of a group/culture that shape how these members see social reality and what they see as right, ethical, and a priority in life and in organisation' (Schedlitz and Edwards, 2014: 127). In Foucault's terms, Jenny represents the 'norm' of leadership in arts practice, even inside community or participatory settings which are generally viewed as highly non-hierarchical. Joan has a learning disability and does not fit the image of the heroic leader.

Shared leadership is strongly influenced by context, as Spillane and Diamond note 'Situation is both the medium for practice and an outcome of practice' (Spillane and Diamond, 2007: 10). In some settings the culture of an organisation itself can prove a barrier to shared leadership, especially, as Alma Harris identifies, when the key conditions of trust, respect and mutual learning are

not in place (Harris, 2014: 73). The project examined here took place in a formal education setting where routine practices were challenging for both members of the DIY team. The group was locked into a classroom at the beginning of each session, and there were frequent interruptions with young people banging loudly at the door and shouting. At several points, the behaviour of group members had a dramatic impact on the workshop, as the moment below illustrates:

Joan asks to go to the toilet mid-way through the session and because she needs to be accompanied by a teacher, Jenny is left alone with the group. The moment the teacher and Joan leave the room, a boy pulls a chair away from another boy, who falls to the floor. Group members start pushing each other and laughing and all structure and focus disintegrates. When another member of staff comes into the room and stands by the door with her arms folded the atmosphere calms immediately.

In this setting, Jenny expressed feeling ‘in quite deep’ and ‘on the edge a lot of the time’, which made her unwilling to take risks. At such times she identified a tendency to fall back on a more hierarchical form of leadership and take control of the situation. The relationship with Joan became more unequal and her attitude became protective. As Jenny honestly and perceptively acknowledges, many practitioners are used to working alone and sustaining a high level of focus and energy within a session. When things become difficult they can find themselves reverting to a more hierarchical model of leadership to help them feel more ‘in control’:

I was worried about Joan being able to handle that behaviour, so I had to step in more than I wanted to. There were moments of panic, when the behaviour was so bad and it was impossible to really share leadership [...] it’s especially difficult because I’m used to fielding things using my energy and voice. I didn’t want to undermine Joan, but I felt the need to step in (Jenny Harris. Interview with author, September 2014).

As Jenny’s interview indicates, a significant barrier to shared leadership is fear of ‘getting it wrong’ or making mistakes. As Alma Harris states ‘for those in formal leadership roles, it is the potential for things to go in a different direction or to go off track that is of most concern. The higher probability of this happening equates with the feeling of relinquishing control’ (Harris, 2014: 74). Jenny understandably felt the weight of responsibility for the ‘success’ of the project and

as a result she 'fielded' the situation using her energy and voice. She felt the need to maintain a high level of control, as the following moment from an early workshop illustrates:

The group forms a circle at the start of the session. Jenny introduces the rules of the 'What's the Chair?' game to the group. She explains 'You can pretend the chair is anything at all – it just can't be a chair'.

Jenny asks Joan to demonstrate the game and she moves to the centre of the circle as if she were an actor making an entrance. She has the presence and focus of an actor on the stage.

Joan demonstrates the game by kneeling next to the chair and pretending it is a sink. Next she turns it into a mirror – putting her hand to her face and miming that she is putting on make-up. Finally, she sits on the chair and pretends that it is a wheelchair.

The moment reflects a delegated model of leadership. Jenny introduced the game verbally and explained the rules, then Joan supported her by illustrating the game physically and giving examples of what the chair could be. Roles had been allocated and rehearsed beforehand to suit the different skills of team members; Jenny offered confident explanations and a clear overview of the timings and shape of the activity, whilst Joan was less confident verbally but used the performance skills of pacing, timing, taking and holding the space. However, whilst at times DIY adopted a delegated leadership model, at others team members were observed moving forwards and backwards within the 'two step' of the workshop in a much more responsive way. The following section explores the notion of leadership as a more emergent process and develops the concept of the drama workshop as a workshop-in-the-making.

Workshops-in-the-Making

Jenny: Now we're going to do another introduction game. What's the game Joan?

Joan: Change Places if...

Joan offers an example – Change Places if you've got black on.

Jenny: Change places if you've got a watch on

Staff member: Change places if you've come in a vehicle

Joan: Change places if you watch Dancing on Ice or a Touch of Frost

Eventually young people join in and offer suggestions for changing places if ... you watch Willie Nelson, you're wearing jeans, you lie in bed a lot, you're over 50, you're wearing trainers, you've got black hair, you're wearing bracelets. There is lots of laughter. Joan keeps her focus and does not join in the laughing.

This interaction is one of many observations of Joan working 'off script' and doing something much more complex than taking turns. Jenny stepped forward to introduce the game, then stepped back to enable Joan to give the first example. Jenny, Joan and a school staff member stepped forward in succession to enable the game to gain momentum. Here Joan's contribution was not rehearsed and she was not specifically invited by Jenny. She seemed aware the young people were hesitant to join in and provided the energy and enthusiasm that were needed. Her role was quite different from other participants, because as soon as the young people joined in, she took a back seat.

Repeated phenomenological observations of this more fluid leadership practice provide the foundation for my focus on leadership as relational and dialogical. This in turn leads me to introduce the notion of the workshop-in-the-making as a means of describing and understanding what is happening within a dialogical model of leadership practice. One way of viewing a drama workshop is as the succession of activities or actions represented by the realisation of a workshop plan. The drama practitioner knows when to introduce a warm-up, activities for idea-generation, games to support group dynamics, ideas to bring people together at the end of a session. This tried and tested structure works well for practitioners working alone, but it restricts opportunities for dialogical practice

which, by its very nature is open-ended. An alternative view is of the workshop is as an extension of improvised artistic practice. In the moment of enacting the workshop, leaders can be understood to be improvising, exploring the form of the workshop-in-the-making with co-leaders and young people and also devising what a drama workshop can or could be.

A key element of relational leadership, according to Hosking, is the notion of 'light structuring'. Tight structures, such as the rigid session plan, are generally the result of control and hierarchy, whilst light structures open up possibilities for emergence and improvisation. Hosking suggests we need to provide enough but not too much structure 'to provide a container, so to speak, that invites and supports the gradual emergence of slow, open, coherent, in-the-moment performances' (Hosking, 2011: 462). The link made here between relational leadership and 'slow, open in-the-moment performances' is illuminating in the context of applied theatre research, and particularly Learning Disability Theatres. Many leadership writers, including Spillane and Hosking, use performance vocabulary as metaphor. This study examines some of the ideas developed within leadership literature at the level of metaphor within the actual arena of theatre practice and contributes to a strand of Cultural Leadership literature which links improvisation and leadership practice (Parker, 2010: 106-113).

From a relational perspective, both applied theatre and shared leadership are created through the in-the-moment inter-actions of protagonists and both present the possibility of knowledge-making emerging from doing rather than theorising. Hosking describes leadership as emerging through a form of 'improvising' which, 'in the context of light structuring means being open to whatever is presented, relating to whatever is 'workable' and open to emerging possibilities' (Hosking, 2011: 462). A consideration of improvisation from a theatre perspective offers deeper insights into how leadership is being shared at such moments. As highlighted in Chapter One, many Learning Disability Theatres emerged from hybrid historical influences across community, experimental and devised theatre. Chris Johnston in his work on improvisation cites The Shysters as an example of a company which used improvisation and devising as a way of challenging conventional theatre. He notes how the company's turn to ensemble

led to the creation of innovative forms of practice and it is interesting to consider how these innovations can be extended to relational leadership and in particular chime with Hosking's notions of 'in-the-moment performance'. For Johnston, The Shysters' showed

clear dedication to finding a way for individuals with special learning needs to make theatre as others could, only differently. These determinations create a coalescing of intentions that makes a group of individuals bond together; necessary if the challenges of survival are to be overcome (Johnston, 2006: 135).

Diane Parker draws a link between the improvising ensemble and shared leadership, stating 'the success of the group depends on the commitment, energy and application of every single member of the team pulling together, working hard for the sake of something both of themselves and at the same time bigger than themselves' (Parker, 2010: 108). Considering the skills of the ensemble, Johnston highlights listening, accepting, understanding how to make change, working with conflict and problem-solving (Johnston, 2006:146). Listening, for Johnston, involves more than just using ears 'It's about listening, watching and sensing, absorbing as much as possible of what is happening in the space' (ibid: 146). There is a strong convergence here with Hosking's notion of 'heart-felt listening' and also with the notion of 'heedfulness' introduced by Spillane in his study of distributed leadership:

Heedfulness describes the way in which a set of behaviours is performed: groups act heedfully when they act carefully, intelligently, purposefully and attentively [...] Members of a group have a sense of themselves as an ensemble or collective. They don't just think about their individual actions but think about what they do in terms of other members of the group (Spillane, 2006: 59).

In the moment described above, therefore, Jenny and Joan can be described as 'improvising' around the 'light structuring' of the workshop plan. They are listening, watching, sensing and absorbing what is happening around them and because they are being heedful of each other and participants they are able to respond to 'emerging possibilities' as they arise within the drama workshop. Improvising leaders need to be generous. As Parker identifies 'letting go' of ideas

and status is an essential skill in improvisation: 'It demands that we are generous and trust in the intelligence, creativity and leadership capacity of others' (Parker, 2010: 110). Improvisers also need to be 'present' and react 'in the moment'.

The notion of being 'in the moment' is central to this discussion of leadership and improvisation. Within performance, when an actor is visibly remembering lines or self-consciously going through motions blocked by a director, the audience is aware of the separation of actor and role. In contrast, when a performer is in the moment he or she is totally immersed within the space-time of the performance. Development of the ability to be in the moment is a core element of DIY's devised work and demands of actors that they are sensitive to each other and able to respond with the whole person. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone describes, when a dancer is performing she exists 'in each moment and point pre-reflectively; she never qualifies herself as being wholly at any given moment or point, for she is always both ahead of and behind herself' (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015: 31). From a phenomenological perspective, the drama workshop, like a dance or a piece of music, is always in the present and at the same time always 'becoming'. Sheets-Johnstone writes from a phenomenological standpoint when she describes a dance piece as perpetually in process of creation and moving towards its own completion:

The very first moment of a dance contains within itself its own singular realm of possibilities; it presents a germinal quality which, even in embryonic form, contains the potentialities of its spatial-temporal future. The dance, then, projects itself as a unique spatial-temporal totality even across its unfinished form, as it is composed and as it is presented (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015: 34).

Translating this insight into the context of shared leadership, dialogical leaders require a similar capacity to be in the moment, focussing on being in the here and now, including sometimes in a pre-reflective state. Improvisers in theatre and in leadership need to be able to be and work in the moment in order to build on whatever is offered and shape the 'becoming' workshop-in-the-making. In introducing notions of 'accepting' and 'blocking' used in improvisation to a discussion of leadership, I acknowledge I am using a short-hand which does not adequately reflect the complex, intuitive nature of improvisation. As Chris Johnston

states, the terms 'offer', 'blocking', 'accepting' mean different things to different people' (Johnston, 2006: 270). Whilst, 'blocking', may force contrast or struggle as a positive element within improvisation (ibid: 157), here, I use the term to describe a situation where blocking sets improvisers at odds with each other and 'The result is there's no momentum, no narrative and no discoveries' (ibid: 147).

Two contrasting moments from the project illustrate the importance of being in the moment and accepting within the workshop-in-the-making. This project also involved two staff members, who knew the school culture, rules and regulations, much better than the DIY team and had long-standing relationships with the young people. They often focussed on issues of behaviour and control and there were a number of occasions, as in the example below, when dissonance between DIY's understanding of what was required and those of school staff became apparent

The class teacher and Joan are working with the two young women. The teacher is working hard to encourage the two young women to participate. The boys in the other group are loud and are taking up a lot of space. The girls are watching them and laughing at their jokes.

Class Teacher: OK then Joan, what do we do?

Joan: (repeating an idea which was mentioned earlier) We get the bean bag and hide it.

Class teacher: You can get the hat and you have to mime a job like a policeman.

Young woman: You could do hide and seek, using the blindfold

The class teacher comes up with the idea of using the microphone for a game of 'guess the song'. She starts singing a popular song. Joan joins in ...

A little later the young women are encouraged to share their game, but appear too embarrassed and so the class teacher steps in to explain the instructions.

The young people refuse to join in.

Joan joins in enthusiastically with 'I will always love you' by Whitney Houston

As Spillane and Diamond state, 'when leaders don't see eye to eye, they still work as a collective in co-performing a leadership routine. Whether two or more leaders seek similar, different, or even opposing goals is just another dimension of the analysis'(Spillane and Diamond, 2007: 11). The description above highlights a moment when the DIY team and school staff were both leading, but moving in different directions. DIY introduced the game to engage young peoples' imaginations and encourage them to share ideas. The teacher's understanding was apparently that the aim was to come up with a 'good idea' or 'product'. She appeared to open up an opportunity to share leadership with Joan, but then blocked her suggestion and was so focussed on completing the task that she missed the offer made by the young woman of 'hide and seek, using the blindfold'. The teacher's lack of heedfulness was in strong contrast to Joan's, who continued to accept the teacher's suggestions; joining in the microphone game, even when the young people refused to participate.

In terms of the workshop-in-the-making, by blocking Joan's suggestion the teacher blocked an artistic avenue which would have taken the workshop in a new direction. Joan's suggestion 'we get the bean bag and hide it' can be seen as a movement towards a new idea, which might have led to the teacher asking the group 'Where could we hide the bean bag?' which might have led to one of the young people offering an idea, which might have led to a girl hiding the bean bag in her pocket, which might have led to another person hiding the bean bag in his shoe, which might have led to another idea, and another. Again, the young woman's suggestion 'You could do hide and seek, using the blindfold' is like a movement towards another idea, which might have led to the teacher to saying 'who wants to wear the scarf?' which might have led to the scarf being tied around the girl's head, which might have led to another young person guiding her around the room, which might have led to another idea and another. In contrast, the movement of the teacher who either did not hear or actively ignored the young woman's contribution led to embarrassment, which led to the young person feeling her suggestions were wrong, which might lead to her not making any more suggestions during that workshop, which might lead to her withdrawing in future workshops. If we view leadership as a process, created through choices and

decisions made in the moment, then any moment in a workshop holds within it endless possibilities.

Another moment from this project offered a valuable opportunity to view shared leadership from within the practice. It is one thing to observe and record leadership as it takes place and quite another to feel and respond to it kinaesthetically, as an embodied experience. Generally, in order to establish my role as practitioner-researcher, I observed projects I was not facilitating, but on this occasion, I became involved as a co-facilitator. As part of their Bronze Arts Award the group was scheduled to watch DIY's performance of *Sycamore*, a devised piece, commissioned by Salford City Council (2012). The performance explored the themes of dependence and inter-dependence and was structured around a number of meetings on a park bench. Joan and I were working together to introduce the play's themes so that the group would gain more from the performance:

The group is coming to see the show next week, so we're introducing some of the themes and ideas which are in the show. We introduce the handshake which we used during our devising process. I then invite Joan to talk about the character she plays in the show, which is a woman on a blind date.

Rather than saying anything Joan gets up and starts miming taking a mobile phone out of her pocket. I recognise the movement – she is getting into her character in *Sycamore* – a young woman feeling nervous before meeting a man on a blind date. I start to panic - can I remember David's lines? How's the group going to respond to a love scene between two women? Then, I start to feel excited – what a great idea, of course I have to follow Joan's lead, that's what it's all about, how will it work?

We run the scene and the young people respond to it with lots of comments and questions. One boy says 'It looked like you were going to kiss'. Another boy says 'it's about 'personal space'. Now that we've done the scene, it is clear that this was the right thing to do – something which Joan had realised and I hadn't.

Joan and I had agreed a workshop plan the previous Friday. I went slightly off-script by inviting Joan to talk about her character and Joan went totally off-script by introducing the scene. I had the choice to block or accept her offer. I could have said 'David isn't here so we can't do that scene', which might have led to silence, which might have led to me feeling like I had to take control of the

situation, which might have led to me asking Joan 'instead could you tell the group what happens in the play?' Beyond the workshop it might have led to young people not recognising Joan as a leader, which might have led to Joan not seeing herself as a leader, which might have led to a change in the team dynamic. Instead, I got up and approached Joan and the imaginary bench, which led to Joan saying her first line, which led to us playing the scene, which led to a very positive discussion. Beyond the workshop it led to everyone in the group gaining a much better understanding of the play and a deeper experience at the performance itself.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the now-ness of our existence means nothing is pre-determined and so individuals can choose, in the moment, to act in ways which are unexpected or even unprecedented:

It is by being what I am at present, without any restrictions and without holding anything back, that I have a chance at progressing; it is by living my time that I can understand other times; it is by plunging into the present and into the world, by resolutely taking up what I am by chance, by willing what I will, and by doing what I do, that I can go farther (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 482-3).

Sondra Fraleigh relates this view to the realm of dance in a way which is illuminating: 'If I view my life-world as constituted by my bodily action, I am not just a helpless recipient of stimuli; I participate in and create my own destiny' (Fraleigh, 1987: 16). In the moment above, Joan and I were able to improvise within the 'light structuring' of the workshop plan, so that when Joan suggested a 'better' idea, in response to the context and the young people, we were able to develop the workshop in a different direction. Of course, in taking the lead within this activity, Joan did not change her social or economic situation and continues, as a disabled person, to be perceived as 'lacking' and 'unproductive' by many of those around her. However, whilst most drama workers have little influence over what happens within social, economic and political structures, we can choose to do things differently in our practice. Nicholson explores the notion of social change as something which can take place through bodies and relationships as part of everyday life. As she comments, this perspective

invokes networks, assemblages and flows rather than structures and frameworks, made up aesthetically and contingently as memory, forgetting, imagination and perception. As such it does not rely for its efficacy on action that is subsequent to the theatrical encounter, but acknowledges that the encounter *in itself* holds potential for new forms of relationality. (Nicholson, 2016: 253).

Participation in dialogical leadership and exploration of the approaches which support it constitute, in themselves, 'political activity' (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015: 6) because they offer alternative ways of developing and thinking about relationships with performers with learning disabilities to those existing outside the drama workshop. What is happening in the moment is just as important as any tangible outcomes emerging from it. The reports to funders or the written thesis make it accessible to others, but such practice is in itself a form of knowledge-making which does not require the frame of 'theory' in order to make it tangible or valid.

Stretching Leadership across Organisations

This second series of observations is drawn from a drama project with pupils with PMLD at a local college. It comprised a series of eleven sessions during the period March to June 2014. Four DIY members, Angela, Robert, Anna and Jenny worked with eighteen Post-16 learners in two groups. The ratio of staff to learners was higher than in many settings, which made this an interesting context in which to consider the complexity of leadership shared not only amongst DIY team members, but also with a number of school staff. The concept of 'stretching', taken from distributed leadership, offers an opportunity 'to investigate how leadership practice is stretched over two or more leaders and to examine how followers and the situation mutually constitute this practice' (Spillane, 2006: 15). It encourages a view of leadership as flexible and responsive, as opposed to the fixed, inflexible model offered by more heroic, hierarchical notions. Leadership is something which has the potential to unfold, extend and contract at different stages within the workshop-in-the-making, as illustrated by the following moment:

A pop up tent has been placed in the middle of the room. Anna is playing a character called Woolly, wearing a cagoule and a pair of binoculars. She enters the tent and is hiding inside it when the group comes into the room.

Rob: What can you hear?

S: Somebody snoring

R: What are they doing?

Anna as Woolly starts waving from the door of the tent

C copies her waving action

Anna as Woolly starts looking through her binoculars

T: She looks like she's bird watching

Anna takes out the map from her pocket

Rob: Shall we sing the name song to find out her name? I'll start the song. He starts off the 'What's your name?' song and Anna as Woolly responds. Some of the group join in.

Rob: What can you see?

T: I can see her knees are covered up

Jenny: What's covering them up?

T: A blanket. Or it could be a map. She looks like she's camping

Rob: What else can you see?

C mimes a bird action

Rob: I wonder where Woolly would like to go?

Jenny asks T Where do you think Woolly might like to go?

T: I don't know, she might want to go on a treasure hunt

Rob: Would you like to make some places for Woolly to go?

Jenny organises three groups and reminds the young people they are being asked to create a place where Woolly would like to go. Each group is given a pile of resources. Angela takes up her position as camera person again and starts to wheel herself around the room to document the group-work.

In this example, DIY team members worked together in a seemingly seamless way, which was responsive to the group. Anna is predominantly non-verbal but her performance skills drew and held the group's focus and attention. She paced the introduction of new visual ideas well, partly cued by and partly cuing the verbal questioning for which Rob took responsibility, supported by Jenny. When they moved into smaller groups, Angela was ready and waiting with her camera to start filming the process. Each team member took responsibility individually, but notable also was the inter-dependence of the team. When Angela experienced difficulty moving into a restricted space in her wheelchair, she asked Anna to help her into position. When Anna did not hear a verbal cue, Rob gave her a visual cue to move onto the next activity. When Rob had difficulty moving from one side of the room to the other, he supported himself on Angela's wheelchair. DIY leaders were working inter-dependently as an ensemble.

DIY leaders were not only mutually supporting each other, they were also learning with and from each other. The first session I attended followed a traditional format with the whole group sitting in a circle and each team member delegated to introduce a drama game. As the project developed and leadership became more dialogical, the structure became 'lighter', more open-ended, drama-based scenarios were introduced and sessions became much more improvisational in nature. Jenny described this process as 'liberating':

I think we've had to find it as we've gone along, but it feels like there's been a real movement, of them taking more ownership of it [...] And it didn't feel like that at the start compared to at the end. I've definitely felt that they've relaxed into it more. You could feel that there was a trying to get the right answer – from me and from our guys - in the session, that wasn't working. And it feels like we were getting to a point where we were getting more confident. (Jenny Harris. Interview with author, September 2014).

In particular, Jenny found herself taking the lead from other DIY team members in interacting with learners with PMLD: 'They are really much better than I am at picking up things and where eye movement is, around reactions, around what they get from students [...] I might think "Is it alright to approach this person like that?" I put a lot of thoughts and blocks in my own head whereas I don't think a lot of our guys do that' (Jenny Harris. Interview with author, September 2014). Jenny's words resonate with the notion of the 'pre-reflective state' explored above. She

also acknowledged the extent to which other DIY team members were teaching her how to adapt her pacing, relating her experience to a project a number of years previously when one team member had taken a relatively long time to allocate people to groups:

In my head we've got the plan, we've got to get into groups of six, we've got the next thing to do. I found it really difficult adapting to her pace. And sort of fast forward a few years and I'm much better at going Ange is now talking about something that's to do with her personal life in the middle of a workshop, but actually that's alright because it will relax people and that's OK (Jenny Harris, Interview with author, September 2014).

Here Jenny is not the experienced drama worker teaching performers with learning disabilities how to run drama workshops in an accepted format, rather, DIY team members are learning from each other. Freire describes the outcome of dialogic leadership as follows:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for the process in which all grow. (Freire, 1972: 53).

Parker describes the process of mutual learning which takes place within improvisational leadership, which involves 'learning, adapting, evolving, remaining alert to changes from all directions; and *allowing oneself to be changed in the process*. It requires an ongoing willingness to be challenged and to learn from others and from personal experience' (Parker, 2010: 108). Echoing the previous discussion of 'disability gain', Jenny's comments highlight some ways in which applied theatre practitioners may *allow themselves to be changed* through the process of sharing leadership, including learning to talk less, to slow down, to be in the moment, improvise, take more risks and be open to different workshop formats.

In addition to being stretched across the DIY team, leadership within this project was also stretched across school staff and this introduced a number of challenges, particularly during the early stages of the project. As Alma Harris states, professional reluctance can represent a real barrier to shared leadership

‘What if others don’t see themselves as leaders? What if they do not want to lead? What if it is not in their job description and there is no remuneration for the additional work?’ (Harris, 2014: 73). The following moment offers an example of staff reluctance having a negative impact on the workshop.

The whole group is sitting in a circle. As Rob is setting up the next drama activity two members of staff are talking to each other. It is possible even from the other side of the room to hear that they are not talking about work. They are having a chat, as if oblivious of the impact they are having on the session.

In interview, staff member Rhiannon Warren reflected on some of the reasons for this professional reluctance. A number of staff members had never worked in a dialogical, open-ended way before and were concerned about feeling ‘out of control’. At the start of the project, she explained, many staff were unsure of a new way of working and were therefore unclear about what was expected:

Normally in a traditional way you’d put your objectives up on the board at the beginning and you’d know what you want students to have learnt at the end. And that’s the way it’s been for years and years. And still is within 99% of the college [...] This is different – we don’t know what we’re going to get at the end. (Rhiannon Warren. Interview with author, June 2015).

The inference here is that if people are feeling uncomfortable, unsure or embarrassed, they are less likely to trust in the workshop-in-the-making and are therefore less likely to take the initiative within a shared leadership model. In her interview, Warren described her own fear of ‘getting it wrong’:

You’re sat with a group full of people looking at you, and the students not moving, ten seconds feels like about a week. I felt the pressure – especially because there can be 8 members of staff in the room – older than you – staring, not looking at the students, looking at you going ‘are we giving up yet?’ (Rhiannon Warren. Interview with author, June 2015).

Warren’s feelings of exposure are palpable and it is clear that barriers to dialogical leadership can be very entrenched and complex. Leadership was only gradually stretched and widened as school staff gained more trust in the workshop-in-the-making and started to take the initiative. Understanding was gained in an embodied way, through experiencing at first hand both the shared leadership modelled by DIY and the engagement and responses of the young people. At the

beginning of one session, for example, Rob entered in the character of George, wearing a heavy coat and flat cap. He sat in front of a bamboo cane in a metal stand to depict a bare tree, leant on his wooden cane with his shoulders hunched, wearing a dejected expression:

Jen: What can we do to make George happy?

H: Clap hands

K, one of the group members who is less vocal gets up and moves towards Rob as George, with her hand outstretched to shake his hand. They shake hands. K grins.

Rob as George smiles: Thank you K

K sits down and George resumes his unhappy pose with head down and arms crossed.

One of the supporters suggests that a guitar might make George happy. He produces a guitar and encourages one of the young people, D, to strum a guitar. D is a young man in a wheelchair who says very little. This is obviously something he really enjoys doing.

Rob as George smiles and obviously enjoys the music: Wow!

Supporter: Is that working D?

George: Music always cheers George up

Supporter: You could start busking

Some members of the group clap.

The guitar is put away and George resumes his unhappy pose.

Rob was a playful, confident leader, introducing a clear dramatic idea and asking for the group's help. He responded to K's contribution by shaking her hand and thanking her and reacted to the music by cheering up and making a positive statement. Rob was demonstrating the rules of the drama game, but he was also demonstrating a value system and an ethos. These values come from the dialogical devising processes used by DIY and include the beliefs that everybody's contribution should be valued, that everyone has something to contribute, and that time and space need to be made available to ensure this is possible. D is a young

man who is non-verbal and has limited mobility and the supporter, who knew D well, was therefore finding a way for D to participate in his own way.

Hosking describes dialogue within relational leadership as a special kind of conversation characterised by a willingness to suspend assumptions and certainties and an ability to pay reflexive attention to ongoing processes (Hosking, 2011: 461). According to Hosking, dialogue 'can help to bring forth and support appreciation (rather than judgement and critique), discussion of what can be done (rather than what cannot), and a sense of relational responsibility (rather than blaming others)' (Hosking, 2011: 461). For Freire, dialogue comprises the elements of love, humility, hope and an intense faith in humankind 'faith in his power to make and re-make, to create and re-create, faith in his vocation to be more fully human' (Freire 1972: 71). In addition, dialogue requires critical thinking 'thinking which perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved' (Freire 1972: 64). Both Rob and the school supporter were heedful, acting in the moment and had faith in both the DIY team and the young people. In actions and words Rob modelled a message that all contributions would be accepted and they would all be 'right'. The supporter was heedful of Rob's messaging and allowed himself to trust that something would emerge from the encounter. As a result, leadership was stretched as he took the initiative in shaping the direction of the workshop-in-the-making.

Of particular interest within the context of mutual learning was the fluidity of roles observed. Whilst DIY team members had art-form knowledge, school staff knew learners and their preferred forms of communication well, and both sets of knowledge and skills were needed to make the project effective. On one occasion, for example, Rob joined a group where a supporter was working with two young people to create an environment. She asked H, the most verbal member of this group, where she would like to go. H responded she would like to go to the park and see ducks:

Supporter: Where do ducks swim?

H: On their back

Supporter: Do they swim on the grass or on a pond?

H: Pond

Supporter: So what colour is this pond – blue or beige?

H: Beige

Supporter lays the beige fabric on the floor to represent the pond and asks ‘Should the grass go at the side of the pond or round the pond?’(Handing the green fabric to H) ‘Where do you want to put it? It’s your choice’. H places the piece of green fabric beside the beige fabric to represent the grass.

Rob has been at the edge of this group observing. He appears to be uncomfortable – as if he doesn’t really know what his role is. Jenny picks this up and asks Rob ‘Are you working with this group?’

Rob: (to H) Would it be a good idea to have yellow ducks?

Supporter: (Holds out 2 pieces of fabric towards K) White ducks or blue ducks?

She holds the pieces of fabric towards K for a long time. Eventually K makes a slight hand movement towards the blue fabric.

Supporter: Blue? Show with your eyes if it’s yes.

K shows with his eyes that it’s yes. The supporter adds the blue piece of fabric to the pond picture.

Rob: That’s looking really good.

The staff member was building on the activity and ethos that DIY modelled by accepting all suggestions. It didn’t matter that ponds are not usually beige, what was important was that the young person was actively involved in creating her own environment. The staff member, in turn, was able to model to Rob how to frame choices to elicit a positive contribution. Following her lead, Rob made an active suggestion to introduce ducks and she built on this, offering possible colours, waiting for and checking the young person’s response. DIY leaders and school staff were moving forwards and backwards in a fluid way, and through dialogue

were constantly extending the scope of the leadership within the workshop-in-the-making.

In this section, a series of moments has offered an opportunity to consider the challenges and opportunities of stretching leadership across organisations. The next two sections will build on and extend this concept by considering two projects which sought to stretch leadership amongst young people with learning disabilities.

Stretching Leadership Across Young People

The observations in this section emerged from a project with a Voluntary Sector Youth Theatre. Jenny, Angela and Robert co-led a three-month Silver Arts Award project with a group of five youth theatre members aged between 14 and 25 in 2012. Unit two of Silver Arts Award comprises the design, delivery and evaluation of a shared arts leadership project and an overt focus of this project was development of young peoples' leadership skills.

As highlighted in the Introduction, the provocation for this research was the negative attitudes towards disabled artists experienced in a Special School which led to DIY prioritising theatre-making and leadership opportunities for young people within its education and outreach programme. Rebecca Mallett and Katherine Runswick-Cole highlight the significant impacts of ableism on young people with learning disabilities, stating that 'ever-narrowing definitions of 'normal' childhoods and 'achievement' work to marginalise disabled children within mainstream education' (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 46). Testing and labelling have a significant negative impact on disabled children, who are deemed 'abnormal' and subsequently experience a high level of intervention and surveillance in all aspects of their lives (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014: 113). In their study of the work of Oily Cart, Goodley and Runswick-Cole, identify that participation in performance-based activities by young people with learning disabilities can play an important role in challenging dominant disability discourses. They challenge the normative perspective that creative arts are valuable for disabled children primarily for therapeutic reasons and call for more

creative spaces within the community and schools which include disabled children (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011).

DIY's education programme is based on a dialogical model of young people and adults with learning disabilities working with and learning from each other and a key aim is increasing leadership opportunities for young people. The analysis that follows extends Chapter Three's discussion regarding embodied leadership to further consider learning leadership as an embodied process. In the Special School and College described above, young people had little or no previous experience of drama. Here, in contrast, participants had a wealth of existing, embodied knowledge of theatre, gained through their extensive involvement in Youth Theatre. DIY company members do not learn theatre-making from explanations or theories, they learn through doing, just as Sheets-Johnstone describes the process of coming to 'know' dance which 'cannot be deduced from theoretical speculation about movement, from principles of composition, or whatever; it can only be described as the thing which it is' (Sheets-Johnstone: 2015: 46). Merleau-Ponty relates this notion of embodied learning to typing, as follows:

Knowing how to type, then, is not the same as knowing the location of each letter on the keyboard, nor even having acquired a conditioned reflex for each letter that is triggered upon seeing it [...] It is a question of knowledge in our hands, which is only given through a bodily effort and cannot be translated by an objective designation (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 145).

Arguably, drama leadership is another area of learning which, like typing, can be gained through embodied experience, as the moments below seek to illustrate.

Rob explains the box game to the group. He mimes taking jewellery out of the box; a watch, a necklace, a ring. As Rob is explaining he is using his arms and his body language to visually support everything he is saying.

One young person seems to find it difficult to join in. Rob encourages him:

Rob: It can be anything you like. Just put your hand in and act it out. It can be anything that's in your imagination or in your head

When the young man completes his mime, Rob gives him a thumbs up.

In the moment above, Rob's clear facilitation provided the young people with an example of 'how to do it'. Rob's intervention was positive and encouraging and through actions as much as through words, he modelled dialogical principles and values that were central to the project. As the project progressed, DIY members started to move back to enable leadership to be stretched across Youth Theatre members. A 'lightly' structured planning process was introduced and a drama workshop for younger participants was planned which Youth Theatre members would co-lead as part of a Sports and Arts Day. The following moment was recorded as young people were trying out new ideas for their workshop:

C leads a game of 'Change places if...'

Jenny: How was that?

P: She needs to be louder. I was standing behind her and I couldn't quite hear her. She needs to stand where the whole group can hear, so the whole group can hear the instructions.

Angela: What if someone in the group was deaf?

Jenny: Yeah, DIY is working with a group of deaf people at the moment who are involved in our Drop In.

Rob: If you can't sign they need to lip read, so we need to be really clear.

T: The game gets you moving as well. It wakes you up.

Rob: It gets you thinking

Through experiencing shared leadership young people were learning, in an embodied way, *how* to share leadership. The Youth Theatre's Artistic Director noted 'The group has really responded to seeing adults with learning difficulties in a position of power and leadership. That's advocacy in itself. Self-advocacy is about being leaders right from the start' (Jamie Patterson. Interview with author, March 2012). DIY members demonstrated generosity in letting go of their own control and power to enable leadership to be stretched. At the Sports and Arts Day, the progression from initial sessions, when DIY team was clearly leading, was apparent. The workshop followed an apparently delegated model, using a pictorial workshop plan as a guide, but two observations below highlight times when the workshop went 'off script' and a more dialogical form of leadership was revealed:

The box passes around the circle, and each participant is asked to take out an imaginary object. When participants find it difficult to think of something, young leaders offer suggestions. Everyone is totally focussed on the journey of the box around the circle; watching, encouraging and guessing. One participant seems to be struggling to come up with an idea.

M: You could do something sporty.

The young person nods and mimes hitting a golf ball.

This moment illustrates how the DIY team took a metaphorical step back in order to enable leadership to be stretched across Youth Theatre participants. In sharp contrast to the Special School, where Jenny felt she needed to ‘take control’, here she literally sat back, silent, to observe the session as it progressed. A mutual trust, responsiveness and ethos existed, which made dialogical leadership possible. Everyone had responsibility for the game, and was heedful of each other; actively watching and intervening as necessary. When the young leader offered the suggestion ‘you could do something sporty’, his intervention offered a light structure, but was sufficiently open to enable the young person to contribute

P passes the scarf to N who introduces Zip, Zap, Boing. The game is complicated and N is having trouble remembering what happens with each instruction. P and M talk with her in soft voices, which the rest of the group can’t hear, and remind her of how the game is played [...]

During the second workshop, N introduces Zip, Zap, Boing again. Her instructions are much clearer than in the previous workshop. She chooses her language carefully and demonstrates with her arms

N: You can do ‘zip’ that way or ‘zap’ across the circle.

N is clearly in charge of the game. When Angela gets a bit confused and ‘boings’ in the wrong direction, N insists that it goes back the other way.

In this moment again, Youth Theatre members took responsibility for their co-leaders and offered support in an appropriate and sensitive way. The moment illustrated the importance of embodied knowledge, as it was through active practice that the young person developed the knowledge to do the activity again more effectively and confidently. An indicator of the extent to which leadership had been stretched was that she felt sufficiently confident to assert herself with a member of the DIY team when they sent the sound in the wrong direction.

Relinquishing Control

The following, final, section of the chapter is based on a live drama event, which was attended by examiners and co-led by DIY Friday Group members working with Aspire, a theatre project for young people with learning disabilities at The Edge Theatre and Arts Centre in Manchester. Before reading the text, I refer the reader to the video of the live event (Appendix M).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the live event presented practice and research as inter-dependent and offered the thesis examiners a 'live' experience of DIY's leadership activities. The event and its documentation were neither offered as a model of good practice nor as a summary of knowledge gained during the research, but rather as a point of reflection within an ongoing programme. Preparation took place across two sessions and a description of the process is offered below. This planning stage of the workshop-in-the-making has until this point in the thesis been largely invisible, but is crucial to all of the leadership processes described and indicative of the planning processes involved in all DIY's educational and outreach projects. Whilst a small group of members generally delivers each project, the whole Friday Group is always involved in contributing and 'trying out' ideas. On this occasion two PowerPoints were shown to the full company as a way of re-connecting the live workshop with previous research activities and, mirroring the approach of earlier sessions, members added additional ideas regarding what was important in leadership. Whilst many suggestions supported ideas from earlier PowerPoints (for example, helping, being encouraging, working as a team, showing, demonstrating clearly, planning) a number of new ideas emerged including taking notice, being adaptable, giving and showing respect. In this way, PowerPoints served both as a document of a process and foundation for further exploration. Sounds and actions were devised to create a human machine which Angela, Anna and Jenny would present at the live workshop. Initially, I started off the human machine but then Friday Group member Cathy, shouted 'stop!', which introduced a convention from 'Stop, Go', which is a favourite drama game at DIY. Building on Cathy's suggestion, we decided to combine the 'Stop, Go' game with the human machines, taking it in turns to start and stop the machine.

At the following Friday Group session, Angela, Anna and Joanne demonstrated the human machine and Anna played with the group, saying 'stop' and 'go' in quick succession, trying to catch people out – this playfulness was something we decided to retain in the workshop with Aspire. Group members took turns using the microphone and we tried this sitting in the circle and moving to the centre to find out what worked best. We worked in small groups to make our own human machines and took turns controlling them. We discussed whether we should introduce the 'Stop, Go' idea at the beginning or once groups had created their own machines and agreed to introduce microphones at a later stage. The group suggested it would be good to repeat the 'Mirrors' game from the previous week so the Aspire group would feel comfortable. Members offered that it was important to 'move slowly', 'have eye contact' and 'do things people can follow'.

The above description offers a sense of the collaborative nature of DIY's planning processes and introduces a number of important observations in relation to this thesis. Firstly, the planning process was embodied; we were trying things out in the space, through practice. Secondly, data created in the format of a PowerPoint was used as a springboard for further consultation and data-gathering. In this sense, whilst 'finished' in the context of this PhD submission, it remains 'unfinished' and a useful focus and stimulus for further data gathering. Thirdly, the planning process was dialogical and strongly shaped by members of the company. The 'Stop, Go' game, introduced by Cathy, was in many respects the most successful element of the workshop, offering as it did a very tangible opportunity for young people to take control within the structure of the game. Lastly, collaborative planning is inevitably more complex and time-consuming than planning undertaken by a single drama practitioner. However, when dialogical processes extend through planning, all team members are able to create shared understandings of the purpose of the workshop. Having offered some context for the workshop, I now turn to moments from the 'live event'. Whilst all other moments analysed come from the workshops themselves, the first comes from a 'practice' session held the previous week:

It is the week before the examiners visit and Anna is leading the 'Follow my Leader' game.

Half way round the circle, one of the young people puts on the hat, stands up, turns round and starts wiggling his bottom. This is met by lots of laughter. Most of the group join in and copy him. Jenny prompts him to pass on the hat to the next person in the circle, who does the same thing, adding farting noises to the twerking actions. Most of the Aspire members are laughing and making noises. DIY members are sitting, watching.

Jenny says 'Some people can't join in' and Angela says 'I can't do that in my wheelchair' but the young people are enjoying the game and it continues. Part of me feels a sense of playfulness – the sheer enjoyment of the game. The other part is panicking - what happens if this happens when the examiners are here next week?

The choice to invite examiners to a live workshop raised a number of challenges. I was particularly aware of the tension between seeking to present an 'ordinary' workshop as a window into the usual practice of DIY and the fact that this was far from an 'ordinary' workshop. The notion of bringing together DIY, Aspire and the examiners in the name of research was unknown territory. Why had I made it so difficult for myself and everyone else? I became worried that the examiners would see nothing of note, that I would find nothing to write about and that neither the DIY team nor the Aspire group would be observed at their 'best'. To work dialogically, whether in research or in a workshop situation, is to relinquish control, to feel discomfort and yet move forward and the situation prompted similar feelings in me to those experienced by Johnston's improviser:

You're looking for a moving current that will carry you on that journey. You're looking for a current stronger than your 'good ideas'. [...] And part of the self will always want to resist this sense of being pulled away. This is one of many paradoxes: the aim is to make a journey, yet for this to happen you need to abandon the self-protections that are so useful in the rest of life (Johnston, 2006: 93).

As with the Youth Theatre project described earlier, the overt aims of this project were to stretch leadership amongst young people. A major challenge within such a project is to find a balance between 'light structuring' within which all young people feel safe and supported whilst at the same time opening up spaces where young people can improvise and work 'off script'. If everything in the workshop is

controlled, possibilities for young people to take initiative are limited, but if there is too little control, the loudest voices and energies take over and the group dynamic can become excluding of softer voices or less energetic personalities. The complexity of this 'balance' is illustrated in the following moment from the live event:

Angela and Anna demonstrate the Mirrors Game with calm, fluid movements. The Aspire group is paired off and Angela asks them to pick a leader. Initially, all the pairs follow the calm, measured actions modelled by Angela and Anna. This changes as J pulls up his T-shirt and starts patting his bare stomach. His partner T follows, laughing. J calls to B across the room and shows him the action. B copies and his partner C follows.

Two couples are now patting their bare stomachs and laughing. I'm feel lots of things all at the same time – I can't help responding to the fun and joy of the young people who are taking control and making the game their own. But I'm also aware of my responsibility to DIY to maintain a level of structure and control. Is M feeling intimidated? Is Jenny going to think I can't 'control' the group? Are the examiners going to feel like the situation is out of control? How on earth am I going to write about this?

One perspective on the moment above would be that that the situation lacked control; my worst fears expressed in the 'twerking' moment being realised in front of the examiners. Another would be that young people were taking charge and making the game their own. An interesting feature was that whilst young people were taking the lead they were doing so within the 'light' framework of the game. When the DIY team stepped forward to re-assert the plan and move onto the next activity, the Aspire group followed. What happened next was particularly interesting, in light of the previous week's session. Angela asked for volunteers to show what they had been doing and J was first to volunteer:

Angela appears hesitant to start with J, but she does and J and T start to demonstrate the mirror game, while the rest of the group watches.

J starts, predictably, by pulling up his T-shirt and patting his bare stomach. Initially T follows, but then, without saying anything, he starts to move his arms in front of him and then above his head. He introduces a range of actions, without exposing any bare flesh. J appears a bit taken aback, pauses, and then re-joins the game, following T's actions. They continue to the end of their 'performance'.

The point at which Angela decided J and T would go first proved a significant moment in the workshop-in-the-making. If J had been blocked from demonstrating the game, this might have led to him becoming frustrated and possibly disruptive. In fact, by handing over to J and T, Angela created the space for T to lead. No words were spoken and there was no conversation about it afterwards, but T demonstrated leadership through his actions in a way which was probably more effective than any intervention Angela might have made. Later, when other pairs were demonstrating their mirror-work, I became aware of J and B at opposite sides of the circle. J cupped his hands around his chin and B mirrored him, then J placed his hand flat on his head and B followed him. I was struck by how they had developed and extended the game into another, all their own, but perfectly within the framework of the original activity.

Another example of unexpected leadership emerged at the close of the first workshop. After the examiners had joined in DIY's 'Goodbye' song, instead of leaving as expected, the group stayed behind, wanting to talk. R started off the conversation, re-connecting with an earlier exchange by remembering that her parent worked in Sunderland:

'His name is Mr R' R says, suggesting the examiners might know him. J gives a speech saying how much he's liked working with the examiners. R joins in to say how much she likes the examiners. I feel uneasy. Should I intervene? This doesn't 'fit' with the format of a practice-based submission I'd imagined and we need to start getting ready for the next group. Then I have a light-bulb moment – of course, the group are finishing their 'performance'.

Members of the group love to make speeches at the end of our termly sharing events. After performances they take to the stage one by one, with the microphone, to make speeches - telling their parents, sisters, brothers, supporters how much they love them. They enjoy it so much that we have built this space into the structure of all our sharing events. So now the goodbye song has been sung, it's time for the 'speeches'. The DIY team do not compete for the space either vocally or physically, they sit back, they listen, they observe.

In making their speeches Aspire members were signalling their awareness of the event as 'performance' and taking control of the conclusion of the workshop-in-the-making. Significantly, the DIY team did not obviously seek to establish these

relationships with the examiners themselves or to direct the end of the session. As Parker states 'in improvisation there is no room for the ego' (Parker, 2010: 108). The model of 'generous' leadership offered here and throughout the session by the DIY team, offered the space for young people to take on leadership roles themselves.

The second Aspire group is more supported by adults than the first. The young people are generally less verbal and tend to engage in activities more physically. Because there was so much adult support, it offered an opportunity to observe the challenges and opportunities in stretching leadership amongst supporters. The moment below occurred when Aspire members were shown DIY's human machine as an example and then divided into smaller groups to create their own leadership human machines. D and J were grouped with C (J's auntie) and L (D's mum):

Whether D finds it difficult to relate to the word 'Leadership' is unclear, because C starts off by saying 'that's a difficult word' and steps in immediately to offer him a suggestion of the word 'strong' and a strongman pose.

J finds the words 'follow me' and C and L point in different directions across the circle and say 'this way'. The group practises their machine and is then invited to show it to the rest of the group.

Immediately, D grabs the microphone and says 'go!' Nothing happens as the two supporters are still working out their positions. D, microphone in hand, says 'go!' again. They are still sorting themselves out. D appears increasingly frustrated. He says 'go!' again, and at last the human machine starts up.

In this example, not only did supporters leave no space for the young person to contribute his ideas, but they also ignored his attempts to gain control of the game. The imperative to make something 'worth showing' was certainly heightened by the performance-like quality of the event. The pervasiveness of barriers to developing dialogical leadership, as discussed above, are highlighted by the fact that even in a group like this, where everyone has to a large extent a shared understanding and ethos, opportunities for stretching leadership across young people can be overlooked and even blocked.

In contrast, moments of positive support occurred throughout the session. For example, when J wanted to be a robot his group went with it, recognising it was more important to accept his ideas than to insist on something more obviously linked with leadership. When the group showed their human machine, with L controlling the robot being made by J and his mum, their presentation offered a very concrete, tangible way of representing being 'in control' to which the whole group could relate. Another moment from the workshop offered insight into the level of heedfulness required to stretch leadership across young people. In an e-mail, sent to me after the session, Aspire's supporter, Nikki, reflected on her own experience of the workshop.

At first I thought maybe it will be too hard. Then M said she just wanted to tell us when to start and stop. She was unable to think of word so I gave her a choice of words and she chose the one she thought was most important and she gave me the action. I had the same when I worked with J. They both decided what they felt happy and comfortable doing. The same happens when we go around the circle and someone decides to take an instruction and do it in their way. So often leadership is stifled because we have to conform to an idea of right and wrong (Nikki Mailer. E-mail sent to author, May 2016).

It is notable that a moment which was so pivotal to Nikki's experience of the workshop, was one of which I was totally unaware until I received her email. According to Husserl, it is only through the intentional act of turning our gaze towards an object that it is perceived (Husserl, 2012: 53). Our perception is always incomplete because 'a thing can be given only "in one of its aspects" and that not only means incompletely, in some sense or other imperfectly, but precisely that which presentation through perspectives prescribes' (ibid: 82). In the live drama workshops there were hundreds of interactions potentially available to view but it is impossible to focus on a multiplicity of things simultaneously. Husserl calls this a 'zone of background intuitions' (ibid: 65). Whilst I missed some moments which were of central importance to others, I also recorded moments of which other participants would be totally unaware, as in the example below:

Jenny asks J to work with his mum and asks L to work with C, another supporter. Instead, the adults decide to work together and the two young people work together. J and L are leading and following in a really focussed way. J's movements are much bigger and more defined than any I have seen him make. I'm really excited by what I see. A couple of months ago J would have found it extremely difficult to stay in the same room with the group and his mum would have been holding onto him throughout the session.

These interactions were notable to me because I was aware of the significance of the fact that J and L were working together and independently. The moment highlighted not only of the benefit of knowing individual participants well, but also the extent to which that depth of knowledge was not available to me in observing other workshops as part of this research. By its very nature, a phenomenological account is personal and incomplete. It tells just one of many possible stories of the workshop, as everyone will feel things differently and notice different interactions. The examiners are likely to have seen very different moments from myself and from each other. The film-maker similarly was creating her own 'story' of the event. The combination of a live experience, written observations and video create a fuller picture of the event, but the picture remains fragmentary and incomplete.

Conclusion

In this chapter a relational lens has enabled me to view shared leadership practices as fluid and emergent and to characterise the drama workshop as an extension of improvised artistic practice, created through the interactions of DIY members, staff from partner organisations and young people. Freire's definition of dialogue has enabled me recognise the centrality of power relationships within leadership and to explore the shifting power dynamics which exist within a workshop-in-the-making.

Descriptions of DIY's practice have highlighted how improvisers in theatre and in leadership need to work with 'light structuring', to be heedful, generous, to accept and build on what is offered and to work in the moment. To work dialogically, whether in research or in a workshop situation, is to feel discomfort, to

take risks and to feel out of control at times. It requires recognition of power inequalities which can be deeply ingrained in existing approaches but it also offers a space where we can choose to do things differently. When we stretch leadership we lose a level of control but we potentially gain something else; a new level of interaction, new relationships, new ideas and new leadership.

This research highlights the imperative for those of us who engage with Learning Disability Theatres to look beyond normative definitions and models to create and articulate our own definitions of what leadership in Learning Disability Theatres is and can be. A relational perspective offers opportunities for applied theatre practitioners and others who collaborate with leaders with learning disabilities, to recognise new possibilities for creating, viewing and describing drama leadership. The descriptions included in this chapter reflect one company's emergent practice and have already influenced the ways in which leadership is viewed and discussed within DIY, as will be explored in the Conclusion. My aspiration is that this thesis will encourage others involved in Learning Disability Theatres to engage with leadership practice and research themselves. The actions and voices of all those involved in Learning Disability Theatres need to be included and heard within wider debates around leadership within the cultural sector.

Conclusion

This thesis has broken new ground, by dealing with a subject which, despite being central to Learning Disability Theatres, has not received the critical or academic attention it deserves. It positions the practice within a social and historical context to raise important questions about where knowledge of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres resides, how it can be accessed, and what its significance and applications could be. In common with much practice-based research it has raised more questions than answers and opened up many more avenues for further research and practice, some of which will be discussed in this conclusion. Others will emerge in the future, as dialogues in words and action develop amongst all those involved in Learning Disability Theatres, the wider arts sector and beyond.

The thesis has introduced the notion of an improvised 'methodology-in-the-making', through which a range of voices and perspectives have been assembled, deconstructed and re-assembled a number of times. In the spirit of dialogical enquiry, my intention is that readers will pull it apart, criticise its weaknesses and be provoked to create their own practice-based research incorporating different voices, perspectives and influences. It is imperative that we continue to make, research and discuss leadership within Learning Disability Theatres and challenge the normative and limiting pre-conceptions imposed on people with learning disabilities and reflected in the judgement that began this study that DIY theatre-makers are 'too disabled' to lead workshops.

In Chapter One, I reviewed the literature that has influenced the development of DIY's research to which my thesis contributes. The term Learning Disability Theatres identifies what I view to be a distinct field of practice which emerged in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, as a range of complex social, artistic, economic and political factors converged. Learning Disability Theatres emerged from the overlapping legacies of community arts and experimental theatre, but developed significantly later than other strands of devised and political theatre and have therefore always existed, to some extent, outside these frames of reference. As a practitioner-researcher, aiming to speak to both practitioners and research communities, my thesis contributes a new perspective to an

increasing body of work within Learning Disability Theatres which to date has not specifically addressed the theme of leadership.

An inter-disciplinary approach has enabled me to examine discourses within Critical Disability Studies and Critical Leadership Studies and to locate Learning Disability Theatres within a broader social and philosophical context. I have drawn on the work of Foucault and those who have mobilised his ideas to explore how social constructs of the norm and the productive individual are idealised notions against which most people with learning disabilities are deemed 'too disabled' to lead. Rather than conforming to an aspiration to the 'normal', this research highlights the value of human diversity and difference, not just to people with learning disabilities, but to groups and individuals across society. Consideration of literature from Critical Leadership Studies highlights the limitations of hierarchical models which focus on the qualities of heroic leaders and fixed leader/follower relationships. This study highlights the potential of more relational, fluid ways of looking at and talking about leadership, which include the leadership of performers and theatre-makers with learning disabilities.

The development of a 'methodology-in-the-making' reflects knowledge-production as dynamic, and processual rather than defined by the search for a single 'truth'. By introducing a range of methods I have sought to make practice count and to assert, alongside other practice-based researchers, that creative practices can offer valid forms of knowledge-making. Of importance to my developing argument has been an epistemological framework based in phenomenology, which draws on the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty to build knowledge from a focus on, and heedfulness to, moments of practice as they occur. A phenomenological perspective positions the *moment* at the centre of our lived experience and this has led me to consider how each and every moment of a drama workshop holds within it the potential and possibilities of what that workshop is becoming. The notion of moments within a workshop representing a series of potential becomings is foundational to the descriptions of relational leadership presented in this thesis.

This research has an overtly 'political' agenda. I have explored the political issues involved in developing research with, about and for performers with

learning disabilities and the imperative for research to both represent the perspectives of, and be useful to, disabled people. Image Theatre, photo elicitation and live workshops have engaged people with learning disabilities in the creation and dissemination of new knowledge and ensured that research processes and products reflected a range of viewpoints, styles and registers.

In Chapter Three the complex inter-relationship of heroic and shared models of leadership was explored. Normative, hierarchical perspectives on leadership are pervasive and resilient within Learning Disability Theatres but observations revealed shared leadership practices that can be masked by more traditional approaches. The concept of 'disability gain' was introduced, which frames disability as a valuable aspect of human diversity and opens up the possibility of people with learning disabilities creating new kinds of productions, conferences and workshops. The notion of 'performative acts' was utilised, referencing Butler's ideas on this, to highlight moments in which disabled people offer an alternative 'script' to normative notions of learning disability. By taking to the actual, and metaphorical, stage at a performance or conference people with learning disabilities can challenge the limiting scripts available to them.

The complex power relations amongst disabled and non-disabled protagonists has been highlighted. Normative perceptions of people with learning disabilities as dependents lacking agency can lead to non-disabled collaborators feeling they need to make themselves 'invisible', in order to signal that disabled people are in charge. However, a more nuanced perspective opens up a view of disabled and non-disabled collaborators as potentially both leaders and followers at different times. Hosking offers a relational perspective which acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of power relations inherent in making leadership. In contrast to 'hard self-other definition' which emphasises the differences between leaders and followers, disabled people and non-disabled people, Hosking offers the notion of 'soft self-other differentiation'. It is only by acknowledging the nuances and complexities of our *relations* with others that we can come to recognise the constantly shifting power relationships involved in shaping different forms of shared leadership.

Finally, I considered the practice of DIY Theatre Company. Phenomenological and relational perspectives that had been established in the writing were extended through introducing Freire's definition of dialogue, which deepened consideration of issues of power and control within the leadership observed. Freire's perspective proved particularly apposite because it complements a view of relationships and knowledge as emergent, supports a perspective on practice and theory as interdependent and emanates from both a relational and a political foundation. Underpinning Freire's writing is the notion that we can create different kinds of relationships with those who are generally disenfranchised and oppressed within society. When we recognise and relate to the shared humanity of others, new forms of dialogical interaction become possible.

The particular synergistic relationship of applied theatre and dialogical leadership has proved a rich site of exploration. From a relational perspective, both applied theatre and shared leadership are created through in-the-moment inter-actions of protagonists and both present the possibility of knowledge-making emerging through doing. The term workshop-in-the-making introduces a view of the drama workshop as an extension of improvised artistic practice. In each moment of enacting the workshop, leaders can be understood to be exploring the form of a particular workshop-in-the-making with co-leaders and young people and also devising what a drama workshop can or could be.

The final chapter highlighted a number of potential benefits in developing more dialogical forms of leadership within Learning Disability Theatres. Development of dialogical leadership with people with learning disabilities requires us to take risks, relinquish control and recognise the power inequalities that can be deeply ingrained in existing approaches. Applied theatre practitioners who collaborate with people with learning disabilities may need to talk less, to slow down, to be in the moment and improvise. In doing so they will learn from, and develop different kinds of relationships with, performers with learning disabilities to those existing outside the drama workshop .

The notion that any single piece of research or academic writing will be 'socially transformative' was shown to be not only unrealistic but inherently flawed.

Both Nicholson and Balfour prompt practitioners to ask whose values and interests we are serving when we allow ourselves to be drawn into making claims for the 'transformative' impacts and outcomes of our work. This thesis makes no claims of identifying a new 'model' of leadership, nor does it set out to advise others on how to 'do' leadership. And yet, in line with a political view of practice and research, it does seek to be of relevance and use to people with learning disabilities and to contribute to an agenda for positive social change.

I have adopted a relational perspective, which views leadership within Learning Disability Theatres as something created through the inter-relationships of disabled and non-disabled people. From a relational perspective, social change can be realised through leadership as it is made, as much as through the ways in which it is described and analysed. The research process and findings have already influenced DIY as an organisation and the theatre company itself is therefore my starting point for considering the potential for 'little changes' influenced by this research to emerge through dialogue, both within the organisation and through creative collaboration with others.

In terms of DIY's ongoing education and outreach programme, the research process has enabled Friday Group members to gain increased understanding and awareness of the relational nature of leadership. The links identified between improvisation and leadership practice open up possibilities for focusing on skills which promote dialogical leadership (e.g. being in the moment, heedfulness etc.) in very practical ways during weekly planning and evaluation sessions. The company will use the findings to develop ways of articulating processes which can be shared with Special Schools and cultural organisations as a basis for stronger collaborations in the future. We now have a better understanding of, and clearer ways of articulating, some of the challenges and barriers we are likely to face in 'stretching' leadership across organisations and this will equip us to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties in the future.

The knowledge gained through this process has influenced the ways in which DIY plans and delivers projects with young people with learning disabilities. The notion of 'stretching' leadership, for example, offers a clear and tangible focus for experiencing and discussing how leadership is shared at different stages in a

project, not only within the company but also with young people with learning disabilities. We have devised resources and activities which we have started using to support the development of leadership by young people with learning disabilities – in particular young adults with learning disabilities in transition to adulthood.

DIY is keen to use the findings of this research to initiate dialogues with the wider cultural sector and is planning two key initiatives over the next two years. Firstly, we are devising a series of day-long practical training courses for practitioners interested in developing theatre with young people with learning disabilities. These courses will be co-led by teams of disabled and non-disabled leaders and will engage with the barriers and potential of dialogical leadership explored in this thesis. Secondly, DIY is planning a day-long conference, to be held in 2018, which will provide a space for those involved in Learning Disability Theatres and others to share their leadership practices and explore opportunities for the development of further research and practice in this area.

Owing to the lack of academic literature dealing with the relationship between leadership and Learning Disabilities, the subject offers offer considerable scope for further study. Important questions include ‘How are Learning Disability Theatres in the UK defining disability-led?’ ‘What models of governance exist in different Learning Disability Theatres and to what extent are people with learning disabilities involved in these structures?’ ‘What pedagogical practices are Learning Disability Theatres in the UK engaged in and how are performers with learning disabilities engaged in these activities?’ Practitioner-researchers are in a unique position to engage in such research through both descriptive and analytical approaches. They have intimate knowledge of the sector and particular opportunities to work in partnership with artists with learning disabilities. How can practitioner-researchers and their collaborators best be supported to undertake such research? This study also provides a useful reference point for exploring practice and research in other European countries and further afield. What leadership practices are taking place involving theatre-makers and workshop leaders with learning disabilities? How do the historical, social and political contexts within these countries impact on the ways leadership within Learning Disability Theatres is developing?

Nor are the possibilities for further research restricted to Learning Disability Theatres or applied theatre. In combining critical and inter-disciplinary perspectives, this thesis highlights the potential for leadership research undertaken collaboratively with disabled co-leaders to be developed in other academic areas. For example, I have been struck by the lack of reference to Applied Theatre discourses within Critical Disability Studies literature which considers the impacts of arts participation. Further research into the relationships of disabled facilitators and disabled young people, as identified in Chapter Three for example, would benefit from drawing on discourses across disciplines. Questions might include 'Is there really a specific kind of relationship which exists between disabled facilitators and young people with learning disabilities within the drama workshop?' If so, 'what are its features and facets?' 'What does it look, feel and sound like?'

Similarly, there is scope for follow-on research to be undertaken at the interface of Applied Theatre and Critical Leadership Studies. DIY has started to explore the synergies of improvised theatre practices and relational leadership. Whilst there is a wealth of practice exploring how drama can increase skills and confidence in emerging leaders within the corporate sector, the majority is based on development of inspirational individuals. A relational perspective on the connections between leadership and applied theatre is worthy of further study. Questions might include 'what are the links between improvised practice and relational leadership within Learning Disability Theatres?' and 'what might a relational perspective on leadership contribute within other Applied Theatre contexts?'

In terms of cultural policy, this thesis contributes to a much-needed problematisation of the term 'disabled-led' as used in relation to Learning Disability Theatres. In 2017, the issue of diversity is at the forefront of debates around leadership within the cultural sector and the notion of disability-led practices and structures is particularly prominent. This study argues for broader definitions than those offered by hierarchical, traditional notions of leadership and highlights the potential for all those involved in Learning Disability Theatres to become more involved in naming what leadership within the cultural sector is and can be.

Finally, in relation to the academy, there is a need for more practice-research involving people with learning disabilities which can challenge the exclusiveness of normative notions of research and knowledge and offer alternative perspectives. This thesis proposes a model of interdependent relational research practice which views knowledge as always becoming rather than fully formed. As a practitioner–researcher, I am particularly interested in working with performers with learning disabilities to further develop the methodology-in-the-making which has emerged through our research. As we increase the number of people with learning disabilities actively involved in research, all of those engaged in practice and research, within Learning Disability Theatres, academic institutions and elsewhere, will gain from a broader diversity of research topics, methodologies and research outputs.

In concluding my thesis, I return to the distinction made at the outset between *our* research as a collaborative process and *my* thesis-writing as an individual endeavour. In making this distinction, I retain a sense of frustration at the dissonance between my own espoused values and my values in action as evidenced in this written outcome. I end with an observation intended as a provocation as much as an expression of personal frustration. As I present a view of knowledge-building as a collaborative, dialogical process, I am sitting in my office, blocking out all human interaction in order to concentrate on my writing. There could hardly be more disparity between the relational perspective I hold and the inward-looking process in which I am currently engaged. In Foucault's terms, I have largely complied with normative notions of research, the systems of the academy and the structures of power, authority and knowledge which they represent. In doing so, I have not achieved the balance of practice and theory that I set out to achieve at the outset. The methodology-in-the-making has included arts-based Inclusive Research, phenomenological descriptions of moments of practice and a live drama event. However, all of these elements require a written 'translation', which supports a view that certain kinds of voices and perspectives can only be presented in an academic thesis through an intermediary like myself, who shapes, interprets and analyses what people have to show and say. A more confident and tenacious practitioner-researcher might have included certain sections free of analysis, and asked readers, viewers, listeners and examiners to

experience them through their own eyes, ears and feelings, rather than through my own. That said, the combination of a Professional Doctorate and a practice-based submission has created a certain amount of space in which this practitioner-researcher has had the scope to explore, in dialogue with her collaborators, new relational ways of making and presenting knowledge. In this respect this thesis represents a resting point rather than a point of arrival and a provocation for further practice and research, rather than a conclusion.

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List of Appendices and Locations

- Appendix A:** Film: *David Remembers*
<http://www.diytheatre.org.uk/picking-up-the-threads/>
- Appendix B:** Film: *The Sycamore Project*
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- Appendix C:** Video Tweet: *Following the Thread Tour*
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- Appendix E:** Print Publication: *DIY Three Year Plan (2016-2018)* Pendrive
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