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S1 Igniting the creative impulse in older people through active participation in video camera drama workshops

Jo I am Jo, Lecturer in Performance in the School of Media, Culture and Society. Applied theatre holds a special place in the performance pedagogy I would like to develop within the School. Nicholson identifies the purpose of applied theatre as using **S2** "drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies" (Nicholson 2005: 3). According to Hughes (2011: 190), "the field of applied theatre deliberately and creatively disrupts the binary of use value and exchange value". In developing a relationship between work, enterprise and the curriculum I am committed to "creatively [disrupting] the binary of use value and exchange value"

Ryan My name is Ryan Bowler. I recently graduated from UWS with a BA (Hons) in Performance. For my dissertation, I was clear that I wanted to do a practice-based research project in a nursing home. After much reading, feedback from Jo and personal reflection, I settled on the research question, **S3** Nurturing creativity in nursing homes: Exploring how the video camera can be used to develop esteem, purpose and a sense of community with residents of Creggan Bahn Court.

Jo In the previous BA (Hons) Performance programme that Ryan was enrolled on, students had to do a core work-related module, entitled, Community Performance Project. The opening paragraph in the descriptor captures the essence of the module: **S4**

> This module focusses on the empowerment of communities through collaborating with participants to make performance as defined by them. Students will be able to work with a variety of community groups in partnership with agencies which are responsible for them. They will be required to work on the site of the community participants and lead a minimum of six workshops with no upper limit.

Ryan Undertaking this module in 3rd year led me to a nursing home in Ayr called Creggan Bahn Court. Together with three of my peers we facilitated eight weekly workshops with the residents. During this time we developed reminiscence theatre using music, poetry, pictures and creative writing to stimulate our collective creativity. **S5** Tom had a love for clouds and he taught me the meaning of cumulous. He celebrated his 100th birthday in May 2017 and we felt privileged to be invited to celebrate with him. While Tom is sadly no longer with us he and the other participants we worked with as part of my Community Project module have inspired my dissertation inquiry.

Jo Ryan was assigned to me for supervision because he had proposed a practice as research project in applied theatre and I had expertise in this field. Nelson equates practice as research methodology to praxis because it is developed from an iterative dialogic engagement with doing and thinking (2013: 19). Bolt (2012: 30) refers to Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1966) in developing the case for practice as research paradigms suggesting that it

is only through our "handling of materials and processes" that we come to understand the world. Worthy as it is, practice as research does not come without its challenges. Freeman discusses the chaotic nature of practice as research **S6**

> Unlike (...) traditional research, performance practice is always messy and its manners are often bad. It neither does what it is told nor does it go meekly in the direction one would usually expect. It sits uneasily with many ideas of academic objectivity and verification. Its goals are often less well-defined and usually impossible to measure.... It is unpredictable, maybe even at times uncontrollable.
>
> <div align="right">Freeman 2010: 81</div>

Yet he argues that "there is still a place in practice-based investigations for research which is systematic, informed and verifiable" (Freeman 2010: 79). While I was prepared for the messiness of this methodology, I began to doubt if I would ever be able to navigate Ryan through the chaos of practice-based research while ensuring that he worked towards systematic, informed and reliable findings. Not only was I concerned that he wanted to tackle numerous challenges arising from an aging population with a very broad and unspecific inquiry but also about whether it would be possible for him to achieve any kind of objectivity when he showed limitless empathy for anyone he perceived to be vulnerable. It was only during one of our dissertation meetings that I discovered the roots of his empathy which made me realise that I had as much to learn from this supervision process than Ryan did.

Ryan   When I was twelve I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue, I would like to explain my deep rooted compassion for people who might be segregated from everyday societal interactions. Chronic fatigue is a neurological disease that leaves its host in constant excessive weakness and severe nerve pain. It can result in a person being bedridden for months or in extreme cases like mine for years, to be accurate five years. I was not able to go to school during these years and my only contact with the outside world was with my physiotherapists who were doing everything they could to try to help me walk again. Through a very dark, exhausting battle between mind, matter and quality of life, I eventually got my illness under control and at 17 was able to enrol on a foundation college drama course. During this time I became brave about exploring my feelings, tackling negative thoughts and gaining confidence about finding my place in society in spite of a number of relapses with my illness. I scraped through college with Cs relying on my acting ability to help me achieve an overall pass as I was weak academically. I cannot thank Jo enough for not giving up on me and not only finding a way to help me academically but also making me aware that I could channel my empathy into research which could have impact. Creative lecturers like Jo through their innovative pedagogy have helped me overcome my academic challenges and educational set-backs, giving me confidence to undertake research that can make a difference in the lives of those who may feel isolated or lonely.

Jo By understanding Ryan's ontology, I began to appreciate that that the success of practice as research is dependent on inherent complexities rather than in spite of it. Ryan comes to this research from a unique, deep place of empathy and an unwavering commitment to bring about transformation in society. These are virtues not obstacles to research. As Ryan's supervisor I needed to develop a framework for his inquiry where his artistic impulses and unrestrained empathy could work together with the rigours of verifiable, systematic research. I suggested to Ryan that he developed Kershaw's dialectical practice as research paradigm where contradictions had its place within objective research processes.

Kershaw (2011b: 64 - 65) acknowledges practice as research as "generating troublesome contradictions" but adds that these are valuable for potential new knowledge, requiring a "tighter focus of analysis". He suggests five "minimal constituents" for this method. **S7** Firstly, he identifies the need for a carefully constructed topic where contradiction can thrive "between the predictability-quotient of questions … and the unpredictable prompting of hunches" . Kershaw's second constituent, aesthetics, necessitates a study of theoretical concepts, ideology and a practical engagement with artistic strategies to develop appropriate pedagogy for practice-based research. He identifies the third minimal constituent as locations where the context and the site of the research need to be established. He names the fourth minimal constituent as transmissions where impact and "multi-modal" dissemination" must be identified. Kershaw refers to the final minimal constituent as "key issues" which he describes as "how to fall into contradiction without only contradicting itself" made possible by exploring contradictions through ethical, practical means.

Ryan   The Creggan Bahn group comprised of 7 participants including a member of the nursing home staff. The residents who participated in the project had no or some progressive form of dementia. I facilitated six workshops with each session beginning with a warm up entailing gentle body movement, then playing a slightly more energetic game called 'hands up' and vocal exercises. Each workshop introduced a new technique with the camera and a revision of the previous techniques learnt. The workshops explored the memories participants shared through the video camera, role-play and image theatre. At the end of the six workshops, I collated the highlights of each session and we enjoyed watching these on the last day.

I used Kershaw's minimum constituents as a guide, developing a focussed research topic, establishing the context and site of the research and also developed the ideological basis and the appropriate aesthetic strategies for the project. I tackled key issues head on. **S8** Dialogic pedagogy developed and practiced by Paulo Freire underpinned the ideological premise of the project design and facilitation.

> When one must speak to the people, one must convert the
> "to" to a "with" the people, and this implies respect for the
> knowledge of the living experience.

<div align="right">Freire 2014: p25</div>

Freire suggests that in conversations we must be equal. Accepting everyone as an equal allows us to build trust on the site of the learning and teaching environment. This in turn gives us the opportunity to explore feelings, opinions and subjects relating to the world around us giving each person a voice and respecting each person's potential ability to teach. In Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (2014), he speaks of life experience, not only his own but that of others, the importance of knowledge being shared as collective experiences. By sharing our experiences, rather than dictating how lessons or workshops be taught, we learn to grow and internally liberate ourselves through working together.

From the outset the key issue of achieving equality when I do not enter Creggan Bahn Court as an equal - I enter with all the knowledge of the camera and theatre aesthetics - was tackled. This contradiction was addressed through my commitment to dialogic pedagogy at every turn. I facilitated the workshops on the site of the participants in an environment familiar to them. I respected the unique knowledge each participant brought to this process and developed the workshops from this. While I entered the workshop with knowledge of drama and the use of the camera, the participants entered with their wealth of experience. I came to believe that what I, as the researcher, and they, as participants, bring into the workshops balances us from the outset allowing us to proceed as equals. By the end of the six weeks the participants where using the video camera independently, teaching me and each other new facts about the history of Britain and other topics, such as homelessness, languages, family and even educating me in bio chemistry!

Heathcote's pedagogy influenced my own practice. Like Freire, Heathcote empowered young children through giving them opportunities to explore their imagination. **S9**

> Heathcote's characteristic stance at the beginning is to step into a role and
> play it in a highly charged, often aggressive way. This sets the stage for the
> class's response. Once their drive is strong, she can play down her own role.

<div align="right">Wagner 1990: P128</div>

Heathcote's practice of dialogic pedagogy allowed her to teach alongside children instead of teaching at them. I applied Heathcote's role techniques to my workshops and it helped me address key challenges I faced such as teaching a high tech device such as a film camera to

those who might not have used it before. It was vital that instead of talking about the camera, like Heathcote I put the camera straight into the hands of the participants and let them familiarise themselves with how to use it. Slowly over the course of the six weeks Heathcote's teachings of empowering others so that they take the lead was achieved through role-play and imaginary scenarios. Participants began to use the camera to film one another, speak to it and feel confident in holding, filming and zooming. The challenges some participants faced with hearing, mobility and dementia did not affect the relationship they had with the video camera as every participant used the camera with confidence and purpose.

The movement and repetition sequences I facilitated with the group were derived from Boal's image theatre. Expression through body language can be liberating for those who are afraid or reserved about expressing emotions through spoken language. **S10**

> The actors swallow a spoonful of honey, followed by a pinch of salt, and then a pinch of sugar
>
> Boal 2002: p31

In Boal's (2002) *Games for Actors and Non-actors* he describes a simple visual exercise that evokes memory and stimulates the mind. Boal observes that human emotions are often related to a memory of foods, smells and actions and develops his pedagogy on observations like these. The majority of the scenes created during the workshops started with image theatre. I facilitated the creation of still images with the participants then made the images move then built characters around these actions which then turned into full scenes. Image theatre led to deep conversations about society, family, feelings and expression. Image theatre even showed promising results in memory retention with participants who had dementia as they could remember sequences and reproduce them during rehearsals. Dialogic pedagogy and image theatre worked well together in the sharing of experiences, gaining knowledge from one another and doing it in a safe environment.

S11 The camera allowed for a variety of avenues to open up. Not only did it act as a documenter of the research, but was a tool of empowerment. It allowed for participants to use technology they were not familiar with and utilise it as a tool for their creation. The camera gave participants the option to take on a role, such as director, camera operator or to perform as an actor in front of the camera. When participants watched themselves back a sense of euphoria, joy and achievement was expressed. When operating the camera a sense of control and confidence was apparent even to the point that an onlooker watching the film could not tell if it was me controlling the camera or the participants. Over a short period we became collective facilitators, teaching one another through our experimentations with the video camera. At the start all of us were nervous for different reasons but towards the

end we left the workshops as an empowered community who had gone a journey of learning and teaching together.

Jo The short film you are about to watch captures the key features of Ryan's research project. Ryan obtained UWS ethical approval for this and both Ryan and I have obtained written consent from the participants for the sharing of the footage you are about to see.

The Film

Ryan S12 Outcomes, Impact and Future

Image theatre paved the way for memory retention. The participants remembered the chronology of images/actions and were able to reproduce them during rehearsals.

Scenes which began with still images turned into thought-provoking moving images which led to important conversations. Participants shared about how they felt being in a home and began to discuss complex feelings about their relationship to their carers.

I found by the end of the six weeks everyone was a lot closer to one another, offering a lot more support and care to one another's health issues or disabilities. The drama aesthetics and the video camera helped to build a community. The staff member involved became an integral part of this community.

The enthusiasm for the workshops demonstrated the participants' desire to gain knowledge and continue the life-long process of learning. There were issues with the weight of the camera but in general the participants were not afraid of the technology and were able to use it as a creative tool. All participants grew in confidence. Self- esteem and a sense of purpose became evident particularly with a couple of participants who were very reserved at the beginning of the process and hardly contributed initially.

Jo and I believe that this research which has its roots in Creggan Bahn Court can have a positive impact on nursing homes across Scotland and intend to seek funds to develop this project particularly with a view to training nursing home staff with drama facilitation and VC skills.

Thank-you

S13 References

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