

Developing the Critical Verbatim Theater Artist during the Pandemic: A Transatlantic Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

Following recent social upheavals and an unprecedented pandemic, the development of theater students to work with stories from the community has become more urgent. Because verbatim theater brings to focus real voices and often involves sensitive topics, artists/educators consider key ethical questions before their engagement with educational or community contexts. Artists/educators are developed within the fieldwork of applied theater, during their study at university, through

supervision to engage communities. The pandemic made such fieldwork difficult due to online learning and teaching, so university educators tested alternative ways of simulating the experience of working with participants. This article analyzes the rationale, application and evaluation of an educational verbatim theater case study that involved British theater students and American nursing students, from the University of Chichester and Kent State University respectively. It identifies how international collaborations might offer an alternative environment to fieldwork by inviting students to consider key ethical questions before their engagement with communities. The narrative of practice reveals how it was rooted in Paulo Freire's pedagogy. The artist/educator's reflection highlights how such collaborations invite students to explore dialectics and the ethics of representation in verbatim theater, and to develop accountability and empathy when working with participants, which hopefully, they bring to their future fieldwork.

INTRODUCTION

The necessity to teach online during the last two years posed a great challenge for universities that prepare artists to collaborate in community settings. At the same time, the pandemic, and events related to the recent resurgence of the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, highlighted further the persistent social injustices. So, it was crucial to adapt university learning environments for theater that addresses social injustice, such as verbatim. Using various processes, verbatim theater practitioners create scripts by 'interviewing individuals, usually from a particular group or community and often about a matter of political and social interest' (Summerskill, 2021, p. 3). The key practitioner Anna Deavere Smith exposed racial violence (Martin & Smith, 1993), and inspired performances about homophobic violence (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater, 2011) and violence against women (Blythe, 2014). Verbatim theater also celebrates communities, such as in Alecky Blythe's latest play *Our Generation* for which she interviewed a group of teenagers from different parts of the UK about contemporary British youth culture (John, 2022). But even with light topics, the artists engage with real human beings in conversations that might involve sensitive topics. For example, in *Our Generation*, children of various genders and ethnicities

were interviewed on various occasions for five years, and their testimonies were performed by actors. Sensitive issues such as racial discrimination and abuse in the family are part of the script (Blythe, 2022), and perhaps more have been cut from the final version. The interviewees included Blythe, but also five ‘collectors’ (2022, p. 9), some of whom had just graduated from university drama departments (Blythe, A., Dougill I., Gaffey, L., Murphy, D., Tebby, R., & Wilkes, O., 2022). When university students are invited to create verbatim theater works during their studies, they reach out to community settings to resource interviewees for their chosen topics.

This article reflects on a case study of a group of teachers and students who used a collaboration between two universities—one in the UK and the other in the US—as a simulation of working with communities for verbatim theater. The first section discusses how the use of verbatim theater to teach university students and as part of obtaining degrees problematizes the artist/educator. It also presents the project and how it resonated with Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, which considers that critical consciousness in adult education and active engagement with their political, social and economic frustrations can help participants to improve their reality (2000). The second section provides the written accounts and reflections of three undergraduate students from the UK institution who accepted the invitation to collaborate with their American peers and were also willing and available to attend a follow-up session after the end of the project and contribute to this essay with their reflections. The third section draws findings from the perspective of the teacher and identifies areas that can be further researched. It evaluates whether the process met its expectations and identifies how unexpected findings can be taken forward. Throughout, university teachers gain substantial insights into how international collaborations can be exploited for verbatim theater skills and the development of the students’ social representations.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE STUDY

The experiment was initiated by Evi—a Greek-born artist/educator who teaches theater at the University of Chichester in the UK—and embraced by Eric—an American artist/educator who teaches theater at Kent State University, both white and middle-class teachers. As artists/educators who work in higher education contexts that promote

and explore the positive impact of theatre in society, Evi and Eric teach varying techniques of the ‘theater of the real’. Verbatim theater, documentary theater, tribunal theater and autobiographical theater are all considered ‘theater of the real’ (Martin, 2010, p. 120). The students apply verbatim techniques that practitioners such as Smith and Blythe have established in the US and the UK respectively: they interview participants on social or political topics and use these real testimonies to create a text and performance. The performances can be more epic or more naturalistic, depending on the chosen techniques (Wake, 2013). In her book *Beyond Documentary Realism* Cyrielle Garson articulates how the varying techniques are means towards a common purpose: ‘it is my contention that most verbatim theatre works are about something that is already there whilst nobody is paying attention and wanting it to be more significant’ (2021, p. 6). But in the effort to balance social with entertaining aims in performing untold stories from the community that often involve sensitive issues, the genre might problematize representation (Kent in National Theatre, 2014, sec. 00:00:04-00:00:08; Stamatiou, 2019) and also how artists follow-up with interviewed participants about the final script and casting (Saldaña, 1998), or the staging of their testimonies (Duggan, 2013). The concerns become more uneasy and perplexed in actor training settings in higher education, in which verbatim theater becomes means for assessing students and ultimately producing degrees. The following sections present and evaluate the verbatim theater teaching and learning process and generate insights that can be applied by artists/educators.

THE PROJECT

Evi teaches the undergraduate module Text and Performance at the University of Chichester since 2017 using a flexible devised theater frame. She facilitates the students to create short performances in small groups, drawing on various forms of theater of the real, such as autobiography, documentary, tribunal and verbatim. Evi’s artistic experience involves primarily autobiography and playback theater, but since she moved to the UK in 2010 and watched Blythe’s *London Road* in 2011 she embraced verbatim theater. She has used every opportunity to attend workshops with verbatim theater artists/ educators, such as Alecky Blythe and the Verbatim Performance Lab at NYU Steinhardt, and gradually adopted relevant techniques in her theater-making and

teaching. She designed the module Text and Performance across 12x3h sessions, with 2 sessions per week, and independent learning tasks that the students explore outside of class time. She invites the students to develop and, at the end of the module, perform a 15' devised piece in groups of 4-6. This is the indicative content of how the module is regularly taught:

Session 1: Introduction to Theater of the Real; Workshop on scenes from *London Road*, and *The Laramie Project* by Tectonic Theater. **Independent task for session 2:** Record, transcribe, edit and prepare to perform in class a 2-minute interview of one of your peers on the question 'Why create verbatim theater?'

Session 2: Verbatim Text and Performance: Screening from *Fires in the Mirror* by Anna Deavere Smith to discuss text choices and how Smith's body, voice and imagination perform the real testimonies; Workshop on epic and realistic performance techniques. **Independent task for session 3:** Prepare a 3-minute idea presentation on a story or recent event to recruit your peers to a group, using PowerPoint, video, or other visual materials.

Session 3: Theater of the Real and ethics: Presentation of project pitches and formation of groups; Reflective discussion on ethical issues and options concerning the engagement of participants from outside the university. Activities about 1) resourcing, engaging, and interviewing participants and 2) recording and transcribing testimonies; Familiarization with the university's relevant Consent Form. **Independent task for session 4:** Watch the screen versions of *London Road* and *The Laramie Project* and also read a play of your choice that draws on theater of the real.

Session 4: Theater of the Real Dramaturgies: Workshop on testing linear and episodic options for the selected themes and how to include postdramatic techniques. **Independent task for session 5:** Research chosen themes, find relevant interviews and bring them to class.

Session 5: Theater of the Real and Characterisation: Verbatim workshop using contemporary or historical figures. Reflection on the authenticity and verisimilitude within choices. Group work to assign interviews/roles to individuals. **Independent task for Session 6:**

Work individually on a short 1-minute interview from your archive and perform with your group in an order that shows dialogue and multiple perspectives.

Session 6: Narrowing the focus and production planning: Performance of interviews and reflection on how to further develop the piece. Group work on narrowing the focus and making final choices about content and style. **Independent task for session 7:** In your group prepare a 10-15 minute project presentation using PowerPoint, video, or other materials. The presentation should demonstrate a compelling idea/narrative (why would audiences see it), a rehearsal plan (how are you going to create this), a timeline for the project (is your schedule realistically planned?) and a staging plan (what is the style, aesthetics and technical requirements?).

Session 7: Project Pitches and Building Blocks: Presentation of pitches and reflection on ethical concerns. Workshop on story building. **Independent task for session 8:** Each group will agree on relevant verbatim texts (or other if a different method is used) and incorporate them in a 5-part plot outline. Then they will rehearse their 5-part plot outline and present it in class in a 'storytelling manner'.

Session 8: Scripting: Presentation of storytelling performances and reflective discussion on choices; Workshop on turning the story into a script. **Independent task for session 9:** Each group creates a theater of the real script and brings it to class.

Session 9: Script Surgery: Stage reading of first draft and feedback. **Independent task for session 10:** Each group considers the feedback from the previous session to rework their script and prepare for a staged reading of the new draft (using earphones, if verbatim).

Session 10: Stage reading (using earphones, if verbatim) of final draft and feedback. **Independent task for session 11:** Each group liaises with the technicians to discuss requirements for the final performance.

Session 11: Rehearsal. Each group has 45 minutes with the tutor to use as they wish. They can show the performance and get feedback or discuss other concerns.

Session 12: Final performance shared with all groups, which is

assessed.

Even though the above session descriptions give indicative information of the students' experience and theatre-making process, it is important to give more insight concerning performance and scripting techniques and how these are taught. With Smith's work as the starting point, the class invites the students to study and engage with various projects that had different priorities, such as qualitative research in drama (Saldaña, 1998), the education of researchers-practitioners (Salvatore, 2020), or the development of new works (Kent, Blythe, Hare, & Fall, National Theatre, 2014). Accordingly, the various sessions focus on different performance and scripting techniques that the students are invited to practice, explore, and mix and match for their final shows. Not as part of a coherent theater-making practice, but as performance and scripting stimuli, the exercises invite the students to develop individualised approaches to scripting and performing real events. The two following paragraphs give more details about the exercises-stimuli, including illustrative examples.

Towards the end of the first session, the students participate in an exercise that invites a first engagement with interviewing participants, and recording and performing an interview. The exercise simulates Smith's aims for an accurate representation of speech patterns and cadences, and Blythe's process of using headphones until the text is mastered.¹ Using my mobile phone on speaker and a pre-recorded introduction of myself, I demonstrate the tempo and focus that is required in repeating the recording until the text and voice patterns are learned accurately, and the actor is confident to address the audience. Then the students pair up and record a short introduction of each other which they practice individually and present to the class before they prepare a longer interview in their own time to be presented in the next class. This exercise fulfils the purpose of first-hand experience concerning being represented in verbatim theater before engaging with participants, which has been previously appreciated in the field

¹ During the 'Our Generation Verbatim Workshop' (2020, <https://www.cft.org.uk/whats-on/event/our-generation-verbatim-workshop>), Evi asked Blythe about the use of headphones in performance. Blythe clarified that since *London Road* at the National Theatre (2011), she began considering the headphones as rehearsal tools that help the actors reach high levels of accuracy until they could abandon them before the performance to audiences.

(Salvatore, 2020, p. 1048). It provides a basic understanding of technique, and triggers challenging observations that resonate with practitioners who find such performance accuracy unnecessary and have even described the process as ‘mimicking’ (Fall in National Theatre, 2014, secs 00:05:10-00:05:23; 00:06:23-00:06:40). During the second session, a similar exercise invites the students to record group discussions and explore the performance of multiple interviewees, irrespective of verisimilitude. In the following sessions, more exercises introduce different techniques, such as the performance of interviews and speeches of contemporary and historical figures from video archives. The students are encouraged to follow the techniques of the exercises in their theatre-making, but also develop variations.

Similarly to how various performance techniques are introduced during the course of the class, the students engage with various scripting methods. For example, during the first session, they familiarise themselves with the scripts of *London Road* and *The Laramie Project* and observe the similarities and differences in noting utterances, such as ‘ums’, accents and speech patterns, such as unfinished sentences, and interruptions. Even though the original recordings of the interviews are not available, the recording extract of the sex workers that is played at the end of the film version of *London Road* (Norris, Blythe & Cork, 2015) provides insight from recording to script, alongside the insight from script to the actor’s performances that can be accessed in the film’s spoken sections. The students’ understanding of how verbatim scripts provide signals to the performer in terms of vocal pattern and gestural cues, climaxes in the fifth session when they explore the performance of historical and contemporary figures. They are introduced to the scripting method of Joe Salvatore, whose work I became familiar with after a workshop with the Verbatim Performance Lab in 2018. During the watching of the original interview between Kellyanne Conway and Matt Lauer and their verbatim representation by actors at the Verbatim Performance Lab (n.d.), the students follow the transcript that the performers developed for the purposes of that project.² The script structure reminds the reader more of poetry or verse. Salvatore’s words ‘[a]s I transcribe a recorded interview, each time the speaker takes a noticeable pause while speaking, I begin a new line of text by hitting “return” on the keyboard’ describe the creation of what he coins as a

² The transcript is used in my teaching with the kind permission of Salvatore.

scored transcript (2020, p. 1047). The accessibility of the video provided the opportunity to note in detail gestures and mannerisms.³ At the bottom of the transcript, a list indicates that the different colours that underline certain words or sentences signal certain gestures, such as 'head flips', 'smiles', 'head shakes' and 'shrugs' (Salvatore, 2017, p. 1). The students are invited to use such a detailed scripting process to practice and perform a one-minute interview or speech of a contemporary or historical figure that has been captured speaking on video archive. Then they are welcome to use any transcribing method for the scripts that they develop in class, with a recommendation to be consistent in using a specific methodology.

Other exercises that concern scripting include workshopping an episodic and a linear version of their scripts and extracts from the screenplay of the series *The Crown* which combines archival material with fictional scenes. Even though the students are also encouraged to use postdramatic techniques for their final performances, these should be indicated in the developing script that will be performed. The script is also crucially used in returning to the interviewee after the first draft is completed to confirm that they felt accurately represented in the work and agreed to have a specific student represent them and still give their permission to have their interview used for the purpose of the class. Such ethical considerations are clearly stated in the Consent Form that the interviewees read, discuss and return signed to the student-interviewer before an interview is agreed.

During the pandemic, the above exercises and scheme of work had to be adapted for online learning. Certain obstacles to performance outcomes were addressed using drama-doc techniques. But the expectations from students to engage and interview participants were problematic. In previous years, and depending on their topics, students had interviewed hospital and theater staff, and school children. Because such contexts were closed or operating with minimum staff during the pandemic, Evi looked to resource an alternative setting. Eric was also working on a devised theater module for nursing students at Kent State University and his students agreed to take on the role of the interviewees for verbatim theater projects, which the British students also offered in exchange. During an initial online meeting with the twenty-seven British students, the three American students and the two tutors, the students

³ Note this formatting in the script excerpt that appears on the following page.

were invited to collaborate in any way they wanted, to create devised performances based on true events. When the British students had decided on their topics, a group that chose gun violence interviewed their American peers, who in exchange interviewed the British students to inform their project on the use of ketamine. All students involved were white and they used the international collaboration to inform their projects with an equivalent British or American perspective on the use of ketamine or gun violence, respectively. The British students performed first and after their American peers watched the online performance, a final reflective online discussion took place. The final discussion invited reflections on the learning side to side on how to employ verbatim theater techniques in their devising and, whether, in the process, they considered the ethics of representation.

Here is an extract of the British students' script, *Gun Violence UK vs US*:

AMERICAN NURSING STUDENT 1

I grew up in California (nods head)

in a huge gang population (shakes head)

I would say so (eyes twitching)

it was a daily occurrence

everyone I knew was affected by gun violence in one way or another. (shakes head)

AMERICAN PROFESSOR

I've been mugged a couple of times (holding hands in front of stomach)

not recently (hands move forward and back to hold)

but

you know (left hand circular movement and back to hold)

a guy comes up

flashes

flashes his weapon (both arms open)

and demanded my wallet. (hands back to hold)

AMERICAN NURSING STUDENT 2

My father

when he was still working at Papa John's (short shrugging shoulders)

uhh

he got robbed at gunpoint and he almost got shot. (long shrugging shoulders) (Cumber, Nodding, Price & Westwood, 2020, p. 7)

AIMING FOR CRITICAL DISTANCE

The main pedagogical aim of the project resonated with what Freire discusses as 'student conscientizacao' which 'refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (2010, p. 3). Through the theatricalization of social and political topics and the engagement with multiple perspectives, the students should develop a critical relationship with their topics. In the absence of experts and communities during the pandemic, the transatlantic peers were expected to offer diverse and challenging perspectives on the chosen topics. To explain the critical development of the student Freire wrote that 'the objects which surround me are simply accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of them, but they are not inside me' (ibid). In this case study, the students should become aware that the issues with gun violence or the use of ketamine are not part of them, but outside to be observed, and perhaps changed, through a critical process that supports the students identify the need for action. But because theater of the real is primarily performance, we often neglect the critical processes that interviewees go through within such relationships with university students.

The students' ethical responsibilities towards their interviewees are an integral part of the learning process. There are identified needs beyond typical university ethical clearing processes, such as the invitation to the performance when applicable and follow-up meetings to invite thoughts and feelings. Our project's outline established a mutual exchange between interviewers and interviewees, as each group interviewed the other for their assessment, and confirmed with the interviewees that the text and casting decisions were appropriate. The

follow-up meeting was designed to provide a space for teachers and students to learn and grow in dialogue, in a manner of becoming 'co-investigators' in the Freirian sense (2010, p. 5) with a focus on what we all learned from this international engagement through our communications and exchanges, and particularly on verbatim theater ethics, that can be applied in future works.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The following section offers extracts from reflective accounts of three British students—two women (Students A and B) and a man (Student C)—about their role as interviewers. Students A and B interviewed one individual each during one-to-one online meetings, whereas Student C collaborated with two of his peers to interview three people simultaneously during a recorded online discussion. The reflections focus on how the process invited the students/interviewers to develop as ethical verbatim theater artists through engaging interviewees beyond the standard ethical clearing processes of the university.

Student A

We decided to pick the topic of gun violence linking specifically with shootings. As someone who lives in the UK, we don't experience a lot of gun violence. We have only ever had one school shooting in the UK, which occurred in 1996. My interviewee mentioned she had experienced gun violence first-hand. None of us could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this.

One of the main challenges within interviewing is making sure to not overstep boundaries. You do not want to make the interviewee uncomfortable during the interview or when they are watching the performance. They should not regret opening up about themselves. So my initial interview made me very anxious as talking to people about a personal experience that changed their life can be difficult. My aim of the interview was to make sure she knew the purpose of the interview and didn't disclose information that she didn't want to. I decided to keep my questions very open and vague, which allowed the person I was interviewing to say as much or as little as they liked. During the interview, I voice recorded the whole testimony for myself to listen back to, with permission.

I think this verbatim module has helped me improve as an individual. It helped me understand that you will never experience anything the same way as someone else. Hearing a story like this surprised me. Her nationality caused her to experience something I would have never imagined. This made me realize that listening to other people's stories and understanding how different everyone is, is one of the most important things that every individual should be able to experience.

Student B

With this subject, I needed to keep aware of what we were asking and that making these boundaries beforehand, so the interviewee felt comfortable to talk freely, and any information that needed to be kept confidential, did so, therefore the conversations before the interview were extremely key. To make sure I didn't drift off-topic in the interviewing process, I set various questions that would limit any unnecessary information that would take up time. The questions varied from asking the interviewee where they grew up; what was the initial opinions and knowledge of the specific cases; what did they think of these outcomes; what they thought the general statistics were of gun violence and how this affected their day-to-day life. After going through the recordings and using the text as verbatim, I decided to portray this character as a college student hearing about the case for the first time as it connected well with the detachment of the interviewee and the case study.

My final thoughts from collaborating on this project, is that modules like this can be explored in a wider range of ways when you open those doors with people from different backgrounds, culturally and socially. Having the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project.

Student C

To ensure that we were getting the information that we needed, we created a questionnaire that we used to steer the conversation in a direction that would give us content for our verbatim project. We made sure that the participants knew we were recording them and that we had consent to use their stories respectfully, ensuring them that we wouldn't take anything out of context. It was difficult having so many clips of

different people to search through to find a structure for our script. Once that was completed, we took some time to read through the script and made any amendments that were needed, then we went on to record our scenes individually. Because of Covid-19, we had to make decisions on camera angles and sets ourselves. After watching the video, my interviewee told me that he felt that we handled his stories with maturity.

Growing up in Wales, I have had very little to no interaction with guns at all and this is why I found it so shocking to hear how the Americans had become desensitized to the thought of gun violence. Most of the people around me that I would have been able to interview are in similar situations to me regarding gun violence, so without the help of the Americans, we would have very little substance to our performance. All of the characters would have been similar.

This project made me think about any negative stereotypes associated with the people that I was representing. I am originally from a small town in Wales and when you see Welsh people represented on stage and screen, you don't tend to see a real representation of what Wales is like or how Welsh people carry themselves. A great example of this would be the comedy 'Twin Town' (1997), where Welsh people are represented as unhygienic and unintelligent. This, of course, is not a true representation of life in Wales. Naturally, it's rather difficult to represent a whole country honestly as there are so many different groups of people in each community, but this project enabled me to consider a true reflection of the people that kindly volunteered to help us create our performance. As an actor, I've played many American characters, but it was very different to hear how Americans have such varying accents. I had to explore, what is the Californian accent or a Southern twang? What are the shades of being American?

FINDINGS

In this section, the artists/educators consider the reflections of Students A, B and C against the set pedagogical aims. In particular, they identify what they learned and can be taken forward for the facilitation of university students in their ethical engagement with participants. The key observations that will be discussed highlight that similar international student collaborations can minimize the ethical complications of engaging with community participants, but still maintain some of the benefits. This section finishes with a consideration of how the students'

testimonies suggest a social change in the Freirean sense.

From a materialistic perspective, the particular context of an international collaboration that facilitated the sharing of stories between individuals from two dominant cultures worked as an exchange of gifts that were used for similar, and equally beneficial, purposes. The involved students accumulated verbatim theater techniques, assessment credits for university degrees, and grades/feedback that supports the accumulation of further training and academic capital in the future. When artists or students interview participants from the community to create performances for ticket sales or degrees that will result in monetary profits, the material benefits of the interviewees are difficult to quantify. The clear mutual benefits of this case study sustained positivity throughout the process and, most importantly, avoided a hurtful ending. The students who did not attend the closing session did not need for closure, perhaps because these interactions and communications were framed as educational ones, and the students are used to navigating the beginnings and endings of educational relationships. Therefore, from a materialistic perspective, such international collaborations present fewer ethical implications.

A non-materialistic perspective is more complex, so it is useful to draw on the three students' reflections to discuss how the project encouraged *student conscientizacao*, which implies both critical distance and social action. All three reflective accounts suggest the development of critical distance at specific moments/surprises during the interviews that caused them particularly to examine their position in society. Student A's testimony that '[m]y interviewee mentioned she had experienced gun violence first-hand. None of us could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this', implies such a moment of surprise in the form of an exaggerated awareness of how different two white Western women who study theater are. Similarly, Student C writes: 'Growing up in Wales, I have had very little to no interaction with guns at all and this is why I found it so shocking to hear how the Americans had become desensitized to the thought of gun violence.' The critical distance gained from such moments/surprises urged action, such as to examine issues within their own culture that they may have taken for granted before. They became acutely aware, for example, of the debates surrounding the legal possession of firearms in the UK. Though they knew about such debates before, they noted that hearing first-hand accounts from a similar situation in another culture

made them more aware of the nuances and complications of a major issue within their own culture. The moments/surprises lead to a better-informed verbatim piece. In the words of Student B: 'Having the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project.' This renewed cultural knowledge was a result of the critical distance that was triggered from the key moments/surprises. It impacted their performance practices by encouraging additional reflection and even empathy when faced with news stories from their own culture.

Considering aforementioned concerns about the representation of individuals in verbatim performances, the critical distance of the students developed the ability to override one's automatic, and often stereotypical, conceptions when preparing for a role that is unlike oneself. Nina Bandelj, writing for *Sociological Forum*, points to the development of this ability as an important aspect of actor training in that it encourages the deliberate selection of character elements following reflection (Bandelj, 2003, p. 400). Our project challenged student tendencies to perform stereotypes, which is articulated by Student C: 'I've played many American characters, but it was very different to hear how Americans have such varying accents. I had to explore, what is the Californian accent or a Southern twang? What are the shades of being American?' In having students from two different cultures work with one another on verbatim practices, students are encouraged to focus on the specific individual as opposed to the character 'type' which they may be faced with. This suggests a newfound sense of responsibility that the students had not felt before when it came to issues of representation onstage.

In a Freirean sense of social change, the project's impact on the students can be also discussed around the development of empathy, which is crucial in developing artists that will engage in fieldwork. Salvatore identifies the development of empathy as a result of putting oneself in the role of the interviewee (2020, p. 1048). The students' testimonies suggest that the process of preparing to interview, interviewing, and following up with the participants also invites the development of empathy. Student A's testimony that '[t]hey [interviewees] should not regret opening up about themselves. So my initial interview made me very anxious as talking to people about a personal experience that changed their life can be difficult' suggests an exaggerated awareness about the interviewee's feelings and an

emotional reaction that triggers a meticulous consideration of the interviewee's feelings as part of the process. Student B's testimony that '[w]ith this subject, I needed to keep aware of what we were asking and that making these boundaries beforehand, so the interviewee felt comfortable to talk freely, and any information that needed to be kept confidential, did so' suggests that the interviewee's consent as part of the process was understood and applied to aim at comfort and trust, both of which imply awareness and consideration of the interviewee's emotions. Student C's words '[a]fter watching the video, my interviewee told me that he felt that we handled his stories with maturity', illustrates the student's focus on the interviewee's emotions during the follow-up discussion. Even though the ethical stakes of this project were lower than what one expects in fieldwork, for the reasons discussed before, the students' reflections indicate development of empathy for the interviewees as part of the ethical consideration processes. The development of empathy and an understanding of ethics and empathy as interlinked indicates a positive social change that the students can take forward in their lives and fieldwork.

Concerning theater-making outside of fieldwork, the students indicate a renewed awareness and appreciation of dialectical processes in contemporary theater. Dialectical theater is 'associated most closely with the theories and practices of Bertolt Brecht' and particularly in using theater as 'ways of understanding reality that resist naturalizing and universalizing human activity and thought' (Barnett, 2017, p. 245). On contemporary stages, dialectical dramaturgies can achieve 'a complex analysis of society, unafraid of leaving important questions open for further consideration by the audience' (ibid, p. 262). Student A's reflection that '[n]one of us [British students] could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this [being held at gunpoint, which was the interviewee's experience]', implies an appreciation of including to the dramaturgy different, perhaps oppositional, perspectives on gun violence. Student C's observation that without the American interviewees '[a]ll of the characters would have been similar', shows a renewed awareness of considering multiple perspectives in theater dramaturgies. This renewed understanding indicates a changed theater-maker. The concluding words of Student B '[h]aving the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project', and of Student C '[t]his project made me think about any negative stereotypes associated

with the people that I was representing', indicate that the dialectical element changed the students positively, primarily as artists. The concluding words of Student A suggest a social change that is beyond theater-making:

I think this verbatim module has helped me improve as an individual. It helped me understand that you will never experience anything the same way as someone else. Hearing a story like this surprised me. Her nationality caused her to experience something I would have never imagined. This made me realize that listening to other people's stories and understanding how different everyone is, is one of the most important things that every individual should be able to experience.

The above reflection suggests that the consideration of the other's perspective, as understood in dialectical theatre, triggered an openness to and appreciation of diversity not in a binary sense but with an understanding and appreciation of multiplicity. This realisation can be taken forward to the artist's fieldwork and life beyond theater, impacting an attitude of eagerness to engage with people from multiple backgrounds and ideologies and pursue deeper levels of understanding and communication. Such a development of the individual is a form of social change.

CONCLUSION

The discussed case study highlighted the complexities and opportunities of teaching verbatim theater at universities. It illuminated the particularities of developing ethical theater-making skills, with a focus on ethical interviewer-interviewee relationships and a critical ability about the ethics of representation. The international collaboration brought together British and American students and teachers, which helped to form mutually beneficial relationships between interviewers and interviewees, in both material and immaterial ways. The pedagogical aim to develop student critical distance was facilitated by moments/surprises during these mutually beneficial interviews. These key moments evoked social change in the sense of developing the student as a social being with a renewed cultural awareness and an understanding of how empathy and ethics can work together in

fieldwork. It also strengthened reflexivity within performance choices, through awareness of the automatic tendency to perform character 'types' and an appreciation of dialectical dramaturgies in the theater and multiplicities of experience and understanding in the world.

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