

**University Of Nottingham School of Education Educational
Doctorate Thesis**

Difficult Conversations:

Exploring the Practitioner Role in Applying Theatre and Drama
Techniques for Adult Training in UK Educational Settings

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Abstract

Difficult Conversations: Exploring the Practitioner Role in Applying Theatre and Drama Techniques for Adult Training in UK Educational Settings

This thesis explores Applied Theatre (AT) with a focus on Forum Theatre (FT) and their processes in my work and the work of another experienced educational theatre practitioner in the UK. As researcher, I examine and reflect on a range of Applied Theatre practices, focusing on three events in UK educational settings. The key theme of these events, common in much AT and FT work is *difficult conversations*.

I adopted an reflective research methodology, as it aligns with Jackson's genealogical critical theories in the development of Applied Theatre (Jackson, 2006). To this end I use autoethnography as a central instrument in reflecting on the research, drawing on autobiographical contextual life story vignettes that are used reflexively and retrospectively. My positionality is embedded fundamentally in this autoethnographic approach. The research explores the nature of reflection and importance of reflexivity in the development of my AT practice.

The study aimed to discover how AT practice and practitioners who use applied drama and theatre techniques as a means of change and transformation have evolved. In the progression and processes of AT practice, there has been an increasing demand for clear ethical guidelines or a framework. Some suggestions of what might be useful in an ethical framework, or guidelines, are suggested as outcomes of this research.

My research draws primarily on the AT practices that have their origins and roots derived from Augusto Boal's *Forum Theatre* and

are heavily influenced by the education and critical theorist, Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970) and his dialogical pedagogical practice.

This study provides a deeper understanding of FT practitioner work. With an ever-growing body of FT practice, this research supports the development and efficacy of my own practice, with the potential to inform current AT practice and future training, and offers advice for potential ethical guidance or frameworks.

Key words: Applied Theatre (AT), Forum Theatre (FT), dialogical action, conscientisation (*conscientização*), Spect-actor, change, transformation, genealogical development, ethics of practice.

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A Brief Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Applied Theatre (AT) and the context for the research, including a personal perspective on the research undertaken.

Chapter 2 considers the literature in this field exploring socio-political and conflict issues, and range of avenues and usage of AT. The contexts and usefulness of the arts in education are examined.

Chapter 3 outlines the Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Research Design, exploring the role of the practitioner researcher as ethnographer as part of this research methodology. Consideration is given to methodological issues, ethical practice, research design and my positionality.

Chapter 4 details three of *The Training Sessions*, the overarching common elements, and their purpose. Each session is described, examined and investigated in the context of *difficult conversations*. The activities and approaches are explored in a varied range of contexts in the application of theatre and drama techniques including the commissioning processes.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the data from *The Training Sessions* and subsequent participant and practitioner interviews that followed the events.

Chapter 6 provides some conclusions, recommendations and contribution this research adds to the field of AT, and possible futures for the development and ethical implications of Applied Theatre work.

Chapter 1 Introduction to Applied Theatre (AT): context, personal statement and research rationale

1.1 A Historical Sketch of Practice

As a teacher and practitioner who has worked in arts education for over forty years, my colleagues and I, have been consistently beleaguered by arguments about the usefulness of the arts in and for education.

I didn't set out to be an AT practitioner; it happened – a process of amalgamation, synthesis, genealogical development and, in my case, perhaps serendipity, and above all curiosity.

This research explores what it means to be an AT practitioner and how I became an AT practitioner, suggesting ways to maintain the currency and relevance of the practice.

Examples of my AT practice are explored in three AT events, situated in varied educational settings, foregrounded by how my AT work evolved in an ethical manner.

My research examines the key factors that led to the inception and the development of my AT practitioner work. I then explore maintaining currency, relevance, and consider the ethics of AT. I reflect on my own journey with close reference to Kim Jackson, my colleague practitioner.

The three events outlined and analysed are representative of my journey as an AT practitioner, serving as a snapshot of AT practice. Reflecting on my development as a practitioner, I illustrate how things have shifted in my AT practice with reference to the literature, and to societal changes and expectations – for example,

children's and adult's rights, and privacy that force us as practitioners to evoke changes, responding to and reflecting current social and political landscapes. As a researcher, I have adapted and engaged with a changing methodology, driven by data and especially by contextual factors associated with autoethnography. Substantive reflection has provided opportunities to scrutinise my journey and examine how practices have enhanced my career, providing continuing development. Engagement with 'reflective practices', sharing my stories and 'ethical dilemmas', is a central feature of my practice and this research (McCammom, 2004, 5, cited in, Bishop, 2014, p.73).

During this writing process I factored in the ethical implications of being an ethnographic participant researcher. For example, the use of historical materials, artefacts, and photographs, that was previously acceptable at the time of the data collection, is neither appropriate nor acceptable in 2025. The challenges of the ethics of practice, and of conducting and writing up research are considered in more detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 draws out some examples of ethical practice and changes that impacted on the work and execution of my AT practice.

Whilst reflective analysis can have its limitations, the experience I encountered over a long period has influenced my thinking and my use of AT in the field. I am utilising a bank of remembrances that allow me not only to reflect on the past, but inform the present. The use of observations, self-enquiry, a lived experiential approach, and 'phenomenological reflection' is important not only for this research, but also for everyday living (Mortari, 2015,p.5). 'Reflection is a very important mental activity, both in private and professional life' and a 'basic cognitive exercise to practice for

developing the capability to dig for our mental experience and so to gain awareness of it' (2015, p.8).

My inner and external dialogue about my AT theatre practice, questioning the doing, and the rationale for doing it, including evaluation with colleagues and participants, is a constant. As a researcher, this meant 'real *reflective practice* and not a mere thinking about practice' (Parker, 1997, p.30, cited in Mortari, 2015, p.8). This required honest and 'radical reflection', not just about what I considered then or now in my own self-interest; it 'demands the uncovering of hegemonic assumptions' (Mortari, 2015, p.7-8).

My approach to the research is dialogical providing a constant *modus operandi*, both internally and externally. What began initially instinctively, now informs and builds reflexively into action, a process that in this thesis allowed and provided opportunities, to go back and dive deeply into events and my experience, to gain a deeper understanding of the development of my AT work.

It is not just the experience over time, but a personal genealogy, and in that journey, I am now an 'old person in training', thinking 'about life in the past present and future', asking 'How did I get where I am today? What is important to me right now? [And] Where do I want to go from here?' (Honoré, 2018).

My many years of practitioner work in AT prompted the exploration of life roles acted out in a wide number of situations, mostly in educational settings. I have made use of short vignettes to illustrate how reflecting on the biographical and ethnographic detail has impacted on this study. These practical instances are used reflexively and retrospectively; they are inserted between theory

and methodology chapters or peppered elsewhere, unfolding 'their affects on their own terms', 'plac[ing] at centre stage the question of their purpose and status in ethnography', aiming 'to evoke a sense of these affects in the reader' (Bloom-Christen and Grunow, 2022, p.2).

I intended in the research to reflect on the changes *I* have made, as a result of the 'present, [and in] the study of the past, so as to [inform and] invent the future' (Boal, 2008b, ix). It is in this context that I have worked, researched, and engaged in the power, and the usage of theatre and drama. The purposes and aims here are to provide opportunity to individuals and groups, to bring about the possibility and awareness of personal and/or collective transformational change. My own context and history are important, as these have driven my work and reinforced my epistemological stance. The intention with vignettes is to 'flesh out', with reflexive examples, aiming, perhaps with a significant amount of hindsight, to better understand how practice and practitioners derived and developed their skills and working practices, underpinned by theories and methodologies.

In this regard, these *memory vignettes* are intended to add substance to the research, reflecting the biographical and ethnographic detail that have impacted on this study. The vignettes cover my early schooling, training, various professional careers, and latterly leading to, and informing the Educational Doctorate and current AT practice, as well as everyday life. The vignettes in the context of this research, offer an informed, retrospective and reflective viewpoint, and to allow AT participants to engage safely. Thrift reflecting on Judith Butler's work on gender identity notes 'becoming ethical now means becoming critical of norms under which we are asked to act but which we cannot fully choose' (Butler

2005 cited in Thrift, 2007, p.15). AT practitioners don't always have a choice in 'taking responsibility...for the dilemmas that subsequently arise' in their work (2007, p.15). Adopting a position towards 'an ethic of out-of-jointness...[and] making the familiar strange...letting go of what you think you know' offers an approach aimed here to better inform the reader (Thrift, 2008, 14, cited in Sloan, 2018, p.591). The first vignette I present below provides a recent example of such a reflexive and autoethnographic approach.

Vignette 1: Wise words, wisdom and knowledge collide

It is lived experiences applied in life and work that change, morph, allow and encourage us all to continue. This was recently reflected in a conversation I had with an undergraduate student.

One bright, very hot sunny day at a local wedding party in our village I met a Polish family who had just moved into the village, living on the same lane. Talking to their eldest son, who was just about to enter his final year, he was a little despondent, noting that 'a philosophy degree doesn't provide many job opportunities'. I tried to reassure him, saying 'a degree is a degree'. It was clear that he really enjoyed the university degree programme, and we talked about internships as a way of gaining experience and contacts. Although political internships were discussed, his fear was having to toe a particular political party line. 'You don't have to adopt any dogma or belief; you can have, and own your own' I added. A fascinating discussion about how one might respond if asked 'what do you think?' or 'what do you think about this'. This led on to a discussion about knowledge, what we know, and what others might know that we don't know. Freire was then mentioned, and Pedagogy of Hope (Freire, 1992) was discussed and ideas exchanged.

This conversation, albeit quite brief, reinforces where I am today, and how my thinking and knowledge has changed, not only through my educational practice, but also through the impact of research and literature. Now I take a dialogical approach that recognises that preserving identity and self (when subjugation and control by others puts conscience or self-knowledge and agency at risk) is tricky when your 'emotional labour' is being tested (Hochschild, 2012). As part of any AT event, the commissioning process can add to 'the dilemmas of practice', as we may be required to facilitate in areas that may challenge our beliefs, and present 'conflicting demands' of 'dilemmatic spaces' (Honig quoted in Hoggett, Mayo, and Miller 2009, 62, cited in Preston, 2013, p.231). These demands may require performativity, with an expectation of specified outcomes as part of a commissioning process. The spaces and contexts where we often work can be a burden that 'impacts heavily on one's emotional resources and purpose' (Hoggett, Mayo, and Miller 2009, 62, cited in Preston, 2013, p.231). For participants, there are 'ethical implications in requesting emotional labor' (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.89).

It is the range of possibilities for usage of AT that makes its usage so appealing. For those who work as professional theatre directors, teachers, trained facilitators, mentors, coaches, researchers, commissioners and participants of AT is manifest in various forms – in and for the workplace, or socio-politically, such as in practice, behaviour, outlook, position, stance or to signify or suggest personal and/or community transformation.

Next, I outline the challenges in the Arts and my role as both a practitioner and researcher.

1.2 Arts, Participation and Identity

1.2.1 Practitioner as Researcher

The practitioner researcher can often be laden with a heavy burden of assumption and prejudice, and yet despite one's own position, by 'illuminating and challenging some of the assumptions and theories' there is still room for change (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013, p.53). There is much discourse on the ethical behaviour, transparency, research and ethics of practice, yet despite attempts to pursue ethical codes, there is an absence of a clearly defined professional code of practice or ethical framework. But 'ethical positioning' for the AT practitioner is 'crucial', because 'generally' practitioners are 'outsiders' (Stuart Fisher, 2005, p.247).

From the outset, I was clear about my responsibilities and the difficulties involved as I intervened and perceivably meddled in 'people's lives and communities' (2005, p.247). I endeavoured to be 'informed by an ethics of practice' that was responsive to my work as a facilitator and to my audiences (2005), knowing that AT ethics 'in any context of transformation are, by nature, slippery' and could lead to 'excruciating ethical dilemmas, especially in the contact between facilitators and audience' (Kerr, 2011, p.177). The ethics, in the context of being an AT practitioner and even more so being a practitioner researcher, place a heavy burden on AT theatre field work.

Practice as Research (PaR) in AT when combined with the 'convergence of diverse positionalities' involved in the processes of PaR, affect the process of knowledge production (Bishop, 2014, cited in, Liang, 2019, p.449) making the demands PaR in 'Applied Theatre [as] peculiar' (2019). Thus the nuances of particularity from 'resonances and dissonances' and 'polyphonic conversation', may

impact on the practitioners practice, theory, action and reflection (McKay cited in Liang, 2019, p.449).

Divergent voices and the conflicting demands of commissioning agencies have been evident since my early days working with students on AT, including on outreach theatre projects, having to work alongside too many servants and too many masters. The data from the events and research explored here highlight the 'knowledge production in PaR Applied Theatre', and in turn are 'concerned with the ethics of such production' (Bishop, 2014, cited in Liang, 2019, p.449). Personalities and hierarchy impact on how AT is managed, approached and delivered in the field. This research was intentionally exploratory to 'find out what works, what changes, what might be improved, how you might solve problems, how something works, and so on' (Wisker, 2007, p.227).

Researching in situ at training sessions, during the preparations for these sessions, and then subsequently reviewing and evaluating them provided a good range of evidence and sufficient material, allowing me to draw on some useful data to inform current and future practice. Even the most modest of conclusions or inferences are sufficiently worthy to add to a body of research that could add to and inform better or best practice. Notwithstanding the pros and cons of practitioner research, it is a messy process because reflective dialogues have 'their own web of messed up research-of-reflection-on-practice' (Hepplewhite, 2014, p.326). The act and processes of the practitioner's direct engagement with participants is fundamental to AT practice.

The role of practitioner researcher as part of my research methodology is discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.2.2 Arts to shape, make meaning and identity

Applied Theatre (AT) and Forum Theatre (FT) are often positioned *within* the Arts and in many respects are no different than Theatre Arts, Drama, Music and the Visual Arts as a means of physical expression and creativity. However, here I am examining and reflecting on AT directly with reference to education and training. The Arts share common values and tenets, and it is from these loci and approaches to the arts, and its wider value in education and its contestations that I positioned myself as a researcher. The arts provide unique experiences that 'enables us to stop looking over our shoulder and to direct our attention inwards to what we believe or feel', and through discovery allow us 'to inspect more carefully our own ideas' (Eisner, 2002, p.10-11).

The Alfin literacy project, and Experiments with the People's Theatre in Peru in 1973 provide a useful starting point as an example of how experiencing the arts were intentionally used to 'teach'¹.

Freire's work on the *Alfin* project was an example of how the arts can transcend normal educational boundaries, as it aimed 'to teach literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theatre, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc' (Boal, 2008a, p.97). The interrelationship with arts and education lies at the root of this research. Boal and others recognised how the arts can shape, make meaning, form and impact, and have an influence on identity to change lives. Jackson draws a distinction between the artistic and aesthetic when recognising the participatory role of the theatre audience.

It is the art form through which the artist's vision is given shape that enables us to see, perhaps understand, what in real life would merely

¹ These experiments were carried out in August of 1973, in the cities of Lima and Chiclayo, with the invaluable collaboration of Alicia Saco, within the programme of the Integral Literacy Operation (Operación Alfabetización Integral [ALFIN]). The method used by ALFIN in the literacy programme was, of course, derived from Paulo Freire BOAL, A. 1979. *Theater of the oppressed*, Urizen Books.

sicken or confuse us; and it is the process of receiving, being moved by and making sense of that vision that constitutes aesthetic perception (Jackson, 2006p.36).

My work as a reviewer and training provider for artists, teachers and administrators' nationwide for the Arts Council England for Artsmark Awards² demonstrated how the arts impacted on teaching and learning, and on my own work and thinking.

Vignette 2: Arts in Schools

As an Artsmark reviewer, I visited numerous schools; primary and secondary, colleges, PRU (Pupil Referral Units), and Special Schools. I was privileged to meet teachers, artists and children making and engaging with the arts. On one occasion in a remote North Yorkshire school, children were working with a local professional sculptor. I was warned by staff that 'he's grumpy', the children were very young infants, and early years. I asked him: 'how is it working in the school?' 'hmm...' he replied, followed by a long silence. 'I've been working with clay for decades and no matter what I say about techniques they ignore me'. 'Oh' I said, 'that must be discouraging'...'Hmm' was again the reply and then with tears in his eyes he said, 'they defy me, and the techniques...they do what they like...and it works, the bloody things they make fire, and don't ruin in the kiln...at my age I'm still learning'.

Another high school in Sheffield was working with a sculptor in the classroom, not in the Art department but in the Physics lab.

Such real and practical examples, both from artists and arts education practitioners, demonstrate how creativity often goes beyond expectations in the classroom. Ken Robinson, similarly, recounts in his Ted talk, a child in a primary school:

² Originally led by Arts Council England now run by Goldsmiths (University of London) in association <https://www.artsmark.org.uk/about> The Artsmark Award is the only creative quality standard for schools and education settings, accredited by Arts Council England (Artsmark, 2023).

She was six and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said this little girl hardly ever paid attention, and in this drawing lesson she did. The teacher was fascinated and she went over to her and she said, "What are you drawing?" And the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." And the girl said, "They will in a minute" (Robinson, February 2006).

Eisner, like Robinson regards the arts as no less essential than education and has 'much to learn from the arts', noting 'another lesson that education can learn from the arts is that the way something is formed matters' (Eisner, 2008,p.196-197). For the individual, the arts invite and 'celebrate imagination, multiple perspectives, and the importance of personal interpretation' (Esiner (p. 594) cited in Craig et al., 2021, p.155-156).

Providing arts, and this includes AT for training and in education, is best done when they don't have hierarchy, age, or socioeconomic boundaries.

The Arts defying gravitas...

For today's child, learner, student, adult, the Arts can defy gravitas, but they also provide understanding, sense, theories and logic, because today our access to the arts is boundless. Living in the 21st Century, our exposure to the arts has become global and widespread. Access is no longer, or much less, controlled by social, economic, or political factors, since access is more often free, developing as part of daily routines, and linked to personal identity and agency from an early age. My curiosity in the arts has always been embedded in my working life, and those I work with and for. I have adopted a pedagogical approach that celebrates and encourages diversity and accessibility to the arts for all, and in education that I view as both important and necessary.

Vignette 3: Arts for all Access to the Arts

Some years ago, on a visit to Egypt, near Luxor, and not far from The Valley of the Kings, I visited the remote Banana Island on the Nile. In the middle of the 'jungle', a mixed-age group of locals gathered around a battery-powered TV with a makeshift arial 'shouting out' a world cup football match in progress. Not art, (well that's a discussion for another thesis) but it could equally have been art, perhaps a film – there are opportunities to access arts in some of the most remote places.

Reflecting on such opportunities to engage with the arts collectively provides 'empowerment', and 'create[s] spaces for shared agency', the 'subject-object dialectic' (Freire quoted in Sarkissian et al., 2010, p.113), and affords an individual role in being 'active' rather than 'passive receptacles of information' and learning (2010, p.117).

...the Arts defying gravitas

The arts are no longer only drawn from 'elite positions' and are accessible to a much wider demographic (Prieur and Savage, 2013, p.250). The result is an emergence of a more 'cosmopolitan cultural capital' and 'new forms of cultural capital' have become part of our 'knowing', appropriating hitherto disregarded lowbrow culture, often linked to the 'agency of young people' (2013, p.253-263). This can be seen in the current eclectic availability of music, a move away from the teenage pop culture of the 1950s and '60s and relatively small 'top 20' hits, to today's online streaming access to the millions of easily accessible music and media downloads. Despite these cultural shifts and advent of pluralism in the arts, this has not always been reflected in education reform. Conversely, the widespread changes in the education curriculum reforms introduced

in 2013 in the UK have done little to dissuade schooling that in some areas still promotes 'highbrow culture' (2013, p.262)³.

Despite such regressive steps in UK curriculum reforms in mainstream UK education away from a deliberative arts curriculum, opportunities to participate in the arts have never been greater. Whether collectively taking part in song, at rugby and football matches, art-making activities in toddler groups, community drama and music groups, or in access to personalised activities through music, drama or art making, both informally or formally through education, as a career choice or through the world of work, participation in the arts is both widespread and accessible. Boal believed that engaging with arts and theatre enabled the discovery of self so that

Above all: we are discovering that we can change ourselves, and change the world. Nothing is going to remain the way it is. Let us, in the present, study the past, so as to invent the future (Boal, 2008b, ix).

The act of taking part is crucial, although this is not always or necessarily a physical act, but just as likely to be cognitive. Boal asserts that his participants who are taking part in 'play' do not 'interpret', but they will 'play' better to the extent that they 'interpret' better (Boal, 2008b, p.107).

Through my longstanding involvement in the arts, I have experienced and recognise the power and the uses of theatre and drama techniques and the potential they have to impact on the senses in so many different ways: to transform, provoke, educate, entertain, engage, facilitate the making of arts, propagate thought and feelings, and create new arts. The potency of 'the arts' has a

³ The arts in education debates are discussed further in Chapter 2.

long and exhaustive trajectory – from the 17,000 year old Lascaux cave paintings, to modern times, be it in the concert hall, theatres, art galleries, public spaces, community venues, restaurants, bars, pubs, hotels, nightclubs, home, school, the workplace, or online.

Vignette 4: Pantomime is an Education

In a previous life, I worked as a professional musician, playing in all manner of bands, theatre shows, television, radio, cruise ships, and in pantomime, touring the UK and internationally. I was friendly with a young couple and their twin girls in my local community. Sadly, their mother died, and their father was left with the twins who were around 10 years old. I was working on a long pantomime run at Bradford Alambra Theatre, a very large Theatre with a capacity of around 1,400. I arranged tickets for the father and twins to see the show and take them backstage. They came from a rural farming community – I met them front of house in the Theatre before the performance. They were overwhelmed at the grandeur of the building. After the show I met them again and the father was in tears – ‘I have never been to the theatre – thank you – I never knew how wondrous it could be’. Sadly, a month later the father also died.

Whilst I’ve already noted above how accessible the arts *can be*, this is not always known to or made possible for everyone. For many children, their first experience of theatre is Panto. Successive budgetary cuts in education and the arts, and access made difficult by regulatory risk management make simply organising a coach trip to the theatre exhausting. The number of venues is declining, despite protestations, and many communities are becoming cultural deserts. Oldham Coliseum closed its doors 31 March 2023⁴ – the

⁴ There has been a reprieve: ‘Oldham's Coliseum theatre, which closed amid an outcry in 2023 after more than 135 years, is to reopen after a successful campaign to save it, led by actor Julie Hesmondhalgh’. BBC 2024. Historic theatre saved after closure U-turn. Online: BBC News.

town's last theatrical venue, previously home to 16-plus theatres, music halls and cinemas with notable visiting artists. I'm not making a case for the justification of Pantomime, but as a professional musician involved for over 20 years, in thousands of performances for tens of thousands of audience members, I have witnessed firsthand the joys, laughter, and tears live theatre can bring.

Involvement and participation in the arts is also important in formal education settings, as I witnessed in my early career teaching.

Vignette 5: Arts in my early teaching

My first post in UK education was in music performance with large numbers of children in schools in a large Northwest Local Authority. I was struck by the comments of teachers and heads: 'you can tell those working with you...they are more attentive, positive in attitude, aptitude and behaviour'. I wasn't seeking any comments, or even praise, but several staff commented that 'they have longer concentration spans, and they work together, they are a pleasure to teach'. An example of how participation in the arts goes beyond the classroom, and back into the classroom.

I am constantly reminded that in my work and life and as a practitioner, access to the arts goes beyond even the most modest expectations – especially when it is live and with an audience.

An Audience for the Arts

The theatre arts and AT are able to respond collectively to an audience, a live audience – you have to be there! AT lends itself by its nature to being participatory, different to the other arts, and Boal began to exploit this by directly engaging his audiences (Boal, 1985). The observations of the participants and practitioners of AT provided a useful vehicle for this study, that also considers tensions with the ethics of AT practice.

1.3 The Development of Applied Theatre

AT embraces a vast spectrum of methods and techniques. Examples have found their way into everyday language such as roleplay, hot-seating, immersive theatre, theatre in education, verbatim theatre. Other techniques and theatre forms, whilst widely used, are less well known such as Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre, Process Drama, Theatre for Development, Invisible Theatre, Image Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed. These are just a few of the terms from the wide lexicon of AT that has developed to the present day. Done well, AT uses theatre techniques and dramatic conventions to convey meaning, to illuminate, educate, inform, suggest transformation and *even* entertain audiences and participants. Augusto Boal's legacy continues as a seminal AT practitioner and drama theorist.

Vignette 6: Teaching and Boal

After initial encounters with Boal, my teaching began to reflect Boal's work, albeit in a limited way. My practical teaching was drawn more to Barker (Barker, 1977), Hodgson (Hodgson, 1972) (Berry, 2011) and 20th Century theatre practitioners Stanislavski, Brecht, Meyerhold, Craig, Laban, Littlewood, Artaud, Brook, Grotowski et al.

Working in a University Drama department with undergraduate actors, teaching staff were commissioned by the Police and Fire Service to provide educational theatre events in West Yorkshire schools. I continued rather 'naively' using Boal's FT techniques and concepts, yet to realise the Freirean connection, while having doubts about my application, knowledge and use of FT when working in inner-city schools.

Boal and Freire's democratic and dialogical principles became buried in the quest to ensure a 'good' piece of theatre for the audience and client 'governed and defined' by the 'funding agency' (Balfour, 2009,

p.350). On reflection, the undergraduate students were genuinely enthusiastic about their work, and the participants acted generously 'rooted in reciprocity to create the sense of community so essential to making good theatre' (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.86).

For these activities I was required to meet the University's undergraduate teaching and assessment rubrics. Also, the schools and their teaching staff had their own needs when receiving these theatre projects. In all, there were too many servants, and far too many masters, with the audience, the children, students and even the commissioners, often left without a voice.

In one challenging inner-city school, the undergraduate's performance was to be followed by a workshop. The performance finished and then the staff selected their 'best learners' for the workshop. We were all taken aback, and one learner leaving the school hall remarked 'it's not fair they always get to do stuff... we never get a chance' [Leeds Inner City Secondary School pupil Comment c. 2003].

We had just become part of these young peoples' oppression, the antithesis of FT's intention. I needed to find a way to ensure that this did not happen again. For the participants, being there wasn't enough – empathy and wider participation could and should have been part of the event if there were to be any chance of instilling 'wider social change' (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.146). It was important that the audience, pupils and staff played their role by engaging with the event and the workshops. Otherwise, this was not a democratic or dialogical process or event and was without just cause or meaning.

The following week in a Wakefield secondary school, the lead member of staff attempted to leave a workshop as we 'babysat' her

class. I intervened, using safeguarding as a rationale – and this worked, although there was clearly more work to be done.

It was using FT at these initial AT events that I began a process of examining my own thoughts, understanding, research and personal development, beginning with much more in-depth reading, including Freire's seminal publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970).

The changes made to my FT would have been radical then. Today the FT workshop includes all the audience, and the performance element is much shorter (see photos 1 & 1a).

My work with undergraduates coincided with my formation of an educational consultancy company in 2004, precipitating work from a wide range of commissioning agencies.



Photos 1 & 1a Kim and I – Forum Theatre HE Students Assessment Feedback c. 2014



1.4 Moving forwards with Boal and FT

Working with Kim, a colleague, we began to refine our FT techniques, presenting at more conferences using interactive workshops, often with large and challenging audiences. In a quest to find out more, Kim and I attended several intense residential workshops with FT practitioner and author Jennifer Hartley⁵ (Hartley and Bond, 2012), and absorbed Jennifer's work and practice into our own events. Our work was very well received, as it was more dynamic, inclusive and 'dialogical' – not that we were fully aware of our dialogical intentions at that point. In 2007-2008, the global banking and economic crisis and recession hit the UK and consultancy work dried up. Our work became less frequent, or poorly paid. I then took up further research, and decided to bide my time and seek to become a better practitioner through further investigation and research. I enrolled in the EdD at the University of Nottingham and began the processes of finding a voice for my

⁵ Jennifer Hartley is the founder of Theatre vs Oppression <https://www.wearetvo.com/> working with and using FT worldwide, providing events and AT in her own practice, working with minority and oppressed groups (in addition to their respective oppressors) internationally. Jennifer's publications include plays, academic articles, and poetry.

practice and its development. I began by revisiting and examining Boal's legacy, including his pedagogy and *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979) and *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* (Boal, 2006). The more I explored, the more I questioned the validity of AT work, and especially the ethics of practice – a practice that can be used and abused for profit, and with some dubious aesthetic/artistic and academic credibility, often with a premise of financial gain.

1.5 The Research Questions – Forum Theatre processes explored in 3 different contexts

The fundamental and core area of investigation for this research was *Exploring the Practitioner Role in Applying Theatre and Drama Techniques for Adult Training in UK Educational Settings* with the intention of answering the following questions:

- How did I come to be an AT practitioner?
- How does my Applied Theatre and Forum Theatre work in educative settings in a safe and ethical manner?
- What do the data and my evidence tell us about how Applied Theatre works?
- What does the participant engagement in the events tell us about AT practice?

To answer these questions, I reflect on the journey that led to my development and use of AT.

The research investigation then focuses on three snapshots from three different AT events.

- i) Staff training in a high school – on the theme of bullying.
- ii) Higher Education external examiner training for an awarding organisation – in the sectors of performing arts and music.

iii) Training for support and academic staff for a Higher Education alternative (private) provider of contemporary music performance, with a focus on assessment, tutor feedback and student engagement.

The research questions also assisted in describing how the AT processes and practice worked, the potential benefits and challenges for its participants and practitioners, and ethical and safety aspects of FT, the primary drama/theatre technique.

I was also interested in establishing whether Freire's and Boal's pedagogies had been lost or submerged in the application of current praxis of those who purport to use AT.

Drawing on literature, research, practice-based research sessions, and my and others' experience, the research intended to lead to recommendations for those who seek to be Applied Theatre practitioners, for those who provide training, and to afford insight for practitioners who are reflecting on their own work.

Finally, this research may promote further assessment and development of an ethical framework or practitioner code of practice that has already begun to be explored in current literature.

Chapter 2 The Field of the Applied Theatre Practitioner: A Literature Review

This chapter examines the field of *Applied Theatre* (AT) through research literature, critiques, theoretical frameworks and definitions. It includes reflexive examples from my own AT work to add context to the literature.

In recent years, there has been an exponential growth in AT literature, its application and research, with *Taylor Francis Online*⁶ alone, providing over 12,000 AT, and over 3,000 Boal articles.

In this review, supported by critical theorists and pedagogies, I focus on key players in AT – practitioners, academics past and present, and researchers.

2.1 Defining Applied Theatre

The varied lexicon surrounding AT practice challenges a definition of this area of work, whilst AT is a relatively recent term derived from a long and respectable history in the 20th Century – its roots emerging from 1920s and 1930s left-wing political theatre, a 'solid left-wing parentage...embodied in the Workers' Theatre Movement' (Jackson, 2006,p.75). There are broad claims for what AT can do and how it can give voice, transform, empower and bring about change. These include promoting and facilitating social and political change; influencing individual and collective behaviour; and uses in education, training and conflict resolution.

⁶ <https://www.tandfonline.com/>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/doSearch?AllField=Applied+theatre>
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/doSearch?AllField=Boal> accessed 06/09/2024.

AT is used in a wide variety of contexts from the extreme, such as bringing torture survivors and torturers together through the medium of drama (Hartley, 2005), to the relatively commonplace practice of toddlers play and 'dressing up'. The boundaries of AT are just as varied as it permeates all sectors and levels of education – both formal and informal – and is extensively used by businesses and corporations, both large and small. Organisations, NGOs, governments, and community groups of all descriptions make use of AT for exploring sociopolitical and conflict issues.

AT includes using Forum Theatre (FT) techniques established during the 1960s and 1970s at a time when South American liberation politics spilled over into the arts and education – AT practices often defined by their potential for transformational and aspirational properties. Such work can be found in 'Arts-based approaches' including the use of Forum Theatre that 'can serve to [promote] young people's ideas of solidarity on their own terms' and 'begin to re-envision their personal, social, and political identities' (Lazaroo et al., 2024, p.440).

Applications of AT are equally varied. For conflict resolution outreach work, 'schools should incorporate lessons on cyberbullying into life skills and bullying prevention classes' (Lyngstad et al., 2022, p.525). 'Conflict and bullying issues' are also echoed in the use of *Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed Meets Process Drama in the Classroom* (Burton and O'Toole, 2015, p.51&56).

Thompson examines different care aesthetic practices, and creative responses to the COVID-19 pandemic 'of artists in a range of socially engaged arts projects' (Thompson, 2023, p.60). He questions 'the sensory and embodied practices of formal and

informal carers in the fields of health and social care' (2023,p.54). During the pandemic 'a major cultural organization in Scotland, Eden Court Highlands, explained how they turned their theatre into a site for the distribution of food aid during the pandemic' (2023, p.60) and 'offered an alternative, proactive way of connecting with the community' (Gulbenkian 2021:16 cited in Thompson, 2023). Thompson questions if these acts are creative 'because these projects straddle a boundary between social and artistic and sit somewhat awkwardly in both' (Thompson, 2023, p.54).

Other health and wellbeing projects promoted the 'transformative potential of story' in the work of *Research-based Theatre* (RbT) in 'shaping and being shaped by the impacts it has for playwrights, performers, and audiences', explored through healthcare experiences (Cox et al., 2022, p.249). AT has also been used to raise awareness about Ebola and AIDS in prisons, schools, and the workplace. And, more recently responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, AT was used, '[building] on a shared understanding of the benefits of social engagement' (McCormick (2017, 8) cited in de Kock et al., 2023, p.508). Despite AT's wide usage, the practice is not without critique, and this will be explored below.

2.2 The Roots of Applied Theatre & Forum Theatre

In defining AT one of the first uses of the term AT was noted by Nicholson (Nicholson, 2005) around the 1990s, although the roots emerged in the 1950s with Vallin's 'pioneering work of Theatre in Education' (TIE), the 'first Theatre-in-Education Company produced work from the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry'. 'It can be called "applied" as it is created specifically to support the education of young people and children in schools' (Stuttaford et al., 2006, p.33).

The publication of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979) may have signified the advent of AT and cemented Boal's place as a seminal theatre practitioner and drama theorist who is still widely revered and whose work and practice continues to be used and respected.

For the purposes of this research, defining the genre that uses theatre and drama techniques is now collectively referred to as *Applied Theatre*. Ackroyd delineated this as 'a restricted and exclusive type of radical practice, enshrined in an evangelical frame' (Ackroyd, 2007, p.1). However for the purpose of this research AT is used as an umbrella term 'for a range of practices (which have specific intention, participation and operate beyond conventional theatre spaces', without restriction (2007, p.7). Further, AT can no longer be regarded as radical or evangelical.

Boal's and Freire's seminal pedagogies provide substantive background to this research. At the centre of this research is the following claim by Boal: 'Forum Theatre perhaps the most democratic form of *The Theatre of the Oppressed*⁷ and certainly the best known and most practised throughout the world, uses or can use all the resources of all known theatrical forms' (Boal, 2006, p.4).

Whilst providing a broad characterisation of AT, this chapter also examines some similarities and contradictions in the use of two main conventions in AT: (1) *role-play* in the work of Heathcote and Bolton, and (2) Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO). I don't suggest that these two forms are similar, but their perceptions and their interwoven usage is worthy of exploration as they are used

⁷ Augusto Boal (1932-2009) is widely regarded as one the foremost leading practitioner-theorists of *Applied Theatre*. In *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979) he outlined his pedagogy defining new forms, new approaches in the uses of theatre.

interchangeably in practitioner language and are mentioned on several occasions in my data analysis of the practice-based research *Forum* events.

Boal and Heathcote's work exemplify contestations that have raged within education, theatre and drama practices. Theatre in Education (TIE) has enjoyed a mixed response – it is revered and loathed in equal measure, and spills over into debates about the value of drama versus theatre that values 'real theatre, not educational theatre' (Glasier cited in Barnard, December 2013). Others, like Mamet and Levy are scathing about the usefulness of educational theatre where 'teaching and dramatic art are clearly seen to make awkward bedfellows' (Jackson, 2006, p.25). Boal's promises change, with the power to permeate everyday life, highlight values, and make judgements. Mamet discounts such usefulness of 'dramatic art', and any notions that 'drama is good for anything else other than telling a story' (Mamet cited in Jackson, 2006, p.24).

Brecht used dramatic devices in *Street Scene*⁸ and *Lehrstücke*⁹ to fulfil similar, albeit didactic functions through story telling, allowing audiences to make their own judgements based on what they see or hear. Individual responses may be different depending on stance; physically, emotively or in society. The dramatic arts have the power and ability to show contradictions and choices, with the possibilities of bringing about change, or at the very least encouraging

⁸ Brecht's *Street* essay 'details the actor's stance of the curious street ethnographer. Here, the imitative behavior of an ordinary man at a street corner, who retells an accident to a group of bystanders, becomes a key pedagogical model for Brecht's way of presenting events in his theatre's 'realistic' style' (FRIMBERGER, K. 2023. The craft of acting as a pedagogical model for living a flourishing life in a world of tensions and contradictions. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56, 74-85. In *The Street Scene*, the demonstrator acts out the situations and 'determines what kind of experience is to be prepared for the spectator... may "see things a different way" or can at least form an opinion' (BRECHT, B. & WILLETT, J. 1964. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁹ Brecht's (c 1920–1930s) *Lehrstücke* (teaching pieces) were designed as 'a special kind of didactic drama...designed to teach certain broad social and communal virtues' (WILLETT, J. 1959. *The theatre of Bertolt Brecht: a study from eight aspects*, Methuen.

individuals to 'form an opinion' (Brecht cited in Whybrow, 2005, p.71).

There continues to be space and appetite for storytelling, scenarios, recounting events, both in work and in our social lives, all too evident in social media and broadcasting. James Graham playwright and screenwriter describes his childhood, and how through television the enduring 'benefits and direct impact that communal storytelling' had 'a key part of [his] identity'...

to this day, millions of people will make the choice to discover who 'H' is in *Line of Duty*, or the fate of Catherine Cawood in *Happy Valley*, together, at the same time, when every opportunity to consume it on your own terms has been provided to you (Graham, 2024)¹⁰.

The pedagogies from Brecht to Boal and contemporary 21st century AT and practitioner work continues and invests in the notions that change, and transformation can be brought about, as long as *you know* it may be possible.

University education and drama departments provide significant volumes of research and literature focusing on defining what AT is and what it is not. O'Connor noting his own position as an academic theorising his own and others' AT practice, observes that

many of us were pre-theory we seem to have become almost post-practice. The travelling master class teachers of Dorothy Heathcote, Augusto Boal, Cecily O'Neill, Jonothan Neelands and others seem to be of a different time (O'Connor, 2015, p.370).

¹⁰ Here James is citing examples of BBC Television dramas, whilst citing other examples of broadcast work in support of his views on working class and identity.

A time, when practitioners shared ideas and 'emerging theories through demonstration, through embodied engagement in the work' (2015, p.370). O'Connor notes the changes.

It seems as if applied theatre or drama in education academics are no longer expected to have practice to share as universities value theorised accounts of practice over practice itself...once our research was intensely self-referential it has become increasingly theorised, enriched by an engagement with performance studies, sociology, and critical pedagogy, creating an eclectic interdisciplinarity in our research (2015, p.370).

O'Connor, in his work with the *Applied Theatre Company Ltd (ATCo)*, sees himself as both practitioner and academic, combining AT practices and techniques, including the pedagogies like Heathcote's *Mantle of the Expert* and Boalian techniques to 'reinterpret the past and to picture alternate ideas of the future' (Boal, 1998 cited in Gregorzewski et al., 2023, p.13).

Differentiated from traditional mainstream theatre forms, AT generally moves away from a 'pre-written script', to a performance that is generated and interpreted, and 'may not be scripted' (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009b, p.7). AT requires intervention and participation by actors or audience, or both. '[P]articipatory theatre is not only dynamic but calculatedly dependent upon the interactive response from its audience or participants' (Jackson, 2006, p.35). AT has become a watchword for 'alternative theatre practitioners', replacing the badged political or radical theatre (2006, p.265)¹¹.

Ackroyd makes a compelling case for the 'reductive associations' of the terminology, tagging the word 'applied' onto conference

¹¹ There are a number of Applied Drama/Theatre courses currently offered in the UK that include Socially Engaged Theatre courses. Radical & Political Theatre are largely delivered through an historical perspective that once was characterised by drama schools like East 15, that came out of a left-wing political tradition.

literature and journals that now reflect 'work beyond the classroom' (Ackroyd, 2007, p.4). Defining AT has become hierarchical and derisory – the older, more prestigious universities do 'pure' AT, and the new universities do 'applied' AT (2007). Ackroyd proposes that AT now 'delineates a restricted and exclusive type of radical practice' (2007, p.1). Publishing in the journal titled *Applied Theatre Researcher* gives a clue to this significant turnaround.

Part of the problem stems from the Western dramatic tradition and the 'closed dramatic structure, or dénouement' and an expectation that there will be some kind of resolution (Neelands, 2007a, p.314) – clearly neither an expectation for AT, nor realistic.

AT has a distinct relationship between 'practitioners and participants through negotiation of representation and working towards equitable norms of mutual recognition' (Neelands, 2007a, p.307). AT became personal, the essential 'characteristic is its tailoring to specific audiences, contexts and purposes' (Ackroyd cited in Neelands, 2007a, p.308). Neelands heralds Boal as the 'iconic and definitive practitioner of the sub-field of AT' (2007a, p.311). Yet Hare notes that FT is 'the most used, and probably by default, most often misused, technique in participatory theatre' (Hare cited in Rifkin, 2010, p.31).

2.3 Key Moments in Applied Theatre

Rifkin considers AT to 'cover practices referred to variously' as part of Participatory Theatre' (Rifkin, 2010, p.4). For practitioners, AT includes drama and theatre forms and techniques like role-play, Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre, Theatre for Development, Invisible Theatre, Image Theatre, etc. 'Applied' is an umbrella term for 'alternative theatre practices...such as grassroots theatre,

social theatre, political theatre, radical theatre and many variations' (Prendergast, 2009, p.6-7).

The exhaustive (and exhausting) debate about definitions...serves only to demonstrate how terminologies overlap, creating a complex territory of ever shifting interpretation, inference, competing genealogies and ideologies, that derive from similar yet distinctive vocabularies...attempt to encompass the cultural expansionism of the practice (however that might be defined) (Balfour, 2009, p.348).

Although the main premise of AT is the active relationship between the facilitator and participant and the 'transformative principle', there is also a 'complex relationship between donor agendas', that includes performativity juxtaposed with 'aesthetic imperatives' and possible 'social engagement' (2009, p.347).

The *transformative principle* is at the heart of both Boal's and Freire's pedagogies that define the main purpose as promoting and bringing about change – a change and transformation that requires a realisation with the individual, a dialogical engagement. For Freire, this requires conscientisation (*conscientização*) – critical consciousness, defined as the way we exist in the 'world', the way we define ourselves:

to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation (Freire, 1970, p.12, Freire and Ramos, 2014).

True dialogical engagement has led to 'many educators who claim to be Freirean in their pedagogical orientation [to] mistakenly transform Freire's notion of dialogue into a method' (Macedo's intro to Freire and Ramos, 2014, p.17).

Leading Henry Giroux to point out that such pedagogy leaves identity and experience removed from the problematics of power, agency, and history (2014, p.17).

Politics, Culture and Democracy

The politics of culture and critical democracy are inextricably linked. Misinterpretations of dialogical teaching that fail to link 'experiences to the politics of culture and critical democracy' are reduced to 'method invoking conversation' and can only provide 'participants with a group-therapy space for stating their grievances'. This reduces the 'teacher as facilitator [to] a safe pedagogical zone to deal with his or her class guilt' (Freire and Ramos, 2014, p.18). Freire asserts that 'knowing' requires not just a mere 'perception' but requires and demands 'critical intervention'. The individual needs to take control; this act of *oneself* is fundamental.

The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização* (Freire, 1970, p.67).

'Applied theatre does not separate itself from aesthetic theatre but rather provides the link between theatre, culture and current key issues in society' (Preston, 2016 cited in Jiang and Alizadeh, 2023, p.5). AT requires participation, individual actual or cognitive presence, providing the opportunity to inform and educate; to provide a response to participants' 'lived experience'. AT this makes it possible for participants to transform

their lived into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge...[AT makes] one basic assumption: that man's ontological vocation (as [Freire] calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world...individually and collectively (Macedo in forward to Freire, 1970, p.19).

Transformative principles are at the heart of Boal's FT:

The audience mustn't just liberate its Critical Conscience... its body too [and] invade the stage and transform the images that are shown there. To transform is to be transformed. The action of transforming is, in itself, transforming (Boal, 2008b, xx).

The participant audience member/s become Spect-actors and relive the fiction on stage, the theatre, their 'social reality'.

By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theatre he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality. By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself (Boal, 2008b, xxi).

Donor demands are not always considered, understood or fore fronted by AT practitioners. Not all AT is delivered with efficacy. Hakkarainen & Vapalahti used drama students, producing videos they scripted, costumed, acted and directed:

portray[ing] elderly people's use of alcohol in response to the problems of loneliness and of their relatives seeming to have no time for them...The Drama teacher, the Substance Abuse teacher and the second author of this paper guided and supported the students (Hakkarainen and Vapalahti, 2011, p.319).

Tutor-led students recorded FT performances about elderly people's use of alcohol. It looks dangerously like a 'drift from theatre forms to cognitive modalities' led by the social imperatives and the demands of the 'donor' (Balfour, 2009, p.351). The events described appear to be more like 'theatre'; it is difficult to see how the processes outlined meet any of Boal's most basic premises of 'participation and transformation'; the drama students merely seem to be 'designing and acting out social cases for digital videos' (Hakkarainen and Vapalahti, 2011, p.317). Where is the

protagonist, the Spect-actor? Derisory student comments 'reported initial discomfort with acting and a preference for more traditional methods of instruction' (Hakkarainen and Vapalahti, 2011, p.315). How far this was a consequence of the facilitation, the processes or poor application is not clear. Nevertheless, it warns of the efficacy and ethics in such projects and is worthy of further study, research and investigation. As AT moved away from the 'pre-written script' (Prendergast, 2009, p.5) there is much more evidence of donor agency control and input in FT. This is not to say there is no structure and never a script.

AT facilitators are more often governed by structures and demands placed by commissions of AT than any scripts or synopses. AT commissioners often outline a theme/issue or scenario to be explored and reworked by practitioners. With active participation AT goes 'beyond theatre' (Thompson 2003 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.4) and 'beyond conventional theatres' (O'Toole 2007 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.4).

Preston explores challenges for AT practitioners including the emotional demands of 'dilemmatic spaces' they face as themselves as facilitators, and for their participants. 'Dominant narratives of emotion potentially construct individualistic narratives which place blame for any perceived failure on the individual, compromising their agency' (Preston, 2013, p.231). In questioning the impact of this work on facilitators, Preston explores the positive implications and need for the 'resilient' pedagogical practitioner of applied theatre who 'performs' in contested spaces, and in contexts of risk and uncertainty. Practitioners are more likely to encounter participants with 'dominant narratives of emotion' with the potential to 'construct individualistic narratives which place blame' and failure 'compromising their agency' (Preston, 2013, p.231).

Being 'beyond conventional theatres' (O'Toole 2007 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.4) whilst still drama, AT reflects current contemporary theatre, although it may be nothing 'new' (Jackson, 2006). The theatre versus drama debate is old and continues to divide AT practitioners.

2.4 Theatre or Drama in Education?

Significant debates on the usefulness, functions and distinctions are made for both *Theatre* and *Drama*. Jackson concludes that 'teaching and dramatic art [...] make awkward bedfellows: it has to be one or the other not both' (2006, p.25). Both directly engage audiences, with the potential to engender positive and subversive messages with intent to elicit change, provoke thought, with the ability to be tempered, politicised, controlled or censored, such is its power. This opens a wider debate on the arts in education and how 'education can learn from the arts' (Eisner, 2002, p.195).

Debates around the distinctions between 'drama' and 'theatre' in education have been virulent, where drama in education 'concerns the concept of aesthetic learning as a common area', versus subject specific learning in each art form'. Thus if subject based, theatre can be seen more as an art form. The act of participation and engagement can be seen as different, with drama as vehicle of 'aesthetic learning' and theatre as more 'subject specific learning' (Österlind et al., 2016, p.43) including dramaturgy, designing, producing/directing, acting, etc. Whilst both drama and theatre are both about communication, drama is seen as more about transformation and improvisation and less about the skills and techniques that characterise theatre. Yet these functions are not set in stone; they interweave. Sanchez and Athanases' work with multilingual learners is able to conflate drama and theatre; they note that

drama [is focused] on process, versus theater (Lester et al.) focused on performance (e.g., McGovern, 2017)...Dawson and Lee (2018) argue, this is not a fixed dichotomy... we focus less on distinctions and, at times, use the terms interchangeably as we seek to illuminate possibilities for educators interested in engaging multilingual learners in drama and theater arts (Sanchez and Athanases, 2022, p.217-218).

Drama and theatre, whilst sharing some similarities and similar definitions, needn't be perceived as similar. At its simplest, theatre is essentially focused on performance, usually in a space with an audience, whereas drama for education explores ideas through workshops and is often teacher/practitioner led. Yet both can include performance and be practitioner led. What it may come down to is the politics of involvement in education by governments, providers and funders or cultural and donor agencies and organisations. Theatre, when seen as an art form could assume a more prominent hierarchical position whereas drama as a 'learning medium' could be considered of less cultural value (Wagner, 1976). Taking part in theatre requires a degree of skill and precludes many aspirants, whereas drama *can* be more inclusive and less threatening – but these definitions and assertions are fraught with contention, contradictions and debate.

The initial hierarchical elevation of AT, supported by value judgements, raised theatre's status as superior, as an 'artform', denigrating drama as merely a 'learning medium'. This reignited the drama versus theatre debate, and the drama and conference literature now include and reflect on work in and 'beyond the classroom' (Ackroyd, 2007, p.4). In effect, drama and theatre have never been closer bedfellows.

Despite a degree of resolution in the drama/theatre debate, some lasting damage had already been done. Prior to the introduction in

1988 of the National Curriculum (NC) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, one such debate may have been responsible for the exclusion of drama as a discrete subject. The final HMI Drama conference circa 1988 was held at Bretton Hall¹², and I was in the audience. Drama and theatre practitioners argued that drama and theatre were so fundamentally different they should not be conflated as one subject in the National Curriculum. Despite protestations and contests, including from Sir Ken Robinson (a keynote conference speaker) who noted without agreement that the future of an NC might exclude both drama and or theatre as a discrete subject. This proved inevitable, brought to the fore in the government-sponsored report *All Our Futures (NACCCE, 1999)* and followed by *Drama In Schools* (King, 2003).

The Education Reform Act 1988 had already outlined the statutory inclusion of music, but drama was subsumed within English, while dance was incorporated as a 'sport', and was, and is still largely taught by PE teachers. Classroom practitioners are pulled in

"contrary directions", summarised by O'Toole as "Drama as an art form versus Drama as a learning medium" or "for expressive development and personal growth" (Luton citing in O'Toole in IDIERI7, 2012, p.83).

The difference, values, contestation and debates surrounding drama and theatre are the 'liminal zone that drama teachers exist [in] on a daily basis' (Luton in IDIERI7, 2012, p.81). Nevertheless,

given that long struggle to successfully argue the case for educational drama practice to be conceived of as theatre, it seems somewhat ironic

¹² Bretton Hall College of Education was a higher education college in West Bretton in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England. It opened as a teacher training college in 1949 with awards from the University of Leeds. The college merged with the University of Leeds in 2001 and the campus closed in 2007. Bretton had a primary focus in the arts and particular drama and theatre.

that drama in education should so quickly be stripped of that status by the addition of the word 'applied' (Ackroyd, 2007, p.5).

The gravitas of this new discourse moved from the 'evangelical' (a rather derogatory and emotive comment) and an 'umbrella' catch all term, to an 'exclusionary discourse' where drama in education is excluded, and 'pushed out into the rain' (2007, p.1). Neelands noted the significant shift or 'redistribution in political theory' in the emerging 'sub-field of AT'. He argued that the Marxist Freirean 'old left' politics of redistribution, prevalent in 'alternative' theatre, was moving to a 'new left' where 'participation in social and artistic struggle are seen as the practice of civic dialogic freedom' (Neelands, 2007b, p.305). Any calls for freedom in the classroom were lost further in the implementation of the NC, and restricted by performance tables and measures for schools and colleges, limiting access to funding streams for the post-16 education arts curriculum. Gove's¹³ 2014 revision and curriculum changes pushed art, design, music, drama and dance further out of the curriculum, further reducing the value placed on Theatre, Drama and arts education. Despite political interventions in arts education AT is still a force for education, learning and training (McKay, 2023, O'Connor et al., 2023) with around 170 UK Higher Education institutions offering Drama/Theatre courses and around 280 Courses with *Applied Theatre* in their titles¹⁴.

Nicholson attempts to distance herself from the 'Marxist Freire and progressive educational practices' which she considers merely as a funding ruse (cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.9). Neelands concurs, and is equally scathing about the shift from

¹³ Conservative Minister – Education Secretary for Education.

¹⁴ UCAS <https://www.ucas.com/explore/search/all?query=Applied%20Theatre> – accessed 14/09/2024

socialism and the politics of redistribution associated with their ancestors in political theatre [and a move to align AT with] the ambivalences of 'identity politics and philosophical communitarianism (Neelands, 2007b, p.312)

Nicholson doesn't give up on the usefulness of drama, commenting on 'the urgency to justify the place of drama in educational and community settings [which] has not diminished over time', finding it 'depressing' and a 'familiar territory, reminding readers¹⁵ that drama is still not fully respected in many schools' (Nicholson, 2018, p.481).

Balfour berates Tony Jackson who broadens the AT lineage discourse by including earlier 19th and 20th century theatre practices of "the 'New Drama' of Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and Shaw; radical theatre in the 1930s; and post war developments" (Jackson 2007, cited in Balfour, 2009, p.348). Balfour disagrees, noting that

these could hardly be defined as applied theatre or drama education, even by the most optimistic of revisionists, but Jackson is keen to point out the lineage of work that attempts to revitalise the relationship between theatre and the social issues of the time (2009, p.348).

Balfour entirely misses the mark by falling into the historical linear trap that Jackson is so keen to avoid. Jackson establishes the roots of AT and its influences, including political theatre. It is the genealogical emergence of AT that is essential to Jackson's argument, and not merely an historical linear or sequential record of the emergence of AT. Jackson believes that AT developed or emerged genealogically based on beliefs and epistemology; admittedly, over time, but based more on 'influences and congruences' (Jackson, 2006, p.11) rather than Balfour's 'overly narrow concepts of theatre's social function' (Jackson, 2006, p.5). In his words,

¹⁵ Readers of RAID (Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance).

the accounts of practice given attempt to trace some genealogies across a hundred-year span but avoid as far possible suggesting that they are part of a progressive evolution towards an ultimate goal. They indicate both discontinuities and some often overlooked influences and congruences (2006, p.11).

Prendergast, discussing the emergence of AT, extends this notion to include 'theatre['s] historic role in society as providing a relatively safe way of talking back to power' (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p.7).

Playwrights can 'offer a theatre of social criticism, debate or in Brecht's case potential revolutionary action', and a more contemporary context, 'focus[ing] much of their theatre on exposing and exploring social and political issues'. But they are *playwrights* and AT can only be 'informed by these plays', as AT 'works overtly either to reassert or to undermine socio-political norms' (2009, p.8). Ian Kelly's *The Gates of Kyiv* exemplifies; extolling and highlighting the subversively political and 'fearless Marxist, banned Soviet piano virtuoso Maria Yudina'. An example of 'how live arts play a crucial role in world events, and in protesting peoples' ability to speak out' (Kelly, 2024).

Neelands, like Jackson, drawing on practitioners from the widest theatrical tradition, both historical and contemporary, and from education and social sciences, with an ability to articulately tease out the contest/s, concludes that

AT can make a difference to the lives of others by affording them 'minutes of happiness' but also by offering the chance to participate artistically and socially in the practice of freedom (Neelands, 2007, p.11).

The *All Our Futures* report (NACCCE, 1999) strengthened the value of drama that

can be a powerful way of promoting skills in reading, writing and in speech. Creative insights often occur when new connections are made between ideas or experiences that were not previously related. This happens across as well as within different modes of thinking (NACCCE, 1999, p.49).

Fisher suggests another form of participatory theatre – ‘radical democratic theatre’ – arguing that Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is at the ‘limits of political subjectivity’, and challenging the ‘oppressive relation itself’ (Fisher, 2011, p.20). He turns to Foucault, Laclau and Derrida to re-examine the relationship of identity and power.

‘[T]he identity of the oppressive forces,’ he writes, ‘has to be in some way inscribed in the identity searching for emancipation. This contradictory situation is expressed in the undecidability between internality and externality of the oppressor in relation to the oppressed (Laclau 2007 cited in Fisher, 2011, p.20-21).

The various ‘definitions create new discourses but they also generate...hierarchical relations’ (Ukaegbu 2004, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.10), and in the case of AT they should include the ‘pretty and the ugly’, but that would mean accepting all practice and practitioners, whereas ‘not all applied practice would be supported ethically by the majority of practitioners’ (Ackroyd, 2007, p.10). By focusing on the craft, theory, aesthetics, poetics and techniques of AT rather than its usage, for example for commercial gain, AT becomes a far more persuasive tool. AT takes the narrative away from the emotive, ownership away from academics and practitioners, and offers it to, and for the individual. Thus, AT becomes more closely aligned to Boal’s and Freire’s original

democratic and dialogical intent, making for the possibility of change:

[T]o use Darko Suvin's phrase, theatre as a dynamo for social change through transformative political action rather than as a mere 'mirror unto nature' that reflects, naturalises and neutralises the status quo (Surkan 1967, Bourdieu 1993, Berghaus 2006) (cited in Neelands, 2007b, p.306)

The plethora of AT definitions do not conflate easily into the suggested 'umbrella term' of AT. AT continues to be contested amongst academics and particularly in the journal RIDE. Nicholson noting RIDE has 'contributed to the professionalisation of our field or subdiscipline of applied theatre and drama education, and research has stretched knowledge and understanding, opening ways to think differently' (Nicholson, 2018, p.481).

Journals like RIDE are 'part of a global system of circulating stories and ways of seeing the world...drama education and applied theatre because these are disciplines which have always focused on examining the power of storytelling and working creatively with unheard communities' (Busby et al., 2023, p.501). For example, Xu's reporting on the inclusion of drama and theatre as part of China's 'policies of aesthetic education introduced by the Ministry of Education'¹⁶ has seen a

rapid development of the use of drama and the sharp increase in the number of participants...drama pedagogy has gained significant attention in China since a series of Policies of aesthetic education introduced by the Ministry of Education (Xu, 2023, p.547).

¹⁶ In April 2022, the Ministry of Education of China issued the Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education, which added Drama In Education (DIE) and Theatre In Education (TIE) to the drama curriculum for secondary school students (XU, J. 2023. 'Page, stage, engage': a case study activating citizenship and drama education in China. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 28, 547-553.

As the range of drama and theatre intervention techniques has grown in use, attempts to politicise, tame and define AT may be ill founded. There is a majority view that there is a usefulness and intention for AT as transformative and participatory but there are inconsistencies and other demands made on practitioners. Demands of the client, the donor group, often go beyond expectations of transformative and change, as they also ask for aesthetic and social engagement.

Definitions have been necessary to lift AT beyond that leftist perception of political theatre and to make it more 'acceptable'. Neelands observed that AT has become the 'new left', where AT participants are encouraged and enabled to socially and artistically seek 'civic dialogic freedom' (Neelands, 2007b, p.305). Balfour argued that the sheer diversity of social contexts where AT operates 'undermine attempts to fix definitions into a coherent framework' (Balfour, 2009, p.350). AT features some commonalities, key components broad purposes and 'social intentionality', actioned through 'participation and transformation' (Ackroyd, 2000, cited in Balfour, 2009, p.347&350).

New Journals and Scholarship

My research saw me grappling with critical theorists, French philosophers, ontology, and epistemologies, and the processes of maturation were not without frustrations. At the same time there had been a prolific rise in journals and specifically in the field of applied theatre research¹⁷ with a vast quantity of papers to consider. Access was useful, but also added to my frustration as it was apparent that the theoretical language defining AT and its contestations was still emerging. This made my own explanations

¹⁷ Journals include: Research in Drama Education (RIDE), Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, New Theatre Quarterly, Applied Theatre Research et al.

and synthesis of my research project either oversimplified or rather obtuse. My doctoral researcher peers jokingly referred to it as that 'role-play' stuff. 'Role-play' is not only an oversimplification but confirms how such a potent technique was being widely used and abused without a clear pedagogy and an understanding of its potency. This affirmed the potential dangers AT might impart to unsuspecting participants – the classic example being, 'we are now going to do some role-play', widely used in any context, with any age group, or at any event. This also challenged me to clearly define my area of research – what it is and why it's important, further reinforcing the need for some kind of ethical framework.

As AT has emerged attempts to close down, and more closely define what AT is, there has arisen a 'contest between the politics of recognition and redistribution' (Neelands, 2007b, p.306).

Kandil & Prentki's (2023) editorial in *RIDE: Representation, empathy, and their intersections*, identified 'race, identity and their representations' as a dominant factor in 'academic and classroom conversations in North America'.

As a result, educators and practitioners have questioned their pedagogy and practice and have shifted material and approaches to address the current climate of fear and caution (2023, p.381).

McKay explores the complexities of working in AT, with the increasing wide range of participants and partners from multiple perspectives.

Adding to the emerging body of work describing, narrating, analysing, and theorising from, training sites in applied theatre practice (McKay, 2023, p.17).

A complex network has emerged of practitioners, academics and literature involved in creating AT, exchanging knowledge 'across a complex network of partners and people in a co-productive process' (2023, p.17). McKay concludes that further research and analysis is required to examine 'the impact of applied theatre training beyond the boundaries of training institutions' to serve and 'inform the strategies used to develop that training to begin with' (2023, p.18).

Journals, including RIDE¹⁸, have put some emphasis on the purpose of AT that has 'subsequently been elaborated into a political theory'. These include discussions of ethics and ethicality, the politics of context, place and space, identity, belonging, and particular cultural context (Ackroyd, Nicholson, Fisher et al cited in Neelands, 2007b, p.308).

It was thought that the 'shift' of AT researchers and practitioners into university theatre and performance art departments would bring more relevance to the field but it has also brought demands for research income streams,

applications for funding with proposed outcomes may be perceived as reductive. By stepping into applied, we are more vulnerable to demands for outcomes. The funding comes with the promise of change (Ackroyd, 2007, p.5).

Any change may have reflected at that time 'heightened sensitivity to the current trends in higher education', adapting to needs and 'what is likely to be funded (2007, p.5). Nicholson makes justification in parallel comparisons between 'applied' university

¹⁸ RIDE "The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance is a refereed journal aimed at those who are interested in applying performance practices to cultural engagement, educational innovation, and social change'
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=crde20>
 accessed 01/12/2020

programmes that use 'theoretical models to solve practical problems'. Whereas most AT practitioners are 'motivated by individual or social change' and of 'similar interest in the effects and usefulness of the work' (Nicholson, 2005: 6, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.4).

O'Connor is much more cynical, suggesting that research has less to do with promises of change and more about hierarchical, prestigious and successful scholarship. O'Connor explains his experiences of funding and sitting on university grants committees

the key criterion for success is how much the funding would assist the applicant's career prospects...[and] unusual to find any criteria on what the research might do for those who are to be the 'subjects' of the research... the primary consideration is on how many publications can be secured, what international collaborations might be entered into and how the status of the university might be enhanced by the growing reputation of the applicant scholar (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015, p.4).

Ackroyd argues that there has been little funding for drama education projects, whereas AT taps into 'social inclusion, and participation and rehabilitation' (Neelands 2007, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.5). If this is the case, then funding may be predetermined by research imperatives, ethics committees and funding streams with an absence of the practitioner aesthetic, and the theoretical and sociocultural intent. Ackroyd raises concerns that AT academics are setting rigid parameters, excluding differentiation in actual practice, with a

discourse emerging [that]...embraces and focuses upon those that are designed to strengthen communities, transform specific groups, and give participants the chance to find their individual and collective voices (Ackroyd, 2007 p.8)...restricted to settings where theatre is being used for explicit social benefit (O'Toole 2007 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.8).

Ackroyd describes the positive aspects of AT work in business as 'specific' and tailored, and is troubled by Nicholson's assertion that 'Theatre for Development isn't actually Applied theatre' (Nicholson, 2005 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.8), and that 'many members have no real experience in theatre form' (Taylor, 2003 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.8).

Syler another academic and practitioner claims that, despite their AT work

a university-based applied theatre practitioner like me is more likely to partner with an arts organisation, social service entity, or NGO to devise performance work off campus (Syler, 2023, p.2).

It seems somewhat ironic that the lack of onsite AT work by some scholars may reflect political internal concerns or pressures. An 'unintended byproduct' of exterior focus by applied theatre scholars

do not, in their practice or scholarship, critically engage the social issues lodged in the most local of contexts – their institutional home (Snyder-Young 2013, 8 cited in Syler, 2023, p.2).

Around the same time Boal was working on his dialectic *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979) in South America, here in England, Bolton and Heathcote were using drama in schools, and developing role-play from a pedagogic tradition – the antithesis of the kind of theatre and the drama expounded by Dodd and Wagner (Dodd et al., 1971, Wagner, 1976).

Heathcote's *Role-play* and Boal's *Forum Theatre* are driven by the fundamental need for direct interaction by their participants.

Role-play and FT are often conflated so to dispel some oversimplifications, Heathcote's and Boal's concepts are discussed below.

2.5 Heathcote – Defining Role-play

In Heathcote's words:

You give people the Keys that allow their imagination to be freed, their power to influence, to operate, their understanding to have to come to it and make sense of it. We explain the world to each other in the laboratory (Cited in Davis 2016, Xu, 2023, p.552).

'The benefits of socio-dramatic pretence, or role play are well documented' with a rich history and tradition in learning and education, from early years childhood development to its inclusion as educational policy in the current National Curriculum. In 'a pretend world that is, however, reality grounded' (Papadopoulou, 2012, p.575).

Theorists, including Piaget, Vygotsky and others (Veraksa et al., 2022) reinforced and encouraged the use of dramatic and imaginative play and the development of educational drama in schools and colleges during the '60s, '70s and '80s. Piaget's influence and theories on child development were prevalent in my own teacher training in the 1970s.

Heathcote and Bolton were substantive figures in developing and extending the use of role-play, work that was very much centred in the 'classroom' involving 'students, trainees or pupils', often collectively with the teachers in role and 'inside the fiction'. Heathcote used the 'potency of theatre', making a distinction between drama lessons in schools, where the outcomes may be uncertain and unknown, whereas 'role-work' is 'almost entirely leader-controlled' (Bolton and Heathcote, 1999). The teacher-led aspect of 'role-work' as Heathcote describes it, is a key element in her work and whilst it has similarities with other AT, there are

some essential, nuanced differences. What is common is leader control. Wagner 1972 describes the 'setting of boundaries' in drama work and the importance of 'emotional safety of the participants and confidentiality of the work' (Wagner 1972, cited in Rifkin, 2010, p.30). Hare describes the characteristics of Heathcote's practice were 'power is deliberately abrogated by the teacher, the culturally assumed powerful figure, and given to the participants' (Hare cited in 2010, p.30).

Observing Heathcote's work, and her practitioners it is noticeable that any boundaries set are implicit and practical for facilitators and participants and only go so far as to 'imply an ethical framework'. Rifkin questions whether in reality 'emotional safety of participants can be compromised and must be protected' (2010, p.30).

Ethics of practice is discussed further in this chapter and is central to the data, methods and conclusions found in subsequent chapters.

Mantle of Expert

Heathcote's more advanced technique of enquiry-based drama is referred to as the 'mantle of expert'. For example, 'Heathcote had children (8–9 years old) playing scientists trying to find a cure for cancer' (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995 cited in Ødegaard, 2003, p.86). But this technique required 'a relatively long school period – two or three weeks, a term or an academic year', to take as long as it takes, to 'build a cultural role of responsibility through a fictitious enterprise' (Bolton and Heathcote, 1999, p.123). Often, such distinctions are missed or forgotten when teachers, trainers or lecturers say those immortal words, '*for the next exercise I would like you all to go into role!*'. Of course, role-play is not restricted to 8–9 year olds.

Fiction (based on reality and practitioner led) and *safe spaces* are key recurring themes prevalent in my research, and are explored throughout and reflected in the data gathering and analysis.

Vignette 7: Heathcote first hand

I was fortunate to be thrown out of observing Heathcote with children as we were 'obstructing' her workshop with local children. During my Master's programme, Heathcote had been invited to run a workshop at the university with local primary school children. We were told to creep into the back of the large drama hall. As soon as Heathcote spotted us, she unceremoniously asked us to leave. For years, this impacted on my view of her as some kind of education prima donna, and I became judgemental about her work. I was so very wrong, and now I'm beginning to get a much more measured and rounded understanding of her role work.

This was a clear example of bias and one of the dangers in autobiography and autoethnography as a research method. 'Clear guidelines and steps are needed to minimize biases and to bring about the potential power of autoethnography' (Poerwandari, 2021).

To minimize biases and to move from subjectivity into intersubjectivity, various methods or data-collection techniques can be implemented. A wide variety of methods might be used, from self-observation, diary recording or audiovisual recording, collecting archival data (such as photographs, letters, or memoirs), combined with interviews and other methods as well as other sources of data as triangulation (McIlveen, 2008 cited in Poerwandari, 2021, p.316).

To avoid bias the research and data collection used wide and varied range of sources and evidence. Whilst a certain amount of subjectivity was inevitable it was measured with the breadth of materials including life stories, field notes, video, photographs, audio, journals, diaries, interviews, transcripts, archival materials,

commissioning emails, observations of AT Workshops and events with the participants and commissioners of work (more detail is provided in section 3.4 An Overview of Data).

Role-play

Role-play is one of the many widely employed participatory theatre techniques, used as interventions in education and training.

Heathcote and Bolton revised their guidance on what they termed 'role work' stressing the importance of the context of that work.

There is widespread and unfettered use of roleplay today, often by practitioners who lack the appropriate training or understanding of the impacts on those who use it and those who are subjected to it.

Vignette 8: Role work first hand

Many years ago, I was interviewed for the position of Head of Expressive Arts at a further education college. There were around eight applicants invited for interview and we were ushered into a board room. We were each given a paper with instructions. We were allocated roles as part of a community arts committee. The roles included character traits and individual aims as part of this committee. We then 'performed' for the interview panel who had never met us or been introduced to us. All with drama backgrounds, we took to the activity with relish, rigour and considerable argument. After a short time, considerable chaos ensued and the management team abandoned the role work. As interviewees, we all thoroughly enjoyed this, but the interview management team didn't know who we were.

This was perhaps my best example of the use and misuse of role play. 'When assimilation predominates over accommodation...The result is play-activity, detached from reality' (Sutherland, 1999, p.287).

Role work should be not so much about the 'role player', or the 'character' but there should be a greater emphasis on the learning and meaning, on 'seeing something as significant'. '*Setting of boundaries*, the *empowerment* of the given client group, and the centrality of open and genuine *questioning*' are three aspects of Heathcote's work that inform current participatory theatre practice (Hare cited in Rifkin, 2010, p.31).

Rolling Role Model

Much of Heathcote's work was based in primary schools. Davis (Davis, 2016) and Simou (Davis and Simou, 2014) reevaluated Heathcote's work, and the less well known *Rolling Role Model*, a cross curricular system for collaborative learning that was developed for secondary education. Rolling Role uses

one set of stimulus material and one basic drama framework planned and employed with a number of different classes [often] over a substantial period of time). The work of each class is different because they are framed differently in relation to the material, and the work of one class can produce materials which provide a starting point for the work of another group (McAra 1984:3 cited in Davis and Simou, 2014, p.4).

Xu describes *Using process drama in community citizenship education* and Heathcote's *Rolling Role Model*, allowing interdisciplinary curriculum areas and an inclusive teacher-to-teacher approach (Xu, 2023). This approach allows teachers and participants to 'draw together common factors and draw attention to knowledge and learning'¹⁹ (2014, p.552).

¹⁹ This quotation comes from one of Heathcote's videotapes. The Rolling Role model was initially intended to provide secondary teachers with a professional development scheme for implementing the English National Curriculum. Sessions were filmed at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and there are 16 videotapes in the series. The Rolling Role Model was regarded as an innovational education system, which featured connections with real-life roles and issues, it recognised the importance of carefully selected material objects and the teacher's role as the active agent of change (Davis 2016, 5).

Notwithstanding the influence of Heathcote and other AT practitioners, the thrust of this research study and literature review is predominantly concerned with the work, practice and application of Augusto Boal's theories and techniques, and is explored further below.

2.6 Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed

Although Boal's techniques have become universal, his writings have been described as often impenetrable and indirect, 'hard to follow, a mix of contradictions and synthesis', a 'process of amalgamation' (Milling and Ley 2001, cited in Österlind, 2008, p.75). Many of Boal's techniques remain unchanged and 'have become suspect to his critics'. The 'rehearsals for the revolution' has 'shifted to rehearsals for healing', with 'political purpose meandered in search of a "real" enemy' (Schutzman, 1990; p.78). Boal 'appreciated some adaptations', although when a 'Ukrainian company staged an anti-model in which the protagonist was a symbolic figure (a representative of a group), Boal felt that this adaptation invalidated his work' (Thompson et al., 2009, p.431-432). He regarded this an over 'simplification' distorting and stereotyping, going against the 'principles of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO)', and he was 'outraged' (2009, p.432).

Criticisms of Boal are nothing new. Ball's 1995 paper *The influence of Boal on theatre in education in Britain* provides an insight into the views and influence of Boal's work in T.I.E. companies, citing problems and dangers in Boal's work. For example, 'by focusing on personal experiences of oppression' it fails 'to take account of the political context in which we operate and ignores the universality of such situations' (Ball, 1995, p.84). There was value in the introduction of Forum Theatre and Image Theatre, although the

context in which they were developed 'in which physical oppression and repression are daily realities [is] far removed from the British education system where oppressions are much more subtle' (1995, p.84).

Boal's binary of oppressed and oppressor have been challenged or developed by some, including Diamond's *Theatre for Living* (2008), in a philosophical shift to a more 'systems' view of the world, and the idea that the community is a large living organism and the oppressor is only part of that. Diamond regards his work as an 'outgrowth' of Boal's work: 'regardless of the form it takes, theatre educates its practitioners and its audience in some way' (Diamond et al., 2008).

Others are more vocal – in later years, Boal's showmanship became more dominant in his work, when his 'personality became larger than the practice' (Hartley and Bond, 2012, p. 6). Nevertheless, although Hartley is influenced by Boal's work she is not wedded to him, and criticises Boal for 'identifying oppression' as personal for telling individuals 'that their state of oppression was wrong, and they need to change it' (Hartley and Bond, 2012, p.147). If this assertion by Hartley rings true, this contradicts a dialogical approach and fails to acknowledge that 'Oppression exists when a dialogue becomes a monologue...so whenever there is a dialogue that has become a monologue, we want to restore the dialogue' (Boal 1996:47 cited in Burton and O'Toole, 2015, p.54). In her practitioner work, Hartley prefers to 'see people as travellers on a journey with many paths' (Hartley and Bond, 2012, p.148).

Hartley adds the very use of *Theatre of Oppression* (TO) and the mere use of *Oppression* can lead to negative literal connotations. It

is a 'strange title for a practice that claims to empower' (Hartley and Bond, 2012, p.7). Diamond's *Theatre for Living* that uses Boalian techniques assumes a less threatening mantle and yet still seeks to deal with social and political issues, including conflict resolution (Diamond et al., 2008).

Despite a 'shaky history' of Forum Theatre in Singapore as it was 'seen to threaten public order and security' (see Lazaroo 2017) (Lazaroo et al., 2024, p.444) Boal still had a place. In *The Kickstart Drama project* Boal's work was used to 'activate community voices and engage in advocacy within the community'. This involved a softer approach of 'care' that was embedded in 'community values' and bonding before any FT work began. For example, 'dinner before rehearsals', engendered a community spirit that wasn't concerned about 'age or background'. The whole group sat in a circle 'all eating great food, spicy food...And then it proceeded on to Augusto Boal's techniques and activities' (2024, p.448).

I continue to be influenced by Boal's work but 'not limited to or by it' (Hartley and Bond, 2012, p.148). I concur with Hartley that *Theatre of the Oppressed* is 'problematic, misunderstood, mistaught and misapplied' (2012, p.148) with the potential for confusion, or in some cases harm (Hartley and Bond, 2012, Hamel, 2013). Fisher adds misunderstanding is due to 'practitioners who are unaware of existing literature, not well versed in the concerns and needs...[and] not properly trained in establishing safety for their participants' (Fisher and Smith, 2010, p.158). Fisher's publication gives a clue to where an ethical framework may begin - 'First do no harm' (Fisher & Smith, 2010).

Boal and Freire's pedagogies, rooted in Marxist 'libertarian education', recognise the power of a dialogical relationship between teacher and student, often in opposition to that imposed by the hegemonic demands of the state (Freire, 1970). Freire berates the state for too often promoting 'antidialogical action and its characteristics: of conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion' as opposed to 'dialogical action: character[ised by] cooperation, unity organization, and cultural synthesis' (1970, p.8).

Boal called his *Forum Theatre* (FT) participants, '*Spect-actors*' as they are not merely spectators but also invited to participate, whilst a significant feature of FT participation it is not compulsory. The *Spect-actors* and the facilitator (or '*Joker*' who is also a '*diffcultator*'²⁰; (Jackson, 1995, p.xix cited in Dwyer, 2004b) gather in a safe environment, using fictional scenarios, based on participants' own observations and experiences. The origins of FT are said to have arisen when Boal's actors were performing an oppressive scenario. A woman intervened saying '*that was not how it was*'.

I could not understand what a spectator was saying ...she wanted us to improvise her ideas, and I invited her to come up on stage...to enact her thoughts, instead of just speaking them (Boal, 2001, p.309 cited in Dwyer, 2004b).

Thus Forum Theatre was born.

when the spectator herself comes on stage and carries out the action she has in mind, she does it in a manner which is personal, unique, and non-transferable . . . as no artist can do it in her place (Dwyer, 2004a, p.157).

²⁰ Boal's had an aversion to the term 'facilitator' insofar as it implies a person who simplifies things. A good joker, says Boal, is more of a 'diffcultator' who challenges an audience to explore new understandings of a problem (Jackson, 1995, p. xix) (DWYER, 2004).

Apocryphal or not, this describes the intention and activities and the foundations of FT for participation, with its actions, consequences and interventions.

Boal, Freire and the Pedagogies of Oppression

Both Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire had ideological and philosophical similarities, and having worked together, reinforced each others' pedagogies. Boal 'interpreted Freire's philosophy into action' and demonstrated

...in his books how to utilize his ideas through games and exercises.

Whereas Freire spent a good portion of his writing theorizing, Boal was more interested in revolution (Harmer, 2010, p.2).

Boal, like many other preceding theatre practitioner theorists regarded theatre as an essentially political act – 'of all the arts and sciences, the sovereign art and science is Politics' (Boal, 2008a, p.19). He vehemently argued that 'theatre is a weapon' and guarded against the passive acceptance of theatre by the masses at the behest, and so often under the control of, the ruling classes (Boal, 2008a, ix), because

when Thespis *invented* the protagonist, he immediately "aristocratized" the theater (Boal, 1979 original italics, p.29).

Boal published extensively, substantiating his theories and ideas with wide reference to critical theorists and classical philosophy. Aristotle did not admonish theatre audiences actors portrayal of characters 'even if they are taking pleasure in something forbidden, it doesn't matter at all, because, as Thespis rightly said, it's a game, it's a representation' (Boal, 2008a, p.xvii).

Boal's calls for theatre to be invested in the audience who are not manipulated by directors, who he regarded as 'cooks of theatrical

menus' along with 'bad playwrights in every epoch [who] fail to understand the enormous efficacy of the transformations that take place before the spectators' eyes' (Boal, 2008a, p.22-23).

Theatre is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being (Boal, 2008a, p.24).

McCammon acknowledges Freire and Boal, the 'concept of praxis (reflection and action)', and their contributions to informing 'not only theory but practice', providing extensive examples of the usage of AT in her chapter on *Research on Drama and Theater for Social Change*. This includes how AT was expedited for truth and reconciliation following the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, and perhaps demonstrating the differing political approach to change that can be brought about by dialogical action through 'conscientization' (McCammon, 2007). 'The drama or the theater practice is designed specifically to make a change in their lives in some way, to be transformative' (2007, p.946).

Freire's pedagogies have lasting relevance and resonance with 'being' and the existential sense of how the oppressed can become knowing and *conscientização*, or critically conscious.

'*Conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (Freire, 1970, p.35). Freire's ideas continue to provide a strong focus *for* education, ideas evident in the praxis fundamental to Boal, epitomised in the pedagogies and aesthetics of his *Theatre of Oppressed* (Boal, 1979). The synthesis of Boal and Freire reflects the communion of those oppressed by the oppressed:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution

someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other (Freire, 1970, p.133).

Liberation necessitates the application and understanding of 'dialogical action' and principles of transformation, if change and or liberation are to take place (1970). Liberation or transformation is not that straightforward and requires first *conscientização*. Freire warns of 'cultural invaders' or neo-liberal acts where the oppressed become objects, and calls for 'cultural synthesis' where the 'actors' come from 'another world' but 'do not come to teach or to transmit or to give anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world' (1970, p.180).

Have Freire and Boal's ideals been lost or submerged in and by those who purport to use Applied Theatre? Have practitioners, too often seen the oppressed as objects, and applied a 'banking concept' of education where the subjects are receptacles to be filled by the teacher? (Freire, 1970, p.72). Did Boal towards the end negate and lose sight of his ideology and ideals as he became submerged in his own popularity and showmanship? And can transformation and change *really* take place? I began to ask these questions, which formed and underpinned the research processes and planning for this thesis.

In traditional Western theatre, the power is gifted to the actors via playwright and director, and the power of the word is significant. Hall questioned whether 'the beginning [is] the word in theatre?' and the 'danger of hiding behind words', regardless of the time, space, context or genre, be it 'propaganda', 'poetic', 'ritualistic' or 'cruel' theatre (Hall, 1972, p.1-11).

All these things are slight swings in this perpetual action and reaction of the theatre. They are none of them guarantees of art (1972, p.11).

Hall was writing in the year I entered Higher Education. I didn't read the article until some 20 years later, and now another 30 years on, it still has purity and resonance, which can be seen in the context of the creation of Boal's Forum Theatre.

[The] word is the greatest invention of the human being, and yet it brings with it the obliteration of the senses, the atrophy of other forms of perception (Boal, 2006, p.5).

Boal doesn't ignore the word but in *Image Theatre* he deliberately chooses not to use words; the power of the image is not lost through the absence of words but heightened, enabling the 'theatricalisation of introjected oppressions' (Boal, 2006, p.5). The evidence of such power can be seen in the undergraduate photos 2 and 3 (below), and 7 and 8 in section 3.2.2 pages 111 and 112.



Photo 2: Undergraduate actors rehearse commissioned work by Police & Fire Service



Photo 3: Undergraduates perform commissioned work by the Police & Fire Service

For Freire, the power invested in the word, and true dialogue between human beings doesn't elevate one human above another.

Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in others even before he meets them face to face. His faith, however, is not naive. The "dialogical man" is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power (Freire, 1970, p.90-91).

Hall was grappling with the word and the methodological problems of theatre making; he was searching for something new or 'different'; maintaining that

'[t]he dialogue between the audience and actor is gone, it is dead. You have to find different equivalents. Some different form of making dialogue happen' (Hall, 1972, p.11).

At the same time in Brazil and Peru, Boal was developing that difference and that dialogue in *Forum Theatre*, the 'signature element' of Theatre of the Oppressed dramaturgy (Sullivan et al., 2008, p.17p).

Boal was not the first to argue that theatre could be used for social, political and personal change. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BC) is quintessentially feminist, socio-political, and demands personal change. Ukaegbu's work suggests applied theatre forms are as 'ancient as theatre itself' (Ukaegbu 2004, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.6). He explains

Irrespective of cultural differences, traditional performances everywhere are applied for history informs us that while ancient Greeks 'applied' Dionysia performances to strengthen community bonds, the early European Church used them to transform adherents' overall religious and cultural experiences (Ukaegbu 2004, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.6).

Boal, fond of metaphors, uses his *Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed* (fig.1) to explain the fruits, first growth, roots, the games (or rules) and the techniques that develop such as *Legislative theatre*, *Image theatre* and *Forum theatre*, the central and defining plank of TO.

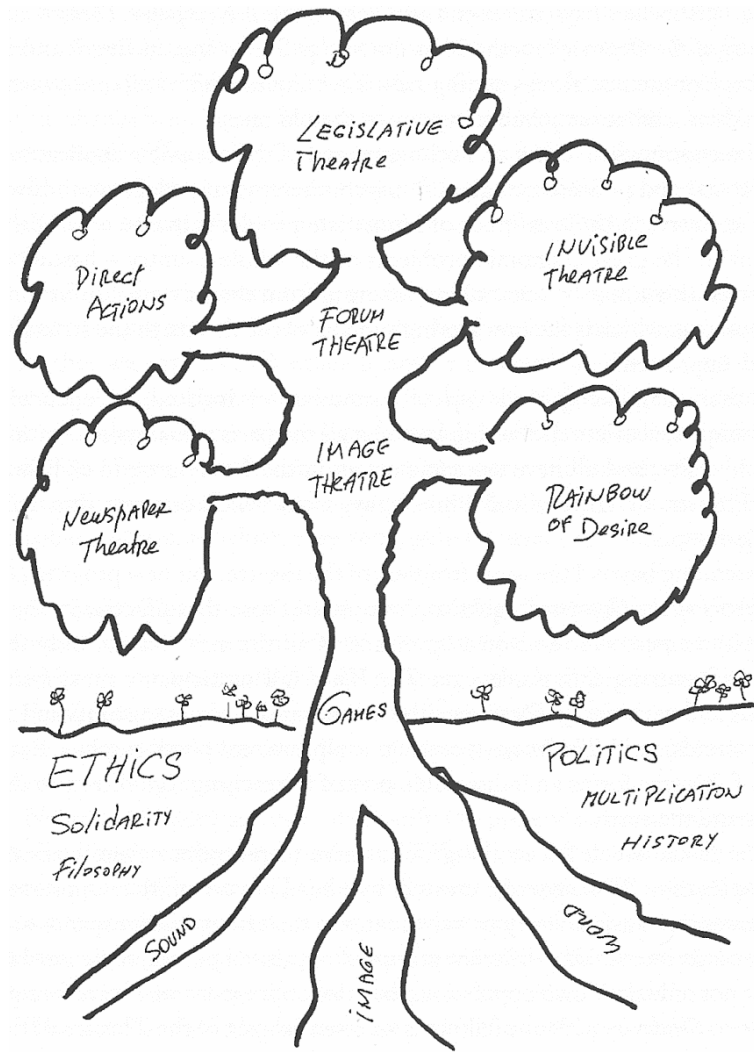


Figure 1 'The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 2006 p.3)

Boal's rationale, like Freire's, was to empower peasants and the powerless through alternative courses in *Forum Theatre*. Connected to this is *Invisible Theatre* that sets up scenes in real situations and demands responses from those around the 'acting'. My FT & AT work, whilst inviting an individual response, sought to embolden communities and targeted participant groups and communities where change was often desired. The techniques of '*Rainbow of Desire*' and '*Cops in the Head*' moved to more individually based therapy.

Rainbow of Desire

The Rainbow of Desire (Boal, 1994), a 'method of theatre and therapy', Boal developed and explored strategies he used 'to act out conflicting desires and explore strategies for taking action [and] issues of pressure and related interpersonal relationships' (Jiang and Alizadeh, 2023, p.6&11).

My AT work doesn't follow or target individual therapeutic strategies, although it makes use of some techniques such as Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Forum Theatre. Boal's Rainbow of Desire (RoD) 'is intended to assist individuals in dealing with oppression due to personal issues and conflicts with family, the environment and internal struggles with emptiness and depression' (Jiang and Alizadeh, 2023, p.10).

Fisher adds to the critics of TO and RoD arguing the 'work is more therapy than theatre'

as its focus is on internal oppressions: one person's individual experience is spotlighted during activities to metaphorically expand it for the entire group to explore...ask[ing] participants to invest themselves fully into the work – physically, intellectually, and emotionally' (Fisher and Smith, 2010, p.158).

Schutzman highlights the connection of individual experience with social context:

To engage in Boal's 'therapy' is to become situated in a space between the individual and the socialized category of all such individuals...[b]oth individual, concrete experiences and collective, cultural knowledge are forced to interplay (Schutzman 1990, p.151-2 cited in Kina and Fernandes, 2017, in press).

Boal soon recognised the limitations of theatrical intervention as a means for change, 'symbolic struggles over identity politics [...] over recognition and equality', and that fiction was safer than active politics – the 'cops at the door became the cops in the head' (Neelands, 2007a, p.8).

Boal broke free of theatre conventions to widen its applications. His techniques, although universal, and his writings, whilst prolific, are often criticised for their lack of clarity and for their 'ambiguity' (Milling and Ley 2001, cited in Österlind, 2008, p.75). Key is active participation, whether it be real or cognitive, based on a reality that is practitioner led. If 'someone who is oppressed performs an action in fiction, this will enable him or her to perform it also in real life' (Boal 1995, cited in Österlind, 2008, p.72).

Österlind questions Boal's assertions including transformative action primarily because of the lack of good follow-up research to support the efficacy of his work. In refuting other critics, including Davis, O'Sullivan, Engelstad and Jackson, Österlind notes that their assertions 'are built on the assumption that the personal and the political, the individual and society are possible to separate' (Österlind, 2008, p.73). Österlind adds exploring the epistemological parallels between Boal and Bourdieu that 'intertwine' and are 'impossible to separate' (Österlind, 2008).

the interplay between body and mind, between inner and outer, individual and society, micro and macro, characterises Bourdieu and Boal's work and is central dimension to their thinking (2008, p.78).

Österlind makes much of the similarities between 'the *habitus* – the embodied history internalized' of Bourdieu, and Boal's 'osmosis or

interpenetration' and the metaphor of the 'cop in the head'²¹.

Although for Boal such a device and other FT tools useful to make the possibility of change and 'have the potential to facilitate the crucial step from insight to action...Boal's perspective is similar to Bourdieu's, seeing the political in the personal' with the

possibilities for individuals to break the pattern of hegemony, even if it seldom occurs. TO could be a way to become aware of – and ready to catch – the 'moment of opportunities' (2008, p.75).

Vignette 9: Knowing and Known

On a recent visit to Spain, in a higher education institution, physical theatre and Forum Theatre was discussed, although the professor strangely had not heard of Boal, and I was surprised that the focus was on another practitioner, Jacques Lecoq. On reflection, my surprise was rather judgemental. The experience did, however, inspire me to look again at the possible links between Boal and Lecoq ²² revealing my ignorance and intolerance when there are clear 'Dialectical Currencies'. The Pedagogies of LeCoq and Boal

embraces the practice of a continuous and cyclical process, similar to the one of the design studio. The work of these two educators is a long and continuous exploration of different ways to reconnect body and mind in theatre praxis (Papaefthimiou, 2014, p.51).

Empirical studies provide some support for Boal's AT practice. For example, in *Acting on HIV*, Francis 'examines how drama, in the Boal tradition, was used for communication about HIV at a school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa' (Francis, 2011a, viii).

Working with the assumption that youth participation and agency is key to halting the rising infection rates in young people, he shows that drama

²¹ Cop in the Head' – analytical process occurs with the Introspective Techniques of the *Rainbow of Desires* which, using words and, especially, images, enables the theatricalisation of introjected oppressions. BOAL, A. 2006. *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, London, Routledge.

²² Jacques Lecoq is highly regarded as one of the twentieth century's most influential teachers on the physical art of acting.

provides an opportunity for participants to express their own feelings and opinions, in a way that is not possible in traditional theatre (2011a, ix).

In Papua New Guinea the efficacy in Baldwin's well-intentioned workshop participation may be questionable to 'enhance the wellbeing of Indigenous communities' (Baldwin, 2009). Baldwin's own reporting recognised that

[a] community awareness and social marketing campaign... successfully raised awareness of HIV/AIDS in over 90% of the population. However, no evidence of positive behaviour change was identified. HIV prevalence has continued to rise and the forms of high-risk sexual behaviour which contribute to the spread of HIV appear to be rising also (2009, p.133).

Francis observed that the work of Christopher John with prison inmates focused on the impact of the project noting that the 'findings add to debates about the potential for theatre to effect systemic change within the correctional system' (John cited in Francis, 2011b, xi).

Lammers' AT literature review contextualises the challenges and ethical considerations with a broad examination of past and more recent case studies (Lammers, 2017). Afolabi's case study 'deals with managing conflict and bullying in a secondary drama classroom' (Afolabi, 2017, p.67), providing direct synergies with my own work. Participation is 'considered an external act', with a 'verb-oriented notion of participation [that] still dominates his theatre practice'; 'locating participation in and within the people becomes imperative' (2017, p.71).

The act of being there and having 'empathy' can be the voice for change and inform 'how individual personal change fed into a wider social change'. This was something that 'neither Boal nor Brecht

could quite work out' (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.146). To add to this difficulty the resourcing of AT practitioner work could be compromised, when often the funding

culture was viewed as acceptable if it promoted particular types of individual change or life skills, and this was governed and defined, in the main, by the funding agency (Balfour, 2009, p.350).

As a result 'trust is notoriously brittle' (Nicholson, 2010, p.88). Nevertheless, Boal's assertion that by engaging with arts, the possibilities for change and the transformative powers enable discovery of self through participation, either physical or cognitive, still have sway.

Boal has been adopted widely in mainstream drama and theatre education and applied in practical training and intervention programmes. He provides a respectable theoretical underpinning in AT and drama training for social change that is recognised in the UK and internationally, and that is evident in the rise of AT undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in UK universities. Although the plethora of courses reflect the difficulties in defining the broad and conflicting areas of the practice (UCAS, 2023b, UCAS, 2023a).

As a major contributor to AT in the 20th and 21st century, Boal has laid a legacy that is rooted in the individual. His last major written contribution – *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* – celebrates the past and the future as 'we must all do theatre – to find out who we are, and to discover who we could become' (2006, p.62). Despite the volume of discussion, academic research, projects and use of AT, little is being done to safeguard against misuse or to monitor the practice. There are no clear or recognisable formal mechanisms or

ethical framework in place, despite much of this work being located in universities.

AT and the Covid 19 pandemic

The 2019 global Covid pandemic 'created a crisis of sharing space' for AT participants and practitioners, with 'virtual platforms' creating a 'digital divide' and leaving the 'vulnerable to the risk of cyberbullying and social exclusion' (Anirban, 2023, p.74-75).

Despite the risks, practitioners like Bowers went to extraordinary and innovative lengths to deliver drama activities and develop their practice, 'whilst safely keeping us apart' (Bowers, 2022, p.323). In care homes, we used multiple iPads to 'bring characters to life, share improvisations and hot seating' (2022, p.323). Technology allowed the work to transcend the four walls of the bedroom and flow throughout the setting, illustrated poignantly by Bower who 'experienced the deaths of multiple residents' and in the knowledge that

they died without their loved ones surrounding them [and it] weighed heavy. Long days trying to fight and escape an invisible virus against a backdrop of constant handwashing, mask-induced acne and social distancing was mentally and physically exhausting. Applied theatre facilitated a space where I too could escape, where the residents and I sought refuge in the creative world that we had formed (Bowers, 2022, p.324).

2.7 Ethics, Politics & the Use of AT in Education & Training

Rifkin argues for an ethical framework for teaching AT in higher education that ensures the participants know the 'boundaries between fiction and reality' and are party to '[any] decision as to whether or not the work should aim to effect any real social change' (Rifkin, 2010, p.36).

With the widespread and international use of AT, and whilst it is overwhelmingly positive and 'worthy', there are those who seek corporate and political gain. Companies like JUICE offer drama-based training. Their marketing goes something like this: '[we work] collaboratively with you to design a programme that addresses whatever organisational challenges you face' (Juice, 2024). Ackroyd calls for 'vigilance, since a powerful medium can be used for dubious as well as humanitarian ends' (Ackroyd, 2007, p.3). AT techniques, especially where they are applied in therapeutic and clinical environments, need careful preparation and training.

AT use by its advocates and practitioners, practitioners are not always well versed in the techniques and delivery, nor might they have full command and knowledge of the potential dangers in implementing AT. Hepplewhite observed that most practitioners tend to come from formal training in theatre and in work focused on non-actors, 'often asserting a political function to the art, in turn demanding an ethical responsibility in regard to the participants and the context' (Hepplewhite, 2013, p.59). Adding to the dangers, Afolabi notes

I have critiqued some unethical theatre for development practices as "parachute theatre"—a practice whereby an expert comes into a community for a short time to deliver a message-laden performance to the people and then disappears forever (cited in Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.251)

The challenges and complexities of ethics reach beyond theatre and education, reflecting our cultural identities and diversity in the complex world we navigate.

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical they undergo constant transformation. Far

from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to that continuous 'play' of history, culture and power (Hall, 1990, p.220 cited in Neelands, 2004)

2.8 Ethical Discourse in Applied Theatre

In my work as an AT practitioner there are compelling arguments to combine and make use of both drama and theatre techniques. Etherton and Prentki highlight a 'strong ethical potential' and 'credo' determining and evaluating the impact of AT (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.143). As a practitioner researcher, 'critical questioning', reflection and review play a part in our 'ethical positioning' (Nicholson, 2005b, p.124, cited in Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.143). In order for 'ethical potential' and 'good intentions' to be realised and measured, ethics should be underpinned 'by concepts of equality and fairness' (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.143). AT practitioners should consider 'reform of praxis' to affirm that we are 'doing some good' (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.143). Bishop adds that new ethical paradigms are necessary to support AT ethical practice in a more comprehensive manner (Bishop, 2014, p.64).

Mullen and Freebody add to debate evident in the intricacies of 'policy agendas', not only on 'ethical values, approaches and outcomes of applied theatre practice' and the AT practitioner but also for participants. Policy funding may impact and marginalise some groups whilst providing a 'megaphone to others' (Mullen and Freebody, 2022, p.282). Nevertheless, AT can be a voice for challenge and could inform 'policy making processes' (2022, p.271-272). Hogan specifically favours process drama as a vehicle to 'rehearse difficult conversations, explore ethical dilemmas', and provide 'a safe space for preservice teachers to explore what it

means to “be” ethical’ (Hogan, 2015, p.74). Although Sadeghi-Yekta warns.

When we separate ethics and aesthetics we risk missing this essential linkage: how ethics informs aesthetics and vice versa (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.75).

‘An Education in Culture’ has a long historical trajectory, including that derived from moral principles during the mid-19th Century (Nicholson, 2011, p.222-225). Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (First pub. 1860, Arnold, 2014) in the age of enlightenment, there was a ‘sensitive preoccupation with whole quality of life’ rather than a formulated code or ethical system’ (Egleton, 1983, p.27, cited in Nicholson, 2011, p.24). Discourses surrounding the usefulness of Arts in Education, creativity and imagination have a long trajectory, Arnold was amongst the many who championed ‘public access to the arts and culture’ for both ‘leisure’ and ‘formal education’ (Nicholson, 2011, p.24). However, Nicholson notes in the first half of the twentieth century commercial theatre was ‘regarded with suspicion’ a ‘shallow infection’ or ‘morally corrupting...[a] view that Slade himself supported’ (Nicholson, 2011, pp.52-53). The development of child drama in the UK fostered by Arnold, Slade and Brian Way provided a ‘modernist idea of child drama creat[ing] and ethical and aesthetic space’ allowing ‘a new form of theatre for children to emerge’ (Nicholson, 2011, p.53). There is nothing new here; Nicholson points to the recycling of ‘vernacular and egalitarian’ practices, and ethical and artistic concerns of theatre education in the 21st century by ‘teachers, artists, theatre-makers and young people’ (2011, p.83).

Hogan argues that the ‘*Four Component Model*’

for ethical behaviour and the development of moral literacy claims that four integrated inner psychological processes give rise to outwardly

observable behaviour (Hogan, 2015, p.76, citing Rest, Navarez, Thoma & Bebeau, 2000).

Hogan's model includes '*Moral sensitivity, Moral judgement, Moral motivation, & Moral character*' that relate and impact on personal professional ethical practice: 'moral character, agency or motivation, sensitivity and virtue' (Hogan, 2015, p.76).

Any ethical framework may need to apply to both corporate and educational settings, to ensure a high level of trust and permission for the outcomes to be valid. Neelands warns:

when theatres of healing and entertainment masquerade as political spaces for radical social transformation or claim to lead to "empowerment" or to "make a difference to the lives of others" the effect can be to further normalise historical patterns of inequality and disadvantage (Neelands, 2007a, p.313-314).

In AT, and particularly in FT, dialogical engagement is critical, with an expectation of individual responsibility for the Spect-actors with the 'Joker' acting as the arbiter, implying equity to allow participants to be treated collectively while they at the same time are allowed to

act as Subjects in the world as opposed to being objects to be acted upon (Freire, 1974, 1982a, 1982b). As Subjects, then, humans, who are in a constant state of development, can act to transform their reality and "go on to a state of being, in search of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1982b, cited in Au, 2007).

The setting of safe boundaries in the execution of participatory theatre is paramount.

It is connected with the equally important questions of whether the activities of participatory theatre can affect reality and of that way in

which the emotional safety of participants can be compromised and must be protected (Hare cited in Rifkin, 2010, p.30).

Rifkin observes that 'Forum Theatre and Role Play have been appropriated in ways that may not have been anticipated by their earlier proponents' (Rifkin, 2010, p.5).

AT can suggest strategies for change in behavioural and conflict situations. The diversity of contexts provides for extremes, not all that are fictional or safe but bringing real situations back to life; for example, health and safety for oil platform workers, and Hartley's intervention workshops for torture victims²³ with their perpetrators (Hartley, 2005, Hartley and Bond, 2012). Boal promotes FT as a possible vehicle in providing possible solutions.

An interpenetration of fiction into reality and of reality into fiction: all those present can intervene at any moment in search of solutions for the problems being treated (Boal, 2006, p.6).

Rifkin's exploration of an 'ethical framework as opposed to a code, capable of enhancing creativity while supporting practitioners, participants and institutions' (Rifkin, 2010, p12) may well be justified and timely.

Sadeghi-Yekta and Prendergast's edited anthology, *Applied Theatre: Ethics* explores, through international case studies, theoretical and practical ways the workings of ethics of applied theatre projects (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022).

²³ Watching Hartley's *El arte del silencio: obra en un acto* (The Art of Silence) at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival c. 2008, in a church, at 7am, with actors reliving scenes between torturer and victim, was a chilling experience.

McKay, working with students in an HE institution, provides a 'potential model of ethical practice for knowledge exchange in applied theatre training' (McKay, 2023, p.14). McKay's AT projects highlighted the complexity of the interactions in local communities with participants and local representatives that initially highlighted stereotypes. In the end, the

event enabled agency for the participants to share their own knowledges with decision makers in an impactful and meaningful way, that involves a HE institution but does not require the knowledge produced to be subsumed into that institution for the knowledge to be legitimised (2023, p.95).

In the past, radical and politically active theatre groups and companies, many well supported and well funded, provided much of the experimentation and innovation as prequels to current AT practices. In the 1980s, the funding of Barrow-on-Furness-based *Welfare States*'²⁴ seven-year project increased from zero to £500,000 with over 2,000 people actively taking part as performers and makers. 'Cultural intervention on this scale in such a context lays strong foundations for an efficacious outcome to individual performances' (Kershaw, 1992, p.240). Kershaw observed that prior to the arrival of the Welfare State, critical representations of the shipyards, whose build included nuclear submarines, came to the town from outside and 'mainly through CND demonstrations' (Kershaw, 1992, p.241).

Welfare State's singular contribution was to invent and develop an aesthetic language through which the community could itself express its attitudes to the malignant/beneficent presence (1992, p.241).

²⁴ Welfare State International was a British experimental theatre group formed in 1968 by John Fox and Sue Gill et al. <https://www.welfare-state.org/pages/aboutwsi.htm> [accessed 19/10/2024]

The reliance on external donors was seen by some as the downfall of community arts 'an economic model from the 1970s that, in Kelly's view, undermined the creative and cultural freedom of the community arts movement [and as a result] incorporated as a quasi-independent subsidiary of the welfare state, and although it "did good", it was no more revolutionary than the district nurse' (Kelly 1984, 97, cited in Balfour, 2009, p.352).

Some forty years on, Danny Boyle, when staging the 2012 London Olympic opening ceremony, may have been contracted conditionally on confirmation that the works would not be measured or influenced by any of his personal or political allegiances. However, the 'staging of an NHS hospital—a scene that Danny Boyle claims some government ministers wanted to withdraw' went ahead regardless, even though 'for some papers at the time, it epitomized Danny Boyle's leftist bias' (Lambert-Charbonnier, 2018, p.2). Boyle's ceremony was AT, state sponsored and was staged in a venue 'beyond theatre' (Thompson 2003 cited in Neelands, 2007a). What of the 'measurable outcomes' (RIDE 2006, cited in Neelands, 2007a, p.10). Initial responses seem to indicate that it made everyone feel good – 'minutes of happiness' were had and possibly that this event was, or might turn out to be 'socially transformative' (Neelands, 2007a, p.4) All the possible indicators of successful AT were present.

Ackroyd and others were concerned that AT academics and university departments (many in Education Schools) were seen to be the current 'key holders' of AT and it was in their interests to be more inclusive, less restrictive and more innovative.

Arts that have a cause and effect, that just do something, educate, cause reaction, cause remonstrance, or challenge the status quo are not new, and are particularly well represented in landmarks of

theatre; for example, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, Bond's *Saved*, Osborn's *Look Back in Anger*, Delany's *Taste of Honey*, Kane's *Blasted* and Kelly's *The Gates of Kyiv*. Yet without being overtly didactic, art can touch a nerve or an emotion, trigger a memory, or cause a physical sensation a 'tingle factor', considers emotions, how we define, measure, or assess creativity (Kleiman, 2005). A key issue in discussing and defining creativity is whether the focus in education is upon those we deem, 'exceptional creative individuals' (2005, p.3).

Consideration of ethical issues are strong elements of this research enquiry and reflect on how my colleague Kim and I considered the ethics of our practice.

2.9 Aesthetics & the Value of Arts in & for Education

Despite O'Toole's assertion that AT takes place 'beyond conventional theatres' (O'Toole 2007 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.4), theatre spaces may not be conventional, they can still employ theatrical devices. Theatre can be site specific, outdoors in the street, on public transport, in museums, etc. The very space and context could bring into question the efficacy and aesthetic of the practice, where theatre space and process 'is valued above product' (Jackson, 2006, p.28) because the product may be seen as unworthy. Good theatre practices and aesthetics are important in any theatre space, including AT, otherwise AT is then neither 'good education, nor good art' (2006, p.28). AT practitioner work sits within the wider debate and contests of the usefulness of the arts in and for arts education, including the discourse that 'there is no such thing as a distinct genre called educational theatre' (2006, p.12).

The artistry of theatre has been fundamental to the development of its usefulness, either through direct intervention, or with educational underpinnings. Jackson adds theatre performance histories and plays, including those of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov, Brecht, Miller, Moliere, and Kalidasa provide witness not only to an aesthetic, but they also have an ability to convey meaning; they are *educational* and include issues, that are social and political, displaying and 'reflected the tensions detectable in the work of many dramatists between their expressed philosophies and the plays themselves' (Jackson, 2006, p.52). But is art sacrificed for meaning when it is deliberately applied to provide that educational message? This has, and continues to be a key debate in arts education, and its relevance here is located in drama, performance and theatre. It is contentious to separate 'social' from 'aesthetic' theatre and performance work, with one's primary focus being art, but there is tension and contestation over the equity of educational aims and its aesthetics when situated in theatre and performance (Jackson, 2006, p.2).

Prendergast discusses the practitioner 'commitment to theatre as an aesthetic medium' to afford and facilitate 'participants [to] act, reflect, and transform', with the possibility of bringing about change (Prendergast cited in Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.66). She argues that 'good ethical theatre contains the *conditions for prompting* critical ethical thinking rather than *doing the thinking* for participants or audiences' (Cited in Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.73). For Jackson, it's the 'making sense of the artists vision that constitutes aesthetic perception' allows us to see, and for the audience to be challenged, moved in a reflection of real life (Jackson, 2006, p.36).

Before cuts in arts provision and changes to the UK National Curriculum, Ackroyd argued that the increase in AT in education and training targeted political initiatives and employability (Ackroyd, 2007, p.6). Now there is little distinction, there is little or *no* funding. Funding for prospective projects is now more likely to have an emphasis on results.

The imperatives, constraints including funding for those in academic institutional practice may now be very different. Still, Balfour warned that practice 'does need to be funded but not at any price' (Balfour, 2009, p.357), and encourages vigilance in the relationship between donor and practice, citing examples where commissions have led to inflexibility and have drifted 'from theatre forms to cognitive modalities' (Balfour, 2009, p.351). Balfour favours a practice that

might more readily encounter the accidental, and acknowledge that what applied does is not always linear, rational and conclusive in its outcomes, but is more often messy, incomplete, complex and tentative (2009, p.357).

The effects of the 2008 economic crash and the global COVID 19 pandemic (2019) made huge and significant impact on all artforms, it may have been subjected to academic posturing with social engagement delivered via an institutional and academic framework/s, yet still there has been a significant rise in academic interest in the area of AT. AT activities may be viewed as attempts to collectively socioculturally engineer, rather than serve the individual and those communities in which those individuals exist. This may be repeating the excesses of 19th century anthropology and the worst kind of excesses of colonialism. Researchers aware of the pitfalls don't always get it right. Rizvi reminds us that

it is impossible to look at a place or culture without seeing it as interrelated to other places and cultures, to history and to the cultural politics of interculturality (Rizvi, 2008, p.30).

The pitfalls of well intentioned anthropological post 'colonial excesses' were repeated when Australian visitors 'fly in and fly out', in Baldwin's *Life Drama Papua New Guinea: Contextualising Practice* (Baldwin, 2010b). The Life Drama HIV project 'instigated by Australian researchers' perceived a need, although this hadn't 'been instigated by Papua New Guineans' (Baldwin, 2010b, p.11). Baldwin is quite vague in an evaluation of the project, and subsequent papers (Baldwin, 2010a), providing a rather descriptive account of what happened and what *might* change (Baldwin and Haseman, 2012). It is difficult to speculate why this potentially rich project doesn't provide much substantive critical evaluation of itself in three research papers, or evidence of why there is a lack of impact or citation in subsequent research.

In the corporate world, Baldwin may not survive; work in the business sector needs to be 'specific' and tailored, and for Ackroyd, corporate work can be a 'positive' aspect of AT work (Ackroyd, 2007). Despite Ackroyd's misgivings about Nicholson's assertion that 'Theatre for Development isn't actually Applied theatre' (2005 cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.8), or Taylor's assertion that 'many members have no real experience in theatre form' (Taylor 2003: xxx, cited in Ackroyd, 2007, p.8), I would argue that Baldwins work lacked sufficient experience amongst its members and could not be judged as AT and *Theatre for Development*. It may be that the lack of theatre experience reduces the aesthetic imperative, and as Jackson noted earlier, makes for 'neither good education, or good art' (Jackson, 2006, p.28).

Ackroyd and Jackson seem to delineate two distinct AT camps – those in socially engaged theatre, others in the corporate world seemingly just for personal or commercial gain. Neelands clearly distinguishes forms of AT ‘which are determinedly pro-social’, which require ‘active participation’, which are not so bogged down in the commercialisation or corporate use of AT, but which focus on AT’s emergent identity as one that

distances itself from commercial and popular forms of theatre-as-entertainment and associates itself with other marginalised pro-social and efficacious theatre movements such as Drama and Theatre in Education (DIE/TIE), Theatre for Development and particularly the Theatre of the Oppressed and the work of Augusto Boal (Neelands, 2007a, p.4).

The *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice* (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009b), signals theatre playwrights’ use of social criticism, debate revolutionary action, social and political issues in AT. Prendergast acknowledges the importance of theatre as a ‘safe way of talking back to power’ (2009b, Ch.1.3, p.7). ‘AT is *informed* by these plays’, illustrating models of ‘effective theatre’, including the ‘aesthetic’ of the forms, and ‘works overtly either to reassert or to undermine socio-political norms’ (2009c Ch.1.3, p.8).

AT literature and research continues to be well represented with an abundance of works and publications appearing in recent years: *Applied Theatre Research* first published in 2013²⁵ and *Research in Drama Education* (RIDE) – renamed in 2009 *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* – Prendergast’s *Facilitator’s Handbook* (2013), Francis’s *Acting on HIV* (2012), Barnes’s *Applied Theatre and Drama* (2014), Hartley’s *Applied Theatre in Action* (2012),

²⁵ See <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-journal,id=218/> [accessed May 2021].

Nicholson's *Theatre Education & Performance* (Nicholson, 2011), *The Applied Theatre Reader* (Prentki and Abraham, 2020), 'Your luxury loft... applied theatre practices in a marginal district of Majorca, Spain' (Bermúdez de Castro et al., 2021), *Learning to Play with Memory* (Harper, 2021), *Insights in Applied Theatre – The Early Days and Onwards* (O'Connor, 2022), *Applied Theatre: A Pedagogy of Utopia* (Busby, 2022), Julian Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed and its Times* (Boal, 2023). These are just some of a plethora of academic material worthy of further consideration for research enquiry, not counting related sectors/areas, such as arts, health, and sciences.

2.10 Arts in and for Education – Summary

Since I began teaching, I have continued to observe a considerable shift in the use of technology in the arts, providing access for anyone to make music, films, publish work, and make art without the need for much tuition. The mystique around creating and realising ideas has all but gone, and in a humanist manner and central to Freire's pedagogy, people can more readily be 'beings for themselves' not 'beings for others' (Freire, 1970, p.74). Although what may be absent in these acts of art and ideas is individual critical consciousness – *the knowing* and an awareness that can spur action and bring about the possibility of change or transformation – Freire's *conscientização*²⁶ (Freire, 1970) and through *Forum Theatre* Boal suggests transformation *might* be realised.

Eisner makes exhaustive claims for the usefulness of arts education:

²⁶ 'The term *conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (FREIRE, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Herder and Herder.

To suggest that education has something to be learned from the arts is to turn topsy-turvy the more typical view that the arts are basically sources of relief, ornamental activities intended to play second fiddle to the core educational subjects [in education we] have much to learn from the arts. Put simply, the arts can serve as a model for teaching the subjects we usually think of as academic (Eisner, 2002, p.196).

The arts continue to be an area of choice and debate for policy and decision makers in the UK, despite exhaustive historical pedigree and a substantive evidence base that widely supports the arts and its uses including *Research Links the Arts with Student Academic Gains* (Gullatt, 2007). Despite continuing negative debate, and after many years, my colleagues and I still do *arts in education*. We adapt to continue arts work, despite incessant criticisms, belligerent opposition and the decline of arts provision in education across all sectors and a general lack of support and funding. The meta-question this poses, despite all this opposition and these obstacles, is *how* and *why* an arts practitioner is still able to continue to engage and develop their practice?

Those academics or researchers who tend to come from drama, education or teaching backgrounds may have little if anything to say about the art and the aesthetics of AT. In this research my fellow practitioner Kim provides a useful measure in the exploration of the aesthetic as he's a theatre maker, actor, director and teacher. In the next chapter, I outline how, with Kim's support, I went about the AT practice for this research.

Chapter 3

Applying a Theoretical Framework, Methodology in the Research Design

3.1 Introduction to Research Design and Aims

This chapter first explains the rationale for repositioning my original research methodology to an auto-ethnographic approach. It then goes on to outline the theoretical framework, methodology and research design, exploring the role of the practitioner researcher as ethnographer and autobiography as part of this research methodology. Discussion is given to methodological issues, ethical practice, research design and my positionality.

3.1.1 Changing to an auto-ethnographic and an auto-biographical approach.

My initial ideas of what I wanted from my research were clear and I knew how I was going to go about it. My intentions were to examine my professional practice in the context of AT using examples of events already in the planning stages, or were recent permissions, and ethical considerations had been sought and agreed. These are the three events I describe in in my introduction and in Chapter One.

I set out with a traditional approach to my research design, aims, and data collection. In the beginning, this seemed to be an effective way of examining my practice and gave ample opportunities to collect data from live events and probe deeper, using observations, interviews of participants and on-site notes. I was clear that there would be hurdles and challenges as a researcher and as a participant observer, mindful of the ethical considerations. My preparation, delivery and collection of evidence was clear to me, and appeared at first relatively straightforward.

I planned to use an approach akin, or at least similar to that of the stages of theatre production, as described below.

- Select a script – or a theme/s.
- Commissioning – work with the client groups.
- Planning, Location and Audience.
- Rehearse, workshopping.
- Performance and execution.
- Review.

This would seed the data to support the thesis and provide:

- observation records
- video and audio recordings
- images
- interviews.

Once I began to write up the thesis, there were data aplenty, but I then began struggling with articulating a methodology with the methods and data collection. Whilst I was able to justify my Practice as Research (PaR), and my position as Insider Researcher and Participant Researcher, I was missing the reflections and reflective practices that led me to the research in the first instance. It was the longevity of my practice (not as a practitioner of AT but) in education and training that was missing and wasn't allowing me to connect my life experiences to each other and to the more recent events that were to be the body of the research.

Reflections and reflexively were much more important than I had initially considered; I needed to use my past, the 'out-of-jointness' (Sloan, 2018, p.585), to better inform the present and future. By changing my thesis write up to an auto-ethnographic reflective research methodology, it provided more clarity, and afforded a richer seam of data that resonated with genealogical critical theories

in the development of my own practice, and Applied Theatre (Jackson, 2006).

Using an auto-ethnographic practice-based research method allowed me to describe how and why I selected the events that formed the basis for the data I analyse. This approach reflected an iterative process of building, refining, reflecting, improving and making sense of data as a basis for analysis. Furthermore, this allowed me to examine the ethical complexities that arose in researching my own and others' practices, where these practices are in 'contested spaces', and are in themselves risky (Preston, 2013, p.231).

The research was designed to reflect how my AT practice developed and provide signs and signals about efficacy and reliability, reflecting the ethical considerations of current practice. Using autobiography I was able to explore and reflect on my practitioner development and shifts in practice, illustrated and informed by debates and contestations in the field of AT.

It was the accidents, incidents and serendipity that allowed me to reevaluate through new lenses and contextualise the past for the present, with more recent experiences providing the basis of my research. This was especially true when I recalled my drama/theatre work with students and helped now to appraise my positionality and what at the time seemed instinctive. My positionality and identity has become embedded in my work and life, and is reflected in the auto-ethnographic approach, and my autobiography. I'm not alone in this approach to research that includes auto-ethnography reported as being a 'life changing' experience (Muiruri cited in Prendergast and Saxton, 2009b) with 'assumptions that underpin our practice, rather than mere confession' (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018), and commentary

devoted to 'The Life-Changing Experience' (Nethsinghe (2012, p.7) et al cited in Cooper and Lilyea, 2022, p.197).

Whilst the chronology of my life experiences is important, it is the impact and development that have emerged to underpin my genealogical development of self and identity that are central.

In *Reason and Passion*, Carsten et al. explore parallel worlds of biography and ethnography. Ethnography generally 'requiring some degree of distance and detachment', and biography often demanding some 'emotional commitment' from 'recalled experiences...[which] are as much the stuff of ethnography as of biography and imbricated in the everyday' (Carsten et al., 2018, p.2-4). These 'parallel worlds' are 'intertwined along several dimensions and mutually illuminating', with my vignettes providing examples that include 'moral judgements' that 'pervade biography and ethnography [that] are simultaneously reasoned and emotional, private and political' (2018, p.2,9.10). One of the moral judgements, both for this research and my working practice, was the value placed on trust.

Vignette 10: Trust

Trust games are intrinsic to drama and theatre workshops. One such exercise reminded me of the power, the hierarchy of the teacher and the associated dangers. I had had considerable time with the students, building up trust to the extent that there was nothing out of the ordinary about a drama exercise, living out 'roles'. On one occasion, my students were 'intergalactic travellers'. A break in the workshop meant moving to another building – 'stay in character' was a grave mistake, as they drove by car to the annex building a couple of miles away. You can only imagine how that went, and I never repeated that exercise again!

Such trust was usually built over time in practice, AT and FT time was very often relatively limited and short, or a small part of longer training events. This required trust and a degree of intervention and acceptance by our audiences; the kind of buy-in based on theatre's notion of the 'suspension of disbelief...a powerful instrument, of both aesthetic and learning potency' (O'Toole, 2009,p.485). But more on ethics and moral judgements later, and in Chapter 4 when describing the events.

3.1.2 Theoretical framework and epistemological beliefs

Noting the parallels of ethnography and biography and conflating emotion with distance, the research undertaken has endeavoured to observe a clear theoretical and ethical framework whilst reflecting my epistemological beliefs. The research design reflects my current operational practice whilst taking account of the research requirements of UK universities, including ethical considerations. Ethics can be divided into two distinct areas: 1) the ethics of the Applied Theatre Practitioner, and 2) the ethics and processes of investigating doctoral research in the delivery of a thesis. However, this is not a simple binary position as academic researcher ethics and AT ethics practice are often blurred and even complementary. My 'commitment to ethical process is integral to applied theatre' and much more than 'a moral debate; it is a political act that is necessary for systemic change' (Afolabi, 2021, p.100).

I considered 'thematic analysis' with a focus on data (Lester et al., 2020, p.94-103). Whilst to some extent it may be useful, it seemed an overly prescriptive approach. In essence, my research wasn't doing anything that was different from my current AT work; however, my senses were heightened by the need to have clarity, honesty and integrity in the planning and selection of evidence

drawn from my AT work, as 'my practice shapes my research and vice versa' (Afolabi, 2021, p.100).

Deliberative questioning throughout the research involved continuous reflection and the kind of 'question-making and question-asking' (Morgan & Saxton 2006 cited in Afolabi, 2021, p.100) that form part of my ethical stance in this academic research. This was shaped by AT processes and developments throughout the events and linked retrospectively to my life stories. The process of reflection takes account for each event 'before, in, and on action' (Afolabi, 2021, p.100) and in my case, also following and preparing for the next event. This was the rationale for deliberately using *Theatre Production* as a metaphor that included commissioning, planning, rehearsal, workshopping, performance, execution and review. As such, this provided useful foregrounding, reinforcing my auto-ethnographic arts-based approach to research design, including reflecting and positioning me as an insider researcher, and the ensuing challenges of research for an AT practitioner.

3.2 Methodological approach of Practitioner as Researcher (PaR)

As a Practitioner as Researcher (PaR) the act of being there is 'demanding, both emotionally and intellectually' (Sadeghi-Yekta and Prendergast, 2022, p.26). The way we approach ethical practice is a 'crucial aspect' and 'our presence is at the heart of what we do', and allows us, without distraction to 'focus...listen, see, learn...and respond, in the moment', these are key elements both for the practitioner and participants (2022, p.26).

As a practitioner researcher, while I was mindful of this role's many critics, I was also aware of its potential to 'reduce ignorance' (Thomson and Walker, 2010, p.36-40). Taylor warns that 'Applied

theatre workers cannot be conned into thinking they are the saviors of the community' (Taylor cited in Sadeghi-Yekta, Prendergast, & Balfour, 2022, p.66). AT isn't a panacea for real change; Boal reminds us that theatre provides a space and 'rehearsal' and 'preparation for when real opportunities for social change arrive' (2022 p.67).

Using Theatre Production as a metaphor incorporated as a research methodology seemed a natural choice when the 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs' with the 'potential to generate knowledge and innovations' (Smith, 2009, pp.5,231). Despite some misgivings, creative input and output from participants instigated and facilitated by practitioners can suggest, lead to, and afford change or transformation, or provide an explication of AT practice.

The AT events described herein provide reference points and examples of methods and approaches I have adopted in my practice, providing a basis and context for this thesis. One of the challenges for the insider researcher is to ensure that we 'become critically aware of the potential exploitation of people, their lives, and their stories in conducting practice-based research' (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.282).

This research is characterised by the cyclical nature of each of the events, and as the research unfolded, new evidence was generated and recorded from the events explored here. The combined research strategy that included discovery, ethnography, auto-ethnography and autobiography provided a developmental and flexible research methodology. As practitioner researcher, this afforded, reflexively, the review and reinterpretation of my AT previous practice.

Vignette 11: Memories of Applied Theatre #1

I'm not the first person to say to their colleagues and family, 'I've forgotten more than I can remember'. Memories are often triggered by life moments that contain vivid recollections, some in minute detail, and this is where I shall begin with my early recollections of Applied Theatre (AT). AT was a term not widely used, if at all, in 1989 when I first came into contact with Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985) with fellow students on the Educational MA programme (The University of Leeds). 'Oppression' became a latch word we used interchangeably during our studies, socially and fashionably extolling its virtues or shortcomings in the conversations, comments and views of fellow student colleagues. But that is not my starting point, which began through a range of processes and a series of events that would ultimately lead to my doctoral research.

It's not fair we never get a chance – it's always them', an exasperated young boy muttered on leaving the school hall – referring to a certain class expressly selected by the staff to take part in a workshop, following a piece of Forum Theatre presented to a large pupil audience in the school hall by my undergraduates in an inner city Leeds secondary school (circa 2002).

To explain, I need to describe what led up to this moment (see Vignette 6), and some 15 years after the MA, then as member of staff, working with students in a University Drama department. We were commissioned by emergency services to produce educational theatre work for schools. This was an annual occurrence, and themes had included safety on the railways, bullying, drugs and alcohol abuse, knife crime and a variety of social issues. First year undergraduate students were charged with delivering a theatre performance piece and workshops to tour schools, including in inner city Leeds schools. There were four groups of students, with a lecturer leading each group.

Before we began on the commissioning process, staff provided a carousel of workshops taking around 15 to 20 students, with a different group each week. Staff had a free hand to do whatever they wished. I decided to run a series of practical team-building events that recognised the different disciplines and mix of each of these groups who came from dance, acting, dramaturgy and theatre design.



Photo 4 Undergraduates carousel workshop

Following the carousel workshops, I led a group of students split into two performance groups that each worked on a distinct AT performance and workshop that then toured schools. My nervousness was compounded on the tour by the first comment in a school: 'It's not fair we never get a chance – it's always them', and this was the trigger that began both my AT practitioner development and further research.

3.2.2 The Ethical Dilemma of the Participant/Insider Researcher

Early Days of Outreach work

In the early 2000s, working with university undergraduate students, in a School of Performance and Cultural Industries, there was little evidence of distinct AT programmes. Whilst there were opportunities for practical educational theatre outreach work and some skills development there weren't at that time 'ways of balancing the aesthetics of the art with the ethics of care' (Prendergast and Saxton, 2020, p.9). The notion that the 'theory is manifested in practice and the practice remains foundational to the theory' wasn't prevalent at the time and that the notion that 'universities value theorized accounts of practice over practice itself' still impacts on the AT practitioner researcher (O'Connor, (2015,370) cited in Prendergast and Saxton, 2020, p.9).

Using photography and video

In the early days of my work I used photographs extensively, and some are evident throughout the thesis. Changes in ethical research practice, reflect the way participants can now be represented by researchers. I have anonymised and censored my own photographs to such an extent that they undermine and fail to communicate or capture the essence of what is happening. When not anonymised, they can demonstrate and capture in the physical and facial expressions the essence of an event or activity, something that photographs can do so well.

Although the positive use of photography for research 'opens up new vistas of research possibilities', the 'ethical and philosophical challenges associated with photography research, specifically issues of power, informed consent, confidentiality, dignity, ambiguity and

censorship' (Cleland and MacLeod, 2021, p.230) must be acknowledged.

Without extensive permissions from audiences' the presentation of photographs here were always going to be problematic. In my early work at the university, we were able to use video that focused on performers while excluding the audiences of young children, retaining the audible feedback and reactions of the children, and capturing the visual responses of the performers.

The photographs used in this thesis have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants, although such protection 'could be a destruction of their identity thus creating harm in a different way' (Langmann and Pick, 2018). Whilst disappointing, the photographs were anonymised to respect the participants and reflect university ethics requirements.

Nevertheless, we spent time and effort gaining trust and creating safe spaces in designing and planning the execution of the AT events. Whilst participants understood that their participation in events may be used for research, their involvement was limited and anonymous in the training events defined by their employers, and participation in the events was voluntary.

Safe Places

Generally, the research participants were the for the AT events; events that provided safe spaces between participants and researcher – the practitioner/s. Participants were encouraged to take part and 'express their thoughts and views' (Cleland and MacLeod, 2021, p.233). Providing safe spaces was essential, thus 'empowering participants' at an early stage, to build a 'connection and trust between researcher and participant—and reduce

participant inhibition later on' (Wicks and Reason [50], cited in Cleland and MacLeod, 2021, p.235).

In later AT works I made use of 'reflective dialogues', using video and audio to 're-examine in-action decision-making' with my fellow theatre practitioner Kim, where his 'expertise' was 'regenerated by [his] actions through a cycle of reflection/theorisation' (Hepplewhite, 2014, p.326). In main I used audio dialogues in preference to video, which were useful for documenting any 'shifting sands' of practice, and in 'hindsight-possibly seeing the work afresh-and to debate' the practice (2014, p.327).

Autobiography and auto-ethnography – the mix

Autoethnography has its roots with a long established 'historical legacy of personal narrative in anthropology, sociology, and literature (Carspecken, 2023p.1068). Carspecken provides examples of autoethnography where works incorporate 'emotions, interpretations, desires, physical sensations, fantasies, and turning points' (2023p.1068). Carspecken's view is that there is a 'truncated view of history [that] distances current researchers from a range of interpretivist ideas and methods, many of which were highly influential in their time', (Darnell, 2001 cited in Carspecken, 2023p.1068). Perhaps with due caution this reflects the colonial anthropological discourse of the worst excesses around colonial ethnography imbalances of the 19th century.

I recognise that 'practitioner-research as a method of pursuing ethnographic research is challenging and difficult' (Carmichael & Miller, 2005, p.700-702), and even more so adding autobiography and auto-ethnography to the mix. 'In some respects the process is itself the point of the research' (2005). The process of designing and planning AT is an art, as much as the product itself. The challenges

of my research in examining my practice are the 'assumptions' and 'value-judgements' made, that may impede the ways that AT and my 'practice operates'. However, this 'adds great value to those who participate in it, at whatever level' (2005). For all these reasons, this kind of research is worthy of investigation. It is 'the process [that] is the art not the product' (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.39), by emphasising the traits required of AT's 'artistic practice', practitioners should use 'the same emphasis, precision, and deliberateness...otherwise we bake into the art violence, oppression, theft, trauma, pain' (2022, p.39).

Using an autoethnographic approach to this research allowed me to connect my autobiographical and personal experiences to cultural, social, and political contexts, making connections to my genealogical development as an AT practitioner. From this genealogical perspective, discussed below, there is a 'risk of re-inventing methodological wheels rather than building on earlier explorations' (Borofsky, 2019 cited in Carspecken, 2023p.1068).

It made sense to include 'blurring the lines' of 'historical autobiographies' and 'early memoirs' as part of a autoethnographic research with the potential to 'increase our field's ability to inspire change by reclaiming its history and scope' (2023p.1067).

It is in this regard that I have described my lived experiences to understand my cultural, social and life experiences, while autobiography allowed me to explore these lived experiences to gain reflexively, insights, perspectives, identities, and cultural contexts through analysis of personal narratives via vignettes.

Vignettes as a device allowed me to explore and provide examples of how the past, on reflection, informed my thinking then, now and for future. An autoethnographic approach made use of 'layered

accounts...vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection' (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). As a device vignettes are used to 'invoke' and to allow readers into an 'emergent experience...and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract' ones (Ronai, 1995,1996,1992 cited in Ellis et al., 2010).

An autoethnographic approach to this kind of research, with direct reference to AT events and activities described in the research, provided a gateway to 'gain a cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self' (Chang, 2008: 49 cited in Franklin, 2017p.281).

Genealogy methodology as an approach in context

I have drawn on the concept of genealogy to inform aspects of my methodology. Genealogy an idea attributed to Foucault who draws on Nietzschean philosophy, making a clear a distinction between 'History' and 'histories'. This distinction between history as a single unified narrative rather than the multiplicity of competing histories, allowed me to tell my story as a complex interplay of diverse narratives and perspectives.

Whereas History reflects 'origins' or attempts to 'capture exact essence' or the 'linear development' or 'evolution' (Foucault 1971: 78 & 76 cited in Jackson, 2006,p.10), the notion of genealogy as methodology in the context of AT is complex. As Balfour notes 'debate about definitions' create 'a complex territory of ever shifting interpretation, inference, competing genealogies and ideologies' (Balfour, 2009,p.348). The AT continuum reflects the diversity from traditional theatre, to socially engaging and participatory forms that employ the skills and techniques from drama and theatre 'derive[d] from similar yet distinctive vocabularies' (2009). This is not a linear process bound by History but is much more holistic and draws on *histories* -'a history of interpretations' that encapsulates 'many

theoretical and historiographical issues' (Foucault, p. 151–2, cited in, Freeman, 2006, p.364).

Jackson suggests that the social function of AT is as much about the audience, the 'theatrical event' and their values, expectations and by *their* 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu cited in Jackson, 2006, p.10). He suggests 'we set our understandings of theatre's function in the contemporary world in the larger context of what has happened in the past' (,p.10). The genealogy is the 'emergence' the 'marginal...unstable assemblage of faults, fissures and heterogeneous layers', a history that 'refuses the certainty of absolutes' (pp.82-87). It is in this context and framing that I have restricted my thinking about genealogy in relation to AT. I use the term genealogy 'a tool for encountering the past that refuses the myth of unitary origins' (Foucault cited in Freeman, 2006, p.364). In simple terms a nonlinear approach that aims in essence to produce a 'history of the present' (Focault cited in, Kearins & Hooper, 2002, p.733).

Using a genealogical approach links to my wider methodological orientation in my discussions about autoethnography. Crucially using the narrative vignettes I was able to map my history and how it branches off hither and thither. And then present and reflectively to have better and 'multi-focal understanding of events', that can be interpreted in a variety of ways, 'responsive to local meanings and to shifts in emphasis and desire' (Freeman, 2006, p.364).

My approach to the research allowed me to explore my 'history of the present' by examining the histories and origins of knowledge and discourse, revealing how they shaped my understanding of the present (Foucault cited in Freeman, 2006, page 9).

Developing Trust

Those early carousel workshops with students provided an opportunity to explore creativity with students. It was experiential. The photographs taken at that time were not for research but were a record of activities for use later as reflection and review by both staff and students. 'Trust and safety of space' were to become watchwords and guiding principles of my AT work, and 'safe' especially, was a term used frequently in participants' feedback.



Photo 5 Undergraduates' carousel workshop



Photo 6 Undergraduates' carousel workshop

The student groups were a real mix of theatre specialisms, and they generally took enthusiastically to the workshops, and it became impossible to distinguish them according to their disciplines. The degree of trust was noticeable, particularly from those students who weren't used to active participation of the kind that drama and theatre students were very familiar with. It was purposeful fun.

Vignette 12: Memories of Applied Theatre #2

Attendance was fluid during the early stages of the carousel activities. Once the groups were formalised into four performance groups, that changed. Over several weeks, I worked with my subgroups, facilitating the devising processes for the theatre pieces, to the commissioned briefs. We worked quite solidly, and often this was both emotionally and physically intense, with same dialogical traits that developed in my later AT work. These early undergraduate sessions took place once a week, in a full three-hour

morning, whereafter students were timetabled to continue working self-directed in the afternoon, and to present/show/discuss progress at the following session a week later. A few weeks into the sessions and an unusually high attendance I said, 'sorry guys I don't get this – I mean I'm flattered but you all turn up every week on time – what's going on?

One student immediately, if rather sheepishly, replied, 'We're scared' – there was a consensual nod of heads and some embarrassed laughter...

'Of what?' I asked...

Another student quietly muttered 'most of us have never been into a state school – and certainly not Leeds'.

I was stunned!

I was shocked but it was understandable – recent reports of violence in Leeds schools and even guns had been in the news. But I was also heartened as they seemed determined to produce something worthy.

Clearly, the majority of the students who came from non-state schools and who were privately educated had identity issues – a class issue – which resonated with my own class background, and this is something I discuss later in terms of my own positionality.

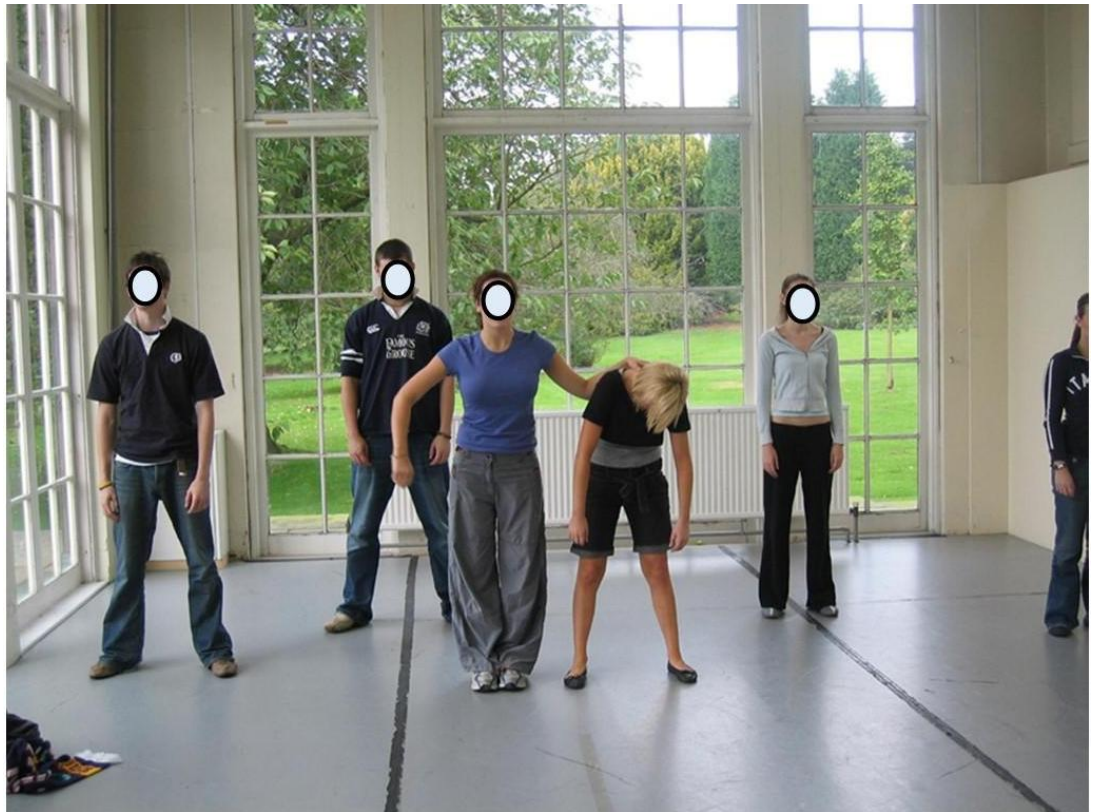


Photo 7: Undergraduate actors rehearse commissioned work by Police & Fire Service

My input to the devising processes was rather naïve, as I loosely adopted Boal's Forum Theatre (FT) techniques and concepts. I was trained as a musician and teacher, but my 'head and mind' was in theatre and drama. Until my MA I had had no formal drama training, something I was very conscious of. Later I was gratified to read the background to seminal practitioners, who also had no formal drama training. Gordan Vallins was a Geography teacher, gaining experience of drama and education that 'would not only shape his work at the Belgrade, but determine the founding principles of [Theatre in Education] TiE' (Turner, 2010, p.5). Renowned for his work on *Improvisation*, Kieth Johnstone (Johnstone, 1992) studied engineering at university.

As we left behind the student workshops at the university, my seeds of doubt were affirmed once we got into the schools, and my application, knowledge and use of FT became challenging.



Photo 8: Undergraduates perform commissioned work by the Police & Fire Service

In the processes of designing and delivering credible theatre work that formed part of AT work, the pedagogies Boal and Freire's, were lost. We were more 'governed and defined' by the demands made by the commissioners, the fire service and police, the funding agencies (Balfour, 2009, p.350,352). My work and that of my students was being monitored by the University for student assessment, and also to ensure that we met the funding and commissioning requirements. The Education establishments and their staff in the schools had their own agendas.

On reflection, despite our good intentions, our work and our actions in those West Yorkshire Schools, whilst laudable, weren't fully inclusive and didn't take into account the participants of our theatre pieces, potentially adding to the children's social oppression. These early collective theatre events should have been contextualised and followed up to include 'and discuss the social

context for individual internalised oppressions' (Kina and Fernandes, 2017, p.243). At best, this early work was TIE and not Forum, or Applied Theatre; it was *exclusive* and only included a select handful of children who took part in a follow-up workshop.

Following this event, I sought to find ways to change my practice so this wouldn't happen again. This wasn't what was envisaged or intended, it wasn't inclusive and unlikely to bring out any 'wider social change' (Etherton and Prentki, 2006, p.146). I considered that employing a more democratic or dialogical process and lessening my own 'theatre ego' required more careful consideration and execution if the work were to have meaning for all. This wasn't even 'show and tell', it was more 'watch and go' for the majority. Why didn't we do the workshop, the FT with the entire audience? We did in future events (see photos 1 & 1a, and Event 1, Chapter 4).

Our change came with more experience and knowledge, and revisions to the earlier projects were made immediately. More personal research followed that was then implemented practically in subsequent workshops and events and led to me working with Kim Jackson, a fellow colleague and theatre practitioner.

To support an emerging AT practice, in 2004 I formed a limited company to provide consultancy and training, for the rapid growth and provision of Higher Education in Further Education, with a particular focus on Assessment.

Vignette 13: Workshopping Assessment

Events and workshops challenged our understanding of the purpose of assessment and how that is understood pedagogically by those who conduct assessment and those who receive assessment decisions and feedback. At that time, the UK National Student Survey (NSS) reported woefully on assessment feedback negatively,

at below 50%. There has been significant change in the NSS 2023²⁷ data, which reported 72-81% overall satisfaction with assessment. We continued working with employers, employees, schools, students, colleges, universities and other agencies, including the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the then Higher Education Academy (HEA) that reformed in 2018 to become Advance HE. We provided support and workshops with and for these agencies and organisations, as well as for universities, colleges and conference (See photos 9, 10, 10a).

The 'Scones' workshop was one pivotal moment in the assessment training – using scones as a way of creating an assessment framework to assess qualitative values. We asked several groups to judge the quality of different scones, determine which were the best, reflect on how those judgements were made, and come up with a grading scheme. We told the teams that the scones came from Asda, M&S, Sainsburys and a Local Bakery and asked them to assess each scone, rank them and create their own assessment framework. All teams did this with rigour and the results were varied, showing a clear range of differences. However, all the scones came from one supplier – M&S. One of the 'judges' – a university professor – was unable to make any assessment, as he noted 'I don't like scones'.

²⁷ National Student Survey – NSS 2023



Photo 9: HE creative workshop, 'Scones'

The workshop raised a number of concerns, such as how do you make judgements about something you don't like – this could be music, theatre, art or a research area, and how do you create an aesthetic assessment rubric. How do we assess creativity when 'creativity is heralded as crucial to individuals and societies, valuable for the economy, essential for leadership and vital for the future of work' (Fox and Smith, 2023, p.1). My work on supporting assessment continues and began and still begins with the question, *what's it for?*

Forum Theatre work continued...

Kim and I began to refine our FT techniques, presenting at more conferences, using interactive workshops, often with large and challenging audiences. In a quest to find out more, Kim and I attended several intense residential workshops with FT practitioner

and author Jennifer Hartley²⁸ (Hartley and Bond, 2012) and absorbed Jennifer's work and practice into our own events. One such event in Northwest England demonstrated the significant changes we made, where the whole audience was included.



Photos 10: Kim and I – Forum Theatre HE Students Assessment Feedback, c. 2014



Photos 10a: Kim and I – Forum Theatre HE Students Assessment Feedback, c. 2014

²⁸ Jennifer Hartley is the founder of Theatre vs Oppression <https://www.wearetvo.com/> that works with and uses FT worldwide, providing events and AT in her own practice, working with minority and oppressed groups (in addition to their respective oppressors) internationally. Jennifer's publications include plays, academic articles, and poetry.

Our work was very well received as it was more dynamic, inclusive and 'dialogical' – not that we were fully aware of our dialogical intentions at that point.

In 2008, the banking and economic crisis and recession hit the UK and consultancy work dried up. Our work became less frequent, or poorly paid. I then took up further research and decided to bide my time and seek to become a better practitioner through further investigation and research. I later enrolled on the EdD at the University of Nottingham and began the processes of finding a voice for my practice and its development. I began by revisiting and examining Boal's legacy, including his pedagogy and *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1979). It was then that I started to explore and question the validity of Forum Theatre work through the work of current practitioners, including the ethics of practice – a practice that can be used and abused for profit, with some dubious aesthetic/artistic and academic credibility, and often with the premise of being for financial gain.

3.3 Research Methods

The research was conducted sequentially over time, with the AT sessions selected for the diversity of context, and for their different educational settings, intended to illuminate any commonalities and distinctions between the different audiences for AT, and to some extent useful as a comparative study. Working with Kim, I was often a participant observer, or actor, with Kim as 'Joker'. For example, in Event 3 – the training for Higher Education (HE) teaching staff – I provided additional perspectives on HE assessment practices.

There was a combination of different yet similar performance vehicles, venues and audiences. Common to each 'training' was

the delivery method using Forum Theatre, although each event used a range of AT and drama techniques. As researcher, the overall intention was to provide an insight into how the practitioner works in different contexts and with different participants, providing purposeful supportive and developmental narratives.

Our role as researchers is not to tell communities what the questions are but rather to support the construction and design of research methods that respond effectively to the challenges, as they are understood by the community from which they emerge (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015, p.51).

The research methods sought to include as much as was practicable, the views of the participants, and to question and discover how much they understood the practice and how this may offer the possibilities to engender change and/or transformation. The function/s within each event was also questioned; for example, the role of the 'Joker' in FT, and how that and other features of the processes and practice may have impacted on the success or otherwise of the training. But this was not an impact study and where inferences were made, these are noted in the findings and commentaries from participants.

Key to the research was understanding the role of the AT practitioners in the planning processes, as well as the practice itself. I sought to capture the process of planning and the intentions behind the AT practices. I observed the practice, and processes as they unfolded, and after each event, captured the reflections on the practice of both participants and AT practitioners', both key to the data.

3.3 Methods of data generation

Key to generating the data were observations of practice, including formal and informal discussions before, during and following events.

I used my text-based data and Kim's notes and reflective journals. Key data were from interviews, with Kim as practitioner, and with some of the participants, including actors. I added an interview conducted by an independent external interviewer who had little knowledge of AT, who questioned Kim and me about our AT practice. Observational evidence was planned to include audio, video and photographs from the AT events.

For each event, data were gathered in situ through observations using contemporaneous note taking, audio and video. Evidence gathered included discussions or interviews with us as practitioners, and also with some participants. Observational evidence was supported by photographs, audio and video, which allowed some basic semiotic analysis taken from the events. Intentional observations looked for evidence of

a greater engagement with the breadth of theory, for both the teacher and student, far from limiting creativity, will feed the theatrical semiotic vocabulary of the students, opening them up to thoughts and ideas previously unknown to them (Nicholson, 1998 cited in IDIERI7, 2012, p.44),

This includes how the practitioners and participants 'perform[ed]' at these FT events and in general terms 'how it [was] done' (Esslin, 1988).

As I already noted, Kim as the joker was a key feature throughout the data gathering, and indeed entire research process. Whilst the participants were important to the data collection and events, they had less relevance as they acted as a participant body rather than as individuals. Nevertheless, their individual responses and contributions to the research, when useful, were included.

Whilst other elements of Theatre of Oppression (see Figure 1) are used in the application as educational theatre practitioner work, the central thrust is derived from *Image* and *Forum Theatre*, and therefore a deep understanding of its genesis and wider application was fundamental to this research enquiry.

The data collected in this research aimed to identify some of the claims made in the literature review for the efficacy of, and challenges and pitfalls in AT practice. These included AT as a vehicle for change, transformation, conscientisation, engagement, entertainment, education, empowerment and providing safe spaces, and the ethics of AT practice.

This research could not be defined by a fixed or singular methodological approach. By examining the processes in the three events (sessions), the research intention was to discover whether there was potential to better inform praxis and to explore the 'genealogical development' of FT as an established and current applied educational theatre practice (Broughton and Brewster, 2007, Jackson, 2006, Nicholson, 2011). Furthermore, consideration was given how my general knowledge, my own and Kim's application of AT practice and other practitioners may have changed and developed overtime. The oversight of the total processes and AT methods allowed for planning, investigation, revision, review and some rumination on the making and using of FT.

Practitioners' work (mine and Kim's) in this field included the positioning of Freiran pedagogical dialogical techniques (Freire, 1996). A range of AT methods and techniques were used in training provision, events and daily interventions. We used conversational aspects of AT as 'a means of gathering knowledge' (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015, p.216, Shaughnessy, 2012).

3.4 An Overview of Data

A basic overview of data, sources, types, and format of data that informed this research is outlined below.

1. Life stories/histories: 1 x 18 Vignettes; Biographical, Auto-ethnographic – references & activities.
2. Field notes: from Bibliographic/Auto-ethnographic references/activities from Gary Hargreaves (researcher) and Kim Jackson – paper, video, photographs, audio, journals, diaries, documents.
3. Interviews: including informed participants' consent from events – audio files with pseudonymised transcripts of audio files of the interviews.
4. Interviews: with Kim Jackson, including with Gary Hargreaves; with actors – audio with transcripts.
5. Emails: anonymised from commissioning events.
6. Practice-based Research: Observations of AT Workshops and events with the participants and commissioners of work.

The Participants

The literature review identified and highlighted several affordances in respect of Applied Theatre (AT), educational drama and theatre studies curriculum. Prendergast and Saxton summarise below.

The affordances that applied theatre offers allows practitioners/participants the opportunities to play together inside a fictional world in which they are able to take risks and to trust the safe spaces that have been co-constructed in collaboration with others (Prendergast and Saxton, 2020, p.11).

Session 1: High School

The high school session featured a day of workshops with six sixth form students and six teaching staff who comprised the twelve actors for the Forum Theatre piece on the theme of bullying. FT explored *difficult conversations* that might be encountered with staff

and students, and this was then presented as after-school training which was attended by around 300 staff and invited parents. All participants and the school had their anonymity preserved.

Session 2: Higher Education examiner training

The training was attended by 11 examiners, including Kim and one full-time member of staff from the UK Higher Education awarding organisation ²⁹ for schools, colleges and training providers. All the attendees, with the exception of Kim who was in role, had their anonymity and confidentiality protected. Seven of the attendees provided feedback and are given aliases to protect their identity. They are:

Tony – Observer, fulltime awarding organisation member of staff.

Molly – External examiner.

Matthew – External examiner.

Simon – External examiner and team leader.

Gwen – External examiner.

Christine – External examiner and team leader.

Johnathan – External examiner.

And as me as senior external examiner, facilitator/training, and in role as actor, and Kim as delegate, actor and 'Joker'.

The attendees contributed to the research, providing evidence as Spect-actors, audience and participants.

Session 3: Contemporary Music Higher Education alternative (private) provider

The training was attended by 30+ academic, support staff and managers. In addition to Kim and me as presenters, two actors were employed, and one of the actors, Steve, who had previously worked with us, provided feedback and commentary on this event and

²⁹ I've not named the organisation for anonymity, although this is a multinational company providing UK and International Qualifications including Higher Education qualifications.

previous AT events. The delegates contributed to the research providing evidence observed as Spect-actors.

Post Event Follow-ups and Data

A range of interviews, including a significant number of interviews with Kim, took place before and following the AT/FT sessions. One interview was also undertaken by a fellow researcher and FT participant who interviewed Kim and me. Steve, our resident actor, reflected on Session 3 and also on my previous FT events. The delegate participants in the external examiner training were interviewed individually following Session 2.

Videos or audio recordings were made of all 3 sessions and included transcriptions. Photographs were also taken and used to illustrate AT application, techniques or the scale of the sessions. Kim provided contemporaneous notes and emails relevant to the sessions and his application of AT practice. I also had notes and diary/journal entries.

There were also a range of useful miscellaneous data, including emails, photographs and video from commissioners and from previous AT/FT events. Also, reference was made in the research to commissioning, preparation materials and documentation for the AT sessions, for example, FT proposal and scripts (see Appendix 1 & 3).

3.5 How the Research Design Developed and then Aligned with AT Practice

Kim and I developed our AT work over a number of years, both conducting AT research, further imbued by our attendance at several AT practitioner training events, allowing us to develop our practice. For example, working extensively with *Theatre Versus*

Oppression (TVO)³⁰, including residential Boal workshops with founder Jennifer Hartly.



Photo 11: Workshop on Image Theatre with TVO; circa 2013

In essence, we felt well placed and confident to undertake Applied Theatre work that we both scrutinised and reviewed following each event, always looking for improvements in the techniques we used, but also trying out new ideas.

Kim was a key player and a dominant character in this research. I had been working with Kim using Applied Theatre techniques for several years. Working alone Kim also delivered a number of coaching and training events with several corporate organisations, such as Rolls Royce, Balfour Beatty and workers in the Oil and Power industries. We had both amassed a wealth of experience

³⁰ <https://www.wearetvo.com/home> 'Over the years we have looked at all sorts of issues. If there's conflict there's a TVO approach to understanding it, from domestic abuse, gangs, tribal conflict, crime, addiction, abuse & homelessness. We've looked both inwards at ourselves, and outwards towards our communities' (accessed 01/02/2022).

delivering sessions to conferences, in higher education (HE) institutions and to HE providers, and had worked extensively with the then Higher Education Academy³¹, providing national events in the UK. The AT events with Kim described in Chapter 4, form the body of the research evidence and data.

Both Kim and I kept contemporaneous journal notes, monitoring events and sessions, additionally supported by participants' feedback, including audio and video recordings. Working together, we also spent time reflecting on and refining the design of new events. For example, we were always searching for a way to use FT with only the two of us, when we actually needed, or FT demanded a minimum of three people. This was often predicated by cost but on occasions we were able to make effective use of student actors in the centres where we were delivering events.

In addition, I conducted post-event interviews and logged communications, for example, emails from commissioners and participants. Whilst there were many other sessions before the ones described in this study, Session 1 was the first of three sessions that I intentionally chose to be included in the research and data analysis. In previous AT work we had always reflected on the sessions using various tools, including journal notes, photographs, audio and video recordings. Sometimes, we held post-mortem discussions, often immediately after an event with participants. For example, a FT event took place in a large Further Education College in the Northwest of England with HE students, many of whom were on Performing Arts programmes. Immediately following the event, a brief discussion took place with a tutor,

³¹ Higher Education Academy (HEA) was responsible for the UK Professional Standards Framework for higher education practitioners. On 21 March 2018, the HEA merged with the Leadership Foundation and the Equality Challenge Unit to form Advance HE [Source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advance_HE accessed 16/08/2021].

student actor, a student Spect-actor, Kim and me. We were able to audio record and photograph that discussion, and it is transcribed and can be found in Appendix 4. The focus of the event was *difficult conversations* with tutors and students on the theme of assessment and assessment feedback. At that time, the Higher Education Academy had commissioned us to provide national events, videos for staff and students, and support materials.



Photo 12: Joker (Kim) engages the audience while the actors freeze; ca. 2013



Photo 13: Post-event discussion with student (actor) and staff (Head of Department)



Photo 14: 'status of the tutor ...' student Spect-actor (see appendix 4)

These useful interactions and interjections during and following subsequent forum events helped to ensure that the research tools, including questions, were focused and apt, including any follow-up work undertaken with participants by Kim and me as practitioners.

I was mindful, for example, that in this short Q&A (Appendix 4) with the student actor and a student Spect-actor, our questions lacked focus and were often closed or somewhat leading. The interviews

that followed the three sessions described in Chapter 4 were much more open and considered so as to extract information with minimum directed questioning, encouraging more evaluative and reflective comments.

Reflections by participants on AT practice helped with clarification when examining and focusing on AT usage of theatre, drama skills and techniques and behavioural methods. Understanding how we used AT was scrutinised for its implications and for its safe application and ethical efficacy.

When we used actors, they were able to provide additional evidence, observations, or commentary that was useful to this research.

In designing this research, taking account of our background in AT and our experience as working practitioners was a critical part of this research journey. These backgrounds were not so much about the development of one person's take on AT, or any given methodologies and techniques over an historical period, but our 'genealogy'. Like Kim, I was looking for and applying a much broader perspective to the research.

The historic roots and precedents of educational (and applied and interventionist) theatre have tended to be ignored in recent years, and the loss of that broader perspective has sometimes resulted in overly narrow concepts of theatre's social functions (Jackson, 2006, p.5).

As part of this research, and as a consequence of the literature review, I was drawn to ideas indicating that perhaps Freire's and Boal's pedagogies may have been lost or submerged in the application and current praxis of those who purported to use Applied Theatre. The loss of pedagogical practice, as a sub-question, is noted in the findings and analysis in chapters 4 and 5.

3.6 Final Research Design

The final Research Design was intended to follow and reflect previous AT practitioner work, and my approach, including planning, processes, delivery and the various tools used and developed to enhance AT and FT events. Whilst the work embraced a range of AT, the focus and the research were FT, but not exclusively, nor in purest Boalian form, as other AT techniques, approaches and methods were used and incorporated.

The approach to AT can be intensely personal and often rooted in the epistemologies of its practitioners, and this was true of my work. However, the lines of enquiry, whilst personal, weren't particularly influenced by the political, as the FT sessions referenced in this research were exclusively a reflection of the commissioners' demands for the events. The overarching and common elements and purpose in each of the sessions is described in Chapter 4; the prime area of exploration was *difficult conversations*. These sessions are best described as 'apolitical', and were defined more as 'socio-political' in the confines of the communities in which they existed and operated.

3.7 Critical auto-ethnography to underpin the research

As I was actively involved both as an AT practitioner and researcher in these FT events, it followed that some elements of critical auto-ethnography should underpin this research. As Carspecken suggests, this neatly links with Freirean pedagogy – the 'idea is to affirm and then expand the knowledge people already have at hand' (Carspecken, 2005, p.20). This approach allowed me to investigate the key research questions, how my approach to FT was used, whether it was an appropriate pedagogy, and whether FT was safe and ethical. I was also examining the benefits and challenges of working in this way. In response to the latter, I was mindful of how

my qualitative research and approach may not have provided solutions or resulted in 'problems solved'. The research wasn't intended to solve any problems, but to shed some light on FT practice to better inform my own and current practitioners' practice and perhaps provide

support for one group of advocates against others who do not find the same research convincing (Carspecken, 2005, p.12).

In this regard, I set out to explore and investigate some of the challenges and difficulties in using FT and AT techniques. Also, it is through a nonlinear and genealogical approach that this research investigation was planned and focused. As noted earlier, the research design was greatly influenced by the application and review of my previous AT practice, experiences and research. The use of auto-ethnography and autobiography or 'memoir', is challenging because 'analytical and descriptive writing is difficult to separate' from 'reflection from description' (Carspecken, 2023, p.1067-1068). Like Carspecken I began my writing outside academia, not confined to institutes of higher education, writing independently is an approach that 'pulls me viscerally into unfamiliar worlds and new ways of being human' (2023, p.1069). Nevertheless, the contribution to 'social change', embedded with 'diverse strategies', and the 'passion', provided me with opportunities to explore 'experientially grounded truths' that may have hitherto been 'overlooked' (2023). As such, the role of the vignettes is to provide accessible analytical examples and in some instances 'sensory details' that may result in changes, 'sometimes with regret', as in the exclusion of pupils from Leeds school FT theatre workshop, or 'with pride' in introducing the twins, and their father to theatre (2023, p.1070).

My research design was intentionally fluid, knowing there would be varied and different FT events, with similarities, providing the rationale and focus of the research. My approach to the research was to ensure that I gathered and generated as much data and evidence of quality as was reasonably possible. As the FT events were all very different, the evidence would be different, but with similarities, meaning that I was able to plan, and gather data, and refine and select the materials during the events, and then follow up with additional evidence as needed; more detail is described below in the next section.

The research analysis reflected observations and exploration of current and past practice, including my own and Kim's working practices as AT practitioners. Overall, I was fortunate to have experience delivering previous events prior to the three sessions in this research, with well over 1000 participants in our AT events.

3.8 Positionality and Identity

So who am I, and what aspects of my own identity are important in this research? My schooling was secondary modern³², then became comprehensive. Both my parents were working class – my father was an apprentice time-served engineer, and my mother worked in cotton mills and in meter assembly for Ferranti. I grew up in a typical northern-mill-town rented terraced house. I failed 11 plus, although that system in the 1950s and 1960s was anything but fair – when I took the exam, with limited places available, 80% of pupils failed, which was predetermined, with pupils from the A stream accessing grammar schools and all the B and C streams accessing

³² Failing the 11+ examination selection process, the 'secondary modern school was the main site of secondary education in England and Wales in the postwar period, educating three quarters of pupils aged 11–15' CARTER, L. 2016. 'Experimental' secondary modern education in Britain, 1948–1958. *Cultural and Social History*, 13, 23–41.

secondary moderns. I was in the B stream. This is important because it defines who I am, which is immovable – class 'is a culture' and my background defines me as working class (Graham, 2024).

Class is just as important today, and this was highlighted in *The 2024 MacTaggart Lecture: James Graham at the Edinburgh TV Festival*, with 'only 8% of those working in television with a working class background'. Like James, 'my comprehensive school made no apology in foregrounding arts subjects for the majority working, or benefit-class kids in a socio-economically deprived area' (2024). In response to James's lecture the following day, the *BBC Today* programme actress Julie Hesmondhalgh who attended the lecture responded, highlighting working class as one of 'the many different identities that can be denied access to the arts and culture...you don't change your class as your life circumstances change' – it is part of our identity. Actor David Morrissey concurred, noting the 'attack on the arts' by the previous government, and Gove (Education Secretary) 'describing some subjects as soft options...whilst public schools have facilities in music and theatre, that would rival west end venues and philharmonic orchestras' access needs to 'start in state education' (Editors Sophie Calvert & Joshua Tindall, 2024). The future of the arts, in and for education already discussed in Chapter 2, is worthy of further discussion.

Key in the final research design and methods was the involvement in commissioning the events. The commissioning processes are outlined in much more detail in Chapter 4.

3.9 Ontology, Beliefs and Methodologies and impact on research

Like Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, I have been 'profoundly influenced by Freire' and with the humanity and 'pedagogical and knowledge work that helped expose the genesis of it' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2011, p.164). Humanity, self and the recognition that all voice should 'be', and that individual ideas and beliefs are the most powerful part of being human because 'to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it' (Freire, 1970, p.88).

The embodiment and the power of the arts are reflected in my early education and personal beliefs but also the integration of all arts is significant, and without hierarchy or favour, and without any subservience or power.

Vignette 14: The Prelude to an Early Teaching Career

On leaving school, I studied at Bretton Hall, a teacher training college. My three years afforded me vast resources to explore new knowledges and creativity. It is where I first encountered drama, took part and experimented in theatre work, and developed my music composition. I worked with musicians across the year groups outside the set curriculum, forming jazz and rock ensembles, including a 20-plus-strong big band. As chair of student events, I was able to attract guest musicians including the Graham Collier Band, Vin Garbutt, and Michael Garrick et al., who we supported on their regular visits to the College. I spent more time in the drama department than in music, working with John Hodgson and creating music for dramas, including for Alan Ayckbourn. It was an exciting time of experimentation and creativity in the arts. I was fortunate to be a contemporary of John Godber, Paul Todd, Pete Harrop, David Llewellyn, David Rappaport and other notable alumni who either went into the Theatre Arts industry or became university academics.

Barry Hines's **Kestrel for a Knave** was published 1968 and the film came out 1969. Whilst I was at Bretton, Barry was a regular visitor to the college. My first teaching practice was at a High Hoyland primary school, the area where the book was based. My final high school teaching practice resonated with the book and subsequent film as I was teaching music to ROSLA³³ (the Raising of the School Leaving Age to 16) kids; they didn't want to be in school, and least of all do music of the kind the school demanded. I did, however, also teach GCSE dance to girls, and that went very well, although getting them in and out of the changing rooms was challenging, and required female staff support. One day during my final teacher training practice, I bumped into the Head of Music on a school corridor dressed in a tracksuit; bemused, I then discovered he'd taken the music class of 'lads' to play basketball – as ROSLA pupils they weren't interested in music, or not the kind the school dictated at that time. In my early career as a music and drama teacher, I began with trust, and a lack of knowing, but searching for a dialogue between teacher and student. In my first year of teaching, I remember the shocked look on the faces of primary children (who I taught flute or clarinet) when I asked them to 'play me something' – 'yes without music – play me something that you do at home, when no one is listening – make it up'. Invariably they played a scale, but the brave were creative and played a tune they had created. This is how I began my teaching career, a 'dialogical' approach to teaching and action, that only now I can see has particular resonances with the pedagogies of Freire and Boal.

I experienced a good deal of dogma from other teachers, who were tied to a particular practitioner or political belief and thus taught ideologically and religiously to that mantra – a trait in my character

³³ Those whose birthday fell after Easter had to stay on at school.

I have always tried to avoid, preferring to select ideas, beliefs, principles, opinions from a broad church in my approach to professional work and life.

Later, as I noted earlier, I observed the last HMI drama conference at Bretton Hall College of Higher Education (circa 1990) where drama teachers argued that theatre and drama were very different, and as a result neither theatre nor drama appeared in the national curriculum, and dance was side-lined into PE. These experiences informed my own dialogical approach to teaching, training, curriculum development, inspection and examining, and resonated with Boal and Freire's pedagogies. In 2004, the Tomlinson Report 14-19 Education Reform (Tomlinson, 2004) paved the way for raising the school leaving age to 17 and by 2018 students were required to continue in education or training until they were 18. In preparation, I used the imagery and analogy from Kes, a metaphor for a FE in HE seminars and events we held.

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Photo 15: Kes 14-19 Education reform

Vignette 15: Beyond Kes: Raising the School Leaving Age (ROSLA)*Much later (2009-2011), when working with One North East**Regional Development Agency I worked on a large two-year project with Newcastle College employers and employees in the creative industries to design a workplace degree, my approach was much the same – we needed to get 'buy-in' and get the employers and employees to have ownership by designing the degree themselves. The final result was a validated degree, and the employers were able to present this dialogical approach at three academic conferences.³⁴*

This spawned my developing professional dialogical engagement, a key feature and signature of Freire's pedagogy.

3.10 Becoming a Researcher and an Insider Researcher

I collaborated with Kim Jackson for many years, including as the occasional writer for conference proceedings, providing short papers or information at events for AT commissioners or delegates. It followed that there was no significant issue with moving more overtly into being a researcher, yet still working with Kim and other colleagues.

For each of three sessions featured in this research, all the key stakeholders were approached prior to each event, and made aware that I was undertaking AT research, and they gave their approval. With the exception of the high school, I knew all the centres and the majority of the participants. Any personal relationship may in some cases have allowed the participants to respond freely, willingly and openly in later interviews. This could be due to my working methods, particularly in Session 2 with external examiners with

³⁴ October 2010, Lancashire LifeLong Learning Network Conference, UCLAN Preston, 'Co-creating and Validating Degree Level Skills with Businesses'. November 2010, UVAC Conference, York, 'Business Partnership in Developing Accredited Higher Level Skills in and for the Workplace – From 'Chalk Face to Workplace' – Are we speaking the same language?'. December 2010, EIAT National Conference New Landscape New Business Partnership '...rethinking higher level skills for a sustainable economy'. Queens Hotel, Leeds.

whom I had developed a dialogical non-hierarchical relationship over a number of years.

During each of the events, I, or key stake holders informed the participants that I was there as part of a wider research project. Only in Session 3 was I asked not to film the event as the centre hadn't had time to inform the staff, although I was able to audio record and photograph the event.

My position as insider researcher was most manifest in the high school bullying project (Session1), where I was an observer. For the other two sessions I maintained an approach that was no different than that at any other training event I had undertaken. As an insider researcher, my observation was heightened, as I internally questioned the processes and made copious mental notes, as I wasn't always able to make physical notes. Mentally storing the details of the events was aided by the audio and video recordings. Mental recall was something I had learnt to do as a QAA reviewer and external examiner; a skill that is useful, as it avoids distraction from those being observed.

The majority of the challenges revolved around making the event work, and of value to the participants and commissioning event organisers. Irrespective of my research, the events always generated evidence, and capturing sufficient worthwhile evidence was crucial to the research. At the same time as I previously noted, I was mindful (as often was the case), of being 'governed and defined' by too many masters (Balfour, 2009, p.350).

3.11 Refining and Revisiting the Research Questions

The review of literature was helpful in the processes of planning and event delivery and for defining research methodologies and methods. The research questions were under constant review and

were refined and designed with a view to getting the events 'right', with the primary focus on how, for each event, AT and FT were executed.

As noted earlier, the research is less concerned with the impact, or effects of the interventions. However, the question of efficacy of AT and FT did arise from the data collection, and is reflected in the analysis.

Whilst this research was not intended to be an impact study, it is only natural to question whether such AT and FT and its processes were transformational, and whether change can *really* take place. And, can the individual and practitioner, through a transformative dialogical approach, provide a conduit for knowing and learning, making the acquisition of new knowledge possible? One of the dangers I was cognisant of in the gathering of the research, is the popularity and aesthetic prowess accorded to Boal by his enthusiastic and devoted followers.

3.12 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data began with revisiting the interviews and transcriptions. Videos, audio recordings, notes and journals were equally important, but also memory – my own, Kim's and the participants'. As a participant observer, I was constantly reminded and aware of the aims of the research, seeing first hand emerging data that would assist and support the analysis. Having researched and practiced AT and FT for a number of years, themes began to emerge, helpful for anticipating answers to research questions. We had a good idea of what the probable themes were, or at least were likely to emerge from the events. What was new, was that I was better positioned to apply theoretical knowledge as a practitioner in the field, with a better understanding of what was working, and

why. When I began to analyse the data, I was able to apply my understanding of theoretical concepts, articulate and support the findings, and apply my understanding of the theories of key theoretical practitioners such as Boal and Freire.

There was some analysis of the signs, signals and language, basic semiotics used by us as practitioners and the participants in the events. The research was designed to provide insight into how the practitioner goes about the processes of AT, and in particular the FT events. I used the observational evidence referenced to Esslin's semiotic approach to drama analysis. This analysis is complex, with its origins in cinema and film. Helpfully, he notes that it 'is basically, extremely simple and practical. It asks: how is it done?' (Esslin, 1988). I looked at how we, the practitioners, 'perform' at FT events – the performance space, the performance, the performers and images presented with a

'reality' always in a contiguous space, but in the 'fiction' of the play the stage also indicates a fictional space (1988, p.39-40).

The key emerging themes

Quite early on in the data gathering, key themes began to emerge, which were mostly expected because I had been doing this kind AT work and training for some time – however, I was better informed by my research into practice and critical theory.

Principally, the emerging themes reflect and often included, without prompting direct responses to the research questions.

It logically followed that post-session questioning also focused on these themes; in fact, they were often volunteered during interviews and provided a substantive contribution to the data gathered (see Chapter 4, and analysis in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 The Training Sessions

4.1 Background to Adult Training Sessions

Following the methodology described in Chapter 3, this chapter now outlines in more detail the three selected Adult Training Sessions. Whilst the sessions are in different educational settings and reflect a varied range of commissioned Applied Theatre (AT) projects, there is commonality of purpose and the underlying theme is *difficult conversations*. The influences and traits of Boal and Freire are important in reporting on the data. My reflections on my observations are largely descriptive and stray intentionally into commentary when it is useful to provide a context and rationale for the activities in each of the sessions.

Each of the sessions includes a background, the commissioning details, scene setting and synopsis reflecting Theatre Production as a reporting structure, framework and metaphor as previously discussed in Chapter 3.

The events were deliberately chosen to reflect culturally contrasting contexts yet are comparative in their aims and objectives as situated in UK educational settings. The events used FT with very different user groups: **The High School** involved students and a large number of teachers and managers from a wide range of subject backgrounds; the **Awarding Body for Higher Education** External Examiner (EE) training included a small group of specialist Performing Arts and Music examiners; a group of teacher/lecturers, support staff and managers from a **specialist vocational music Higher Education provider**.

Each of the events had strong bespoke themes predicated by the demands of the clients. The events were all commissioned with the

purpose of exploring how training could be delivered with the intention of promoting change. By using FT and AT techniques as practitioner/s, we were able to suggest and inform the participants about the possibilities for change and provide potential intervention strategies. The purpose was to persuade and encourage participants through both 'real' and 'fictional contexts' (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015, p.112) to foster awareness and bring about transformation.

These sessions, influenced by Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* techniques, aimed to encourage participants to share their stories and experiences arising from difficult circumstances or conflicts. We approached the work in the knowledge that 'Theatre of the Oppressed is not a finished, finely honed product' (Gökdağ, 2014, p.29). As Boal intended, the techniques employed were adapted to assist the participants who were encouraged to take an active part to 'comprehend their problems, whether personal, social, or political' (2014, p. 29).

In describing and reporting these sessions, I have used the act of Theatre Production as a metaphor to explain the sequential nature of these AT projects as it aptly allows the reader a vantage point to view the progression in each of these projects. Typically, this begins with a commission. Whilst those who commissioned each project had an initial input, Kim and I were responsible for the project delivery, and as the designers, directors and facilitators we had a more or less free hand. The nature of each session determined by the participants as, during the events, they retold their experiences and sought to try out potential solutions to the issues they shared, discussed and encountered.

Kim: It's always customised, irrespective of the brief you get, its customised to the people in the room...that brings in theatre skills and

directing skills 'cos I have to play the room, in a way that's our short hand for stand up...I'm drawing them in trying to understand where their anxieties and blocks are, and moving through some other way of dealing with it...at the same time as holding back [KJ & GH interview, Part 2].

As with a theatre production, there is an idea, a theme which is the basis of the 'play'. Once we had established the basic commission, theme or idea, Kim and I (the Production Team) began by developing a scenario, synopsis, or in some cases a script (see Appendix 3a). Mirroring professional theatre practice, this initial stage of the production process then evolved into a working framework for each session. Each session included planning for the use of AT techniques incorporating rehearsal and performance. The delegates are the audience who were strongly encouraged to be active participants as the 'Spect-actors'. An approach that reflects Shaughnessy who examines companies and practitioners that use 'modes of participatory theatre', a 'collaboration between the performer/animateur and the spect/actor or client' and a 'negotiated in a space', where the stories told are played out and 'are both real and not real while the performers are more explicit about their roles than in more conventional theatre frameworks' (Shaughnessy, 2005, p.201).

This approach resulted in the 'spect-actors' being much freer, uncluttered and less stressed. The participants were briefed at the start of each event, and approached the events as knowing participants, who could choose whether to take an active or passive role without any of the expectations that some forms of training or participatory theatre can and often demand.

Boal's and Freire's practitioner and critical theories were the basis of the pedagogical approach to each event and this was evident and

observable as a part of the methodology. My practitioners' predisposition to my own epistemologies, pedagogies and theories are also a key feature in understanding the approach to practice in the research.

The aim when using AT techniques and in particular Forum Theatre was to retell and act out the participants' stories, sometimes with actors, under the guidance of Kim the 'Joker' and facilitator 'who transformed the spectacle into a forum of ideas and facts' (Gökdağ, 2014, p.36). In each of the sessions, possible solutions and alternatives were provided and explored using AT techniques, allowing stories to be acted out repeatedly.

Kim describes these spaces as 'political' spaces and to a large extent 'because of what the actor is doing, they're steering it in particular direction...maybe a dialectical negotiation space' [Kim, post event interview with GH].

Drawing on materials from the experiences of participants, there is a focus on real and shared events, giving a sense of realism to the situations and conflicts. Participants allowed us to explore their stories, yet controlled in venues that acted as 'fictional spaces' – the spaces between 'performance and ordinary life...a space for intervention and change' (Shaughnessy, 2005, p.201) giving consent to participants to try out solutions without the possible dangers inherent in doing so in real life.

Boal was clear that 'theatre is a vocation for all human beings', and he had purpose and faith in the ability of people themselves to change, a faith supported by his contention that theatre can be an instrument of change. *Forum* enabled people to observe their reality, 'perceiving what it is, discovering what it is not and

imagining what it could become' (Boal,1995, p.13, cited in Gokdag, 2014).

4.2 Key Moments in the Events

Vignette 16: Realism from non-actors

One of the overwhelming and consistent surprises was the ability of FT spect-actors and participants to give realistic and believable performances, despite my worries of potential 'wooden' acts.



Photo 16a: Forum Theatre Actor -The Teacher in Role Hot seating Training Session 1

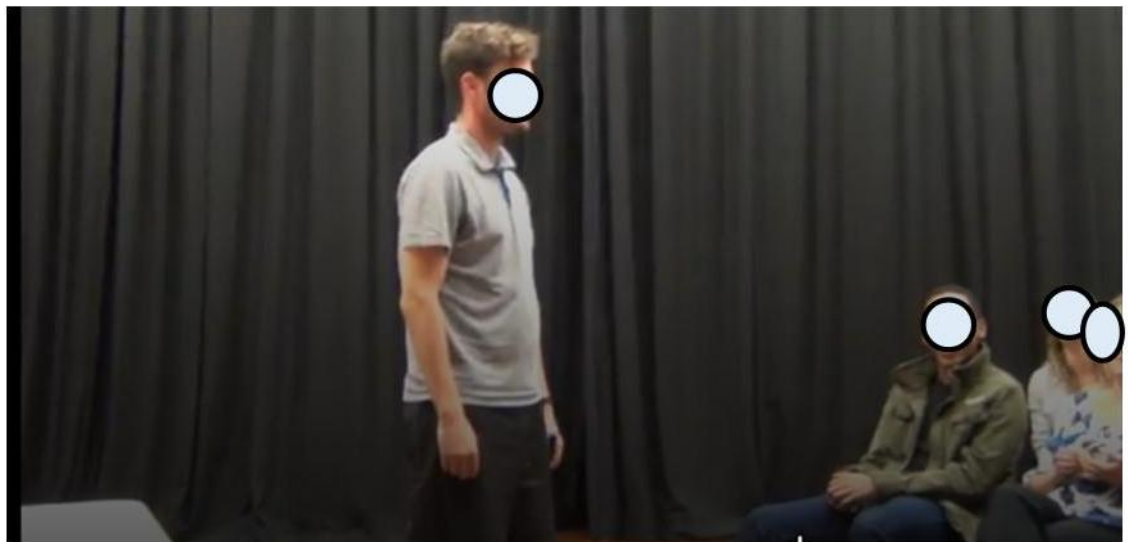


Photo 16b: Forum Theatre Actor Training Session 1



Photo 16c: Forum Theatre Actor Training Session 1

The Bullying Theme in Session 1 was presented as an FT piece. In photo 16a, the 'actor' in role as classroom teacher is being hot seated in front of the 300 strong audience. In photo 16b, the 'actor' is frozen for several moments after the spect-actors stop the action. In 16c, the 'actor' is engaging with the class (the other 'actors') under the direction of the spect-actors. Such devised performance work requires considerable skill.

The influence of other media forms can be problematic leading to wooden, unimaginative naturalistic scenarios as participants draw upon the vocabulary of television and particularly soap opera to stage their representation of 'real' life (Shaughnessy, 2005, p.208).

In this case, the 'Actor' was not imitating art but using his own experience as a teacher to respond to each situation and action, simulating the 'real', rather than an 'imitation of the verisimilitude of film and television' (2005, p.208). The preparation for FT in workshop, using the language and vocabulary of theatre, made for a believable and realistic performance from this Physical Education teacher.

Overarching Features of Each event

Every event is forwarded by with support by the practitioner/facilitator – the ‘joker’ who describes the execution, with supporting and brief basic background about AT and FT (as described in earlier chapters). This includes an outline of the prospective audience/participants and commissioning expectations.

The Joker’s explanation included a request for participants to suspend their disbelief, yet at the same time reassuring them that we can expect participation although it’s an individual decision how much physically or cognitively.

Humour and comedy are used to relax and reassure, the practitioner working as a ‘warm up Act’, often intentionally ‘on top of the audience’ as they come into the performance space. The Facilitator is the human embodiment of the ‘tab warmer³⁵’, the ‘warm up Act’ before event begins, and an essential part of each event. Kim as facilitator (Joker) wanted to avoid a formal introduction to these sessions although this was not always possible.

Despite seemingly having all the trappings and similarities of theatre, for the performances, consideration should be given to delineating the theatrical performance in these events as *academic* and distinct from those created primarily for public performance. Beck refers to this as the *Spectrum of Research-Based Theatre* ‘based on two defining continua: the research continuum, which distinguishes among many types of research used to inform research-based theatre, and the performance continuum’ (Beck et al., 2011, p.687).

³⁵ Tab warmers; theatre curtains with a warm lighting effect providing a warm welcome for the audience.

Research-based Theatre Continua

There are additional challenges for an AT practitioner as researcher when using drama and theatre techniques, and in particular, theatrical performance. Beck et al. in examining theatrical performances based on research, is delineated as spectrum of research-based theatre, distinguishing academic performances and performances created for the general public. Distinctions are made in terms of 'research continuum' vs. 'performance continuum', distinguishing from other research, and 'different kinds of performances, audiences, and purposes of a given research-based theatre piece' (2011, p.687). For my research AT used theatre techniques derived 'on participants' experiences to 'collectively create theatre and engage in discussion of issues through theatrical means' (Conrad, 2006, p.376). Performances that result from these processes may only ever be seen by the participants themselves. The events described in this research are 'closed performances' and are unique to the participants and are not aimed at 'general audiences' and 'therefore cannot be judged solely on their aesthetic value' (2011, p.693).

Traditional theatre audiences and AT audiences have certain levels of expectations. Both have made a commitment to be members of an audience, although the expectations between them may be very different. O'Toole notes if expectations of a performance 'differs from [audience] expectations too radically they will probably reject it, not necessarily because they would in all situations reject it, but because they feel that a contract has been broken' (O'Toole, 1992, p.186 cited in Beck et al., 2011, p.691).

In 'general audiences of public theatre pieces agree to suspend disbelief and participate in the imagined world on stage' (Beck et al., 2011, p.691). In the AT events explored here we ask the audience

directly to suspend their disbelief, but their expectations may be less about the 'aesthetic qualities' of the performance and instead be about looking for support and answers to difficult and challenging situations. 'Performances may be welcomed as a presentational form but are likely to be rejected if this different audience contract is not also upheld' (Beck et al., 2011, p.691).

As previously noted, the use of **humour and comedy** was an essential ingredient in all the AT events. Key also to each event was an informed introduction that provided the audience with some basic details about what they were about to see. Kim always said '*I want you to suspend your disbelief*' – 'invoking the voluntary suspension of disbelief is a powerful instrument, of both aesthetic and learning potency' (O'Toole, 2009, p.485).

We were mindful in each introduction, clarifying that: '*What you are about to see is not about this centre, or you, but somewhere similar*'. This can be challenging when it's a subject or matter that can be 'something so close to the bone for many' (O'Toole, 2009, p.484). Such are the challenges encountered, as Forgasz suggests, when working with teachers who are often 'exhausted and frustrated by their lack of agency' and who may require a different and more direct approach. At the same time, the use of AT in teaching environments needs to be mindful that 'the interplay of power and oppression is complex for teachers, many of whom are doubly positioned as powerful/oppressor in relation to their students and powerless/oppressed in relation to the wider school system' (Forgasz, 2019, p.401).

Reflection and reflexivity

We were ever mindful of the need to engage the participants through a range of AT techniques to get to the defining moment/s of critical consciousness. Forgasz draws on teaching, learning,

pedagogies and 'on theories of embodied and critical reflection to propose how Boal's The Rainbow of Desire (TRoD) develops teachers' critical consciousness by supporting them to interrogate practice through the lens of power' (Forgasz, 2019, p.402). Whilst we did not intentionally use TRoD techniques there are synergies:

in particular, the embodied, emotional, problem-posing, and collaborative characteristics of TRoD offer an embodied approach to critical reflection that makes visible the structures and dynamics of power informing teachers' decisions and actions and the possible consequences for their students' (2019, p.401).

Forgasz usefully reflects how Boal's use of the *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1952) effect/technique 'to focus on multiple perspectives is the overall aim of the TRoD technique of Rashomon: to get insight into the different experiences and interpretations that different people may have of the same situation' (Forgasz, 2019, p.411).

Before, during and after each event, Kim and I discussed and unpacked each event – the aesthetic, its theatricality, audience response and reactions and ethics. We considered and reflected on different viewpoints, gleaned from participants, observers and ourselves, all the time looking for changes, improvements and possible developments for the next event.

4.3 Training Session 1

Staff training – A Large High School in Southeast England, Forum Theatre on 'Bullying'

Event 1: Staff training – High School on the theme Bullying Overview & executive summary

Kim had been doing some work using theatre techniques with a large rural high school. His introduction to the senior management at the school came through an ex-colleague who was then the Head

of Drama at the School. The school wanted to explore ways in which they could open up discussions and dialogue with staff in the school on the theme of bullying. Whilst the school indicated that they didn't have a bullying problem per se, the local authority had identified that it was an issue in other schools. The school was seen as a potential training vehicle for the wider education community.

This is a large high school with over 2000 pupils and over 300 staff. Kim provided a number of workshops in the school with the training concluding with the final workshop day that then led to the Forum Theatre event in an after-school twilight training and presentation. The event took place in the school lecture theatre and was attended by over 300 staff and invited parents. The concluding final day that included AT workshops and a FT performance was the end focus of this event.

The Workshop

Throughout the day, Kim worked with post-16-year-old students and teaching staff who volunteered to take part in the workshops. These workshops were comprised of sixth-form students and an equal number of staff from the school, including the head of Drama. The staff were from a range of disciplines, with an equal gender mix across staff and students.

The drama workshops took place throughout the day. Kim used a range of AT techniques with the aim of by the afternoon having a prepared 'performance'. This would then be used in the twilight training session for all school staff.

The Forum Theatre

This twilight performance was introduced by Kim with more explanation of FT and how the teachers and the audience would interact with the twelve actors, with Kim working as a facilitator (the 'Joker'). The FT lasted around one hour with a high rate of audience

interaction. Following the prepared performance that involved a student being bullied in a classroom in full view of a 'teacher', various solutions and ideas were offered by the audience and then acted out by the performance group. The large number of delegates provided a rich source of material that Kim guided, with the actors adopting and playing out scenarios provided by the audience. I have identified specific key moments for each event.

Event 1: Key Moments

- Power versus agency (see performance continuum above p.148) – one senior member of staff asserts authority and is quickly and humorously disarmed by the joker.
- One student left the workshop and didn't return but was supported by a staff member who was part of the staff–student workshop group – in all the events, any such incidents were dealt with by the commissioning centres, which was their responsibility as we were invited guests and were as such outsiders.
- Democracy – staff and students working together as equals this could be attributed to preparatory workshops prior to the FT event and reflects a Heathcote approach to enquiry-based drama and the 'mantle of expert' (see page 58) and a reflection of continuing work.

Commissioning

This particular AT work was initiated by staff at a large rural high school (now an Academy) located in a village in the East of England. Built in 1975, the school had over 2000 students and around 300 staff and included a large sixth form of around 650 students founded in 1978. The size of the staff and the involvement of the sixth form students were key factors to the realisation of this project. In

addition, parents were invited to the after-school staff training Forum Theatre Session.

Kim was approached to facilitate staff development as the local authority had identified bullying as an issue in their schools. In response, we outlined the planning and how the day was intended to be delivered, whilst providing some background to Applied Theatre and Forum Theatre (see Appendix 1). This pilot training session and this particular school was identified by the local authority as they had been active in the past, providing innovative training. Following this session, a subsequent Ofsted report noted:

Staff training on child protection is regular... students were well informed about the different forms of bullying that can take place. However, all considered that bullying of any kind, including cyber bullying, was very rare and we're confident that in the rare event it should take place the school would deal with it quickly and effectively [Ofsted report³⁶]

This particular high school was regarded as having a good track record in providing innovative in-house training. It was identified by the local authority as having the potential for providing training for bullying as part of a young person's safeguarding programme and then for the wider dissemination or training in the local education community.

Previously, Kim had done some work using theatre techniques with this high school. The school had wanted to explore new ways they could open up discussions and dialogue with staff on the theme of bullying. Kim initially began by providing a number of workshops in the school over several weeks with pupils and staff.

³⁶ The school Ofsted report anonymised for ethical research compliance.

Setting the Scene – The Synopsis

Following the initial workshops, a whole day was set aside by the school for the bullying project with the AT work delivered by Kim in two distinctive parts (for this event I was an observer – the researcher).

Part 1: A Final day of Workshops

In the first part of the day, these focused on a small number of staff and pupils. Six staff volunteered with the majority having had no previous experience of AT or drama techniques, save for the head of Drama. Staff interest was in safeguarding, and all were made aware that the theme was bullying. School staff were joined by six sixth-form students, making for an eclectic and gender-balanced mix of workshop participants.

These workshops were delivered throughout the school day and explored bullying using a wide range of Applied Theatre and Drama techniques, including those drawn from Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, including, Forum Theatre, Image Theatre and Games for Actors and Non-Actors.

Part 2: A Forum Theatre Session

The Forum Theatre Session followed on from the earlier workshops that day and took the form of after-school whole-staff training to which parents had been invited. The presentation of Forum Theatre took place in the school lecture theatre between four and six in the afternoon and was attended by over 300 staff.

4.3.1 Part 1: Applied Theatre Workshops***The Workshops***

As an observer on the session day, I attended both the workshops and the Forum Theatre event. Throughout the day Kim worked with the post-16-year-old students and staff who had volunteered to take part. The staff were from a range of disciplines, including sports.

Having worked alongside sports staff in a department in a school on a carousel teaching programme in his previous workshops, Kim observed that students always came to drama work with 'energy and enthusiasm and to actively and physically engage' [KJ & GH, post-event interview].

The drama workshops began promptly at 9am and lasted throughout the school day. Kim used a range of drama and AT techniques with the aim of by the afternoon having a prepared 'performance'. The performance would then be used for the Forum Theatre after-school training session with all the school staff and invited parents.

9:00am The workshop began with brief explanation and introductions and quickly moved into practical work within minutes, with the teachers (staff) and 6 students following a fairly physical warm up. All seemed very relaxed and an energetic and enthusiastic game of Fruit Bowl³⁷ ensued to much merriment and laughter [Extract GH Journal]³⁸.

³⁷ FRUITBOWL Players sit in a circle on chairs. Everyone is given the name of a fruit in turn, e.g., apple, pear, banana, apple, pear, banana. One player stands in the middle of the circle and their chair is taken away. When the player in the middle calls out 'FRUITBOWL!' every player must change places and move to a new seat! Watch for players getting too excited and pushing other players. Keep playing until everyone is exhausted! <https://www.artsonthemove.co.uk/resources/drama-games.php> [accessed 23/08/2021].

³⁸ See Appendix 2: Journal extracts.



Photo 17: Fruit Bowl

Nearly 15 minutes into the workshop, Kim asked an exhausted group to think about the social rules of Twitter, Facebook and social media accounts. A brief discussion ensued. Kim had clear purposes and deliberate intentions throughout all the activities.

Kim: I'm doing this to get an understanding of where they're coming from, in lots of different ways, physically, I mean, at the beginning, it's about how much physical activity can they do. How much out of breath can they cope with...you know, before we move on to the next stage, but it's also meant to get them to give me information about what they know, what their politics are, who they are in their kind of social, cultural, you know, in a very simple way [KJ, post event interview with GH].

With a whole day ahead, this may appear to be about group dynamics, trust and some random or ad hoc drama games but it was much more systematic and planned and intended to tease out where the participants stood in their 'bias'. For example, being out of breath may mean, as I suggested, that 'their guard is down'

[GH], 'and it's an indication that they are involved...how out of breath they get' (he laughs) [KJ, post-event interview with GH].



Photo 17a: Fruit Bowl

Because that's quite a complex game [Fruit bowl] in a way, it's the way it moves through sort of social preferences and all that kind of stuff. I mean, it does move through various stages...[and] meant to introduce them to all sorts of stuff, it's meant to introduce them to the overall theme of what we're doing, the overall idea. But it's also meant to introduce them to technical performance language at a later stage. And also, it's meant to also introduce them to the relationship between the ensemble and the director [KJ, post-event interview with GH].

Then followed another very short game of Fruit Bowl, however, this time not with fruit as the subject, but 'I believe' – again, this intensified the group dynamic to tease out preferences and any potential biases, political and ingroup predispositions. As Kim noted, the activity could only have been undertaken because of the level of trust built up with both staff and students in the previous workshops. As Kim observed, 'it was a very trusting

school, and the staff worked well together anyway' [KJ, post-workshop interview].

Argument by Committee

About 30 minutes into the workshop, Kim split the workshop participants into group A and B, where each group confront each other with an argument. Each time the groups discuss by committee the next line of the argument and then confront the other team with it. This then led to doing the same activity but without words and a 'freeze frame', which was the starting point for another Boalian technique, *Image Theatre*, where

the participant is asked to express his opinion, but without speaking, using only the bodies of the other participants and 'sculpting' with them a group of statues, in such a way that his opinions and feelings become evident (Boal, 2008a, p.133).



Photo 18: Image Theatre

What followed were various activities that incorporate freeze frame and fruit bowl activities becoming much more challenging and demanding of the participants, and requiring sophisticated recall and concentration all designed to prepare the group for an ensemble approach and for theatrical direction.

For example, first Kim asked each group to provide a freeze frame, and to a countdown of five seconds in three different emotional states remembering their positions in the freezes. Then they were asked to go into their first freeze, '*Memories*'. Each group were then asked to unpack what they saw from each other's freeze frame and the other emotional states. Prompts given included *arrogance*, *foreboding*, and *unbridled joy*. These positions and emotional states were then recalled as A, B and C. This exercise then involved participants transitioning from one state to another as they were executed, changing their emotional state as they transitioned with varied combinations. This was done in snatches of five seconds, 10 seconds or at their own leisure. This all required precision, concentration, group work and was again designed as preparation for direction using the language of actor training that was further developed in the afternoon workshop sessions. Key moments here were understanding 'freeze' and 'transition' – to be used later in the Forum Theatre presentation.

Some 45 minutes in Kim began to explain the purpose of the day – to explore bullying, effective conversations and interventions, and a little bit of explanation about Forum and Applied Theatre. Then followed more quick-fire freeze frames, *The Wedding* and *A Day at the Races*.

By 9:57 I observed all the participants seemed very relaxed, and [it was] interesting that the group had organised themselves without prompting,

with chairs in a circle, a 'comfort area', and also precluded the outside, me the observer [Extract, GH Journal].

What is clear is that this series of workshops was detailed, complicated and challenging and till then, expedited in a relatively short space of time. Kim then addressed the group, saying

What are we doing today...discussing the Product – the Method – exploring bullying – effective conversations & interventions, developing a Scenario, this is about FT/AT, Community, not Policy driven, not long term, Micromanage, Didactical/Dialectical using Freeze frames, body movement, transition, etc. [Extract GH Journal].

Kim prepared this workshop with a clear focus – by the end of the day, the group had to provide a performance for the 300 staff attending training in the lecture theatre. Up to this point in the day, getting the students and staff working together was as Kim noted 'an aim in itself' [KJ, post-workshop interview].

An hour into the workshop, Kim referred directly to me, the observer, for the first time: 'Are they on track?' he asked. I was surprised and mumbled something noncommittal with a reassuring nod.

Kim: It's actually quite uncomfortable having somebody outside it actually... [KJ, post interview].

And I was outside it, and Kim was clearly irritated by my presence...

Kim:...Yeah. Not what normally...it's like having a kind of errant kid outside the circle. It's like... it disrupts the whole bloody thing, doesn't it?

Kim's comments were quite a surprise – firstly asking for reassurance and also retrospectively indicating his irritation at my presence. This was an aspect I had not previously witnessed. For the rest of the day, I was conscious of keeping my conversation to a minimum and fairly restricted, avoiding anything that could imply criticism or advice, such as questioning whether sufficient progress was being made. I had noted in my contemporaneous journal that I thought the performance work was somewhat wooden and was worried that this could impact on the later forum event – but I chose not to mention this, both in the interests of my research and so as to not influence or impact on the outcomes of the event. Kim reflecting on being irritated at my presence was less concerning as I was familiar with this trait in previous events, perhaps caused by my own interventions when I questioned if the work with delegates was proceeding at a fast enough pace. I later questioned Kim's pace of progress in Event 3 as I worried about the amount of time we had. I should have been reassured as the events always worked out and any concerns about a *dénouement* were unnecessary. The dilemma I faced ironically mirrors the theme of 'difficult conversations', central to this research.

The morning workshops concluded with discussions directly related to bullying, with both staff and students openly relaying their own stories and experiences. Kim carefully and empathically led the conversations and discussions and included the ethics of reporting and the sharing of these stories. The whole tempo and dynamic of the workshop had now changed and there were plenty of personal examples being put forward, although it was clear that there was a lack of intervention and resolution in these stories. In pairs, they told their stories and then retold them to the group, with partners interceding to further explain and clarify. There was clearly a high degree of emotion and trust, which then led naturally into heated

discussions on classroom situations which were to provide the scenarios for the eventual Forum Theatre. Around 40 minutes was spent in discussions – the longest session without any practical work. The level of detail and advice and suggestions offered now became prominent, complex and heated – this was intentional as it provided a good amount of material for the later FT performance.

After lunch, there was a recap on the 'argument by committee' and one-liners, which then led directly into discussion and focus on the actual scenarios that might be used, or be useful for the FT performance. An hour of rehearsing and refining scenarios then followed. I commented to Kim at the time that whilst this was beginning to define the characteristics of a performance and drama it wasn't realistic and believable and was 'wooden'. They weren't actors, a point that Boal emphasised in discussing the merits of actor training...

BOAL:...actors try to transform everything into works of art. Much more than a person who is not an actor and really cares about the problems. The actor has the tendency to very quickly step aside. To say, "That's not my problem. That's the characters." And people in general who are not actors have the tendency to say, "Yes. That's my problem" (Boal et al., 1990,p.73).

Perhaps I, the observer, was concerned more about the aesthetics of the performance. However, the workshop participants had ownership of these stories and were emotionally attached and involved – was this impeding the believability of the scenes played out? And did it matter?

Kim also reflected on the actors:

Kim: They know how to be real...covering a different agenda, because they're there to be believed. But then probably in a political sense, because actors are...there to serve the audience, the audience, they're

there to serve the peasants so to speak, you want to go back to the origins, and to make sure that those, you know, those participants are not feeling out of their depth or worried or nervous or putting themselves in a class position of being unable to do it...he's got real sensitivity about making sure that at some point, the actors will help you realise your potential about what you're going to be doing...there is a point in that morning session that they needed the audience...just to start, just to get out there and do it' [KJ, audio, post-event session].

By the end of a very intensive day and just before 3pm, the workshops come to a close, and we all reconvened in the lecture theatre to have a final run through before the audience appeared for the next part – *Forum Theatre*.



Photo 19: The Scene, Bullying in the classroom

Kim: I always think that, in that stage of all the forum pieces...especially when you've got an audience in there, and there's people sat there so waiting for that...it all takes on that kind of theatre [KJ, audio, post-event session].

4.3.2 Part 2 The Forum Theatre

One of the features of Kim's work is his preparation for each Forum Theatre event. He recalled the video of another FT event that replicated his approach to most of his preparations for being the 'Joker' in such events:

I'm spending a long time just pacing up and down the front of the audience...doing a lot of hand wringing...a lot of walking up and down possessing the space [KJ, audio interview after observing our AT video of staff training university teachers conference].

As in the majority of these sessions, Kim observed that he was mumbling to himself, which lasts about 10 or 15 minutes as the audience arrives. When the audience are seated Kim invites the actor or actors to take their positions, so he can start.

Essentially, he is intentionally there 'on top of the audience' as they come into the space. He is the 'tab warmer', the 'warm up act' before the actual event begins but it is an essential part of the event. Kim wants to avoid a formal introduction to these sessions, although in this case, the commissioner introduced Kim almost as an act. Kim attempts to subvert this by being there as the audience arrives:

Kim: by being there I began making quips, talking to the front row of the audience...having a little bit of conflagration between us: '*having a nice night love, is this your husband?*' (a pastiche of a variety act) ...and the audience start to realise that he isn't just some bod standing around, he's going to be running this...it works for me if I walk into the space before anyone else and people start coming in [KJ, post-event interview].

All this initial engagement then leads up to the critical moment and suddenly Kim turns around to the audience and says, 'we are going to start'.



Photo 20: 'We are going to start' [KJ, Session 1]

Following the introduction by a member of staff from the school (the Commissioning Lead), Kim provided a very brief explanation of Applied Theatre.

Kim: We've been working all day on Applied Theatre techniques...a kind of posh way of saying we've been trying together a few scenarios...drama exercises to be able to apply them to what is a difficult area...concentrating on effective conversations. I'm not here in any way to talk about policy or training or other techniques that go beyond just that, micromanaging of conversations...[or] and how interventions might take place... [KJ, intro to Forum video].

Kim very briefly then provided a background to Forum Theatre derived from the work of

Kim: Boal, started in South America with liberation politics, with therapy, personal therapy and then into Forum work...the advantage...is that you

suspend your disbelief, and you become more involved with the action more quickly and decisions are made on a much more emotional and intellectual basis, so we get to the heart of the matter very quickly [KJ, video/audio Session 1].

He explained how the teachers, staff and parents (the audience, the spect-actors) could or might interact with the actors, with Kim working as a facilitator, the 'Joker' in Boal's conception of the term. Kim quickly established rapport with the audience, drawing on his acting and directing skills to take the audience on a journey *with him* and the actors. In order to make them feel at ease, Kim used humour, a confident manner and his performance skills to direct the audience.

Kim: All you have to do, and I'm not going to ask you to take part in drama in a way that might (he pauses) well, I don't know, sometimes I'm in a room of people and you know what, these look like the kind of people that really want to get up and move and do the kind of drama exercises that they haven't done for 30 or 40 years maybe, or 10 or 15...so I might ask you to be as *small as a mouse* or as *big as a tree*...(another pause)...NO! I was joking (much audience laughter). What I *will* ask you to do is to suspend your disbelief and I'm going to show you a scenario [KJ, video audio Session 1].

There were several stages to the session. Kim first asked the audience to observe the classroom scenario in a school, which was not their school, and to watch and take in what was happening.

'Action' – the performance began. It was a disruptive classroom with a teacher trying to control an unruly group of pupils with some clear harassment of one particular latecomer.

The scene lasted less than three minutes, the actors were asked to freeze, and Kim asked the audience to imagine a cartoon speech bubble over the Teacher and Tom (who was being disruptive and

bullied) and get them to describe what they are thinking. This provided a wide range of thoughts about the two characters. Meanwhile, the actors were frozen, taking on the mantle and skills learnt earlier that day. This is a real skill and discipline as they have maintained the stillness for a considerable amount of time over five minutes.

Next Kim asked the audience to chat to each other and ask themselves 'what do we know?', and conversely 'what don't we know?' and 'what do we suspect?', and these are key elements in this work and all sessions. This allows the audience to focus on facts, instances that may be taken for granted, and highlights the complexity of the situation presented in such a short scene. This provides the group with a 'safe environment' to 'micromanage' and explore in some detail what might be going on in this scene and apply that then in a real situation. In all the sessions, Kim makes it clear that he isn't looking for correct answers but is providing an opportunity for participants to ask questions and voice opinions – 'within the room they are safe' – and is about 'exploring experimenting in a replication of the real world' [KJ, video/audio, Session 1].

The next stage is 'hot seating' the protagonists who remain in character with Kim as 'Joker' and facilitator who controls the situation. The audience are there to ask questions, not to give advice. This allows them the opportunity to gain more information about the characters in the scene. Whilst not restricted to Forum Theatre, 'hot seating' is a useful theatre technique and device that extends and further explores what might be going on for characters in the scenario. It is also useful because this engages the audience and gets them to think about how they might approach and question...

“hot seating” allows the audience to uncover motivations of the various characters in a scene. After showing the scene, the actors remain in character while the audience questions them. This can help participants better understand the complexities of abusive or victimizing behavior and begin critical dialogue about why bystanders choose not to get involved. Hot seating also helps to reduce uncertainty of a character’s actions in the scene, which may lead to less apprehension in replacing characters during the Forum (Mitchell and Freitag, 2011, p.1005).

Kim’s concerns about hot seating affirmed the need to maintain safe spaces, and prior to any hot seating actors and participants were briefed to ensure all questions were considerate. Kim would intervene if any questions were deemed inappropriate.

Kim: If the bully is questioned, he’s not going to say very much. Also, they (the audience) might have an ethical thing about how you interview the bully, which I’m not worried about... we are not testing people... how they ask open questions in a real situation [KJ, audio interview after the Session 1 workshop].

The practitioner could intervene in the hot seating if needed. As Kim rehearsed and conducted the earlier workshops, he was dealing with any potential issues both in the workshop and in his thinking and planning processes for the Forum Theatre later that day. In facilitating the hot seating Kim noted that

Kim: it was empowering to me as a facilitator, in the way that I have power over other people...in that centre, they were certainly more powerful than me in a hierarchical sense...the deputy head or some head of the department at the back of the hall put his hand up when I asked for any questions when the actors were ‘hot seating’...he exerted power...making a statement that went on and on, there was then a pause, and I said ‘and the question is’, and everyone laughed. Clearly there was a context outside, and he was exploiting the fact that he was head of something [KJ, Marriot retrospective interview].

Following the prepared performance that clearly involved a student being bullied in a classroom in full view of a ‘teacher’, the session

progressed into Forum Theatre with the audience providing interventions, working the scenario again from the top and stopping to 'freeze' with various solutions and ideas offered by the audience that were then acted out by the performance group, with the audience suggesting the reworking.

These scenarios were repeated several times, often not progressing after a few seconds with the audience interrupting any progression, stopping the scenario. With many interventions and suggestions, there were no solutions or answers, but the audience was very engaged in trying out a wide range of possible interventions. Audience engagement was extensive with no discernible holding back as there were multiple interventions from the 300-strong audience. This is where the Forum Theatre takes hold and as Boal envisaged,

I, Augusto Boal, want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own Space and offer solutions (Boal, 2008a).

The FT Session had lasted around well over an hour with a high rate of audience interaction and direct participation. The large number of delegates provided a rich source of material that allowed Kim to control and facilitate, with the actors adopting and playing out a range of scenarios, possible solutions and interventions *all* provided by the audience.

As we left the school at around six that day and were walking towards our cars, one of the teachers stopped Kim and I and remarked that 'in twenty-five years of teaching I've attended a lot of training and that's [been] the best and most entertaining'. As we reflected, it's not just meant to be entertaining. Kim noted 'it's very difficult to have that level of engagement without it being to some

extent entertaining...that is the nature of theatre', yet with 'seriousness underneath it all' [KJ, audio phone recording, immediately post event extract on the way to the school car park].

Commenting further on the length of the day – starting with a very early breakfast briefing and then working through from 9am to 6pm with only a couple of short breaks – I was curious as to how Kim found the day. Was he exhausted?

Kim: I feel energised by the Forum...that hour and a half I was on the ball, engaged, you can't really afford to lose concentration... [KJ, audio phone recording, immediately post event extract on the way to the school car park].

4.4 Training Session 2

Higher Education External Examiner (EE) training – *Difficult conversations* with centres and their delivery staff in Higher Education

Event 2: Awarding and examiner training

Each academic year, as the senior external examiner I am responsible for training external examiners in preparation for visits to higher education providers of higher education qualifications in Music and Performing Arts. These activities usually take place at a university conference centre, and this was the case in preparation for annual examination series. The training took place on two consecutive days and included eleven higher education external examiners (EEs). This small group explored the *difficult conversations* that were often encountered when visiting centres. I played the role of a disgruntled centre manager/assessor, based on scenarios provided by the EEs from real events and encounters. Leading the FT activity, Kim acted as the facilitator or 'Joker'. What

was very different in this event was that we began one session with some 'Invisible Theatre'.

In invisible Theatre the spectator is transformed into a protagonist in the action, a spect-actor, without ever being aware of it. He is the protagonist of the reality he sees, because he is unaware of its fictitious origin (Boal, 2002, p.17).

Boal developed Invisible Theatre as a device where the actors perform as real actors, often in a public space where the audience is not aware they are actors. Typically, there is an issue between two or more of the actors, a victim and an aggressor. I was leading this training event, and Kim, who was also an examiner in the training session, started to challenge and strongly disagree with my observations and advice. This caused noticeable alarm in the event and was picked up in the subsequent interviews following the event (see Chapter 5). Unlike the other two events, when this was revealed as Invisible Theatre, it *then* developed into Forum Theatre, exploring scenarios based on the examiners' real experiences, difficult conversations, and possible solutions. Overall, the two consecutive AT activities lasted around 45–60 minutes on each occasion as a part of each of the whole day training events.

Event 2: Key Moments

Knowing your audience – all the examiners were known to me, some for a number of years, providing opportunities to try out new, or mixed approaches to AT.

- Risks: Invisible Theatre – was this ethical? Explored in the literature and in the event.
- Ensure we used real events and stories captured in the AT activities, making them relevant to the participants' own experiences, providing shared and mutual experiences.
- As examiners, we aren't definitive experts, but we have some expertise, recognising and reinforcing that *we all* have some

expertise, linking to democratic dialogical engagement, when Freire met farmers and played the question game (*Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1992, p.37-39).

- Issue of delegate compliance necessary feature as a training requirement and an expectation as part of commissioning processes.
- Knowing the participants (audience) allowed us to improvise, to use Invisible Theatre and move in a direction that suited the participants. And, as in stand-up comedy, we were reading the audience.

Kim: It's always customised, irrespective of the brief you get, its customised to the people in the room...that brings in theatre skills, directing skills, 'cos I have to play the room. In a way, that's our shorthand for stand up...I'm drawing them in, trying to understand where their anxieties and blocks are, and moving through some other way of dealing with it...at the same time as holding back [KJ & GH interview, part 2].

Further Background and Context

This training was intended to prepare examiners for visits to higher education providers of higher education qualifications in Music and Performing Arts in the UK and internationally – qualifications that provide a diverse offering, with a choice of over 40 subjects from Art & Design to Railway Engineering. These qualifications are designed to provide mandatory core modules and a large number of optional modules to cater for a wide range of specialist vocational pathways. Centres then define the overall programme of study against rules of combinations, making them unique and distinct for each centre and in the way they are delivered and assessed. Whilst this provides centres with a large amount of freedom, it does present challenges and risks that require robust quality assurance processes, and

guidance and support to ensure that delivery, level, and standards are consistent across all centres.

To reflect the high risks stakes of these qualifications, the examiner training is closely monitored at all stages, from the preparation and scrutiny of the training materials, including standardisation activities, external examiners are mindful of the importance of the training as it will impact on their appointment year on year.

Despite the stringent and valiant efforts of the awarding organisations to assuage centres' concerns and promote the positive and supportive aspects of external examination, any external scrutiny is often seen as inspection. This can lead to conflict between the external examiners and any number of staff, including senior management, when visiting a centre.

As part of the annual training for the Performing Arts and Music examiners, Kim and I designed a session using Applied Theatre techniques that was embedded in the EE training and explored some of those **difficult conversations** encountered by examiners.

Commissioning

Typically, the examiner training takes place at the beginning of July each year and the commissioning process begins around March. The planning and production of materials are the responsibility of senior examiners, subject to extensive and detailed commissioning instructions and to tight deadlines before final signoff by full-time senior staff.

This face-to-face training allowed EEs to receive updates and review examples of assessment tools employed by centres, including evidence and exemplars that demonstrate good practice and require improvement. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the past year. Essentially, the training is a very full day, a collegiate process, to

identify emerging themes and trends, with time built in for a generous amount of professional discussion. During the planning of the standardisation day and in spaces for professional discussions, I was able suggest that we plan time in each of the day-long examiner trainings for a session that focused on ***difficult conversations***. We were able to use Applied Theatre Techniques in the training without overtly mentioning it in any of the preparatory materials. As one examiner from the Music training session noted, in the invisible theatre '[we were] ambushed because we did the EE training...we were slightly tricked into being there' [Matthew, audio reflecting on the EE Performing Arts Training]. Molly, one of the EEs, noted on the overall AT approach used:

Molly: it's safer, less embarrassing than traditional roleplay [that] can be tricky to deal with as you aren't asking two people, to initiate...you are stepping into a picture that has already been partially painted and the embarrassment factor is less as they are stepping into something that already exists and are taking over rather than having to initiate...it's safer and allows the shared experience of the group to come out...it was so good that I said to my colleague we need to use this [Molly, audio, reflecting on EE Music Training].

Setting the Scene – The Synopsis

This sector training for Performing Arts and Music took place in a university conference centre in the UK Midlands. Because some of the materials were generic to all sectors and some delegates were equipped to work across both Music and Performing Arts, some of the training was modified over the two days to avoid repetition.

Following the invisible theatre, we had already decided to use a short scenario for a Forum Theatre piece and I began by playing the role of a disgruntled centre assessor and Kim the visiting EE. It wasn't long before the EEs were taking over the visiting EE role, in the Music training session. Jonathan was the first to be the Spect-actor and Kim took on the role of 'Joker'.

Gary: So, what you are saying to me, Jonathan, is that there is a problem with the assignment brief, but we've been running this brief for three years now and it's ok and it still works.

Jonathan: But I think, Gary, what you've described there is the problem, it's that...

Kim: Stop! There is a bit of a rule to this and if you feel that there might be a point where it might have gone in a different direction, if a certain word or a certain phrase might have been used you can kind of freeze it. So, I'm going to freeze it here because I'm not quite sure why Jonathan has said 'that might be the problem'. Sorry Jonathan I've got to pick you up a bit here [Extract from the video of Event 2].

Good humour and engagement are indicative of these training events that naturally spilled over into the actual training, making it viable and making it possible to try out new approaches and ideas to what otherwise could have been a very dry and lacklustre couple of days. This event was as much about the trainer as the delegates and is at the heart of *my desire* to be collegiate, inclusive and dialogical and provide the kind of inclusive Friirian pedagogical approach.

Despite the end-of-year tiredness and the inevitable issues over the year such as the introduction of new qualification frameworks, OfS and QAA updates, changes to policies, reporting, processes and procedures, there was a readiness to engage with fellow colleagues and meet new ones. With the confidence gained from previous events, we decided that we could stretch the use of applied theatre in the sessions to be more challenging. We decided to use 'Invisible Theatre' at some point during the training the next day. There was no script for this, and I left it to Kim to initiate a suitable point in the training.

The plan was then, following on from the invisible theatre, to transition into Forum Theatre. The idea and what followed was then to use several scenarios provided by the delegate EEs from their own experiences. Their real events and encounters would be played

out on the day of the training, developing into Forum Theatre work, using theatre techniques for part of the days' training.

4.5.1 Day One of Examiner Training – *Performing Arts*

Lavish buffet breakfasts, overly generous meals and the constant supply of refreshments was a feature of these training events. As a result, the only complaints about the food were usually there was too much. This all set a cheerful tone for the event, allowing us all to fully focus on the training.

Following a brief introduction to the day, I began very briefly discussing the theme by referring to *Jidaigeki's* film *Rashomon* (Kurosawa) as a way of introducing 'perceptions. This would then lead into our FT work and the idea of multiple conflicting or differing versions and perspectives.

Tony, the principal standards manager (PSM), who worked fulltime as PSM for Performing Arts, was in attendance as an observer. Tony interjected with some news updates on changes to the role of the examiner. He had a background as former lecturer in higher education with vocational experience as an actor/director.

After a brief discussion on changes, there was interactive discussion of the previous year's challenges, highlighting good practice. The whole premise of the event was for it to be participatory, and this would lead into the active participation, and the use of Applied Theatre techniques. After around 10 minutes there were already interventions and discussions from delegates on good practice, paving the way for further participation, including the FT.

4.5.2 Invisible Theatre

Having planned the day in advance, Kim would lead the FT activity and act as the 'Joker'. What was very different in this event was the introduction of 'Invisible Theatre'.

In the first part of the EE morning training session, we had discussed report writing, shared good practice, our own individual continuous professional development (CPD), and some of the essentials required, for example, reviewing advance assessment tools, planning visits and the evidence required for reporting on centres.

Following the morning break, as I was leading the second part of the training session, Kim interjected. He challenged me directly, strongly disagreed with me, and accused me of being 'patronising' with my observations and advice. This then developed into a very heated discussion and caused noticeable alarm in the event and was picked up in the subsequent interviews following the event.

Kim: The most important factor was other people's reactions to the intervention, not the intervention itself, how they perceived it, felt about it and how uneasy it made them feel... [KJ, post-event interview].

Tony, the senior observer of the event, was caught off guard as he was not paying attention, and he reflected later that he initially experienced a certain guilt and doubt.

Tony: I was aware after a while of the dynamic and the rhythm of the event changing somewhat...Kim was somewhat more vociferous... it was quite effective...I don't think anyone noticed as the change came quite suddenly but at a certain point, people were starting to wonder why Kim's attitude changed... also it was clearly making your dynamic with the team you were presenting quite difficult as well...and you were having to make

adjustments...in terms of the audience the other EEs, they were witnessing atypical behaviour from Kim and then you were put in a slightly difficult situation because of that...it made the examiners question the principles you were talking about [Tony, post-event interview].

In this particular FT event, the Invisible Theatre allowed a seamless transition as the participant delegates had been 'ambushed'. This was intentional and was planned:

Kim: that is what we talked about at the beginning of the session and what we could try and do...rather than me standing up and saying we are going to do this exercise...a bit of training, and that what they expected, and we were working against that [the training] doing this in a more subtle and nuanced way...and turned it round by saying how would we deal with that. It is explicit without saying you are being trained [KJ, post-event interview].

This also reflected our approach to these events – we expected active and not passive participation. This was also reflected in the vivid recalling of the events during later interviews. How this impacted on their responses as EE following the training when they worked in centres is interesting, but not reflected on in the context of this particular research.

In Invisible Theatre, unlike Forum Theatre, it is intentional that the audience is not aware that this is an 'act', but as the group becomes aware, we then reveal this as Invisible Theatre, and this then develops into Forum Theatre. Making use of Invisible Theatre allowed us to visit confrontation in situ, providing an emotional connection with the delegate examiners that initially felt real for them:

Molly: I eventually gleaned it was kind of a roleplay, but it wasn't absolutely obvious to begin with, which was quite interesting, it was

different. It was certainly different than the kind of thing you normally get in any of those types of training event [Molly, post-event interview].

Matthew: You were naturally sharing those experiences without asking a question...it's not led by the presenter...the lack of structure by throwing it out to the group gives the group the energy, I think that that is quite useful...in any kind of meeting or any kind of teaching experience it's often more useful to get people to want to engage rather than to respond to a question...in training you are actually in the situation but it's still safe...and you can try again...good training feels as much like reality as possible but it's still safe...when you did that stuff with Kim it helped set the scene for that, everyone was learning from it and some of that stuff might have even come about when they were in a centre, because it was real...whereas if it was a dry exercise on paper no way it would. [Matthew, post-event interview].

This then paved the way for moving directly into Forum Theatre and the *difficult conversations* that had begun with the Invisible Theatre.

Kim: The invisible theatre was quite subtle, very nuanced, in other words it was pushback...what we were trying to generate was pushback from what they might expect from the quality manager or a tutor that was disagreeing with what they were saying...and what we were trying to lead to was how *difficult conversations* could be resolved...what we set up was just a bit of awkwardness [KJ and GH, Marriot post-event interview].

4.5.3 Forum Theatre

Following initial formal delivery of the training programme and after the Invisible Theatre, we quickly and 'seamlessly' moved on to the FT session. The FT explored real scenarios based on the examiners' real experiences and *difficult conversations* and worked on possible solutions.

As with Session 1, Kim provided a very brief introduction to forum.

Kim: What we are going to do is to set it up as a forum, basically. I won't use the word 'roleplay' necessarily, but it is some kind of a forum where

the discussion that we have, in terms of the conversations that we have, is triangulated into something a bit more practical and something that we can test in a much more direct way within that kind of forum. So, it doesn't necessarily involve you taking those roles although it would be quite useful if you did volunteer yourself in some way later on in the process. But it is about using me and Gary to a certain extent to set up a particular difficult conversation or a specific way in which you've approached a particular area and using the forum to coach us really in a way that we might handle that difficult conversation. Initially we will start with maybe that kind of feedback session, or the way you have to give information that they don't want to hear, or a result that they don't particularly want to hear and there might be some kind of defence process that they go into or some kind of anxiety. So, in a way, it is kind of pulling from you, initially, examples of that... [Extract from the opening FT EE video and conversations with the 'Spect-actors'].

Again, once the FT activity began, it followed much the same as **Session 1**, albeit with a much smaller group. We ran and reran the scenarios based on the EEs' own stories, intervening as Kim stopped the scenes and the EEs suggested changes, micromanaging the conversation. The group members made changes to dialogue, tone, gesture and physicality, although this time they played the role of the EE in the centre with me playing the belligerent member of staff who had initially been played by Kim. As often happens with FT, the scene didn't progress very far – a word or slight movement would signal either Kim or a group member to say 'stop!' with a suggested alternative.

What followed led to a series of short scenes that replicated events that as examiners we had all faced, a disagreement about the assessment processes. Matthew kicked off the discussion with an example from one of his centres where he had suspected the assignment design wasn't allowing the students to attain the full range of grades. Kim at first attempts to get to the root of the issue: 'Is the key thing that comes out the fact that they really don't want

to listen to that?' 'Yeah', Matthew agrees, and Kim delves deeper. Whilst there appeared to be only a little to go on, it provided a potentially rich seam to explore as *difficult conversations* go.

Kim: That is important in the context of the last ten minutes in terms of the way this conversation works because it's *about what we listen* to and how can you get past that resistance of them not hearing you or maybe not understanding what you are asking them to do. What examples do we have of that, where you kind of get the sense of them not quite getting it or you not being able to get behind that front?' [KJ, video/audio, EE training session].

Jonathan quickly interceded 'I try and break it down in that situation...what I think they ought to be doing, down into smaller units and then check...'. As with Session 1, we were entering the territory of 'what do we know, what don't we know and what do we suspect' (KJ).

Kim asked Jonathan for an example, and we got Jonathan to take the chair to become the 'protagonist', continuing the conversation with me as the Centre assessor and Kim in the role of 'Joker' – the forum thus began. Very quickly Kim intervened, and as in most forums, the scene didn't progress very far as the 'Joker' picked up on a single word or gesture – in this case, the phrase - 'that might be the problem'. Even rerunning without this phrase, Jonathan's 'diplomacy' only opened new 'rabbit holes', issues and traps for the examiner.

Another delegate was put in the seat, and then another and the whole forum was micromanaged, perhaps without any solution – but what it did throw up was ideas, suggestions, pitfalls and how to manage the conversation. This process provided the examiner with suggestions without it turning into an opportunity for the Centre

assessor to add more complaints (which would have thereby digressed from the original issue). The process thus helps to focus on the initial and salient point the examiner is trying to raise, if not resolve.

Following the event, Kim and I discussed and unpacked the EE training session, discussing the purpose, intentions and processes, including how we perceived the event went. Both Kim and I had a similar and overlapping purpose. As the trainer, my purpose was overarching, to provide the prescribed training against the commissioning, including the standardisation, to facilitate the maximum positive outcome – that the examiners pass the standardisation. I am always made aware that no matter what I say to the examiners it is a test and my role is to make it as stress free and transparent as possible yet at the same time rigorous. To facilitate this, there needs to be a dialogue – a two-way dialogical process – and this required ‘buy in’, engagement and active participation. Adding nuances and introducing new ideas each year to the EE training provided scope for the unexpected rather than an expectation of familiarity and seemed to better engage the examiners. Molly’s response sums this up:

Molly: over the years, there’s always different approaches, you always tend to throw a slight curved ball in; you make good use of, kind of, I suppose, different stimulus...to try and introduce and try and get us thinking about what we are doing [Molly, post-event interview].

With such a vast amount of material and information to deliver, the training day has to be broken up into ‘bitesize’ chunks and to accommodate different ‘tastes’ and learning styles and assist delegates to take in the detail while remembering the most salient points. By linking activities to a clearly defined agenda and with a

variety of approaches, the aim is to promote better recall long after the training event has passed – I am constantly reminded by examiners that the training is in July and yet it isn't until some six months later in February at the earliest that they go into centres. Visits could be even later, into late June and on other occasions, abroad, into the following July and August.

At the heart of Kim's approach in this session was communication and to that extent it conferred with my overall approach. Although, for Kim, the purpose was to pick up on a point in which *difficult conversations* were becoming part of the agenda and to interject with examples of the ways in which *difficult conversations* could be handled. This is why Kim's response was at a point in the conversation dialogue that could or may elicit further progress, improvement or change by the participants in the room.

In this examiner training event we used a different approach that reflected the more corporate approach that Kim uses. Cramming so much into a tight schedule, Kim drew on his experience outside formal schooling as he reflected on how different this whole-day event is to other more corporate sessions:

Kim:...it's also to do with the demands of industry. In the forum, and in that context, in an industrial context, what they can't cope with is an all-day workshop, whereas they can cope with a 45-minute effective communication session,...that they can measure in terms of what benefits they're going to get out of that workshop/session...So, in a way, you have to keep talking, and telling them what's going on here. And what it is that we're going to go on to do, you know what I mean? I think it makes you very, you know, very selective, edited, whatever, it is small, you know, all that kind of language, there's no open-endedness about improvisation, you know, it's very kind of clear to them. But in a bit in a context of what I was doing at [X], or when you've got the whole

morning to do it. You know, you can throw that stuff in, but you are going to equip them with the language quite quickly. And they needed to, you know, they started off very nervous [GH and KJ, post-event interview].

4.5.4 The 'Spect-actors'

The external examiners attending the training had diverse backgrounds that included working in high schools, universities, industry and private providers. They were an eclectic and pragmatic group, often querulous yet eager to tell the latest stories from their centre visits.

The EE team unwittingly became the 'Spect-actors' in the training event. This was not lost on Matthew, who questioned Kim and I much later, following the training event:

Matthew: So how do you get them there in the first place, because we did the EE training...we were slightly tricked into being there so does that happen a lot?

Kim: That's what we said earlier about the acting skills, because they happen right from the beginning and there are certain tricks you can play to make them think that we are just one of them. That generally works best in smaller groups. What's really useful about those standardisation days irrespective of Forum Theatre is being able to share those experiences and learn from them...you were naturally sharing the experiences without there being a question...it's not led by the presenter...the lack of structure by throwing it out to the group; give the group the energy, and I think that is quite useful...it's better to get people to want to engage than respond to a question...it's important to me when I'm running a meeting, I don't want to be the person driving it...in training, at best you are actually at the situation but it's still safe...

I continued questioning Kim:

Gary: Did it matter that you knew some of the people in the room?

Kim: No, it didn't matter because the other thing about forum which is different from roleplay is that suspension of disbelief goes wider into those because it becomes much more part of the immediacy and whatever it is that they are doing becomes much more about belief in it. They are not setting it up in an artificial way so actually the thing about knowing the people is that they kind of look at you a little bit differently because you are putting them in a position where they are repositioning themselves in relationship to you, or to me as the joker as well as the conversation they are having [GH and KJ, post-event interview].

4.6 Training Session 3

Training for Support and Academic staff for a Higher Education alternative (private) provider – supporting student assessment and assessment feedback

Event 3: Higher Education Music Provider

Kim and I conducted an FT event as part of a whole-day training in a London hotel for a higher education music institute. The FT event took place immediately after lunch and involved centre managers, full and part-time teaching and administration staff. The staff consisted of a mix of academic teaching and support staff. I was a facilitator on the day and Kim and two actors led the FT event. The focus of the FT was providing assessment feedback to students. There were approximately 80 delegates, and the FT part of the programme was designed to be interactive to allow staff to discuss and challenge the way that students were provided with written and verbal feedback support from their tutors. Kim and I designed the script for the actors which was modified in consultation with the Centre (see Appendix 3a). The delegates were very active participants, which led to a great deal of interaction and extended into 'Chain Forum' – a quickfire activity that allowed participants to

suggest in rapid succession how the dialogue and action of the actors (as tutor or student) could be improved/changed.

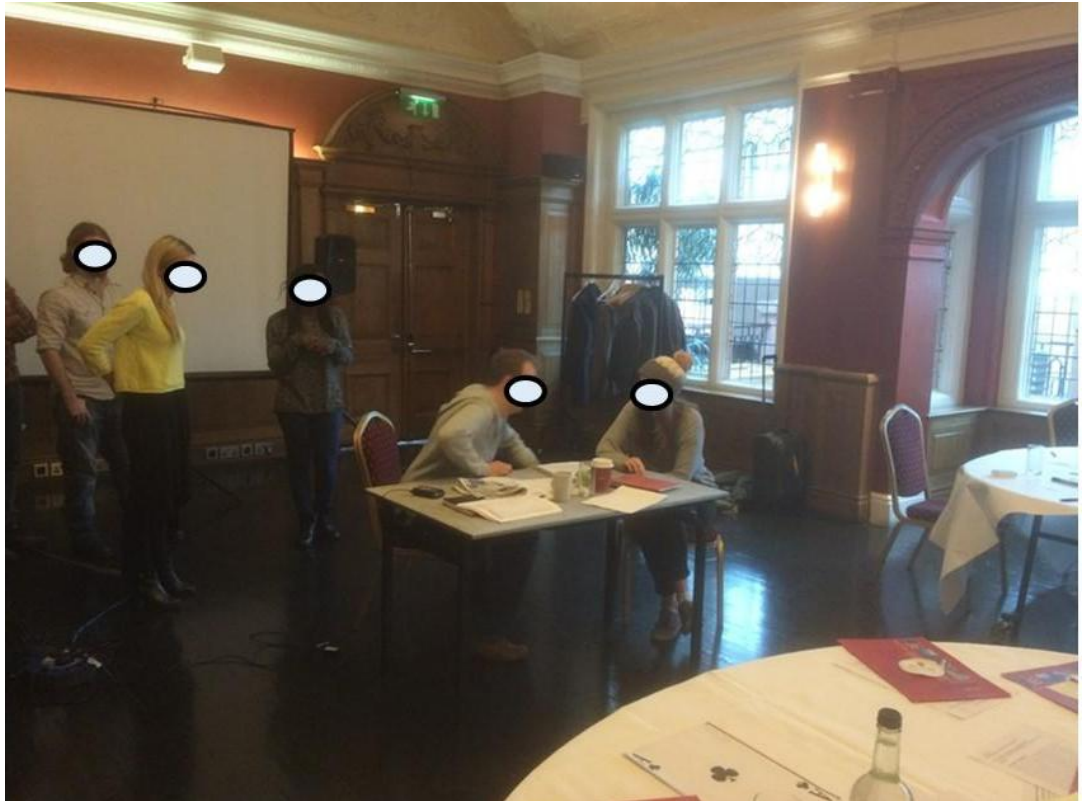


Photo 21: Chain Forum – A 'Spect-actor' with the student (Actor).

The audience transforms fiction as they take on the role of the actor, becoming 'Spect-actors' (Boal, 2008).

Event 3: Key Moments

- Commissioning process requested a change to the script, but this didn't really matter as the subject and context was retained.

Kim: Despite many changes to the script by the Centre, it didn't really make any difference nor on the impact as the 'participation was good and energised and quite active'. So, it matters less about the scenario even if written by the centre 'because it [FT] works' [KJ & GH, Marriot interview].

- There were some passive-aggressive interventions from a small group of delegates before we began the actual FT. We were able to improvise and deal with the heckling with the classic putdown, 'if you want to join in and take part you need to rehearse'. Kim well versed as an actor skilfully improvised and thinking on his feet was able to diffuse the heckling.
- Knowing your audience: the end of the day slot wasn't aided by the 'graveyard' slot at the end of the day where the use in the FT of 'Stereo types' exploited the actors and led to aggression against them. This then led to participants having arguments with the Actors, and Kim had to intervene to remind the audience/participants that they were watching a performance, and that they were watching actors

Background and further context

Previously I had worked extensively with this specialist contemporary higher education music provider over a number of years, delivering support and training for all staff and management at the Centre. Together with other consultant colleagues, we had provided support on quality assurance and preparation for external audit and review. During this full day of training, I was tasked with providing training and sessions that involved centre managers, and full and part-time teaching and administration staff. The overall focus and remit of my work for the training was on assessment and although *The Agenda* for the day included Forum, it wasn't overtly named as such but rather *Assessment and Feedback – Practical Workshop*. The aim was to focus on **providing assessment feedback** to students and those *difficult conversations* that may arise. This Forum was more akin to Kim's corporate work. However, although the corporate work has a

Kim: commercial end...the tools remain the same...though they are delivered in a much more truncated way, and there is more delivery, rather

than a free flowing process between the audience and me as the 'Joker'...and the limited time I have to introduce the process [KJ & GH, Marriot interview].

I asked Kim why AT and FT works and he replied:

Kim: Because they take ownership of it...as soon as they think they have the ideas and they are controlling it, it can't fail because it works [KJ & GH, Marriot interview].

This event required the participants to be correctly informed and guided by the 'Joker' in the execution of all the activities. But as I noted earlier with heckles, it wasn't always plain sailing.

Steve: Kim had to intervene during this Forum when one of the delegates reacted to my performance, Kim reminding delegates 'they are actors' [Steve audio interview].

Of all three training sessions, this was perhaps the most challenging as we had already met resistance and cynicism from a handful of staff in previous meetings. However, we continued to have the support of senior management both before and following this event.

Their practical approach in workshops and training ensured that staff at all levels claimed ownership of roles, procedures and policies. In turn, this allowed academic and administrative colleagues to take a unified, focused approach...Their approach to the job was creative, detailed, measured, robust and thorough [Centre Chief Executive testimonial].

Another difference in this session was the use of actors that gave Kim a different perspective as the 'Joker'. We had for a long time worked around the situation where Kim and I were both actors and facilitators. This was never ideal, and we had always thought that using actors and a separate 'Joker' was much more effective, although for commissioners using fewer trainers, this was much

more cost effective. Also, actors are much more detached from a Centre, its issues, problems or politics and this allowed Kim to focus on being the Applied Theatre practitioner – a role that he saw as integral to his work as a theatre director.

Kim: I integrate so much of my Applied Theatre work into theatre directing that its quite difficult to see the difference between them. It's much better to think about a branch of Applied Theatre being directing...and one of them being direct theatre 'Joker' facilitation work...they begin to merge...and have the same kind of aesthetic process...there is still no recognised place for the Applied Theatre practitioner...but that's the pyramid of experience I sit on top of...the genealogy of it [KJ & GH, interview].

Commissioning

The Forum event took place immediately after lunch and involved centre managers and a mix of academic teaching and support staff. I had already facilitated previous parts of the training throughout the day. Kim and two actors led on the FT event, and I observed. The focus of the Forum was providing assessment feedback to students. There were approximately 80 delegates, and this part of the day's programme was designed to be interactive to allow staff to discuss and challenge the way that students were provided with written and verbal feedback and support by their tutors. Kim and I designed the script for the actors which was modified in consultation with the Centre (see Appendix 3a).

4.7 Forum Theatre

As with all these Forum events, Kim understood the necessity of informing participants about what the workshop entailed and framing it in such a way that it didn't create any preconceptions in the minds of the participants. The delegates need to know something of the language of drama or theatre.

Kim: You have to deal with it...I know when I'm working with a group, I have to get the theatre, drama thing out of the way...I set up at the beginning of the session what it's going to be, and what it's not going to be...they will have their idea of school drama and their own notions [KJ and GH, interview part 1].

There are several ways that Kim was able to achieve the 'buy-in' for Forum and dispel any myths and bias the delegates may have brought to such events. Kim was 'careful not to reinforce their expectations...you are going to show them a piece of drama', when their experience is often of 'watching TV, soap operas, it's no different to that, we are asking them to suspend their disbelief, we begin to use performance language, we are going to see a scenario' [KJ and GH, post-event interviews]. The scenarios would have been familiar to them as they came from their own stories. Although we told them we were going to '...change [the scenarios] in a way you wouldn't if you were watching on TV, although you might want to, you do shout at the TV, we all do... If EastEnders comes on, we say "you wouldn't do that". Would it make good drama? No, it wouldn't' [KJ and GH, post-event interviews].

Kim also noted that the 'validation' to his work in the way that the genealogy of AT and his own experiences have coalesced into his current approach and methodology when delivering training, becoming a 'hybrid' of theatre practitioners. He noted his NLP coaching was 'a mongrel of all those things...and creates a new aesthetic and ways of moving forward' [KJ and GH, post-event interviews].

Earlier in the training and shortly before the Forum, I presented a session on assessing creative work using an extract from the film *Amadeus* to demonstrate that music can be qualitatively assessed if

a measurable language³⁹ is used. At a point towards the end of the presentation, some questions that the delegates would like to have asked were directed at Mozart. Spontaneously, and without warning, I was able to use Kim, (who at that point was randomly placed in the room) as Mozart. Kim rose to the occasion and a light-hearted, yet fruitful encounter ensued with Kim assuming the role. He responded to all manner of questions, including some clearly passive-aggressive comments from a small section of the delegates. This was to provide a useful lever into the Forum that Kim led shortly after this activity.

Disappointedly, the bulk of the previous presentations that day had been lacklustre and focused on telling and listening with little interaction from the delegates. PowerPoint presentations dominated up until our Mozart and subsequent Forum event. After lunch, several delegates left, despite being paid for their attendance at the event.

³⁹ Blooms Taxonomy of measurable verbs was explored here a range of sources discussed HANNA, W. 2007. The New Bloom's Taxonomy: Implications for Music Education. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 108, 7-16.



Photo 22: Kim, the 'Joker' facilitator, Steve the tutor (actor), & Hanna the student (actor)

Despite these misgivings, the delegates during the FT event and 'Chain Forum' proved to be engaging and very positive. The audience transform fiction as they take on the role of the actor, emerging from the audience becoming 'Spect-actors'. The Spect-actors relive in the fiction on stage their 'social reality'. 'By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself' (Boal, 2008b, xxi).

For this session, Steve the actor, playing the role of tutor, understood the close proximity of the audience and the reality required of the actor in Forum to facilitate the 'buy in' and emotional involvement needed. During freeze moments Steve recalls as key messages, not to 'listen to Kim or the audience comments – and to shut off...like a video that has been stopped and started again' [Steve, audio interview reflecting on FT]. Engagement in the events can be quite vociferous – Steve recalled a previous Forum where a

university head of HR got very 'exasperated', saying that this was 'a disgrace and [that] there would be disciplinaries arising from this' [Steve FT actor, interview with GH]. This was quite common as delegates would be vocally incensed, they would 'go off on one and Kim would bring it back to [issue/s] we are trying to deal with' [Steve, audio interview reflecting on FT]. Again, as in previous events, the scene was revisited and adjustments made to body language, the dialogue, and approach, but 'there [were] still things that hadn't been picked up' [Steve, audio interview reflecting on FT]. The Forum was micromanaged.

Steve recalls very clearly that Session 3 was in a huge hotel ballroom, set out cabaret style with about eight delegates to each table around 10 tables. 'I was playing the hip music lecturer/tutor "too cool for school" basically a failed rock star'. Hanna, the other professional actor, didn't meet up with Kim or Steve until about half an hour before, but both had prepared the script scenario [Steve, audio interview reflecting on Session 3].

Kim again introduced Forum, and Steve noted his role:

Steve: I was the personal tutor for this student, and she was feeling under pressure and wanted some pointers for the submission of an assignment, and I was a bit of a slacker and said, 'don't worry about it and just chill'. I was minimising all the problems and being patronising. It wasn't long before the audience became incensed, Kim had to do bit of crowd control...a guy at the back was completely rabid about it, he was 'spitting blood and shouting' and Kim reminded the audience 'they are actors' [Steve, audio interview reflecting on Session 3].

The Session also included hot seating as in Session 1, Kim asking each table to be prepared to question the characters like a mini investigation, adding a further dimension to the event. For Steve the

anger continued on the tables, Kim reminded the tables 'you are investigating, and some tables got it and asked me more appropriate questions' [Steve audio interview reflecting on Session 3].

Following the session, the audience were able to chat to the actors, Kim and me. Steve recalled the very positive feedback and lively discussion around the Forum session – 'it created quite a stir' [Steve]. The environment provided a 'safe' place to explore *difficult conversations*, and 'the overreactions by some of the audience members would not have played out in real-life situations, clearly at this event the audience had suspended their disbelief' [Steve, audio interview reflecting on Session 3].

Summary

This final session was both distinct and the most challenging yet in many ways elicited the most positive and active response both during and following the event. Using actors allowed Kim to fully encompass the 'Joker' role.

A highlight of the day was undoubtedly the hypothetical student/tutor vignette. Just brilliant. The potency of having professional actors perform and then respond to our comments was incredible [email from Centre manager, see Appendix 6].

The AT literature may suggest that practitioners, thinking they can transform the world, too often see the oppressed as objects, 'beings for others' instead of the opportunity to become 'beings for themselves' (Freire, 1970). Freire warns of 'cultural invaders' or denouncing 'neoliberal fatalism' where the oppressed become objects. He calls for 'cultural synthesis' where the 'actors' come from 'another world' but 'do not come to teach or to transmit or to give anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the

people's world' (Freire, 1970, p.180). Boal's approach here leads us to expect that those who use such AT are indeed from 'another world' and there is an expectation that they are actors, directors and that they are from theatre.

The Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional...and outside of it, in a dual reality (Boal, 2008b, xxi).

For this research, although the actors were not necessarily familiar with either Boal or Freire, they added to Boal's intentional pedagogy of FT practice and also were able to add valuable insights to the data.

The three sessions elicited a large amount of data, which are considered and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of the data gathered from the AT training sessions. Where possible, I have attempted to triangulate observed actions and events from the training sessions, reflexively from the viewpoints and perspective of the participants, my practitioner colleague Kim, and me as researcher/practitioner and actor.

In terms of **qualitative research**, Malterud outlines 'specific challenges' (Malterud, 2001, p.483) in the processes of data collection and subsequent analysis. The **specific challenges** in my qualitative research methods relate to the 'nature and assumptions of the data and questions to be answered'. As an insider and participant researcher, I have reflected on my effect on the research, and attempted to maintain an awareness of 'the principles and consequences of sampling, and the process of organisation and interpretation during analysis, [that] all affect research, and are closely related to different aspects of validity', and I have given attention to the legitimacy of *my* research (Malterud, 2001, p.483-484).

First, I should outline my **initial thoughts** reflecting on the entire research processes, and in response to my research questions.

1. How did I come to be an AT practitioner?

There was no clear logic to my becoming an AT practitioner; it was progressive, a coincidence, serendipity, and gleaned with contributions from a wide range of opportunities and experience/s. I was open minded and curious, and often sheer hard work and determination to reflect on my work and improve my skills played a key role. My development was *genealogical*, not linear.

2. What do the data and my evidence tell us about how Applied Theatre works?

The benefits included positive feedback on the usefulness of the training, and the active engagement of participants that often went beyond the planned expectations of each event. The challenges included last-minute changes, and poor organisation and briefing for attending delegates on the part of the

commissioners. Passive aggressive and other behaviours of sceptical participants, and hierarchical power interventions all added to the value of the events. The events provided fictional safe places to explore ideas for change and transformation.

3. How does my Applied Theatre and Forum Theatre work in educative settings in a safe and ethical manner? Participants noted how useful and safe it was to try out fictional scenarios in preparation for real and *difficult conversations*.

4. What does the participant engagement in the events tell us about AT practice? What did participants have to say, how did they perceive the events, and what are the implications for those taking part? Enjoyment! Attendance was good, interaction was excellent, and comments were overwhelmingly positive thoughtful, supportive and developmental.

Summary of Training Sessions

Session 1

A high school provided data from a large number of teachers and managers from a wide range of subject backgrounds and included direct participation from students and staff in workshops that were developed into a forum theatre event performed by students and staff. The participant audience was made up of teaching, administration and support staff and invited parents.

Session 2

Higher Education External Examiner (EE) Training for a UK and international awarding organisation for a small group of specialist Performing Arts and Music EEs.

Session 3

A group of teacher/lecturers, support staff and managers from a **Specialist London-based Vocational Music Higher Education provider**.

Overarching Themes and Aims from all Sessions

The purpose of each event was to explore the stories and experiences of the participants using theatre and drama techniques to provide and explore opportunities for change and transformation that AT and FT promise. The key and overarching theme and subject for all these sessions was *difficult conversations*.

Emerging Themes

As noted earlier, the themes were numerous and

- rooted in the personal experiences and stories of the participants

Intended Aims

How Applied Theatre was used

- to promote, suggest and facilitate social and political change, and influence individual and collective behaviour to educate, train and use in conflict resolution,
- beyond theatre norms,
- with fiction, based on real stories and experiences in safe spaces.

Other key and emerging factors, whilst not all directly related to the research questions emerged from evidence that supports the inquiry:

1. The **benefits** and **challenges** of working with AT, and the background and development processes to becoming an AT practitioner.
2. **How participants engaged** in the events, what they had to say, how they perceived the events and **what the implications are for those taking part. Participant engagement and evidence of how AT works.**
3. Establishing whether the **ethics** of Applied Theatre and in particular Forum Theatre provided a **safe (ethical)** and

useful pedagogy and practice in the context of these and for future events.

5.1 What do the data and evidence tell us about how Applied Theatre worked, and the benefits and challenges in providing training in this way?

Each of the Forum sessions had relatively strong bespoke themes. Whilst the themes were predicated by the demands of the clients, we had a relatively free hand once each event was underway. The sessions were all marked by clear objectives, all commissioned with the purpose of exploring how training could be delivered with the intention of promoting change. By using Forum and Applied Theatre techniques, as practitioners we were able to inculcate, apply and suggest possibilities for change. And thereby provide potential interventions and strategies for the participants to consider, if not directly implement. The purpose was to persuade and encourage participants with 'real' and 'fictional contexts' to foster awareness and to bring about transformation (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015). We were not encumbered by the commissioning process because, at its core, these events were about the stories and experiences of the participants. The commissioning process served mainly to set in broad terms the theme/s after advance consultation with the event commissioners. Once we entered the space and venue, the 'stage' was ours.

5.1.2 How the Applied Theatre sessions worked

Despite the clear differences in the three sessions (described in Chapter 4) we approached each project in similar but nuanced ways. We drew on our previous experiences, knowing that each event, whilst seemingly very different, had a structure and intention based on reliable and robust pedagogy. We had a tried and tested formula that we had used several times, so we trusted in ourselves, and in the techniques we had evolved over time. We didn't adopt a

didactic, dogmatic or ideological stance towards the AT work, although we were mindful of the safety of our participants.

Theatre tools can be used to protect participants emotionally and at the same time give possibilities to explore burning issues – not only through intellectual means (Österlind, 2008, p.76).

We were informed by the theoretical frameworks and practitioners, but not bound or tethered to them – we adopted a pragmatic approach that enabled us to change, adapt and improvise in response to given circumstances. Over time, our work had developed, which was also evident and carried forward in elaborations in the sessions I have described here. As Kim noted,

Kim:...it became much more fluid and intuitive in the way that we began to understand when and how the particular method was appropriate. There didn't have to be much forethought about that actually and it became more embodied [KJ, post-event interview].

Either immediately or shortly after these sessions, Kim and I reflected on the work we had done – at times reflecting on past events as well as looking forward to the next event and future work. The face-to-face conversations were largely about Forum and on one occasion, held with another colleague, Darren, who knew us both and who was also a doctoral researcher in education.

Contextual background to our practitioner work

Of similar age, Kim and I had a similar education and cultural background. We were both performers, although my experience was mostly in music whereas Kim was an actor/director and scriptwriter. We both had a drama in education background shared the same language which provided a clear and helpful basis for our Forum work. Kim, reflecting on his influences and his current work,

discussed his background and historical influences, including his original degree training, said:

Kim: It wasn't pure...its wasn't a straightforward drama in education training, because the people I worked with at that time were actors and directors...so it was framed by a theatre aesthetic, it was really about producing plays but at the same time...it was the teacher training stuff, that at the time I wasn't interested in [KJ, interview with GH].

I had similar experiences in my own higher education teacher training and postgraduate training and in the 'business end' sociology. We had both largely ignored or at least disregarded the educational drama lecturers and the teacher training modules. Like Kim, I attended practitioner workshops, including with Dorothy Heathcote and Ken Robinson, and at the time, as Kim recounted, 'I didn't know how important and significant those people were', including 'Johnathan Neelands...who was on the same course as me...and he wrote his first book⁴⁰ shortly after that'. Similarly, at the time, we both ignored the 1970's landmarks in drama education as we were more interested in being performers. But the knowledge of those British practitioners' work 'got in somehow, because I was there and the whole drama in education context was about those books' [KJ, interview with GH].

It was in formal teaching that we both returned to those texts – 'we had to start again' – and also became interested in assessment of creative subjects. This then developed as we both progressed in our teaching roles into Further Education and the work of Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed. This continued and resonated in our 'half-hearted attempts at Forum Theatre' [KJ, interview with GH]. For both, it was a challenge as it didn't quite work, and we both began

⁴⁰ Neelands, NEELANDS, J. 1984. *Making Sense of Drama: A Guide to Classroom Practice*, Heinemann Educational Books published., *Making Sense of Drama: A Guide to Classroom Practice*.

to apply our efforts through more rigorous research and through attending workshops and observing other practitioners.

Kim would regard himself as politically much further left than me, 'an old fashioned Marxist' [KJ]. This was important as it allowed us to challenge each other's views and in practical terms also provided a much more measured and less didactic and dogmatic approach to our work.

While the contests between Theatre and Drama (discussed in the literature review) have a personal meaning for both Kim and I, these seem to have been ameliorated in that

Kim: the power of drama [is] communication, transformation and improvisation...it wasn't about skills and techniques, and theatre...when drama was at the centre of things...In retrospect, it was the whole...the theatre schools, the Brecht work, the actor training, [all] became as relevant in its methodology...[my] early drama training became as relevant as [much as my] theatre work...it was about combining those two and not worrying about the division between them [KJ & GH interview].

Vignette 17: Dogma

My positionality was often tempered by those around me and particularly teaching colleagues, many of whom had very entrenched views. As a young teacher, I wasn't very accommodating about what I often saw as blind obedience to practice and practitioners. Later, working for the QAA on Higher Education reviews, I found it astonishing that university professors and academics could be so biased and even bigoted when conducting reviews – on one occasion, about a multicultural provider, a visiting reviewer commented: 'Who do they think they are – thinking of running research, a level 6-7 programme of degrees?' Similarly, I witnessed unethical behaviour by a group of Ofsted reviewers who were reviewing an FE College. The behaviour took the

form of 'loose' conversation and disparaging comments in public places, including in the lifts.

These experiences shaped my behaviour and ethical stance and served to help me develop a more dialogical efficacy through all my work.

5.1.3 The benefits

The benefits of working this way were the flexibility that Forum allowed. Although there is no prescription for AT or FT, above all it is a very democratic process – it's not about the 'theatre', the aesthetic or the event, but it helps if the performance work shines through, but essentially it works on a different level – beyond theatre. It is intentionally rooted in the audience as participants, and this makes it real, believable and relevant. The participants own the stories, it's their experiences that Forum brings alive and Forum has the potential to promote and facilitate social and political change. As 'Spect-actors' the audience can be and do whatever they want or feel comfortable with – as influencers, individuals or collectively, they can decide if the Forum educates, trains them, or is useful, for example, in conflict resolution.

Interviews with participants, particularly those from the EE training (Session 2), reinforced the idea that it was fiction, but believable and a safe space to try out some of the challenges encountered when visiting and examining in such a wide range of centres both in the UK and internationally. In all the Forum sessions, there was no shortage of stories and experiences, which were willingly shared. Invariably, we ran out of time at these events but there was no need for a dénouement, thus leaving the *difficult conversations* to be continued. This isn't a problem, as we aren't there to provide solutions – 'plays that are too narrowly directed toward a single purpose run the risk of contradicting a fundamental principle of

theatre, which is conflict, contradiction, or some type of clash or combat' (Boal, 2008b, p.48). The actors in the Forums must be 'free' and 'without limitations or restraints. In short, the character is the absolute subject of his actions' (2008b, p.74).

5.1.4 The challenges

As noted earlier, whilst there were numerous themes, the participants' perceptions could not really be gauged. But we had to work from our experience which told us that using drama, theatre and roleplay created barriers and fears amongst a significant enough number of audiences so we avoided even mentioning this in our preambles at FT/AT events. Roleplay pervades our lives from early childhood to the workplace, and even socially. But this doesn't sit well with everyone because unlike FT theatre, you *are* unavoidably required to actively participate. Others are much more critical about the effectiveness of roleplay, and whilst the function and purpose maybe laudable in an environment that is thought to

...provide safe practice, typically of an interpersonal skill, such as interviewing or selling, in an off-job environment, almost always a classroom. By 'safe' we mean away from real interviewees or customers, so mistakes can be made without damaging real relationships. In practice, role plays are anything but safe, because participants are (or believe they might be) in danger of suffering the worst injury that can be inflicted on any adult, i.e. embarrassment in front of their peers (Shepherd, 2010).

Roleplay, unlike Forum potentially exposes its participants to all manner of stresses. For example, whilst roleplays may ask participants to be themselves, reflecting on *given* situations or events, they aren't based on or focused on the experiences and stories of the participants, and at worse roleplays demand that a participant play the antagonist. Roleplay becomes about performance, and the performance then becomes the focus of the

activity rather than the issue. The stories or experience are lost, and the activities are more about the participants and their active participation.

Typically, role plays are acted out at a painfully slow pace in front of other course participants functioning as observers. For the brash and more confident amongst them, this is an opportunity to show off. For all others this constitutes a terror as great as they will experience without having to speak in public (which makes the role playing of speaking in public the most terrifying of all) (Shepherd, 2010).

This resonates directly with our experiences and Shepherd's assertions are backed up by other contributors to his blog, with one anonymous contributor noting that

Role play is fine if I am in acting school! If the subject I am learning is NOT ACTING, why would the instructor think the skill of ACTING would apply to learning something? (Shepherd, 2010).

Whilst Shepherd's contribution to this research may be limited, his observations prompted a wide degree of agreement and replies that broadly outlined some of the challenges of using roleplay. It underlines the misplaced use, understanding in the widespread use for training, and highlights the fear omnipresent for a large number of those on the receiving end. Used poorly, role work demeans and devalues Heathcote's pedagogy. Roleplay or role work should be planned and involve the teacher or trainer playing much more significant role, with clear and applied understanding.

The encounter with the role may be intense and absorbing for her pupils, but it will also be objective and reflective, since experience alone without reflection will not lead to learning (Johnson and O'Neill 1984: 12, cited in Booth, 2012, p.7).

Heathcote and Boals pedagogies have some synergies for example teacher in role, and the role of the 'Joker'.

Heathcote's development of the strategy teacher in role allowed her to influence the dramatic action while participating in it, as well as offering opportunities for stepping out of the role to review, plan and negotiate with the students what had happened and what might happen next (2012, p.7).

Whilst I'm not deliberately conflating Heathcote's pedagogies, Shepherd's observations on the inherent preconceptions about using drama/theatre/roleplay, and my observation is, that perceptions and fears about actively taking part in AT can be avoided by careful preparation and communication with the participants. The literature, our experience and observations suggest the importance of trainer/teacher/practitioner whose role in FT is much more purposeful than merely an instigator of the roleplay activity.

The key challenges I propose are first in the preparation and commissioning of FT and AT, and this may include working on scripts or scenarios as part of the commissioning process. Second, the 'Joker' practitioner preparation and preparing for the inclusive preparation of the participants, the audience, that should include at least some minimal theoretical background, whilst putting the audience at ease and dispelling any myths that we are not asking them to do drama – 'be trees...the wind...small or big'. And third, we are not making any claims about the 'transformative powers' of the methodology, we are providing a vehicle for participants to suspend their disbelief. The challenge is to ensure we communicate to participants 'what it's going to be, and what it's not going to be' as all part of the inclusive 'buy in' [KJ and GH interview, part 1].

5.2 How participants engaged

in the events, what participants had to say, and how they perceived the events... **What are the implications for those taking part?**

Above, I've already outlined some of the challenges and benefits for those taking part in FT. In reviewing the implications for the participants, I was conscious not only of what and where the evidence could be found and located, but what the expectations of the participants and commissioning agents and practitioners they employ. We applied a familiar and usual procedure, with the exception of the EE training (when we used Invisible Theatre as a starting point). At the start of each of the sessions, we made clear from the outset, directly addressing the audience/participants, that this process was a dialogue and was not intended to be a panacea, but an exploration and an opportunity to share their stories and experiences, and the way we were going to do that was through FT.

Kim: What I do a lot of the time is I assume that people in the room know what I am about to do, and are already thinking 'here we go again with roleplay' but that is just not true. Even if they've got a hint of what might be happening then, thirty seconds into it, they realise it is slightly different to what they thought [KJ, interview following Session 2].

Kim in setting up the Forum session indicates why Forum is used...

Kim:...the advantage is you suspend your disbelief, you become more involved with the action, more quickly involved and decisions are made on an emotional and intellectual basis, so we get to the heart of the matter...

...and what he expects of the audience participants when watching the initial actors performing a short scenario...

Kim:...very quickly take in everything about it, the movement, the action, the body language...all I want you to do is focus... [KJ, extract, video, Session 1 – the Forum].

This research was never about impact but about processes and methods of working AT.

An important consideration had to be made when using AT in these training sessions as they were often embedded as a part of other training needs. Perhaps more obvious in **Session 2** where it was not all about Applied Theatre. To be able to introduce AT in the event, there had to be a set-up, a process of consent that would allow such an activity to be moved 'seamlessly' – as Tony observed, 'you did something with Kim...Invisible Theatre in which Kim started in a way that was quite seamless, interjecting quite inappropriately in the conversation' [Tony, PSM post-event interview].

Furthermore, the way the event led up to the Invisible Theatre and Forum Theatre required a stylised approach to the overall training day and was predicated by a Freirean dialogical approach with all the delegates celebrated for their individual expertise and experience. For example, this was framed in their sharing of their professional development over the past academic year. Whilst there are the mandatory PowerPoint presentations with a basic structure 'dictated' by Head Office, a few moments into the event I interrupted proceedings to encourage professional discussion.

Molly, EE delegate and Spect-actor (Session 2) was an experienced senior examiner who always threw herself wholeheartedly into training. Herself a proficient trainer, her engagement with the training was active and dynamic over the two days as her role encompassed both Performing Arts and Music. Reflecting on the Invisible Theatre interlude, Molly noted

Molly: you make good use of different stimulus...to get us to think about what we are doing. It wasn't absolutely obvious from the beginning...it was incredibly useful [Molly, post-event interview, Performing Arts EE Training].

What was apparent was the participants' vivid recall during later interviews. Whilst this research is not looking at impact on the training, it can be surmised by active participation, observations and comments by participants they had been imbued with the sense, meaning and usefulness of the activities. This was supported by their comments and actions for example in the case of Molly employing Kim directly to engage with other examiners in a similar project at a much larger event.

Whilst the overall themes may have been defined by the commissioning process, a key element in all the sessions, and a factor in most of our Forum work, was that the sessions were rooted in the personal experiences and stories of the participants, and this made it much more real. And, crucially, it was *not* about roleplay:

Kim:...kind of goes with the territory of not setting it up as a kind of defined set of agendas. I worked with what they said...it was the *difficult conversations* for them. We might have primed them a bit and you have to know where to nudge here and where to go in a particular direction but essentially, they were quite clearly saying 'well I had a conversation with someone, and it was like this'. So, it couldn't have been roleplay in one sense because the roles weren't defined in that [instance], and we wouldn't know what those roles were, necessarily. So, I think there are differences between roleplay and forum theatre because forum is much more dynamic, I think in the way that it changes people's perceptions [KJ, post-event interview].

This dialogical approach applied to training and examining resonates with Boal and Freire's pedagogies. Freire's 'dialogical action' in this sense is the antidote to the 'banking concept of education' by looking to 'problem posing education' and a dialogical approach to the student-teacher relationship, and without any age boundaries (Freire, 1970). It is in keeping with Freire's and Boal's principles that I regard the participants as the subjects of the research and not as

objects; therefore, it was essential to maintain a dialogical approach as practitioners *with* participants. The equity of power and the dialogical relationships between the Joker/facilitator, actors and the Spect-actors (the audience) are what creates the possibility of transformation in all these Applied Theatre sessions. This whole process of engagement may begin with fictions enabled through the stories and events espoused by spect-actors, and are then acted out; they are 'real' scenarios, allowing the participants the opportunity to make change. Freire's conscientisation (critical consciousness) and knowing was also evident through the active and direct engagement of the 'spect-actors' in all three sessions. There was a relationship that created the opportunity to make amendments in the scenarios and the *difficult conversations*, and to show circumstances, or make a difference to given circumstances, and thereby at the very least causing participants to think about 'what if', and effect change.

The teacher–pupil relation as proposed by Freire is translated into TO as the relation between actors and spectators, and the task of conscientisation becomes the task of making spectators aware of their limit-situations through embodying the position of the 'spect-actor' (Bala and Albacan, 2013, p.393).

It seemed quite natural to use Forum for the EE training despite there being no mention in the agendas or detail that would indicate its use.

Kim: I was kind of repositioning the agenda and the work to be a subject that could be shared by everybody in the room in terms of the physical forum so that we could take whatever it was at that particular time as part of the agenda. For instance, you could be leading a particular training event based, in this case, on standardisation of particular materials. But when it came to the point where somebody needed to have some kind of advice or support, or we needed to bring up the agenda of having a difficult conversation with someone in their centre who needed to be told that the standard wasn't correct, or the evidence wasn't correct – then we needed

everybody in the room to be on the same kind of page. It became a forum because, as a trainer working with me, you were kind of deferring to me that democratisation of the stuff in the room. So, you were saying 'I don't want to lead this anymore or say that this is what you need to do; I want to try and find an exploratory way of sharing good practice'. So, it becomes more meaningful to them [KJ, post-event interview with GH].

Whilst Tony, the PSM, attended the event, he was very much an observer, and after the initial introductions was busy on other work, occasionally interjecting. When Tony joined the Forum as Spect-actor he was stopped very quickly by the delegates and Kim in a post event interview noted that

Kim: Tony appeared to be a bit more wary than anyone else...I think it was the kind of position he had...a formal hierarchical position.

Whereas another EE delegate Matthew held the conversation the longest and Kim noted

Kim: he has a more sensitive approach...he's a bit of a coach, he's a good listener...he's very good in the language he uses to make an exact point [KJ & GH Marriot].

Simon was a team leader and experienced examiner and professional musician. As team leader, he supported other examiners and oversaw their work in centres, including their feedback and report writing. He was the first port of call for examiners who may have had issues or required further support in their centres. He provided some perceptive comments on the Invisible Theatre following the EE training:

Simon: I personally know Kim and you, so I sussed this immediately though I do know that other colleagues were alarmed, thinking it was a genuine argument. There was a dawning realisation...amongst the cohort gathered, that what it was, in fact, after a little while... roleplay, and I

remember a sense of relief amongst them...I think it allowed them to look at things in a different way and that was what was refreshing about it because it did project real potential scenarios...and conversations in centres that could come up and how to deal with them [Simon, post-event Performing Arts EE Training interview].

One of the perceptions and contradictions in Forum Theatre is the ways it is conflated with roleplay as we discussed earlier and in the literature review (Chapter 2). The danger is that FT is seen as so similar to roleplay that FT then becomes wrongly misrepresented. I asked Kim how different FT is from roleplay and participant perceptions in the way that we use it?

Kim: Well, from their perception – and it's only possibly because everyone will have a different interpretation of what roleplay is – but what I can see happening there is that roleplay would have had to be kind of set up. We would have been putting them in a liminal position because they would have been thinking we had an agenda on the kind of way that they needed to respond – I mean, we did want them to explore how to have that conversation but we weren't setting up a kind of roleplay. That said, this has been kind of preconceived in a given situation and this is the kind of role that, that person would come up against and these are the examples of the kinds of conversations that you could be having. It needed to be much more exploratory than that [KJ, post event interview].

There were various implications for those taking part, and in the case of the EE training, from all the post event interviews and observations, they appear to have been very positive, and 'helpful'. The bullying workshops (Session 1) saw real engagement and focus with equally positive engagement and active participation during the FT event.

In the final Session 3 with the Higher Education Music Provider staff, there was real and active 'Spect-actor' involvement – for example, a large queue formed to take part in the chain Forum (photo 21).

Those who wish to take an active can elect to do so, yet those who don't are still involved – they are an audience in much the same way as they would be in any similar theatre setting. How much, either as participants or audience members, this challenged or changed them, we don't know, but what we do know is that they took part and those who commented did so very positively on the overall experience.

I wanted to thank you for organising the training day on Friday. I think it was excellent – both enjoyable and productive, which pretty much sums up how we need to present to our students, I think.

The line I wrote at the beginning to express what I wanted to achieve from the day ahead was:

Get a better understanding of how to deliver for the students.

I think I did...

The setting [FT scenario performance on student assessment feedback] put everything into context was the main thing that connected for me...This was so topical ...I've spent much of the weekend amending my slides to reflect this. It is not just about "Here's the learning outcomes, remember them." I reckon we can do much better than that, and spending time to get behind the course objectives at the start, then invoking them as we go along, is really important, but easy to overlook in the madness of it all.

Another level beyond showing a film piece to illustrate a point...Great actors and director, total caliber. I think this sets the standard we should all aspire to [Appendix 6, email from one of the Centre Directors].

As I noted from the outset, this is not an impact study, but the comments and interviews seem to suggest there was some positive impact.

5.3 Is Forum Theatre Safe and ethical?

This research was not an attempt to coerce or persuade AT practitioners of the need for an awareness of social learning theory or dialogical theory. But to understand how we as practitioners use

the tools and techniques derived from personal learning, or through skills and attributes gained over a long and sustained career in arts teaching, training and performing arts activity, including acting and directing.

Much of the operational delivery of the FT sessions could be regarded as innate and even intuitive, and certainly deliberative. For example, during a recent Forum community workshop, Kim, prior to the performance prepared himself by walking the space – the school hall. This is a very 'actor' activity, an activity I have observed when working with actors in professional theatre. Walking the space can be viewed as part of dialogical learning processes. Walking the stage is an activity I often witnessed when working in touring theatre and something musicians and actors do instinctively, and good teachers may be aware of it under the guise of classroom management skills. As we have already noted, the practitioner facilitator or 'Joker' plays a key role in providing and explaining the purposes of AT theatre work in events. However, in defining AT when working with delegates, specialist terms such as 'process drama', 'image theatre' whilst useful may not be that accessible and require further explanations. I agree with Nicholson that using theatre 'forms' such as 'promenade, scripted' may be more 'widely recognised both inside and outside educational settings' and provide a clearer basis for delegates in understanding AT (Nicholson, 2011, p.85). AT is dialogical in the sense that it empowers the participants to take ownership of ideas, their inner thoughts. Thomson concurs the importance of the practitioner approach.

We possibly failed to recognise that the training also required some kind of an ontic participation, i.e. where participants would 'do, react and experience, rather than receive, study and reflect upon the stories told' (Thomson 2005,35 cited in Bala and Albacan, 2013, p.394).

Fictional safe place is a crucial notion that Kim was keen to point out when exploring solutions to the bullying scenarios (Session 1 workshops). We were not testing the 'Spect-actors' (teachers') ethical or 'correct' responses – they were free to try out any ideas and strategies. This is

the fiction of the stage and the space occupied by the audience or participants in their real lives. This distinction was to become, and remains, a central concern of practitioners of participatory theatre (Hare cited in Rifkin, 2010, p.30).

Incidentally, during the workshops, there were occasions when the groups' behaviour could be perceived of and questioned as unethical with some situations and solutions provoking undue and inappropriate or politically incorrect behaviour. In role work and acting this happens in order for drama to take place; in fact, a dramatic response is required and thereby conflict is created – the drama is born and if the actor believes, then the audience believes.

In Session 1, the longest of the events, there was very little focus in the initial phase of the workshop on the intentions or even the theme of the day, although in previous workshops and discussions, the school, staff and students had worked together with Kim using some AT. Initially, the purpose of the session was, as Kim noted, to get to know and trust each other, and to then allow more intense exploration of the themes and ideas.

Performance is integral to Forum and to the role of the 'Joker' – for Kim, acting skills and comedic timing are critical for the Joker. His ability to respond, improvise and deal with heckles and passive aggressive interventions and behaviours from the audience sets this work apart. In theatre, it is performers with charisma, guile, talent – however it is described or perceived who provide the 'tingle factor'

(Kleiman, 2005) – and who set them apart from those who know, and those who can do! Boal was accused of being a showman 'who retreated to his 5 star hotel at the end of the day' (Fryer et al., 2022, p.166) perhaps that's what the best actors, directors and teachers are, and upstaging is part of that.

At one extreme the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality. When his audience is also convinced in this way about the show he puts on...only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the 'realness' of what is presented (Goffman, 1959, p.8).

The realness is what in Forum the practitioner strives for and to some extent that was why the use of Invisible Theatre was so potent in the EE training, Session 2.

On leaving Session 1, Kim remarked how energised he was. This replicates how performers and directors in the world of theatre and entertainment feel after such challenging days. As in the case of actors, dancers, musicians and entertainers there is a need to wind down. Like athletes who need to cool down to avoid injury, so, it is with performance work and actors and even more so in the case of work like Forum Theatre that often takes place over a very long day.

Phillip Boykin's fierce portrayal of the menacing Crown in *Porgy and Bess* earned him a 2012 Tony nod ...[the] intensity eight times a week left Boykin unsure how to climb down from the emotional peak the role required. "A vodka with cranberry always helps,"..."But even with that, I wound up laying on the bed or sitting on the couch, mindlessly watching television—eventually I'm able to feel the energy subside, and I'm able to rest." ...

Durant [in] *Spring Awakening* as Moritz...wasn't easy. "Most of my day was spent getting into character, and then I had to go through those emotions every night...After the performance, most of his night was spent trying to

reverse the process: "I played video games to get out of it". [(MANDELL, 2017) accessed 04/10/2021].

When using AT, and in these cases, Forum, there was always a certain danger in working in this way – initially there was euphoria prior to the sessions. Despite any early doubts, forebodings and misgivings and nervousness, Forum worked. We did the preparation, homework, and research; we explored workshops as participants, and we took risks.

Kim: There are moments where it's skating on thin ice, where I'm thinking I'm not sure I want to hear this story...and that takes a lot of skill to turn that around and an ethical framework to be able to do that. I think it works because drama works, because of the suspension of disbelief...the reflection, stuff of transformation [KJ & GH, Marriot interview].

Inviting parents to the bullying Forum (Session 1) was a bold, confident and potentially dangerous move by senior management as they had no real idea how this piece of theatre would work – the drama might unfold as it was by definition unseen, unrehearsed and would be only developed on the day. The performance would then be exposed to the entire school and their community, including parents, with a lot of participation by staff and students. There was potential for calamity and possibly catastrophic consequences – in terms of risk assessment, this was simply not done!

Confidence, and the courage to take risks, to try out new approaches, for example, in using 'Invisible Theatre' with no script, is a hallmark of AT and the very foundations on which Boal's FT was built.

Gary: Would you say it took any risks?

Kim: Yeah, and the risk goes with that because that kind of demands that intuitive thing which is not an exact science, and

which is in itself a risky business [KJ, post-event interview with GH].

During the sessions recounted here we had the given freedom to experiment and develop AT techniques and take risks. What this might say about the future development of AT and what might be useful for other practitioners is explored next in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Recommendations and the Future of Applied Theatre

The overarching theme of this research is the progressive genealogical impact on my pedagogy, approach to knowing, refining and implementing AT techniques, and without exception, the importance of reflective practice. Following on from the data analysis, I extrapolate here the main conclusions of my research, indicating some of the limitations. I then consider the future of AT and possible areas for further development and make recommendations.

6.1 Conclusions

Main Conclusions reflecting the research questions

No single key, overriding or dominant conclusion emerged from the data. However, several observations combine to provide guidance in terms of development and operational delivery for those who commission AT, as well as guidance for prospective and current AT practitioners wishing to improve and develop their practice.

In summary, the four main questions on the use of AT were:

- 1. How did I come to be an AT practitioner?*
- 2. How does my Applied Theatre and Forum Theatre work in educative settings in a safe and ethical manner?*
- 3. What does the data and my evidence tell us about how Applied Theatre works?*
- 4. What does the participant engagement in the events tell us about AT practice?*

Whilst the questions are fairly precise, the conclusions, like the responses, were fluid and I therefore try to capture the essence and provide an overview of the AT practice.

1. How did I come to be an AT practitioner

The reflective auto-ethnographic process and vignettes served to add clarity to how the processes of becoming an AT practitioner came about. As researcher and practitioner my genealogical development impacted on my work. I adopted a dialogical approach to research, practice and everyday life, acknowledging it was a challenge to be consistent. My overriding sense of curiosity was the main reason for me working in theatre, music and education. The thesis answers some of the questions about how I came to this work but not fully *why*.

2. How does my Applied Theatre and Forum Theatre work in educative settings in a safe and ethical manner?

The structure of the AT events was similar to those previously tried and tested. I judged that any prior planning and development work needed to take place based on research, pedagogical practice, and an awareness that the participants had the knowledge, the ownership, the ideas – even if they didn't or weren't able to acknowledge this, they always seemed to 'come up with the goods'. It was the participants who found the possibilities for change and solutions – through a dialogical process not encumbered by any kind of AT expertise as presenters, but through a dialogue of mutual expertise. The preparation employed for the events allowed for the taking of risks.

The reflections on previous events, and attending training and workshops added to the vocabulary Kim and I shared, and this is highly recommended – even the nonspecific events we attended had something to add to our genealogical development as AT practitioners. The design of events was circumspect, without being prescriptive, ideological, dogmatic or didactic in the use of AT techniques, essentially adapting the work of Boal, Heathcote, et al.

It helped to be familiar with the contestations, differences and nuances of drama and theatre, aided by both of us being performers and directors.

There was no awkwardness of those who see conflicts in 'teaching and dramatic art' making for *happy*, rather than 'unhappy bedfellows' (Jackson, 2006), as practitioners we made full use of both drama and theatre tools. In terms of applying ethical practice we operated ethically with the principle premise to 'do no harm'. However, although the ethical approach was deliberate it was not aligned to any specific code of practice. Although as qualified UK teachers we operated under the terms of the latest UK Teachers' Standards⁴¹.

3. What do the data and my evidence tell us about how Applied Theatre works?

AT should encourage an unfettered and open commissioning process that should be seen as a positive aspect in all the events, and shouldn't hinder the application of AT by practitioners. If anything, it assisted and was beneficial and relevant to participants who knew why they were there and the context for the events/training, and this was mirrored by those who set the agendas and theme/s for the events. This is no different to what often happens in plays and theatre – whilst there may not be a *dénouement* in AT, there is, and can be a forecast of an ending that doesn't detract from the performance, with examples from theatre such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Russell's *Blood Brothers*.

4. What does the participant engagement in the events tell us about AT practice?

There was evidence of clear engagement when the participants took part either cognitively or physically, and even more so when they

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b73d6c8fa8f50384489c9a/Teachers__Standards_Dec_2021.pdf [Accessed 23/10/2024].

became involved in making use of their own and their peers' stories. Direct engagement should be encouraged and cooperatively facilitated

Some amount of conjecture and subjectivity may be evident reinforced by additional self-affirmation, and for this researcher further emboldening Freire's concept of 'conscientizagdo enrolls' my own 'search for self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism' (Freire & Ramos, 2014p.36). I therefore include those affirmations below.

What the research and data conclude (affirms)

The data

- reinforces and provide confidence in my approach to AT described here – it works; and it works without doctrine, ideology or a dogmatic, or inflexible or a singular theoretical alignment, but with a flexible and malleable approach to design, commissioning and implementation.
- shows the importance of working with, knowing and respecting participants and an awareness of the audience; and as a result, we are able to take risks that allow the practice to develop and improve.
- outlines a need for an ethical approach to AT requires honesty and includes providing background and explaining what is expected of participants and what their expectations might lead to.
- shows the importance of the Joker/facilitator in making AT happen in facilitating the expectations of the audience/participants in a 'dialogic social contract between practitioners and participants' (Neelands, 2007)
- and research indicates that the AT practitioner need to engage with the currency of AT practice, practitioners, and research.

In response and arising out of the observations, conclusions and affirmations, I set out below, the contributions my research makes to the field of AT.

6.2 Contribution to the field of AT, research and pedagogy

I outline below some of the key contributions, challenges, and areas of possible development this research adds to the field of AT in terms of knowledge, theory, research method and practice.

6.2.1 The ethics of AT theory and practice

This research highlights and raises questions on ethics of AT practice but also questions the ethics of doing such research. For example, I have raised the broader ethical questions surrounding the efficacy in Baldwin's well intentioned AT work in Papua New Guinea (A. Baldwin, 2010a, 2010b). Baldwin latterly had misgivings about using students who 'did not yet feel confident enough to act as trainers' (Andrea Baldwin & Haseman, 2012,p.12).

Similarly Francis cautions AT's participatory process that "is not in itself liberatory; the issues of power and authority cannot be circumvented through 'participation'" (Francis, 2013).

Ethical constraints

A key consideration for ethics is for participants who are brought to AT for support as potential therapy. Throughout the research I've been confronted by various ethical dilemmas, such as Hallewas's work with refugees warns of the dangers and damage of retelling trauma, that can retraumatise 'instead of being therapeutic, can work against the pain' (Hallewas, 2022,p.179). This is contrary to Arias's play 'Minefield' when veterans from the Falklands conflict were brought together to reenact and *relive* traumatic events. This was seen as a way of accessing buried emotions through bodily actions provide 'authenticity and factual accuracy of both the text and the body performance' (Pividori & Bellot, 2022) (see also Unger,

2022) and an extension of Boals' *Image Theatre*. Minefield is not dissimilar in concept to Hartley's play *The Art of Silence* (Hartley, 2005).

These dilemmas raise questions, and demonstrate a need for a clear and considered ethical framework for AT. The lack of a clear ethical framework marks out a major contribution and a demand that has been made throughout the thesis. A major focus emerging from this work is challenging some of the assumptions about ethical practice and practices. Role play is a key field of AT practice that is perceived, delivered, and widely misunderstood. Assumptions and perceptions have inherent dangers when conflated within AT practice. An ethical framework may test and question if Role-play and other AT meet the potential of the primary ethical principle of 'first do no harm' (Stuart Fisher, 2023).

Is Role Play worth the risks

The widespread and unfettered use of Roleplay is perhaps of even more of a concern, as its isn't immediately associated with any risks as many old and young have had that experience the 'Marmite' of AT - regarded with distain and revelation in equal measure. Scholarly reference tends to support the positive aspects of role play, and yet those who take part are often scathing and loath the mention of role play. Although there is less research into the negative aspects of role play.

The diversity and sheer range of AT practice and the conflicting demands of practitioners their working contexts, socio-cultural, geographic, political, regional, national, international make for significant challenges in developing an ethical code for AT.

6.2.2 The Rationale development of an ethical framework or code of practice

Throughout the research and my AT practice I was continuously questioning, is an Ethical Framework/code of Practice questionable or even doable. Developing and then implementing an ethical framework or code or practice would clearly be helpful but there are dangers – ensuring that any ethical guidance is flexible to meet the needs and the extensive variable nature of AT.

The varied and contrasting AT theatre practices highlight the dilemma in formulating an ethical framework or code of practice that isn't a one size fits all.

6.2.3 The issues with any ethical framework

As a practitioner and for other practitioners putting on limitations on what they *can*, must and *can't* do could be extremely limiting and prescriptive. Any kind of ethical guidance is probably the best route. Something that is acceptable across the wide scope of AT practice as a minimum requirement. Any code or framework should be applied before anyone embarks on this varied diverse, complex and often heterogeneous area of applied theatre. The complexities of formulating a singular ethical approach to AT are reflected by Grile (Grile, 2023) and Halawas (Hallewas, 2022) who highlights 'risk' in seven ethical principles⁴². Nevertheless both have merits that should

⁴² Seven ethical principles in applied theatre with refugees [edited for the purposes of brevity]

1. The retelling of trauma can cause re-traumatization...
2. The repetition of a refugee narrative perpetuates refugees as victims in need of saving...
3. Complicated power differentials between practitioners and marginalized and vulnerable communities [and] disempower...
4. The sensationalizing of stories...
5. The positioning of audiences as witness can cause (re) traumatization...
6. The acknowledgement that suppression may be a preferred form of healing...
7. The acknowledgment that (former) refugees may prefer to work with others who have also experienced life as a refugee...

be viewed with flexibility to reflect given circumstances to include culture, location, social and political and AT genre that encompasses diversity and practice. In essence any AT code of practice should reflect individual circumstances.

6.3.1 Research methods and methodologies

The Research methods and methodologies adopted in this research may provide guidance on AT research and the efficacy in providing a mixed approach to research methodologies that combines genealogy, autobiography and autoethnography.

Due to the complexities of AT and its variable uses further practitioner research should consider and acknowledge that a nonlinear approach to development and research would be better reflected in both a theoretical and in the practical application of AT. Therefore in delivering and researching AT, benefits would be gained from both a genealogical and autoethnographic approach in order to untangle the complexities that are likened to 'pinning down jelly' (Grile, 2023). Grile suggests that in practice AT participants and facilitators should move from 'reflective into a reflexive mode', an autoethnographic approach she distinguishes in six key principles of praxis (Grile, 2023, p.16). Grile principles provide an apt starting point for an ethical framework '(1) insistence on an embodied practice, (2) emphasis on process, (3) thoughtful consideration of place and space, (4) attention to collaboration, (5) the use of polyphonic (5) communication, and (6) focus on a reflexive practice' (Grile, 2023) .

6.4.1 Theory, Practice and Knowledge

The approach to AT adopted in this research provides potential for AT practice with practical guidance and a useful overview of AT for those thinking about AT for research, training, study or initiating or developing AT practice.

The thesis provides a broad yet detailed oversight of AT, a starting point for those new to AT or those who wish to develop their practice or further research. This AT research defines praxis as an iterative process of reflection and action, demonstrating how theories and pedagogies can be interpreted into practice. Using autoethnography that link to narratives through vignettes demonstrates for this practitioner that evidence of reflection and reflexivity revisited can provide visual memory and 'sensory details' that unlocked vivid 'cognitive memories'. Whilst they may contain *emotion*, memories reflectively can unlock dispassionately thoughts and insights into developing new ways of working.

Further Work

Ethical Approval

It would be beneficial to undertake more research and consultation with participants and practitioners from those who deliver from different perspectives under the umbrella term of AT. So much of AT practice is defined by the kind and type of practice, location and culture, there is unlikely to be a one size fits all.

I was working within ethical approval systems from a particular period and like O'Connor I 'would consider the work I was doing then was applied theatre, the term itself was yet to be invented' (O'Connor & Anderson, 2015). Many years on I am leaning towards ethics that's responds and reflect the context of my practice. There are aspects of forum theatre rather than applied theatre, that would actually lend themselves to some minimum requirements. For example the Joker is probably the most important feature of FT who is much more than a facilitator.

I anticipated that one of the outcomes of my work and this research would be to develop guidelines for ethical framework. I'm now cautious as there is much more work and research to be done in

defining what it should be and to respect the wide range of AT practice.

Gaps in the literature

There is clearly potential for more research work to be done, and the following are some areas that could be developed;

- The lack of a clear ethical framework/code of practice
- The importance of Joker training requires more attention
- Drama versus Theatre debate seems ongoing
- 'Role play isn't child's play' (Bodrova, Leong, & Yudina, 2023)

and more research including the work of Heathcote could be revisited. Some work has been done (see Booth, 2012; Buldu, 2022; Davis, 2016; Davis & Simou, 2014; Matos et al., 2010) more work could be done to reflect the challenges and possible risks of role play.

Moving Forward

The 'Spect-actors'

The participants, the 'Spect-actors', can choose to influence – as individuals, or collectively – and it is they who decide whether AT educates or trains. Participants were particularly clear that they were exploring *difficult conversations* through fiction, but through believable stories in a realistic in a safe space. Participants' experiences were freely shared, and provided ownership of the training, an essential element of AT. The practitioner needs to be aware of the dangers of using real stories, and there is therefore a need to ensure that consent is sought during FT events, and names, time, place and location are anonymised.

Forum Theatre can – and as participants noted does – provide a safe fictional environment to examine the oppressed and the oppressor and work towards solutions or resolution. Whilst any kind of transformation may be idealistic, it may at the very least promote self-awareness and allow us to see ourselves as 'people as

uncompleted beings, conscious of their incompleteness, and their attempt to be more fully human' (Freire, 1970, p.71). The notion of a *safe space* or fictional environment or what Ermine calls an 'ethical space of engagement' (Ermine 2007 cited in Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.50) is key. Provision of a safe space is a dominant feature in this research and a recurring theme that is evident in the data from the events is that this is what makes the training effective and valuable and what provides the possibility for change and transformation.

As practitioners, we are always aware that ownership is a key factor for those commissioning the events. So, the commissioning process can be challenging, when, for example, commissioners' scripts seem too prescriptive, although this can soon be overcome during event delivery as participants quickly point out when a narrative is unrealistic.

It is important from the outset of each event to ensure that the participants know that they aren't being asked as 'Spect-actors' to participate in conventional drama or roleplay, by putting them at ease, and dispelling preconceptions without making excessive claims. They need to be reassured that, just as in a theatrical event, they are being asked to suspend their disbelief and to observe what it's going to be, and what it's not going to be' [KJ and GH interview, part 1]. The rules of FT and AT should be made clear.

The Joker

Whilst the 'Joker' was originally derived from Boal's Forum Theatre practice, the concept can be gainfully employed throughout other AT work. The 'Joker' plays a substantive role and is a key element in the success of FT and AT. Adams aptly recommends:

The Joker should be an expert in diversity, with a multidisciplinary background and attitude, possessing knowledge of theater, popular culture, pedagogy, psychology, politics and as much else as possible. Beyond that, a Joker must have sensitivity, the ability to communicate with and coordinate groups, heightened perception, common sense, energy and the ability to synthesize (Adams et al., 2002, p.227).

The Joker's job description might include:

Essential

- ability to respond, improvise and deal with heckles and passive aggressive participants
- know your audience and the commission
- know the pedagogy of AT practice
- have confidence, courage, take risks
- have background in theatre and education

Desirable

- have empathy and tact
- have knowledge of Socratic⁴³ and Maieutic⁴⁴ methodology and application
- use comedic timing; have charisma, guile, talent
- have a skills background in theatre and or performance as actor and director

The use of AT techniques is internationally widespread, penetrating training within organisations, cultural and heritage industries used by trainers, human resources, schools and colleges, and university

⁴³ The Socratic dialogue and various forms of discussions are also key features of forum theatre, which, in addition, encourages embodied learning and differs from most forms of discussion by adopting an oppressed protagonist's perspective (HAMMER, A. 2021. Using forum theatre to address homosexuality as a controversial issue in religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 45, 23-33.

⁴⁴ Through Maieutics, the Joker must assist the birth of all ideas, of all actions. "Going further than Socrates, who framed questions that expected answers, and, in so doing, limited the field of discussions, Forum Theatre frames questions that expect, as answers, new questions: what do you want to talk about? We try to avoid any form of manipulation of the participants" (Boal, 2002: 262). MARTHA KATSARIDOU, K. G. V. 2015. Theatre of the Oppressed as a tool of ed .pdf.

departments (and not just in faculties of Performing Arts). This pervasive use of AT has the potential to accelerate, promote or broaden the use of AT techniques as a tool for development and learning. Because the primary focus of the research was on the AT practitioner and the benefits and challenges faced by using AT, it had much less focus on how the participants engaged because it was the practitioner being observed in relation to the 'spect-actors'. How far they met their originators' intentions, or how effective they were in bringing about change therefore remains uncertain, my research does not conclude as this would have required a different focus, or a different research imperative.

In discussing Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), and the subcategory of AT Österlind affirms:

As TO is being used and spread all over the world, one could assume that its impact is proven; but in an academic context, that is not enough. There is a need for drama methods that address both the political and personal sphere, just as TO does, and to develop designs to examine outcomes of these methods (Österlind, 2008, p.79).

One change and striking observation is the way I now consider and reflect on AT and FT. This became evident during following the events and was reinforced in the literature review and research methodology. Operational and delivery methodologies form the data analysis changed the nature and way that Kim and I delivered Applied Theatre sessions, firmly rooted in both Theatre practice and Drama. Worthy of further investigation would be to examine more closely whether the contestation between the application of drama and theatre techniques and skills as practitioners has any significant causal effects on AT work.

6.3 Recommendations

The Joker

The evidence in this research confirms the centrality and importance of the role of 'Joker' in FT in the application of FT and AT. Joker training should be essential for the AT practitioner. Bala & Albacan propose that

a training in TO must view the dissemination of techniques and methods of joker practice as inseparable from a deep commitment to a "conscientised" understanding of the complex social problems that the theatre seeks to address (Bala and Albacan, 2013, p.389).

My AT experience has largely been developed through practice in the field and working with other practitioners and not essentially within formal institutional settings. Freire, Bala and Albacan remind us of the dangers of the 'banking method' and 'technical training' as counterproductive pedagogies in any suggested training (Bala and Albacan, 2013, p.388). Rifkin noted the need for an ethical framework as part of the teaching of AT practitioners. With many ethical considerations for AT largely situated in higher education it may, as Rifkin reminds us, that AT may be stymied by 'institutional ethical codes which are sometimes incompatible with its working practice', making both AT practice and research cumbersome (Rifkin, 2010, p.6).

In Sadeghi-Yekta and Prendergast's extensive discourse on AT ethics, the first ethic challenges practitioners to "'First, do no harm"—to ourselves, to our fellow artists, to those who come to witness our work and be healed' (Sadeghi-Yekta and Prendergast, 2022, p.56). I suggest that 'first, do no harm' provides the backbone to guide the 'principles and protocols that AT practitioners operate within, and that should be scrupulously adhered to by all

individuals who consider themselves to be members of “the body,” which holds the privilege of practicing the discipline’ (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.56).

Fisher calls for ‘informed consent’ from AT participants in the hope that ‘practitioners in applied theatre settings will develop an enhanced appreciation of the need to provide clear and open invitations to applied theatre work’ (Fisher and Smith, 2010, p.163). There is such a broad canvas in AT work that any restrictive attempts to ‘prescribe a comprehensive one-size-fits-all approach’ may restrict the creative practice, and future AT development (2010, p.163)

The continuous reflection on current practice as demonstrated in my research could impact on any framework or code of practice for AT practitioners. As yet, there is no clear consensus on what a code of practice or framework might look like, and such reflective practice may be a useful recommendation for good practice.

In the narratives and participant observation, it becomes clear how theatre created a fictional space that helped to reconvert these internalised stigmas and reclaim a new place of dignity.

Theatre has made me look people in the eye (Massó-Guijarro and Pérez-García, 2021, p.182)

The range of AT and personalities and practice seem to indicate that practitioners operate in such a wide range of contexts, and this is true of my work. There is a compelling case for the questioning of ethics and reflection on AT practice that may be better served by a high level of reflexivity, constant reflection and self-critique in the development of AT. Consistently problematising, engaging with literature and with other practitioners with discursive questioning, rather than a fixed framework or a set of ethical codes may be a

more appropriate solution for future practice. Applied correctly, AT embodies an ethical approach.

The fundamentals that lie behind the 'Joker' in FT should be equally applied to all AT practitioners. It is perhaps the theatricality, and the tools used by the Joker for the processes of FT that equally apply to AT practitioners. For example, making use of space in relation to the participants/audience; the importance of a dialogical approach, respecting that your participants have a wide range of experience and knowledge, and that AT practitioners are not experts but have some expertise. The 'Joker' performance is similar to that of the theatre director's interaction and dialogue with actors, but unlike the theatre director, the Joker has direct interaction with audiences, the spect-actors. The Joker performance takes place onstage with both actors and audience, and requires similar techniques to those employed by both actor and theatre director. It follows that AT practitioners who command the stage may do better, and therefore, I strongly suggest that actor training is useful in this regard. Practitioners like the 'Joker' should control the AT event or Forum, without being controlling. The practitioner should mediate with empathy and the use of humour can be helpful.

There is consensus that more research that examines AT that particularly focuses on participants is needed. This may require interventions with an AT practitioner whose techniques aspire to transform.

AT has potentially all the benefits of theatre making; it is a social event, it is artistry and aesthetic combined with 'ensemble' and is part of a collective 'second order identity of citizens struggling together' (Neelands, 2007a, p.315). As Boal reminds us, in Forum, *'The end is the beginning!'* (Boal, 2006, p.6).

Essentially, learning through drama participation is aesthetically different from learning through a theatre experience, although both afford the opportunity for participation.

There continues to be 'persisting tensions in education' that 'questions whether drama, theatre, and learning in school fit together' (Österlind et al., 2016, p.43). Concerns and ongoing discussions 'regarding drama in education' and debates around 'drama as an art form versus drama as method for learning in other school subjects' seem set to continue (2016, p.43). Such concerns seem to be more dogma led than operationally practical or useful to AT practice.

The training or guidance for future facilitators, or those who intend to deliver, teach or practice AT demand a more inclusive approach to the discourse around AT practice without being dogma bound or aligned to any one AT theory or pedagogy. I maintain that an eclectic approach to training should allow, pursue and explore Heathcote, Boal, Brecht et al, inclusive of both drama and theatre, with a focus on the practicalities.

The pedagogy of the AT practitioner and professional practice

Notwithstanding Jackson's assertion of the awkwardness of 'teaching and dramatic art', hindered by doubts about the usefulness educational theatre, my experience suggests in practice the pedagogy of the AT practitioner using theatre and drama tools and techniques is both useful and essential.

Jackson's assertion that 'teaching and dramatic art' (Jackson, 2006, p.25) are incompatible, is not my experience. The 'drama versus theatre' debate does not align with the experience seen in the AT training sessions undertaken as part of my research. Drama and theatre are played out and are evident in each of the sessions and

are a substantive feature of this research. AT is an amalgam of pedagogies, Shaw's⁴⁵ old assertion that 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach' is not supported by the research. It is a marriage of FT/AT and the 'intersections of pedagogy and practice of theatre and education' that make this training work (Dawson, 2012, p.136), perhaps better expressed in the Indian proverb, *To learn, read. To know, write. To master, teach.*

The events explored here may not have revealed any answers or solutions; however, the use of Applied Theatre tools and techniques facilitated the exploration of difficult conversations.

By a way of conclusion, the symbiotic and dialogical relationship with Freire, Boal and their pedagogies is a strength that makes the use of *Applied Theatre* and particularly *Forum Theatre* a powerful tool. From a practitioner's perspective, I wanted to know whether Freire's and Boal's radical approaches to acquiring and enabling power work. Simply put, the evidence from the sessions showed that the AT process allowed and provided the practitioner with the tools to explore *difficult conversations* with an engaging and interactive approach. Early in the research process I had misgivings about Boal's ideals being lost or submerged by current praxis. However, my sense is that those ideals are still present. That said, there is clearly room for change, improvements and development whilst still holding fast to those original intentions – namely to facilitate change and transformation.

In the Events described in this research, individuals who reacted or responded either by their actions, or in interviews, were generally positive, and often exuberant. Whether this was because of our

⁴⁵ George Bernard Shaw's *'Man and Superman'* (1903).

transformative dialogical approach, rooted in the existential human 'project', allowed and provided a vehicle to make individual choices is not known. Or by giving voice to learning as a means to make the acquisition of new knowledge possible happened, was not measured, but worthy of another research project.

Although AT is already extensively used in training, if this research can provide a better understanding of the practice and the efficacy of FT that incorporates theatre and drama skills and techniques, this approach may provide useful tools for use in learning, training and education and better inform practitioners. Forum Theatre may also be useful in teacher training and staff development as an insightful mechanism for creating a more dialogical relationship between teacher and students, promoting a productive climate for better knowing and more meaningful respect for each other, and a dilution of the notion of teacher as expert. Dialogical action that facilitates human beings' movement from subject to object may be possible through AT practice, brought about by facilitators of training, who incorporate a range of techniques and skills including Boal's interventionist theatre techniques.

6.4 The future of Applied Theatre

Julian, son of Augusto Boal maintains Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as the 'pedagogical coordinator of Escola de Teatro Popular' (Taylor et al., 2019, p.344). The school is 'run by social movements *for* social movements, where political unity is practiced at the grassroots level through the practice of theater' (2019, p.344). It may be too early to judge how Julian's work adds to the development and future of AT. His recent book '*Theatre of the Oppressed and its Times*' interestingly explores genealogies of praxis that led to TO including the politics at that time (Boal, 2023). Julian

continues to provide workshops using social media to promote TO using Instagram and Facebook.⁴⁶

The literature and pedagogy of AT can be seen in school curricula and in the expansion and development of higher education programmes. There is space and an appetite for using theatre and dramatic techniques for use in a wide range of contexts and audiences both here in the UK and internationally. With an increasing demand for interactive training that addresses both large and small difficult situations and conversations, donor agencies are using the Arts for good. The small charity *Rock for Ukraine*⁴⁷ – music therapy for children – whilst not theatre, is using the arts for change. *Voices for Ukraine* is part of the European Theatre Convention with projects⁴⁸ using theatre to support a range of issues. Using dialogue facilitation and peacebuilding through forum theatre as a method of conflict mediation is another example of how the application of theatre and the arts was initially used 'to help in the joint search for solutions dealing with the social consequences of the war in the Eastern Ukraine'⁴⁹.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

Following this research, I have deliberated about the reasons for Boal's success and his continuing importance for AT practitioners. This is best attributed to his knowledge, application in his practice of *Theatre of the Oppressed* and extensive writings. His work with Freire confirms he 'knows' – *conscientização*, (Freire, 1970) and this is evident in the application of his pedagogy and the genealogy of AT

⁴⁶ @julianboal <https://www.facebook.com/julian.boal/>

⁴⁷ <https://rockukraine.co.uk/> Part of <https://www.globalgiving.org/aboutus/> [Accessed 15/09/2022].

⁴⁸ <https://www.europeantheatre.eu/page/about/transformations>

⁴⁹ https://kriegsfolgen-ueberwinden.de/en/activities/dialog-und-friedensarbeit-mittels-forumtheater_de/

practice in the world in which he operated. Boal grasped fully the theoretical underpinning in theatre and theatre practice. And in developing TO he emphasised the importance of the various roles in the exposition and implementation of AT practice. This research has defined and explained the distinct roles of the director/ 'Joker', actor/s and 'Spect-actor'. Boal knew the importance of these roles, and it is these key factors we must know if we are to be '*Applied*' Theatre practitioners, but crucially the application and processes of AT demand a dialogical approach if change and transformation are to be possible.

Perhaps the success and popularity of Boal's AT may be responsible to some extent for the usage and commercialisation of the techniques and approaches. Overall, the research seemed to demonstrate whilst there may have been some impact, change wasn't evident as it was at the behest of the individual. The events were appealing and appreciated and generated positive emotional responses from participants. But generally, the participants responded very positively and went away satisfied, although they didn't always 'know' why.

I have become more 'knowing', more critically conscious, and hope I have changed as a subject who is curious and one who embraces change – I am transformed and will continue thus. It was and is *life changing*. Whilst I still make some use of FT, it is conceptually and theoretically that now mostly underpins my work as an independent consultant and trainer. For example, FT can be used in a variety of contexts, although not always overtly, but is embedded as part of my conceptual and personal epistemological stance. This has resulted in a major shift in and modification of my approach to my work, be it as a trainer, senior vocational higher education

examiner, government inspector or commissioned musician/composer.

Like many contemporary artists of today, Boal's work makes art but he used and depended on others to make that art useable – we need an audience.

The development and acquisition of our practice demands progression, and, in that progression, we need to and should find an ethical framework or code of practice to assure ourselves that AT work is both worthy and safe. Whilst the events demonstrated the implementation of some ethical elements, much more formalised and further work needs to be done to develop an ethical code or practice that can then be tested and researched for its efficacy in the field. However, there is no one blueprint, panacea or silver bullet for the ethical and moral application of AT practice. As a result, there is agreement that the 'ethics discourse is a moral and difficult minefield' (Sadeghi-Yekta et al., 2022, p.163, citing e.g. Bishop 2014; Dalrymple 2006; Kerr 2009; Neelands 2007; Nicholson 2005; Stuart Fisher 2005). Notwithstanding ethical concerns, AT practitioners should operate within current safeguarding and human rights legislation for children and adults. Answers to important questions are often found in the most unlikely places. The potential to learn from all and not just one's own niche was exemplified in Freire's writings. Kock et al., during the Covid-19 pandemic, presented a compelling arts initiative case study that has resonance with how we might think about the application of ethics in the arts.

A theatre company engaging seniors in the Netherlands, using ethics and aesthetics of care as sensitising concepts. The findings reveal that this work can promote relational forms of care. This study makes visible how

different forms of care can be identified in a participatory art project (de Kock et al., 2023, p.506).

This ethics of care framework revealed the potential roles artists and 'added value' can fulfil in caring processes (2023, p.522). I have been only too familiar with the ethics of my own care.

Vignette 18: Difficult Conversation with my Consultant

I had a rather lengthy consultation over an impending operation that resulted in a surprising and reassuring context for this research. I am faced with range of challenging options regarding my treatment and life-affirming decisions will have to be made. After well over an hour of detailed explanations and a further physical investigation, I was asked if I had any questions, and of course I did. Would the surgery and treatment impede my physical and mental capabilities – would I still be able to be an active musician and play the saxophone, would my cognitive/cerebral and any academic work be impeded during any recovery. Ignoring the answers as they were ambiguous and to be expected, I was then questioned by the nurse, consultant and trainee nurse about my research. I gave a pithy reply and the consultant and nurse, almost in unison, replied, 'Role play – I hate that'. After I had provided a more detailed explanation, they seemed to understand. The very searching question was, 'but how can you, for example, do that with 25 NHS practitioners in an hour?' I explained that we had had over 250 delegates, just like theatre – and no fear of 'roleplay'. I explained that our tenet is 'Do no harm', and the chord was struck – my consultant gleefully extolled 'that's our maxim!' To which I replied, 'yes, I know, we are borrowing it'.

Although I have already noted that I'm not suggesting a code of practice or ethical framework here, this encounter did lead me to think about the **expectations for Applied Theatre**.

For **Practitioners** these might be:

1. Do no harm⁵⁰
2. Be respectful and preserve anonymity and a safe environment
3. Briefly outline the purpose and background of the AT practice
4. Encourage, questioning, participation and engagement **be it** either actual or cognitive

Participants

1. Are encouraged, to question, be open and be curious and to engage participate taking part either actual or cognitively.
2. Suspend their disbelief
3. Are respectful of others

Perhaps more AT training may encourage more professionals in those 'fictional spaces' 'to look people in the eye' (Massó-Guijarro and Pérez-García, 2023).

What is clear, is that in order to make effective use of AT techniques as a means of change and transformation for the *difficult conversations* like those explored here, there has to be a dialogue, a dialogical approach and an engagement that facilitates listening in a life that represents dialogue, not a monologue. All the sessions demonstrated that there was clear engagement, involvement, listening, dialogue, words and actions in a positive approach to exploring the *difficult conversations* in the themes probed in each event. Freire reinforces the act of words and the possibilities of engendering change.

⁵⁰ Chrismon examines the ethics and implication of Invisible Theatre for 2024 – “Ethical implementation of Invisible Theatre requires ensuring that all participants, including actors and bystanders, have a clear understanding of the performance's purpose, potential impact, and their right to participate or withdraw consent” JIMMY CHRISMON, E. 2024. Exploring Ethics: Augusto Boal's Invisible Theatre Technique in 2024. Available from: <https://www.thedtalks.com/blog/exploring-ethics-augusto-boals-invisible-theatre-technique-in-2024/>.

Human existence cannot be Silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world (Freire and Ramos, 2014, p.88).

Boal reminds us of the risks in the acts of exploring *difficult conversations*.

Dialogue is always dangerous, because it creates discontinuity between one thought and another, between two opinions, or two possibilities – and between them infinity installs itself; so that all opinions are possible, all thoughts permitted. When Two have ceased to exist and only the Sole Absolute Thought remains, creation becomes impossible. Dialogue is Democracy (Boal, 2008b, xvi).

Difficult conversations will continue to be a recurring issue for us all, in both formal education and training but also in our daily lives. Applied Theatre may be a useful vehicle which, whilst not a panacea or antidote, can be used as a means of exploring possible avenues for change and transformation.

Final Vignette 18: – Curiosity hasn't killed this Cat – yet!

It may have been accident that led me to these final words but as I reflect, it is more likely my predilection for curiosity that lands me here. I suppose this began with my finding several of my father's clarinets hidden away at the back of the house pantry. That led me to music, to teacher training, experimentation, professional musicianship, music, drama and media teaching, professional theatre, training and ultimately to research the MA and EdD and a dialogical life.

*The recent release of the Beatles song Now and Then seems to sum this up – **you** being my simile for **my curiosity**.*

*Now And Then*⁵¹

*I know it's true
It's all because of **you**
And, if I make it through
It's all because of **you***

*And, now and then
If we must start again
Well, we will know for sure
That I will love **you***

*Now and then
I miss **you**
Oh, now and then
I want **you** to be there for me
Always to return to me
I know it's true
It's all because of **you**
And, if **you** go away
I know **you**'ll never stay
Now and then
I miss **you**
Oh, now and then
I want you to be there for me*

*I know it's true
It's all because of **you**
And, if I make it through
It's all because of **you***

⁵¹ Now & Then – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Opxhh9Oh3rg> accessed 5th Jan 2024.



Photos 23 & 24: Now and Then – Bretton Hall College, pictured with the same Alto Saxophone I have had since I was 16 years old.

This, of course, *isn't* the dénouement.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Training Session 1- Email and Proposal

Training Session 1

Email Proposal and Outline of the High School Bulling project from Kim Jackson to Head Welfare & Pastoral Provision, Lead & Key Services Manager

Hi [REDACTED]

Hope you are well and had a good break. Further to our meeting I'm attaching a paper that gives a bit more context to the proposed event and also, hopefully, sums up the objectives and intentions of the day.

Since our initial discussion I have received an approach from a colleague who is interested in following the progress of the event and my forum practice generally. He is researching for a doctorate on Applied Theatre at Nottingham University and wants to observe and record the event. I hope this is OK with you.

I look forward to hearing from you and am sure the day will be a lively and progressive one, for my part I see it as a pilot that could lead to similar approaches being delivered across the country.

Cheers, Kim

Appendix 2 Training Session 1

Journal Notes & Extracts (Bullying)

Notes from workshops (GH)

Bullying:

9:00am The workshop began with brief explanation and introductions and quickly moved into practical work, within minutes the teachers (staff) and 6 students following a fairly physical warm up. All seemed very relaxed and an energetic and enthusiastic game of Fruits Bowl ensued to much merriment and laughter.

9:14 Brief discussion of Twitter, Facebook accounts and the social rules was asked to get participants thinking.

9:24 Beliefs – 'I believe' – all twelve! – Fruit Bowl

9:28 Performance work begins Freeze frames A & then B Memories go to 5 seconds Explaining starting to think about – 5 seconds

Move in 5 - with arrogance, foreboding, and unbridled joy.

Bring back to small circle, encourages - the success of language and movement

Freeze frame - two to explain the narrative - content free

9:44 Q. 'What are we doing today'? (Kim)

Product - Method - explore - bullying - effective conversations & interventions

Scenario - FT/AT

Community

Not Policy

Not long term

Micromanage

Didactical/Dialectical - Freeze frames, body movement, transition

Exercises in freeze frame - wedding, day at the races,

9:57 all participants seem very relaxed, interesting that the group had chairs in a circle a comfort area and also precluded the outside - ME!

Builds cultural stereo types - and Kim talks about 'bring to the circle'

Individual work to move!

Move to direction

Reality and ideals - political or social message

Circle only broke after an hour 'it's deliberate' - Kim keeps control so I can observe and they me!

Student staff working together an aim in itself -

101:10 Kim refers for the 1st time to me - 'are they on track?' - I'm surprised and don't really say much noncommittal - yet reassuring

10:20 - much more dialogue from participants - Transition - between -

10:21 Reality & Ideal

10:37 Questions any concerns? (Break)

Appendix 3 Training Session 1

Training Session 1

Journal Notes Extracts (Bullying)

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10:21 Reality & Ideal

10:37 Questions any concerns? (Break)

Possible questions arising to participants/Kim (if I was to intervene – but I didn't)

1. *What was the aim or objective of the day? (for the workshop)*
2. *And for you (as facilitator)*
3. *How has it been so far?*
4. *What word would best describe how you felt before you started?*
5. *What word would describe how you feel now?*
6. *Anything unexpected, good emerging?*

10:50 Return - circle gain then pair stories of bullying with staff/students- Kim directing

Ethics - reporting the story

- *As working with staff and students*
- *With bullying a sense of detachment*

The student then tells the staff story and vice versa.

The tempo – has now changed as were clearly dealing with narrative – and personal – despite being semi fictional.

Interesting how partner intercedes to explain and clarify (in retelling the stories)

- *This is now becoming the longest section because dialogue is happening*
- *11:16 – its clear that Kim isn't a bullying expert and doesn't need to be?*

"Concentrate on micromanagement" – (Kim)

- *Unexpected – special need stalker*
- *Was this bullying – lack of intervention seems to be a recurring theme.*
- *Worryingly no (shortage) problem of thinking of examples!*

11:27 Kim now explaining the level of detail of micromanagement opportunities that need to clear that single solutions –

Emotional memory seem to come into play with recounting situations. This is leading towards bullying scenarios.

11:40 – explaining about the process of the presentation!

11:55 setting up

12:10 – getting very detailed and is getting quite complex and not definitive...

- *How to control bullying – or is it about bringing about change!*

12:15 Really getting heated and the discussion is focussed on too much classroom situations?

*12:20 This so has been the longest session without practical participation
(Lunch)*

1:15 Restart - one-liners

Argument by committee – this gets them back into action again!

- More discussion on the scenario!*

1:45 Now impetus to make it more focussed in the scenario.

*Now the workshop is beginning to show the defining (characteristics) – it's
becoming a drama – (resembles) 'Our Day Out!'*

- It isn't realistic*
- You need actors!*

2:09 and the scenario hasn't changed in 25 minutes

2:29 – played both scenarios

2:30 – what scenario –

2:40 – full group - 12

Notes stop

Appendix 3a Training Session 3 Script

Training Session 3 Script

Steve *on phone* Yes, yes, I'm just about to email it now. Yes, I know it's a bit past the deadline but what with students demanding answers to facile questions... *Steph enters, he beckons her in.*

What? I thought I was promised less teaching next semester not more. But another module? Well the book will have to go on the back burner. No I'm not sure I can manage both. Yes, yes, and you have a good break as well. Cheerio!

Throws phone on desk.

Break my arse. Sorry, excuse my French, Mel, isn't it?

Steph Stephanie, Steph.

He continues to look at paperwork.

Steve of course it is. Stephanie. Which is what I was going to be called if I was a girl which is what they wanted of course... shouldn't you be on the train home by now, surrounded by all the other young people talking loudly on the phone with rising inflection? What can I do for you, Mel, Steph, Stephanie.

Steph I just thought I'd try and catch you. I wanted to talk about the last essay... and the mark... you said your door was always... that we could always come and talk if we were unhappy about an assessment.

Steve I said that? When was this?

Steph At the beginning of the year. We had a tutorial.

Steve Ah yes. The beginning of the year. You mustn't believe everything I say in the first flush of a new year Mel. *She is puzzled.* I'm joking. Let's have a look, although it's too late to change it of course, with the board meeting round the corner.

He gives it a cursory look.

Looks a fair mark to me, what's the problem?

Steph Well, I've looked at the criteria, and my dad did too, and I think I've covered it at a higher mark, at the 2:1 descriptors.

Steve *becoming defensive* Hang on, hang on, there's more to this assessment game than criteria and descriptors you know. There's professional judgement, a few years experience. *Pause* Is you Dad a historian? *Freeze, begin deconstruction process.*

Appendix 4 Transcript of discussion with a Student Actor, a Student Spect-actor and with Kim and I

Following an event in a Further Education College in the Northwest of England with HE students many of whom were on Performing Arts

Kim Jackson (KJ)

People might thinking he's behaving like a Knob...but I've got a part to play in this as well...

Student Actor

Yeah, well it helped me because at first the character (the Tutor) was a bit arsey...he didn't really care by the looks of i. but then I was able to change him into a completely different personality...it really helped

KJ

...even in that situation everybody has got the ability to just calm it down or say something differently...

Student Actor

...It just helps its just the smallest things...it wasn't massive changes...just small changes...that changed him...

KJ

...that's the point that were' just talking about it sometimes difficult to get the audience to concentrate on the small things the little things, specific things... they want to make bigger points 'he aught to do this, he aught to do that' when actually all the time you're pressing for what does he say now...its quite difficult always to get people to think like that

Student Spect-actor

Well at first when I started watching it, I like doing things that focus mainly and looking at that but when I found out that around status the guy was the tutor ...well there's immediate status already

KJ

Yeah, yeah, yeah...

Student Spect-actor

...and this student isn't going to one-up that not unless the student has a better understanding of... I think of his job...

KJ

Yeah...

Student Spect-actor

So the status was always there...



Photo 14 'status the guy was the tutor ...well there's immediate status already' Student Spect-actor

KJ
Yeah...

Student ~~Spect~~-actor
...but er no as I said it really does help from an acting perspective to be able to take all that on board and then when you do a script reading and going from page to stage...you can dissect that character as we did today...yes it was really helpful...and enjoyable.

Gary Hargreaves (GH)
What about as a learning process for yourself...forget about the performing arts aspect... but about that relationship you just mentioned with the status thing...do you think there is something there that can be exploited in your own behaviour perhaps in the way in that the tutors work with you...because actually...I'm asking a question and giving you the answer but maybe the students don't behave in your situation like anyway and there is less of a status and more of a learning community ..how does it reflect your own personal experiences in that situation ..have you had similar situations in the past with other people...

Student Actor
...every time I've had to go to someone for help everyone has always been really...caring and understanding...having said...they would that know you were nervous and would sit down with you...

Student ~~Spect~~-actor
...from my experience I haven't really come across a teacher, lecturer, tutor like the character was ...they have normally been sort of....

KJ
...yeah...maybe we have been dealing with a closed system that doesn't throw up that kind of tutor...

Student ~~Spect~~-actor
...but then again when we progress to Uni, we may face that...

KJ
...yeah, good point

Student Actor
I've has similar things with work...when I've gone to my manager and they said like 'I'm too busy can you come back later...'

GH
That's what were talking about it's the wider application of anything else you might come across in terms of that situation...in fact to be honest you yourself could have been Gary (the actor tutor) in a different situation...and we might have all been forced to be in that situation...

KJ
...sometimes you have to have some information that you haven't got sometimes it can be that simple...it can be using, exploiting the power situation...

Student ~~Spect~~-actor
...all in all very helpful...

KJ
Sometimes we forget it works on all levels it works with students, actors...therapy... coaching...and recognising that there's all kinds of different things going on...its very dynamic

Appendix 5 Session 3 Training Day Agenda

Dear Colleague

Many of you will be aware that the institute will undergo QAA Higher Education Review (HER) in the coming academic year. As a member of our valued teaching team, you will play a central role in the success of the Institute's review. In order for us to support you, and for you to support both our students and the Institute, we are planning a series of training, development and information sessions.

The first of those is a whole-day HER training and orientation event, to be held at the [REDACTED]. This event will run twice in Semester A (second date TBC) and it is essential that you attend on one of the days. In recognition of the demand this places on your time we will be paying a fee of £100. The format for the day is outlined below:

Time	Activity	Activity Leader
9:30-10:00	Registration, tea and coffee	
10:00-11:00	Overview of the Institute's Quality Process, HER+ and the Code	[REDACTED]
11:00-11:15	Comfort break	
11:15-12:00	Quality Assurance – from classroom to QAA	[REDACTED]
12:00-12:30	Introduction to assessment and feedback	Gary Hargreaves
12:30-1:30	Lunch break	
1:30-2:00	Networking activity	Gary Hargreaves
2:00-3:15	Assessment and Feedback – Practical Workshop	Gary Hargreaves
3:15-3:30	Tea and coffee break	
3:30-3:50	Plenary	Gary Hargreaves
3:50-4:00	Closing remarks	[REDACTED]

You will receive an Eventbrite invitation shortly – please register with Eventbrite and then RSVP for the event. Please also follow this link for

if you have any queries, please feel free to contact me.

Very best,

[Handwritten signature]

Head of Studies

Appendix 6 – Session 3 Email Post event

Session 3

Email Post event

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: [REDACTED] September [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Training Day [REDACTED] September

Hi [REDACTED].

I wanted to thank you for organising the training day on Friday. I think it was excellent - both enjoyable and productive, which pretty much sums up how we need to present to our students I think.

The line I wrote at the beginning to express what I wanted to achieve from the day ahead was:

Get a better understanding of how to deliver for the Students.

I think I did.

The setting of everything into context was the main thing that connected for me. That need to stand back and think about why we are all in this room together, what are we trying to achieve and why, and what might be the valid and stimulating offshoots. This was so topical coming right ahead of the first session from each of the modules we are about to embark on delivering this week. I've spent much of the weekend amending my slides to reflect this. It is not just about "Here's the learning outcomes, remember them." I reckon we can do much better than that, and spending time to get behind the course objectives at the start, then invoking them as we go along, is really important, but easy to overlook in the madness of it all.

A highlight of the day was undoubtedly the hypothetical student / tutor vignette. Just brilliant. The potency of having professional actors perform and then respond to our comments was incredible. Another level beyond showing a film piece to illustrate a point. Like the difference between a great gig and listening to a recording. It hits you much harder if it done right, because you are *in the moment*, as opposed to reflecting from a distance. Priceless. Great actors and director, total caliber. I think this sets the standard we should all aspire to.

Gary Hargreaves 94171393 Thesis

If one had to find fault with anything in the day it would be the logistics of the screen being accessible from around the room. I'm always sensitive to this (which is why I sat at the front). When I lecture in a new room I always sit at the back to get a student perspective before the session starts if a can (Springsteen used to do this at sound checks apparently - it is never bad to learn from the Boss). It is really important and often overlooked.

So a great start for the new term and the next phase of the college.

Thanks again,

████████

████████

Appendix 7 – Data records including Audio Interviews

Audio Interviews (the majority have been transcribed)

General

- **K J.docx (with transcript)**

Date of interview: [REDACTED]

Interview conducted by Gary Hargreaves

Interviewee K J

- **K J.docx & GH (with transcript)**

Date of interview: Transcript Kim, Gary and [REDACTED]

Interview conducted by [REDACTED] (Peer Postgrad researcher)

- **Bullying Sharnbrook workshop and event** [REDACTED]

KJ post-mortem interviews [REDACTED]

- **HE Examiner training** [REDACTED]

post event interviews with Colleague Kim and
with delegates [REDACTED]

- **Independent HE Music Provider Staff Training** [REDACTED]

Actor Steve and Kim Joker (facilitator) [REDACTED]

KJ post-mortem interviews [REDACTED]

Videos/Audio

- Bullying number of daytimes workshop video and school staff active FT presentation [REDACTED]
- HN Music Training Video x 3 [REDACTED] audio transcribed
- Training day (audio only) [REDACTED]

Photographs

[REDACTED] Bullying number of daytimes workshop [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Staff training day [REDACTED]

Contemporaneous notes

- Kim's notebook/journal
- GH notes/journal

Misc.

Emails with commissioners

- Dr [REDACTED] – workshop [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] School – various including commissioning emails
- [REDACTED] – commissioning emails

In addition, there are commissioning, preparation materials and documentation for the case studies for example FT scripts.

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