HOW DO WE TEACH
SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE?

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B. Descriptions of the films

As part of the research, four films were developed; three are short provocation films on the three key themes which emerged from the research and the other film is a summary of the major research findings and is not intended for teaching purposes.

C. Suggested activities to accompany the films

The three films that have come out of our research show practitioners, teachers and students talking about a particular theme. These are intended to provoke discussion and reflection around the theme, and to help students to reflect on their own ideas, opinions and dilemmas. All three films were piloted with groups of current and recently graduated students, and here we offer you some potential activities that can be used to develop the themes. Please adapt and develop; the activities obviously depend a lot on the stage and experience of your students, and the place in any course where they might be used.

With each theme we asked students to listen out for key ideas and phrases that struck them in the films, and note them down. These fuelled discussion, questions and personal response. In each of our workshops we used the film at a different point, but never first. Warm-up activities encouraged the group to start thinking about the themes themselves, which made them more alert to the filmed interviews.

1. PRAXIS

This film explores the balance between action and reflection, with particular reference to the theoretical reading that MA students in Applied Drama/Theatre might encounter, and the ways in which this might facilitate their reflection.

- Warm up activity: Place a book (ideally one familiar to the students from their reading list) and a ball in the centre of the circle. These represent reflection and action respectively. Everyone goes in one by one to show the relationship for them of these two aspects, with each other, and with them as a student, using still or moving image, but no words.
In our pilot workshop students bounced the ball on the book, tried to close the ball in the book, tried to open the book using the ball – a whole range of imaginative and revealing images.

- After watching and responding to the DVD, ask students to work in pairs. Their task is to share with each other any key text or idea that they have encountered that has helped them to understand a piece of practice better.

- Small groups: Give out a case study to each group, (for examples please Appendix D) and a short piece of contextual writing (a different one to each group) Ask the group to read these aloud and then see how they can help to illuminate each other

- After 10 minutes ask the pairs to discuss an experience or piece of practice that has helped them to understand a key theory or idea better.

- Share back the students responses

- When and where do we reflect? On a large piece of flipchart paper gather student’s observations on when and where they are able to reflect on practice and on theory. Ask each student to create for themselves a list (taken from the flipchart) of ways to increase their opportunities for reflection.

- Return to the warm up game. Again, going one by one into the circle, use the book and the ball to show your ideal relationship between theory/reflection and practice.

In our workshop all the students showed a different way of relating action and reflection this time around.

2. QUALITIES & SKILLS

In this film interviewees reflect on the qualities and skills that an artist needs to work in participatory and socially engaged settings. The distinction we make is between innate qualities, that the practitioner already possesses but can be developed, and skills that they need to learn. The film also explores where skills are learned and qualities honed.
• Warm-up activity: Show the students a wide range of objects, (we used a real variety, including a notebook, a banana, a screwdriver, a juggling ball, a camera, a pair of glasses, a mug, a set of keys, a crown, a toy bird, paints, binoculars) and ask them to choose objects that represent skills or qualities that they believe they have, as practitioners, and label them using a post-it.

• After watching the film create on the floor two large overlapping circles, using tape or string. Either by using distinct colours, or by labelling, identify one section as ‘Practice’, and the other ‘Academic courses’, with the overlapping section as ‘Both’. Ask students to place their objects and labels in the spaces which best represents where they could learn or have learned this skill or developed this quality.

• Once the entire group has contributed, look at the whole Venn diagram, and discuss.

• Show the group the Venn diagram created in our student research group (Appendix E). Discuss how this compares with their own one. What discoveries, and contradictions do they find?

• Personal audit: Ask each person to fill in a short audit form, under the headings: I have, I need to learn, I need to get from another person/organisation (see Appendix F for an example of the form).

• Share these back
3. CREATIVE RISKS

This film opens up the need to take creative risks, and a need to accept mistakes and failures, which can sometimes be at odds with the ethos of the academic world, where students’ goal is to succeed.

• Warm-up activity:
  On a large piece of flip-chart paper collect all the words and responses to the word Risk

• Identify which of these terms you would see as positive or negative. Try to unpack what are the ideas, attractions and fears that attach to the notion of risk.

• Ask the group to stand in a line across the room that expresses, as a continuum, where each person feels they stand in relation to Creative Risk, and then personal risk. Discuss

• After watching the DVD, and hearing responses, work in pairs to look at the following (or others that you might want to select) quotes from the DVD

  I’m really keen to do things I don’t know how to do or I don’t know anything about that means I’m going to have to find out how to do that and sort of in terms of learning and practice, there is a bit of me, I means it’s the same lesson of failure is fine, it’s actually, I mean again it’s with age and maturity you’ve got a certain level of going this set of workshops isn’t going to work. Or if there is a chance of it not going to work, but that’s fine because I’m trying to find something out.

  I really learnt something about the group of people that I was working with about how much fear, I think a lot of what you are doing is removing the fear from people’s existence so they can do whatever they want to do and that’s not always necessarily a creative thing but it’s a creative path to get there to sort of thinking “well I can”.
Maybe it’s being responsive to them, talking to them, listening to them, creating a safe environment, creating space

- In the same pairs discuss the notion of Safe Space. Create a joint definition, and share this back with the group.
- In small groups or individually write a short manifesto for an applied practitioner that includes the words ‘safe space’ and ‘creative risk’. For example, one group of students noted: “Safety brings people the ability to lose their sense of fear, to trust each other and to relax. So, as practitioners we must always aim to make our spaces feel safe, physically and emotionally. But the aim of this is to help people to take creative risks, to play and release their imaginations. The two things are hand in hand.”
D. Case Studies for Praxis Film Activities

CASE STUDY 1

Working in a regular drama workshop for children with and without disabilities, aged between 8 and 12, the facilitators aim to work in ways that help everyone to participate, whatever their particular needs. There are two drama facilitators and two volunteers who are there to help with one to one support. In one workshop the facilitators want to do some sensory work and ask all the children to remove their shoes. They have prepared different surfaces for the group to walk on, including bubble wrap and artificial grass. One of the children wears ankle boots that help him with his mobility, and he doesn’t unusually remove them in the daytime. One of the volunteers is unhappy about this, but, rather than contradict the facilitator in the session, goes ahead and helps the boy off with his shoes. His mobility is affected, but with an adult on each side of him, he is able to walk across the different surfaces, and seems to enjoy it. However, in the evaluation after the session the volunteer and the facilitator remain really adamant about their positions, one arguing that it was important to support the young person to do something unfamiliar, and the volunteer who believed that the activity was too risky.

- How would you ask questions about access issues using this case study?
- How would you ask questions about risk and the role of the practitioner using this case study?

CASE STUDY 2

Working in a situation where the facilitator and the participants come from different cultural contexts, on issues that the local community want to discuss, the facilitator aims to be open and welcoming to the participants, creating a space in which allows all to participate and contribute at a level they feel comfortable at. One participant is deeply involved in the practice, contributing, playing and enjoying, generally helping to push and expand the work. After one session, the participant approaches the practitioner to ask for some advice. She is living with her baby’s father who is providing shelter and food for them, however he is not faithful and is occasionally violent. She does not have anyone else to turn to and does not feel able to return home to live with her family (it would mean returning to the countryside where there is very limited work). She is currently unemployed, her child is under a year old and feels she has no options. She asks the facilitator for help because they are the same age and she feels the facilitator would be able to offer advice. The facilitator is very troubled by this, particularly seeing how despairing the young woman is. What advice can she offer in this context?

- How would you consider the ethics of this situation and what ethical framework would you draw on?
- How would you question and consider the role of and the limits of the practitioner in this context?
E. Venn Diagrams

Where do we learn our skills in applied arts practice?
Views of teachers in Applied Theatre practice

- **ACADEMIC**
  - To speak is the language that important people understand
  - The importance of structure
  - Connection to the wealth and riches of the ideas and practice and reflection of others all over the world
  - Learn from others (who you’ve never met) feetsteps
  - Rigorous and expansive analysis
  - Understanding of the structures and values of formal learning
  - Being asked to articulate ideas and intuitions, and not assume I am understood
  - Greater/increased sensitivity to a larger world
  - Time - to think and seek answers rather than just to keep swimming

- **PRACTICE**
  - Constantly re-shuffling
  - To keep things in motion
  - On the spot flexibility
  - To bend, be flexible
  - Resilience
  - Plan BICUAP
  - Work with/through failure
  - To be at ease with what I don’t know how I do it
  - Expect the unexpected
  - Endurance
  - Lesego
  - Subtle, nuanced differences that come out of all our choices: none are wrong
  - Feedback that helps me know my strengths and my weaknesses

- **BOTH**
  - Play
  - Resilience
  - Reading people
  - Lateral thinking
  - A safe space to take risks
  - The importance and intuition
  - To collaborate, share knowledge, skills, etc.
  - Sweet enjoyment
  - Bolt of inspiration (what moments)
  - What safety and safe space actually means
  - The passage of thoughts/ideas/skills from one part of myself to another
  - Learn from the past/wise ones
  - Asking: What does the work need
  - Adapt for the future/new
  - Luck

- **Learned through both**
- **Through an academic/MA route**
- **I have learned from practice**
Where do we learn our skills in applied arts practice?: Views of recent graduates in Applied Theatre practice

ACADEMIC
- Networks
- Security and confidence
- Planning
- Documentation
- Playfulness as a way in
- Evaluation techniques and importance
- Advice and ethical grounding from established practitioners
- Applied Theatre’s position in the academic field
- The support and skills of other applied practitioners
- Keeping an open mind
- Facilitator and participants
- Time and people with whom to reflect, plan and deconstruct
- Being sharp, thinking on the spot and being adaptable
- How the bigger picture fits with the detail

PRACTICE
- Timings
- Identifying what’s wrong and knowing how to fix it
- Professional distance and safety
- Professional confidence and a protective layer
- Strong structures with gaps
- Documentation and how to do it creatively, learned academically
- Practical understanding of limitations and how to do it
- Stage fright, Shows you care and are passionate
- The need for a plan even if not used
- Intuition and sensitivity
- Flexible skills base
- Holding it together, making connections
- Good working relationships
- Time and space to reflect
- Using Technology
- Willingness to scrap plans
- Welcoming

Both
- Taking mental images to inform future planning
- Interest in everyone
- Leaving room for surprise and inspiration
- Flexibility, sensitivity, resourcefulness
- Be honest, in a light, positive, inquisitive open way
- Managing participants expectations
- If I give something of myself I connect with people
- Know everyone’s name
- Responsiveness, fluidity, impulsiveness, intuition
- An assured voice (with a mute and a quiet button)

= I have learned from practice
= Through an academic / MA route
= Learned through both
F. Form for Qualities and Skills exercise

Personal Qualities and Skills

I have:

I need to learn:

I need to get from another person: