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Larry O'Farrell

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Developing Creative Citizens through Experiential Learning Environments in Applied Drama

Rea Dennis
School of Creative and Cultural Industries
University of Glamorgan
England
rdennis@glam.ac.uk

Abstract

The Seoul Agenda (2010, p. 8) recognizes the value of arts education in enhancing creative and innovative capacity in young people. It goes so far as to suggest that applying arts will "cultivate a new generation of creative citizens". This paper documents a specific area of arts education in university level drama degrees. In a case study approach, it discusses the outcomes of a work-based learning approach for students of applied drama. It explores the drama student's experience and considers how engaging in the study of applied drama and applied performance and having the support and opportunity to transfer these skills in real contexts acts to develop creative capacity and to contribute to consolidating the students' identities as citizens.

The Seoul Agenda (2010, p. 8) recognizes the value of arts education in enhancing creative and innovative capacity in young people going so far as to suggest that applying arts will "cultivate a new generation of creative citizens". Arts Education is gaining renewed attention in the contemporary debates about learning and development worldwide and is once again being touted as the foundation for the "balanced creative, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and social development of children, youth and life-long learners" (Seoul Agenda, 2010, p. 3). This paper documents a specific area of arts education in university level drama degrees. In a case study approach, it discusses the outcomes of a work-based learning approach for students of applied drama. It explores the drama student's experience and sets out to consider how engaging in the study of applied drama and applied performance and having the support and opportunity to transfer these skills in real contexts acts to develop creative capacity and to contribute to consolidating the students' identities as citizens.

Notions of Citizenship and Creativity

Arts Education stimulates creative and innovative capacity in young people. Learning about applied arts introduces students to thinking about the value of arts education and arts participation for others. Beyond the purpose of creating art for commercial purposes, it asks the student to think about art in society, art as culture, and art practice as inclusive, accessible, and in some cases, a right. At the centre of this discussion is the concept of the creative citizen. Notions of citizenship are varied and in the context of this discussion the notion of citizen identity is aligned with the way in which the experience of the undergraduate student in their work-base placement contributes to building critical consciousness and political awareness. Creativity can be understood to occur at cultural, individual and social levels. On a social level, creativity might mean that energy invested (mental, physic, physical) results in something: some kind of discovery, or a work of art, or perhaps a performance. On a cultural

level this might result in something new and original. Whereas, Bryant and Throsby (2006, p. 508, cited in European Commission, 2012, p. 22) suggest that, at the level of the individual, creativity "relates to the capacity of individuals to think inventively and imaginatively and to go beyond traditional ways of solving problems." This idea is useful and extends to include ideas of creativity as the "capacity for divergent thinking rather than convergent thought processes"; the ability, for example, to "connect ideas", "to see similarities and differences", be "unorthodox"," be "inquisitive" and "to question societal norms". In addition, creativity includes the ability to connect with senses and emotions expressive of the human soul. Many of these personal elements are common in artists and creative people. However it is useful to stress the importance of contexts, place and social conventions. And to this end, it is pertinent to consider Csikszentmihalyi's conceptualization of creativity in the context of this paper. He states "creativity does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a socio- cultural context. It is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 24, cited in the European Commission, 2012, p. 23).

Applied Arts and Citizen Identity

This study is based in South Wales. In a case study approach that draws on over 6 years of artist-facilitator training[1] at the University of Glamorgan, the paper examines the way in which the course has provided a bridge to social responsibility and citizenship for the young adults. The Applied Drama course aims to deliver conceptual, theoretical and skill-based education to undergraduate students in the generic drama degree. Like many courses of its kind, the Applied Drama course at the University of Glamorgan targets the gap between

[1] Ongoing yearly plan-act-reflect cycles were followed. Over the six years the cohort size has been consistently between 20 and 35 students. The data informing the paper is drawn from informal student and practitioner interviews, module evaluations, reflective notes, and reflective on-line student submissions.

industry and classroom. Embedded in a generic three-year undergraduate drama degree the Applied Drama element mixes studio and classroom based learning with an experiential work-based learning model which aims to support students to begin to consolidate a professional identity. Working with relevant community partners can result in context-specific learning environments within which students apply their creative skills to artistic, facilitation and reflective tasks. Sayers (2012, p. 6) promotes "the innovative nature of live projects in community settings" as learning environments. Indeed Vaughan (2010) stresses the importance of workplace learning opportunities for establishing a strong framework for young people to begin to think about their career development and to come to some understanding of the need for lifelong learning. Outward facing learning opportunities are becoming more commonplace with the Higher Education sector in UK. Some findings suggest that the student experience is so enhanced that learning is both deep (Smith, Clegg, Lawrence, & Todd, 2007) and contextualized (Harmer, 2009). Students are in context, responding to real situations. Errington (2011, p. 86) states that "the dual concept of student as both learner and would-be professional is an important one: connecting both are notions of "personal and professional identity." Engagement in real-time environments where students' learning is facilitated through the application of skills for a specified purpose develops more than the professional identity of the undergraduate. Students also develop their social and civic identities. Errington (2011, p. 86) claims that this approach stimulates students to think creatively, and to imagine "multiple" and "alternative" futures. The student naturally begins to assume the professional identity and with this comes the necessity to adopt reflective distance and eventually begin to question or challenge practice decisions; to interrogate "historic ways of thinking and operating"; and to develop creative responses.

Artistic Practice and Facilitation

The mandate of the community performance artist or applied drama practitioner is to "extend creative processes beyond themselves to people who might not conventionally see themselves as artists" (Kuppers & Robertson, 2007, p. 2). Translating passion for drama and basic artistic skills into competency in facilitation is a complex work for students. Understanding their own experience as participants is the first step. The work-based placement experience is one way to begin applying this understanding in the field so that they learn what works and what does not. In order to adopt this identity position, the young artists-in-training must learn relevant facilitation and professional skills to accompany their discipline-specific skills. Phillip Taylor (2003, p. 54) suggests that an applied theatre practitioner needs to have a range of skills. He nominates skills in facilitation and "teaching" as "just as important, if not more so, than theatrical presentation for it is in the teaching ability of the artist that the *applied* nature of the work will be realized."

Taylor also outlines the following skill areas as essential:

- The ability to draw participants into an imaginary world
- To inspire enthusiasm and commitment
- The ability to assist participants to dialogue with each other and with other teaching artists
- To put participant anxiety at rest so that they can practically and willingly engage within the work and reflect
- To monitor how participants are responding at any given point
- To find the appropriate source, stance, gesture, question, or attitude that will enable participants to notice what needs to be noticed
- To engage participants and empower them to take ownership of the material.

Two principal learning points for student practitioners is that any number of drama activities, interventions and processes could be the gateway to enacting these areas; and that each area is not singular or static, rather each is ongoing and continuous. What the student practitioner must come to terms with is that detailed planning is essential and that the dynamics and unknown nature of the real environment will demand innovation, flexibility and adaptability.

Flexibility, Adaptability, and Innovation

The student-practitioner is immediately required to adapt when they enter the field. This adaptation occurs on a personal and cultural level. Student-practitioners frequently need to come to terms with their expectations in the experiential learning context. This could be as simple as expecting to work in a school context with young people and finding instead that it is an after-school context or a community context. For others it might be that there was an expectation to work with young people and the placement focus is young people with learning disabilities. The reasons for adjustment are varied including simple things like timetable clashes to more complex things like the limitations or ethical constraints within the community agency. Such adjustments are significant and students always make a comment about how they have to realign their expectations and deal with various emotions from anxiety to disappointment. I take Sally's experience as an example. Sally had dreamed of leading a community production project and admits to being "a little disappointed" to be working instead alongside an experienced community artist. As Sally engaged more fully in the project she found she was able to:

> *think of this in a positive way [and] adapt as if [she] were in this situation professionally, that is dealing with people schedules, making sure that the communication lines between us is strong … and also to push ourselves to be independent to work on our research and prepare ourselves out of choice and passion,*

> *rather than being told what we need to learn and where to find the required materials.* (Sally[2], online reflective log, 27/12/2009)

Sally's response to was to focus on planning: researching the context and getting to know the agency, the practitioner and the profile of the participants. This kind of initial adjustment is consistently played out in the journeys that students undertake year in and year out. Student practitioners identify key moments that contribute to this adjustment and re-alignment of their expectations. The necessity to adapt soon after the transition from classroom to genuine contact with the field placement context often coincides with various other adjustments and shifts including role shifts from facilitator to co-facilitator, or participant facilitator, and values shifts from commercial production values to social care priorities and back again to art production priorities including discovering the value of relationships within the task.

Facilitating: in front, behind or beside

It is common to imagine a drama facilitator out front, giving instructions and leading groups. Student practitioners tend to begin the course with this image of the facilitator. Some already possess excellent self-presentation skills and have a good command of how to communicate within a group process. Less familiar to student practitioners are notions of facilitating from behind or indeed facilitating from beside. In the early responses (both written and in discussion) the young student-artists can be gripped by what appears to be a fervor to help someone or fix something, that can stymie their capacity to be creative. Coming to an understanding of applied arts as relational and task oriented is essential in developing skills in applied drama facilitation. Neumark (2007) alerts us to the way in which the task components of arts practice; the work we do and the skills we are relying on or developing, are what makes arts *work* in community contexts. She writes:

[2] All names are changed for the purposes of confidentiality.

> *I have often considered that artistic activities are referred to as artistic practice because they provide the artist(s) and participants/audience with the framework to practice dealing with issues that in real life may be too difficult to approach or handle directly … not only is art itself inherently a process of conflict, engaging with art is a deliberate engagement with conflict. Such engagement with the symbolic is a structured and relatively 'safe' means of dealing with the challenging issues and inviting change.* (pp. 146-147)

Facilitation is responding to this minutiae; moment by moment, with an eye on the artistic purpose. Taylor (2003, p. 67) believes that facilitation skills range from asking "probing questions", to structuring processes that will enable participants "to speak for themselves" and to somehow "help them feel protected and not presented as a laughing stock." Yet there are multiple dimensions to facilitation and often student-practitioners find themselves exploring co-facilitation and participant facilitation strategies in order to maximize the participant experience. These things are discussed next through Lucinda's story.

Lucinda was one student with aspirations to make a difference. Her focus was on the criminal justice system and idea that she and her project team would create a project that would engage offenders and transform them and their worlds. Over half of the students in the undergraduate applied drama program express the desire to work in prisons or in young offender programmes. Students frequently elect to explore the feasibility of such a work-based option for their project and have always found that the complexity of the social system is beyond the feasibility of the course. Issues such as access, supervision and time are interrogated. Lucinda was determined to succeed and invested a significant amount of time trying to establish such a placement. At the 11th hour she yielded. The shift required was personal and demanded humility and in some ways it also required the ability to admit defeat. In the weeks that followed she accepted an invitation to work in a very different project with older people. After the long period in which she and her group were unsuccessful in establishing their placement in prison due to the raft of bureaucratic issues they began

working within an intergenerational environmental project. Here is an edited version of Lucinda's initial reflective note:

> *Ah today was so fantastic in so many ways! We went up to the Centre to meet Clarice who is our contact for the project.*
>
> *We then got to meet the group. This moment was almost surreal; after so much process, physically being in real time with a group we would be working with felt alien, but in a good way! After everything I have been thought and learned, I didn't go there today expecting anything of the group.*
>
> *Meeting them; the small details about the groups like married couples and families involved were aspects I had never considered and now practically understood what other students meant by having to meet the group before you could plan activities for them … We then began practically, making things… The idea is the group will model their own pieces in a Trashion Show.*
>
> *One main reflection I had in this process was how much I learnt from the participants in terms of skills!!! I was taught 3 different sewing stitches and was given a fantastic first hand history lesson in being a fireman on the steam trains and how doors need to be hung … I felt like a participant! I developed such a high level of respect for the people I talked to by sharing experiences and offering each other skills. Denise was the lady that I ended up working with mainly today. She is quite a quiet lady and came across as fairly un-confident in her convictions. However when I asked her whether she could sew because I wasn't very confident in my skills she was in her element explaining each stitch and encouraging me to copy her. Then by asking her questions about herself she started to engage in conversation not only with me but the others. Clarice [practitioner] commented on the fact she was laughing with others, something she hasn't done. Just sharing in each others skills brought out the best in each of us. (Lucinda, online log, 16 February, 2010)*

This reflective note by Lucinda tells the story of how adopting a task-oriented approach opened the space for relational aesthetics. Lucinda adapted and focused on the tasks rather than leading a process. She states that she is learning from them, that she "felt like a participant!" This capacity to shift from a facilitator led dynamic to valuing and contributing alongside, as a participant-facilitator is essential when working in some context, especially with older aged people and with people with learning disabilities. Lucinda also identifies the central place of the 'doing' when she is working with Denise. A social relationship is developing to a degree, yet this is not the focus. It is the task-based component that gives both Lucinda and Denise the purpose to sit, hour after hour, together; the task and the

deadline – there is a fashion (Trash-ion) Show for which to prepare. She has been able to "inspire enthusiasm and commitment" in Denise and others and in some ways put Denise's anxiety at rest so that she could "practically and willingly engage within the work" (Taylor, 2003, p. 53). Lucinda demonstrates a capacity to monitor how the participant is responding and allow this to lead her. The notion of responsiveness and facilitation through following the participants' leads is discussed more fully in the next section.

Inquiry, Discovery & Responsiveness: Following the participant's lead

Student facilitators engage in multiple and simultaneous learning moments during their work-based placement. A principle part of the learning process for the student practitioners is that moment of realization that participants can and indeed must lead the process in some way. Taylor (2003) suggests that it is essential to construct and create pathways in which participants' might directly enter the protagonists' experience. Indeed even experienced practitioners, as Jenny Hughes and Simon Ruding (2007:367) acknowledge, do not always know just what activity, what skill, what theme or stimulus will function to capture the imaginations of participants and transport them into the dramatic frame. They go so far as to suggest that the necessary "skills and capacities needed by practitioners to facilitate these imaginative leaps have not been fully articulated by those working within applied theatre." Yet these skills and capacities are not always something teachable, rather they are discovered as the following student practitioner's comment suggests:

> *I was extremely anxious before the workshop started and although I was prepared I was defiantly out on my comfort zone … I found that once I started my nerves ceased, and I felt at ease whilst working with the boy. I was concerned that I would lose their concentration if I did not keep my instructions short and to the point, and to my great surprise I did not lose them at all. They all understood and did the activity with an astonishing amount of concentration … I cannot describe the feeling I had when that activity that I chose worked and they actually enjoyed it!* (Sally, online log, 28 February, 2010).

Sally celebrates her experience of success and acknowledges that her understanding and confidence has grown. In her next session this confidence and insight accompanies her facilitation and she is able to focus more on the experience of the participants than her own experience. Her comments reveal that she is beginning to make sense of the participants' experiences:

> *This week we played the keeper of the keys once again … During this game that I realised how caring Jasper is, he was the keeper of the keys and I believe he was aware that Toby was attempting to retrieve the keys, therefore, Jasper put no effort in trying the keep the keys. This truly touched me, and I became a lot more aware of the strong relationships between the participants. These workshops are more than just an opportunity for the participants to be creative, but an opportunity for them to feel at ease with one and other, there isn't anyone to judge or discriminate them (sic) during the workshops.* (4 March, 2010)

Sally is uncensored when she is expressing her delight in her growing capacity to see what is happening in and between people, rather than her previous sustained preoccupation with her list of outcomes. She has been able to value participant direction and initiative and is developing an "eye" that can see more. This transformation is enabled through the applied theatre praxis of the student practitioner. Taylor (2003, p. 35) suggests that, "put simply, praxis denotes the action, reflection, and transformation of people as they engage with one another." Student practitioners are accompanied on their learning journey by experienced drama and community arts practitioners, other community players and academics. Over the past six years the module has been embraced by the local area industries and receives generous support from practitioners in the areas of applied drama, community dance, youth theatre, community theatre, and community based performance. Such settings facilitate genuine knowledge transfer for field-based practitioner/mentor and student where the reciprocal nature of the relationship delivers genuine life experience for the student. Individual artists have developed their own frameworks for sharing their practice in singular

ways depending on their values, their cultural backgrounds and their competencies. Such contact and the varying contexts stimulate the reflective practice of the students. Positioning the learners as artist-facilitators has emerged as essential in enabling them to clarifying their sphere of influence in the working relationships, and gives them a framework for clarifying expectations and negotiating necessary resources and support. The academic demands placed on students to reflect renders these experiences more meaningful. Mezirow (1991, p. 64) claims that it is not so much "people's experience, but how they interpret and explain that experience, that determines their actions and their performance." The interpretation and meaning that is derived from such experiences are then subject to constant revision and replacement. Mezirow (1991, p. 7) suggests adult development occurs when the act of reflection "moves the individual toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view) and integrated meaning perspective."

Laurelle began her placement with 10-12 year old children as part of an after-school drama programme in an area labeled at risk. Working alongside 3 classmates and in a team of 4 other artist facilitators she had the responsibility to use concrete tasks in the creation of simple scenarios. Laurelle recounts that the children found it difficult to concentrate for long periods. She shares how the necessity for her to see the process of creating a dramatic scene as a series of tasks, and to respond to the various expressions of leadership from the children, at times without a clear cognitive understanding, was essential to the success of her work. She states: We were working on a scene about what a family is. I was focused on developing a story. Yet the children seemed uninterested or resistant to any clear narrative wanting instead to focus on the role they might be.

On reflection it became clear to her that her principle function was to assist participants to dialogue with each other, to create something together that held meaning for all of the participants in the group. Unlike Lucinda who found aesthetic meaning in her

participant role, Laurelle struggled to find meaning and struggled to relate to the elements of the scenes that the children were creating. She states:

> *Ian was determined to include a dog. We had a mother who was not home, and three children. In my mind the next step was to ask either: where's the mother? Or: where's the father? But Ian was insistent about the dog. My adult mind really wanted to lead them to the story, but something inside me kept insisting that I listen to Ian. It was such a difficult moment as he is often disruptive and everyone is always telling him to be quite. I said, in a soft voice: OK Ian, tell us about the dog. You know, I got a huge surprise as he just started leading the drama, directing it. Making suggestions and everyone got involved and the story developed and what was most impressive, what most got my attention was that Ian was joining in. He was in the middle of things. Usually he is disruptive and being told off … not this time* (Laurelle, 3 March, 2012).

Notions of voice and identity are central to applied theatre values. Yet Laurelle's experience here demonstrates how facilitation can enable the participant to become protagonist; to influence the action, and to offer solutions. Laurelle is grappling with authority and the place of the expert coming to some understanding that the solutions that the practitioner "may be inclined to make might have no greater currency or accuracy than those of participants" (Taylor, 2003: 57). Such moments can signify a turning point for the learner. The student practitioner begins to invest more in planning so that they are better equipped to take risks, to work within uncertainty or with the unknown, to follow the group, and to facilitate with the spirit of discovery and inquiry.

Visitor, Helper, Expert and Participant?

When the student practitioner enters the field they enter with implicit assumptions that they have something to share, they can help, they will lead, direct or facilitate, and perhaps that they are in some ways, an expert in the making. Yet applied drama work is exclusively systemic, and so the artist facilitator must act relationally and to come to understand how the system interacts. Kuppers and Robertson (2007, p. 2) state that work is most often created collaboratively, challenging conventional ideas of the artist as core creator or specialist.

Earlier I wrote about Lucinda working alongside Denise making a costume from recycled materials for the *Trashion Show*. I return to this story now to demonstrate the way in which the fieldwork experience for the student practitioners begins to situate them as citizens.

As revealed earlier, after her formation and preparation for her applied drama placement Lucinda found herself in the midst of a paradigm shift that required her to reconsider numerous elements including: what drama might be, how one might apply it in this context, who might the participant/s be, who she is, and what her role might be. She became preoccupied with the question: what role am I playing?

> *There are moments where I feel very much the participant's friend yet in a quick transition we (uni lot) are being 'helpers' aiding some of the ladies up the stairs, running errands and preparing lunch. All of a sudden we are 'collaborative artist' working to make pieces [and this role is] merged with, for some of us, [the role of] 'confidantes'; where participants share more personal information with us. It is sometimes hard to keep from being the 'friend' and being an encouraging facilitator who guides the participant on their journey of learning; or perhaps in this project elements of both are required … I am working closely with Denise, who always puts self doubt into her thoughts 'Do you think bows will look nice or silly? 'Coz I think they could...look silly...what do you think?' Denise's ideas are great but she is clearly lacking confidence in them and likes reassurance, like me! … I asked Denise what type of bow was she thinking about, cause that usually helps me to think creatively, I asked, where she would imagine it and how many. Once she had though about it I would ask whether she liked the idea, I deliberately didn't ask her 'or not' as that is still laced with doubt. She would then answer it, mainly with a yes, or a yes with a slight alteration on the original idea and that would be that. I'd smile and we would begin to make it. She now tells me about how she tells her daughter all about HER dress and HER ideas which is great as it implies that she does feel that it is HERS.*
>
> *Denise's choice of language meant she presented herself in a certain manner. I realised that if it made such an impression on me, then my own choice of words could have a similar impact. This reflection also made me think more about why Denise and I gravitated towards each other, we may be more alike than I realised. Think I need to look at this area more, what draws people to certain people - what does this mean for a facilitator?* (Lucinda, 2 March, 2010).

As Lauren is negotiating the necessary steps in making the costumes for the performance, she is also engaged in a negotiation with Denise in relation to personal boundaries, cultural norms, and exchanging knowledge, all the while, sharing stories. It is complex to ascertain the risk to Lucinda in this work. Perhaps it is best to consider it in her words. As she sat alongside

Denise week after week she began to enjoy herself. This experience of joy led her to fear that she had become complacent and she began to interrogate her purpose. Two weeks later she reflects:

> *Something that has been occupying my mind about going to placement is what exactly am I meant to be doing there. I was a bit afraid that I was just turning up every week, getting caught up in chatting away to all and helping Denise with her costume and thinking about my learning; was I forgetting to do something there? Maybe it was because we have fallen into a routine and the complacency worried me into thinking I had forgotten to do something. This week in particular was when I felt this as going to placement seemed like it was a break; a slower pace from the hectic schedule of pracs [sic]! I decided to look into what facilitator's responsibilities are and the results I found helped me a great deal … [So I asked myself: What am I meant to be doing?] …*
>
> *In a personal, practical way my 'task' with Denise is to help her identify that she has put up personal boundaries as she feels incapable of some tasks due to her health and ways in which to bring some of the self created boundaries down … A practical example is when Denise explains to me that she doesn't think she can make and wear bows because her hand movements aren't as 'good as they used to be' and she is 'too old to wear pink bows' even though she would like to. I realised that I didn't push her to try but suggested that we could have a play around at making some and see what they look like, as she does like the idea of wearing them and then she can decide; 'we have plenty of time and I can learn too because I'm not sure of the best way to make a bow' I say. Denise and I then had fun looking for colours that she liked and practiced different ways of making them. She then found a really clever way that she remembered from when she was young (with the help of Mary, Creative Saint!) and made a bow that she really liked and found it comfortable to create. She taught me and we produce a few and put them on her skirt. She immediately started to point out where we would need more and began making them. It is only now looking back that I realise that was quite a big step for Denise not to question the idea more … Last week in an hour an a half Denise made 18 bows, and she mentioned to me that she was so surprised that her fingers weren't hurting.* (Lucinda, 13 March, 2010).

Needlands (2007, p. 315) remarks that it is in the "social and artistic practices of applied theatre with the commitment to full participation in the process … [that can liberate all participants to be] social actors freely engaging in civic dialogue." A passionate emerging artist like Lucinda, reflects on why they are passionate about their art, so that they might usefully share it with others, so that they too have access to the kinds of expressive spaces that have been so meaningful to the students themselves. Opening these chances to contribute

acts to open the students' eyes to the world around them and fosters what Kolb identified as "critical linkages" that are fundamental in the development of individuals to their full potential as citizens, family members, and human beings (in Beard and Wilson, 2006, p. 31, cited in Stuart Fisher & Oman, 2011, p. 3).

Inclusive Practice and the Hydraulics of Power

Comprehending the scope of the discipline is a big task for undergraduate students. As explored through the experiences of Sally, Lucinda and Laurelle aspects of skill deployment, task - relationship balance, participation and facilitation, and production place demands on the student practitioner, with little attention so far paid to the political complexities of the work. Kuppers and Robertson (2007, p. 2) insist that "to keep their practice attentive to the hydraulics of power, community performance artists often work though intense self reflexive processes." The hydraulics of power can extend to government departments, non government funding agencies, hospital or allied health partners, and even parents and family of participants when the project focus is more vulnerable people. Student practitioners tend to be limited in the way they can influence due to their temporary positioning; yet the field experience can stimulate the students' political awareness. Working in a complex placement, student practitioner Sylvia invested effort in keeping attentive to "the hydraulics of power" through a consistent and systematic self-reflexive process. She began her work-based placement with a local non-government organization that specialized in creating community plays. The remit of the agency is inclusive theatre; which means in simple terms, that the cast of these plays aspired to include adults with learning disabilities. I select just two excerpts from Sylvia's online log to illustrate one situation she encountered during her placement that demonstrates the way her values and understanding about inclusion interacted and conflicted

with what she was experiencing, causing her significant concern and leading to extended reflection.

The day Sylvia joins the project is the first day that the participants come together. It is a rare experience to be involved from the outset and she is excited. She quickly learns that many of the participants know each other from other projects that the agency has done and indeed some struggle to accept the parameters of the new project wanting to recapture the rhythm and style of previous experiences. Sylvia talks about being open to the learning experience and joins in working alongside the participants and following the practitioner-leader. On her second day she has an encounter with one of the men, Dean, that she feels is inappropriate. Despite feeling uncomfortable, she is unsure whether it was intentional so focuses instead on the directions of the leader and fulfilling her role. She has been asked to participate fully and in so doing, model the degree to which participation is possible. She is also expected to support others at times if she feels that this will enable them to increase their level or range of participation. The following week she experiences a similar moment with Dean, which increases her discomfort. She discusses the incident with her field-based supervisor yet is left feeling dissatisfied with his response. This leads her to undertake considerable reflection, including talking to her classmates, spending time talking with me, writing her reflections about the dilemma, and also seeking extra reading about working with adults with Asperger's syndrome. She also begins to read the logs of other students in a search for a way to better understand her experience, while continuing with her practice. It was around mid-way through her placement she had identified a strategy to try to alter the amount of time this one participant was demanding from her. She says:

> *I decided I wanted to try and avoid working with Dean today as I felt he was becoming the focus of my time there, however Brad [practitioner] asked me to work with him in the first exercise of the day. I didn't refuse as I understand Brad obviously sees a reason to partner us up regularly. This exercise led to me being blind folded and led around an obstacle course by Dean, for me this was a break through as even during Tuesdays session I still did not feel as if I trusted Dean to be left alone with*

> *him but today I trusted him enough to lead me around the room blindfolded. Later in the session I stuck to the decision I made in the morning as when Dean approached myself to work with him on another exercise I just stated 'Dean we have worked together once today lets work with someone different and see how that goes, maybe we can learn something new with someone new'. Dean seemed a lot calmer today* (Sylvia, reflective log, 20, February, 2012).

Sylvia's greatest challenge has been the way in which she interacted with and communicated with Dean in a moment-by-moment process. Her engagement in reflection was mostly focusing on how she could be more effective so that she and Dean could both participate and so that Dean's presence did not automatically exclude her from relating to other participants, leading exercises, contributing ideas, listening, modeling a range of ways of participating and facilitating process. On her final day, her critical reflection no longer focuses on her personal discomfort; rather the focus has shifted to think more broadly about the context that she and Dean are in and the contradictions in what she was experiencing and what she saw as the purposes of the project. She states:

> *I've spent a large amount of today wondering how the dynamic of the group would be different if people without learning disabilities were invited to join the [group] instead of acting as supports for Brad (the principle facilitator). I think people like Raleigh, Dean and Martin Mullens would really benefit from something like this as they often look to us for reassurance and compliments, but if we were their peers I think they would like to be recognised for their capabilities in comparison to ours. The whole group in my opinion is capable of working in a fully inclusive group…* (Sylvia, 5 March, 2012).

The tension implicit in the project is impacting on Sylvia and she is thinking about Dean and his peers systemically. She is engaged in the kind of creativity that Csikszentmihalyi (cited in the European Commission, 2012, p. 23) claims can only occur "in the interactions between a person's thoughts and a socio-cultural context." Working amongst vulnerable participants with varying support needs can often limit the practitioner's capacity yet Sylvia's openness to her discomfort and her curiosity to question has forged a political awareness, stimulated through critical reflection and emotional honesty.

Critical Reflection and Active Citizenship

The experience of engaging in the active application of drama within the community delivers significant creative learning experience for students, enhancing their process of learning and contributing to building resilience through negotiation, discovery, experimentation, trial and error, and improvisation. Students engage in a continual process of structuring for uncertainty, sharing the roles delegating, leading and following. Learning is facilitated through the management of complex processes, the sustained delivery of a project, and the evaluation and documentation of work. Creativity is a central factor in our ability to continue to adapt to the changing environment. The intensive work-based learning offered in applied drama module provides a significant possibility for conversion into employment in the Welsh Context. By internalizing the spirit of creativity and the principles of creative problem solving, an individual can be transformed into a change leader.

Sheila Preston (2006) observes that contemporary undergraduate arts students lack the kind of political awareness and creative dynamism of previous generations. Preston (2006) draws attention to the undergraduate drama student's inability to consider their arts practice beyond entertainment. She identifies an apathy linked to fundamental approaches to knowledge and limited diversity in thinking or what could be considered low capacity for creative thinking, for thinking flexibly and for responding creatively within unfamiliar environments. In contrast to this profile, Prensky (2001, np) claims that this generation, what he terms "digital natives", have different learning needs. Calling on the latest neuroplasticity research[3], he suggests that the digital native's brain has adapted through use of and wide

[3] The idea that the brain *constantly* reorganizes itself all our lives is a phenomenon technically known as *neuroplasticity*.

exposure to technology[4] enabling them to "think differently from the rest of us" due to what he calls their "hypertext minds" and a greater disposition for "inductive discovery [or] making observations, formulating hypotheses and figuring out the rules governing the behavior of a dynamic representation." While the basis for Prensky's claims have been challenged (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008) the focus he brings to the importance of figuring out ways to ensure that reflection and critical thinking are embedded in the learning experience is critical for teachers of arts. Prensky nominates critical reflection as the "one key area" that appears to have diminished through the digital native's daily diet of technology. This paper has sought to explore how work-based learning adds a much needed dimension for the young student-professional to imagine multiple and alternate futures. While an arts based approach to learning, and the extended scope of applying the arts in meaningful ways bring a complexity to the learning environment and consolidates the creative development of the student. Throughout the work-based learning experience of applying drama, students have engaged in reflective meaning making process: discussions, reading, writing, and praxis. In some respects their acts of reflective practice are political.

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[4] Prensky (2001, np) claims that " the numbers are overwhelming: over 10,000 hours playing videogames, over 200,000 emails and instant messages sent and received; over 10,000 hours talking on digital cell phones; over 20,000 hours watching TV (a high percentage fast speed MTV), over 500,000 commercials seen—all before the kids leave college. And, maybe, at the very most, 5,000 hours of book reading. These are today's "Digital Native" students.

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About the Author

Dr **Rea Dennis** is a Reader in Drama & Performance at the Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Industries, University of Glamorgan. Her research specialisms include the physical in contemporary performance; improvisation, memory and autobiography; and applied performance. She has a particular interest in performed memory; performing self; and the body in performance. Previous publications include essays on refugee performance, autobiography and performance writing and playback theatre. She is Artistic Director of contemporary theatre company, Lembrança.