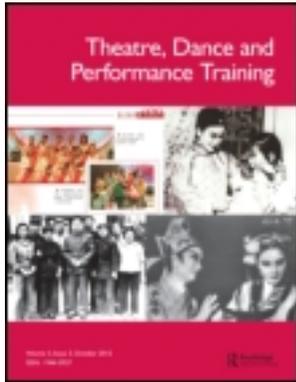


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On: 21 April 2013, At: 02:06

Publisher: Routledge

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Theatre, Dance and Performance Training

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtdp20>

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To cite this article: Kay Hepplewhite (2013): Here's one I made earlier: dialogues on the construction of an applied theatre practitioner, *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 4:1, 52-72

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2012.761643>

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Here's one I made earlier: dialogues on the construction of an applied theatre practitioner

Kay Hepplewhite

This article uses reflective dialogues to consider the complex expertise of those who work in applied theatre, with the objective of informing training for the role. Operating across a range of differing locations and practice genres, applied theatre prioritises responsive approaches and resists secure identification with a fixed set of practices. Characterisation of an applied theatre practitioner is also hard to delineate. They function beyond the craft, spaces and processes of theatre alone, working with artistic *and* social factors generated in practice within the context, facilitating both performance and participants' personal outcomes, negotiating ethically within communities for potential social gains. These specialised practitioners demonstrate interactive qualities whilst in the role which can appear intuitive, and consequently challenging to teach/train. To explore the question of how to make a 'good' applied theatre practitioner, a dozen experienced practitioners were invited, through reflective conversations, to consider what makes up their expertise and how they trained for practice. The article also examines ways to conceptualise the role, and a model of skilful ethical comportment is drawn from nursing training to illuminate how professional capacities can be identified and acquired in the development of expertise. The role emerges as responsive, dialogically negotiated, embodied, and not prescribed.

Keywords: applied theatre, practitioner training, vocational learning, expertise, reflective practitioner, intuition

Introduction: skilful ethical comportment

In order to support the construction of new practitioners who focus on applied theatre practice, this article pays attention to the make-up of the skills and qualities required. I argue here that applied elements of practice require *additional* competences beyond theatre skills to manage the positive engagement of the participatory aspects and intended personal/social outcomes which distinguish the work. To conceptualise this package of expertise, I have utilised a model from nursing training: skilful, ethical comportment.



All images show students, practitioners and lecturers together in workshops at Alchemists at Work event, June 2012, York St John University. Photography by Jen Todman.

Nursing and nursing training is concerned with developing effective communication with the patient to support their work. Hubert Dreyfus' introduction to a phenomenological reflection on nursing and caring professions (Benner 1994), outlines types of knowledge which make up professional skill. He considers skills which go beyond a basic toolkit to deal with complex choices and ethically informed practice. He highlights 'participation' in the world of the patient and intuition as key to a 'knack' or understanding which lies beyond basic (here clinical) knowledge, asserting: 'Nursing is a combination of technological and existential skill which approaches healing the embodied person' (Dreyfus 1994, p. x). Hubert Dreyfus, Stuart Dreyfus and Patricia Benner (2009) present a further definition of professional expertise focussing on this 'combination' which comprises what they describe as 'everyday skilful ethical comportment'. Dreyfus *et al.* claim that this 'comportment' requires the individual to develop and utilise their personal ethical judgement through practice locations: 'The practitioner must find out directly what the good feels like and looks like in many particular situations. And this discourse is nurtured and continued in caring for and about others' (Dreyfus *et al.* 2009, p. 317).

Although the language of 'healing' and 'caring' may not on the surface of things translate well to an applied theatre context, this model of skilful ethical comportment could help tackle some of the challenges posed when developing applied theatre trainees. It combines aspects of expertise: having specialised techniques and an aptitude (skilfulness), the ability to make ethical judgements appropriate to context which consider the wider political impact of their practice choices and actions, and interactive 'people skills' embodied in a demeanour (comportment). It offers a potential way to define what a 'good practitioner' may look like, and also guidance on how to go about constructing one. This model is positioned here at the outset to underpin the writing and will be reviewed throughout to inform my conceptualisation of the applied theatre practitioner.

There are challenges to the issue of applied theatre (itself a contentious term) practitioner training. As trainers and educators, how can we consolidate the construction of a worker for a diverse field whose definition is necessarily unfixed? Specifically, which qualities are valued by a 'good' practitioner in addition to the crafts of theatre? How can senior practitioners' intuitive qualities be made more evident in order to be developed in training situations? This article starts to address some of these issues with a view to informing existing HE (higher education) provision.

The article investigates specialist expertise in applied theatre in parallel with reflective dialogues with 12 experienced practitioners. The particular dozen (although, paradoxically, few describe themselves as disciples of applied theatre), were approached because they represent a range of participatory practices that are conventionally embraced by academic explorations of applied theatre. They work with actors who are not formally trained, in communities and outside of conventional performance locations, in theatre education and youth theatre, in hostels, prison, schools, hospitals and health services.

Their development journeys and their practices are diverse, but aspects of their shared perspectives of their own training are revealing. Specific themes emerged which are explored further below: their own experience of

theatre participation, the question of whether applied practice demands specialised theatre approaches, and the role of mentors.

Reflective conversations were structured around trigger questions with the aim of generating a collaborative enquiry. Frequent emphasis was placed on the dialogic

nature of the work. This is reflected in the layout of the research presented here. The practitioners' oral comments are documented to lie in parallel to the text, and the writer gives acknowledgement to their voices. Details of their professional practice and names are included in the Appendix.

Structurally, the article looks initially at issues relating to applied theatre in the context of practice training within higher education. I then consider the challenges which arise in attempting to identify an applied theatre practitioner

I used to love that. I just waited until somebody told me to 'f. off' and then I'd know somebody was listening and it was great. I am much more comfortable responding in that way than I am to talking at people, so I suppose yes, a dialogue. AJ



through existing nomenclature. I go on to scope how political and ethical aspects of the work impact on the composition of the practitioner. I explore the images of hybrids and grafting in order to gain further insights into priorities for the role .

I think everyone's developing, I'm developing myself in that moment, I'm developing them in that moment, 'cause otherwise it's not creative is it? I think if you're not on a learning curve in any sense, I think if you get to that awful place where you think you know everything, you think you know how to do it, then you stop being creative. JF

After highlighting specific features of the practitioners' training journeys, the nature of intuitive expertise and skills acquisition is considered. Building on concepts of professional development through reflective practice, the model of 'ethical skilful comportment' is applied in order to locate what 'good' practice may look like. I conclude with an emphasis

on how further links with senior practitioners can support the development of trainees in education settings.

Contextual issues of training in education

I like to think that my role is to take drama and theatre to people who wouldn't normally access it and that's not the case in all of my work – but most. AG

Applied theatre as a practice resists a single definition. Applied theatre is an 'umbrella' term (Prentki and Preston 2009, p. 10), which has brought together many otherwise named theatre forms and processes, which,

as Helen Nicholson notes, 'often are rather different from one another' (2005, p. 2). James Thompson (2009, p. 3) observes that the boundaries of applied theatre are continually being tested and extended by the contexts of their application. This diversity is reflected in the many names used for overlapping categories of related theatre practice: applied drama and performance, social theatre, community theatre, participatory arts, process drama, etc. The umbrella can embrace drama and theatre practices with education or therapeutic objectives. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009, p. 10) categorise applied theatre as theatre and drama working *for*, *with* or *by* specific communities, signposting a potential ubiquity, diversity and proliferation of applied theatre practice.

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offer increasingly popular options to study and train specifically for applied theatre, but little debate is focussed on the development of practice skills. Many courses are presented as a training for, as well as a study of, and students seem attracted to applied theatre because of a perceived 'vocationality'. In the UK, as elsewhere, education is under pressure to justify the investment made by government and from student fees to produce work-ready graduates. However, making applied theatre a career of choice may result in students preparing for a profession urgently in



search of a character. There are few codes of practice for the ‘industry’ (as in the social, education or health professions they often work alongside), and it may not be desirable to be prescriptive, but increased attention to the issues of training and education is needed to support the development of the responsive and competent practitioners demanded by the field of work.

Theatre, drama and performance students are frequently drawn to the applied work instinctively. They often come with heightened social/political awareness and concern for the role arts can play in society. They can evidence an aptitude for the ‘people skills’ required in applied practice which enhances the more easily instructable basic or ‘toolkit’ approaches. But the scaffolding to build on existing competences and intuitive abilities is not widely established. Training needs to embrace development of ethically sound practice which understands the wider personal and social implications of participatory arts approaches. There are good pedagogic models, some operating through productive partnerships with practice locations beyond education, but further research of provision could reveal more to inform future approaches via dissemination and dialogue. As context, I first consider nomenclature, and how labels may inform an understanding of the construction of applied theatre practitioners.

Naming the practitioner and identifying practice

You do feel very much that it’s either participation or professional work and how do you keep your practice alive when it’s not trying to compartmentalise and say, well I’m this person when I’m in the classroom and then I’m that person when I’m in the rehearsal room? Of course you are, you are different shades of different people but you need to have a through line . . . LL

In applied theatre activities there are usually one or more distinct individuals undertaking a role of leading, facilitating or directing as a specialist amongst non-trained participants.

Although processes are usually egalitarian and collaborative, the existence of this professional, trained job role distinguishes applied theatre from amateur (for the love of it – from Latin *amare*), practice.

So, what do we call this person who practices applied theatre? Workers under the umbrella can embrace specific job titles, communicating different facets of practice, e.g. facilitator, teaching artist, community director, workshop leader, actor/teacher in Theatre in Education, joker and

There are shades between directorial behaviour and facilitative behaviour. I think there's a whole coaching behaviour, supporting behaviour, those kind of different ways of working with people ... TW

difficultator (as opposed to 'easy'-making suggested by facilitator) in Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, conductor in Playback Theatre, etc. The animateur or community artist functions in participatory arts which also focus on health, education, community or social outcomes beyond

the art process itself. Nicholson's 2005 model of applied drama as a grouping of intersecting practices states, 'Most practitioners in applied drama are eclectic, using many different forms of improvisation extensively in their work' (2005, p. 56).

The application of *all* theatre and drama is not completely embraced by an applied theatre definition: curriculum teaching and drama

And you don't use the word therapy, this isn't therapeutic, but that is what is happening. They might be learning skills about theatre and that is what it says on all the literature, but actually, there's something else going on here, as well. KE

I might be facilitating them learning a skill but I don't see myself as a teacher and I wouldn't want to be. JLM

Because for years I've not felt the need to make a differentiation of myself as an educator and myself as an artist ... I still see both those things as essentially being the same skill but with different audiences if you like. JF

therapy uses are usually excluded. It may not be a coincidence that those professions can be delineated via their regulated standards, mandatory qualifications, promotional and supervisory structure, and recognised codes of practice, all of which are absent in applied theatre.

These practitioners have no shared or agreed title to describe either the practice or the practitioner. Few interviewed for this article use the term 'applied theatre' as a reference. Many fiercely resisted categorising themselves and their work, but all identified as theatre workers and artists.

We don't make participatory theatre, and the reason that I say that is because I think, it's important, the definition ... the only definition that works for me is that participatory theatre works primarily for the people taking part and I think that's what I've spent my career doing. RG

Labels generated debate in the dialogues and, paradoxically, were also dismissed as meaningless. What they chose to call themselves fluctuated, frequently adapting to an external necessity and the diverse contexts of freelance

work. Many also use their skills and approaches to work in 'mainstream' theatre with other professionals producing plays for audiences in theatres, as well as applied contexts.

I make more of a connection than some people might make between workshop leading and directing. I am essentially a theatre director and when I am leading a workshop I think I am a theatre director and I am trying to make things happen in the room that I think are interesting and pleasurable and enjoyable, and if I am engaged it is much more likely other people are going to be engaged. AJ

I think non-actors can have the same impact as professional ones, if not more because of the personal dynamics. NH

For me the really obvious cross-over of how I work with one group and how I work with another, it's the quality of what you do ... exploring a workshop around a play, or whether they create something which is brilliant that goes on the stage, it's still about what is done in those rehearsal rooms. JF

Most, but not all of the interviewed practitioners had started with a formal training in theatre. Few had trained specifically to work with non-professionals, for example as part of community theatre or drama education degrees. Respecting the participants as 'valid' actors consistently emerged from the dialogues, through a presumed understanding that applied work did not take a second class role to 'proper' theatre.

But there was a strong presence through the dialogues of another purpose within the work. These are practitioners who utilise recognisable skills as theatre makers, directors, performers and actors, workshop leaders, devisors and improvisers. What distinguishes those interviewed is that they were also working with, and focussed on non-actors; embracing other modes at the site of practice, such as group worker, therapist, activist, educator, agents of change and, in some cases, powerful political agitators.

There is meaningful and meaningless interaction ... some of what one hears about is fairly meaning-less ... if an audience is going to do something it's got to mean something more than just the fact they are playing your game ... AJ

Personal and political actions of practitioner

In and around the moment of operating in applied contexts, an applied theatre practitioner can be required (and often wishes) to make choices about wider impact of the theatre processes.

This characteristic was important to those interviewed, and differentiates applied practice from artists who work with non-artist participants as an aesthetic choice, in which case the primary focus is not the personal or social gains of the participatory experience.

As competent workers, these practitioners combine theatre-making skills with the ability to facilitate, or collaborate with non-professionals. They create opportunities through that engagement to embrace the participatory benefits and developmental outcomes of the work. They improvise around the initiatives and responses of participants, valuing shared authorship for the work, and thus its unfixity, emphasising the flexibility of the expertise demanded by a responsive medium.

I would never say art for art's sake, because it's never for art's sake, there's always something more of value than art for art's sake – what does it mean? Art always has meaning. SB

I don't think we're very explicit about identifying learning goals, we're more explicit about the art we want to make. BM

Attitudes to the 'purpose' of the work differed, particularly where the practitioners placed their work in terms of the personal/social/political/educational objectives. This underscores the diversity of the 'umbrella' of applied theatre and emphasises caution in devising a single skill-set for training. However, the focus on context, participants and purpose reiterated in the

dialogues sharply highlights applied practice as needing these specific, additional, qualities in its proponents.

One challenge for educators is to find a vocabulary and identify curricula for training which can move towards equipping the student/novice practitioner as this multi-faceted operator.

If you don't explore that motivation – what is your deep motivation for doing this work – and that doesn't start translating into some sort of methodology – if you don't do that first, then how can anybody deliver practice that means anything? How can you build a house without foundations? SB

Jonathan Neelands (2007, p. 312) highlights the range of motivations in applied theatre, from the radical to the therapeutic, arguing that 'what is needed is a political theory for AT'. In order to capitalise on the potential for social change, he saw that the 'political/artistic question for AT is how to equip and sustain participants' (ibid., p. 316).

This is a theatre worker, therefore, whose work aspires to have an impact wider than the facilitation of the theatre experience alone, often asserting a political function to the art, in turn demanding an ethical responsibility in regard to the participants and the context. This duty of care, arising from Neelands' *equipping* and *sustaining*, requires specific training and development. An applied theatre practitioner must also negotiate and assert their practice within a field of critical discourse, being reflexively aware of their own motivations whilst empowering the perceived concerns of the participants; championing a political vision and

brokering wider social impact, whilst juggling the diverse agendas of others in the context, including stakeholders beyond the theatre participants. An ethically informed understanding of these issues is integral to informing good practice choices.

I'm aware for that funder we need to be more explicit, but there's resistance because it becomes a blunt instrument and not very creative and exciting and beautiful art, because we want to make beautiful things, we don't want to make something that's didactic and not very creative. SB

How can these qualities be best nurtured in the young practitioner? As trainers and educators, we need effectively to engender competence beyond the craft of theatre to blend politically informed operators who also remain faithful to artistic concerns within the work.

I remind the reader here of the model of 'skilful, ethical comportment', and go on to consider an image of the hybrid to inform conceptualisation of the applied theatre practitioner.



Re-modelling the practitioner: hybrid or graft?

I see myself as part of a kind of informal movement in participatory arts that sees the artist – artist/facilitator/teacher/director hybrid – as a partner. SB

Chris Johnston's *House of Games* (2010) surveys active practitioners for insights on the requirements of their work. He identifies those practitioners operating in community contexts as a 'hybrid of artist, organiser

and teacher ... trying to work a certain alchemy in unlikely situations' (Johnston 2010, p. v). I will return later to the image of alchemy, in a consideration of the role of intuition. The image of a hybrid suggests two or more components of mixed origins; a blend of differing stock. Informed by the dialogues discussed in this article, I would also suggest the image of a graft, the uniting of two plants to grow as one. The main root stock of theatre

provides the media onto which the 'scion' plant of the 'application' is grafted. In horticulture, the grafted plant fruits more effectively and is more resistant and resilient, thriving better in diverse or challenging environments. However, new varieties are not produced, as both stock and scion retain their individual characteristics.

Seeing work is the most important training. AJ

Each of the practitioners interviewed here saw themselves as an artist first and foremost, with theatre as their 'root stock'. Perhaps they are not *radically* (i.e. at root) new

varieties of director, theatre maker or actor, but specialists made specifically for purpose. The characteristics of each element (the artistic practice, and where it is applied) are retained, but brought together by the graft. Potentially, the paradox faced by trainers in propagation of this hard-to-define multiple role becomes less problematic if the training experience is embedded in the roots of this particular hybrid – that is, the medium and craft of theatre. As highlighted by Monica Saxton and Juliana Prendergast (2009, p. 18), 'Playmaking is the root theatre activity of applied theatre practice'. This is a model of a centralised stem and tap root which sources the nourishment of theatre as its mainstay.

Having explored qualities of the hybrid, let us now look at the specific genetic modifications an applied theatre practitioner makes in regard to their environment. In the dialogues, senior practitioners highlighted aspects of their own growth and development: early experiences in theatre, a nurturing dialogue with participants, and the influence of mentors.



'Root' experiences: embodied knowledge of the benefits of participation in performance making

In the reflective conversations, much importance was placed on the investment of *doing* theatre. The dialogues revealed that, for some, their own theatre experiences at a young age offered an alternative, familial or fulfilling

I think I had really interesting practitioners in youth theatre and an interesting practitioner as a teacher. That was fundamental; even though it's obviously early stages, I wouldn't be doing what I am now. BM

My first experience was at youth theatre, being sworn at for not knowing my direction and motivation. SB

We had a little den under the stage, where we used to hang out and smoke and bitch about people and stuff. LL

I spent most of my breaks and lunch times in the drama department because it was an essential escape from the bully that used to plague me. TW

I didn't find the world where I felt entirely comfortable. And I think Youth Theatre, because it's so accepting ... you see it here, now, you just see young people who you know will have trouble existing in other areas of their lives. AG

experience. This stayed with them as a blueprint, to help understand the potential of the medium, contributing to an all-important empathy with their participants. The sense of significance and value of participation became embodied in their relationship with theatre, forming a vital part of their 'training' and preparation as applied theatre workers.

However, not all models have theatre as their 'tap root' of primary trade. Non-theatre practitioners also come to 'apply' drama or theatre approaches within their own professions. Johnston (2010)x, p. 12) write: 'Social theatre practitioners are "facilitators" ... helping others to perform as much as performing themselves. Social theatre activists are often artists, but they need not be.'

In further exploration of social theatre, Guglielmo Schinina's term 'choragus' described a disruptive professional as:

the one who is able to build the choir in the group s/he is acting with. S/he can be an actor, playwright, a social worker, etc., but s/he always uses her or his own particular profession to better serve the construction of the choir. (Schinina 2004, p. 24).

In this model, how far does opening access to a 'vocation' diminish the necessity for a thorough grounding as an artist? In education and training also, there are risks to emphasising the focus on 'applied' skills in theatre training. If a student is not supported to develop a solid identity as a practising theatre artist, is their practice role reduced to a rote reproduction of a limited 'bag of tricks', or an untrained social, health or education generalist? Do we fail students by not equipping them primarily as theatre makers? A grafted practitioner needs strong roots.

Schinina goes on to debate the dilemmas associated with widening access to being a choragus: 'If we specify the requirements for a "good" choragus, we give up the deprofessionalization of the work; whereas if we continue not to specify the optimal parameters of the work, we endanger the practice as a whole' (ibid., p. 27). He also states that an artist drawn to the employment

... people assume that because I'm working in drama and working with young people is a sideline to me wanting to be a Hollywood star! Even a lot of people within the theatre and drama world would make that assumption, which isn't the case ... people do a lot of acting and want to be actors and facilitate as a bit of 'bread and butter' ... You can spot that – when people are really invested in facilitation or working with young people – you can tell when people are really passionate about that. And the majority of people in my line of work actually are. JLM

opportunity can be at risk of applying 'acting methods and aesthetic criteria in their social work with unethical and ineffective results' (ibid., p. 27). It is bad practice to let theatre students loose in community contexts without full and proper preparation. And at what risk do graduates enter the field of applied practice with only their own experience in theatre training to replicate? Novice and senior practitioners, however, *do* learn 'on the job', as I explore next.



The work as a nurturing source

That's the attraction, the privilege of hearing stories, being drawn in to a place and being allowed to be part of something, that's what's stimulating. So the engagement thing is a two-way process ... AJ

All the practitioners described an egalitarian commitment to listening to the voice of participants within their approaches to practice. In articulating the potential for the work to go even beyond responsiveness to a level of

I'm interested in where we get to the point where we become collaborators with young people ... when you can really experience that collaboration between young theatre makers and more established theatre makers and we're all in it together. It's really exciting – you know, shifts happen! SB

I think one of the most dangerous things is when people decide what the outcome is before they start doing the work, with a group they don't really know. SB

But I will always allow surprise in my practice and it's about a conscious dialogue with someone ... so I am trying to influence and be influenced because I'm in dialogue with the different people I'm working with. TW

I want to make things which I enjoy. I am there ... it is not selfless. It is as selfish as anything else. I am immensely stimulated by the people I work with, and that is why it is pleasurable to me, it is not a do-gooding mission, it's just that I am fed. AJ

What's so lovely is I just sit there, and I hear all these young people talking about their work and their challenges, and getting inspired about their responsibilities and being really proactive and really assertive and really empowered and I just think, 'great' ... SB

[Tutor said,] 'Always remember whenever you go ... if you say you're an artist, people will immediately think you're weird. And actually, enjoy that, and be comfortable with that.' – Well – that opens up a host of possibilities! TW

shared authorship, the practitioners rejected token engagement in theatre-making practices. The integrity of seeking real participation was an ethic which both informed their practice, and, in turn, developed their expertise; they were nurtured and developed by the work.

Applied theatre is claimed as a potentially transformative experience, with the practitioner as the agent of this change. But Etherton and Prentki (2006, p. 149) warn that we should 'eschew the notion of Facilitator as catalyst', as this model from chemistry imposes an agency to provoke change without the dialogic dynamic of interchangeability. A monologic model, such as a catalyst suggests, was articulated by those interviewed as possible (and perhaps common) within the practice, where artists 'apply' practice indiscriminately and without a responsive openness. This was associated, however, with poor quality practice, in terms of both ethical and artistic criteria.

The interviewees were all clear that they gained significant rewards from their work. The dialogic nature of the work is fulfilling and enriching. The practitioner in an educator role, as one who can enable development, as Paulo Freire's dialogic pedagogy asserts, is not fixed or beyond change. Freire talks of a cycle in dialogic education where the teacher is able to, 'remake their cognosibility through that of their educatees ... the ability of

the educator to know the object is remade every time through the students' own ability for knowing' (Freire and Shor 1987, p. 100). A nurturing aspect of the practice therefore forms an important component for professional (as well as personal) development. I return later in the article to this potential to re-'know the object' as a feature of applied theatre students' vocational learning.



The importance of mentors

I knew Dorothy Heathcote as I was growing up ... so I saw a lot of that work in action. SB

Because, [with Boal] I think it sort of was like the first time every time, and I've tried to take that on board. AJ

And the charisma of the man! [Boal] ... very interesting personality. TW

I just think that there was something that he [youth theatre leader] brought into his practice that made being in his workshops very - it wasn't spiritual, it was just, something about his manner, his demeanour, a kind of calmness ...

I like to think that I'm trying to create this same kind of environment in the room that he does. I know that I'm very aware of trying to put people at ease. AG

As well as being 'developed' by contact with the participants, all those interviewed could identify role models who have been influential on their training.

Particular individuals have been significant, enduring mentors for using theatre participation; others had engendered a passion for theatre as a medium. These were teachers and tutors in formative training/education contexts who had been a secure role model early in their career and inspirational fellow artists whose work they admired from near or afar. Reference was made to qualities which went beyond technical skill. In the conclusion, I discuss the opportunity

to capitalise further on inspirational potential through senior role models as mentors, and strategies of reflexive practice to make hidden aspects of expertise more visible.

En route to the model of skilful ethical comporment, I return to Chris Johnston to consider notions of intuition.

The nature of 'expertise': examining intuition in a ready-made practitioner

I don't know if it's intuition or experience, it's hard to separate them. AG

I will write a plan that works for whoever has given me the money or do the job, and then when I'm actually in the moment I might make a different decision because you have to. Half the time you don't know who you're going to be working with, how many people are going to be there, what mood they're going to be in, if they're going to be drunk or not! You can't plan for those things ... I think 50–75 per cent of my job as a facilitator is reading and manipulating people's energy, that a massive part of what you do. JLM

Johnston's (2010, p. v) reference to practitioners 'trying to work a certain alchemy in unlikely situations' points to a mysterious, magical dark art which appears to enshrine much of the dynamic, but inscrutable expertise of competent or senior applied theatre practitioners. Technical or 'toolkit' knowledge is accompanied by complex 'people skills' and responsiveness to context, sensibilities which are harder to quantify and articulate. Good practice, as in any context, is nuanced and subtle; experienced practitioners can appear to operate intuitively. These enigmatic, 'alchemic' qualities

are difficult to deconstruct, label and then reconstruct in training.

Intuition can be seen as a hunch or insight which then leads to a decision or creative outcome. The intuitive actions of the competent senior applied theatre practitioner have grown through a series of knowing actions to achieve the now tacit understanding s/he uses implicitly within the work. Michael Eraut (2000) highlights that expertise is not a process, but the combination of explicit and tacit knowledge of one who is experienced. He speaks of the dispositional nature of intuition, suggesting a value to the localised expertise evidenced in experienced practitioners. This interpretation of intuition points to a lived experience embodied in the role which could uniquely inform teaching, but

also to qualities which remains beyond articulation, possibly even beyond teachability.

It is desirable to capitalise where possible on this explicit and tacit experience, and deconstruct and translate aspects of the senior practitioner's embodied expertise into language accessible to the novice trainee, such as illustrated in these dialogues.

... this is a thing which happens with experience: the less planning the better. AJ

So a lot of in-the-moment stuff is based on prior knowledge, and where it's not based on prior knowledge with that particular student, it's based on prior knowledge of working with similar students; tried and tested. KE

The skills honed through years of experience can be invisible to the observer; even the practitioners themselves find their expertise hard to describe without objective ways to review their work.

And being able to walk into a room without any idea of what you're going to do. That's a kind of practice. TW

Critical reflection through observation and analysis of practice actions can reveal that tacit knowledge. Strategies of reflection on practice may reveal such issues as how practitioners apply improvisation

in their practice, how an effective multiple operator can shape-shift between roles in performance, how choices are made around the sometimes conflicting artistic, political, ethical, educational or therapeutic imperatives within the practice. The next section considers ways for practitioners and trainees to deconstruct these complexities and view aspects of reflective practice as a foundation for development of skilful, ethical comportment.

Training the applied theatre worker as a reflective practitioner

I can then kind of absorb what it is and reintegrate it and I lose complete consciousness of it ... It's about a visceral change or a change in habitat which takes years to develop ... There is a great difference between those approaches: people who go out to acquire knowledge as a kind of intellectual thing and those who engender or embody it. TW

The dialogues revealed that those interviewed operated as reflective and reflexive practitioners, embracing issues about the wider context. In conversation about their own training and skills acquisition, most highlighted their learning and development which occurred through the work itself. To aid construction of each new occasion, they reference previous experiences,

developing their established practice with close attention to the context and detail of the work. In his concept of reflective practitioner methods, Donald Schön (1987, p. 3) describes the 'swampy lowlands' of practice with complex problems that defy technical solution which could bog down the professional in action unless effectively negotiated.

A developing professional is trained, claims Schön, to have a capacity for higher level reflection in order to build a senior expertise following on from their basic 'know-how'. Schön (1987, p. 157) states that the ability to learn from the 'reflection-in [and on] -action' in itself denotes competence: 'skillful practitioners learn to conduct frame experiments in which they impose a kind of coherence on messy situations'.

The grass is greener on the other side ... so it's professional contrariness I think ... because otherwise you're fixed and you start appearing like you know it all and that's not the reason I'm in it. I'm in it because I'm curious. TW

We need to encourage people who are emerging practitioners to set up peer relationships for reflection ... what we promote is that they choose something to measure their work against, whether that's that they create a set of values, ethical values, for example ... SB

It is evident from the conversations that these senior applied theatre practitioners respected the role of reflection and valued its place in the development of quality, detailed and ethically sound work. They had created their own coherence to the complex swamps of practice through a constant reflection

on the work, and the context of their work, in turn building their craft. The practitioners interviewed also emphasised the importance of reflective practice as a way to empower trainees and participants. Michael Balfour (2010), considering the training of applied theatre practice skills, speaks of the objective of metacognition in his exploration of the role and nature of reflective practice in the learning of undergraduate and postgraduate drama and theatre students. I also propose that close response to context in applied theatre is a key factor in differentiating the 'applied'-ness from a 'pure' practice of theatre craft, which can be less reflexive with regard to its audience than the alertness of applied practice to its participants.

This layered contextual understanding of social, personal, environmental factors at play in and around the actions of the work encourages students to embrace an ethical/political framework within which to articulate, reflect upon and develop practice.

Skilful ethical comportment reviewed

To return now to the model of skilful ethical comportment borrowed from nursing training, which may illuminate how intuition and more elusive aspects of sophisticated practice can be approached to be 'taught' in trainees. In nursing, as in other health and social fields, much training occurs 'on the job' alongside teacher practitioners operating as mentors within the wider practice setting. Patricia Benner (1984, p. 39) notes, 'To understand behavior, therefore, one must look at it in its larger context. Practical knowledge, particularly at the expert level, must be studied holistically'. She claims practice skills are composed of both knowledge and understanding, and universal principles must be worked through intuitive skill in action. Benner's (1984) formulation of a progressive journey for training nurses uses Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus' 1980 model, building from novice to expert stages through development of practical 'know-how'. She notes how the complex knowledge of the senior/expert nurse was too complicated to be presented as simple instruction in the training of novice nurses. Advanced skills can only be demonstrated by engagement in practice situations, 'The variety and exceptions in actual clinical practice elude textbook descriptions but gradually yield to the experienced nurse's fund of past similar and dissimilar situations' (Benner 1984, p. 41). This model can offer potential ways for applied theatre students to learn more frequently and effectively from the experts in a real-life setting. Dreyfus, Dreyfus and

Benner (2009, p. 310) note how intuitive instincts must also be balanced with a benchmark from others, 'To become an expert in any area of expertise, one has to be able to respond to the same types of situations as do those who are already expert'. This highlights the importance of dialogues across all components of training, and reinforces a call here for greater exchange between education professionals, trainees and experienced practitioners.

Application of this model assists embodiment of practice judgements. As cited in the introduction, 'The practitioner must find out directly what the good feels like and looks like in many particular situations. And this discourse is nurtured and continued in caring for and about others' (Dreyfus *et al.* 2009, p. 317). Responses in my reflective conversations with practitioners highlight how the 'discourse' of 'the good' is nurtured within the work itself, reinforced through responsive practice with theatre participants. The 12 practitioners interviewed all valued the potential to reflect and grow through acknowledgement of the creative role of participants, influencing both the work and the facilitator. This model of dialogic action can be interpreted as an opportunity for the practitioner to also be a *participant* in the practice. They then share an ability to experience the value, or 'the good', of the participatory theatre experiences. This parallels Friere's model where a practitioner can learn reciprocally and develop through a cycle of dialogical education.



Locating 'good' practice as an embodied experience emphasises the important contribution of experiential learning in forming students into future practitioners. Collaborations with senior practitioners can exemplify models of 'comportment' for skills development for students. The senior practitioner, having found out *what the good feels like and looks like in many particular situations*, can inform higher education in the task of training and further development of novice practitioners. Framing the experience of work alongside senior role models can enhance the potential for vocational learning.

Well-supported methods for student trainees to learn in practice settings would enable them to understand through first-hand experience the ethical,

political and existential dimensions which inform professional choices around the participatory experience of artistic activity. So, how can we best enrich a dialogue across the generations of applied theatre practitioners?

With a climate of potential change in education resourcing and practices, it may be a good time to re-envisage the potential of vocational training in HE. Structures which embrace vocational training as an important component of a student learning experience could present a challenge to traditions of study in university programmes. Some existing provision already offers some valuable experiential training with guidance through existing models and facilitation of self-discovered strategies. Wider dissemination of good practice will enhance the potential for vocational training. To enhance the role of educators and 'textbook knowledge', well-constructed work experiences for students can exploit the bank of embodied expertise held by senior practitioners.

Establishing jointly debated criteria which characterise aspects of good practice could help to consolidate a shared vocabulary between HE and professional practice. This could then underpin detailed co-mentoring structures, long-term placements and shared responsibility for in-programme 'live' group projects and individual working. Postgraduate traineeships which are theoretically underpinned through taught modules of study could be expanded with closer support from those in the field.

In order to find the motivation to establish new structures in a climate of collaboration, it is necessary to nurture mutual respect for the qualities each side brings to this potential training partnership. This means acknowledging the respective contributions of practice-based, theoretical and pedagogic expertise through a value of what each partner can best offer novice practitioners, as well as seeking relationships which are not dictated by short-lived funding opportunities.

Research into vocational approaches across HE boundaries could also develop 'applied' expertise for theatre activity in contexts. Other examples of training models can be usefully drawn from health, education or social care programmes which collaborate with senior expertise to produce rounded future practitioners. Review of carefully constructed systems of reflective praxis will enhance the theorising of experiential learning.

Conclusion: training the applied theatre practitioner – here's one I prepared earlier ...

Applied theatre practitioners are complex and intuitive professionals who embody arts *and* social skills which are hard to identify and, consequently, to teach. Negotiation of this challenge presents an increasingly pressing task for educators. Conceptualisation

And I think, when you understand the power of drama and theatre, and have experienced it as a participant and then as a worker/facilitator ... And when everyone's working together to a common goal: that's creative. AG

of a blended figure who is able to embody technical skill, contextual politics and ethical choice can inform training and skills education.

Structures of embedded praxis can nurture the development of practitioners,

recognising the potential to learn from the participants and the work itself. And through dialogues with those who 'prepared earlier', we can produce more thoroughly fit-for-purpose novice practitioners.

I argue that, in order to be well prepared for work within applied theatre, students need carefully considered immersion in reflective practice through increased interaction with senior practitioner mentors *in situ*. Educators and trainers should build up well-traversed bridges between working practitioners, sites of practice and higher education. This writing forms part of that bridge.

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Appendix

Written from dialogues between Kay Hepplewhite and:

Stella Barnes	Director of Participation, Oval House Theatre, London
Karen Eastwood	Head of Drama, Boroughbridge High School, training to be a drama therapist
Juliet Forster	Associate Director, York Theatre Royal
Richard Gregory	Co-Director, Quarantine Theatre, Manchester
Amy Golding	Drama worker, Live Theatre Youth Theatre, Newcastle and Artistic Director, Theatre Auracaria, Gateshead
Nina Hajjiyani	Artistic Director, Action Transport Theatre, Ellesmere Port
Adrian Jackson*	Artistic Director, Cardboard Citizens, London
Chris Johnston*	Co-Director, Rideout, Stoke on Trent
Laura Lindow	Creative Director, Theatre Tantaraa, North Tyneside and Clown Doctor, Tin Arts, Durham
Bex Mather	Director, Mongrel UK, The Sage Music Centre, Gateshead
Jon Luke McKie	Free-lance theatre worker
Tim Wheeler	Artistic Director, Mind the Gap, Bradford
*Telephone dialogues	