

Theatre of the Oppressed and the transformative  
practitioner: an aesthetic of presence, motivation  
and reflection

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

## **Abstract**

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a social theatre methodology that offers creative tools and generative processes through which participants can aesthetically explore their individual and collective struggles and oppressions. In these processes the practitioner strives to create moments in which participants can examine the power dynamics present in these struggles and rehearse possibilities for transforming them in positive ways. However, while the practice is well established, research into this potentially transformative and generative work is in its infancy.

This autoethnographic thesis explores my TO practice in order to better understand the work, add knowledge to the field, and improve the practices themselves. Through phenomenological reflection and action learning, I explore what I bring to the work in order to facilitate the possibility for change in others, and what enhances or hinders that process.

This research is located within three case studies: a project dealing with sexual abuse and violence with 13 Aboriginal young women; men in a domestic violence 'perpetrator' program; and a community youth Forum Theatre project focusing on respectful relationships.

Three key elements emerged as essential for the practitioner in order to animate the dynamics of theatre as tool for engagement and dialogue: motivation, presence and reflection. Motivation is the foundation for perseverance,

commitment, patience and connection. Second, being present, or 'presencing', the generative act of allowing the story, the action, to emerge, supports the possibility for dialogue. Third, reflexivity is the key to learning; extracting what the learning is, applying it, and preparing for it by holding in tension the 'unknown' and moving towards 'resolution/s'.

Furthermore transformation is not something that can be prescribed for someone else, but rather is a trajectory where participant and practitioner can travel together; a journey in which ultimately both are affected.

Finally, questions of engagement and of top-down driven, issue-based work arise that call for further investigation.

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## Prologue

*The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens.*

Rainer Maria Rilke<sup>1</sup>

‘It’s like washing your feet with your socks on!’ shouted out a young, red-faced Tibetan truck-driver from the back of the room. The other men, drinking their strong, salted teas exploded into laughter. The room was suddenly animated as the young man moved to the front and demonstrated for my benefit. The local outreach officer translated as we watched the cheeky driver pretending to wash his foot, tugging and making faces at his dirty, grey sock. His Tibetan workmates clapped or slapped their legs jovially. He was referring, of course, to the discomfort of wearing a condom.

It was early 2006. My Tibetan colleagues and I, all working for an Australian NGO, were conducting a focus group on attitudes and behaviours around safe sex and sexually transmitted infections in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). As a rapidly growing city with a high influx of temporary migrant populations in the booming Western region of the country, Lhasa was home to a population deemed ‘at risk’ of contracting and spreading HIV if the virus were to arrive.

Safe sex education was receiving a lot of resistance. We knew from the high prevalence of STIs among people of all ages that condoms were not being

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<sup>1</sup> In Kaplan 2002, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> In Schaedler, 2010, p 147.

<sup>3</sup> In Machado, 2010, p.

<sup>4</sup> Act Out is the business I founded and through which I conducted community and organisational development work

frequently or adequately worn. While the more savvy up-market Chinese sex workers managed to negotiate condom use, the less experienced local women had much less success and reported that men (especially Tibetan men) refused to wear condoms. These men, in turn, took herpes and chlamydia back to their unwitting wives at a high rate: a perfect setting for an HIV epidemic – it was no laughing matter. However, at that moment, among this group of Tibetan men, among the laughter, the teacups, the cigarette smoke and the actions of the young man frantically rubbing his feet, I laughed heartily and found it hard to not agree that wearing a condom was an unpleasant, and in many ways, absurd alternative.

Not long after I sat in our office among the colourful Tibetan furniture and the thousands of change behaviour pamphlets we had printed, feeling deflated and impotent. Our workshops, our training sessions and outreach efforts seemed to be changing very little. We could see from the interviews and focus groups we were conducting that people simply did not ‘get’ the connection between actions, consequences and ability to do something. How could we encourage the young man to see his role in transmitting the disease? I thought back to the actions, the theatrics, the laughter; that moment of connection, feeling and understanding between the young man, his charade and us watching. The moment was aesthetic, not a term that I had yet learnt in that context, but I knew that the expressive aspect of the moment, its physicality and emotion were key to everyone engaging in what the young man wanted to convey.

I love theatre; I had written a play and received funding for producing and directing it in 2002, so the idea of using the medium for education and behaviour change interested me. I decided to take the sexual health outreach along those lines and convinced my manager in Australia to let me apply for funding for some theatre pieces. We eventually received some funding from a Tibetan focused organisation and I commissioned a local playwright to write a short slapstick play to be performed at the popular dance hall venues frequented by Tibetans. For various uncontrollable reasons related to the ever-shifting political sensitivities of doing work in Tibet and the HIV focus of our work, I was required to leave the region and this play was never performed. However, in the lead up to my departure I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about Paulo Freire's work and the state of being oppressed (1970).

The TAR presented a situation with many forms and layers of oppression and paradoxes. There was the obvious systemic, overarching oppression of a foreign power controlling the region through a strong Chinese military presence. Conversely, my experience of ordinary Han Chinese, e.g. restaurant owners, hairdressers, shop assistants, and even some government officials was generally positive. They appeared unaware of the extent of the role they played in the oppression of a whole people. Most Han Chinese I spoke with had migrated to the region to take advantage of the economic development to improve their lives. Moreover, many of the Chinese labourers working in the building boom lived and worked in appalling conditions on building sites doing work that Tibetans refused to do. At the same time, many Tibetans who had

maintained or achieved some status in the system (such as administrators or government officials) were often inflexible, extremely bureaucratic and had become part of the oppressive system. They wrote and spoke Mandarin and reaped the benefits of belonging to the dominant power. What is more, both Tibetan and Chinese cultures are strongly patriarchal and women do not generally have equal decision-making power, not until they are older; this is especially true of anything relating to sexual behaviour.

I asked myself where does the oppression begin? Who is the worst oppressor? The Chinese noodle man who went west to make a living and used sex workers but wore a condom? Or the Tibetan husband who was colonized but refused to wear a condom and gave his wife and other sex partners chlamydia? What tools were necessary to create a shift in the husband's perception so that he could be aware of the harm he caused? How could that behaviour be changed and who was I to be deciding that it needed to change? Freire's ideal that people's vocation is to 'become more fully human' (1970, p. 44) seemed so far from possible in a situation in which as he also points out liberation is blocked because '...that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness' (1970, p. 51).

In the situation I was observing everyone was absorbed by his or her oppressive reality and in this situation it is those who are oppressed who have to act. If according to Freire what is necessary for liberation is a '...praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform

it' (1970, p. 79) then what tools do we need in order to create action and reflection? Furthermore, on the level we were trying to engender change; that is on a sexual health level, our methods so far involved a one-direction message. Even during focus groups we were directing the conversations; what was necessary was a dialogue that was real. One thought led to another; I started wondering whether there could be self-liberation through theatre, a Theatre of the Oppressed? In fact, for about ten minutes, I excitedly thought that I had coined a winning concept, that is until I googled it.

What a discovery! This was my first contact with the wondrous work of Augusto Boal (1985). I read everything I found online about Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and knew then that I had found one of the ways I wanted to work with people in community development and behaviour change. Not only did TO seem to offer an alignment of theory and practice, or as Freire puts it, reflection and action, but this methodology also used theatre and self-expression through physical techniques, and this excited me. I wanted to engage and grab people's feelings the way that young truck driver had grabbed all of us watching a few months earlier.

This is literally how my journey as a practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed began; this was my entry into the world of applied theatre and its transformative potential. This thesis not only presents that journey, it also scaffolds that journey, guides it and shapes it.

# Introduction

*'There is no way to transformation, transformation is the way'*

Paulo Freire 1987<sup>2</sup>

*'Traveller, there is no path  
The path is made by walking...'*

Antonio Machado, 1912<sup>3</sup>

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a social theatre methodology that offers an array of creative tools and generative processes through which participants can aesthetically explore their individual and collective struggles and oppressions. In these processes, the practitioner strives to create moments in which participants can examine some of the power dynamics present in these struggles and unearth and rehearse possibilities for transforming them in positive ways.

In late 2006, I made a decision to learn TO and apply it to community and organisational development. In 2007, I founded Act Out<sup>4</sup> in Perth, Western Australia and began using TO and other applied theatre practices to help communities and organisations tackle challenging social issues. As I knew very little about TO when I made that decision, what followed and continues for me today, is a journey of learning, practice and reflection; a journey of great discovery and amazement. Not only is there amazement at the depth and integrity with which this methodology can allow people to face and explore

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<sup>2</sup> In Schaedler, 2010, p 147.

<sup>3</sup> In Machado, 2010, p.

<sup>4</sup> Act Out is the business I founded and through which I conducted community and organisational development work using TO. I discuss it in greater detail in chapter three.

difficult realities, but also amazement at who I have needed to be to facilitate this space for people. As an emerging practitioner, I have discovered multiple, unexpected dimensions of this work and of myself, sometimes as its generative processes unfolded with those people before me; untethered and confronting, powerfully raw and honestly liberating. Sometimes these discoveries were about my own entangled and problematic role as the facilitator, encumbered by limitations that my shortcomings and my position imposed on the work and its transformative potential. In effect, this study has provided an opportunity to understand empirically the transformative potential and limitations in and of both the practitioner and the practice. It is this experiential examination of an emerging practitioner that makes this research relevant. It has been and continues to be a journey in which I feel foolishly intrepid every time I step into a workshop space with people and idealistically curious about what is possible and what is not. I present in this thesis some of the 'conflict, struggle, movement, and transformation' (Boal, 1992, p. 39) that has characterised this journey.

This thesis is an autoethnographic (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) journey, where I reflect on my practice of TO in a reflexive and reflective manner to understand better the work, add to knowledge in the field, and ultimately to improve the practices themselves. More specifically, as an emerging social theatre practitioner<sup>5</sup>, I explore, through phenomenological reflection, what I as a practitioner bring to the work to facilitate the possibility for change in others and

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<sup>5</sup> This term is used interchangeably with theatre practitioner and practitioner.

how we can enhance or hinder that process. As such, this study joins a growing, but still relatively small, body of research about TO. Consistent with their approaches, this research is grounded in the canonical texts of Augusto Boal (Boal, 1985, 1992, 1995, 2006) that expound the theory, methodology and techniques, and Paulo Freire (1970), whose critical pedagogic theories inform TO, as well as social transformation practices (Morrow and Torres, 2002), including reflection and dialogue (Huiskamp, 2002; Gunnlaugson, 2006). Practitioners and scholars Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman stand out as important contributors to the ongoing critical examination of TO and its place and application in continually changing contexts. Their essays join a compilation of narratives and interviews in *Playing Boal* (1994), a book which brings together examples of the practical applications and challenges facing TO practitioners in its early practice, especially in North America and England. Particularly relevant to this study is David Diamond's piece on his work with First Nation communities and his adaptation of forum theatre to embrace the complexities of issues like violence (2004, p. 35). This important adaptation is given a greater theorisation and context in his own text, *Theatre for Living* (Diamond, 2007). Similarly, *A Boal Companion* succeeds in further contextualising and theorizing TO in light of its expanding usage across disciplines (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006, p. 1). Warren Linds's contribution on the concept of *metaxis* (2006, p. 114) and Schutzman's own exploration of the joker<sup>6</sup> and its multifarious and sometimes disregarded potential (2006, p. 133) resonated with my experience of the practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Joker is the term given by Boal to the TO facilitator/director. This role is further discussed in chapter four.



More recently, in *Come Closer*, Emert and Friedland present a collection of narratives offering further critique of and perspectives on TO and its current uses and challenges (2011). They discuss ways that both the practice and those who practice it are being transformed within a more unstable and demanding global context. For example, Blair calls to 'pan out' beyond the dualism of existing restrictive contexts and 'exploring meta-narratives' to engage in a more sophisticated approach to the practice (2011, p. 32). In addition, among the examples of the shifts taking place in the practice are Aristizábal's powerful use of his personal story to develop the aesthetic power of the experience for participants, Kuftinec's (2011, p. 109) and Alon's (2011, p. 152) adaptation of TO in extreme conflict situations, and Weinblatt's turning of TO's focus on the 'oppressor' to work with privilege (2011, p. 21).

Further, with its focus on young people, Duffy and Vettraino's *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed* offers important critical reflections on the 'intersection between TO and youth' (2010, p. xiii). Within these texts, TO is examined from the perspectives of practitioners and educators working with young people and their complex experiences of oppression and disenfranchisement across different settings, including schools, prisons, and community projects. For instance, Blair's account of a community youth theatre program points to a commonly felt precarious line between 'instruction and invitation' present in using TO with young people (2010, p. 116). Like Blair (2010, p. 117), Duffy (2010, p. 204) and Marín (2010, p. 217), Vine reminds us of the ambiguity and stratified nature of the oppressions experienced by young people and our own

position in this hierarchy of power as adults (Duffy, 2010 pp. 188-189). Dwyer (2004) and Balfour (2009) also critically explore this position. Balfour, in particular, discusses the 'commissioning' of transformation (2009, p. 350) and the 'promise of change' that applied theatre<sup>7</sup> makes (2009, p. 353). These important challenges about intentionality and motivation are further and thoroughly examined by Snyder-Young in *Theatre of Good Intentions* (2013).

At the same time, this study is guided by the work of scholars and practitioners in the wider landscape of applied theatre (Nicholson, 2005; Taylor, 2003; Schechner, 2003; Rohd 1998; Bergman and Hewish, 2003, Balfour, 2003, 2004, O'Connor, 2007), among others. The fields of dramatherapy and psychodrama also offered some depth to this examination (Jones, 1996; Jennings, ed. 2009; Blatner, 1996).

In addition to locating this study in the field of TO and applied theatre studies, my intention is for this phenomenological work to also find a place in the field of transformative and dialogic social practice. Kaplan's description' in *Artists of the Invisible* (2002, pp. 177-178) of practitioners being 'our own instruments' and as 'participants in the unfolding and becoming of those with whom we work', reinforces my experience. Likewise, Kaplan's observation that the 'world within and the world without are one and the same' (2002, p. 177) is echoed by Ziegler in *Ways of Enspiriting* (1994, p. 28). Ziegler describes

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<sup>7</sup> As Balfour (2009, p. 348) and Nicholson (2005, p. 2) explain, there is still no real agreement on what is meant by applied theatre and whether it is a disciplinary field of its own or an 'umbrella' term for 'interdisciplinary and hybrid practices' (Nicholson, 2005, p. 2). Both scholars also point to Ackroyd's (2000) valid identification of intentionality as a common characteristic; that is, the use of theatre practices to improve or change human conditions and behaviours in societies and organisations.

'enspiriting' practices that access a deeper and transformative learning, self-empowering learning, unlearning, in effect, ways of imaging and bringing to existence 'that which is not' (1994, p. 144) through a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. Scharmer, in *Theory U* (2009, p. 135), also describes a process in which transformation can occur through *presencing*, or 'seeing together' and getting out of the way of the future that is waiting to emerge. Conducting sessions with these kinds of understanding, intention and attitude could add to the transformative potential of TO and other applied theatre practices. Additionally, to further understand the dialogic, generative and transformative processes that characterise the work, as well as the role of reflection in this learning, I looked at the work of Bohm, Factor, & Garrett (1991), Isaacs (1993), Mezirow (1991), and Freire (1970) in the field of dialogic and transformative learning (Gunnlaugson, 2006; Baumgartner, 2001).

Lastly, this study offers an experiential contribution to the understanding of reflective practices and the natural processes of becoming a reflective practitioner. Effectively when I founded Act Out and pursued work using TO, I created what Schön called a 'practicum', or a situation where students learn by doing (1987, 37), or my own version of 'work-integrated learning' (Balfour, 2010, p. 59).

This research makes a number of assumptions. First, transformation is possible through dialogic and aesthetic practices, such as Theatre of the Oppressed and applied theatre. This assumption is based on my experience of

the work and some of the literature around this practice (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 1994; Boal, 1985, 1995, 2006; Diamond, 2007; Österlind, 2008). However, this assumption does not ignore the limitations of TO and applied theatre (see Nicholson, 2005; Snyder-Young, 2013; Dwyer, 2004; Balfour, 2010, Thompson, 2009) but contends that alongside the limitations are many possibilities. And these possibilities – whether quantifiable and evaluable – arise through the aesthetic impact of the work on both the participants and the practitioner. The second assumption is that access to the transformative potential of the practice relies on more than a skillful application of the methodology and tools. The concern in this work is about how much of that potential lies with a practitioner and certain attributes and characteristics they bring to the work. The third assumption is that through this autoethnographic and phenomenological reflexivity, I will be able to access important knowledge about what is required to facilitate this practice and provide answers to the central questions of this research. These research questions are as follows:

Firstly, who is this transformative practitioner and what are her attributes? What are innate qualities and what are qualities that need developing within the practitioner that facilitate the transformative potential of this practice? Secondly, in which ways do these attributes specifically contribute to her practice? In other words, what is not possible without these qualities? Thirdly, in which ways are these attributes naturally or purposefully developed over time? What does the practitioner need to foster and nurture in order to grow as a practitioner over time?

In his introduction to Boal's *Rainbow of Desire*, Adrian Jackson argues that beyond preparation and some degree of camaraderie, to practice the skills described in the book 'the only skills necessary are observation and openness' (Jackson, 1995, trans, p. xxiii). I disagree.

In the case studies presented in this research, as with all of the work undertaken since I began to use TO, observation and openness have been absolutely necessary. Jackson is correct to claim their importance. However, as I embarked on this path of seeking to create the kind of generative learning and aesthetic experience of possibilities for groups of people, I was called upon to be and act in ways that were more than simply open and observant. Sometimes I was able to; often I was not.

This experience began with the formation of Act Out in 2007 and the work conducted with the men described in chapter five. Since then, I have conducted scores of projects with communities and organisations. Projects have included a program for youth offenders in prison, various projects with Aboriginal communities and organisations dealing with mental health, wellbeing, reproductive and sexual health, sexual abuse, violence and social exclusion. The work discussed in chapter six represents some of this more sensitive work. I have also worked extensively with government and non-government organisations trying to address issues relating to bullying and conflict in the workplace. In addition, I have developed and produced three forum theatre plays of which I describe the first one created in 2011. All three plays have

revealed different qualities and different challenges and helped deepen the learning of the practice.

While it would have been very interesting and useful to add to the work of Bentley (2001) and Smith (1996) by looking at the attributes of other practitioners, my aim was to use this study as a learning process for myself as well as to contribute to the field. As a result, I made the decision to examine my own work, my own journey as an emerging practitioner so that I would engage in an action learning process, which I considered, for me, a powerful and effective way to become a more skillful practitioner and learn empirically about praxis. I felt that this approach would contribute more experientially and directly to both the practice of others and my own practice as a novice.

In addition, this thesis is also not an evaluation of the transformative practices presented here. While I do present some definitions of transformation and discuss what are considered transformative practices and ways of working, this study does not explore the effectiveness of these practices. I am not evaluating the efficacy of TO in working with offenders or with any of the other groups presented in this study. For example, I am not evaluating whether using drama with violent men is an effective way of addressing this behaviour or comparing it with the methods more commonly employed. Likewise, I am not trying to demonstrate the advantage of one Boal technique over another or one applied theatre methodology over another one. In the same way, this study is not concerned with various definitions of applied theatre or where TO sits

among differences and similarities to Theatre for Development or Theatre in Education. Finally, this study is not presenting TO as a “silver bullet” for transformation in community and cultural development, but as one of many tools available for transformative learning, and of potential importance to that field.

## Chapter Outline

This thesis brings together an examination of reflection and action as they occur during the application of this practice. This reflexive account of my experience of the work is located within three case studies over the period of five years and adds to the body of practitioner-based action research. As much as possible, I have attempted throughout to remain grounded in theory and practice and endow the work with a robust practicality and a practical robustness. Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is structured as follows.

### Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, methodologies and reasons for the chosen approaches. This research has naturally fallen into the realm of autoethnographic, practitioner-based research and its intrinsic phenomenological and reflexive processes.

It also dwells in the domain of action research, or action learning<sup>8</sup>, in two ways. Firstly, it is action research as a ‘...deep reflection that leads to professional growth...’ in that I act and study the effect of my actions in order to

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<sup>8</sup> I use these terms interchangeably.

further the knowledge of this practice (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, p. 31). Secondly, TO is by nature an action learning practice employed with the aim of collective problem solving, and as a result it follows a natural action research flow that filters into the reflective and reflexive processes.

Reflection plays a pivotal role as both a research process and a finding. Reflecting on moments of difficulty and tension as well as moments of seeming success allows for that alignment of praxis; that edge at which the theory and the practice return time and time again to meet. Reflection has played a central role not only as a process through which this research has been conducted but as an integral part of the practitioner of TO or as I assert here any other 'transformative' and generative practice. I have recorded my experience through journaling, photography and film and use these to both record the work presented and to reflect on it. I have also striven to be as honest as possible in the writing, with the intention of recounting what I felt and what I thought, searching deeply for the source of many of the challenges experienced.

The research is presented within the parameters of three case studies about projects tackling challenging issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, respectful relationships and bullying, underpinning these issues are found systemic issues of gender relations, marginalisation and power.



### Chapter 3: The Practice - Theatre of the Oppressed: dialogue and transformation

Chapter three deals with the practice and covers four important areas. Firstly, it describes Theatre of the Oppressed, its background, some of its applications and the main Boalian techniques employed in the three case studies: Image Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Cops in the Head and Forum Theatre. Regarded as a transformative practice, TO and its tools and techniques can be applied in numerous contexts to enable participants to explore situations and relationships that render them powerless; to deconstruct these situations and relationships; to examine them closely within the safety and distance of the aesthetic space of the theatre; and to rehearse empowering actions and behaviours that can be taken into real life (Boal, 1995, p. 40).

Secondly, chapter three presents Blagg, an applied theatre technique used with offenders in prison which involves asking the group to create a fictitious character that might also be in the same situation as them and to give this character a history that might be similar to theirs (Hughes, 2003). This useful technique allows the group to place a liberating distance from themselves and their experience, enabling a less confronting exploration of a particularly sensitive or incriminating issue.

Thirdly, the chapter introduces Scharmer's concept of *presencing* and dialogue and considers how these processes contribute to the transformative and generative possibilities of TO. Presencing draws on the work of Otto Scharmer (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004; Scharmer 2009) and

dialogue on the work of Bohm (1991) and others regarding what is authentic listening and observing (Ziegler, 1994), skills central to the practitioner's ability to not get in the way, or allow anything in a session to get in the way of what is waiting to emerge.

Lastly, in chapter three, I look more closely at the idea of transformation, turning to transformative learning and futures studies for useful definitions and ideas around what is, in effect, the ultimate aim of the practices employed (Slaughter, 2004; Gunnlaugson, 2006, 2007; Baumgartner, 2001). What is transformation and what is a transformative process? Who wants it and how does it happen? What are the processes involved that are outside the control of the practitioner?

#### **Chapter 4: The practitioner – motivation, presence and reflection**

In chapter four, I take a closer, reflective look at the practitioner and describe my experience as I embarked on this journey to learn and apply TO in community development work. Many elements contribute to the transformative impact of a practice. Among these are the methodology and its premises, tools and techniques; the participants and their own self-awareness and willingness to be present and to look closely at their behaviour and their roles; the political time, context and space; and the practitioner herself.

The pivotal question of this thesis is how much of the transformative element is brought to the work by the practitioner? Supplementary questions

concern the following: What are the attributes that the practitioner brings that enhance or hinder the practice? Are these developed over time? In this section I present my own experience as an emerging practitioner; that is, my development into a practitioner that is able to critically reflect, learn and adapt in order to grow my capacity to enable transformation. When I set out on this path I knew that effective practice would require flexibility, adaptability, patience, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, empathy, perseverance, the ability to dwell in chaos, observation, good listening skills, and an attitude of positive self-regard. However, this study teases out three key elements that are desirable in this practice and perhaps in other social practices; that enable all of the above qualities to be developed and applied: motivation, presence and reflection, each shaped and framed by the aesthetic space generated through TO practice.

*Motivation* is evidently the underlying drive in all projects; it is the foundation for perseverance, commitment and patience and a connection to the larger picture that informs the practice. Likewise, being present, or *presencing*, the generative act of allowing the story, the action, to emerge in its own time is what supports any possibility for dialogue and empathy. Presencing is what allows the deep listening and the observation that facilitates the safety; the space, the collective understanding that is possible through an individual story. Finally, *reflection* is the key to the learning, to extracting it, to applying it, to preparing for it and for being OK with the unknown.

## Chapter 5: theatre of the oppressor – ‘balancing on the edge of a teacup’ and the aesthetic of presencing

Chapter five centres on a project piloting the possibility of TO being a complementary tool for working with men who had been violent towards their partners and families. This case study, which took place over five and a half months from November 2007 to April 2008, is significant in two ways.

First, it was my first experience of using TO on my own and it is ripe with contrasting feelings of excitement and fear. Relying heavily on journal notes, the chapter describes how I approached securing this work, my initial meetings with the men during their cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) group sessions, right through to the weekly sessions that I conducted using image theatre and cops in the head techniques.

Second, this was the first time in my practice in which I felt a ‘presencing’ moment; that is, a moment in which out of somewhere I was moved into an action which, while being suitable and effective, I had not assessed beforehand as to its possible consequences. I simply acted on an ‘instinct’ or an inner knowing. I was present in the space enough to allow something to emerge that was there but not spoken. There were several powerful moments like this while working with this group of men. It stressed to me the power of the work and of the practitioner. It made me very aware of the vulnerability of participants in a group, even those that are ‘oppressors’.

In addition, this project experiments with the premise that if TO can affect those that are experiencing oppression, it might also be able to raise awareness in those who are oppressing others. While this is not a thesis evaluating the transformative power of TO, I record what I consider small shifts in attitudes and awareness of the men and include them in the overarching discussion. At the same time, in this chapter I demonstrate how reflection plays a crucial role in this steep-learning curve project, highlighting, sadly, but also importantly, my own shortcomings as a practitioner and the untimely end of the project.

## **Chapter 6: Derby or Bust - the aesthetic of motivation**

In the sixth chapter I present case study two, a three-day residential workshop that took place in October 2010 with a group of young Aboriginal women and girls from the Kimberley region of the northwest of Western Australia. The aim of the workshop was to explore ways to increase protective behaviours in relation to sexual abuse and rehearse empowering ways for the young women to stay safe and demand respect in all their relationships. It is the most sensitive issue I have tackled amidst some of the strongest and understandable resistance I have encountered.

While all the case studies have examples of each of the key attributes, this case study traces motivation far back in the practitioner's life as it underpins the drive not only to do community development work, but also more specifically to work with young Aboriginal women. I explore scholarly theories of motivation alongside spiritual ones. Through the detailed outline of some of the life

changing decisions I made to enter the community; the monetary and time investments made to build relationships, the absolute determination and stubbornness, I question and deconstruct the level of motivation that was present in order finally to do work that was ten years in the making. This workshop represents a huge personal and professional achievement and carried a high level of expectation and a profound desire to facilitate a meaningful and truly transformative and creative space for these participants.

Also in this chapter are important discussions and examples of the acute role of reflection and reflexivity in creating the potential for empowering and transformative experiences, as well as trespasses of power and struggles with the tension between doing what the client wants and doing what the session calls for.

## **Chapter 7: Relationship Status - the aesthetics of reflection**

Chapter seven presents *Relationship Status*, a community forum theatre project with young people conducted over a period of four months in early 2011 leading to four forum performances. The chapter delineates the trajectory between the first conceptualisation of the project to its final conception a year later.

This was my first attempt at creating forum theatre; I was its sole driver. I wrote the funding proposals and succeeded in accessing the funding, I managed the project, I recruited the participants, I marketed and publicized the performances, I prepared food, I drove people home, I broke up fights, and somewhere in between I facilitated the process to create a forum play. During

this project reflection highlighted many aspects of the practice that had not been so clear before. First, there exists great tension between engaging young people in taking a look at their lives and in influencing them to be more progressive in their thinking. Was this project about empowering young people or teaching them what is considered right? Second, although this had come up before during case study two, when there is funding involved the pressure on producing 'value', in this case a performance, can overshadow the transformative intention of the work. Third, during this project I experienced how the methodology itself goes a long way in engaging the performers, the practitioner and the audience on its own. The practitioner has the capacity to heighten the experience and the power of the practice; however, this chapter illustrates the many ways this potential was reached and NOT reached during this project.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion – transformation of a practitioner**

In the final chapter I conclude the research by outlining the findings and discuss motivation, presence and reflection, what they meant to this practitioner at the end of the last case study and what they mean to me now after completing many other projects.

My intention in this thesis was to look at my practice as a social theatre practitioner to create a record of an idealist who began by following an inspiration; a practitioner in the making, as well as the effort it took to become trained and establish the practice; to apply the methodology and record of the stages of learning and failing and relearning.

Underpinning this intention is the aim of adding to the field of knowledge in an empirical manner with the learning as it occurred and continues to occur. I also set up questions for further inquiry related to engagement and practice, related to synergies with other generative practices and to reflectivity.



## CHAPTER 2

### Methodology

This research seeks to explore the role of the practitioner in the transformative potential of an aesthetic and generative practice such as Theatre of the Oppressed. As described in the previous chapter, this practice is being examined from a subjective stance; from an epistemological perspective that views the actions of the practitioner as shaped by her or his values and attitudes; guided and originating from the 'internal perspective of individual practitioners themselves'. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 574) Further, the practitioner in this case is both the researcher and the subject of inquiry; as a result, the research is framed within a family of qualitative methodologies including specifically practitioner-based autoethnography, reflective phenomenology and action research all situated within the context of three case studies.

#### Autoethnography

This study will make use of autoethnography, as defined by Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 742), that is, a methodology that allows the researcher to construct a self-narrative that can '...self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation.' This self-consciousness placed within an ethnographic process is crucial in this study. Consequently by using autoethnography, I will be able to capture my experience in doing this work as I live it, in the context of my life and where that sits in

relation to my social and cultural surroundings as well as the other people present and experiencing the way I work with them.

I have chosen this methodology because if this study is to add to our knowledge of what constitutes a transformative practitioner it needs to have the latitude for inspection of all that is present in the work. As a result, I and the work I do, and how I arrive at doing it and what I feel before, during and after I am doing, how I learn from what I do, the mistakes I make, the insights I have, must be examined with an understanding of what is contained in 'I'; it necessitates a self-consciousness of the values, attitudes and beliefs that I bring to the research, and to my work with groups of people and the cultural parameters where all these converge. This research will be self-conscious of the sociocultural contents I share (and those that I don't share) with those I work with. Chang (2008, p. 43) distinguishes autoethnography as containing '...cultural analysis and interpretation within a self-narrative.' Like Ellis and Bochner she points out that autoethnographic narratives are '...to be reflected upon, analysed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context' (2008, p. 46). This idea applies to this investigation as while the accounts and investigation is self-led and originates from the intention of the researcher/practitioner; it is because it dwells in the interaction with others and the cultural and social nuances that are always present in these interactions that it has significance. Anderson asserts that a characteristic of autoethnography is its scope for theoretical analysis (2006, p. 379), and this study is seeking to follow a theoretical exploration; nonetheless, it will lack the objectivity that Anderson also claims must be present in autoethnography. This objectivity is not

possible, but an 'analytic reflexivity' is a component that enhances this autoethnographic research (2006, p. 382). However, this theoretical analysis will move alongside, or be woven in and out of, a more evocative and emotional narrative, as presented by Ellis and Bochner (2006, p. 743).

What is more, the cultural space in which this study takes place is not always constant. This study must take into account the variations in cultural spaces as groups change. As the work moves along a varied sociocultural and socioeconomic terrain it travels from a low-socio economic space of men who are violent and have drug and alcohol issues, to a remote cultural space of Indigenous Australians, to a space of young people living in a metropolitan area. These locations sit within the backdrop of the Australian 'culture' and at the same time offer specific contexts that will be considered. This study is, in effect, a study of self within culture, within culture. For this reason, the belonging of the researcher to the culture, as Anderson (2006, p. 379) expects, is not 'complete' but multiple and in degrees. Autoethnography can give me the space to represent myself as member of the culture I live and work in, but also to represent myself as 'other'. This requires a constant crossing over and moving between the two spaces; it requires being a 'boundary-crosser' with 'dual identity' (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 3), and it is this that makes the work authentic. I will not be assuming a complete knowledge of the cultural realities of the groups I work with, but will recognise the overarching cultural rituals and contexts. For example, when working with a group of young people who are coming together to do a theatre project, I was not privy to the nuances and

specificities enacted by young people; the exact language and activities they perform, but from living in the same country and having been to school in the same system, I had insight into this youth culture as its systemic framework has not much changed from the one I experienced at the same age. Therefore, I can cross into and out of it with a firm footing and make observations that are informed by a common experience.

Interestingly, in her explanation of culture Chang refers to Krebs (1999) and the term 'edgewalker'. This term is used to describe an individual who has 'shared experiences with different cultural communities' and displays a 'solid cultural competence while keeping a healthy understanding of self'. I sit within this category, and have many characteristics that allow me to walk the edge of different cultures. For example, a native Venezuelan culture gives me an insight into some constructions of wider Latin American culture, but I also sit within the wider Australian expressions of culture, as well as within its more particular multi-cultural spaces. Along a similar vein, but not quite aligned with Krebs is the fact that I have close, perhaps not 'edgewalker' status but certainly a strong cultural literacy of different Asian cultures. My upbringing in Hong Kong and significant time living and working in Asia, in particular, China, coupled with the long-term work as an educator of Asian students, allows me an edge to walk on within that cultural space as well. There are three reasons why this is important to this study. Firstly, it includes an adaptability and flexibility that has been present in me due to my history and that can transfer over to my practice. Having the ability to turn others of difference into others of similarity 'by reducing strangeness in others' and 'expanding their cultural boundaries' (Krebs, in

Chang, 2008, p. 29), facilitates a level of adaptability and flexibility that could substantially add to my role as practitioner.

Secondly, and paradoxically, there is an element of remaining an outsider, which offers a liberating element to the practitioner. When I step into the space of a workshop with, for instance, a group of social service providers brought up and educated in Western Australia, or a group of engineers who work within a corporate environment, I may be seen slightly as 'other'. The degree to which this occurs will vary from group to group, some may see 'otherness' in the way I look and sound (Latin American with a not quite Australian English accent, with traces of north-American pronunciation), or they may see 'otherness' in the fact that I do not work in the same field as they do, or that I just was not brought up here completely. This fact, this slight 'otherness' gives me a leeway to conduct a less conventional workshop. For instance, a TO workshop where there is very little sitting down and writing and where most of the communication happens through a physical depiction of emotions and actions. At the same time, it may give participants permission to engage in this new way of exploring the issues as it has been initiated and requested from someone who is not wholly 'same'; it may facilitate a willingness that may not be there if someone who is 'same' would attempt it, but they may try it because the activities; the request to be expressive and open; the intention in allowing them to be themselves; i.e. a different epistemological approach, is coming from someone who is 'other'.

Thirdly, being a cultural edge dweller gives the practitioner permission to 'engage others in the mutually transformational process' and walk them back and forth over the borders of the aesthetic space so that they can explore their possibilities (Chang, 2008, p. 29). Autoethnography as a research methodology enables me to situate the research through providing a cultural understanding of both myself as a practitioner and of those being impacted by the work. My individual story will offer entries into a larger story of the social formation and also enable me to analyse the characteristics present that contribute to a transformative experience. Thereby making an inquiring into the way these cultural attributes affect this work. What does it look like to me when I am walking with participants back and forth over the aesthetic borders? What do I experience as participants are offered an alternative possibility? How am I able to guide them back and forth? An autoethnographical account will allow for a profound analysis of the interactions from both a cultural and an individual space. This kind of account will give this study access to multiple layers of ontological analysis within the practice. Experience can then unravel through the thoughts and emotions present for me and what I perceive is present for participants.

Moreover, I will reconstruct these experiences, sometimes from memory, often from notes and diaries, but always with myself as '...both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and who experiences, the observer and the observed...at the intersection of the personal and the cultural.' (Ellis, 2009, p. 13) If what I am doing is effective, then what I observe in what I do and how I see people respond will give insights that are placed at a vantage point for other

practitioners, in the same way that I have gained insights from the work of others. Yet, there are, as Chang points out, pitfalls to avoid. If the accounts fail to place the self within the social context of others and if there is too much emphasis on storytelling and not enough on the analysis and the interpretation then the account will border on an autobiography. Likewise, a significant amount of the information being recalled should be obtained from sources other than memory (Chang, 2008, p. 54).

One more important aspect of using autoethnography is its potential for transformation (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 748). This is significant to a study of a transformative practice: the writing of this autoethnographic study has in itself the potential to transform the writer. The approach I utilise is itself a transformative approach. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 748) talk about the conversation that we enter into ‘...with ourselves and with our readers...we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience.’

### **The nature of relationships**

It is important at this point to mention and take into account the nature of the relationship with the groups that I work with because these relationships vary; and the depth, quality and scope of the analysis is affected. As a practitioner that is asked to come in to help a community or organisation and provide ways of transforming situations that are negatively affecting it, I am in a position of a ‘clinician’, as explored by Schein (1987, p. 23). This does not mean that I am not able to provide an autoethnographic account and analysis of my

practice, but it means that this account will reflect the nature of the relationship. In his exposition on the need to clarify between a clinical and an ethnographic approach, Schein describes as fundamental the relationship between the researcher and the others involved in the research. While both ethnography [and autoethnography] and clinical research are heuristic in essence, they display a different relationship to the groups they work with (1987, p. 25). In effect, an ethnographer, whether aligned with the Chicago School or with symbolic interactionism, whether immersed in a semiotic and semantic interpretation method or using phenomenology, has chosen a certain group to research (Deegan, 2001, p. 41; Rock, 2001, p. 26; Manning, 2001, p. 145). Generally, the aim is to influence the culture they are studying as little as possible to keep the research pure. However, a clinical researcher is always someone who has been invited in to provide a service and is assisting the group to learn something about their situation. Even, as Schein points out, 'if the person who ultimately ends up in the clinical role has manipulated the situation so that someone in the organisation will ask for help' (1987, p. 24).

Furthermore, there are times when the roles may overlap. In terms of this research, which is focusing on my role as a facilitator, it is important to take into account the nature of the relationships between myself and the various individuals and communities. For instance, when I analyse the way I have conducted a workshop to improve protective behaviours or health in a community, I must be aware of the expectations of the group or individuals



whose decision it was to contract me, as well as to whether participants actually really wanted to be there or not.

Similarly, when I engineer to be able to work in a remote, largely Aboriginal town, on issues that I am interested in addressing and eventually 'sell' my service to a group, I must be conscious of the kind of relationship I am creating; where I place my intention and as a result how I analyse and describe my experience. In all of the above I am advertising and promoting myself as a practitioner that can help tackle an issue and as such I am not choosing directly but have placed myself in a good position to be chosen. This means that this research has been in many ways already tilted towards an assumption that there is a degree of transformation and change in the work. It is therefore important to be aware of the bias that is present. This is a very important consideration in view of this work not only being work I do for the sake of research, but also work I am doing for the purpose of making a living. Getting the work affects my livelihood and so how I relate to the paying client is affected by this relationship.

Having said that, this is not a study of the people I work with, although they are present throughout the work and in the narrative, this is a study of what it takes to be a practitioner of what is considered a transformative practice. Therefore while it has many of the qualities outlined by Schein in his examination of a more clinical approach because fees are exchanged, and data in some cases has to be confidential, this is not research that is client led (like PAR<sup>9</sup>);

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<sup>9</sup> Participatory Action Research – see Dick, 2009, pp. 423 - 441.

there is no team of colleagues with whom the evidence is analysed and while the concern for improving the health or wellbeing of the client's community is an objective of engaging the practitioner, evaluating the extent to which that has occurred is not the aim of this research (Schein, 1987).

## **Reflexivity**

This study has been conducted through the “self-critical lens” of reflexivity (Finlay and Gough, 2003, p. ix) with the purpose of examining the qualities that a practitioner brings to this potentially transformative practice. As Luttrell points out reflexivity is ultimately about transparency, ‘about making the research process and decision making visible at multiple levels’ (2010, p. 4). On a personal level, as both subject/practitioner and researcher, I am present in the research, present in the practice I am trying to understand and therefore so are my ‘biases, theoretical dispositions and preferences’ (Schwandt, in Luttrell, 2010, p. 3). Being aware of these is important when looking at the work, my experience of it and using this reflection as evidence for analysis and theorising to provide insights into this practice. Likewise, the ‘intersubjective reflection’ in this research seeks to reflect relationships, both the practitioner/participant relationship, and the subject/researcher relationship (Finlay, 2003, p. 8). This focus of reflection is important because although I am the principal subject of this study, it is, as explained previously, in relation to others and the cultural setting that this research has importance. Reflecting to uncover the effect the relationships have on the practitioner/researcher and the ‘projections and introjections’ present (Hollway 2001, in Findlay, 2003, p. 8), will allow for an

analysis of the dynamics and what that means in relation to transformation. I have considered both 'personal meaning and shared meaning', not through interviews, as discussed by Nicolson, but through the communication that goes on with the Boal tools, such as frozen images, internal dialogues and interventions (Nicolson, 2003, p. 133). Furthermore, on an epistemological level, this phenomenological reflexivity – or what Finlay calls hermeneutic reflection (2003, p. 105) – reveals insights into the practice and helps deconstruct how learning is occurring.

For Johns, reflexivity refers to 'the way insights have emerged and influenced future experience' (Johns, 2004, p. 4). Like many researchers, I often use reflection and reflexivity interchangeably (Finlay, 2003, p. 108n3); however, I also use the term reflexivity as defined by Luttrell, that is, a 'bi-directional' process of '(self) awareness and scrutiny' (2010, p. 14n10). Or as Hegel put it 'self consciousness is real only in so far as it recognises its echo (and its reflection) in another' (quoted in Sartre, 1969, in Findlay, 2003, p. 106). This process means being both in the experience and being continually engaged in a dialogue about it and how it is being perceived. Finlay asserts:

Reflexivity is thus the process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomenon being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes. (2003, p. 108)

Further, this kind of critical reflection is a commonplace research tool in drama education research and forms part of the transformative and emancipatory motivation underpinning these research objectives. As Neelands suggests reflexivity is a way to 'dig deep into self in order to bring into consciousness, the otherwise unconscious instincts, habits, values and learnt behaviours that shape their practice' (2006, p. 17)

In this case I am interested in reflexivity as a way of uncovering and investigating power structures (Haney, 2002, p. 286) examined within the methodology of TO including the power present in the practitioner in the many roles needed to perform this work, and the hegemonic assumptions that might direct the practice (Brookfield, 2009, p. 126). This self-conscious concern about power permeates the work; however, its gendered dynamic was particularly tangible during the work with the men who had been violent.

Additionally, this research also used other tools associated with reflexive inquiry such as keeping journals of observations during the various interventions and activities, as well as digital voice recordings made soon after the delivery of workshops. Writing has been an important tool for reflection in this study. This researcher has used journaling for many years, since before my early teens. This journaling has contributed to creating memories; remembering experiences, places, moments, people, feelings and ideas. As a result, there existed a habit of writing regularly. Similarly, this data gathering process brought together the 'building blocks' of this research (Coffey, 2002, p. 317). The writing aimed at

being descriptive as well as reflective, capturing as much of the immediate responses and feelings about each session to be used for further reflection and examination at a later time. An effort was made to record as much as possible the feelings, other events and significant occurrences that may have affected the emotional and mental space of the practitioner. Similarly, I have attempted to give as honest as possible accounts of my judgments and my errors throughout.

Viewing recordings, mostly video, has also provided a clear and direct record of interactions and these can be examined again and again without relying on memory alone. These methods of creating records and documenting the information gathered about the practice have been studied and analysed through an action research, action-learning framework. The reasons for these are many.

### **Action research**

Firstly, the work that has been described and explored in this study has naturally fallen into an action-research pattern (Stringer, 2006, p. 16). By its very nature TO is a form of action learning<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, other applied theatre and generative approaches employed are in themselves a fluid and always adapting form of action research. From the warm up activities to the more complex techniques as a facilitator, I observed the participants and adjusted the session to how they were responding to each activity and how that response would be useful in leading them to whatever exploration we were attempting to make.

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<sup>10</sup> The terms action research and action learning are used interchangeably

Moreover, the cyclical nature of a session, flowing from a plan, an action, observations and reflection and returning to the next round of planning, action, observation and reflection is a clear example of how it has the natural action research flow (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 3).

In addition, as a researcher aiming to learn from her practice and contribute to the existing knowledge about the subject, action research seemed the most adequate tool for the study of actions from the perspective of the subject. The potentially transformative sessions described in this research do not happen on paper or in a laboratory where the conditions are controlled and measured. These exchanges and observations that could lead to a transformation of someone's life, a community, or an organisation may happen in a controlled situation; i.e. a timed, closed session where everyone present understands we are working on a particular issue; however, they also happen in an uncontrolled situation because they occur with real people (including the researcher/practitioner) whose reactions, emotions, feelings, attitudes, fears and biases are all mixed into the practice and cannot be predicted or planned. A plan is made for a certain session to attempt certain movements and explorations; the practitioner does not know what these are going to be; she does not know where the participants need to go that particular session and so she must, while this is carried out, observe, learn and move with the energy of the group as is the intention of action research. To me, action research is a dialogue, unscripted and alive. And so with this research, an extension of the

practice, and the learning, is a cyclic, dialogic dance that must engage a living exchange in order to claim it has been real.

As Kemmis and McTaggart explain, this method of conducting research is utilised here because I see myself as ‘autonomous and responsible...acting in live worlds of human relationships’ and because ‘...changing these life worlds requires engaging...re-forming selves and relationships in shared life-world settings’ (2000, p. 577). As such this is a social inquiry that for me requires an approach that as Winter claims:

addresses “head on” social inquiry’s fundamental problems – the relation between theory and practice, between the general and the particular, between common sense and academic expertise, between mundane actions and critical reflection, and hence – ultimately between ideology and understanding (1987, in Anderson, 2007, p. 32)

Furthermore, and along the same vein, action research is a methodology that supports research that is not concerned with objectivity or making claims of replicability; it lends itself to the study of human beings where everything ‘depends on mental constructions, mental interpretations’ (Guba in Stringer, 1996, p. x). What is going to make the practice better will be different in different settings and its transferability depends on the person wanting to transfer the knowledge not on the person who generated it (Lincoln and Guba in Anderson et al., 2007, p. 44).

Finally, action research has as a premise that ‘one cannot understand a human system without trying to change it’ (Schein in Dunbar, Georges, Romme & Starbuck, 2008, p. 557). This work and this research are both about change, about transformation. Change occurs in movement, expanding and contracting to the rhythm of the participants and their needs, balanced on the tempo of the practitioner; it is always shifting, growing and shrinking, exploding or lulling; as I see it, action research has the scope to move with the work; it can keep up alongside.

### **Case studies**

This exploration and inquiry will take place within the context of three case studies that differ by site but are linked by a number of similarities, one of which is the intention to tackle a difficult issue. They all involve groups of people who have some knowledge of each other, either quite close through family or community (the young women in the Kimberley), or distant knowledge and commonalities through sharing similar experiences (young people in forum play and men who have offended through DV). While they are described and explored as separate cases their sum equals the whole of this research. According to Stake (2006, p. 8) ‘a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.’

The reason for presenting the research within the confines of case studies is threefold. First, the case studies selected allow for a sampling of a specific place and group where I interacted in particular ways. Each has distinct qualities that required different combinations of roles to be present in the



practitioner. Second, the case studies offered a sampling that could be followed and analysed within time parameters that were useful for gauging the qualities of the practitioner as time has moved on. Lastly, the limiting of the analysis to a group, place and time provides an intensity that can highlight the particular elements of the practice that are being examined.

Stake also delineates three types of case studies, intrinsic, instrumental and collective (2000, p. 437). While this study will bring together the analysis of three case studies making it, by Stake's definition, a collective study, each case serves both an intrinsic and instrumental role. Consequently, I will analyse each case for common qualities, characteristics and actions present in the practitioner that might contribute (or not) to the practice of TO being transformative. Each case; therefore, is instrumental and used 'to advance the understanding' of what might be transformative qualities in the practitioner. At the same time, nonetheless, the case studies are intrinsic in that being the practitioner and the researcher I have an 'intrinsic interest' in understanding how I conducted that particular workshop or project (2000, p. 437).

The first case study is from the beginning of my practice. It took place at a residential program for men who have been violent violence against their families. A maximum of twelve men participated in a weekly 2-hour TO session that complemented their therapeutic program. Their program uses a combination of psychological therapeutic approaches for working with violent men including cognitive behavioural therapy and anger management therapies

and Alan Jenkins' (1990) constructivist model 'invitation to responsibility'. The work was unpaid and formed part of a pilot.

The second case study took place in Broome, in the Kimberley region of North-western Australia. It involved a 3-day workshop exploring protective behaviours and healthy relationships with a group of 16 young Aboriginal women. I had already been using TO for about three years.

The third case study is a forum theatre project with 7 young people recruited from my local community tackling the issue of respectful relationships. I initiated this project and secured the funding from three different organisations. In addition to facilitating the creation of the forum play I managed every aspect of the project. There were four performances, 3 at senior high schools and one in a public cultural venue.

## **Conclusion**

My decision to examine myself as a practitioner whose aim is to facilitate an opportunity for examination, exploration and possible transformation of a wicked problem will, I hope, throw some light on the lived experience of this generative and aesthetic practice. My choice of research methodologies reflects the nature of the practice being examined. TO is itself a methodology of inquiry and reflexivity; it is a form of action research and learning in which the dialogic process gives access to previous unseen or unexpressed possibilities.

As the subject of this inquiry this emerging social artist and practitioner seeks to understand and embody the qualities that enhance this practice; indeed, qualities that are separate from knowing the methodology and the

exercises. To achieve this an autoethnographic, hermeneutical phenomenological and action research approach has been employed through the reflective exercise of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### The practice – Theatre of the Oppressed: transformation, dialogue and aesthetics

This chapter describes several important components of this research. Firstly, it describes what constitutes Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and the other aesthetic transformative practices employed in the community development work presented in this thesis. It is aimed at illustrating this form of applied theatre methodology and its transformative aims in its various forms and applications. In addition, it explains other applied theatre techniques like Blagg (Hughes, 2003).

Secondly, it defines and explores related practices like dialogue (Bohm, 1991; Freire, 1970; Isaacs, 1993) as used in 'presencing' (Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2002) to show how they, too, can transform and add to a powerful synergy enabling and giving form to alternative possibilities.

Thirdly, this chapter looks more closely at the concept of transformation, examining four theories from the realm of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1970) looking at the relevance of the Transformation Cycle (Slaughter, 2004) and touching on the relation of transformation to community development or social change.

This chapter explains the tools, techniques and concepts that I have been discovering, learning and applying since I began this journey and the ways that I have interpreted them and applied them, sometimes effectively, sometimes not.

## Theatre of the Oppressed

*Theatre of the Oppressed creates spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it*

(Boal, 1992, p. 5)

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is an applied theatre practice that, put simply, aims to transform unwanted situations into more ideal ones. These situations may be related to the behaviours of individuals taking part in a TO session or to the behaviours imposed on them by others outside of the session or both. Developed by Brazilian theatre practitioner and social activist, Augusto Boal, TO has been used and continues to be used in social and behaviour change interventions throughout the world with great success (Schutzman, M & Cohen-Cruz, J, eds., 1994; Cohen-Cruz, 2006; Cohen-Cruz, 2010; Diamond, 1994; and Ganguly, 2004). For example, over the last twenty years, since its acclaimed production of *Out of the Silence* (a forum theatre play dealing with domestic violence and sexual abuse), Headlines Theatre (now Theatre for Living) in Vancouver has produced over 30 forum theatre performances and community dialogues using other TO techniques on issues ranging from addiction to homelessness, from social exclusion to bullying, from indigenous health to corporate colonialism (<http://www.headlinestheatre.com/pastwork.htm>). In India, the Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed has been active for over 20 years, travelling throughout rural Bengal and creating theatre and workshops

around injustices imposed on farmers and workers through the effects of globalization and social inequity (Mohan, 2004, p. 41).

Boal referred to theatre as the 'first human invention' that comes about when 'a human being discovers that it can observe itself' (Boal, 1995, p. 13). TO is based on a methodology that assumes that all human beings are actors (Boal, 1992, 15). We are able to observe ourselves enacting and reenacting, acting this way or that way, mirroring situations. We can watch others acting and reenacting and see our actions in their actions. TO offers a methodology that firstly, facilitates an exploration of the 'what ifs' and the possible trajectory between where the participants are and where they would like to be (Howe, 2010, p. 7). Secondly, TO enables participants to imagine alternative actions in order to transcend obstacles and externally and internally imposed oppressions that block this trajectory. Thirdly, it gives them an opportunity to rehearse these possible future actions (Boal, 1995, p. 13).

As its name suggests, TO concerns itself with power and its structures; with those that hold power and those that do not; with those that hold power over others and those over whom power is held. Conventionally, it is used to work with those that experience oppression as a strategy for deconstructing the oppressive structures and empowering the 'oppressed' into transforming their no longer acceptable reality into a desired situation (Boal, 1995, p. 40). This oppressive power may take the form of a system, a person or a group of

people, and it also can be found in the ideologies and self-beliefs that are present in the minds of the people wanting to transform an unwanted situation.

One of the many hypotheses of Boal's work is that '...knowledge acquired aesthetically is already, in itself, the beginning of transformation' (Boal, 1995, p. 109). Think back to the young Tibetan man comically tugging at his sock in the Prologue. He affected all of us present aesthetically. That is, we 'felt' what he meant; we experienced what he meant directly not as a cognitive process. In the aesthetic space of the theatre the oppressed can see himself or herself in the 'imaginary mirror' and enact and witness not only his/her behaviour but also potential alternatives to that behaviour (Boal, 1995, p. 13).

Boal was greatly influenced by Brazilian educator and critical theorist, Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has served as a canon for 'liberatory pedagogy' (Paterson, 2011, p. 13). Freire sought to transform a system of education that was serving to keep people in his country oppressed. Freire developed a methodology to work with the poor and illiterate people in raising their consciousness, becoming *conscientização*, in order to affect the larger social system (Freire, 1970, p. 35). He sought to transform the system by bringing together the teachers and the rural poor in a learning process that involved a dialogue, not a one-way giving of information by those who 'know' to those who 'don't know'. Rather, it involved enabling the learner to participate actively in the 'appropriation of knowledge in relation to lived experience' (Morrow and Torres, 2002, p. 1). Further, for Freire, it was not only the

information that was being given, but also the way in which it was given to people that contributed to keeping the poor in oppressed conditions. This consciousness raising was to enable the poor to see how they themselves had the capacity to liberate their thinking from the grip of the oppressive system. In other words, Freire generated a 'cognitive self-actualisation of the poor' (Huiskamp, 2002, p. 73).

Boal, like Freire, understood what Schutzman calls 'the inseparability of reflection and action, theory and practice, in pursuit of social change' (Schutzman, 2006, p. 133). Boal highlighted the way that transformation through TO came primarily from moving the spectator of a play/scene/workshop from playing a passive role into playing an active one, as he explains below:

Theatre of the Oppressed, in all its forms, is always seeking the transformation of society in the direction of the liberation of the oppressed. It is both action in itself and a preparation for future actions. As we all know, it is not enough to interpret reality: it is necessary to transform it! (Boal, 2006, p. 6)

If a spectator or workshop participant, who is also experiencing an oppression, a struggle of some nature, watches another person also trying to act against that same or similar oppression through certain actions but not succeeding, that spectator/participant might think to herself, 'why doesn't she try this, I wonder if this would work?' In TO, the spectator gets that opportunity.



When she steps up into a scene to replace the oppressed character and try a different action (an action she thinks might be effective against the oppression), she may get a different, more useful outcome in the scene (which is spectated by others watching). This discovery; this simultaneously individual and collective unearthing of a possible solution by the spectator/participant themselves, is what Boal considers the foundation for transformation (1995, p. 45).

This idea is similar to Schechner's distinction between 'aesthetic drama' and 'social drama'. In aesthetic drama, a performance happens in a space where the audience is part of the performance (as the audience watching) and only the actors are part of the drama (e.g. on stage). By contrast, 'social drama', is a performance in which all participants to different degrees are part of the actual drama, for example, a wedding, as Schechner explains:

The performance, as distinct from the drama is social, and it is at the level of performance that aesthetic drama and social drama converge. The function of aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama does for its participants: provide a place for, and a means of, transformation. (Schechner, 1988, p. 193)

In TO, especially in forum theatre (one of the TO tools), the social drama and the aesthetic drama are effectively one because the separation that exists between the spectators and the actors is dissolved so that the audience is both part of the performance and part of the drama.

In a way, Brechtian<sup>11</sup> drama does the same thing. However, the performer steps in and out of character, or from the 'performative' world into the 'ordinary' world, to reflect and ponder and directly address words to the audience in order to raise questions about a particular social predicament; in order to make the audience think critically about the issue and hopefully raise the social consciousness and awareness of those watching (Schechner, 2003, p. 270). In TO, however, the performers do not address the audience, addressing the audience is done by a facilitator or the joker. It is the facilitator/joker who invites those watching to enter the 'performative world' and those who do enter are transported into characters to act and transform not only the performative drama on stage/in a workshop but also, crucially, when they return, to act and transform the social drama in the ordinary world.

According to Schechner, when an ordinary actor (as opposed to a TO spect-actor<sup>12</sup>) ends the performance and is 'transported' back in the 'ordinary' world, they are changed, especially after repeat performances. Likewise, the TO participant may join the 'performative' action and, on stepping back into the 'real' world, he or she may be transformed, especially if the struggle that is being presented is also their struggle. For Freire, the oppressed fight an inner battle between wanting to be free to exist authentically and a fear of this liberated existence:

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<sup>11</sup>Bertolt Brecht was a German theatre practitioner who used theatre to expose and critically examine unjust power dynamics of society reflected in his plays. Brecht broke new ground by dissolving the 'fourth' wall of the theatre and directly engaging audiences in a 'dialogic' aesthetic that greatly influenced Boal (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 20)

<sup>12</sup> Spect-actor is the term coined by Boal to describe the role of the audience member in a Forum Play. The spect-actor is not expected to just sit at and watch but has the capacity to enter the aesthetic space and contribute to the problem solving by taking on the role of the protagonist and offering alternative actions.

The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided... between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the actions of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world.' (Freire, 1970, p. 48)

For Boal, this inner battle has to be made visible; the conflict has to be made audible and physical so that it can be acted upon. As with other applied theatre practices, these oppressions and these tensions are made available through the different exercises, games, activities and techniques that Boal developed and which constitute the 'arsenal' of TO (Boal, 1992, p. 48). In various combinations and depending on the context and the nature of the participants' issues, these techniques are facilitated by the practitioner and used to create a dialogue in which the participants can examine the conflict and tensions present in various forms of internal or external oppressions. If TO has transformative potential, then, as Donovan posits much of the power the methodology offers lies 'in its ability to make internal and external voices visible' (2005, p. 39).

This need to externalise means that an effective practitioner is someone who is able to facilitate a space where the various conflicting voices can be made visible through their embodiment. The practitioner must be able to help expose the space where a participant can dwell in what Boal calls metaxis; where they can belong 'completely and simultaneously to two different,

autonomous worlds... her reality and the image of her reality, which she herself created' (Boal, 1995, p. 43). At the same time, the practitioner must be able to tread the borders between these two territories, to walk along the edges of these conflicts, to ask the right questions so that they can be played out, literally. The practitioner must also ensure that the tensions that are present are contained, observed and made useful to the whole group. As Warren Linds describes, '...I am both inside and in, standing in the crack of the in between, and also keeping it open...I live constantly in this liminal space, the land betwixt and between' (Linds, 2004).

## **The Techniques**

As Boal explains, while the theatre techniques that comprise TO are diversely applicable, they are also intricately interconnected (Boal, 2006, p. 4). What is more, as Blair remarks, over the last forty years, there has been an organic development in the techniques as they have shifted to accommodate the changing complexities of the struggles facing individuals and groups of people (Blair, 2011, p. 33). This development suggests that every practitioner contributes in her own way to this organic evolvment depending on what is important to the participants and the nature of the issues in that particular context. Nonetheless, certain commonalities are present in both process and objectives in a TO workshop or performance.

## Warming up

All workshops begin with warm-up activities and games aimed at stimulating the physicality and senses of participants. They aim at reeducating the senses; re-attuning the perceptual sensibilities of participants. They create opportunities for participants to reawaken or refocus the ways they perceive the world around them. Through habit and repetition, most of us become accustomed to using our bodies in the same way all the time. We walk a certain way; we get out of bed a certain way; we pick up objects a certain way. For this reason, our awareness of our own bodies and our own senses can often be diminished, reducing our ability to use them fully. At the same time, the activities and games are fun and allow participants to enter a more playful state; they allow us to be 'transported', as Nicholson writes (2005, p. 12). These activities fall into different categories depending on their focus. Some are aimed at enhancing the sense of touch, some at listening and really hearing what is being portrayed; others focus on our sense of seeing and observing. They all assist in bringing participants closer and in building trust.

For example, one technique, 'Complete the Image', involves participants creating stories out of frozen images. One of the aims of this exercise and other activities is to examine the power of communicating through the body. In a workshop situation with others in a circle around them, one person in the group enters the space/stage (aesthetic space) and freezes in an image. This person can do anything they like with his or her body and stay unmoving like a statue. Other participants observe the image and are invited to step into the space and

– using their bodies – also make another statue that ‘goes with’ the one already in the middle. This activity creates a tableau of human statues depicting some emotion or story; some moment of interaction between two characters. For example, the image might be a person bending over and someone may step in and bend over helping them look for something; or they may place themselves behind them and freeze in an action of pushing them over, or they may lie down on the floor under the bent person’s face as if they are being examined.

The techniques created and used by Boal aim at moving participants out of conflict and into action through small, safe and simple steps. Ultimately, a drive to action is desired in TO practice. The participant is driven to action – using a certain degree of confidence that comes from the new understanding, from having experienced and rehearsed that behaviour could be different, that a situation could be altered. While Brecht’s audience was expected to engage intellectually, Boal’s forum theatre invites the audience also to engage physically (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 20). The practitioner has a role in helping participants reconnect with their bodies and take small safe steps to action.

## **Forum Theatre**

In forum theatre, the wall between the audience and the actors is also demolished and the dialogue is open. As a result, it is not only the actors of a short play (who can be both professional actors or ‘actors’ who are members of the community or group dealing with the particular issue) but also the spectators (reframed as spec-actors) tackling the issue. They are also brought into the

situation and invited to enact their own solution (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 42). Forum theatre says to the audience: here is a play. We have identified these points of conflict and struggle but we do not assume to know what the best solutions are. You know better. Come and show us. Generally, the play is introduced by the 'joker' (Boal's term for the role of the practitioner in this technique and a term discussed further in chapter four) and follows the story of one protagonist<sup>13</sup> as he or she attempts to overcome struggles/oppressions unsuccessfully. The play is performed once all the way through allowing the audience to watch and think about all the moments in which the protagonist might have done something different. Then it is performed a second time. However, during this second performance the joker invites the spect-actor to stop the action and replace a character experiencing the struggle by entering the aesthetic space and offering a different action to see if it will have a different outcome; a more liberatory outcome. The 'dialogic aesthetic' that Boal so admired in the Brechtian drama is embodied in the scene that is created and also in the discussions that the joker generates with the rest of the audience (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 44).

Forum theatre, like all branches of TO, has two important aims. The first is to help the spect-actor transform into the 'protagonist' of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for his or her 'situation' or behaviour. The second is through this rehearsal to take into real life the actions that have been rehearsed in the forum space (Boal, 1995, p. 40). Initially, when Boal began working in

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<sup>13</sup>Over the years the question of one protagonist and what constitutes oppression has generated much discussion (Paterson, 2011, p. 9). Many forum theatre performances make use of multiple protagonists and also what David Diamond calls the 'powerless observer' (Diamond, 2007, p. 115).

Brazil, he strived to destroy ‘...the barriers created by the ruling class’; the struggles he saw his people suffer had a distinct external oppressor and Boal aligned with Marxist goals of equity and the collective power of the people (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 42) ‘Maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a *rehearsal for revolution*’ claims Boal (1985, p. 141). These initial Marxist underpinnings shifted as Boal became more aware of the internal oppression experienced by many people who lived in countries where the external oppression was not as evident.

Nevertheless, in the case studies presented I was always very aware of the tension between providing a space to examine the systemic ‘macrostructural’ causes of the issues being tackled and providing practical opportunities for the participants to derive as much ‘cognitive’ value from the sessions as possible (Rahman, in Huiskamp, 2002, p. 74). It is in these blurred borders of practice that the practitioner dwells. For example, when I was working with the offending men in case study one, it was their own actions and choices to use violence that were examined, not the systemic structures that created the conditions for them to become oppressors. Sometimes these overarching structures underscored some of the discussions that were initiated about their own fathers, for instance, but they were not the focus of the sessions. Likewise, when I was working with the young women in case study two, we aimed at examining actions to the immediate struggle they faced in keeping themselves safe from sexual abuse. We did not examine the existing



extreme social disadvantage and marginalisation that they shared, along with their potential abusers.

## Rainbow of Desire and Cops in the Head

Boal explains that when he first worked in Europe, after having worked with people whose oppressions were systemic and physical, he found that people had more time to preoccupy themselves with ‘...solitude, incommunicability, emptiness...*Theatre of the Oppressed* became much more psychological’ (Taussig & Schechner, 1994, p. 26). This adaptation comprises one of the many shifts the practice has undergone, thus giving TO its broad applicability and capacity to deal with real complexities existing in wicked<sup>14</sup> social issues and power relationships (Blair, 2011, p. 33). The techniques of Rainbow of Desire (Rainbow) also came about through these shifts. As Popen observes, this is a ‘different notion of struggle against power’ that required finding out ‘how the cops in the street’ became ‘the Cops-in-our-Heads’ (Popen, 2006, p. 125). The rationale goes like this: because the oppressor is no longer located externally, but dwells in ‘the spaces of our thoughts and imaginations’ as logic and reason, as common sense, opposing them is in many ways harder because we are asking to oppose ourselves. The task, as Popen beautifully articulates, is to find ‘openings, slippages, fissures, spaces than can provide footholds onto different ways of thinking and acting’ (2006, p. 125). These openings, these fissures, allow light to be shed on previously unseen possibilities. I would argue that the creation of these opportunities for revision,

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<sup>14</sup> The term ‘wicked problem’ was coined by Berkeley planners Rittel and Webber to refer to complex social problems, that are difficult to define, are tightly interwoven with other equally challenging problems and can never truly be solved, on ‘re- solved’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973, pp. 160-161)

based in physical action, is the role of all the techniques in TO. They are important tools of the TO practitioner.

There are many variations for conducting the Rainbow techniques but, as a rule, it requires that several people in the group tell a story. Each storyteller can share the story, in silence, by moulding or 'sculpting' other participants into images that communicate the principal obstacle or struggle. More commonly the story is recounted orally to the group and the group then decides whose story they want to work on. Usually, the story shared is a story that relates to the theme being workshopped. For example, with the young Aboriginal women in case study two, we were exploring protective behaviours and strong relationships. All participants were all asked to share stories relating to struggles they may have had around these themes. All came from similar backgrounds and most had similar experiences, as they lived in the same community and belonged to the same cultural and social group. According to Boal, this shared collective experience means that when one person recounts a story, 'it will immediately be pluralised' (Boal, 1995, p. 45) and everyone will see something in the story that they can personally relate to. Even though the group votes on the story they would like to see explored, the practitioner can make a significant contribution during this process by deciding which story will work best in the Rainbow process.

Some workshops may be composed of individuals who are not from similar backgrounds or communities and so others in the group may not

immediately identify with that struggle. For example, in some of my other work (not these particular case studies), I have conducted workshops with the general public that explore blockages to creativity with the aim of examining what is stopping participants from pursuing creative endeavours they so much want to pursue. Where is the cop who is stopping them? Participants in one creativity workshop were women of all ages, from early twenties to late sixties. The stories they told were very different and, at times, the identification by, say, a financially struggling thirty-something mother of two with a well-established, sixty-eight-year-old, single woman with no children was not immediately clear. In this case, identification emerged from what they shared and what they embodied. As Boal puts it:

The Theatre of the Oppressed is the theatre of the first person plural. It is absolutely vital to begin with the individual account, but if it does not pluralise of its own accord we must go beyond it by means of analogical induction, so that it may be studied by all the participants. (1995, p. 45)

However, in this study, all the groups shared similar struggles or belonged to the same community or social group. In case study one, all the men were facing similar consequences and their behaviours were comparable. In case study two, the young women were all indigenous and most lived or have lived in the same community. Many were related to each other by blood or marriage. Similarly, the young people in case study three, the forum theatre piece, were all teenagers at school. Thus, all were in some level of relating to

struggles around relationships, power and identity. In addition, I propose that the participants shared identity in the social science definition of sharing, for example, gender, race or social class may have less influence on identifying with each other and each other's stories, than their sense of experiencing a level of recognition and acknowledgment in the TO process. As Tingle points out, 'fundamentally, elementally, and basically, one wants to be recognised' (Tingle in Bracher 2006, p. 7). Perhaps, in some way, TO's recognition that each one is an agent of change in one's life, possessing the knowledge and capacity to affect change is what generates identification.

After a group chooses the story they want to explore, it is followed by the next step, which Boal calls the 'dynamisation exercises' (1992, p. 176). These exercises help bring the image alive so that it can be explored. Because the scene depicts a moment in the struggle faced by this person as they come into contact with the character (or value, belief, attitude) that is the source of the oppression, those watching have an opportunity to offer alternative actions to counteract the oppression, thereby multiplying the possibilities for liberation (Boal 1995, p. 45). Activating the image can be done in a variety of ways. However, to achieve dynamisation (and therefore a possibility for transformation), a certain 'interrelation' between participants/actors and the images being presented must occur. That is, participants/actors must in some way identify, recognize and/or resonate with the story or the characters (Boal, 1995, 69). Even if those watching (who might not completely identify with the characters they see) may recognise the 'other' represented. According to Boal,

they can ‘...be mobilized not because the image relates directly to her but because it relates to this ‘other’, who she knows well’ (1995, p. 69). Similarly, participants could experience a type of resonance that generates feelings that are vague or difficult to pin down but could assist in the discovery of what is possible or what is desired. Boal believes that the practitioner has a role to help to bring about ‘a disjunction of action and reflection’ on the actions that emerge (1995, p. 45). The practitioner is not there to interpret or explain but to facilitate ‘multiple points of reference’. He or she can enable the protagonist to be ‘the observer and the person observed’ (Boal, 1995, p. 46).

Thus, the practitioner can choose from a number of variations how she will dynamise the scenes that are presented. One common way is to offer the protagonist of the scene ‘three wishes’. In other words, if they could change something in the scene, what would that be? This approach is a way of identifying what the character really wants. Another common dynamisation technique is to have the protagonist (that is, the character who is being oppressed in the scene) create an ideal or desired scene. Alternatively, the facilitator can simply tap the shoulder of one of the characters and ask them to give voice to their internal monologue. In other words, if we could hear what the character is thinking, what would we hear? In effect, this approach is an improvisation, and at the same time a rehearsal or trying out of a possibility (Boal, 1995, pp. 58-64).

In sum, TO is an applied theatre practice that makes use of aesthetic activities and techniques to transform oppressive situations and empower behaviours. TO is aligned with Freirean radical pedagogy in that it makes use of 'a dialogic process of collective self-discovery and critical reflection' (Huiskamp, 2002, p. 79). This discovery occurs within the aesthetic space of art that 'stimulate[s] the process of learning by experience' (Boal, 1995, p. 20).

## **Blagg**

In addition to TO, I have made use of other applied theatre practices also, but as secondary to the TO methodology. Most importantly, I used Blagg, a workshop process (Hughes, 2003) used and developed for Theatre in Prison and Probation (TiPP)<sup>15</sup>, with the young Aboriginal women in case study two.

Blagg is an applied theatre approach developed specifically to work with offenders in detention. Workshop participants create a fictional character, Jo(e) Blagg, and make up a story about his/her experience and why s/he is locked up. By collectively constructing these scenarios about his/her experience before and after the offence, participants are able to examine aspects of offending, such as causes and consequences and the effects on the victim. An important factor is the distance that can be created between the offenders and the offence/trespass by using the story of a fictional character (Matthijssen, 2006, p. 3). This approach has been found to lead to some useful results (Centre for

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<sup>15</sup> This theatre company is based in the Drama Department of University of Manchester, UK.

Applied Theatre Research, 2003). I describe how I used this technique in more detail in chapter six.

## Dialogue

Dialogue, or more specifically, transformative dialogue is at the heart of Theatre of the Oppressed. It is through dialogue that individuals in the aesthetic space generate the 'collective creativity' that allows them to improvise alternatives and potentially transform situations for the 'oppressed' character (Boal, 2006, p. 86). A key role of the practitioner is to facilitate/enable this dialogic process. For this reason, it is worth examining this 'exploratory' and 'unfolding' communication process (Bohm et al. 1991) as a separate and potentially generative practice with specific characteristics.

Isaacs defines dialogue as 'a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25). In a review of principal dialogue theorists Cooper, Chak, Cornish & Gillespie distinguish four common elements in transformative dialogue<sup>16</sup>. Firstly, in transformative dialogue all parties must be valued and respected (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 82). For example, for Freire, whose usage of dialogue has influenced both the fields of education and community development, dialogue requires the presence of love, humility, faith and commitment to others (Freire, 1970, p. 91). These personal characteristics are

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<sup>16</sup> Principal theorists in the field of transformative dialogue include Buber (psychotherapy), Bakhtin & Freire (education, community development) Habermas and Köchler (social change), Bohm, Isaacs and Scharmer (organisational and social change) (Cooper et al., 2012, pp. 70-03). Due to the limits of space of this study it is not possible to enter into a deeper examination of the development and usage of dialogue by each of these theorists.

what Freire asserts enable people to accept others' differences and to recognise the legitimacy of everyone's (diverse) but valuable knowledge (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 78). Dialogue can then interrupt the 'monologue à deux' (Boal, 2006, p. 86) that keeps people from reflecting critically about their situations. Second, in dialogue an element of 'mutuality' dissolves the hierarchical structures that value the authoritarian 'expert' over 'local' knowledge and (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 79). For Habermas, for instance, who has influenced the field of social change, the intention of dialogue must be 'mutual understanding' and 'disregard of status' (Morrow and Torres, 2002, p. 41; Cooper et al. 2013, p. 80). Third, a willingness to be changed through the process is also necessary, and last, in all traditions transformative dialogue is seen as pivotal for 'growth, development and positive change' (Cooper et al., 2013, p. 82). Dialogue offers a group of people an opportunity to explore:

... the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions... a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. It can therefore be seen as an arena in which collective learning takes place (Bohm, et al., 1991)

When entering into a dialogue, we should know that we bring with us what Ziegler calls 'our KBVAF' - knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and faith



(Ziegler, 1994, p. 128). Bohm also invites those entering into a dialogue to be aware of these values and attitudes and to 'suspend' them. This suspension, Isaacs predicates, allows for an examination of what is underpinning our thoughts. Such suspension enables a better understanding and can lead to change. Once again, the transformation can occur because of a developed awareness of what is real and what is not. Thus, suspending allows the thinker to become aware of the way the thought is developing as it develops. This pause in turn allows us to listen differently to others and ourselves.

Scharmer further develops the idea of dialogue presented by Bohm and Isaacs as 'the art of thinking together' into 'the art of seeing together' or generative dialogue, making further contributions to this field of study (Scharmer, 2009, p. 135). This 'presencing' approach, which evolved through conversations between Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers, 'requires a letting go and letting come' process of observing, suspending and listening (2004, p. 219). This process does not differ greatly from that which is in effect, proposed by Boal. To allow a transformative dialogue to emerge through the images and scenes created in the aesthetic space of TO is at the core of the practice. This idea of 'seeing together' and allowing something unknown to emerge might be a comfortable event to an experienced practitioner but as a beginner I learnt and was astonished as I watched myself listening, sometimes suspending my own reactive thoughts and observing how TO worked in this way. I experienced how short moments of 'seeing together' allowed individuals to express something they seemed to not have previously realised about their

realities. Furthermore, Scharmer's model of four 'fields of conversation' maps the movement groups and individuals can make towards generative dialogue and transformation (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 45).

This approach to listening and perceiving describes a desired depth of awareness that needs to be present if participants are really to transform challenges. Scharmer's *Theory U* proposes a trajectory that allows us to move away from 'reenacted habits' of listening through which we simply 'download' information that reinforces what we already hold to be true; a trajectory that leads away from a place where we can hear nothing new to a place where we can listen from the place from which the other person is operating (Scharmer, 2009, p. 12). This listening can then, with more practice and with increased willingness (Scharmer talks about the 'open will'), lead the practitioner into a listening that is 'generative', that is, a listening that allows the practitioner to 'presence' a space in which a 'landing strip' is created to connect the present to an emerging future, 'listening from the emerging future' (Scharmer, 2009, p. 274). This practice can allow a group to move from relating on a superficial level to connecting and dealing with a difficult issue on a much deeper level. Scharmer explains how presencing is also about developing 'an inner observer that helps [participants] recognise and redirect their way and focus of operating' (2009, p. 279).

Whether this suspension and open mind were achieved effectively in any of my case studies is questionable. However, there were many signs in the case

studies that this deeper kind of listening or this 'seeing together' brought into the space something unexpected. One example that stands out was during a session in case study one. There was a scene in which we were exploring through Rainbow techniques the desires of one of the characters. The man playing a desire present in that character suddenly put on a high pitched 'girly' voice and said 'I want to be loved'. There was silence followed by some giggles. I cannot claim that this is what happened with any certainty but it is possible that some of the men in the session 'saw together' this connection he was making between femininity and love. It is possible that for a fleeting moment they 'saw' their collective vulnerability appear in the space.

One more approach that is also worth mentioning is Warren Ziegler's 'Deep Listening', like dialogue, is a way of becoming present to what another person is saying without judging them (Ziegler, 1994, p. 54). However, Zeigler's technique here is more formal than the listening presented by Scharmer and others, paying particularly attention to where a listener looks and where she sits. Knowledge of dialogue, what makes it possible and an understanding of its generative potential are useful for a practitioner who is facilitating a space for transformation.

## Transformation

'...a new self-understanding, a fresh sense of who you are and what you're up to' (Ziegler, 1996, p. 39).

As a term that is commonly used to describe the intentions of community development and social change, and a term that is integral to this thesis, it is important to define transformation and explore its characteristics. Brookfield (2009, p. 140) asserts that the word *transformative* is at risk of losing its 'descriptive and definitional utility' through its ubiquitous misuse and its reified status 'imbued with mystical significance' and assigned a 'revered' position in discourse (2009, p. 141). He warns us against allowing the term to become a 'premature ultimate' or a term that 'forestalls further debate or critical analysis' (2009, p. 141). I agree with this observation. For this reason and since transformation is the aim of generative practices like TO, deconstructing and understanding what is meant by transformation can offer a TO practitioner insights into what the practice is and what it is not.

## Transformative Learning

To discuss the meaning of transformation I have chosen firstly to look at the field of transformative learning where four general theories and definitions of transformation that are useful. The first and most familiar to a community development practitioner is the social-justice focused approach of Paulo Freire, for whom transformation is possible through the dialogic processes described above. For Freire this kind of learning is not a learning that simply increases the

information that we know so that we add to an already existing knowledge bank, which, according to Freire, keeps the oppressed powerless. Instead, it is a learning that alters how a person sees herself and how she sees her world (Clark in Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16). Transformation in this context is about deepening awareness and consciousness of people regarding their oppressive situation and their own knowledge and capacity to affect change in their lives and society (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16). For Freire this raised awareness could happen only through praxis, that is, '...the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p. 79).

This social emancipatory approach is not dissimilar to the second theory, Mezirow's cognitive rational approach (Fisher-Yoshida, Geller and Schapiro 2009, p. 8). 'Transformation refers to a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Mezirow asserts that transformational learning must lead to empowerment and that it comes through a change in how meaning is constructed (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 16). The process, for Mezirow, involves a disorientating process of critical reflection about the 'uncritically assimilated assumptions' that underpin beliefs and values, which, according to Mezirow, have become limiting 'habits of the mind'. This 'disorientating dilemma' that begins the process can lead people to '...realize something is not consistent with what [they] hold to be true' (Taylor 1998, in Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17), is then followed by 'rational dialogue' or discussion and finally, action on the newly

perceived meaning and transformation can occur (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 4).

The third approach centres on developmental shifts from a lesser to a higher order of awareness. The individual is looking to education as a way to make sense of their lives. Again, this transformative learning approach involves a change in the ways in which meaning is constructed and places great importance on a mentor or teacher who serves as a guide through a 'learning journey' that is influenced by social and familial dynamics (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17). Finally, the fourth approach proposes that transformation is an 'extrarational' occurrence that necessitates much more than a cognitive reshuffling and rational discussion. The use of intuition, images and symbolism is the key to affecting transformation, which is in effect the integration and resolution of 'intrapsychic conflicts' (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 18).

Whether transformation is defined as a deepening of social consciousness leading to social liberation, a cognitive process that affects the way people see themselves and their world, a mentor-led shift from one level of development to another, or a spiritual reintegration of various aspects of the psyche, it is generally agreed that transformation leaves a person different in a positive way: 'Transformative learning shapes people. They are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognise' (Clark in Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 6). A principal concern of TO and the other practices described in this chapter is leaving people different in positive ways.

## The Transformative Cycle

Transformation is also a key idea in the field of futures studies, where it is similarly described as a 'holistic and deep' change covering both attitudes and beliefs in a short period of time '...and how these changes are expressed in behaviours at the individual and collective level' (Naismith, 2004, p. 22).

Slaughter's Transformative Cycle (Slaughter, 2004, p. 6) describes four phases in the process of transformation that are useful in this discussion. The first stage is marked by a breakdown in meaning in which common ways of thinking are no longer held up by values and beliefs. In a TO workshop or performance, it is exactly this disorientation that is desired: this observing of oneself (or someone who represents oneself) in a different light that triggers a questioning, an understanding that something else is possible and a wish for that change. The cycle then flows into a re-conceptualisation phase where possibilities are expressed and discussed. Many of these possibilities will throw up challenges against the existing structures and possibly '...the interests embedded in them' (Slaughter, 2004, p. 7).

This resistance can occur during the interventions in a forum play or the alternative actions offered up during a rainbow or cops workshop, and it is a time that provides an opportunity to explore what really lies in the way of freedom for the participants. As Cohen-Cruz explains, 'the great hope is that unearthing how we stop ourselves will naturally lead all of us to acting more justly in the world' (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 46). Therefore, transformation in this context, that is, in the context of changing behaviours or overcoming obstacles,

is about facilitating a critical examination of a move into action against an oppressive system, thought pattern, attitude or behaviour.

The re-conceptualisation stage is followed by a stage of conflict and possibly negotiation, a stage into which the participant might be attempting to put into action the new rehearsed behaviour and encountering conflict from those that are threatened by it (Naismith, 2004, p. 24). The final stage, or stage of 'selective legitimisation', is marked by the implementation of the ideas or actions (Slaughter, 2004, p. 6). The relevance of this tool lies in the awareness it can potentially offer the practitioner about the group she is working with. Different groups or individuals may find themselves at different stages of this cycle. Further the practitioner is not limited to positioning the participants but can also gain further insights by positioning the environment and society they are in.

### **Other characteristics of transformation**

First, in the world of applied theatre, Helen Nicholson describes being 'uneasy' about using the term 'transformation' to describe the change that can be engendered by using applied theatre with communities and individuals. She has reservations about the political implications and poses questions about the values, ideals and interests that are envisioned in this transformation. Whose values? Who gets transformed and by whom? (Nicholson, 2005, p. 12). Nicholson argues for the term 'transportation' as used by Schechner, who distinguishes between transformation (a process that results in a permanent



change) and a journey that participants take during the workshop to a different place but from which they can return 'with gifts'<sup>17</sup> (Schechner, in Nicholson, 2005, p. 12). Nicholson concedes that this transportation can lead to transformation through a '...gradual and cumulative process...a progressive act of self-creation' (Nicholson, 2005, p. 12).

In a similar vein, James Thompson challenges the dominant focus on the 'purpose, effect and utility' of applied theatre, that is, the necessity to endow it with 'identifiable effects' (2009, p.116). Rather, applied theatre's power lies in the 'generative nature of the affective response' (p.119), that is, the 'beauty, pleasure, awe and astonishment' (p.117) that applied theatre elicits from participants. Echoing Deleuze, (1995, p.243 in Thompson, 2009, p. 131), Thompson suggests that:

'...the decisive moment of transformation is found in an abandonment of 'solutions' and 'interpretations' and a location of consciousness in gestures and sounds' (Thompson, 2009, p. 131).

That is, the conscious raising that occurs in the theatre, such as that which can occur in TO goes beyond Marxist (Boalian and Freirean), Brechtian or other types of consciousness-raising and is not about solutions but about affect.

Second, in the world of community development transformation can refer not only to achieving the change that is desired but also to all of the small shifts

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<sup>17</sup> Also Tim Etchells quote in Nicholson, performance is about 'going into another world and coming back with gifts' (Nicholson, 2005, p. 13)

that occur along the trajectory towards that change (Kenny, 1994, p. 31). What is more, community development projects must help to improve individuals' experiences in community, but if they do not address the larger, systemic, root causes, as Ledwith points out, '...our work is good but not transformative' (Ledwith, 2005, p. 7). Similarly, the Freirean influence in TO, imbues it with a methodological and pedagogic expectation of promoting a 'dual transformation...both cognitive and macrostructural' (Rahman in Huiskamp, 2002, p. 74).

Furthermore, transformation is not something that is prescribed by someone for someone else; it is something that reveals itself for that group or that individual as a kind of surprise (Boal, 2006, p. 86). The solution to a problem cannot be known or taught by someone. Instead, in a transformative or generative approach finding out the possible solutions and actions to improve a struggle is part of the transformation. In this approach, a practitioner does not (or at least is not supposed to) start out already knowing how she wants everyone to change and what direction he or she must take in order to improve a situation or overcome obstacles. This solution or possibility emerges through the process, out of the experiences and existing knowledge present in the participants, whose own struggle it is. In effect, this need to maintain a distance from standard solutions to issues and genuinely allow the participants to explore their problems is a great source of tension for a practitioner because, generally, those who are paying for the project have agendas and ideas about the desired behaviour. Therefore, one has to be aware that transformation cannot be simply

an attempt to convince or impose a certain 'better' behaviour on participants. For example, generally there exists a negative view about young pregnancy and single motherhood. During the work in case study two, one of the young women in the workshop explained that for a friend of hers getting pregnant and accessing her own social security payments was a way to assert independence and escape from a violent family home.

Third, a practice is transformative when it accepts and works with what is, enabling a space for imagining and reshaping this reality into what wants to be. As Maxine Greene writes, 'our transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being - something that goes beyond a present situation' (Greene, 1995, p. 51). This flexibility can allow what is present to be seen and accepted; the individual who is present to be real and respected; and the reality that is desired to be imagined and practised. Greene is correct in highlighting the essential role of the imagination in facilitating the possibility of something different, as the first step towards creating something different is the ability to imagine it (1995, p. 16).

Fourth, for Ziegler, transformation is possible through what he calls 'enspiriting' – a process that involves deep listening, deep questioning, deep learning, imaging and intentioning (1994). The spirit and the social biography of individuals and then collectives enter into a tension where new boundaries and scenarios are negotiated so that spirit may be present (1996, 54). This is a very personal and sacred journey that involves the spirit and action. Ziegler describes

the inner and the outer as being bonded in transformation, 'what is not right in the outer world and what is not right in the inner world are part and parcel of the same condition' (Ziegler, 1994, p. 28). Once this subtle relationship is realised and an individual can no longer accept the status quo of a situation or behaviour, something happens inside each individual. Thinking changes form, attitudes change form, and perception of others changes form. Perhaps something of this bonding is what can occur using TO, something that helps create a space where generative dialogue can take place. It is possible that something 'enspirited', beyond the body and the mind, beyond words and dialogue is invited to come in when there is an 'open will' present (Scharmer, 2009, p. 15). An open will enables us to look beyond our accepted and solidified realities into other possibilities.

Lastly, on that same vein, during a radio interview, interfaith minister Stephanie Dowrick (2010) described transformation as an ability to alter the way we look at ourselves and one another so that we can undo the established perceptions and welcome new, more emphatic and compassionate ones. This is my paraphrase, but I liked the definition because it was about a self-practice. Ultimately, whether it is generated by the work that is carried out in a group through the collective learning or through a multitude of generative dialogues and rehearsals of the future desired, transformation is ultimately a self-practice.

What would transformation look like in the case studies presented in this research? In case study one, perhaps transformation might have come from the

men recognising a 'self-concept' or an 'emotional response pattern' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17) that leads not only to a 'fundamental questioning' of their actions but also to a fundamental change in the 'foundational premises' on which their thoughts and actions are based (Brookfield, 2000, p. 143). Similarly, for the young women in Derby, it might have been transformative if, through the activities in the sessions, their 'personal paradigms' shifted and they not only saw themselves as capable of taking action to avoid potential abuse, but also did so and thereby affected familial and cultural hierarchical structures in their communities.

Transformation, then, refers to what is possible when an individual or a group of people is confronted with a sudden or cumulative cognitive/aesthetic realisation of the mismatch between what they assumed was true/possible and what they now see as true/possible. This event can generate a deep and critical reflection; a 'shift in the tectonic plates of one's assumptive clusters,' (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139) causing a reshuffling, re-visioning or restructuring of fundamental assumptions about life and society that leads to action.

## CHAPTER 4

### The practitioner: motivation, presence and reflection

*'Depth in the practitioner is what evokes depth in whatever methodology is being used'* (Slaughter, 2004, p. 3)

This chapter is about the person learning and applying Theatre of the Oppressed and the other transformative and generative tools described in the previous chapter. It is about the artist/social change/community development practitioner who believes those tools help create aesthetic opportunities in which participants can creatively unleash their collective knowledge and find ways out of the struggles that they face. In this sense, this chapter considers: who is this 'transformative' practitioner? And, further, what are the attributes that an informed, creative and critical practitioner possesses and brings to their practice?

It is important to understand that this practitioner is not a person who belongs to a body of professionals with a generally standardized set of governing rules that informs and supports the practice (Schön, 1987, p. 6). For example, a lawyer might be asked to draw up a will, or a divorce, and while these may have very unique variations, these variations are made to fit into the standardized conventions and practices that they need to adhere to in what has been an agreed process (Schön, 1987, p. 6). However, in the social-aesthetic sphere, a practitioner does not have established canons of practice or 'rules' in

the same way. For instance, for a transformative practitioner, whose role is to create a space where a social ill is to be explored and observed, issues like violence, or exclusion, or homelessness or gender inequity; or generate an environment in which an organisation's culture and leadership can be questioned in order to change it, it is not possible to standardise. Every contingency cannot be planned in advance. There cannot be detailed, step-by-step processes with outcomes neatly established and controlled. We are not dealing with tractors, mathematical equations or theories. When working with a 'social organism', as Kaplan asserts, and in the context of genuine social change, 'the social will not allow itself to be manipulated' (Kaplan, 2002, p. xii). While, as Schön describes, there are always murky areas in professionalized practices, areas that he calls 'indeterminate zones of practice' which for various reasons '... escape the canons of technical rationality' (1987, p. 6), for the transformative practitioner every case is indeterminate and escapes rationality.

Further, this is not a study of an exemplary practitioner; it is a study of what this emergent practitioner has discovered has been useful, necessary and desired and what has not. For example, what has been conducive to creating a space where participants can be open and engaged? What has enabled participants to connect to each other? What led to moments of self-expression and authentic listening? More importantly, how has the exploration gone beyond the localized struggle and addressed oppressive systemic structures? Further, as Greene suggests, what enabled participants to '...open themselves up to what they create to see more, to hear more, to feel more, to attend to more

facets of the experienced world’? (Greene, 1987, quoted in Taylor, 2003). And, of course, what has got in the way of all of this openness and engagement? What was present in the process as an intrinsic part of the methods applied and what was there because the practitioner brought it along or found it as the space evolved?

In this chapter, I first discuss the different roles of the TO practitioner. Then I briefly describe the case studies through which the work and attributes of this practitioner are being interrogated and the roles that I had to play to carry out this work. Next, I look separately at each of the elements: motivation, presence and reflection, citing theories that illuminate how each is defined, accessed and applied. Finally I outline certain tensions present in the work that a practitioner must be able to negotiate.

### **What does the TO practitioner do?**

In her doctoral dissertation *Courage to Joker*<sup>18</sup> Leslie Bentley, TO scholar and practitioner, discusses the multifarious and ever shifting role of the joker with six well established TO practitioners. For instance, joker Johnny Saldaña includes ‘actor, director, counselor, humanitarian, action researcher, analyst, friend, ethicist, and storyteller’ in his list of diverse roles attributed to the joker (2001, p. 41). I have certainly experienced shifting from counselor to actor to director, within the span of one workshop. Similarly, David Diamond’s description of the joker as ‘a clown, an activist, a trickster, an improvisationalist

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<sup>18</sup> Joker is the term coined by Boal to describe the role of the TO facilitator. I have used the term practitioner, facilitator and Joker interchangeably. However, I give preference to the terms practitioner, using the term Joker when referring to forum theatre or when it has been used in the literature by other TO scholars/practitioners.



[and] a psychologist' (2001, p. 42) resonates with my own experience. Taylor adds that a transformative facilitator is also a critical thinker and a theory generator (2003, pp. 74-75). Boal describes the joker as a midwife who 'must assist in the birth of all ideas, of all actions' helping participants to 'gather their thoughts [and] prepare their actions' (1992, p. 262).

In effect, as a 'key figure' the role of joker or TO practitioner is to perform whatever role is necessary to 'facilitat[e] TO's transformative process' (Bentley, 2001, p. 40). But how does the practitioner do this? What qualities enable this diversity? So, here I examine the work I have done and how I have needed to be to do it. I examine the skills I have had to develop or think would have been useful to develop as a self-employed TO practitioner. Through reflecting on the work in specific cases I look at how I have needed to adapt to the group I was working with and how all my attitudes and beliefs, my personal characteristics and personality, my biases and insecurities came together in this practice.

During the course of this exploration, many attributes and qualities have emerged as essential to facilitating an experience or process that might lead to transformation: flexibility, self-awareness, risk-taking, engagement, collaboration, perseverance, energy, and open-mindedness. However, for this practitioner, three overarching qualities have emerged as crucial: motivation, presence and reflectivity. Having awareness of these qualities, and the ways that they are enacted, has helped me better understand this role, its practices, and how it might be developed in the future.

## Case study 1 – a pilot with offenders

The first case study took place over five and a half months at a residential program for men who are violent. This project was a pilot<sup>19</sup> comprising of a weekly, one-and-a-half hour session to complement the men's cognitive behavioural therapy and anger management sessions. Participation in the 'Act Out' session was mandatory. The men appeared resistant and, at the same time, maybe because they had a lot at stake, were compliant. Nonetheless, it was equally important that there be a genuine space for introspection and honesty so that they could have a real look at themselves. For this to happen I needed them to not only understand that they were respected but also that they were not there to be judged.

Thus, I had to develop an environment for dialogue by creating an understanding that their participation was going to be useful for them and not just another box that would be ticked. Engaging them was very important for the work to have potential transformative effects. It was very important for these men to realise that they were not required to do and say the 'right' thing and/or to keep their cool. Sometimes, to break through this 'cool' protective barrier and elicit images closer to the truth, I confronted and challenged them; sometimes, I used the language they used (more slang and colloquial, rougher, less tactful and more direct). This need to adapt placed me in an unknown space where the effectiveness of the practice also depended on my ability to let go of my protective veneers and my immediate moral judgments to meet the participants

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<sup>19</sup> The aim was to assess the complementary role of TO in the rehabilitation program delivered at this facility. The rationale and background to this pilot is explained at greater length in chapter 5.

where they really were. Moreover, to avoid hindering my ability to 'remain open' (Ellsworth in Bentley, 2001, p. 130) it was important for me to be able to distance the men from their behaviours and see the person and not the offence. I made a choice not to read their personal case files so I had no idea of the gravity of their offences.

Additionally, as a female practitioner, it was important to remain neutral with all the men and be conscious of the effects that being female might have on them. As a woman, knowing that they had hurt other women and that they could hurt me often brought up strong judgment in me. I had to keep those insights well out of the space. At the same time, boundaries had to be very clear to avoid colluding with them and starting to see them as the 'oppressed'.

In this case study, these men were the 'oppressors' and the role of the practitioner was to use the Boal techniques to enable them to uncover and see their role in their oppression of others, in particular their female partners. This was a tough task as their resistance to this self-awareness was strong and it required a high level of self-examination to override the underpinning tendency to see themselves as victims. My role was to provide them with opportunities to look into the mirror they represented for each other. Many of these men expressed a strong belief that it was the alcohol and drugs that made them violent and that they had abused alcohol and drugs because their lives had been difficult; some said it was the women who had made them do what they had

done. All of them expressed a view that the system was responsible for the situation in which they found themselves.

## **Case study 2 – young women exploring safety**

The second case study is a three-day workshop that I conducted in Broome, in the northwest of Western Australia with a group of young Aboriginal girls. The focus was on protective behaviours, especially around the highly sensitive issue of sexual abuse. The goal of these sessions was to explore and rehearse behaviours that would enable the young women to avoid or defuse violent or abusive situations. Most had been exposed to domestic violence directly or came from communities in which domestic violence was a regular and commonly visible occurrence. Some had been directly or indirectly affected by sexual abuse. The space needed to be safe for them to examine their issues. There also needed to be an understanding that **they** held the possibilities: this was their work and the practitioner was not holding a set of answers and actions that they had to follow or learn. It was important for me to make visible the active role they played and could increasingly play in situations in which many of them saw their role as passive.

It was crucial to me that this available agency was clear because there are historical tendencies for interventions in this area to be top-down and imposed. I found from the beginning of the process that some participants held the expectation that this workshop presented a similar situation (Louth, 2012, p. 6). Equally important was the need to be aware of my 'foreignness' and my

'whiteness' in their community and to tacitly communicate that I understood this was a false 'authority'. It would not be beneficial for the practitioner to have been perceived as an 'expert' who knew the best answer: an answer that came from the outside, white world. At times, I worked with the young women in the presence of other indigenous role models or elders, who might have an idea of what the 'right' action might be. However, it was important that the young women had enough freedom to explore what they perceived as right for them. In many cases, it was the older adults who, while meaning well, suggested actions that could disempower the young women or that empowered another member of the group whom they perceived as being most vulnerable. Moreover, the intricacy and complexity of the familial and social connections and networks always needed be acknowledged and taken into account. What might be revealed in front of someone who is connected to someone else might unleash consequences that deterred participation. It is worth noting that for this group of young women an adaptation of the Blagg model was adopted as a key tool in the workshop.

As with all work I have done with indigenous groups this was emotionally charged and sensitive. It was necessary to be able to discern through focused reflection when it was useful to go deep and explore and whether the individuals had the capacity to go there and back using the TO methodology. At other times, it was appropriate, sufficient and more useful simply to conduct activities that allowed for self-expression and play and generated discussion and self-confidence.

### Case study 3 – the young people

The third case study was a community forum theatre project that I conducted with a diverse group of eight young people (aged 14 to 23) in the Fremantle area south of Perth in Western Australia. This Forum Theatre project required enabling the group to create a piece of theatre: specifically a forum theatre play, about the issue of respect in relationships based on their interpretations and experiences. From the beginning it became crucial to gain the trust of the participants while at the same time being able to manage their behaviours and the many tensions that existed. The project required that the young people understand their role in the creation of the content of the piece and the role of the practitioner in enabling this process.

At first, I was unable to convey clearly to them the concept of a forum play. Even after watching the video of a forum theatre performance they remained apprehensive of where we were heading with the games, the improvisations and the 'activating material' (Rohd, 1998, p. 97). As a result, after about eight workshopping sessions, it was still necessary to explain the methodology and the reasons why we had so many workshops before jumping into creating a script – they needed to be kept constantly engaged; that was my role.

As explained, TO requires that the practitioner be able to create a space for honesty and expression that can allow participants to take a good look into their lives, their relationships, their fears, their desires and identify their struggles and their possible solutions. However, at the same time, each group of people requires a specific focus and framing that is not known before the session. The

practitioner is therefore required to make decisions in the moment and take the group in changing directions, all to ensure that nobody, the practitioner or the participants get in the way of what is arising from the work; the transformative possibility that is emerging.

The following are not necessarily skills and competencies but they are some characteristics that I found were crucial. As Kaplan asserts, as important as these are, they 'are not of the kind which can be taught on training courses' (2002, p. 141).

### **Motivation – why the work gets done**

Looking back over the years since I began Act Out, I can clearly see, but am nevertheless surprised, by the extreme levels of perseverance, commitment and energy required to carry out this work. Where has that motivation come from? What made me quit my fairly well paid lecturing job and move to a remote town and an entry-level government position so that I could build relationships by immersing myself in an indigenous community? What has inspired me to invest thousands of dollars into learning a methodology and practice that most potential clients have never heard of? Why did I exert myself in project managing, driving, promoting, and facilitating a project with really difficult to engage young people? To better understand the practitioner I found it useful to examine theories of motivation, especially self-determination theory and identity.

Motivation connotes an intentionality of action (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 340) and has been studied from the perspective of needs: physiological, psychological, social and emotional, as well as from the perspective of traits and values (Reeve, 2005). I have chosen to first look at self-determination theory (SDT) because its proposition that we all have 'fundamental psychological needs to be competent, autonomous and related to others' (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 85) resonates with my experience and reflection. Central to the premise of SDT is the idea that there are two types of motivation: autonomous and controlled (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 340).

Controlled motivation includes extrinsic motivation that is externally regulated, in other words motivation that is driven by external factors, such as a reward or the avoidance of punishment (Deci and Ryan, 20012, p. 88). Also in the category of controlled motivation is what Ryan, Connell and Deci (1985, in Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 334) identified as introjected extrinsic motivation. That is, motivation that regulates behaviours because someone else's (external) values, structures and attitudes have been internalised and assimilated to different degrees by the individual. Behaviour driven by controlled motivation is dependent on the coercive or seductive contingencies derived from the behaviour; without these contingencies the behaviours are not performed or they are not sustained (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 88).

Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and two internalised variations of extrinsic motivation: identified and integrated (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 89). Firstly, intrinsic motivation may originate from engaging in something that interests us or that we feel we are good at and can master. Or it may simply



result from the pleasure and satisfaction that activity might bring (Reeve, 2005, p. 134). This is the kind of motivation that drives individuals to persist with activities regardless of whether anyone is watching to praise them, or whether they will receive a pay rise or a prize.

Secondly, identified regulation is when an individual has internalised and understood that even though the activity or behaviour is not interesting or is unpleasant, it has some value for that individual and is more congruent in reflecting a certain side of the self or the individual's goals, therefore offers some freedom (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 334).

Finally, integrated regulation is extrinsic motivation with a high degree of autonomy and volition (2005, p. 335) because it is recognised by a person as 'instrumentally, important, valued and meaningful' (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 89). The behaviour is seen as 'integral' and 'emanates from their sense of self and is thus self-determined' (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 335). Interestingly, studies show that behaviours motivated by identified and integrated regulation point to higher levels of effort, discipline and sustainability (Deci and Ryan, 2012, p. 89).

## **Identity**

These last two categories of autonomous motivation strongly support the work of Bracher who argues that identity is a major 'mover of human behaviour' (2006, p. 3). His views are important to note as he ties motivation into the effects this kind of identification has on how we learn, teach and pursue social justice. Bracher presents the work of various researchers who have advanced theories supporting the idea that we will do anything to maintain or rescue our identities

from anything that threatens them (Bracher, 2006, p. 3). This drive is even stronger than hunger or sexual drive (see Lichtenstein, 1977; Holland, 1985; and Swann et al., 1992 in Bracher, pp. 3-4). According to Gilligan, 'people will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual or group identity' (Gilligan, 1996 in Bracher, 2006, p. 3). The importance of these 'identity-maintenance' motives is also supported by the work of Steele, who proposes that a self-affirmation system kicks in whenever there is a threat to our identity (Steele 1999 in Bracher, 2006, p. 4).

Thus, as I look for answers to what motivated me to pursue the work described in this thesis – and if identity is defined, as Bracher asserts, by being someone of importance; someone who contributes – I could say in this work I have found an occupation and a direction that supports my sense of being someone who matters (Bracher, 2006, p. 7). However, while striving for social justice, driving this effort is the motivation to maintain my identity based on the realisation that by doing this kind of work I enhance how I am seen in the world, or how I want to be seen. That is, it reinforces my sense of being **able** to do this because I count. So, in this work, I have found something that, according to Bracher, fulfills several qualities considered to be prime motivators. These include recognition, distinction, meaning and agency (Bracher, 2006, p. 6). As Steele (quoted in Bracher, 2006, p. 7) explains, distinction is what provides a clear separation from the other and marks a clear boundary of where 'I' stands so that I can be recognised and thereby valued. Similarly, meaning comes through the 'significance that one receives from the multiple dimensions of

interrelationship with otherness' and this gift leads to agency, which can be felt once we have had confirmation that somehow what we have contributed through our behaviour has had an influence on the world (Bracher, 2006, p. 7).

Additionally, Deci and Ryan also credit motivation to the personality traits related to orientation. They identify people that may be more autonomy oriented than others and who perceive the environment as being 'supportive of their autonomy and providing information relevant to choices they are making' (2010, p. 90). It is true that I perceive my environment as supporting this autonomy. For example, being in Australia where I was able to apply for funding for a community development arts project or earn enough money to pay for international travel to access tuition, certainly facilitates this autonomy.

Thus, as I write, I have a feeling of self-centredness and hypocrisy, as if I am revealing that, while it may look as though I am concerned about the suffering of others in the world and want to do something to improve conditions and attitudes, I am simply asserting my identity and demonstrating to the world that I matter! However, I am assuaged by the belief that this act of pursuing what I desire will inevitably lead to work that cares for the 'other' in what Bracher calls 'Moebius-strip fashion' (Bracher, 2006, p. 152). This paradox is so beautifully expressed in the Buddhist explanation that to achieve true happiness it is necessary to put the wellbeing of others first. Thus, in effect, by wanting to end the suffering of others and striving to support their wellbeing, one is actually benefiting oneself. Benefiting others and benefiting oneself, in this case, are both

one and the same thing because when I put others first it follows that I inherently benefit.

I recall clearly the moment (which I describe in the introduction) in which I made the decision to pursue this path and to learn TO. I was driven by a desire to have some effect on the work of behaviour change among a community of people whose behaviours were spreading disease and possibly death to their loved ones, while they were unable to see their role and/or change their behaviours. This altruism is what I felt was the initial motivation. However, the more I think about it and reflect on my behaviour and what drives it, the more I am drawn to the idea that I have created my identity around the person I am when I am doing this work and how that distinguishes me from others, allowing me to determine who I am. I want to be a person who is both socially conscious and creative; I value that in myself and in others. Therefore, I am pursuing this work as a means to attain that. Nonetheless, conducting this work, as well as allowing this individual and her desire for recognition and value, has the potential to affect positively those that are involved. While I aspire to have the Buddhist motivation that tells me that by doing something that benefits others, it is also benefiting me, I could not say with honesty that this is my principal motivation but is a true aspiration nevertheless.

## **Power**

What Bracher explores in relation to teachers and pedagogy, but which is equally relevant and transferrable to the social theatre practitioner is, firstly, how

does the way in which teachers (or practitioners) operate (the ways we communicate, the strategies we put in place to affect learning) 'promote optimal support and development' of the identities of those we work with and at the same time uphold, enhance and maintain our own sense of self? And when does maintaining a sense of self lead to behaviours that do not support this development and support of others' identities and, in effect, create a tension that hinders any learning or transformation potential? (Bracher, 2006, p. 76). For example, I immediately remember a time during the forum theatre project with the young people when one of the young men, who was playing a major part and was a very strong actor, came to rehearsal very late and 'stoned'. We were unable to do any of the planned rehearsals until he arrived and he really hindered our rehearsal that evening. But he was the strongest actor and he was a most affable, intelligent and charming young man, and although I could not approve of him being drugged, I had a soft spot for him and his performance gift. So he walked in and we all stared at him. I said nothing about his lateness and requested that he change. I knew the other actors were angry with him. I was also upset and, as I sat there and waited with the others for him to get changed, I wondered if should I say something in front of everyone or say something in private. When he returned, unable to hold back I berated him in a way that was not useful; but it was somehow what the others expected and in this sense sustained my status within the group of the person who was in charge and who was not going to allow this one cheeky and disrespectful member do what he wanted.

When I thought about it later, I regretted saying what I said because it had singled him out and humiliated him. He was his usual brilliant self during the rehearsal and while we'd been waiting for him the others were able to practice their parts intensively – and they needed it! I also felt that it broke a confidence that existed between that actor and myself and an unspoken understanding of mutual respect. This example demonstrates an incident in which the fundamental and emancipatory aims of TO were hindered by the practitioner because they stood in the way of my identity needs.

### **My motivation and self-determination**

Principally I want two things: autonomy **and** to work in a field that I feel contributes something extraordinary and beneficial to society through creativity. First, I do not want to work for someone else or need to follow what someone else wants me to do. This motivation to succeed as a social entrepreneur continues to be a driving force in my actions. It is this level of self-determination that contributes to the perseverance and commitment that is necessary to do this kind of work. To feel this autonomy and competency, I needed to generate personally what I did. I needed to create a forum play; I needed to work with groups of Aboriginal youth or women; and I needed to do the work I did with the men. Second, I needed to see if I could do it; I wanted to know that I had done it, so that I would get opportunities to do it again, because being able to do it again, in my regard, would mean I had succeeded.

Additionally, I wanted to see whether, when I did it, the play would be as powerful as when I had seen others: like David Diamond's *Out of the Silence*

(1992) or like the short skits we made with Boal in Omaha.<sup>20</sup> Yes, it would be great to be able to create forum to tackle wicked problems and involve the community. And, yes, it would be “awesome” to do forum theatre with young people and get them involved and empowered. However, when closely examined, my main motivation was to gain the experience necessary to continue doing forum theatre and other Boal work in the future<sup>21</sup>.

I can see from reflection that there is a more personal, more self-focused current in this desire and that is the reinforcement that I, too, can do something that affects the world. Thus, motivation is an important aspect on many levels. It is an attribute found behind any action, and whether it sits simultaneously on the desire for extrinsic reward (under which financial and professional independence fall), and a need to self-determine my identity through asserting autonomy, agency, meaning and recognition, it has driven me to a high level of commitment, perseverance and focus. It has also generated in me the courage to take risks. And yet, motivation is an attribute that leads to creating opportunities for work but not necessarily to creating opportunities for transformative experiences. If I was ever able to facilitate a space for transformation through TO for anyone in the three case studies, it was through the qualities and attributes that come from presence and reflection.

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<sup>20</sup> At the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference 2008 in Omaha, Nebraska, Augusto Boal led a workshop on making legislative theatre using forum-like skits.

<sup>21</sup> Since the completion of Relationship Status I have been involved in two other significant forum theatre projects, one with federal funding.

## Presence

During one of my first sessions with the men in case study one, I became aware of having been in a state of such full attention that I noticed it only after I had stopped an action and was looking back at it. While it might sound obvious, as Jackson (1995, trans, p. xxiii) points out, one needs to be observant; it's a well-known requirement of any facilitator. This experience was more than just being observant: it was being 'present' and it was one of the first qualities I recognised as absolutely essential at particular moments throughout the interventions. Being present made it possible for other important attributes to arise.

By being present, I mean being both there in the action as the facilitator (who needed to get the participants to follow certain instructions and carry out the activities), as well as being there as a spectator on the sidelines observing what was going on between everyone, ensuring that neither I nor anyone else got in the way of what was being created. This duality meant dwelling throughout the work in a space of a tension and division, leading but not obstructing the flow. For instance, in the session with men when I first experienced being truly present, the men had not been depicting the scenes they were creating in a genuine way. They were holding back, perhaps by their fear of being judged or by their lack of interest in seeing the reality of their role in the violence. In any case, we were not getting anywhere because the scene was not genuine. I remember being highly focused watching and suddenly taking the place of one of the characters and saying what I thought that character would



have said. This incident is explained in more detail in chapter four. The result was that the men, apart from being a little shocked at my outburst, were able to show something that was real with which we could work. In this case, my unconscious action, an action that did not come from a cognitive analysis, did not allow the reservations the men had about being genuine to get in the way.

Kaplan describes this kind of presence as being 'both inside and outside at the same time: inside and outside the organism's (group's) process, inside and outside the intervention, inside and outside their own process' (Kaplan, 2002, p. xix). Likewise, this action did not allow my own fear of being wrong or not knowing to get in the way.

Yet another way of thinking about being present (and the one with which I am most familiar) comes from the Buddhist concept of mindfulness: a state of awareness that allows the mind to perceive the moment before meaning is given to a phenomenon by the mind. 'In a mindful practice there is no goal, no journey; you are just mindful of what is happening there' (Trungpa, 1976, p. 53). Being mindful of what is happening in this context might come from listening in an intentionally focused way. During the work presented in this thesis, I was not consciously trying to listen in the focused, 'deep listening' way that is suggested by Ziegler (1994, p. 54), but there were moments when this kind of listening is what occurred. In those occasions both listening and observing led to what Bohm might call a 'suspension' or slowing down enough to pay attention.

These attentional practices Bohm refers to pay close attention to thought processes so they can be separated from the habitual thinking and the views that keep a group stuck (Bohm in Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 5). Bohm calls these moments ‘acts of proprioception’: this ‘sustained attention to the movement of our intellectual, emotional and kinaesthetic process as these unfold in real-time’ (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 5). It is interesting to note that TO’s methodology facilitates something like this kind of suspension through the use of frozen images and tableaux, so that the role of the practitioner is in stopping actions and demanding that a character reveal their internal monologues. This revelation then allows all participants to pay attention to the thoughts behind the actions. While this is part of the methodology, it is up to the practitioner to decide the moment in which this suspension should occur. This proprioception of thought can enable participants to experience the kind of listening that is required for a transformative experience.

### ***Presencing***

This inquiry into what I experienced as being present led me to the work of Otto Scharmer (Senge, et al., 2004; Scharmer, 2009) and more experientially the work of Arawana Hayashi<sup>22</sup>. Scharmer describes the experience of ‘presencing’ as a space of ‘really’ seeing; a space of listening and paying attention from a ‘stillness, collective creativity’ or ‘generative flow’ that make a ‘deep social emergence’ possible (Scharmer, 2009, p. 236). Being present is acting from a connection with a deeper source of knowing that informs each

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<sup>22</sup> I trained with Hayashi in March 2014. The quotes attributed to her are from notes made during that training.

action as it arises so that it is an action with the highest potential to transform. Innately, it is a state of trust that the next necessary action will be the right one because it is emerging from an unseen connection to the real, present energy and spirit of the moment (Hayashi, personal communication, March, 2014).

Scharmer's *Theory U* (2009) offers a 'compositional frame' (Hayashi, personal communication, March 2014) for this possible U-shaped trajectory through different 'field structures of attention' inside a dialogic process that involves 'presencing', the most transformative space (2009, p. 236). This 'presencing' or 'connecting to the source' can then be followed by an upward movement towards co-creating actions, or in Scharmer's terms 'crystallising' what is desired and intended, 'prototyping' and fine-tuning what this action might require and finally setting up practices and structures that allow 'performing' that action (2009, p. 38). Many parallels can be drawn from the upward curve of Scharmer's Theory U to the rehearsal and performance qualities of TO and its many branches. However, here I want to focus on the parallels in the role of the practitioner in facilitating this journey past judgment and fear.

One of the biggest barriers to being able to make these movements towards transformative listening is judgment. Judgment in listening cannot be present when '...self-empowerment, a new self-perspective, a new mediation between spirit and social biography are in the making' (Ziegler, 1994, p. 54). The speaker, or in the case of TO, those making the images or improvising an action, must truly perceive that they are not being judged. Scharmer also refers

to the 'Voice of Judgement' as one of the three barriers to co-creating a desired future. A practitioner must be able to 'shut down or suspend the Voice of Judgement...' or 'make no progress towards accessing creativity...deeper levels of the U' (Scharmer, 2009, p. 246). In addition, Scharmer refers to the 'Voice of Cynicism' and the 'Voice of Fear'; both are equally powerful in sabotaging any attempts to 'surrendering' and 'diving into the fields around us' (2009, p. 246).

In case study one, I remember the moments before the session being nervous and scared of my ability to know what would be needed in the moment. I sat at home thinking about the session and quietly wondering if I would be able to lead the group to explore their behaviour in their own way, with their own language and their own scenes and important moments; in effect, to conduct a Rainbow<sup>23</sup> process for the men. This session was the first in which we would attempt some Rainbow work and I had absolutely no experience in doing this. When it came to the moment I mentioned above, I do not remember thinking about anything. I was watching with a feeling of being plugged into their resistance as they faltered in their attempts to reenact the situation authentically.

This deep connection (that I must admit has only occurred on a number of occasions) allowed me to overcome my fear of being inadequate and incapable of leading the session effectively. Through overcoming this barrier, I believe that I enabled some of the men to overcome their own voices of judgement and fear. Thus, being present is not a state that allows the

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<sup>23</sup> Rainbow of Desire: one of the principal Boal techniques employed in the case studies described here.

participants or the practitioner to judge what is best. Rather, we can simply discern what is, or to hear what is not being said, and to see what is not being acted out. Kaplan reminds practitioners 'not to fill ourselves with opinions and information and expert solutions, but to empty ourselves so that we may allow the social organism's own process to evolve with integrity and rightfulness' (2002, p. xix). Similarly, presencing as described by Scharmer, requires an authentic 'letting go' and 'letting come', and is something that a practitioner can aspire to generate in a group (2009, p. 38).

If presence can be seen as a continuum a practitioner can move along this continuum and be present in varying degrees. That is where I stood with regards to this concept of presence during the three case studies. Even with a small amount of presence comes an ability to adapt. I believe that this is the openness that Jackson is talking about: an openness to go where you had not thought you might need to go. Or it may be an openness to omit something that had previously been considered necessary.

The cultivation of this skill takes time and means, and involves having a high level of self-awareness and a high level of emotional and social intelligence, in order to control and refocus emotions so that they do not affect behaviours negatively (Goleman, 1995, p. 43). Skills that benefit the transformative experience that a practitioner aims to facilitate include the qualities of self-awareness, knowing one's triggers, being able to regulate and monitor oneself, and having the empathy to understand others' emotions and the capacity to

influence them (1995, p. 43). As I recount in the following chapters, I found myself lacking skills in this area on so many occasions. As I agree with Kaplan that the practitioner who holds the space is ‘... responsible for maintaining awareness and centredness in all’ (Kaplan, 2002, p. xviii) then my shortcomings probably reduced the potential of my work to have transformative effects.

In all, presence allows many important qualities that may not come naturally to the practitioner, qualities such as adaptability, flexibility, improvisation, acceptance and most importantly I have discovered, the ability to reflect effectively.

## **Reflection**

From the beginning of this study I adopted reflection, or more specifically reflexivity, as a central research methodology. Details of this process are described in chapter two. It was with this research goal in mind that I began making notes or audio recordings after every TO session I conducted. I knew that, as a novice, I would need to record my experience, feelings and ideas through this very intentional reflective journaling so that I could remember what went on in each session in order to analyse it and make it part of this research.

Something that has emerged over the course of this study is a profound empirical understanding of the central role that reflection plays in this practice. In agreement with Taylor, ‘...to be an effective practitioner in applied theatre is to be a reflective practitioner’ (2003, p. 70).

This kind of conscious reflection began when I started working with the men who had been violent, described at more length in the next chapter. At the end of each session I would record, through free writing, short notes, or through audio recordings what I had experienced in the session. I made note of the exercises I had done with the men, how I thought the men had reacted to them, whether the activities seemed useful or relevant, if I thought I had given clear directions, what I had felt, and my general thoughts about doing this work with the men. At this point I had not come across Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) or Mezirow's levels of reflectivity (Redmond, 2006, 16) or Johns' model for structured reflection (Johns, 2004, p. 17). I was not reflecting in any particularly structured way or following any specific method, but simply recording what I was experiencing as part of my research method in order to understand the practitioner better. However, over time as I have become more adept at paying attention, I have realised the critical role reflection has played in the development and learning of this practice. Reflection has not only allowed me to understand the practitioner better; reflection has allowed me to become a better practitioner.

Reflection, defined as a practice that can bring '...unconscious aspects of experience to conscious awareness' and create 'opportunities to experience the world and oneself in a fundamental different way' (Sengers, Boehner, David and Kaye, 2005, p. 50), has long been used to facilitate ongoing learning. As Dewey argued, reflective thinking can give us insights into 'the relationship between what we try to do and what happens in consequence' (Redmond,

2006, p. 10). Dewey's work in the area of adult learning set a foundation for the work of others who uphold reflection as a tool for greater self-awareness and knowledge (2006, p. 9). For example, Habermas proposed that to look beyond 'unjust dominant ideologies' a person must exercise critical reflection (Redmond, 2006, p. 14). Similarly, for Freire it is through critical reflection that a person can become conscious of her own (oppressed) reality in order to act and improve it, in order to have praxis (Freire, 1970, p. 65). Likewise, for Mezirow, who has contributed greatly to the field of transformative learning, reflection can lead to critical consciousness that could free a person from the constraints of 'psycho-cultural assumptions' (Redmond, 2006, p. 18) leading to a 'more informed, nuanced, sophisticated or deeper understanding,' (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139). For all these theorists and educators the awareness and self-knowledge possible through reflection has important emancipatory qualities.

Schön<sup>24</sup> was influenced by these ideas and proposed that the incongruity that we sometimes experience between the way we purport to act and the way we act, is due to tacit and deeply embedded 'theories-in-use' that guide our behaviour (Schön, 1987, p. 255). Reflection enables a person to discern whether a particular theory-in-use guiding a behaviour will lead to the desired goal and if not, enable that person to change the action. This 'reflective practitioner' described by Schön is thus able to negotiate the 'indeterminate zones of practice' (1987, p. 13) that are faced by those who work in environments in which learning must occur by doing. Before I stepped into the

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<sup>24</sup> In research conducted with Chris Argyris.



first TO session that I conducted, I had never conducted a TO session. TO, like other practices describe by Schön possess 'uncertainty, uniqueness' and 'escape(s) the canons of technical rationality' (Schön, 1987, p. 6). For each of the case studies presented, I used a TO technique and many TO and other applied theatre games and activities. However, similarities between and among each case study go only that far. Each group presented its own set of unique challenges and dynamics; each group required a different approach and unfolding of the work.

At first I was very conscious of the learning that I accessed through the 'on-action' reflection, that is, the reflection that I did after I had run a session or after a certain activity (Johns, 2004, p. 2). For example, realizing as I sat in a quiet space purposefully thinking back to the session that the way I had given a set of instructions for a certain activity had been confusing. Then I reflected on how I could do it more clearly next time. However, with time I started to become increasingly aware of the kind of 'in-action' reflection that I was constantly engaging in throughout the session. The kind of reflection that made me realise that what I had assumed to know about something was not correct, in other words I was critically thinking about the thinking that lead to that assumption (Schön, 1987, p. 28).

For instance, there is an activity called 'grab the power', in which a table is set up with a chair behind it and a few chairs are set up in front facing the desk, as it might be set up in the office of a manager or in a classroom. The

participants are then asked to take a position in the scene that would give them the position of power. This activity is used to examine power and the concept of removing the power from a character by simply changing positions. The first time I used this method was with a group of health workers in a workshop about their work and challenges working with homeless populations. Homeless people were also workshop participants. The first person to take the position of power went straight to where most people go and sat in the chair behind the desk like a 'boss'. The next person is then supposed to come into the space and position themselves and the furniture in a way that power is taken away from the first character. In this case, the person who followed went up to the seated 'boss' and positioned herself as a doctor taking blood pressure and seeming quite concerned about the boss's condition. The seated character very quickly lost its powerful impact and the activity continued in this way, with many varied and interesting depictions and positions of power presented.

When I conducted this activity with the young Aboriginal women in case study two, the activity was not easy for them to understand and I had to explain it a number of times. When someone finally decided to go into the scene, they also went to the seat behind the desk. However, the person who followed went straight up to the seated character and pointed a gun at the character's head, changing the power dynamic radically, but also limiting what was possible for the rest of the participants to offer into the scene. What ensued was a series of I've-got-a-bigger-gun-than-you series of images. I found myself having to intervene and request that no guns be used in the scene.

After thinking about it for some time one young woman climbed on a chair and looked down at the room. Then another girl jumped up on the desk and looked down at the girl on the chair. She jumped off and then someone put a chair on the desk and looked down at the person standing on the desk. The actions were repeated with variation only of the height achieved through the use of the chairs, a set of actions that had only limited possibilities.

While the group was carrying out this activity I remember thinking, 'what can I do to improve this activity because it is not working the way it is meant to?' I finally jumped into the scene, and, while one person was standing up on top of a chair on top of the desk, I positioned myself with my hands at the feet of the chair as if I was going to tip it over. The young women thought it was a great move and very funny, but they did not really get engaged by this activity. I had never encountered the situation in which the activity did not deliver its learning and had to reflect-in-action to address the challenge and try to salvage its value to the session.

When I consider it at the time of finishing this chapter, some seven years later, every part of running a TO session is a reflection-in-action activity. The example described above is just one of many in which I had to move from 'trial to trial' where '...reflection on each trial and its results sets the stage for the next trial' (Schön, 1987, p. 27). This is not simply applying what is already known; it is performing an 'on-the-spot experiment' (1987, p. 29) that has an impact on the following actions. It adds to the knowledge that is then available to the

practitioner afterwards, but at the time it is an experiment. Furthermore, what I have also become aware of is what Johns refers to as reflection within-the-moment (2004, p. 2); that is, dialoguing with myself about how I am feeling and reacting to the activity in that moment. With the example above, I remember being very frustrated because the exploration of power through this embodied activity was not effective, frustrated because I was assuming that it would be so obvious, as it had been to other participants in other sessions, and as it had been to me when I first took part in that activity as a learner. It was only later that I reflected on how I might have been able to use the 'bigger than you' images the young women had constructed if I had not been so set on exposing more subtle forms of 'grabbing power'. In other words, I was not able to access the within-the-moment reflection that might have given me insights into the perspectives of the young women in order to use 'their' examples and their constructions of power to explore the issue.

TO and applied theatre in general are inherently reflective practices. The practitioner leads participants/audiences to create aesthetic moments that engender reflection through taking action. In TO in stepping into the action, in becoming an actor, the participant, or the spect-actor, engages in an act of reflection: 'an actor, acting, taking action, he has learnt to be his own spectator. This spectator (spect-actor) is not only an object; he is the subject' the participant is 'a spect-actor acting on the actor who acts (Boal, 1995, p. 13). In the same manner, the practitioner, the joker, the person that is facilitating this

reflection in others, must also be immersed in a reflective process of continuous self-discovery and learning as a person and thereby as a practitioner.

This is especially important because as O'Connor observes, the mirror of theatre is often 'dimpled and broken, obscured in places' so that it is able to 'bend light into places that have been well hidden to reveal new and often quite startling discoveries' (2007, p. 8). The practitioner's ability to dwell and facilitate the examination of these 'refracted' and 'distorted reflections' can give participants access to play with an alternative version of their realities and themselves (O'Connor, 2007, p. 9).

I am aware of the arguments that question the validity of reflection as a practice and a skill. For Ixer, there is no such thing as reflection (1999); he argues that reflection is being used as 'legitimate pedagogy' that elevates work-based learning to the same level as classroom learning (1999, p. 523). However, I am presenting here what I have experienced and uncovered for myself through this study. What is more, while trying to instill this reflective habit, I soon became aware of what Senge (in Johns, 2004, p. 7) calls the 'creative tension between our vision of practice and our current reality'. I have never written out a plan that I have been able to follow right to the end – there is always a redirection, or a tangent, or another activity that has to be employed or an adaptation of an activity. Senge et al. (2004, p. 35) talk about the creation of something new often requiring a specialized container – an example is that of a baby to whom the normal adult body chemistry would be toxic. This example can be paralleled

to our learning: when we are learning something new, we can feel awkward and stupid and it is not difficult to give up with the argument that it is just too hard and it could not be that important. The comparison to an immune system is interesting, as it would harm the existing system to have a new way of thinking or doing things and establish a new system (Senge et al., 2004, p. 35). In other words, any system is going to demonstrate some innate resistance to innovation as it would destroy/alter the existing system – this is similar for a new way of learning or thinking. For example, related to the reflection, learning this practice and instilling it in my own process of reflection have met with plenty of resistance. I find this resistance in the gaps in reflection notes I made after sessions, or more accurately, the notes I did not make on many occasions, or the default tendency to want to blame the participants for not understanding the tasks or for not engaging at times.

Nonetheless, for me reflexivity, accessed through the space of being present as described in the previous section, is central to being able to go where the session needs to go and to potentially benefit the individuals, deeply exploring the issue being tackled. Reflection facilitates learning so that the space is expansive enough to allow the emergence of everything that needs to be expressed and exposed. Thus, reflection is not just part of the research methodology that I am employing in this research, in thinking about the work for the benefit of this thesis. Reflection is also an essential practice. It is a practice that must become an innate attribute of a practitioner.

## **Tensions**

Taylor lists what he considers are six critical characteristics that an applied theatre practitioner needs for effective practice, including risk-taking, open-mindedness and flexibility, critical thinking and collaboration (Taylor, 2003, p. 74). I propose that these, and other important characteristics, are possible through the existence and cultivation of a certain level of motivation, presence and reflexivity throughout the practice. These attributes enable the skills to be developed; they are also what give the practitioner the ability to navigate a number of common tensions in this work.

## **Power**

The first tension relates to power. While in theory, the practitioner is a person who remains impartial and is focused on allowing the group to reach its own outcomes through its own participation and contributions; in effect, the facilitator has enormous amounts of power. The practitioner chooses the games and activities, as well as deciding when one is finished and the next begins. For instance, when activating the frozen images, a principal tool, the practitioner is responsible for asking each character in the image a variety of different questions (about the fears or desires or simply about the feelings or the inner thoughts). The order in which the facilitator asks, the length of time he or she spends on a particular exploration of an image and then with the help of the participants, and the scenes he or she chooses to deconstruct: all these actions reflect an exercise of power by the facilitator. Further, interpreting what a person is expressing, suggesting what something might mean in a scene or stopping a

scene at a certain moment or letting it go on for a certain amount of time: all of these actions carry power that is not in the hands of the participants, even though they are generating the material being acted. Rarely would a participant say, 'I would like to let this go on for longer,' or the opposite: 'I would like this to stop here.'

This position of power was very clear in the work I did with the men who had been violent. Often they would want to do a scene that treated alcohol and other drug abuse; in fact, almost every time they were keen to look at their drug use and examine how they were victims to the addiction. However, in my view, this approach was not going to get them to look at their role in the offences. Rather they would continue to direct the blame for their behaviour to a substance or a set of circumstances outside of themselves. Thus, I considered that their approach was not going to be useful and I made a decision. In this situation, as a theatre practitioner, I had the power to direct the focus of the analysis. Similarly, I experienced power strongly when I was working with the young people on the forum theatre piece. After some time, they expressed explicitly that they did not think that the warm-up activities and games that we played before each session and each rehearsal were necessary and they wanted to get straight into the acting and rehearsing. Knowing that these activities are essential to the creative process and the aesthetic connection to the work, I insisted on doing some activities. Because of this decision, I found myself having to re-engage and be the person who 'made them do' certain activities.



Bracher identifies recognition as the most principal identity need: 'to be 'appreciated and validated, or at least acknowledged' (2006, p. 7). Todorov, whom Bracher refers to, claims '... man does not begin to exist except through the gaze of others...each of us is born twice, in nature and in society, to life and to existence' (2001, p. 54). While Bracher's work is centred on pedagogy and the role of identity in learning or as an obstacle to learning, his discussion of the ways a teacher upholds her identity can both hinder and/or enable the learning of others is significant. This is a parallel I would like to make to the role of the 'transformative' theatre practitioner. How I uphold my identity within different groups will have a huge impact on the potential for that workshop to be transformative or not. Or it can be transformative for some and not for others. The way I handle the authority that dwells in the identity of practitioner will directly affect how the participants will engage in the work and to what degree it will have the potential to transform. This, I found, is not only true of any work with young people, but also with any group of any ages in which one person is holding the space and directing the activities.

### **Difficultator**

Another tension (that relates to power) is found in the role that the practitioner has in being a 'difficultator' (Boal 1995, p. xix). This joker role that Boal assigns to the facilitator of a forum theatre piece, and that is also active in the workshop based work, ensures that the group does not follow the easy path of the familiar and the most 'correct' possibilities. The joker constantly reminds participants of the many layers and complex elements making up the issue and

the possible outcomes and solutions that may not be the easiest or most apparent. The role of joker, according to Boal, is 'to assist in the birth of all ideas' but not to manipulate the spect-actors into coming up with ideas that align with his or her own (Boal 1992, p. 262). They are there to guide the participants deeply into the problem, into the 'thickness of the knot' and into the multiplicity of perspectives, or factors that make up the issue. Their role is to problematise because problem-posing is 'as important as finding solutions' (Jackson, in Boal 1995, p. xx). Thus, the practitioner 'personally decides nothing' but, at the same time, decides if an action that is being presented is 'magic' or inadequate. There must also be a balance between being 'dynamic' (so that the audience is stirred and motivated), while at the same time not influencing the audience/group in their decision whether a suggested action has worked or not (Boal, 1992, p. 261). The practitioner in TO then is there both to follow the methodology, guiding an individual's story out into the space of the collective where it is also the group's story, and also to 'keep it real'. I see the role as one that challenges the participants to emerge from behind their masks into a space of connectedness to their truth (or the truth that wants to emerge); so they can look at the issue unencumbered by their own protection mechanisms and survival techniques. This role of pushing for the truth carries tremendous power and can be testing to navigate as discussed in the chapters following.

I never have a solution or a point of view that I'm trying to put across to the participants. However, if I am conducting a workshop on respectful relationship, for example, I am privileging the idea that men must not be violent

towards women, that most violence against women is acted out by men and that women are often the victims of domestic violence. When I decide not to allow the men in the workshop to examine the effects of their addiction on their violence, I am privileging the idea that they cannot blame their addiction for their offences. In effect, I cannot separate myself from the views I hold about certain behaviours. Thus I always have to be vigilant so that I do not voice or guide a scene or analysis in a particular way. In addition, this difficultator role can perhaps generate criticism from those that are paying for the work and who may have strong views or ulterior motives that control or influence the participants.

### **Who's the Client?**

This discussion leads to the next tension that is always present in the work, especially in the work with organisations, but in all work that is paid for by a 'client'. There is always a tension between what the client has asked the practitioner to do and what is discovered during the course of the workshop that the participants really want to explore. It is important to question who is paying for the workshop and what their intentions are. For a practitioner, the aim is to provide the participants with a space to be themselves and enter into an honest examination of important issues. In some cases, the possibilities may be the least preferred by the organisation paying for the workshop. Where does the loyalty of the practitioner lie? How to play a diplomatic role so that there is enough trust in the space for everyone to really participate and enter wholly into the process and that there is also enough willingness from the client to listen and want to do what is seen as best by participants?

This tension was very present in the work carried out with the young Aboriginal women on protective behaviours in case study two. They did not want to do this work; they did not want to look at ways to behave more protectively and demand respect from prospective partners. They wanted to have a break from their lives and have fun away from home. Their elders and the organisation that paid for the workshops wanted them to learn more about staying safe from sexual abuse and from violent relationships, both of which are important. However, in this case, it meant that the bulk of the work was about engaging the women. That was a challenge every moment of the workshop.

### **Yes or No?**

The last point of tension that I found challenging was between being a business owner working for myself and being a social change practitioner. As a business owner, I have to generate work to ensure that I (and everyone I contract) stay employed. This reality has to affect the price I charge, the actions I take to generate work and the choices I make regarding what work I will actually take on. For example, there is a tension that needs to be negotiated between quoting a client a competitive daily fee for training of trainers that an NGO can realistically afford and is well below the standard training of trainer rates, but that will sustain the practitioner and other workers so that we can do the work.

When I first began doing this work I ran many workshops for free (I describe this in chapter six). Some of these free workshops were not taken seriously, or were poorly attended because there was nothing for the

organisation to lose. When a client agrees to pay a fee they are communicating that they believe the work is worth doing. My experience confirms that people are often more engaged when they think they are getting something of value, which was paid for (because money is what we use to indicate value) than when they are given something for free.

Balancing personal financial needs, wanting to earn a good abundant living and remaining focused on the reality of this work and the potential it has to generate thought and transform is a constant wrestling match. Similarly, what are the parameters when deciding whom to take money from? Do I work for companies that are having disastrous effects on the planet – or do I have a philosophy that we are all having a disastrous effect on the Earth? Do I have system of gauging whose actions are most damaging and refuse to work with those that I consider worst?

To conclude, a practitioner that seeks to create spaces and moments of transformation is a practitioner that must be willing to develop a discipline of reflection and an ability to be present. These two attributes will give her access to all the necessary competencies needed, adaptation, flexibility, patience, risk-taking, creativity, acceptance, self-awareness, engagement, non-judgment, and anything else the unique group requires at each particular moment.

Further, reflection in this practice has become both a ‘distancing strategy’ allowing me to closely examine what is occurring on many levels. As Taylor writes, a practitioner is often pulled in opposing directions by what is

requested of the funders or clients and what is actually emerging as essential in the moment of the practice. Likewise, reflection is an important tool in coming and remaining aware of our own views and values about the issue so that these are not what are transmitted to the participants and instead they are free to learn and explore their own visions and needs (Taylor, 2003, p. 71)

While she will benefit from having some level of experience in the methodology, she will also benefit from being able to dwell in a space of not knowing and constant movement between being the facilitator and being able to observe the facilitation from a distance.

Similarly, mindfulness and presence enable a practitioner to see and listen beyond his own limiting views, or her own judgments and allow the organism to travel between the reality of what is and the possibility of what could be.

In addition the practitioner needs a significant level of intrinsic motivation; the kind of motivation that will give her energy, determination, sometimes stubbornness and drive to get some of these projects off the ground. At the same time she will identify with the work because it is aligned with the values and the self-determination she seeks and this knowledge will allow her to change course mid-way or even walk away if the freedom of the participants is compromised. In effect, a transformative practitioner is one that is willing to be transformed every time she works with a group of people.

## CHAPTER 5

### Theatre of the oppressor: 'balancing on the edge of a teacup' and the aesthetic of presencing

*We work with the possible, not only with the given* (Kaplan, 2002, p. 200)

In this chapter, as in the following two chapters, I describe my experience of using TO and explain how motivation, presence and reflection emerged empirically as essential to the practice. This first case study stands out in two ways. Firstly, it was the first TO work I had done independently. Internally, I felt fearful, daring, capable and foolish. This tension was visible in the reflection accompanying the work. I was also very conscious of gender and power dynamics, unsure of how I would deal with them. Secondly, the study stands out because it was the first time I distinctly experienced something like presencing in the practice; that is, a movement into an action without knowing or planning; listening, observing and allowing something to be generated without knowing what that would be. This had a profound impact on me and on my understanding of what is possible through this and other generative practices.

This chapter relies on notes, journals and voice recordings subsequent to each session. Firstly, in discussing motivation, I outline the trajectory I followed while formulating, planning and eventually generating the opportunity to do this work. I also explore existing literature around using theatre with offenders. Secondly, I examine selected moments and activities that contain elements of presence as it emerged in the sessions. I aim to tease out the times these

elements were there and the times they eluded me to show how they might be cultivated, and my struggle in doing so. Lastly, I discuss how reflection played a crucial role in leading this work. At all times, I am self-conscious of the newness of this work and my lack of experience, while at the same time, I am filled with the 'knowing' that it is the right thing for me to be doing at this moment. Throughout, I describe many activities in some detail and share directly from the journaling to show how I processed my work.

### **Motivation – Theatre of the Oppressor**

I was drawn to working with men who had been labelled 'perpetrators' of domestic violence (DV) for several reasons. First, I had already worked closely with some survivors of DV through another organisation, as explained in Chapter one. I had co-facilitated a few workshops with women who had been victims of physical, emotional and verbal abuse, and was aware of many of the challenges they faced in walking away. I had been exposed to one side of the issue: the devastating and debilitating impacts it had on the lives of women and their children. More personally, while I had not experienced the nightmare of living with violence, I fell into the statistical pie slice of women who had directly experienced a form of gender-based abuse. Professionally, violence against women in the dominant patriarchal system troubles me, as I am certain it does other social practitioners, because it is a global issue of inequity, central to many of the struggles posed in work with communities. As I saw it, men were the most oppressive force against women and their wellbeing.



Second, and more practically, I was a beginner. As a newcomer to working with TO, DV presented an issue I felt I could facilitate effectively as the positions of power and lack of power appeared relatively unambiguous. On one hand, there was the person (usually male) physically, verbally, psychologically or emotionally abusing; and, on the other, was another (usually female) being physically, verbally, psychologically or emotionally abused. I perceived DV as an issue with somewhat clear distinctions between the ‘perpetrator’ and the ‘perpetrated’. Of course, this perception is not true in practice. Generally and simplistically, however, there exists an oppressor and an oppressed. This simplicity was important to me at the time, as I needed the clarity I believed this issue offered.

Third, and most importantly, especially in terms of the motivation, it would break new ground<sup>25</sup>. I had experienced the effectiveness of TO with the women with whom I had worked. I saw how the supportive aesthetic space and simple activities offered a fun and protected place that enabled them to explore their experiences – past and present. They each shared difficult stories that resonated with the collective, which generated common strength and courage. I wondered if this could also be a tool that allowed the offender to see his role in abuse. My questions were as follows: If the oppressed holds the key to her/his liberation, as Freire asserted (1970, p. 44), is that not also the case for the oppressor? Can oppressors be transformed enough to reveal themselves as they are? In other words, can they see themselves as oppressors; can they see themselves as they are seen by those they oppress? I was motivated by the

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<sup>25</sup> I did not know it at the time but Alon (2012) and Kuftinec (2012), among others like Weinblatt (2012), have worked with the ‘oppressor’ directly.

possibility of not only doing social transformation work using creativity and theatre, but also breaking new ground in the use of this practice. I was motivated by the possible contribution this use of TO could make towards addressing the issue of DV. What is more, I was also motivated by the prospect of doing future work using TO and getting paid for it.

This journey began when I started thinking about the young man in Tibet and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I thought a more sustainable solution could exist to men spreading disease to their partners than simply getting those with less power (i.e. the women) to gain awareness. An even more powerful way to generate what Freire calls a more 'humanized' society (Freire, 1970, p. 68) would come from the oppressor becoming aware of the role he played in the oppression. Moreover, the paradox and complexity of the system in which we were working in Tibet struck me at the time. The young Tibetan man, viewed by many in the world as existing in an oppressed state, living with restricted freedom and the imposed limitations of a colonized people, is, in turn, an 'oppressor' when he refuses to do what the young sex worker asks him, e.g., wear a condom. Thus, he transmits disease to his wife, and subsequently, to other sex partners. Why would he consider himself an oppressor?

In an article entitled 'Pedagogy of the Oppressor', where this question is tackled to some degree, Allen (2002, p. 44) writes that '...all of the oppressors, through all of their social strata need to account for and rebel against their oppressor identity.' How is this possible? How can someone with privileges and

power acquire the necessary introspection that would enable him or her to ‘...take responsibility for their own structural advantage and intermediate hegemonic location...?’ (Allen, 2002, p. 44). Allen points to Freire’s distinction between ‘oppressor’ and a ‘dehumanised’ person, arguing the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the oppressed and oppressor’s relationship (Allen, 2002, p. 6).

David Diamond explains his break from traditional TO and his view of a community as a system. His example relates to forum theatre, but encompasses the idea that the oppressor ‘was not created in a vacuum’ and must be included in our work:

I believe the oppressor is always in the audience in some manifestation...we have a responsibility to create...theatre in which both the oppressed and the oppressors see themselves on stage as real people and legitimate members of the community, who are engaged in their own complex struggles (Diamond, 2007, pp. 40-41)

Furthermore, Freire said, ‘the oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow within them’ (1970, p. 64). What if this were true, too, for the oppressor? If the oppressor were to see examples of his or her own vulnerability, it might generate the critical reflection needed for a fundamental shift in thinking, or ‘habits of mind’ (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). TO could be a complementary tool to bring awareness to men who want to change, who know their behaviour negatively

affects their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In my mind, surely, some men who are violent wanted to change! A woman needed help to break out of a violent cycle, but once she had broken it and freed herself, her abuser would still be free to behave in similar violent ways with another woman. He was the ideal target of intervention, not for the kind that attempts to teach 'right' behaviour, much as when we tried to teach safe sex in Tibet; rather, a generative intervention through the playful activities and techniques of the TO methodology.

After the project was over, I travelled to the US to train with Augusto Boal<sup>26</sup>. I was anxious to discuss with Boal the work I had done and wanted to continue doing with offenders. While Boal did not outright disapprove of using TO in working with perpetrators, during a conversation in Omaha<sup>27</sup> in 2008, he unequivocally explained that TO must be used to work with people experiencing oppression (Boal, personal communication, 22-25 May, 2008). Like Freire, Boal was not convinced that the oppressor could ever help liberate the oppressed. On the contrary, like Freire, he believed only the oppressed could liberate their oppressors through liberating themselves (Freire, 1970, p. 44).

Boal insisted that the only way an 'oppressor' could be brought to this work was if he or she was aware of the need to change. 'He must want to change', he said sternly (Boal, personal communication, 22-25 May, 2008). From his perspective, the work must lead towards the liberation of those who

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<sup>26</sup> New York and then Omaha, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Before and after the 2008 Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference (PTO) in Omaha, Nebraska, Boal conducted a number of workshops one in New York City and the other in Omaha. I attended both and presented the work I had done so far with the men at the facility. This conversation took place during a post-conference workshop on legislative theatre.

are struggling with the oppression. That view made sense; however, while the brunt of the oppression was being experienced by the oppressed (in this case, the victim of DV), was not the oppressor also suffering from the fruit of his behaviour? He was criminalised, separated from his family, shunned by society and his freedom restricted. He also struggled, even if he was the oppressor.<sup>28</sup>

Also in Omaha at that time I met and discussed these thoughts with Marc Weinblatt, whose work using TO to help those with privilege was encouraging. Weinblatt, referring to Boal's image of a man (oppressed) lying on the ground and another standing over him (oppressor) with a foot on his chest, also wonders '...how much easier might it be if the oppressor removed his own foot?' (Weinblatt, 2013, p. 24)

Balfour writes that drama with offenders should be seen as a way to transform understanding in ways that pursue 'personal growth, development and knowledge' (Balfour, 2003, p. 71). This understanding is what I believed TO could bring to working with men who are violent in their relationships. This understanding would involve not simply a 'treatment' that attempts to change attitudes and values against their will, but rather, a radical transformative journey on which the offenders and the practitioner embark together without knowing exactly how the journey would go or where it would lead.

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<sup>28</sup> Boal and I were not able to discuss this matter further, as the workshop was underway and others wanted to speak to him.

## The Facility

This project took place in the outskirts of Perth, Western Australia, at a residential facility for men who have been violent to their partners and families. During the time I conducted workshops there, the men were expected to stay for a period of 12 weeks, as mandated by the courts or other statutory institutions such as the Department for Child Protection. During their stay, the men underwent rehabilitative Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), in groups and individually. This therapy aimed to address aggressive behaviour and rehabilitate the men so that they could return to their normal lives and control their violence. They were not incarcerated; some chose to go out and visit their children at the weekends, but all were expected to comply and attend all the counselling sessions.

Like most rehabilitation programs using CBT in Australia and elsewhere, the aim is to 'enhance self-control, critical reasoning, problem-solving, interpersonal perspective taking, socio-moral decision-making, victim awareness and to prevent relapse' (Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey & Day, 2004, p. 30). The facility's psychologists followed a weekly program that tackled these aims in various ways, illustrated through a series of case studies. Individual counselling on issues that arose during the group sessions or issues they felt were particularly relevant supported this program. In addition to the CBT, residents agreed to participate in parenting, anger management and cooking workshops. The anger management was part of the CBT 'cognitive restructuring' (Novaco 1976 in Naeem, Clarke & Kingdom, 2009, pp. 20-31), informed by Novaco's model of anger. These programs premise that the cause of many violent

offences is 'poor anger management', which are important to the rehabilitation process (Heseltine, Day & Sarre, 2011, p. 19).

The men were responsible for cooking their meals and cleaning their rooms. There were strict rules on drinking and other drugs, respect towards the staff and program participation. For many, the first weeks were an opportunity to detox, as a large number of the residents were heavy alcohol and drugs users. Many men did not make it through the twelve weeks. Some were simply charged while they were there and transferred to a prison to await sentencing. While I was working with the residents, most of those who did not make it to twelve weeks were evicted for offences like taking drugs, staying out without permission or being abusive to staff or residents. The psychologists on staff worked shifts and someone was on site 24 hours. As far as I could determine, it was the only residential program for DV offenders in Australia, and one of the first in the world.

I had approached the coordinator of the facility, forwarding him my outlined ideas about the type of complementary role the workshops could have to the CBT already offered to the men. He was interested and after some months invited me to meet the psychologist in charge of the program. She was very supportive and a few months after that, I began the 'Act Out' sessions, as they called them. We agreed that because it was a bit 'radical', it would be a pilot project with no payment. I was extremely keen to begin and put into practice what, until then, had been merely a notion or concept.

Using drama with offenders is not radical, of course. Drama programs and programs using other arts-based approaches have existed in prisons since the 1960s<sup>29</sup> and fall under a philosophy of rehabilitation that rejects the concept of punishment and emphasises the social conditions affecting people that lead them to offend and the important role that society plays in helping them to ‘...explore alternative ways of social functioning that are legitimate’ (Balfour, 2004, p. 9). Scores of drama theatre programs are run in prisons and with offenders.<sup>30</sup> The prison and offender work I was most familiar with when I approached this facility was the work of the TiPP Centre (Theatre in Prison and Probation), an organisation working out of the University of Manchester’s drama department. I had read an evaluation on their Blagg techniques.<sup>31</sup> In Australia, the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, through their Prison Project,<sup>32</sup> has been conducting projects in prisons since 2006. Furthermore, much has been written in the last fifteen years about drama with offenders (Bergman and Hewish, 2003; Shailor, 2010; Balfour, 2003, 2004), especially within the prison setting. Although I never entertained the idea of doing therapy, the obvious therapeutic elements of TO (especially in the use of Rainbow and Cops), led to

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<sup>29</sup> Balfour (2004, p. 1) points to the work of Berlo et al. (1996) and suggests that there has probably been art in prisons since the first prison was opened.

<sup>30</sup> Geese Theatre Company is a well-known theatre company in Birmingham, UK that has conducted programs with thousands of offenders since 1987. Another well-known organisation is Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA), which was founded to work specifically in Sing Sing prison in New York ([www.rta-arts.com](http://www.rta-arts.com)).

<sup>31</sup> As used by Formaat in their work with female offenders across two prisons. Formaat is a theatre company based in the Netherlands. They use applied theatre, including Boal-based techniques, in social interventions ([www.formaat.org](http://www.formaat.org)).

<sup>32</sup> Curt Tofteland’s Shakespeare Behind Bars [www.shakespearebehindbars.org](http://www.shakespearebehindbars.org) has been the model for several Shakespeare performances in prison including Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble’s Prison Project [www.qldshakespeare.org](http://www.qldshakespeare.org) (under the artistic direction of Rob Pensalfini) and Jonathan Shailor’s Shakespeare in Prison Project [www.shakespeareprisonproject.com.au](http://www.shakespeareprisonproject.com.au). Both Shailor and Pensalfini employ Boal techniques in their projects.



me review psychology literature, which provides a wealth of research in using drama and enactment in therapy involving violence (Nichols and Fallenberg, 2000; Paré, Bondy & Malhotra, 2006; Hanec, 2004; Fuller and Strong, 2011; Blatner, 1996).

Moreover, I was aware of the debates about the value of ‘perpetrator programs’ using CBT and anger management. For a short time I was involved in convening the Stop Violence Against Women Campaign for one of the Perth Amnesty International groups. We had many discussions about wasting resources on ‘perpetrator programs’ when there are so many gaps in the support of women victims and survivors. I was involved in advocacy for establishment of more programs for men with ministers during the compiling of the National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (FAHCSIA, 2009). As Balfour points out, pro-feminist organisations also find it problematic that any behaviours addressed in CBT or other rehabilitation processes will not tackle the insidious presence of unequal power structures within a patriarchal social paradigm (Dobash and Dobash 1981, in Balfour, 2003, p. 12).

This thesis is not about evaluating whether drama with offenders is beneficial or which approaches achieve the best results. Rather, the focus is to examine what exists, in addition to a practitioner’s knowledge of the methodology that enhances the transformative potential of a practice. The focus is on the practitioner and the way he or she works with the participants.

My goal, when working with the men, was to conduct workshops that might bring the men closer to realizing and understanding that their behaviour was oppressive and they were responsible for correcting that behaviour, even if rooted in negative social, economic and psychological experiences they could not directly control (Clear and O'Leary, 1983 in Balfour 2003, p. 3). Through the workshops, they could explore their behaviour, unpack it and come up with possible non-oppressive ways to express themselves in the 'real' world. To be completely clear, in terms of offender programs and approaches, at the time I had only looked closely at the work of Alan Jenkins, whose discourse on abusive men is centered on an 'invitation to responsibility' for their actions (Jenkins, 1990). The Jenkins model, based in Narrative Therapy (White and Epston, 1990), offered a basis of themes to treat during each session, some of which I used to create sample sessions, e.g. 'She made me do it'. While I could see how TO would bring awareness to the concept of responsibility, I did not enter the session with this goal. I could also see how the reflection involved in Jenkins' work and the action of TO would possibly create the praxis that could help transform attitudes – and perhaps behaviours.

At this point, I had not explored Novaco's anger-management model, which underpins most anger-management programs (Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey & Day, 2004, p. 30), nor had I undertaken comprehensive research on the specific aims of CBT. Had I been more familiar with the aims of controlling physiological arousal and coping with provocations, as well as focusing on recognition of cognitive flaws like making wrong assumptions, jumping to

conclusions, and over-generalizing (Naeem, Clarke & Kingdom, 2009, p. 22), I might have incorporated this knowledge into the focus of sessions and perhaps been able to ask more pertinent questions. I did, however, become highly familiar with the Duluth model of DV interventions for women, which provided a scaffold for the sessions. The Power and Control and the Non-violence Wheels from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project were particularly good models on which to create session themes (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, nd.) The Wheels are divided into sections that describe various abusive behaviours.<sup>33</sup> All of these sections had specific actions that could be turned into scenes.<sup>34</sup> (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, nd.)

All these actions could somehow be created and used in relation to the men's experience and enacted in scenes where other men could intervene. I strongly felt TO could be a transformative, perhaps therapeutic, tool that complements the cognitive behavioural work in which the men were engaged in and would provide opportunities through aesthetic experience. Perhaps not all the men would be successfully engaged in this kind of approach or want to change. However, I assumed most residents would know they were in the program because of their unsuccessful behaviour and expectation to change. Most importantly, this work could enable them simply to get to know themselves better or, as Balfour writes, to 'help redefine subjectivity by clarification' (Balfour, 2003, 83). How was it they wanted to be? How would they really want their

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<sup>33</sup> For example, the Power and Control Wheel has the subthemes of using intimidation, using emotional abuse, using isolation, minimizing, denying and blaming, using children, using male privilege, using economic abuse, and using coercion and threats.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the section on emotional abuse listed: putting her down, making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she's crazy, playing mind games, humiliating her and making her feel guilty

relationships to be? Jenkins assures us that many of the men he worked with communicate 'preferences and desires for respectful relationships which are based on mutuality rather than fear' (Jenkins, 1997, pp. 43-47).

The TO sessions were to take place once a week for an hour and a half. A resident psychologist would be present during the session to ensure professional help was available to handle any incidents triggered by the sessions' content. This support was important to me because, while I felt confident the work would be useful and I would be able to facilitate the sessions, I was apprehensive about the appropriateness of my responses if there were any emotional upheavals. I was very aware that these men were in therapy and, while I could conduct a session that might have therapeutic benefits, I was not a therapist. It was also comforting because I would not be alone doing work I had never done before with a group of offenders.

The twelve-week program I was asked to put together had a number of goals. The first two sessions would familiarise the men with the theatre and its workings and introduce the format of the sessions. They would also help to build trust between everyone involved. Then, weeks 3 to 11 had the following goals:

- To recreate, enact and examine some of the choices in behaviours made by the men in the group
- To create images of feelings and attitudes towards various themes and issue in the group

- To re-vision the images and offer alternatives to the behaviour depicted in images
- To enact alternate behaviour and dynamise images with a respectful and non-violent choice and

I was also asked to provide a series of sample sessions. As noted, I had only run two TO sessions on my own.<sup>35</sup> Additionally and notably, at this point in the process, I was playing the role of salesperson. In pitching my idea, I used Jenkins' themes as springboards for the sessions providing plans with great detail regarding the role of the activities and games. I explained the warm-ups, how the activities served to reconnect the body, reengage the senses and spark creativity. I talked about the greater, more holistic involvement in analysing the issues and finding alternatives in the aesthetic experience. In effect, I *sold* the work using descriptions almost directly from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-actors* (1992). The detailed and structured sample sessions served as a means to get the work but I knew that the sessions would not run according to plan.

In reality, my 'plan' was to do the warm-up activities for about half an hour then move towards more bridging and activating activities (Rohd, 1998, p. 2). I would elicit some theme that had emerged during an earlier group session. If they had nothing to offer, I would fall back on the themes of 'control' or 'empathy', as, according to the literature, are both key issues in DV (Jenkins, 1990). I would elicit a story from whoever was willing to share and we would build a scene they thought depicted the story accurately with its unwanted

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<sup>35</sup> One had been with women survivors of violence and the other with facilitators of workshops with women survivors of violence.

ending. We would begin by creating only frozen images and activating those images. After they were familiar with the process, we would invite the men not involved in the scene to offer alternatives to the actions. The main techniques I planned to employ were 'Rainbow of Desire' or 'Cops in the Head', as explained in Chapter three<sup>36</sup>.

One of the rules I imposed on myself was that the session was not complete until I had journaled or recorded notes about the session while they were still fresh. I did not follow a methodology for reflecting. I was not aware of the Gibbs' reflective cycle of describing the experience, the feelings, the positive aspects, my interpretation of the experience, what I could have done and what I would do in the future (Gibbs, 1988 in Johns, 2004, p. 17). Instead, I wrote freely about the sessions. Often, when I reread what I have written, I cringe at the lengthy descriptive and emotional blurting, the lack of order and scholarship; nonetheless, the journaling, albeit chaotic, created an important habit.

I wanted always to keep in the forefront my strong belief that while I was facilitating the sessions *for* the men, I was also facilitating the sessions *with* the men, and my learning and growth were tied to theirs. As I later read 'facilitating the development of others cannot be achieved without facilitating our own; and our own development is dependent on the consciousness of the world around us' (Kaplan, 2002, p. 178).

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<sup>36</sup> There is a very clear and succinct explanation of how to discern between doing a Rainbow and a Cop exercise in Diamond's *Theatre for Living* (2007, p. 183), a book that he had for sale during the workshop that I attended and which unfortunately I did not buy until after these workshops.

## Learning the tools – building trust

The first two sessions served to build rapport and trust. I used them to give the men the tools to work with and, in particular, make them familiar with image work, a principal tool of the practice.

During the first session, I was highly conscious of showing the program coordinator and other therapist the value of the session. I also felt that this setting required that I show I was ‘running the show’. While I ‘knew’ all of it was going to be novel and interesting, I wanted to make a great impression and do a good job for myself. After all, this opportunity had taken a lot of time and energy to establish!

When we piled into the communal TV room with big lounge chairs and sofas, I was afraid there was not enough space. Before the men came into the room, I asked the other therapist to help move the furniture to the edges of the room. Still, the space was not big enough to move around freely. The men started arriving, lethargic and unengaged. They sat on the sofas and looked at the coordinator for directions. I immediately caught myself, colloquially and inaccurately, labelling the men ‘bogans<sup>37</sup>’. The head therapist introduced me and I took command of the session by asking them to stand up. Nine men, two therapists, and I squished into the semblance of a circle. I told them that what we were going to do in the sessions might seem weird, but I believed they would get a lot out of it and asked them to give me the benefit of the doubt.

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<sup>37</sup> This is a negative word used commonly in Australia to refer to someone who is a bit rough and unsophisticated, from a low socio-economic background.

The first activities were mild clapping games, which we managed to do within the limited space. However, as soon as we did the more active 'Mingle Mingle', in which I shout 'mingle mingle', they have to shout back 'mingle' as they move around the space and then when I shout 'stop' and say a number, e.g. 'threes', they have to make a group of three people as quickly as possible. That process was a disaster. They pushed each other playfully. When I shouted the number, they rammed into each other. One pair ended up falling on the floor; others nearly hit their heads on the edge of the furniture. I looked pleadingly at the coordinator and asked if we could try outside. That worked! Except for the last session, we conducted all sessions outside on a basketball court, an unused parking area and the covered rest area attached to the house. There was initial concern about noise level but that was never a problem.<sup>38</sup> It would not have worked to have the session inside. Even in a large enclosed space, the men would have been too stifled; outside they could be huge and loud.

After the warm up games I started the trust activities with 'Colombian hypnosis', an activity conducted in pairs. Two people face each other. One person, the 'hypnotiser', leads the other person, 'the hypnotised' around the space. He does this by extending his hand with an open palm in front of the other person's face – the other person looks at and is 'hypnotised' by the hand and must always maintain the same distance from the hand, so that when the 'hypnotiser' moves the 'hypnotised' has to move also. From this activity we can

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<sup>38</sup> The only occasional problem was in the middle of summer when it was very hot and we were restricted to a shady area.



draw parallels to power. I directed them, as suggested by Boal, to try to challenge their partner to move in lots of different and awkward ways; to twist them around and ‘contort’ their bodies into funny positions (Boal, 1992, p. 51). I was very conscious when demonstrating, as it might have conjured up images of sexual domination. I had one of the men ‘volunteer’ and pair up with me. I demonstrated and the others watching were silent and then laughed. When we swapped and I was following his hand, the others looked on quietly. I made a joke of it by stopping suddenly and giving my partner/volunteer a friendly slap across the shoulder and saying, “Thank you.” It was chummy but curt and a little rough. Similar to their exaggerated ‘blokey’ tumbles in the room earlier, all of us were perhaps overcompensating for feeling vulnerable.

Then we did ‘Forest of Sounds’, in which again, one person guides another around the space; this time through emitting a sound they have agreed on. The person who is following the sound has their eyes closed, as in the children’s game Marco Polo. The last activity was a ‘Circle of Trust’, a common trust activity that has all participants stand in a closed circle with their arms bent at the elbows in front of them. Everyone takes turns in going into the middle, closing their eyes and letting themselves fall backwards and forwards onto the ‘safe’ arms of the participants’ circle. It was a risky activity that could have had negative effects, like isolating some, frightening them, creating mistrust.<sup>39</sup> I felt this activity gave the session an edge; the message that we were not here to goof around. Additionally, as I went first in the circle – a decision I made on the

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<sup>39</sup> In hindsight, I would never begin a first session with such an activity. At first, as we started, I thought that it was a mistake and in milliseconds toyed with the idea of stopping. However, I decided it would have been more disruptive to stop it and continued.

spot – I may have unwittingly given a message that I was also willing to make myself vulnerable. What is more, if any participants had felt fear or hesitation about going into the centre, I had now set a challenge: if I could do it, they could do it. At first, they pushed me forward too strongly as if overreacting for fear that they might drop me. I stopped and told them to be gentler. Interestingly, I did not feel vulnerable, I felt strong in trusting they were not going to let me fall. After, I encouraged everyone to enter the circle but did not push anyone. Harry, a stocky man, was hesitant; perhaps he did not trust anyone was strong enough to catch him. After some encouragement he did it and when he opened his eyes after he had done it he seemed surprised.

After the activities we had a short discussion about power and about whether it was more difficult to trust or be trusted. It was a superficial discussion with the therapist doing a lot of talking, but it nevertheless exemplified the function of the activities and gave them some context they could relate to, even if they did not share very much this first session.

I then began the image work with some mirroring. Ironically, I felt that facing each other was more challenging for them than the 'Circle of Trust'. Perhaps the proximity and intimacy required in facing and imitating each other were too challenging for these first sessions. We then did 'complete the image' in the circle.<sup>40</sup> One person enters the circle and freezes in a pose. Then another joins them; also freezing in a pose that, together with the first image, makes a

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<sup>40</sup> I discussed this subject in detail in chapter three.

story<sup>41</sup>. I noticed that many of the images they constructed involved hitting and kicking. One man, Alex, always had someone in a headlock or was kicking him in the stomach.<sup>42</sup>

In my processing two men stood out: Harry and Lance. To me Harry was engaged and attentive; I think he took naturally to using his body to express himself, I imagined him as a kid doing drama at school. In Complete the Image, his images were different from the others'. He offered violent images, but also funny images and ones that took place on a different plane. At one point, he fell to the ground and made an image of someone who was injured. He seemed freer than the others with his facial expressions and pulled funny faces. Lance also caught my attention for different reasons. He participated well and acted respectfully but I felt it was just an act. When we were doing the 'mingle mingle' activity, he tried to get the others to shout 'jingle jingle'. I stopped the activity and asked whether he was trying to be funny and referring to our breasts. All the men went quiet. I told him that if it was that, it was inappropriate and disrespectful. I was very serious but then went straight back to the activity as if nothing had happened and did not mention it again. I did not give the incident power.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Or at least, an image that can be interpreted as a story

<sup>42</sup> Alex had already stood out as the one who needed the most attention. He was hyperactive and always trying to sneak away for a cigarette. He seemed to be detoxing from the drug 'speed' but this was not something that I wanted to ask about. Similarly, I was not interested in finding out exactly what each of these men had done.

<sup>43</sup> During the time I worked with Lance, he never showed any sign of empathy for the oppressed characters we constructed or show any indication of being remorseful. I am not a psychologist and have no idea of his offence but I would not have liked to be alone with him: he set off my self-preservation alarms.

In the second half of the session, I did something that I was unsure about: a guided visualisation. I asked them to lie or sit quietly with their eyes closed and think about what they had done since they woke that morning. I was surprised at how quiet they became. Even Alex, who could not stop fidgeting and interrupting, was quiet and still for a short time. The whole session thus far felt like one risk after another. Every direction I gave and every invitation I made to do something else felt like a performance itself. When I recall the first few sessions, I felt at times like I was on a stage being trusted to know what to do, and never once letting on that what I asked them to do next depended on how the last activity turned out.

Then we built a few tableaux, that is, groups of frozen images depicting a scene. I started with a simple theme – sport. It worked well. They created images of footy tackles, soccer goal saves and basketball players shooting up into the hoop. Then I asked them to do a domestic scene: a typical family scene at home. Not surprisingly, two of the three scenes dealt with the theme of domestic violence, even though I had not specified that they depict these images.<sup>44</sup>

The most interesting scene for me in this session was the third, in which three kids were watching TV and the father was reaching over to change the channel. This was not violent, but when we interpreted it, some of the observers said that the father was a ‘control freak’ and he was controlling what was being watched because it was his house and he ruled. The scene could have been

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<sup>44</sup> In one image the police was arresting someone and another person was trying to intervene. Another image was about a father wanting to hit a child and the others were trying to stop him.

interpreted in a different way: three kids and their father watching TV. There was no indication of violence whatsoever. This interpretation was interesting because it brought into reality some ideas I was playing with, including Boal's claim that in the work 'everyone reveals themselves as they are (or how they think they are) and their enemies as they see them' (1992, p. 180). If I had been familiar with the literature on CBT and anger management, I would have also been able to detect it as evidence of false cognitive assumptions and brought this to their attention (Howells et al., 2004, p. 30). While this insight might have been helpful to begin raising awareness and reflection on their cognitive processes, it may have made this work too readily similar to earlier work the men had undertaken in their CBT sessions, making the men reject it as another treatment for their 'problem'.

Although referring to the 'oppressed', Boal explained that 'when they are showing their 'enemy' they have a tendency to portray subjective images ...distorted images...because the makers of these images have experienced this aggression' (1992, p. 180). This observation is applicable to the way the men were constructing their scenes. While the men in this case were the ones generating aggression, it seemed to me that in *their* minds, their partners/parents/children were their 'enemies'. The partners/parents/children were perceived as 'betraying', 'disrespecting', or 'humiliating' them. Thus, these characters were depicted as responsible for these men's legal troubles and restricted freedom.

Finally, the session ended; my overall feeling was that it went very well. Both therapists said they were 'amazed' at the men's engagement. They explained that only men like Harry and Alex would participate during the CBT group discussions, but everyone had participated and engaged in the TO session. Particularly, they noted that the two Aboriginal men, who generally would not say anything during group sessions, had participated in in their own more quiet way. While perhaps coaxed a little, they had offered images and communicated something. Harry commented that they should do the session twice a week instead of the group session. I walked to my car at the end of that first session feeling ecstatic, feeling that what we had done was powerful and useful.

There were 16 sessions over five months, covering a number of topics relevant to the men. While unnecessary to recount every session, I have identified moments that revealed information about my experience and how I adapted or failed to adapt to what was needed.

### **Being present**

This is a reflection on the third session and describes feeling...

...a bit uncomfortable and uncertain about my ability to handle whatever came up, I knew I could handle it but I didn't know exactly what it was that I might have to handle. I felt like a novice but knew that there is nowhere else for me to learn.

I was excited and nervous about this session; it was my first time setting up a Rainbow interaction and workshopping some of their stories. To warm up, one of the first exercises was pushing against each other and is an interesting example of how gender plays a part in the dynamics. Two people stood facing each other with their arms upon each other's shoulders. Then they pushed. It is an exercise about balance and counterbalance and a common Boal warm-up exercise. Metaphorically, this activity can depict Boal's 'maieutic' process that takes place when two characters push and pull, either on stage or as part of a Rainbow or Cop scene (Boal, 1992, p. 58). Counterbalancing appeared to be a difficult notion for some of them, when paired up many went into wrestling mode. However, no men pushed as hard as they could when paired up with me, so I encouraged them to push harder. Even when I pushed them so they moved backwards, they would increase their push, but never with the force that they could have employed. They had counterbalanced and we discussed this. They said things like 'we're stronger' or 'didn't want hurt you'. I asked them if this reminded them of any other examples from their lives. They were all silent. Maybe for some of them this exercise was a simple but powerful aesthetic and embodied experience of their physical advantage in DV.

We did other activities and by the time we started to do the Rainbow work, I felt the men were warmed up. I had come prepared to base the Rainbow on the cycle of violence. Men who are violent have been observed to follow a cycle. First, there is the build-up to the violent act, and then the explosion of violent act(s) is/are committed. A period of remorse and shame follows, during

which they usually ask for forgiveness. Finally, there is a honeymoon period where the men behave lovingly and affectionately towards their partners and families (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, nd.).

During this session, I asked the men to break into three groups and to choose a topic: 'the explosion', 'regret' or 'the honeymoon'. I asked them to think of an incident that contributed to them being in this rehabilitation program that could be categorized into one of these stages and to make frozen images about it. Finally, after discussing the images, we decided to work on Lance's story, an incident in which he and his partner were arguing because he thought she had spent too much money. In re-enacting the story, he became agitated and repeated several times that he had worked 'a 56-hour-week and she just spent it on fucking cosmetics'. He also said he had been angry because there had been no dinner.

I had little experience with the Rainbow at this point, having only once been part of a Rainbow activity during a workshop with David Diamond. I felt a level of alertness as if I was about to perform surgery. I looked for the right moment in the exchange between the two characters in which, as Diamond puts it, there is 'emotional engagement and true complexity, where the conflicting fears and desires of the two parties are most evident' (Diamond, 2007, p. 185). It was not difficult in this case. The conflict between two partners over money was a distinct place to freeze the action.



I was so focused that my body felt as though I were walking along the side of a cliff. I activated the above scene by asking them to say what the characters would be saying, and encouraged Lance in his particular conflict. This was the first time they were asked to vocalise anything related to their unwanted behaviour.

Lance and Luke were in the image, Lance lifting his hand in an aggressive 'about-to-strike' image and Luke bending down protecting his face. Both spoke softly, failing to convincingly depict a scene of someone being threatened. I asked if they were speaking with the words and tone of voice of the characters they were playing. I said I was not convinced by what they were saying because it didn't fit the image. I even remarked to Lance that he was not at this facility because he had spoken to his partner as if he were just slightly annoyed. I kept encouraging them to be more real.

Then, suddenly, without thinking, I stepped into the role of the attacker. I moved Lance out of the way and...

'... surprised myself by actually stepping in and shouting some of the stuff I thought he was trying to say. 'You stupid bitch!' I shouted. 'You stupid fucking bitch!' My shout was loud and sounded angry. I heard the men say, 'Oh, she's gone mad' or 'Oh, my God, she's going to get him'. And the men were actually immediately engaged – they sat up and were interested.'

Notably, this is a deviation from the current Boal role of the joker, who is not there to offer interpretations. As Boal clearly writes, the joker ‘must avoid all actions which could manipulate or influence an audience...’ they must not be confronted with the joker’s ‘own interpretation of events’. Further jokers ‘...personally decide nothing’ (1992, p. 261). However, as described by Schutzman, in Boal’s original Joker System, the Joker was assigned the role of ‘...wild card able to jump in and out of any role I the play at any time’ (2006, p. 133), I didn’t know this. By offering what I thought was a more accurate version of the dialogue depicted, I became part of the performed action and maybe gave them permission to be real, resulting in the men’s instant engagement. In addition, I thought, akin to a lifting of a veil, my intervention caused a feeling of embarrassment, as if they had been caught lying.

This experience is close to what Scharmer’s *presencing*. Like the downward movement of the U,<sup>45</sup> we shifted as a group, from the default ‘downloading’ resulting from ‘re-enacting the past’ through ‘habits of thought’ to a place where they could suspend their own judgment. In this new place, we could see with ‘fresh eyes’ and ‘sense’. I believe there was a collapse of ‘boundary between the observer and the observed’ (Scharmer, 2009, p. 39). The men could see themselves in their own system (2009, p. 39). My dramatic action temporarily shattered their habitual thinking and inadvertently called them

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<sup>45</sup> Theory U is a methodology for accessing individual and collective ‘inner knowledge’ in order to manage difficult change and create better futures at individual, community, organisational and global levels – it is described in chapter three (Scharmer, 2009)

upon this 'falsehood', allowing it to be 'suspended'.<sup>46</sup> Metaphorically, it was like a child caught with his hand reaching for a forbidden cookie jar. Except everybody who saw was the child.

I was completely alert and willing to see the 'whole' of these human beings. For a moment, I let go of my own judgment of them as 'oppressors' and of myself as a 'practitioner'. I let go of control of knowing what was to come next.<sup>47</sup> I could not be attached to something I did not yet possess. Perhaps that is why, with this first group, these moments of presence occurred.

I had not come to this facility to do therapy, but to see if this methodology was applicable in the transformation of extreme and violent behaviours. Was it possible to transform ways of perceiving our socially constructed reality? My mind had been preparing itself to step into the unknown and, during this session, I believe it did, causing a brief connection to a deeper source of knowing or a 'primary knowing' (Rosch 1999, in Senge et al., 2004, p. 98), long enough to let the needed action show itself.

### **Reflecting vs. presencing**

Another argument is that this experience came from reflection-in-action. I had quickly made a decision to react to the men's understated actions the way I did as an experiment; once I learnt that it had worked, I could cognitively choose to bring it into the moment as needed. However, the very first time there had been no precedent, it was not reflection, I did not think, it was a generative

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<sup>46</sup> I am not claiming that suddenly these men became self-aware and developed a Freire-like conscientisation about their oppressor roles.

<sup>47</sup> Probably because I simply did not know.

experience in which I got out of the way enough to ‘know’ and do what was needed. I am not implying that the participants themselves had an experience of ‘inner knowing’ (Scharmer, 2009, p. 33). Nonetheless, I observed them acting differently; perhaps they had suddenly perceived themselves in a new, more uncomfortable but revealing, light.

Lance, playing the aggressor, went back to his character and showed, with more emotion and less self-consciousness, what the character might have done. Harry, a more extroverted personality, then replaced the character in the victim role. Harry, perhaps having been given permission by my acting of aggression, played the character convincingly, reacting to the abuse and talking back to Lance’s character. It was such a strong reaction that Lance started to get upset. This was a moment where I once again I felt we had entered the unknown. Lance was so upset; the psychologist looked worried and inched forward. I simply applauded loudly, as a performance and encouraged everyone else to do so. I also appeased Lance by slapping his shoulder, strongly and brusquely, smiling at him in approval. I praised him for playing the character authentically and acknowledged he had done a great job. His emotion subsided and he returned to playing his character.

We ended the session with a discussion about what each of the characters actually wanted.<sup>48</sup> All the men agreed that both of the characters wanted appreciation. It was a step toward understanding the process as well as

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<sup>48</sup> I.e. Why was he upset when he came home and there was no dinner? Why was he upset that she had spent the money on cosmetics?

the concept that underneath the exterior of emotions is a range of desires and fears.

At the next session, I did something similar. The participants enacted a scene in which jealousy was the main emotion and the character was upset with his girlfriend who had been talking to another man. They were, again, speaking unrealistically and so I stepped in and shocked them with a much angrier and realistic depiction. On reflection, this second episode was less of a moment of presencing and more of reflection-in-action. Having learnt that taking on a role had worked and was a valid action I could choose it though reflection. In my mind, jumping into the action momentarily from time to time served a useful purpose.<sup>49</sup>

### **The power of the practitioner**

Reflecting after each session was helpful in taking a distanced look at the practice and comparing it to theory, in order to develop *praxis* (Freire, 1970, p. 65). However, to increase the benefit of the session for the participants, the reflection that happened in the moment and the action that it generates is most crucial. This action will also enhance or decrease the opportunities for participants to reflect and act. As a result, the power that is carried by the practitioner should receive very important consideration.

For instance, interestingly, during a session earlier that year with the female survivors of DV, I was asked to enact an offender in an abusive scene. I

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<sup>49</sup> I recall that it happened on only a couple of further occasions at during this project.

was not very successful; I could not sustain the role without feeling very emotional and uncomfortable. However, here with these men, it was what I was drawn to do. In addition to being a practitioner who wanted to ensure the maximum effects of the session, as a woman, perhaps like the women they had been violent against, I was refusing to let them minimise their actions. Every decision I made during each one-and-a-half-hour session could lead to an action that might provide an opportunity to reflect on their 'structure of assumptions' or 'habitual rules for interpreting experience' (Mezirow 2000, in Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17), thereby changing perspective. It is not possible to know which moment is going to be THE moment that shifts people's ways of viewing their lives, their interactions and their meaning.

For example, at the beginning of each session I sat down for a few minutes while all the men came out to the yard. I informally began the session by asking them to share something that had come up during their CBT sessions or during the week regarding the reasons they were there. As a kind of session rule, I usually asked them to get up within ten minutes so that we could do the warm-up games and get to Rainbow or Cops work. Once, after they had all been home for Christmas<sup>50</sup> I was interested to see how they had managed, and listened to the accounts for longer than usual.

Damien, who had been in the program only for a couple of weeks, tried to describe why he nearly lost his temper with his partner when he went home.

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<sup>50</sup> This return home had caused much anxiety and we had spent the session before their break examining the risks of offending again when they went home

He explained that they had had an argument because she wanted to go out and spend some time with her friends. She had been looking after the kids since he was in the program and had not had a break. When he finished, I asked him jokingly why he had been so averse to his partner going out. He said he wanted her to stay but couldn't pinpoint why. I suggested that we role-play the interaction, and he sat at the table, with me playing his partner. The improvisation went like this:

Me: I am going out.

Damien: No, you are not.

Me: You cannot tell me what to do.

Damien: Yes, I can.

Me: You are not my Dad.

Damian: You are not going out.

Me: Who do you think you are?

Damian: **I am your boss.**

Vivienne: Since when?

Damian: Since you started going out with me.

This dialogue allowed us all to look at the attitude beneath Damian's demands to his partner. As Balfour puts it, 'the arts offer a language with which to engage an offender in dialogue' (Balfour, 2003, p. 14). While the above example was literally just a dialogue, this following dialogue is aesthetic.

I had asked them to make an image they could relate to in regards to control and money, the issue of that session. We looked at all of the tableaux created, and I decided to activate Damian, Jason and Tom's tableau, as it depicted the images very clearly.

Standing, Damian showed empty pockets and made a facial gesture that portrayed either dismay or anger or something unpleasant. The internal monologue that accompanied his image was this:

*'You get your own job, get it through your head there is this, there is nothing, there is zip, get it through your thick head...'*

Tom had his arms up as if asking a question. His monologue was:

*'I want you to tell me what you do with the money. Are you spending the money on that woman down the road? What do you do with the money?'*

Jason had his hand stretched out in front of him in a demanding gesture. His facial expression was angry, and also went in and out of character:

*'I need to feed the kids. I need to give them food. I need money give me some money. I need to buy food. We need cereal, milk, and eggs. They gotta eat...'*



We gathered around the three statues, and each spoke their monologue individually. Then I asked them to say them all together on my signal. It was so powerful for me; it must have had some effect on the men watching. They were silent and I made them continue it until I saw Damian getting emotional. This was possibly what Balfour calls 'reflection through a process of creative action' (Balfour, 2003, p. 76). Sometimes, the simplicity of the frozen image can be as powerful as a more profound deconstruction through the creation of Rainbow or Cops.

After a break, I asked them to share a situation that we could workshop using Rainbow. Four of the men had stories to share. I listened to them all and finally chose Jason's story about a recurring argument for him and his partner. Jason did not want to give his partner, Nancy, money to go out to the shop because she ended up buying a whole lot of 'unnecessary' toys for the kids the last time she went out. Even though she wanted to go because she had been home alone with the children all day, he would not allow it. Also, Jason did not trust her because she had had an affair a while ago.

Despite having already rejected all the other stories in my mind, I asked the men which story they wanted to do. There was a close debate between Tony's story (about his partner headbutting him and his subsequent attack on her) and Jason's. However, after letting them discuss it a little bit, I explained my inclination to do Jason's. I explained that I felt we could learn from Jason's because most men there had been violent towards their partners and not the other way around.

The scene was enacted and both men playing characters did a great job of improvising a dialogue that captured what Jason had shared about controlling his partner through money. When I asked the group to voice what they thought the characters wanted and feared this is what resulted:

Jason's fears: *I am afraid I am going to lose her; I am afraid I'll be left alone. I'm afraid we'll be destitute and not be able to pay the bills. I don't want to be humiliated.*

Jason's desires: *I want to be respected and loved.*

Nancy's fears: *I am afraid he is going to be violent again and I am going to get hurt again and I am going to live in this violence for long time.*

Nancy's desires: *I want some time out. I need a break. I want to go out of the house. I want to be trusted.*

We did the Rainbow work using these dialogues and although there was a scene in which the character refused to give his partner money, as he had often done, on this occasion, Damian did not get up to play any roles, and just observed.

## So what?

I have described three events that took place in two separate sessions and in which I used my power as the practitioner or 'joker' to chose one alternative over another. All events involved Damian in different ways. I mention this because later, during a conversation in which I asked him if there were any moments that stood out for him, Damian mentioned the last event because it had upset him to see Jason acting out something he did; he said he realised he had been an 'arsehole'.

Could there have been a small but significant shift in Damian's perception? Was his initial perception as his partner's 'boss' affected by having an uncomfortable or disturbing experience while making the frozen image about money and then watching the Rainbow work on the same theme?

In this rehabilitation-focused work, this kind of 'bracketing' of reality occurs in drama so that an 'awareness of plurality in social interactions may be presented by looking at events from other people's point of view' (Balfour, 2003, pp. 81 and 13). Rainbow and Cop techniques are explicitly aimed at bracketing through exploring 'internalised struggles that manifest as behaviour that is detrimental to both ourselves and people around us' (Diamond, 2007, p. 182). Yet, how much of that bringing into focus, that 'bracketing', is decided by the practitioner? What would have been the result if I insisted on choosing a different tableau to activate, instead of the one with Damian in it? What would have happened if I had gone for Tony's story of his head-butting girlfriend? And what if I had, as on other occasions, encouraged Damian to participate in the

Rainbow? It is impossible to know if Damian's experience created a small shift that actually translated into transformed behaviour. However, it is very clear to see the power the practitioner carries and how it affects the direction of a session, even when one is working with a methodology that is emancipatory and focused on the participants.

This is a constant tension for practitioners working towards transforming the future in the social realm, regardless of the setting. As Lievegoed explains, 'One must have the skill to do so in such a way that the object with which one is working is not violated, but is transformed according to its own laws' (Lievegoed 1978, in Kaplan, 2002, p. 140). Lievegoed describes developing a 'moral technique' that works hand in hand with 'moral imagination'. Moral imagination enables 'seeing' what exists in the present to allow the moral technique to work out a 'doing' that aligns with maintaining the freedom of all involved. Lievegoed claims this is 'an extraordinarily difficult task' (Lievegoed, 1978, in Kaplan, 2002, p. 141). As explained in chapter three, the premise of *Theory U* is likewise concerned with the integrity of being able to listen to what is present: of 'letting go' in order to 'let come' an emergent future that upholds the needs of everyone (Scharmer, 2012 online webinar). I like the idea that the journey the practitioner makes is a creative journey:

'...an inward bound journey...a paradoxical state of great confidence and profound humility – knowing that their choices and actions matter and feeling guided by forces beyond their making' (Senge et al., 2004, p. 13).

There is perhaps a benefit in my inexperience at the time I conducted these workshops.<sup>51</sup> I had only done some training with Diamond in 2007, a few months before I began the sessions at this facility. However, I had not yet read *Rainbow of Desire*, so I had to base the way I conducted the Rainbow on Diamond's approach to creating Rainbow with both the protagonist and the antagonist. I knew no other way and did not question it. What is more, this interpretation of the Rainbow work I learnt from Diamond is informed by shared beliefs about the 'whole' community, or living community: 'If we are trying to investigate issues that are relevant to the living community, then stopping the investigation having heard one side of the equation is not appropriate. This is not dialogue; it is monologue' (Diamond, 2007, p. 189).

Working with offenders poses an interesting situation in which the dialogue is between two antagonists – one of them playing himself or a version of himself – and the other playing a version of the person they have been violent toward. It may not have been easy for some of them to play the victim because in their construct, the victim was somehow responsible for their violence. Directly relevant is a quotation in Baim's piece about psychodrama with very violent men (2004, p. 139):

The scene: A UK prison, psychodrama group therapy session

1<sup>st</sup> inmate: I can't play the role of my victim. If I could see his point of view, I wouldn't have abused him in the first place.

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<sup>51</sup> This is not an observation that I made at the time, but I am making it now, as I write this.

2<sup>nd</sup> inmate: Isn't that the point?

### **Sitting on the rim of a cup**

We were working on one of the men's stories about jealousy. In the scene the protagonist grew angry because his female partner had talked to someone at the bar. It was going to end with him hitting her. I asked the men to offer different options so that scene might end differently. There were several offers, but the one that most surprised me was Harry's offer to walk away. The suggestion was not strange; it is a strategy the men are taught in their sessions. However, when Harry cockily stood up to enact it, he made a threat to the other man at the bar and to the female. I made him do it three times before he was able to walk away without threatening either character. It was funny to all of us, including Harry, but it was also the first time I challenged him by insisting he go back and try again. I detected some agitation, perhaps from being put on the spot and 'failing'<sup>52</sup> or because of my 'authority' as the facilitator to ask him to do it again.

My insisting that Harry repeat this action after having already offered it twice is a moment Dwyer refers as supporting an 'invisible pedagogy' (Dwyer, 2004, p. 201). While I unintentionally emphasised the importance of walking away, it effectively communicated to Harry and the others its importance. I was more interested in the disparity between the action that Harry had identified as useful and his inability to perform it. Is using the methodology in this way with

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, this rehearsal was not a failure.

'oppressors' inducing a kind of reflection that is, as Kemmis suggests, a political act? (1985, p. 140) If this is the case, then this action is actually performed by the 'oppressor' against his own thinking. Perhaps making him attempt the action until he achieves helps him in this subversion.

There was a similar session where we looked at empathy and I asked the men to share about the latest incident that resulted in their entering the program. They each told their versions of the events, many minimising the violence. One said he didn't remember; a few blamed alcohol. I listened to them as objectively as I could, but noted that Lance always tried to play the victim. In my journal I wrote *'he cannot be allowed to play victim and offer excuses'*. My italicized sentence is a judgmental call and brings up three areas of interest. First, it demonstrates how I have internalised the philosophy and approach of the institution and made it part of my approach. If I let him continue with his reasoning, he continues to dwell in a place where he is the victim. He cannot accept responsibility for his actions, which is the first step toward changing the behaviour from a Jenkins' perspective (1990) and that of the other psychologists I was working with. While I was satisfied to embrace this as a positive undercurrent in the work, it puts creativity in clear parameters.

Kaplan believes the effectiveness of the practitioner rests on their ability to 'work from the outside, see beyond what can be seen from the outside', and be on 'the rim of a cup' inside (Kaplan, 2002, p. 143). Balfour touches on this point when discussing the 'danger of aligning too closely with 'the system''.

Here, he refers more specifically to the contradiction of doing theatre in prison work, a liberatory and 'humanising' process within an institution whose main functions are to contain and punish 'and on occasion rehabilitate' (2004, p. 3). He points to the 'paradox of creative work within a system orientated as much to punishment as to rehabilitation' (2003, p. 10). At the facility, this paradox was not felt strongly because the men were, at times, free to come and go in this therapeutic rehabilitation program. Still, it played a role in separating and restricting the men from their normal lives. When I write, 'he cannot be allowed to play victim and offer excuses', I realise that I too am restricting them, while sitting on the 'rim of the cup', dipping my feet into it.

Second, reading this my notes made me realise how much I dislike Lance. While I restrained myself from telling him to '*shut the fuck up and grow a pair*', there was no hiding those urges from myself while working with him. I brought this to the space, even if I didn't articulate it. Third, I was aware of how I chose to be short with Lance, but with no one else who equally avoided responsibility. I could be patient and understanding with others. This lack of equanimity unveils a prejudice and reveals that the power I hold as a practitioner can subtly favour one person over another. Fourth, this revelation highlights the crucial role of reflection. This phenomenological understanding is key to developing the 'moral techniques' that Kaplan describes. When I wrote about Lance I had been working with the men and making notes for over three months. I was becoming more adept at picking up what was, or might be,



important. I had the motivation to persevere and do the work, but the skills and insight came in a cumulative process enabled by reflection.

My notes also show that I was unconsciously making some adaptations. For example, my language had become more simplified and my use of swear words increased. I also took on some of the participants' idiomatic expressions. For example, Jason had used the expression 'pissing in your pocket'. I had not heard it before so I asked, and they laughed and explained. During another session, while I was acknowledging they had done something well I said qualified it with 'I'm not pissing in your pockets'. The whole group laughed a lot. Krebs talks about the *edgewalker* attributes found in people who are privy to two or more cultures. In a way, although these men and I live in the same city and speak the same language, we inhabit different cultures but 'all of us essentially say the same things, just different words, different sounds' (1999, p. 45).

### **The last session**

After five months working at the facility, the workshops came to a sudden end, due to my own deficits in communication and impatience. A staff psychologist was always present at the workshops. After a few months, it was mostly a psychologist named Tanya<sup>53</sup>. She was initially friendly and supportive of the sessions. But in the last few months, when Tanya was increasingly involved, there appeared to be many reasons why we started late. Sometimes, I felt that she was competing with me for the rapport with the men. I had a great rapport

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<sup>53</sup> Not her real name.

with the men and it was indisputable that they were engaged and cooperative during the Act Out sessions, unlike their feelings (which they expressed regularly) about the group CBT.

Perhaps Tanya felt the work was not worthwhile. I was acutely aware I was not a therapist and accepted all the suggestions made by the professional staff. I had taken on some of Tanya's suggestions on the importance of using exact language when referring to the violent behaviour of the men. In repeating their accounts, she had noticed I had said 'bash' and it was important to be accurate, for example, to use accurate words like 'struck', 'slapped', 'kicked', 'punched'. I accepted these insights immediately. I felt I had been open to their comments and suggestions. At times, I knew I had done or said something that was not the way the psychologist would have reacted so I always reminded the men that I was not a psychologist and looked at the therapists to see if there was anything that I – or they – needed to add.

During the last session, Tanya, who had been increasingly holding up the start of the session by arriving late, exclaimed about 20 minutes before the end of the session that we had to start wrapping up. We had been working through a difficult session and I was having difficulty engaging the men.<sup>54</sup> I had finally managed to start a Cops deconstruction. It was going well and seemed important to Damian. Suddenly, Tanya brought up the time! I reacted angrily in an unprofessional and emotional way and stormed out of the room. Realising the inappropriateness of this outburst, I returned to the room almost immediately

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<sup>54</sup> There had been an eviction and the men were not participating very willingly. We had also had to move inside because it was raining heavily.

to apologize to the men and tell them this had nothing to do with them and that I had felt frustrated with Tanya. I mentioned Tanya's tardiness had repeatedly cut the sessions short; she objected. While not aggressive, an exchange took place in front of the men that was unprofessional on both our parts. I believe Tanya was not thinking of the men, but instead, of her break before the next session. Regardless, I walked away that day filled with a terrible dread. I had reacted in a way that was impulsive and showed the lack of emotional control not unlike the lack of emotional control that had landed the men in that facility. My time there was cut short; the facility closed their doors to me. Going back to Kaplan's analogy, I had fallen off the rim of the cup.

## **Conclusion**

This case study illustrates many of the important qualities that a practitioner brings to a practice, such as reflection and presence, which in turn enable risk-taking and adaptation. These are qualities needed to guide the participants to a place where they can suspend their thinking and find alternatives: something we could rehearse and try out. I also brought my own attitudes and biases and shortcomings; sometimes these arose unexpectedly and I was horrified by my reflection. On a few occasions, I was surprised by how centred and present I felt; how connected to the participants I felt, as if their journey was also mine. As Kaplan notes, 'it is not only the intervention which becomes part of the story, but the practitioner as well' (2002, p. 143)

This thesis shows how the practitioner role affects not only the degree to which the work can be transformative but also the limits she can set. In an ideal world, a complete transformation would involve the men ending the program without exerting violence or abuse again because they have holistically realised that this behaviour is counter to their spirit and dehumanises themselves, as well as of their victims. As Freire asserts, 'it is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity (thus negating their own as well)' (Freire, 1979, p. 55). On a more pragmatic level, transformation could involve the men becoming sufficiently aware of their emotions to walk away and breathe deeply until the urge to abuse is over.

The practitioner's role is to provide a space in which the men can allow the real issues to surface, and then according to methodology, something will shift. Getting to that point requires they engage and come to the practice voluntarily.

These men are generally intolerant of authority, angry at the system and their situation. Some have limited emotional vocabulary to express themselves in a way that is perceived as appropriate, and thus, are not used to expressing emotions and defaulted to aggression. Furthermore, many of the men were in active addiction and temporarily off drugs and alcohol, which certainly added an edge to the work. I was conscious of charming them with the methodology. I wanted the men to like what we are doing, and wanted the therapists to like it so that they would support the future use of this approach. I wanted this to be a successful pilot that would become a model.

I realized my gender might distract the men. I did not use this as part of the engagement intentionally. Being a woman may have also meant that I represented someone they have hurt; they may have reacted to what we were doing differently than if I had been a man. In addition, I had strong personal feelings about what they had done because, if it were done to another woman, it was also done to me. Even though I despised that they had hurt other women and children, I was 'spiritually' on their side. Not only did I want to do this work to contribute to peace, harmony and wellbeing, I also chose to do it to assist a fellow human to move closer to their humanity. Ultimately, that choice assists me to move closer to mine.

I was emotionally attached to the issue and required conscious effort to remain detached and non-judgmental. I was surprised, however, by how I genuinely liked working with the men. But, deep down I had an agenda. I wanted them to cease their violence. Finally, my own inability to be flexible and adapt to what the moment needed resulted in the abrupt ending to my use of this technique with this group.

## CHAPTER 6

### Derby or Bust: the aesthetic of motivation

*'If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'*

(Lilla Watson, in Rhoads, 1997, p. 126)

*'Who's this fucking cunt?'*

Young Aboriginal woman referring to me as I rounded the group to start a workshop on self-care

This chapter describes and explores the motivation and the commitment that was present when I began working on sensitive issues with Aboriginal communities. What did it take to get me from the initial wish to do this work with young indigenous women to actually doing the work? Once in action, how much tension was there between those that desired the work to take place, i.e. the elders in the community, the organisers and the practitioner, and the young women involved and 'at risk'? How did this potentially retract from the transformative potential? These are important questions and form a platform for nearly all community development work, but specifically impact the transformative possibilities of an aesthetic practice.

At the same time, this chapter helps to further demonstrate the essential role reflection played in allowing a practitioner the opportunity to adapt and in doing so enhance the potentially transformative possibilities for the participants and practitioner alike. There were many adaptations made and risks taken

during this project, these were based on reflection **in** the moment and **on** the moment; many changes were made to the sessions as they evolved and this practitioner's flexibility was nurtured by heavily relying on reflection and focused diarizing of sessions.

This case study centres on a three-day residential workshop that took place in October 2010 with a group of young Aboriginal women and girls from the Kimberley region of the northwest of Western Australia. It was organised between an Aboriginal corporation in collaboration with a well-established non-for-profit community service organisation whose vision is one of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The workshops took place in Broome, a tropical town 2,000 kilometers north of Perth, where we stayed at a campground with dorms and a large communal kitchen close to the beach. The workshop space was a large, air-conditioned hall attached to the kitchen. The group was comprised of about 16 young women aged between 14 and 21, three youth workers, two organisers who were also community leaders and an elder, who was the grandmother of three of the youngest girls taking part in the workshop. We met for 3 hours every morning over three days for the formal TO sessions but also shared meals, outings and I was present at the other more conventional workshops they attended on protective behaviours and respectful relationships.

In this chapter I first give some background and narrate the events that led to the implementation of this project. During this account I look closely at motivation as the driver of the continuous involvement, relentless pursuit,

investment, and huge effort that generated the opportunity to work with these young women. Then I describe each of the three days of the workshop illustrating the effect and use of reflection and the tensions that exist between (i) the idea of what the practice is, (ii) the reality of the practice, (iii) and how that disparity is accessed through a reflective process. Woven throughout this analysis is the learning that has emerged from this reflexive study.

## **Background**

Aboriginal communities in Australia experience much higher levels of domestic and family violence and sexual abuse than the general population (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry, 2002, p. 40). Reports of child sexual abuse are almost double in indigenous communities compared to non-indigenous communities and given that sexual abuse cases are hugely under-reported (Gordon et al, 2002, p. 41; Lievore 2003 in Keel, 2004, p. 7), incidents 'have reached epidemic proportions' (Robertson 2000 in Stanley, 2003, p. 5). The idea of the organisers was to use the applied theatre work to explore strong relationships with the young women and rehearse protective behaviours.

Usually, the term 'protective behaviours' refers to a process used to assess the danger present in certain situations and prevent harm through violence or sexual abuse. Developed in the 1970s in Wisconsin by North American social worker Peg West, it was a response to the inadequacy of 'stranger danger' training for children when the majority of abuse was found to be perpetrated by people known to the child (Rose, 2004, p. 25). It is a



widespread approach used in Australia based on the premise that ‘we all have the right to feel safe all the time’ (2004, p. 25) and ‘there is nothing so awful that we can’t talk about it with someone’ (2004, p. 26). In this case, however, there was not an explicit brief about communicating that specific message to the participants. In addition, the organisers also had facilitators from the host organisation doing a workshop about strong and weak relationships one afternoon and the girls watched a DVD about sexual health and safe sex another afternoon.

When I first got the call about the possibility of going to Broome to conduct TO work with young Aboriginal girls on the issue of protective behaviours, I was overjoyed. Going up to Broome for this job meant a big success for me. Up to that point, I had invested a lot of time, effort and money into creating this kind of opportunity for working with Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley on some of the tougher issues facing women there. It had taken a couple of years of building relationships and getting to know the area and its challenges. I felt that I had ‘proved’ myself enough to be trusted with a much more sensitive issue, an issue at the heart of my personal motivation to undertake community development work in the first place.

### **Motivation – the long haul**

I spent the first ten years of my life growing up in a country with disproportionate wealth distribution and extreme poverty. From when I was a little girl in Venezuela I remember seeing the poverty around when we went into

the city or the outskirts of the town where we lived and feeling bad about it; feeling like I wanted to do something about it. There is an image from Venezuela that always stays with me of a young street boy, wearing dirty, ragged clothes and flip-flops standing on the middle island of the street with an older man. The boy was about 9 or 10 and looked like one of the boys that I went to school with, a boy I liked. I stared at his beautiful face while we stopped in the traffic in my grandfather's big American car. The boy was looking elsewhere and I remember thinking as an 8 or 9 year old that he could be at school with me, he was the same age. When he saw me looking at him he smiled and I smiled back. As the car moved away we kept smiling at each other until the car went around a corner and we could not see each other anymore.

I know this moment, or critical incident, had an effect on me, which is why I recount it here more than thirty years later. There has always been a strong feeling in me that I have a responsibility in trying to create more equality and reduce the suffering that exists in the world. While that may sound rather grandiose and self-inflated, it is a sense of responsibility not only because I think I have the ability (as does everyone) to make a small change, but it is more of a selfish realisation that for me this is also a way to my own freedom. It is this aspect of Buddhist teachings that continues to inspire me today, the idea that for my own self-realisation I must take others into account. It is the thinking that tells me my ability to realise my highest potential is tightly locked into the ability of others to do the same thing. I especially feel a strong drive to create opportunities for young women to break out of oppressive situations that

disempower and silence them into insufferable conditions and degrading situations.

I can see resonances of this critical incident in an article I read in June 2002 about the closure of the Swan Valley Noongar<sup>55</sup> Community in Lockridge, following the revelation of gross abuses of power against young women. In particular, I committed in my mind to do something about it. Lockridge is a suburb of Perth and the Swan Valley Aboriginal community had been closed after a shocking and tragic event resulting in the death of a 15-year-old girl; the whole incident led to an inquiry that revealed frightening high incidence of child sexual abuse and extreme neglect in WA Aboriginal communities. I read most of the inquiry (Gordon et al., 2002). I was shocked. While I had worked and lived in many countries including 'developing' countries and so was aware of the level of poverty, inequality and deprivation that existed in the world, I was stunned by this information in relation to Australia. I had already been thinking about doing a Masters in Community Development and this tipped me over into this pursuit. I decided that I would one day play a role in trying to tackle this wicked problem in Australia. I downloaded and printed out a map of the Kimberley region with all its different Aboriginal communities and stuck it on the wall of my study.

Fast-forward to June 2008 and I now held a Masters in International and Community Development and had spent a couple of years working with very marginalised Tibetan women in remote China. I had also managed a small NGO in Lhasa. I had come back to Perth a year before to pursue a learning in the TO

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<sup>55</sup> Noongar is the predominant Aboriginal language group of the Perth and south West region. This was one of the few metropolitan based communities for mostly Noongar people.

methodology and establish a practice using this methodology. I now had done some training with Catherine Simmonds and David Diamond<sup>56</sup> and had conducted the work with the men who are violent discussed in chapter three. Also, and most importantly, I had just participated in some intensive training with Augusto and Julian Boal and been around TO practitioners and scholars like Chris Vine, Doug Patterson, Mark Weinbaltt, and Marc Weinberg. I was inspired and ready to do what I had once said I would do.

I quit my lecturing job at the university and I applied for an entry-level job with the Department for Child Protection (DCP) in Derby a remote Kimberley town 200 kilometres east of Broome in the northwest. It was a five-month position and while I did not have a social work degree I got the job, probably because of the difficulty in getting people to such a remote location. Within two weeks of a phone interview I was driving the 2,000 plus kilometres to my new job. It's hard to describe the powerful feeling of autonomy and self-direction that I felt knowing that I was taking bold steps towards a possibility that had been just a dream at that point.

And sure enough, it was a very effective strategy to get to know the community intensively and quickly as, sadly, DCP is involved in the lives of most of the Aboriginal community in the town. That is how I saw my move up to the region and change of job; it was a calculated and thought-out strategy that provided me with invaluable knowledge of the main issues facing the community

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<sup>56</sup> One of Boal's first North American students and the founder of Headlines Theatre in Canada, David Diamond's Living Theatre makes use of forum theatre and other Boal techniques in their award-winning social interventions and productions.

in Derby and the surrounding areas.

This move gave me some insights into the main families, the 'troublemakers', some of the supportive connections between families as well as the destructive feuding reflecting the reality that 'many families are now trapped in environments where deviance and atrocities have become accepted as normal behaviour' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, 2000 in Keel, 2004, p. 4). Most importantly, I found out who were the strong individuals and leaders. I was, likewise, able to build some relationships with those involved in providing services to the community, including some of the people that I worked with at DCP. I even made a couple of friends. Nonetheless, as Diamond writes 'being in the geographic location does not mean one has entered the community' (2007, p. 54).

After being there a few months, I offered some free TO workshops to the Aboriginal staff of a women's resource NGO. These workshops centred on building self-esteem and better working relationships. It was revealing that those who were providing services as staff and caseworkers were often themselves needing support for similar issues. This workshop was significant in that it exposed me to the complexity and intractability of the issues and the inadequacy of some of the existing responses.

After my contract finished I returned to Perth and continued to work for the Department in a metropolitan office. I had come to an understanding that working with the Department in Perth would also give me the insights into the

provision of social services, the organisations doing this and the communities that existed in Perth, so I stayed in this position as part of my education strategy while further establishing Act Out<sup>57</sup> and the work I was going to be doing through it. I stayed in touch with a number of people in Derby and Broome and continuously asked if there were any possibilities of doing any workshops. Finally, an opportunity came to return to Derby, at my own expense to run three workshops.

I conducted two workshops with girls from the high school. While I look at all of my experiences as learning, at the time I was very disappointed. The workshops had been organised through one of the teachers from the high school, a health worker who I had made a strong connection with and the Shire Youth Officer. The teacher welcomed the idea of the girls doing something different but did nothing towards it other than, on the day, tell her teacher's aide to walk the girls over to the youth centre. The youth officer supplied them with lunches, drinks and transport back to the school at the end. On the second day the youth worker even had to go and pick them up from various locations; now I know this is not unusual but it highlighted the lack of involvement by the school.

I know that I contributed to the ineffectiveness of the workshops by not requesting that the organising teacher be present, and failing to suggest that she ask the young women if they were interested in participating in this kind of workshop. As a result, the teacher had to make little effort and the girls had no

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<sup>57</sup> Act Out is the business name through which I work with organisations and communities.

idea what they were there for when they arrived. They seemed to be happy just to get out of class, get a feed and a sweet drink! This is a principal lesson for me in working with groups of people: participation must be out of their own volition. I expand on this idea later in the chapter, as it is particularly true with young people since they are often left out of the decision-making. What I had managed to facilitate was a very chaotic, fun and games session. However, there was also, in retrospect, a wonderful moment of deep conversation with three young women who were keen to talk about staying safe and their experiences. The true outcome of the sessions was building trust and relationships with young women in the community.

The third and last workshop involved the staff and committee members of an Aboriginal corporation running the women's refuge and a women's outreach service. During this last workshop I met DM, a woman who would be instrumental in getting me to return to the region. She thought the workshop had gone really well and clearly she felt she and the staff had experienced something worthwhile. She mentioned that it was unusual to treat such a sensitive issue of conflict (it had been a serious conflict between members of the committee, the staff and the chairperson) because everyone, including the person who was the cause of the conflict, had had a laugh. I had been particularly direct and open about the 'elephant in the room' and when I think about it today I cringe at the risk that I naively took because of the potentially inflammatory nature of the conflict and the lack of support in case there had been any need for counselling of any participants. Later in the year DM hired me

to run a workshop with women and service providers on the issue of domestic violence. That was a great breakthrough.

The relationships that I had built, beginning first with my initial contact as DCP worker with the families in the town, then more directly with the participants of the free workshops, had resulted in being asked to run three workshops for which I would be paid. On the day the first of those three workshops I remember going to the bathroom, looking at myself in the mirror and feeling nervous, strong and elated all at the same time. It was in this workshop that I met HP, the woman who contracted me to run the workshops in the case study presented in this chapter. Like DM she commented on the fact that even though the workshop had tackled such a serious issue nobody had felt uncomfortable, and on the contrary she had had fun.

When I got the phone call from her to work on protective behaviours with young Aboriginal women eight years after I had first learnt about the Noongar Community closure in Perth, I felt I had arrived at a moment I had been creating since that time. That was in mid 2010, two years from when I first went to Derby to live. To get to that point there had been a number of radical steps: I had undertaken and completed a Master's degree, I had spent two years working on similar issues in remote Tibetan regions, I had travelled to Adelaide, and twice to Melbourne and the US; I had trained with Diamond, O'Leary, Santos and Boal; I had changed jobs, I had moved house, I had moved town and I had paid to have people experience the work. I'm not sure what was stronger, the desire to



affect change and contribute to the improvement and agency of Aboriginal women's lives, or the desire to be someone who did this type of work? In any case, I had been prepared to make a great deal of changes and investments in order for this to happen. I now wanted to deliver something truly worthwhile.

I wanted to truly create a space for these girls to explore their experiences, express and celebrate their innate strengths and have a playful and creative time identifying and rehearsing ways to keep themselves safe. I was making all of Boal's assumptions that 'once freed from the social restraint through the liberating power of theatre...this renewed self-knowledge will enable individuals to act at their most creative' and this had to be a good thing, 'a positive force for the good' (Nicholson, 2005, p. 116). I was about to have the opportunity to see if this was the case.

### **The workshops**

There were three days of workshops attended by sixteen girls (this went down to thirteen after three girls were sent home for being disruptive and not participating) and six camp leaders. They had all come from Derby or communities surrounding Derby as it had been decided that a trip to Broome would provide both a treat and distance from their usual environments. Their ages ranged from 14 – 21, with the youth workers being in their mid-twenties so technically also young women. The campground had a large dormitory, where the girls and the youth workers slept and a big hall attached to the kitchen. There were also smaller rooms available to us, including a computer room and a

TV room. We conducted the workshops in the large, air-conditioned room attached to the kitchen.

### **Day 1 – whose story?**

It was clear from the beginning that the girls were a lot more excited about being in Broome itself than about doing theatre work, safe sex education or anything else that was on the three-day program. The highlights for them seemed to be riding on the double decker bus that was hired one afternoon and cruising through the town yelling at people from the top. They also appeared very excited about a trip to the cinema one evening and even demonstrated a lot of enthusiasm for a very sweaty Zumba dance class, a basketball game and a barbecue on the last evening at a youth centre. According to the organisers, for the girls the whole trip was a holiday and a welcomed break from their routines and their often-difficult situations at home. From the very start the girls had made it clear that the prospect of exploring protective behaviours and respectful relationships was not that enticing to them; as a result, it was a challenge to engage them and keep their attention for three hours at a time during each session.

I had detailed plans for the first session and a clear structure for the other days. I had decided, however, to see where the process led us. I had learnt from previous experience that no workshop ever went completely according to a plan. What was more important, I had found so far, was to think about the intention of the workshop. Planning a variety of the games and activities I

wanted to use was helpful because as Rohd says they act as 'building blocks' in the 'progression' of the group process (1998, p. 2). Ultimately the session depended on how participants reacted and what they were present and open to. My initial idea in this case was to build up to using Rainbow<sup>58</sup> techniques on the second or third day so we could explore the various desires and fears in any of the struggles that they brought up.

The aim of the first session was to get everyone used to working with the theatre tools, to start telling stories and generally for the young women to start trusting the methodology and as much as possible to start trusting me. I let the activities and games work themselves into the girls. That is, create a feeling of safety in being there together, generate some focus and increase the energy of the space. Thanks to the activities being so playful there was laughter and some engagement early on in the work. I remember as I conducted the activities feeling extremely alert the whole time, but I was also tense from having high expectations of what we could achieve this first session. Expectations can be useful as they prepare us for possibilities; however, they can also be disheartening if there is no preparation for the possible outcomes and reactions to a session. For example, sometimes an activity that has worked with one group will not work in the same way again with a different group. The opposite is also true – dismissing an activity because it did not work well with one group can mean missing out on its potential effect. With this in mind, I tried to approach each activity in this workshop with a fresh outlook. So for instance

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<sup>58</sup> Rainbow of Desire is one of the techniques that Boal developed later in his career when working with participants whose struggles were less physical and systemic and more psychological. Rainbow is explained in chapter three.

when I noticed that three ‘troublemakers’ began to increasingly stand back, I did not become alarmed (as I had in some earlier work) but gave them some attention and then the option of sitting out of activities if they felt they were too confronting.

Whenever I have worked with Aboriginal people in Australia and they are reluctant to speak in front of others, or express opinions, ‘shame’ is almost always put forward as the reason. I have interpreted shame in different ways depending on the context. In some cases it has seemed to me as embarrassment that comes from not feeling comfortable in a certain group of people, for example when young Aboriginal girls have been in workshops with older women or with non-Aboriginal girls; other times I have interpreted it as coming from a feeling of insecurity about their ability to do whatever is being asked of them; a fear of being judged for not knowing the right answer or reacting the right way. This apparent lack of self-esteem and confidence, or reluctance to stand out has been partly attributed to the marginalisation that has been and continues to be experienced by indigenous people in Australia today. It has also been seen as contributing to low levels of academic achievement and social exclusion (Louth, 2012, p. 2).

As a facilitator having an idea of possible reasons for this tendency to sit back or shy away from participating is important for two reasons. First, as a

white<sup>59</sup> facilitator, no matter what my political inclinations are, my ancestry is or to what degree they participated in the oppression of indigenous people in Australia, I felt I represented the 'oppressor'. These girls might not have labelled it that, they might simply have seen me in a 'teacher' type role, but they would most probably have seen me as someone who is 'not like us' and as someone who had authority. To these young women, I was probably someone who did not really understand their lives and their struggles, and they were right, I did not. I had to take into account every time I gave an instruction and made a request of them that it was not just the dynamic of facilitator and participant that was present, there was also the dynamic of the oppressor (tacitly so) and the oppressed.

Snyder-Young talks about a need to 'de-centre our own authority...' (2011, p. 34) and as I watch the DVD of the workshops I see that throughout the workshop I was engaged in keeping a balance that swayed between asking them to do something, enticing them if they were shy, joking and making light of it, being as much as possible in touch with them. It was not a getting them on side so that they liked me, it was a getting them on side so that they trusted me enough to trust themselves and each other to participate and thereby be able to potentially benefit from the experience. In effect, it was trying to get them on side enough to get present to themselves.

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<sup>59</sup> I am a Hispanic Latin-American with olive-coloured skin, which tans almost as dark as some of the lighter-skinned girls present in the group. I do not consider myself as white, I am a person 'of colour', but to these girls I represented a white European.

The second reason why it is important to have awareness of this tendency for Aboriginal youth to feel 'shame' is because it can give the practitioner entries into posing useful questions. Asking an appropriate question may enable the young women to draw parallels between what they were too 'shamed' to act in the workshop and less sensitive situations in which they also felt shame and could not act, such as at school or at home. While the aims of the workshops were to explore struggles in their lives that were exposing them to sexual abuse and to rehearse protective behaviours, some of the young women were more confident than others. This disparity meant that it was often the same girls offering possibilities and participating with ideas and comments. I constantly tried to get the others involved in the smallest of ways. As a practitioner, my role was to make sure nothing got in the way of the women accessing a 'new self-understanding' (Ziegler, 1994, p. 39) and this task calls for a great deal of reflection and reflexivity.

As already discussed this reflection and reflexivity informs the practitioner on many levels. For instance, in this case reflection gave me insights into another tension related to authority that was present in this session: given a choice the girls would not have been in the room doing this work. Their elders and those concerned for their safety and wellbeing (also my clients) had arranged for them to participate. So as a separate issue to being someone that in their eyes had authority not only as 'teacher' but as 'white' teacher, I was 'making' them look at an uncomfortable topic. I had to get them as much as possible to feel that they would benefit from this activity and they had a choice

to participate. If there was going to be any critical reflection, let alone transformation in the space, this practitioner's role was to ensure that the young women were not feeling coerced or powerless in their participation.

The de-centring of authority, as Snyder-Young observes, needs to be balanced with fulfilling the 'job' in the eyes of the client and 'maintaining our authority as problem-posers, inciters of critical thinking and shapers of aesthetic form' (2011, p. 35). I was both creating an opening for the participants to 'choose' to be there and allowing them to truly exercise their volition and sit out if they wished. I walked a line between providing what was necessary for the girls to engage in the dialogue and participate willingly and 'making them' participate because my job was to run this workshop with them. I do promote my work as being able to 'engage those that are most difficult to engage'<sup>60</sup> and there were times when these young women were very difficult to engage. This proved particularly challenging with the group of three girls who were sabotaging the workshop activities at every turn. I was not sure about the inter-familial relationships that were present in the room, or the histories that the girls had with each other, but there was a delicate balance that I was negotiating between letting everyone who did not want to participate sit out and ensuring that the girls were not sitting out because others were. In the end the three young women were returned to Derby, which I saw as a failure on my part.

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<sup>60</sup> See [www.actout.com.au](http://www.actout.com.au)

TO is a methodology that is ostensibly expansive enough to include everyone even when they are being disruptive. But because I did not have the capacity to make it seem valuable enough for them; because I did not manage to maintain the participation of the others within the disruption, or because there were other reasons that I did not know regarding families and dynamics, the choice was made to have the ‘troublemakers’ removed. I did not make that choice, the elders made the choice and I had to respect it. This example supports what Dwyer is referring to when he brings up that there is a risk in undermining the emancipatory potential because it is a methodology in which ‘...the hierarchical nature of the teacher-student (or joker-audience) relationship is masked’ (Dwyer, 2004, p. 201). Dwyer is talking in relation to the choice of focus of a forum theatre performance and the direction of a discussion, but nonetheless, the removal of young women who were considered ‘at-risk’ of sexual abuse because they refused to take part in this imposed workshop seriously demonstrated the existence of hierarchy and the girls’ lack of agency. In my eyes, the young women were only trying to exercise power in the only way they could at that moment.

Nonetheless participation in the session improved drastically once they were gone, and this brings up a question about making the best choice for the rest of the group, another interesting tension in the work. The participation of 13 other girls was being affected by the behaviour of three. Perhaps if Boal, Santos,



Jackson<sup>61</sup>, Diamond, or some other more experienced practitioner had been the facilitator, the workshop might not have lost three participants within two hours of commencing. However, now without the disruption the workshop was allowed to continue and while there were still some activities and moments that encountered resistance, and there were still some girls that participated significantly more than others, the day flowed well.

On the first day of the workshops I included an activity I had learnt from Terry O’Leary<sup>62</sup> to generate storytelling and acting. The girls had to work in groups and each one of them had to tell a story to the group. Then in the group they had to choose one story out of all the stories shared and recount that one story to the girls in the other groups. They each had to do this in a way that did not disclose whose story it really was so that those watching would think it was possible for the story to be anyone’s. The girls watching then had to decide whose story it was. I considered it a fun and non-threatening way to get everyone sharing a story safely in a group, and then with more risk, with the larger group. It was a preparatory activity geared towards more sharing and acting later. I gave the instructions and then had to give them again several times, as I had not made myself clearly understood.

It turned out this was an extremely difficult task for many of the girls. I walked from group to group repeating the explanation. Finally, they said they were ready and I lined up three chairs for each of the storytellers to begin.

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<sup>61</sup> Adrian Jackson is an experienced practitioner and artistic director of Cardboard Citizens, a UK-based theatre company working with homeless and other marginalized groups.

<sup>62</sup> Terry O’Leary is a trainer, facilitator and joker with Cardboard Citizens.

Naturally the girls that were more confident went first and recounted their stories with each girl successfully retelling the story as if it was her own. I thought the exercise would become clearer for the rest of the group when they saw how each of the girls had added her own individual nuance to the story. But it didn't. When the second of the four groups tried to do it, I thought I would have to pull the activity because it was not working the way I had intended it to. Most of the other girls were shy, we could hardly hear them, even with the step by step explanation many had not grasped the idea that was behind the activity; that is, to act as if the story was yours even if it wasn't – this introduces the idea of acting and taking on someone else's story. However, I decided to keep the activity going for two reasons. First, I figured that just having the shyer girls recount any story, in any way in front of everyone else was enough of a challenge to them and a small step closer to feeling more confident about speaking in front of others. Second, by pulling the exercise after some had already had a go, without letting them all try may have increased a feeling of 'shame' they were already displaying. This may have seemed like a pointless exercise to some of the others who did understand the idea but I did not regret leaving it in.

I certainly did not want any of the activities to reinforce any self-beliefs about inadequacy or inability. At the same time my role was to ensure that through the activities they started to develop the skills and language of TO to enable them to explore the issue effectively. This capacity building meant enabling them to participate in all the activities that might trigger a more critical

reflection. When I watched the recordings of the workshops I could see myself adapting the way I gave directions to the young women so that they could participate critically. For instance, during the Colombian Hypnosis<sup>63</sup> exercise, the 'hypnotised' follows the extended open palm of the 'hypnotiser' who leads them around the space. Boal writes that 'the hypnotizer must force her partner unto all sorts of ridiculous, grotesque, uncomfortable positions' (Boal, 1992, p. 51). Poulter explains how her directions were different and instead of asking for forced contortions Poulter encouraged the hypnotiser to go slowly, take care of their partners and to try to work together on the movement (Poulter, 1985, 19). I too gave directions in very similar ways to this group of young women; I stressed that the 'hypnotiser' was responsible for their partner. This had important processual implications.

In this case, I was very conscious of the feelings that being so directly controlled might bring up for the participants. I felt protective of these girls and feared them reliving a feeling of shame, worthlessness or lack of control. I feared that instead of allowing them to feel freer to engage and explore, some activities might further humiliate or disrespect them and result in some participants rejecting the activity and further mistrusting the work and each other. In contrast, when working with the men in case study one I did encourage the men to experiment with all sorts of movements and twists. One possible outcome there was for the men to have an aesthetic experience that might generate empathy with being the one who is controlled as this is what their behaviour did

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<sup>63</sup> Described in chapter five.

to others. With the young women; however, the activity could serve not only to explore the issue of being controlled but also for them to start feeling more confident in discussing it critically. With this activity, as with another similar activity called Blind Cars, I chose to stop the action and tell them that they depended on each other and had to generate trust with each other. Each time I checked them in some way, I tried to do it gently and without letting any frustration show. What is more, I often brought up some of these issues during the debrief discussion, so that how they chose to conduct the activity was as important as what they felt in relation to issue of protective behaviours.

Interestingly – and Boal may have laughed at this – some of the girls took great pleasure in tripping each other up and making their partners run into doors and table edges. It is possible that my feeling of protectiveness might have reinforced a feeling of ‘victimhood’, and the girls may not have seen themselves as vulnerable or ‘victims’ at all. It is possible that the girls were less fragile than I assumed. Earlier, during the story-sharing activity I found myself looking around the room wondering who had been sexually abused already, when had it happened, who had abused them, who was scared of being sexually abused now, what did they see as abuse? I was suddenly struck by the sensitivity of the issue we were going to examine. Of course I already knew this but at that moment, in contact with the young women, I became very aware of the vulnerability we were asking them to tolerate during the process. What is more, I suddenly felt a rush of self-doubt as I questioned my ability to guide them safely

through the process. Who was I to even be asking them to share anything? Perhaps they did not want to share because it was nobody else's business.

In theory, using TO would allow the participants to examine where they were in relation to their ability to protect themselves, who was a threat, what was acceptable behaviour, what was a trespass. TO would also, in theory, allow them to determine how much they were able to protect themselves and how this would be possible; what actions this would require. Then, finally, they would be able to rehearse these actions and in theory, take them out into their real lives and enact them as needed. This was the theory.

It is interesting to note here that I had to dwell on and make decisions in a space where there was an ever-present tension between the way in which I knew the session could run and the way it did run. In this and other projects, there is always a tension between what activities could be employed and the transformative impact these could have AND the reality of how the session had to run according to where the participants were willing to go, and how the activities sat with them. I thought back to the girls' reluctance to share a simple story, how agonizing it had seemed for some of them to talk in front of everyone, but how they had eventually done it; I thought back at how they had seemed awkward and self-conscious when we did any of the activities but how they had laughed a lot during some of them, they had been very cheeky and demonstrative with each other, but it was when it came to opening up and

sharing about emotion or relating it to their real lives, they did not want to open up.

Participants may resist coming to Boal's 'imaginary mirror' (1995, 13) that is presented in the aesthetic space so they can 'see' themselves; the practitioner has to find ways ignite or uncover this quality for 'self-observation'. The practitioner has to be present enough and reflective enough to decide what exercises, games and techniques will be most useful to 'safeguard, develop and reshape' this theatre 'vocation' which Boal ascribes to human beings (1995, 14). In other words, we are reflecting on how best to generate self-reflection or a 'process by which one's false consciousness becomes transcended', i.e. Freire's 'conscientisation' in our participants (Freire 1970 in Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985, p. 23). If we want to promote a reflection that leads to self-knowledge and then empowerment it has to be accessed through understanding where participants sit in their individual constructs of their world. 'One must again and again return to the person before us' (Abbs, 1974 in Boud Keogh & Walker, 1985, p. 23). This is easier said than done. What is more, Nicholson points to the importance of having a shared understanding of the context in which TO's work is carried out (2005, p. 119), between upholding 'idealistic principles' and exposing 'materialist politics' (2005, p. 124). In other words, it is also necessary to understand our own as well as others' worldviews.

After the session I spent a few hours on focused reflection about how the session had gone and the changes I needed to make before next one. So far

that first day we had only briefly mentioned the issue of protective behaviours and had not related any of the activities so far to sexual abuse or any personal stories. During the second day we would have to touch on the issue more explicitly and start to unpack it through the activities.

I realised that since it had been so challenging to recount a story in day one, talking further about anything relating to their own lives AND to sexually related content was going to be impossible; the girls would not even share if they had boyfriends or not! This might have also been partly to the presence of older community women in the workshops. On one hand the presence of the older women helped because they were respected and so the girls participated, on the other hand, their presence could deter the girls from opening up fully; I had to find a way to better negotiate this dynamic. I had also remarked that during their afternoon workshop on protective behaviours (with other facilitators) the young women had been quite focused, listened and offered some input about weak and strong relationships; they had participated well. The facilitators from the host organisation had used examples from case studies and I felt the young women had found this engaging.

## **Day 2 – changing tack; staying on course**

It was from these reflections that I decided that I would try using Blagg, the technique developed by Theatre in Prisons and Probation (TiPP) run through Manchester University. I had some idea of the way it should be done as I had read a couple of reports (Matthijssen, 2006; Hughes, 2003) and had been

experimenting with it at a juvenile detention centre. Blagg is an applied theatre technique – developed to work with offenders – in which a group of people in the same situation creates a fictitious character that, if real, would be there in the same situation as them. It uses image and forum theatre work as well as techniques from other applied theatre form (Balfour, 2009, p. 351). Even though these girls were not offenders I could see how it might be useful to distance the girls' real stories from the stories they might create for a character.

In this case reflection led to adapting the sessions and using a technique that I was not familiar with, but which I intuitively felt would work better than the course I was pursuing up to then. This was a risk that I was willing to take even though I was far from comfortable using it. Moreover, I had to let go of using Rainbow to examine their personal stories because without the girls' full engagement accessing personal stories was not going to happen. 'There has to be a point in which the artistic and educational integrity determines that it is not worth proceeding!' shares Vine, referring to the adaptation that is sometimes needed when making technique choices while working with young people (Duffy, 2010, p. 199).

As Kemmis points out this kind of Aristotelian practical reasoning, which is the kind of reflection I am concerned about here, not only has the means and the ends in mind but also the criteria by which the action will be deemed effective or not (Kemmis, 1985, p. 141). A potentially transformative practitioner is continuously considering these. In this context, I decided that my criteria would strongly favour engagement; I wanted to make sure everyone was



participating; everyone felt they had something to offer and could. The openness and trust needed for the deep exploratory and aesthetic work possible with Boal's Rainbow techniques would not be sustained with this group, at least not by me. I wanted the young women to get to the end of the workshops and feel they had been included; they had been capable of participating and to different degrees had gained some insights and learning. I wanted them to feel that they had been creative and they had had some fun.

Following this reflection, I asked the young women to create a character based on a young woman who, if real, would have a similar background to them and perhaps even be there with them that day. In addition, I embraced the simple language of 'strong' and 'weak' of the protective behaviours workshop to cover the spectrum of relationships, including relationships that might be violent and/or sexually abusive. Joy! The young women became extremely engaged and animated as they shouted over each to construct the imaginary characters, giving them names, backgrounds and occupations. Once we had the main characters – they called the protagonist Sharona, she had a boyfriend, Michael, and three best girlfriends – I invited them to create three separate scenarios in which Sharona had a weak relationship with someone. The girls were now in three groups. One group derived a scenario in which the weak relationship was with a family member, another group a weak relationship was with a friend, and the last group a weak relationship with her boyfriend. The language and examples about what constituted a weak relationship were fresh in their minds, as they had only just workshopped that the previous afternoon. What is more,

this 'double framing' protected them from having to share anything personal about their own lives while still enabling them to use their experience in the drama (O'Connor, Holland & O'Connor, nd, 9). Moreover, the activity would still incite some reflection using the distance afforded by the use of the Blagg methodology. The girls may not have been willing to step in front of Boal's 'mirror' for a serve of self-reflection, but they were present to debate what someone 'like' them, albeit a fictional character, might encounter when she stepped up to have a look at what was going on and what was possible.

As in the work with the men in case study one, if reflection is, as Kammis asserts, a political act 'which either hastens or defers the realisation of a more rational, just and fulfilling society, '(Kemmis, 1985, p. 140) then we are asking the participants in a transformative practice to participate in an act of subversion. Bearing in mind that if we consider any community, in this case the community in which the girls lived, a system in which everyone has a part in both the liberation and the oppression of everyone else, we were asking these girls to demand that their aunties, cousins, grandmothers and older role models too reflected on the actions presented. For some of the girls this might have been impossible with some of those people present in the space; it might have been impossible even if they were not. It might have been impossible for anyone. In this way using Blagg could potentially allow the participants to be subversive and reflective vicariously, through a fictional character. Through the character they would be able to suspend attitudes and values in order to better see them and raise awareness (Bohm et al, 1991, p. 6). I was free to ask 'what

does Sharona think?’ or ‘why would Sharona find it hard to say that?’ for example, rather than have to ask the participants directly ‘why is it hard for you to do this?’

The second day then ended with the young women having created a set of characters, a set of scenarios and a set of simple dialogues illustrating **weak** relationships. The first scene involved Sharona being ‘visited’ by her uncle. The uncle came into her room and asked her if he could lie next to her. The second scene was with Sharona’s boyfriend Michael who was treating her roughly and trying to control her. The last scene depicted a struggle between Sharona and her girlfriends because she was spending more time with her boyfriend than with them. I ended that session with a very high-energy activity in which in two groups the girls competed against each other; it was fast and engaging and there was no need to talk or think, just physical action. It generated a lot of laughter – that was how I wanted to finish the day – with laughter.

### **Day 3 – who’s taking whose power?**

After such a positive session on the second day I had arrived at the space feeling pumped about what we would be able to achieve. This third day was about deconstructing and examining possibilities for the character they had created. What was examined today would fuse together all the work we had done so far and culminate in some rehearsed actions that might leave an imprint that could make a difference to their safety and wellbeing. In my mind it was a big day.

Not for them. Maybe it was because we had had a barbecue the night before with other young people or maybe because they had had enough of all the relationship stuff, but the young women initially did not want to participate at all! If I had not been contracted to do this work I would not have continued at this point.

I started to understand two things. First, participants have to want to be there and find what we are doing valuable. Doing this work, exploring what is going on in our relationships – even if it is in the relationships of a fictitious character – is demanding, no matter how playful and creative the activities. What arises can be consciously or subconsciously disturbing, even for people who were willingly participating. These young women had been brought here to learn about themselves, about ways to act more protectively and assertively. There was no ambiguity about the potential risk they might be exposed to or had already been exposed to. Everyone knew about the widespread sexual abuse in the region, everyone knew about the endemic family violence present in their communities, everyone knew about the high rates of suicide; it was in all the papers. So this work, located among activities that could engage aesthetically and generate laughter and unity was serious and intense.

Their elders, concerned for their wellbeing, were imposing this supposed 'holiday' on them. However, as far as I could discern the girls would have rather been in the town checking out the boys and looking at clothes; or walking along the beach or listening to their own music and talking about people they knew –

just like most teenagers, everywhere. This point leads to the second point and back to the comment by Abbs (1974 in Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985, p. 23) about the need to always keep in mind the participants. There was a moment at the beginning of day three when my reaction was to worry about the job I had to do. How 'my' session was going to run, about how 'I' had to energise the space. To be able to keep them engaged I had to keep **their** realities in the forefront remember this was **their** workshop.

And so we pushed on. After some energizing activities and some pep talking by the elders, we began the third day with a set of dialogues ready to be rehearsed and performed as 'mini-forum' pieces. That is, the young women would perform their short scenes and dialogues to the group and those watching would intervene and offer alternatives that would help the main character, Sharona, gain power in her **weak** relationships.

### **Don't do this to me!**

I was formulating how this was going to unfold as it was unfolding. As with the men in the previous chapter, I had to be present to know how to proceed. It was both an unnerving and liberating way of working, not knowing what I was going to do next, but knowing that I would know what to do. To do this I used an activity (that I had remembered that morning) we had learnt during training with O'Leary. It involved a simple forum scene in which a female character is harassed by a male character on a train. There is also a third passenger on the train reading a paper. The participants who were not in the

scene had to watch it in the way one watches a forum play and think of ways in which the 'oppressed' character, in this case the woman, could take the power away from the 'oppressor', in this case the man harassing her. It had been quite powerful when we had done it with O'Leary because taking the power away from the perpetrator had been very difficult. I still had an embodied memory of feeling overpowered by that character when I had tried to intervene; I had failed. It had brought home in a visceral way just how difficult it is to put into action what one thinks is possible while watching.

I needed three volunteers to play the three characters. The girls required some coaxing to take on the roles but eventually we had the woman and the bystander, but not the man. While I was trying to entice others to take on the role of oppressor it dawned on me that nobody there was going to play it and I would have to do it. I had failed to anticipate this in my quick decision to use this activity, but it was not surprising that nobody would want to play the offending character. As I discussed at length in the previous chapter I had jumped into scenes on several occasions while working with the men who had been violent. I had taken on oppressor roles when I thought they were not being fully honest and played them the way I thought was more authentic. In those occasions I had not felt like I had to tread gently or hold back in the role.

In this case, however, it was a very disturbing role to play, but I also did not want to change the activity. So I did it; but it was very strange. It was not a violent role, but it was a role in which my character tried to make the other

character feel as threatened and as uncomfortable as possible so that they would be able to generate actions that came from a genuine aesthetic experience. However, I was also aware that for many of the young women this kind of harassment – and probably worse – would have been a reality that they had lived with and I did not want to confront anyone so much that they relived an offence.

Also, it might have been much more effective to have male play this character as at first some of the girls did not understand why I was acting that role. At one point I heard a voice saying ‘is she a lesbian or what?’ This misunderstanding made it even more clear to me that this activity was necessary to make it absolutely clear that we were acting and that when you are acting you can take on any role. Likewise, it was important so that the girls could practise and witness the concept of trying to take the power away from someone in a random activity before trying to do this in a scene depicting closer to home situations.

For the duration of this whole activity I was both in the action playing the harasser and in the session being the facilitator. From my position in the scene I would sometimes break out of character and ask the girls questions about the scene and the shift of power in it. Was the character still feeling threatened? Was my character any less powerful after she sat somewhere else on the train? We had several young women try to overcome the harassment and get away from the ‘oppressive’ character. It had worked as an examination of how difficult

it was to actually get the power and what strategies had more success than others. Interestingly, the intervention the girls thought had had the best outcome involved violence. The young woman who played it was about a 30 centimetres taller than me and much wider; at 20 she was also one of the older girls. She resisted my character's leering and advances until finally she aggressively stood up and pushed me away. It was a very clear and visible power difference because she was so much bigger than me. The girls watching seemed to love the action; they clapped and cheered. I could not stay in character and stand up to her, but laughed and agreed, while nothing else had worked as soon as she stood up and threatened me physically my character had backed away. Clearly this action may not have the same impact if I had been male and 30 centimetres taller than her; likewise, its use of physical violence is questionable. However, in their eyes it had worked; she had taken my character's power away and those watching got the idea. Those that took a role in the scene had reflected and acted; those that sat back and observed had at least seen the characters reflecting and acting.

Furthermore, I too as the practitioner reflected and acted and through this action affected the social world, therefore placing myself as Kemmis writes '...in the historical struggle for social emancipation, whether implicitly or explicitly' (1985, p. 146). For me it was very explicit, this was my intention. Likewise, for the young women who have been brought together by their women elders and community leaders any reflection that lead to action, even if only in the aesthetic space created in the workshop, also meant implicit, and



probably unwitting, participation in a political act. The 'oppressed' woman pushing the 'oppressor', away aggressively communicated 'don't do this to me!', at least that is how I interpreted it. Additionally, although I did not think about this much at the time, I could see that this activity may have also been useful as a way to help the girls distinguish between saying something as a character and saying something as themselves – a distinction that was important when expressing themselves in the Blagg scenes.

### **The Scenes**

The first significant observation for me was about the two young women who enacted the very first scene of Sharona with her uncle. These roles were played by two of the least confident girls who during session one had been very shy to tell their story. The dialogue was very simple and the performances were far from powerful in my eyes, but standing in front of the group and acting out the dialogue when they had previously not wanted to even share a story, felt like a remarkable accomplishment to me – I was delighted.

Some of the young women watching shouted out what they thought the girl's character should do and when I asked them to step into the scene and change the action themselves they did not need much coaxing. This is where having practised and demonstrated intervening on the train scene proved useful. What they were creating through Blagg, as Balfour observes, was 'limited in its aesthetic impact' (2009, p. 351) but it was provoking participation, engagement and discussion and I was happy with that. At one point the girl playing Sharona

was replaced by a very confident participant and after some negotiating with her uncle someone suggested that she tell his Mum. So I asked one of the adult organisers to step into the scene and play the uncle's mother but I whispered to her not to believe anything Sharona said. The scene went on for a while with the mother disbelieving and making every kind of excuse for her son until I felt it was becoming repetitive so I stepped in and stopped the scene. When I watched the recording I thought that I should have let the scene run a bit longer. I remember the whole time the Blagg scenes were being performed that I was very concerned about the girls watching getting bored or the ones playing the characters feeling uncomfortable in the parts. As I watched the recording I saw that I could have been less worried and let the participants take the scene further than I let it go. Part of the role of the joker is to problematise, which is why I asked the woman playing 'aunty' not to believe what Sharona told her but I did not let the problem expose itself fully and give the character more time to get what she wanted, i.e. the power. What we might have seen if I had not stopped the action are variations to the reactions that Steve might have had on being accused in front of his Mum. In other words, the problematizing could have continued until Sharona had had many opportunities to come up against the reality of the action she had begun to pursue. I was not present to this; my attention was on keeping it engaging and fast moving for everyone in order to maintain everyone's attention to the end.

In reflection, I also became aware that I had been endorsing an action as enabling the character to move closer to having power or not. All of us

watching, including me, believed that the best thing for Sharona to do was to let someone else know what was going on. We uttered comments like ‘that’s a really good idea’ or asked ‘so how many people know about it now?’ indicating that nothing was too shameful to talk about, our accepted ideas about protective behaviours – what we were encouraging here was a rehearsal of that action. This critical reflection is important, not just here but throughout this work, because it helped to unveil my own assumptions and perspectives, my own unsuspected attitudes and beliefs (Brookfield, 2000, p. 143). If the work is to have a transformative quality it must be as unaffected by these limiting parameters so that it can lead to an action that is emancipatory for the participant.

As I mentioned, I had a lot of expectation about this project because it had meant so much to me to be doing it. I had expected to be able to use Boal’s Rainbow techniques to thoroughly deconstruct experiences and enable the young women to increase their self-awareness, gain insights into their ability to overcome obstacles and maybe stay safe from sexual abuse and violence. I had also expected them to be more engaged throughout. In the end, we had a very powerful session and the three scenes were enacted and deconstructed; everything had flowed. But it is very important to note that effectively, the girls had had no choice. They were made to be there and the authority of their elders and of the practitioner directed them and imposed this work on them. I did not quite have to ‘peel workshop participants off the walls and beg, cajole or try to force them to engage’ as David Diamond (2007, p. 56) strongly asserts is not

the role of the practitioner; but there was still an overarching knowing that most of them would have rather been somewhere else. Whether in spite of that the three days of workshops led to a transformative experience, to whatever degree, for some of them is questionable.

Lastly, I recall noticing during one of the warm up activities at the beginning of the session on day two, that all the girls were actually participating in what I thought would be a really confronting activity. Boal calls it 'two by three by Bradford' (Boal, 1992, p. 106). It is an exercise that has different stages and can be a little complicated to explain but I chose to do it because it requires the participants to think sequentially with another person, to be expressive both physically and vocally and to perform. Also, in my experience it generates a lot of laughter and sometimes there are some very creative displays.

In pairs participants stand facing each other and the first step is to take it in turns to count to three between them. So the first person says 'one', the second person says 'two' and then the first person says 'three', then the second person goes back to 'one' and it continues until they have the hang of it and establish a pattern. What happens next is that instead of saying 'one' the person whose turn it is to say it makes up a movement and a sound. Now they continue counting but every time they come to where 'one' would be they have to do the action and the make the sound. I always demonstrate and in this case I demonstrated with the most outgoing young woman in the group. When it

comes to my turn I always make up a very outrageous movement and sound and it makes everyone laugh.

It can be a confronting activity and I expected some of the girls to drop off or stand back and not do it. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see that they all did it, even the elders. The same girls that half way through the first day would barely whisper their story to the group, were now standing in front of everyone and making rhythmic movements with their bodies and uttering nonsense sounds. Is this transformative? Will they appear different afterwards to themselves and those around them? Is it possible that the experience of a workshop like this will be a critical incident for them in the future, something that they will remember and which will motivate them to pursue something different or remind them that there were other alternatives and that they have the capacity to perform them?

## **Conclusion**

In all, the three days demanded a huge amount of recurrent and refocused energy and great effort to engage and keep the young women participating – not all the girls all the time, just some of them some of the time. Sometimes some girls just looked bored but watched on as others participated. As I reflected after the last day I know I had both a feeling of relief and frustration. I was relieved because I did not want to continue working in a power dynamic that resembles that of a school. Especially at the end, when we were doing some focused and serious digging around relationships. We attend school

because it is generally necessary for our participation and survival/success in our social settings. Students are not asked if they want to learn certain subjects, instead there is a core set of subjects that are deemed necessary to know and get some skill in. Similarly, this workshop was considered useful by a group of women leaders from the community who dealt with the issues treated, i.e. sexual abuse and violence, and knew the young women participating were vulnerable to both.

The young women were offered a three-day holiday in Broome, with outings to the cinema, around the town and to a youth centre to meet other young people. It was all planned to be very appealing. They attended for their own reasons, but they were not consulted about workshopping protective behaviours through theatre. I had been employed to conduct a workshop that engaged them enough for them to explore where they had power, and for this I was paid a fee. I had been brought there by the community but those who made the decisions held power over the participants, I became complicit in this, even if it was for the best, like going to school. As Taylor points out: 'what seems to be a true negotiation is often not; key pedagogical decisions are made before participants are genuinely engaged with the work,' (Taylor, 2003, 67).

I had great expectations of myself and of my capacity to create an aesthetic space that allowed every participant a degree of freedom and expression. I am not sure if I could have communicated to them my motivation; that I was there because I wished for them all to be safe from harm and abuse

and I thought this was a good way for them to discover how to do that. I could not communicate that I thought we were all in this together. I don't think I could have said this to them because it would have sounded hollow and false. We were not in this together – they were **there** in their communities living and witnessing appalling situations that I read about in newspapers **here**.

That I was motivated to patiently sustain the vision and commit to the effort that it took to arrive at working with the young women from Derby is unquestionable. From investing in training and radically changing jobs to driving 2,200 kilometres to Derby to returning there several times and building relationships in the community, this would not have been possible without motivation. I got the opportunity that I wanted and if the work had any transformative impact, motivation would have to be given some credit. Further, reflection enabled me to identify and negotiate the multiple tensions present in the work. These tensions were potential obstacles to any chance of awareness raising or transformation. In this chapter I have demonstrated how continuous reflection aided this practitioner in getting out of the way so that something genuine could emerge. In other words, reflection enabled me to recognise how far we could potentially go in contrast to how far we would actually be able to go and still remain true to the generative possibility of the work. For example, reflection helped me to 'de-centre' as much as possible the potentially oppressive 'white' person and 'teacher' authority that I represented to the young women. Similarly, recognising the girls' reluctance to tell stories in front of their elders but understanding the need for the elders to be there, led to employing

Blagg. Also, by being able to recognise that the girls did not really want to be there I was able to keep my focus on engagement while at the same time working closely with the elders who hired me to deliver the learning they wanted. Thus, through doing this work reflectively this practitioner accessed empirical evidence from the practice that directly informed the work as it unfolded in real time.

It had taken me two and a half years to make this opportunity happen and at the end I sat at the end of the third day wondering if TO or applied theatre had really been the best way to work on this; wondering if I had just contributed to the disempowerment of the young women who took part in the workshop. I consoled myself with a note I received from one of the participants:

*This workshop was great; it made me think about the future. I really loved it.*

Maxine Greene referred to teaching artists as being activators of the imagination allowing what is not yet seen to arise and be seen as possible (Greene 1987 in Taylor 2003, p. 70). I only hope that I was able to maximise what the young women might have imagined; as mentioned above, to be present to themselves and each other and their possible futures.



## CHAPTER 7

### Relationship Status – creating a forum play with young people or the aesthetics of reflection

*“If no one changes the world it will stay as it is, if no one changes the play it will come to the same end as before”* (Boal, 1993, p. 20)

We arrived at the building where the performance was to take place. I parked the van and reminded everyone to be responsible for their own clothes and props. The building did not look like it was used very often: an old cinema still owned by the high school. The caretaker welcomed us and we made our way through the mildew smell that filled the building to the back room that served as a dressing room and weights gym.

We were in Katanning, a rural centre, three hours southeast of Perth and we were on in forty minutes.

Georgia and Fiona immediately clambered over the equipment, calling each other names. Michael had lit a cigarette and stayed outside and Bec talked incessantly about a number of subjects, ranging from her siblings, to her dressmaking, to her neighbour’s outbursts. Grace, who was technically the stage manager, was going over lines under her breath. She had had to step in a few days earlier when Gemma announced that she suffered from anxiety and could not travel that far away from home. My levels of anxiety had shot through the roof. We had spent the last three months workshoping, creating, scripting and rehearsing – for our debut performance of *Relationship Status*. I called everyone to the stage and we ‘bumped in: we placed the few props that

we had on the stage and talked for a minute about where everyone should stand on the stage and how everyone should leave. I made everyone eat one of the sandwiches I had made at 4:30 that morning. I asked Grace to help with some vocal warm-up exercises; the whole time, all the young actors were goofing around. Mia, the videographer, let an occasional smile visit her cool poker face as she observed the chaos. My mind was racing.

*Would they remember their lines? Would Georgia remember to take her props with her?*

*Would Fiona remember to take a breath during her lines?*

*Would Bec remember to keep her eyes open when she was speaking?*

*Would they be able to improvise with members of the audience?*

*Would the members of the audience actually get up and come on stage?*

*Would I know what questions to ask when it came time to interact with the audience?*

I was hyper-tense. Finally, I forced us all to focus, told everyone they were 'all over' this and told them to 'break a leg'. Fish said 'Chookas'. The Katanning Senior High School students were arriving: all seventy of them. I stepped to the side for a couple of seconds, took a deep breath, clapped my sweaty palms three times (my anchoring gesture) and walked out onto the stage to face the audience: to be the 'joker'.

An hour and a half later, I was ecstatic. I almost cried! I was also so relieved, I collapsed onto the stage floor and just sat there, breathing,

smiling and shaking my head. Our first performance, my first forum play, had not been a complete disaster.

That was the first of four performances of the forum play, *Relationship Status*. Thankfully, people did change the endings.

As chapter three explains, a forum play is developed with generally one main character<sup>64</sup>, whose struggles are the focus of the play. The play offers no resolution; rather, it is a series of unresolved moments (or anti-models) with negative outcomes for the protagonist(s). If someone in the audience can relate to the character, they can stop the action and step onto the stage to be aesthetically in the situation and attempt to use different actions to change the outcome. The play becomes a kind of experiment where anything is possible and can be tried. It becomes the rehearsal of possibility for change in the real world: a possibility that, according to Cohen-Cruz, has now become more plausible and familiar, not only to the spect-actor performing it, but also to the audience watching (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 45).

Theatre in general, as Atlas observes, has the power ‘...to embrace multiple meanings and to resist, reframe and reconfigure....’ This power serves to enable us to ‘engage in the critical and visionary thinking needed to imagine the world differently’ (2001 in Donovan 2005, p. 46). Because a forum play is created using issues that affect the collective (in this case, young people), the

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<sup>64</sup> Adaptations of the form can include several protagonists or ‘powerless observers’ (see Diamond, 2007, 115). Patterson offers an argument for remaining true to Boal’s original form to retain the clarity and strength in the protagonist role (2013, 14 -17).

potential involves collectively imagining a different world. In TO, as Boal explains, the collective acts as ‘...a multiple mirror to enable new and multiple readings of past (and always present) events.’ (Boal, 1995, p. xxiii)

*Relationship Status*, created entirely from images and stories workshopped over three months with a group of seven young people, addressed issues of bullying and abuse through social media over the Internet. In chapters five and six of this thesis, I examined, the role of practitioner in the context of two workshops: one with offenders and another with indigenous young women. I discuss the practitioner in this third case study in the context of creating and directing a performance of forum theatre with a mixed group of young people. This case study further highlights the diversity of the roles played by the practitioner. These roles included project designer, project coordinator, publicist, cook, driver and counselor, as well as facilitator, writer and director. How did I perform these roles? How well did I act as ‘conduit’ for the range of energies present in the workshops and the performance spaces. And how well did I sustain what Bentley calls ‘a space for mutual learning’? (Bentley, 2001, p. 42) More importantly, to what extent did my activities and expressed insights in the project enhance or reduce participants’ opportunities for transformation? Which attributes made, or would have made, a difference to this play and to the whole project?

The first part of this chapter describes how the project developed. In the context of motivation, I describe its initial conceptualisation, funding acquisition

and recruitment of young people. Secondly, I discuss the processes of developing a performance with the young people. Throughout, I explore the important roles of presence and reflection in enhancing the project's transformative possibilities.

## Forum Theatre

### What I expected to create

*Participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed* (Greene, M. 1995, p. 123)

To hear, see and become more conscious by participation: these are the transformative possibilities I wanted to incite through the creation of a forum theatre performance with young people. Ideally, this is what I envisioned when I sat in a reverie and imagined the project. I wanted to create a forum play that left both young participants and I overflowing with our sense of capacity and power to affect change. I wanted the feeling to be so contagious that it spilled out from them to every young person in the audiences, engendering in them a desire to participate in the community for social change.

Further, I wanted every adult to feel both a bit ashamed at their possibly low expectations of young people and excited about the potential they now recognised in them. I also wanted to create forum theatre that viscerally moved

and inspired all involved to take action. The play would be inspiring and all who participated would be affected. My vision was alive with idealism.

When I first read about forum theatre in 2006, I was intrigued by the prospect of theatre that went beyond simply depositing information at an intellectual level, and moved toward an actual dialogue between the actors and audience (Cohen-Cruz, 20010, p. 43). I grew increasingly curious about creating theatre with no resolutions other than a request that the audience participate in collaborative problem solving in the oppressed protagonist's best interest. In 2007, I was further inspired by a DVD, *Out of the Silence*, David Diamond's work at Theatre for Living<sup>65</sup> in Canada. I had read about how this project broke new ground and its telecast to various locations around the Canada (Diamond, 1994, p. 35).<sup>66</sup> Watching the real performance excited me, as I witnessed how the audience experienced real freedom to discuss an extremely sensitive topic without feeling the need to be directly linked to the suggestions that came at the end of the performance. I observed that the increased potential for transformation lies in this final collapse of the divide between the audience and the actors.

*Out of the Silence* (1992) is a forum play about domestic violence and abuse. The characters are part of a Native American family, whose patriarch is a seemingly affable guy who bullies his family and regularly sexually abuses his

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65 Formerly Headlines Theatre

66 Later performances by Diamond's Headline Theatre (now Theatre for Living) were not only telecast around the country but also to various locations around the world, and through the Internet, viewers were able to request that actors perform certain actions on stage to experiment with a certain possibility – see Meth and Don't Say a Word.

daughter. The play is set on the daughter's birthday, with a scene in which the father/perpetrator gives the 'birthday girl' a diamond ring. When it came time for the audience to intervene, many took the role of the girl or mother. They refused the ring or argued that the ring was a more appropriate present for a lover, not a daughter. The discussion centred on the ring as a way for the father to show 'ownership' of his daughter (Diamond, 1994). I was deeply moved as I watched how one scene generated twenty or so interventions that led to an open discussion on such a sensitive issue in a public space. Watching it, I noticed how it was both poignant and powerful. I felt that empathy, as I had worked on the issue of domestic violence -- mainly with groups of both survivors and offenders.

In 2009, I also watched and intervened in Anne Sorenson's *After School I'll Marry You*<sup>67</sup>, involving young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds on issues related to sexual health. That experience helped me understand more clearly what Boal calls the transition from spectator to spect-actor (Boal, 1995, p. 25). As a member of the audience, I stepped up to the stage and enacted a possibility. I experienced the safe distance between myself and the suggestion I had made because I was playing a character; I was participating aesthetically. As Boal explains: 'when a spect-actor occupies the stage ...he or she does it in the name of all other spectators, because they know that if they don't agree, they themselves can invade the stage and show their opinion' (Boal, 1995, p. 25).

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<sup>67</sup> The play was one of the outcomes of the Sharing Stories Project through the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Perth Western Australia.

There is no correct or right solution sought, for, as Donovan explains, part of the process of transformation lies in the exploration of multiple possibilities and approaches (Donovan, 2005, p. 39). I was immediately reminded of how I had seen participatory action research (Baum, MacDougal & Smith, 2006, p. 854) employed in health projects in China. When one spectator intervened and returned to the audience, there was both a degree of separation (from playing a character) and closeness to the experience (from physically enacting), which allowed a profound yet distanced dialogue. This process reminded me of the 'think, act, look' principle of PAR and the role of the joker as problematiser, similar to what Stringer (1996) calls the researcher as catalyst (Stringer, 1996, p. 23). Forum theatre was a medium centred on a 'we're-all-in-this-together' attitude. It spoke to both side of my being: community development practitioner and artist. I sought the experience of creating an aesthetic space to problem-solve as a collective - through the expression of individual ideas. Determined to learn the form and one day create forum theatre, watched other Theatre for Living forum plays, *Meth* (2006) and *Don't Say a Word* (2003).

In addition, I started to learn this methodology by training with the people I wanted to learn from. During the 2008 Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) Conference in Omaha, Nebraska, I participated in Boal's workshops on turning forum theatre into Legislative Theatre.<sup>68</sup> They presented many of the principles of intervention; I was able to experience rehearsal

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<sup>68</sup> Legislative Theatre is another branch of the Theatre of the Oppressed Tree in which the performance is aimed at affecting legislation, see Legislative Theatre (Boal, 1998)



techniques and the creation of scenes. Further, I gained significant understanding of the practicalities of the construction of a forum play during training with Terry O’Leary, from the UK-based Cardboard Citizens.<sup>69</sup> During a week-long intensive, O’Leary led us through the stages of constructing a forum piece, which we presented to an audience. We also experienced being able to intervene and even direct or ‘joker’ some scenes. This training gave me ideas for structuring the creation of forum theatre and reinforced the possibility of working with non-actors. As with case study two, I did not know how or when I would create a forum play, but I was determined to do it.

### **Creating the Opportunity**

Creating the opportunity to implement this project was an epic effort, almost as epic as creating the play. Perhaps this project would have been different if I were a well-established practitioner with an existing reputation. In such a case, I might have been required to do little negotiation and would have had at hand what I required: participants, the space, the support, and the resources to pay everyone and myself. But no, I was an emerging practitioner; if I wanted the opportunity, I had to create it myself. How else would I get an opportunity to learn?

I completed some small projects and trained with Barbara Santos, Warren Linds, Julian Boal and Adam Blatner at the 2010 PTO Conference and decided to apply for funding from a local community arts organisation. The application was complex: I was required to show how the project would benefit

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69 Cardboard Citizens is led by Adrian Jackson and almost all of their work centres on working with homeless people and involving non-actors in performances (see [www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk](http://www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk)).

the artists involved and demonstrate that I had garnered the local community's support, which required hours of telephone and email communication, contacting key personnel at schools, community centres, city councils, local businesses, local artists and local residents and gathering written proof of their support.

Secondly, I had to demonstrate the likely impacts on the community. I compiled of the project's objectives: first, to contribute to the community's transformation into a place where people treat each other with respect and violence is eliminated. Second, we would raise awareness and generate peer-based discussion about how the impacts of violence on young people and the challenges to respectful relationships that existed in the lives of local young people. Third, the artists would use and explore the medium; gain experience and present this experience as an effective tool to engage a community and generate discussion of creative ideas to tackle the issue of violence. Fourth, this project would recognise the capacities of young people to contribute and voice their issues and concerns (between young people and the adults in their lives) by generating meaningful interaction through the aesthetic medium of theatre. As I wrote these objectives I knew there was very little I would be able to substantiate other than to assert that we would all get to practice and experience the medium.

Nonetheless, the application described a project that aimed ambitiously to involve a maximum of eighteen young people in four forum theatre performances to their peers (in schools) and the community (at a public venue).

The rationale for the project was well researched; the aims clear, perhaps lofty, and the outputs realistic and attainable. I had specific timeframes for advertising, methods for recruitment, guidelines for recruitment interviews, schedules for weekly workshops and weekly mentoring sessions. I had devised additional roles set out that participants would all be mentored in poster design, props, stage management, photography, blog writing and monitoring & evaluation. When I finally popped the large A3 envelope into the mailbox, I knew that I was submitting a very strong proposal, the probability of which, I knew, going according to plan was very low. And I was right. Nothing turned out the way I had planned.

## **Recruitment**

I requested the maximum \$15,000; I was thrilled when we received \$11,000. I later managed to obtain an extra \$7,500 from two separate organisations. As it turned out, funding was the easy part. I had designed the recruitment process guided by the UN Y-Peer program<sup>70</sup> - a program using theatre for peer education. I sought to generate as much ownership and engagement as possible because I predicted the time and commitment required. I also wanted participants to realise the competitive nature of the project: they had earned a much sought-after place. The documents explained the project and selection criteria and contained an application form and interview guidelines. A number of artists and community figures agreed to serve on the interview panel. The flyer sent to all the schools I made contact with earlier

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70 United Nations Population Fund (2005) Standards for Peer Education Programs, United Nations Population Fund and Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER), New York.

complemented the poster I had posted in community centres, notice boards and other places that might be frequented by youth, including laundromats, churches, supermarkets and libraries. Advertising included Classified advertisements in several community newspapers and a free newspaper noticeboard to thousands of homes in three catchment areas (total population: over 230,000). Agreements with several schools allowed me to recruit young people; so I reconnected with them, visited schools and invited groups of young people to participate. As application deadlines loomed, I waited. I was horrified to receive only four applications. What was wrong with young people? Didn't anyone want to be part of this great social change project? The self-talk that ensued was fraught with thoughts about giving up, handing back the funding and concentrating on building up my business running workshops. I blamed young people for being apathetic and unmotivated. At the same time, I thought about being proactive and finding some way to recruit a few more people. I remember lying in bed mid-morning wincing as sound bytes from motivational speakers came back to me: '...it is in the moments of decision that your destiny is shaped' and 'take action', I heard Anthony Robbins croon. I had recently attended a workshop by neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner, Michael Grinder, who contended that when he felt deflated, he would tell himself '...don't be such a cry baby!'<sup>71</sup> So I started making phone calls and managed to recruit eight people.

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Grinder personal communication during a workshop in Perth in April 2011.

## The crew

I had already worked with young people who had not particularly wanted to be in a workshop but at the time they had been engaged by the dynamic qualities of the methodology. Accordingly, I assumed that young people who had voluntarily applied and were willing to be there would be an easier group to work with. How wrong I was! It was a great challenge to manage behaviours and retain their focus; I found these young people unreliable, unpunctual and disruptive and it was not until eight weeks into the project that I truly believed that it would all work out.

After the first session, the group reduced to seven people. One lived too far away and could not come every week. There was Michael,<sup>72</sup> a natural actor at fifteen, who had been expelled from a Catholic school for selling cannabis and now attended one of the public schools where we were going to perform the play. There was Gemma, also fifteen, whose Mum was a recovering alcoholic and who had a distant relationship with her Dad, who was often buying her clothes and concert tickets. There was Georgia, an angry, boisterous fourteen-year-old, who put on a tough front about living in a dysfunctional household with her Dad and brothers. She was disruptive and swore constantly. Like her, Fiona, her best friend, was also fourteen, used coarse language and behaved in a loud and emotional manner. The two argued continuously throughout the project, and at times they physically fought each other and had to be split up, resulting in long periods of not speaking to each other. Interestingly, they were in a major

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<sup>72</sup> All the names have been changed to protect the privacy and rights of the young people involved

scene together as mother and daughter and, to my surprise, did a great job both in acting the anti-model and improvising with the audience.

Then there was Sue, a very expressive sixteen-year-old, who also pulled out towards the end of the process because she was not going to be able to attend the performances. There was Simon, fourteen, a young man in foster care, who had a penchant for musicals; he had wild hair and his school uniform was always dishevelled. Lastly there was Bec, seventeen, a good actor, very intuitive but always talking, recounting disparate story after story. She had trouble holding eye contact during the performance; she would roll and shut her eyes. Bec surprised us by memorising the whole play. As I read these descriptions, I can see my judgments and my predisposition for stereotyping these young people; that was the filter through which I initially saw them.

Alongside myself, there was Fish<sup>73</sup> assisting with facilitation. All of us were fortunate to work with him, as he had experience as an actor, as well as someone who had worked extensively with young people. This experience brought useful skills, especially in communication, to the project. In addition to his charisma and genuine, warm energy. Much learning came from interacting with Fish and watching him interact with the young people. He was patient and detached; he listened to the young people carry on, telling irrelevant stories, and brought the conversation back to the topic without becoming agitated or changing his tone. Unlike me, he did not appear stressed or worried at any time

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<sup>73</sup> James Gill is a Perth-based actor, musician and creative consultant with a background in theatre with young people and improvisation

about anything. Perhaps this was because he was not responsible for almost \$20,000 of funding and had nothing to lose. Regardless, his participation gave me the space to stand on the sidelines and observe and reflect when I needed to. Grace, an actor and theatre student interested in production, took the role of stage manager, also in charge of props. She was vivacious, outspoken and, while she was still young, her 23 years made her at least six or seven years older than the oldest young person in the project. I had also contracted a videographer, Mia<sup>74</sup>, who painstakingly recorded almost all sessions and all the performances. One of the evaluation tools was a DVD compiled with the material; and we had amassed many hours of film recording every detail of the project.

We established a regular Monday night meeting and arranged to meet for at least one whole day on the weekends, beginning with three full days during the Easter break. In total, we had over 50 contact hours, excluding the four performances. These performances ranged from between 1.5 to 2.5 hours and were delivered to audiences ranging from twenty to over 70 people, mostly comprised of young adults, like the participants.

### **The learning**

As in the other case studies, I have selected moments that I found significant and enlightening in relation to the practitioner's role in facilitating a possibility for transformation, recognising the contexts of motivation, presence and reflection.

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<sup>74</sup> Mia Holton.

Because the development, rehearsal and performance of *Relationship Status* occurred over three months (with at least 50 hours of contact with the young people involved), I felt as though I spent my entire time reflecting on it (while working or away from the work). This is not to say that reflection was not an important a component in all the other case studies; I felt that I was in a non-stop cycle of reflexivity and action in which I was constantly reflecting, adapting, learning and unlearning. Initially much of my reflection focused on the distressing state of oscillation – between wanting to see it through and complete it and wanting to walk away from it and hand back the money. When colleagues and friends expressed their admiration and commented positively on my energy and commitment, I felt pleased and encouraged. However, these exchanges were usually followed with deep reflection on the many frustrating and deflating moments I was experiencing and the enormous amount of energy and effort I was expending with seven young people, who did not seem to be interested in co-creating but seemed to want to be told what to do. One friend said to me, ‘well, something is motivating you!’

### **It was all about me**

Yes, I am deeply concerned with violence against women and domestic violence in particular; I have been involved with this issue for over a decade. Similarly, I value community development and working with young people and I strongly believe in the capacity of young people to contribute to solving issues in their communities. While all of these factors contribute to my motivation for initiating this project and other projects; for travelling afar to train with different



practitioners; for investing financially in this process and this journey, I would be lying if I said they were the main reasons for doing this particular forum play on respectful relationships. They were not. I wanted to create a forum play – **any** forum play, about **any** issue, with **any** group of people. I needed to see if I could do it; I wanted to know that I had done it; I wanted to be an artist who did this kind of work. Like Boal, Santos<sup>75</sup>, and Diamond, I wanted to create social dialogue through performance. Thus, I envisaged this project, more than the other TO work I had done, as a significant and bold step in the direction of people whose work I admired as artists. Idealistically, I felt ignited to learn and create something that could affect positive change in everyone involved. I sought work that makes a participant light up through some sudden understanding of themselves and their role, their ability to do something, even the most minute of actions: in short, their potential. Realistically, I can now see a more personal, self-focused undercurrent: the reinforcement that I, too, could do something that affects change. Ultimately, I wondered whether I had the capacity to create a space for social transformation as an artist.

As discussed above, many times during *Relationship Status* saw me wanting to walk away. My notes from the first workshop revealed that I had begun the project half-heartedly because of my efforts to recruit participants. However, reflection also made me aware of this personal (and perhaps limiting) thought pattern. I would reach a certain point of achievement and begin to think about letting it slip. Or I would actually let it slip. This thinking pattern is

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<sup>75</sup> Barbara Santos worked closely with Boal for over 20 years. She is the artistic director of Kuringa, a TO organisation in Berlin ([www.kuringa.org](http://www.kuringa.org)).

somewhat similar to what has accompanied this research. Writing this, I am aware of my desire to abandon the whole project and slip into ordinariness, neglecting to complete this thesis. *What is it for anyway? Who cares?* I can answer these questions myself the way someone encouraging would answer, enumerating many reasons to persevere. However, I can also list lots of compelling reasons to stop. It was the same with the project to a degree: lots of reasons to stop it and lots of reasons to keep going. It is possible that the kind of motivation fuelling this effort would not allow any damage to be done to the identity I had been fortifying over the past six or seven years (Bracher, 2006, p. 3), portraying myself as a socially-conscious community practitioner and artist. This is what Steele labels an 'identity-maintenance motive' (Steele 1999 in Bracher 2006, p. 3).

This drive to reinforce and maintain my identity could explain the effort I had to make to pursue *Relationship Status*, to conceptualise, plan and seek funding; to give it almost my whole attention for months; to garner and muster the energy it demanded; to deal with the challenge and unpredictability of working with young people and all their conflicting needs and moods. At the same time, this behaviour was driven by what Gagné and Deci call *autonomous extrinsic motivation* (2012, p. 89). That is, in some moments I did it 'for the pleasure of doing it.' In many other moments, I persevered because I had 'chosen to do it myself for my own good' (Gillet, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012, p. 81). It benefitted me to continue and 'succeed' in this project because it provided a means of recognition and agency, important characteristics of

identity (Bracher, 2006, p. 6), while at the same time potentially benefitting others. This connectedness is the *Moebius-strip effect* that Bracher describes (2006, p. 152). While in retrospect I uncover these possible reasons, I must have had some subconscious understanding at the time. Perhaps no project I have created would have happened without this drive.

Reflecting further on these qualities, I uncover how this very motivation almost impeded the project. I wanted to design a project that stood out and showed that the young people had a sense of ‘ownership’ and leadership. Thus, when I came across UN documents on youth-peer education with guidelines for recruitment, interviewing and evaluation, I incorporated them into the funding proposal. In my mind, this was going to be one of the distinguishing factors of this project as it would show the funders how these added guidelines would enhance the young people’s sense of success in something worthwhile: something worth their commitment. But I was so wrong! What my good intentions had done, in effect, as Synder-Young suggests, was limit the collaborative and transformative potential of the project by designing a project for young people without actually consulting them about their availability and needs (2013, p. 23). By seeking to shine in the funding application, I was not considering the context of the creative process I was designing; I was ignoring the ‘relationship between idealism and materialism’ in relation to the young people and their realities (Nicholson, 2005, p. 119). I meant well, but in wanting the young people to have a sense of ownership, I had failed to take heed of Cohen-Cruz’s warning ‘not to simply repeat a methodology, but to shape and

adapt it to fit the circumstances' (2010, p. 10). This is such an important part of the community development ethos and its power to sustain a project and learning (Sarkissian, 2009, 150). I had designed such an inflexible structure, developed such strict guidelines and stipulated such unrealistic time commitments that I had scared young people off. I had become an oppressive force before the process had even begun!

### **I got the power**

There might not have been a project without my determination, which was born out of strong motivation. Still, there most definitely would not have been a project without the young people. They largely dictated when and how often we met. Not me. In one clear moment I slipped down from my motivated, idealistic 'I'm a TO-practitioner-changing-the-world' stance. Then I became aware of the reality of working with young people, as well as the quality of uncertainty that this project was going to have throughout. In the end, not only did I adapt the schedule to suit the young people, but I also had to adjust the content of the workshops to accommodate those who could not be there every time, or those who would have to come late and leave early. What is more, every week there were some people who had to be picked up or driven home, or they could not participate, that also became my job.

After this realisation, my reflection on the project was also preoccupied with the tension I was experiencing in the powerful role of practitioner. On one hand, I wanted to create a space where these young people could experience

themselves in a more empowered way and felt free to create through using the TO methodology. On the other hand, I had to direct them to produce a performable event that artfully dealt with some issue related to violence by a very real deadline. In this way, this project was unlike my previous experiences in TO work with other groups. I felt the pull between being the facilitator of a creative and generative process of the project, and being the project manager ultimately accountable for the funding and what I had committed myself to delivering.

### **Play – damn it!**

I was lucky, as Chris Vine points out in his interview with Peter Duffy (Duffy, 2010, p. 190), because I had an opportunity to create the forum with the young people who were both the actors and the subjects. I knew from the answers they had submitted on their applications (I did manage to get them to fill out an application form for the project records), that they all wanted to do drama because it was fun. And even though one person had said that her step-dad wanted her to do ‘something, anything’ so ‘it was either drama or cadets’, two people were contemplating acting and performance as careers, and one wanted to do musical theatre.

Following the training I had done with O’Leary a year before as my foundation for constructing the forum, as well as activities from the training I had done with Boal, Diamond, and most recently Santos, I knew that it was important to spend plenty of time playing and imagining. I had experienced the physical exploration that these games and activities provided, the way they

awakened forgotten or alternate ways of perceiving and moving, sparked an individual and collective learning possibility. I had experienced the 'dialogic exchange between two or more participants' that Boal talks about (1992, p. 48). These physical exercises awaken dulled and less used senses; they aid in becoming more aware of who we embody, what we carry around with us dormant, and what we are capable of. We can therefore become more complete and learn in different ways, we can become, as Kaplan suggests more 'transparent to ourselves' (Kaplan, 2002, p. 79). That was the theory (and my experience), and that was the position I was coming from with the activities. Unfortunately, for some of these young people these activities just seemed like 'farting around'.

In theory, these activities could lead to the creation of what Vygotsky called zones of proximal development (ZPDs). These ZPDs are spaces in which interaction between participants contributes to their development and therefore their learning (Holzman, 2010, p. 28). Through a playful exploration of a particular emotion or situation an individual is able to connect and relate to peers in ways that lead to 'reflexive experience of one-self' (Marjanovic-Shane, 2010, pp. 42-43).

I was also working under the premise that to enable a real creative exploration required time and play. The more time we played, the more creative we were able to be, the less time spent playing and rushing on to 'skills,' the more cliché and contrite the results would be. If creativity is an exploration of 'available cognitive pathways' for ideas and possibilities that are novel and fresh,

then time is required to explore this unfamiliar territory (Newell, Shaw and Simon, 1962, in Amabile, Mueller, Simpson, Hadley, Kramer & Fleming, 2002, p. 3). Further, theories of componential creativity (Amabile, 1983, p. 362) suggest that there are four components to creative cognitive processes. Two of these intra-personal components, that is, related to the inner qualities and skills of the individual, I wanted to foster. The first relates to what Amabile terms domain-relevant skills, or the skills required for a particular activity (1983, p. 363), in this case acting, improvisation, and self-expression. The second component relates to creativity-relevant processes (1983, p. 364), like the activities participants started to complain about. Through play, these activities awaken different ways of listening and thinking and allow for more creativity.

Though the young people did not seem to be aware of the change that occurred when they did these activities, I noticed how it enabled them to reach a more creative and open place. I could see how these activities made an enormous difference. For example, during one simple circle activity in which one person had to make up some movements and everyone else had to copy them, one girl was so self-conscious she hardly moved her body at all in the first session. I watched her looking around and holding her arms close to her body, barely swaying; she never offered a new movement. During the later sessions when we did variations of this activity her arms movements were bigger and her movements bolder, she even offered a couple of movements for others to copy. Similarly, activities like making statues in pairs or creating frozen tableaux of different scenes helped to ignite creativity. What is more, activities such as

simple clapping games at the start of a session calmed the young people down, redirected their focus, and made them more aware of each other. After a while, even though I varied the activities from session to session and explained their role in the creative process, this type of activity was met with resistance. However, because I knew how essential these activities were to creativity and expression of stories and bringing the attention of seven young people to the moment, I would not compromise on them at all. I had to insist that these happen and therefore exert a level of power over the group. As I reflected on how to make these young people aware of the changes that were brought about by these activities I decided to simply embrace the authority carried by the role and playfully continue to exert this power over the participants so that eventually I might arrive at creating with the participants and thereby having power 'with' the participants (Follett 1924 in Brookfield, 2000, p. 137). As Brookfield explains 'externalizing and investigating' power dynamics is intrinsic to critical reflection.

Direct feedback from assisting facilitator Fish<sup>76</sup>, an experienced theatre practitioner and actor who had worked with young people for over a decade, was very useful. The following comment reinforced my praxis:

I thought that the process of devising was great. Even though it took a long time to feel like we were making any progress, the time spent

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At my request



developing ideas for the script ensured that it reflected issues and attitudes that were strongly relevant to the participants, which in turn focused them further and motivated them to strive to perform better. They really owned those characters.

Your ability to capture those scenes and put them into a script that really excited the team was fantastic. (Gill, personal communication, 2012)

I wanted us to start talking honestly about feeling powerless or abusing our own power, this process required lots of lead up and loosening of barriers. As Fish pointed out, taking this time enabled the young participants to become present to a crucial element of this project: the struggles or 'oppressions' explored in the play had to be completely theirs.

Vine supports this lengthy exploration process when working with young people.

The first things they give you is what's at the top of their head. When you have a little bit more time to explore these ideas, you suddenly find that actually they represent the tip of the iceberg of their concerns and there are other things they are much, much more interested in (Duffy, 2010, p. 190).

After about three weeks of games, trust building, familiarising with activities, and using image theatre to explore issues in relationships, I showed them a video of Sorenson's *After School I'll Marry You* (Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, 2009), a forum play about sexual health. They watched, were curious about the

interventions and expressed their concern and frustration that we had no play yet. I recall Bec saying 'look, we're not writers, just tell us what to act and we'll act it.' I talked about forum theatre I continued to reassure them that they were in the process of accessing what the content of the play was going to be so that we could create the play from their own experiences and stories. I didn't see any benefit in discussing Boalian or Freirean dialogic and pedagogical process in much detail (Cohen-Cruz, 2010, p. 52). Our aim, I told them, was to deliver a play that showed what got in the way of respect in relationships. If I ever used the word 'oppression' it must have been while Mia was not recording because there is no record of it. Nonetheless, I don't think they got the full intention of the forum until the very first performance.

I do not recall what made me feel we were ready, but finally, something felt right and to their great relief, the moment came to enter more deeply into their own personal stories. We sat down around a huge piece of paper and they shared their experiences relating to relationships and respect. As I was writing these down it became clear that for most of the people in this group were or had been affected by bullying and in particular, bullying on Facebook. Everyone had a story regarding something they had experienced. The worst stories came from Gemma and Bec, who had both moved schools due to bullying. Bec's experience had been so bad that she now attended a school on the other side of the city. Simon had also experienced bullying, but not through Facebook. At the same time, Georgia and Fiona admitted to being bullies themselves, especially Fiona. They told the story of how they had hounded a young year 8

student once and taken her lunch. After this general sharing during which we only scratched the surface, but the right surface, we moved onto something deeper. I guided them through some prompts in a quiet visualisation, with their eyes closed so that they could access images of oppression without entering into a didactic explanation of them. The prompts were aimed at evoking individual memories that they could relay to others. For instance, I asked them to think of a time when someone had power over them and they had felt unable to do anything about it; and a time when they had had power over someone else and had used this power badly or had used it well. Also, I asked them to think of a time they had felt scared but acted despite their fear or when they had stood up to someone else's power.

This important step propelled all of us into a space where we stopped and looked at the events in our lives, then acknowledged and maybe shared them. Sharing required letting go of our inhibitions and fears of being judged. I knew that they would all have stories, as we all have stories, but I did not know that they would share them. I stressed that they did not have to share anything they felt uncomfortable sharing. Then I modeled by going first.

I searched carefully for examples of my own experience, retelling some incidents of embarrassment to model being vulnerable and honest, but not explicit. Fish also shared honestly from his experiences. By opening ourselves up, we gave the young people guidelines on how to share. This opportunity also gave them a view into universal struggles and humanity present in everyone as

we tried to relate respectfully to others, to e this was a moment of sharing power. What is more, I wanted them to feel united in this recognition of how power was present in all of our stories, whether we had been disrespectful towards others or others had been disrespectful towards us. What we shared was real, and it was there in that space just as it was there in anyone they might encounter on stage or in life. I am not able to say whether anyone sitting in the group judged the others as they shared or if they had a moment of empowerment through sharing, but I can say that everyone shared, even those who had seemed reluctant.

From these exchanges and the image theatre work that ensued, the play was created and filled with the young people's stories. This sharing and image making was a distinct experiencing of presencing for me. I stood aside and listened, allowing the content to transform into what the young people wanted. I became aware that what wanted to emerge in the space was not a play about domestic or family violence—it was about sexual trespass, online bullying, and abuse. These topics were relevant, meaningful and useful in their lives, but not what I had had in mind. I had to let that go. Thankfully, I did.

This is what we created<sup>77</sup>.

The first action takes place in the future, that is, the end of the play. Kate and Mel are in Mel's bedroom getting ready for netball practice. Mel, who is online, sees a disrespectful picture of Tanya, a friend from school, in an email.

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<sup>77</sup> For the full script of Relationship Status see Appendix 1.

She shows Kate, who calls Tanya a slut and posts the picture on a social media site. Mel protests weakly but does nothing. Just before she is about to close her laptop Mel notices something else that is alarming and tells Kate. The scene ends before we know what she has seen. In the second action we go to the chronological beginning of the story. We see Kate's boyfriend Ben, a cheeky, rebellious adolescent, and his mate Gibbsy at footy training. The coach, Ben's stepfather, strongly reprimands and embarrasses Ben in front of his friends for something unimportant. Ben storms off angrily.

In the third action, Tanya is getting ready to go to the party where the picture was taken. Her mum, who works very hard and is bringing up Tanya on her own, is sitting on the sofa getting drunk (as she usually does). When her mum leaves the room, Tanya skulls her wine and then tells her to stop drinking.

In the fourth action, Ben is at home when his angry stepfather becomes abusive, yelling and threatening his mother (played by the same actor who plays Mel). He blames her for his disobedience and lack of respect. The abuse is something that happens often, and Ben regularly stands up to him.

The fifth action is at the party with loud music. Drinks and a bong are being passed around. Tanya smokes cannabis, drinks alcohol, and dances while the guys admire her. They watch as she goes off to a room where she passes out. Ben and another older male follow her, carrying their mobile phones and sniggering. Gibbsy makes some effort to stop them, but does not succeed. In the next action, Gibbsy and Ben wake up in the aftermath of party and start to clean up. Tanya, who has been asleep in the room the whole time, comes out and overhears the guys talking about some photos. She finds out that someone

has taken her photos and sent them around. She is distraught and leaves angrily.

Then we go back to the first action and discover the missing information: some of the photos included Ben. This makes Kate very angry, not towards Ben but towards Tanya. The last action is at school in a classroom where all the young people come together. There is an angry exchange between Tanya, Kate and Ben. Tanya is called a slut and put down. As she rushes out of the classroom, the teacher asks the others what the matter is. When they respond that it is about some pictures that were posted on Facebook, the teacher quickly dismisses as not worthy of his attention.

The participants were all very happy when they finally got the first versions of the script. Everyone wanted to have a go at playing all the characters. I think it was at this point that they all got that they really would be performing and creating a play. Their level of engagement soared as they expressed further ideas, replaced the language I had used with theirs, and fought over who was going to play which character. We were on our way.

In spite of the positive impact that having a script had on the participants' level of engagement and focus, there were still many issues regarding behaviours and participation that I had to deal with regularly. The young people were frequently disrespectful to each other, they were often late and some of them regularly made excuses to not attend. So there was this strange tension between working closely with the young people to create a play using the

liberatory methodology of TO, and being the project manager, an authority figure who had to manage their behaviours so that we could deliver a performance and fulfill the funding. I felt a great deal of pressure and this pressure had a detrimental effect on my ability to access the states of presence and connection that I felt in other projects. For example, when working with men who had been violent I experienced presence on many occasions, I discuss these at length in chapter five. I felt connected to their realities, their vulnerabilities and more importantly I felt accountable to the men not to the organisation. During the creation and production of *Relationship Status* I felt mostly accountable to the funders. That is not to say that I did not feel connected to the young people in the project, I grew very fond of all of them, some more than others, but the relationship was almost parental. In effect, I felt like an extension of their parents to whom I spoke regularly; the young people's wellbeing and safety were my responsibility when they were with me, this was an added pressure. For the duration of *Relationship Status* I mostly felt frustrated and stressed, my sleep was affected and I was short-tempered.

As a result, I was not always the best communicator, but I had not realised how much this skill had let me down until the following incident. It involved Gemma who throughout the project had made many excuses to be absent for various reasons. The first time she was absent she called to tell me that her Dad wanted to spend the day with her and that she would not be attending the rehearsal. I was very cross and expressed my disappointment unequivocally. Instead of communicating in an emotionally intelligent way, that

is, managing my emotional reaction to her absence, or to her seeming lack of concern at the inconvenience her absence created, I reacted irritably (Goleman, 1996, 43). Later, about a week before our first performance, which was to take place at the local senior high school in a country town three hours away from Perth, Grace pulled me aside during one of the rehearsal breaks. Gemma had asked her to tell me that she would not be travelling to the country because she got anxiety attacks when she was away from her mother. Gemma had told her a few days earlier and now they were telling me. Gemma stood at a distance. I stood there stunned and then reacted.

‘Letting me know five days before the performance is not OK,’ I had said angrily. How could we find someone to perform her part and rehearse it within a week? In addition, I could not believe that Gemma was the one doing this. She had been the first young person to join the project and had given me a long, excited spill about her wishes to become an actor. What is more, when they had signed up to the project the young people were asked about their availability to perform in the country and also at the other schools during school time. On her application, Gemma had expressed her keenness to perform wherever necessary and as many times as possible. It was such an inconvenience, and I was extremely annoyed about her lack of forethought. If she had told me at the beginning we could have been planning for it all along. Why hadn’t she?

The answer to this question was what was most upsetting about the whole incident. Gemma had not felt comfortable or safe enough to come and



tell me directly, but had done it through Grace. Effectively, I had not created an environment safe enough for this young person to approach me with her problem. This really upset me. I was, after all, in the midst of creating a potentially transformative performance dealing with the issue of relationships and relating, which included communicating safely. Evidently, this safety had not been there for Gemma. I clearly had not been present enough to perceive the distance this young person felt between herself and me. In the end Grace played the role during the away performance, a solution they had already concocted together and then suggested to me. Grace did a great job and there was, in the end, no disruption to the project. However, I was left very aware of the environment that I had created for some of them with my communication style.

If transformation, as Ziegler suggests, is about gaining 'a new self-perspective' (1996, p. 54), then that is what occurred to me when Grace spoke to me that morning. I came face to face with this image of myself that did not match the one I thought I was portraying and upholding. As Mezirow posits, my 'terms of reference', that is, the 'structure of assumptions and expectations' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16) that filter my perception were challenged. I had made a 'prescriptive' assumption about the kind of space and experience I was creating for the young people and how I expected them all to act and participate (Brookfield, 1995, in Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). Further, I had also believed that the way I communicated, albeit directly and sometimes not very tactfully, was effective and inclusive. It wasn't. This sudden awareness sparked what Mezirow

calls an 'epochal' or 'reorienting insight' (2000, p. 21) and I entered into a process of critical self-reflection that involved the 'subjective reframing' of my assumptions about the interpersonal relationships I was engendering through this project (2000, p. 23). I realised that I had judged Gemma as being spoilt, lazy, and sloppy. I had assumed she thought herself a little better than the rest of the group. This realisation made me think about how I judged everyone else in the group, whom I had a soft spot for, whom I just tolerated. Slaughter might refer to what followed a stage of 'selective legitimation' in the transformative cycle, that is, a period for implementing a new approach, and of new challenges posed by the need to implement it (Naismith, 2004, p. 25).

For example, in chapter three I recount an incident relating to Michael. He called me after we had started a critical rehearsal saying he had lost track of time and was going to be late. This was very inconvenient because Michael had a role in almost every scene and he knew we were unable to rehearse properly without him. While we were waiting for him I started to reflect on what to do when he arrived. I wondered whether I should let it go and mention it later; whether I should bring it up in front of everyone so that they would see that I was fair and had no favourites or whether I should take him outside of the room and talk to him. In spite of this reflection, I wanted to blast him when he walked in, but I stopped myself. But then when he sat at the edge of the room stuffing corn chips and chocolate in his mouth, smiling at me and very visibly stoned, I felt that it just was not fair to the others. I decided that I would say something, but would keep it direct and without emotion. However, despite my strongest

intentions to apply the new approach and to remain unperturbed, I still managed to communicate in a way passive-aggressive way.

On many occasions I observed as Fish smoothly talked in a low, even voice and just expressed his thoughts about them acting out without getting ruffled at all. Although on some occasions I also managed my emotions and spoke calmly, mostly I felt like I was just holding myself back from letting my disappointment or frustration show. Fish gave me some sobering feedback (that I requested) at the end of the project:

There were a few times I saw you speak to participants in a way that doesn't fit with your commitment to them and to your work. In times of frustration you would sometimes 'guilt trip' participants or humiliate them. I think it's important to be able to mend those moments when they occur by taking time out with that person later and communicating more responsibly. I felt that this was left up to me. (Gill, personal communication, 2012)

This feedback was not lost on me. One of the main venues we used for rehearsal was a hall/basketball court that was also used by a gymnastics school so often there was gym equipment left out, like vaults and bars. One morning when I wanted to start rehearsal (we already had the play pretty much finalised), Fiona and Georgia would not stop playing basketball, Simon was on a beam and Gemma was lying on the jump off mats with Michael, all of them completely

ignoring me. I called them several times, feigning annoyance and telling them we had to warm up. They continued to ignore me. So, I climbed on top of a set of low parallel bars and just played around on them. I just climbed around the bars, hung from them, twisted myself over them and let myself be playful on them. In less than a minute all of the young people were standing around watching and laughing at me. 'Are you ready to play some games?' I asked them teasingly. Sometimes I did manage more intelligent ways of communicating.

Ironically, I experienced another moment of presence during a time that I faced a potential incident with Georgia; my blunt and forthright style was just what was needed. Georgia and Fiona attended what was considered the roughest school out of everyone in the group. Georgia had quite a tumultuous home life with separated parents who were involved in the party, drinking and drug culture. Fiona was a bully to some kids at school. As I have said, together they would play rough, at times punching each other. I perceived Georgia, in spite of her tough act, as particularly sensitive, and when Fiona ignored her or met other girls after school she would come to the workshop and rehearsals in a foul mood. One time, she suddenly got upset and sat down away from the group, refusing to join in. She then stormed off crying. I followed her into the corridor where I stopped her and, looking at her reddened eyes, I felt her low self-esteem so strongly I wanted to hug her. I wanted to tell her that she was beautiful and that she belonged and everyone liked her, but I didn't. Instead, I asked her "what the fuck" was up. I used her swear words and talked to her directly. She said she was hopeless, and nobody liked her. I told her that was

“bullshit” and she was just feeling sorry for herself and that she knew very well that she was one of the best actors there.

She didn't leave; she came back and did the session. Afterwards I spoke to her again, but this time softly and thanked her for staying. I pointed out the many ways in which she had contributed that evening and that it would have been a terrible session without her. I don't really know why I was compelled to speak to her roughly initially, but I felt it had a stronger impact than if I had spoken to her gently. So despite not having so many moments of feeling, as Scharmer describes, connected 'to a deeper source' (2009, 39), I felt that I was able to facilitate a space sufficiently safe and conducive to the sharing and exploration of their stories.

### **Whose learning?**

A few weeks into the project I gave each participant a journal so they could record their experiences and reflect on the process. I had written in the funding proposal that participants would be involved in reflective writing, which could be used as part of an evaluation process. I knew that there would be demands on them as actors during the interventions, for which they would need to be prepared and for which reflection would be a really helpful tool. Further, I thought the journals would give them a chance to reflect and learn more generally about themselves and their participation in this community project. As I handed the journals out, I remember thinking how pleased they all looked to be getting the brand new journals and yet I also remember thinking that they would

probably not write a single word. It sounds defeatist, but this is what really went through my mind at the time. I also thought that at the very least I was keeping my word to the funders and if there were no reflections from the young people I could write that in the acquittal.

This made me think about the idea of learning and whether one has to be aware that there is learning to do. I knew that I was learning about facilitating a space with the potential to be transformative. These young people were there to act and perform. I don't think they would have minded if the play was about a love triangle or a murder, they just wanted to act. The overarching theme of respect in relationships and the community aspect of it, the part where they explored an issue close to them, that came from me.

This question of learning extends to the performance and the audience as spect-actors too and I became aware of right in the middle of 'joking' the play during the first performance of the play. One of the scenes that represented a sub-theme to the main story was a domestic violence scene (DV got into the play after all!) where a stepfather exerts his authority by shouting abusively and threatening the mother of one of the protagonists. Most interventions offered some way for the young man and his mother to get out of the house or to lock themselves up in a room and call for help; generally the father character was perceived as being an oppressor. The interventions all revolved around deflating his anger and staying safe.

Interestingly, one of the more successful interventions during that first performance came from a young woman who stopped the action just as the father was about to explode. She replaced the mother. Then, instead of siding with the son and berating the father for always being angry (which is what triggers the outburst from the father) the spect-actor called the son sternly and asked him to sit down and explain why he was being cheeky. She reprimanded the son and told him to listen to his father, saying that even though he is not his real father he is 'the man of the house.' The spect-actor reinforced what to me and many others would certainly be a discourse of male dominance and control that justified the abuse that he was in the habit of dishing out in 'his' house.

I was faced with a dilemma: do I let the young person continue and allow what I believe to be one of the most pervasive, oppressive and insidious '-isms' to be a possible intervention for this scene? Or do I start a Freire-inspired dialogue so that these young people start to think about oppressive social structures? In those seconds of reflection I chose to let her continue; it seemed more important for me to acknowledge the courage that it took to get up in front of her peers and let her intervene the way she wanted to than bringing up my own beliefs and values. Snyder-Taylor problematizes: 'Where are the points of balance between honouring participants' voices and critiquing embedded assumptions? How do facilitators learn to negotiate their own authority and privileges?' (2011, pp. 42-43).

This authority and privilege exist in me not only as I facilitated the project, but also right now as I interpret the information that I present in this research.

Authority and privilege may even be partly responsible for my own motivation and self-direction in trying to create this kind social intervention and work towards a more progressive society, and in undertaking research on it. The young person's intervention had the effect to of calming the father, of derailing the violent episode and avoiding the abuse. It worked. But it didn't work in a progressive way. Reflecting on that moment I ask myself whether I could have asked other questions that might have instigated deeper examination of what was being examined on stage.

Likewise, Mutnick brings up this tension in her discussion on achieving praxis. She retells the dilemma of a young university teacher who is against the war in Iraq but finds herself in a classroom of students who support the war and do not want to discuss it. Mutnick asks 'what is the praxis, the "true word", in this instance?' (2006, p. 38). How does a practitioner or educator, uphold the ideal of critical inquiry neutrally, without imposing our own ideas and convictions? Blair poses similar questions:

at what point do teen cultural field-workers invite the unfettered, uncensored voices of youth to speak on their own behalf, and at what point do the facilitators have an obligation to contest the same voices when they bespeak a new oppression against another marginalised group even while telling the narrative of their own oppression? (2010, p. 117).



For Boal, theatre is a tool whose aim is to transform for the better; to get clarity on existing oppressive power structures and rehearse a way to deal with them. Boal was interested in giving the audience agency by presenting them with an aesthetic situation that facilitates the rehearsal of less 'oppressive' relationships – a 'rehearsal for revolution'. However, as Snyder-Young points out what does revolution even mean in today's context, and in particular in the context of these young people's lives? (2011, p. 42).

Generating progressive solutions is what practitioners of TO aim to do, whether they are addressing the themes of domestic violence (Diamond, 1994, 35); serious conflict (Alon, Kuftinec & Turkiyye, 2010, p. 84) safe sex (Sorenson, 2009); or teen relationships, (Blair, 2010, p. 97). Their aim is to create an opportunity for the participants to step into a struggle and find a way to transform it in a non-oppressive way. The tension, as described by Snyder-Young comes because '...not all popular actions within Theatre of the Oppressed are progressive' (2011, p. 33).

A mistake I made during the first performance also highlighted an interesting point. As I had understood one of the roles of the Joker was to be vigilant for solutions which are 'magic'; in other words, it is unlikely that they are possible (Boal, 1995, p. 254). For example, if the scene is a husband about to hit his wife and she is cowering in a corner, it would be magic for someone to take the role of the wife and stand up to the husband and perform a Tae Kwon Do move on him. Before the start of the play I mistakenly forgot to tell the audience of young people that there were certain characters that could not be

replaced. One of these characters was the father in the domestic violence scene.

One young man jumped up and offered to replace the father and, not wanting to thwart his enthusiasm, in the moment I thought that if he replaced the character and made him 'magically' an understanding and respectful man I could use it to discuss the rare likelihood of that happening. However, to my surprise the young man went on stage and played the father with a fury and realism that had the characters in the play reacting with fear. He kicked a chair across the stage and pretended to swing a backhander at his wife. It was shocking, but perfect. There were some giggles from the audience, but I could feel them waiting for my reaction. I thanked the young spect-actor and asked the students in the audience whether they thought he had depicted a more real version of what that kind of father would look like. DV was a real, lived experience in many of those young people's lives. There were nods from the students and I told them that from now the actor would play the character more violently. The young spect-actor had effectively, as I saw it, told us to "get real". The scene we had presented, it seemed, had not represented a reality that many of the young people in the audience lived. By depicting a more realistic version of the oppressor the young man had perhaps engaged in a dialogue that was less about the collective problem solving of the scene presented, but more about defining what the real oppression was. My task was to be present to this. The scene became significantly more difficult to intervene in and as we were pressed for time we moved on the next scene but it left me feeling that something significant had occurred.

There are no guarantees that I could facilitate a transformative experience for anyone, whether they are there for it or not. But I have to know when I am getting in the way of someone's possibility for this I must be always reflective; I must let go of my own judgment and be present to their experience. A truly reflexive practitioner, as Gouldner points out, 'recognises that the knowledge of the world cannot be advanced apart from the knowledge of themselves and their position in the social world,' (1970 in Robertson, 2000, p 321). I have to avoid, as much as possible, becoming an oppressive force within the work. I also have to be present to the fact that sometimes participants are not there because they want to affect social change. If as facilitators we are trying to awaken inner knowledge in individuals, then we are saying that our role is to facilitate an expression of what is already there waiting to be expressed. Unfortunately, we face a tension between this methodology and the reality of the participants' motives. We then must ask what constitutes 'oppression' and empowerment in their eyes.

In this research, and in the reflection accompanying the projects described here, I am consciously pursuing insights into my practice by reflecting critically, that is, reflecting on both how power is being exercised in this context and on the assumptions that may serve to uphold oppressive structures (Brookfield, 2000, p. 126). I have done this so that I can learn, because I want to learn. I cannot say that the young people had any desire to learn or if any of them at least engaged in any critical reflection about their own realities – none of the participants wrote in their journals.

## Conclusion

Four performances of *Relationship Status* took place; three at senior high schools to audiences of years ten or older (that is 15 to 17 year olds). One school was in a country town about 3 hours out of Perth, the other two in the local area where the project took place and where two of the participants each attended. On the last performance, which took place at Kulcha, a popular cultural venue and was open to the public, the play received feedback like:

*Great to see passionate and committed young people and their mentors working for other young people*

*Strong facilitator, authentic participation of young people in a real story about their lives*

*Engaging, relevant, interactive, professional eye-opener, awesome*

Some concerns expressed were:

*Perhaps needs clearer direction at the beginning about offering alternatives*

*The loading of photos onto Facebook opened the young girl to child pornography charges (this was not mentioned by Joker)*

*Sometimes treating serious issues by 'taking the mickey' could derail the play*

Whether positive or negative, none of the feedback could detract from the reality that somehow, we had succeeded in creating a forum play. I will never know whether the project led to personal or social transformation for anyone other than me. But it did do some of what we set out to do.

First, the project seemed to have given the young people more confidence. Each actor appeared to have come away with a sense of being able to do something that they could be praised and admired for, and they were.

This is what Fish had to say about the growth he saw in the participants:

When the project started I was concerned about the participants' lack of focus and lack of respect for each other. It was really hard to get any real participation in basic drama activities.

The project has asked a few key things of the participants: commitment to a something outside of themselves; self-expression and openness; the confidence to risk failure and judgement in front of their peers.

In each show I watched each participant grow in confidence and gain strength from risking failure. I saw them feel proud of what they were doing. When we had dinner after the Kulcha show I looked around the table and saw how much each participant had grown in confidence and how much more respect and care there was in the group. (Gill, 2012)

Second, it gave the audiences, including their peers, opportunities to discuss and explore the issue of respect in relationships as it affects young people. Many people may not have said a word but might have been considering the issues and perhaps the play provoked discussion beyond the performances.

Third, the project gave this practitioner an opportunity to create a forum play and display a certain level of capacity. As my first forum play and my first community project of this size with public funding, there had been pressure to have both valuable community development outcomes to satisfy funders and sufficient artistic merit to make it worth watching for an audience.

As I patted everyone on the back after the last performance I knew the biggest opportunity had come from learning about myself. Reflexivity is very important to enabling the creation of a space for transformation. I cannot say that there was any transformation in anyone other than myself. I know that I am not the same as I was before the beginning of the project, and I do not mean that in a philosophical way, implying we are never the same from one moment to the next. I mean that there was a huge shift in my understanding of myself, the way I communicate, the way I use my power to manipulate situations, and the way I learn. In addition, reflection helped me to bring together the theory of the practice and the reality of its application.

Although to experienced TO practitioners this might seem obvious, as an emerging practitioner it helps me to know that reflection and reflexivity must be an intrinsic part of this practice. As Balfour affirms, integrating theory and practice depends on being able to 'reflect on the dialogical relation between disciplinary knowledge and practice-based experience' (2010, 57). My experience is that reflection must happen in-action and on-action, which is to say that there must be reflection about the reflection and then again about that reflection—it is a never-ending process. The practitioner must always be willing to look, think and act, then look, think and act differently, keeping in mind that there are different ways of looking, thinking and acting throughout the whole process.

Through reflection, much needed adaptation and flexibility happened in this project. Engaging in reflexivity kept me honest about my motivation, '...rendering explicit hidden agendas and half-formed intentions' (Gough, 2003, p. 25). I was able to realise that my motivation, whilst certainly essential and naively well intentioned, had almost stopped the project from happening.

Second, constant reflexivity allowed the presencing needed to access the real stories that were waiting to emerge. Through reflexivity I learned to get sufficiently out of the way, thus preventing myself (most of the time) from becoming another oppressive force in the lives of the participants.

There were times when I found the young people intolerable, ungrateful and unimaginative. Other times when I thought they were impatient and

unreliable. I wanted to give the money back and walk away. Reflection facilitated insight into my character and gave me access (not always!) to compassion, understanding and acceptance. The young people had lives that were complicated and uncertain. Like everyone else, they lived with insecurities, disappointments and conflict. During the course of the project, Michael ran away from home and turned up stoned at a couple of rehearsals. Gemma's Mum reached five months of sobriety. Not long after, Gemma was physically assaulted by her boyfriend, and Bec broke up with hers. Fiona and Gemma, who fought constantly, had a terrible, ugly fight and stopped talking to each other. They later bawled their eyes out and made up. For a short time Simon was put into my care as a foster child.

Moreover, reflection kept me grounded in the intention of the methodology. I was reminded that meeting project outcomes, satisfying audiences and establishing myself as someone that can be trusted with funding were important, but did not measure my ability to create a potentially transformative space. To create forum theatre, I had to be connected to the humanity in everyone. Lastly, through reflection I was able to step in and out of the process so that I could do it by learning and learn it by doing it. This was a responsible way to take participants, other artists, and each member of the audience along a course that I had never travelled, directed by tools I was barely learning to use. Without a commitment to engage in a reflexive inquiry of the practice, the journey would have been quite reckless.



## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

*We must learn to live without resolution, without clarity, with continuing ambiguity, with patience and with questions*

(Kaplan, 2002, p. 196)

In 2006, I was excited when I made the decision to learn and start using Theatre of the Oppressed as a way to work more holistically and creatively with communities and organisations. I anticipated that acquisition of these aesthetic and generative processes would engender higher levels of engagement and participation, deepen explorations of community issues and facilitate the kinds of dialogue necessary for transformative and perhaps more empowered and sustainable change. It was a good decision; a decision that has transformed my practice, for it was a decision that catapulted me into an ongoing, reflexive and reflective learning journey that has extended beyond the essential knowledge and the exercises, games and techniques that constitute this methodology. This decision has forced me to come face to face with deeper ontological and epistemological questions whose answers I attempted, as Balfour encourages, to locate in my own experience (2010, p. 59).

Across each of the three projects discussed, this autoethnographical study revealed the essential personal and professional qualities for effective practice: flexibility, adaptability, patience, empathy, perseverance, observation, good listening and an attitude of positive self-regard. However, through

phenomenology and reflexivity, the study has also teased out three elements that are crucial in this practice to enable development and application of all of the above qualities: motivation, presence and reflection (each shaped and framed by the aesthetic space generated through TO practice). In addition, this study highlighted my limited understanding of transformation and resulted in my ability to apply a more sophisticated and evolving understanding of TO.

### **Transformation – pushing through the cocoon**

First, when something is transformed it does not change back. The common metaphor of the butterfly that cannot return to being a caterpillar is a good example. Another common analogy is that of riding a bicycle. It can take some time but once a person ‘gets’ the balance right and rides the bicycle, they cannot go back to not knowing how to ride one. They can choose NOT to ride one, but they are able to if they choose to. It is in this vein that similarities can be drawn to what happens when, as Mezirow proposes, a person becomes ‘critically’, and I would add aesthetically, aware of the ‘psycho-cultural assumptions’ that limit how we make meaning and interpret our experience (Mezirow in Redmond, 2006, p. 16). Once a person has become aware that what they believed, valued or thought was not true, or is no longer true, they cannot go back to seeing themselves in the same way. Therefore, transformation is not simply ‘having a more informed, nuanced, sophisticated, or deeper understanding of something’. It is a ‘fundamental reordering’ of ‘paradigmatic assumptions’ (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139).

Second, transformation may come in ‘epiphanic...cognitive events’ (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139), through ‘upheavals and seismic rumblings which shake the foundations ... to their very core’ (Kaplan, 2002, p. 136). However, that event may also be the culmination of a cumulative and incremental process. Thus, it must be allowed to develop; it requires patience and time and cannot be imposed or controlled (Kaplan, 2002, 196). Further, while individuals can facilitate activities that guide a transformative process within a group context, transformation is a personal experience that occurs in a ‘place of silent mystery’ or as Kaplan poetically describes, a place ‘where butterfly wings are grown within the shroud of the caterpillar’s concealment’ (2002, p. 135). Transformation in this sense cannot be prescribed; this would rob it of the generative process necessary for the transformative action to emerge (Freire, 1970, p. 87). In a transformative practice, it might be acknowledged that there is a difficult problem in a community, for example, high rates of STIs and risky sexual behaviour, but the solution is not already known and a desired behaviour (i.e., everyone should wear condoms) has not already been prescribed.

### **The practitioner – emptying the cup**

First, the practitioner who aims to be transformative is discerning about what drives them. For me, it is important to know that I am socially conscious and that I want to affect positive social change. At the same time, I must understand that what motivates me to persevere in this work is as much about my own self-determination and autonomy (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 332) as it is about improving the lives of those with whom I am working. Yes, this

motivation is altruistic, well-intentioned and driven by spiritual pursuit; however, it is also intricately tied into preserving my identity as someone who matters enough to affect change (Bracher, 2006, p. 7) and has the autonomy and competency to do so (Gagné and Deci, 2005, p. 332). As discussed in the previous chapters, to generate each of the projects required high levels of energy, determination and focus.

In addition, many of the activities necessary to make the work described here happen, were not interesting, for example, writing funding proposals and reflections, pitching and selling the work, generating publicity, designing posters, phone calls and recruiting participants. What is more, many actions involved a level of personal sacrifice like moving to the northwest and delivering workshops at my own expense. Therefore, as Gagné and Deci identify, this motivation was in many ways autonomously extrinsic and marked not by 'being interested in the activity but rather by the activity being *instrumentally important* for personal goals' (2005, p. 335). These personal goals include being autonomous and self-employed, as well as doing work that is creative and beneficial. This motivation was as self-serving as it was socially conscious. Grasping this reality contributes to the possibility for change, as Nicholson articulates:

'Acknowledging that there is a reciprocal relationship between altruism and self-interest, between practitioners and participants [...] has the potential to disrupt social hierarchies and to displace individualism...'  
(Nicholson, 2005, p. 33).

Without this crucial level of motivation, none of this work would have taken place. At the same time, a practitioner can generate all the work she wants but there is no guarantee that this work will be transformative.

Second, the transformative practitioner aspires to generate moments of *presencing*, that is, moments in which she listens, as Scharmer proposes, ‘from an emerging future’ (2009, p. 274) and thereby enhances the generative possibilities contained in the workshop/performance space. That is, she is able to ‘let go’ of all she planned and all she thinks she knows and ‘let come’ previously unseen or unnamed possibilities. I was profoundly affected when I experienced something like this level of presence while working with the men in the project described in chapter five. It was the experience of being a conduit in a very literal sense for something bigger that wanted to emerge in that particular space. In the context of working with men who were violent, and therefore potentially seen as ‘oppressors’, the action that emerged seemed to have the powerful impact of dissolving the masks and falsehoods behind which I saw them hiding. It seemed to give the men permission to come out and be honest about their unwanted behaviours so that they could explore how they could collectively transform them.

Unfortunately, this kind of intense presencing experience eluded me in the other projects I describe. While I experienced many moments of acute and non-judgmental observation and many incidents of ‘seeing together’ and

reflection (consistent with the aim of TO), the intense connection to the moment that I felt with the men, was never repeated in the same way. The absence of this presence might have been partly because I had to focus on other localized aspects of the work. For example, with the young women my main focus was on keeping them engaged, which required delivering fast-paced, constantly-changing activities and limiting any analysis. Similarly, during the creation of the forum play, the demands I experienced by the production and performative aspects of the project (in addition to driving, counselling and feeding the young people) decreased my ability to be present in that same way.

Kaplan warns practitioners how the 'clutter' of knowledge can impede generating '...the space from out of which new possibilities may emerge...from beyond oneself' (2002, p. 186). Emptiness, he suggests, is necessary to transcend what knowledge might obscure so we can 'remain centred in the midst of conflicting flows and processes' (2002, p. 190). When I undertook the project with the men, there was not much for me to empty. I had limited knowledge about the methodology and almost none about praxis. However (and in spite of still considering myself an emerging practitioner today), by the time I had implemented the other two projects I had already 'filled' myself with some knowledge, with plenty of clutter; perhaps this is also what got in the way.

Reflection is the third, and I think the most practical and applicable quality of a practitioner who aims to support a space for transformation. This research has made me acutely aware of the power of reflection. First, it is an innate and

necessary component of the practice. TO and its methodology are intrinsically reflective. The processes generated by the techniques and activities are aimed at an aesthetic experience that leads first to critical reflection and then action. This combination of reflection and action is what gives the practice the generative possibilities for transformation. Thus, the practitioner is involved in facilitating this process for the participants throughout the practice.

Second, reflection is a practice that a practitioner needs to develop to build praxis and facilitate the transformative potential of TO and other practices. As discussed in this thesis, my capacity to conduct this work depended on the reflection that has accompanied it *in* and *on* the moment. Through reflecting on these three projects, I have found that reflection increases the capacity of a practitioner because of the insights it makes accessible on at least three areas: building knowledge and skills, developing self-awareness and negotiating the tensions present in the work.

Firstly, in the area of building knowledge, reflection is essential. Reflection that stems from the 'immediacy and heat of practice, the sticky moments of indecision' (Bleakly 1999, in Dallos and Stedmon, 2009, p. 14) helps us to understand our actions in unpredictable situations or situations in which we lack experience. This understanding can then be turned into knowledge that can be continually built on to inform the practice. Countless improvisations and decisions based on the knowledge accumulated in this way aided the adaptation and flexibility of my practice. Likewise, looking back reflectively at a

session contributed to identifying which activities worked well and which did not, and why. I could then identify how an activity was best explained or the language that worked best. This knowledge greatly improves the practitioner's capacity to increase the transformative potential of the practice.

Secondly, in the area of self-awareness reflection can provide access to our biases, agendas, values and limitations. The awareness that reflection has raised about many aspects of my character and behaviours has enhanced my capacity to hold a space more effectively for the possibility of dialogue and transformation. For instance, the insights gained about my communication style during the implementation of *Relationship Status* are invaluable to the practice, as well as my own interpersonal relationships. Similarly, reflection made me aware of what I might have represented for participants and of the assumptions I might have made about them. Kaplan asserts 'if we are not able to reflect on our own processes, we will not make sense of the processes of others,' (2002, p. 294).

Lastly, reflection gives the practitioner a space from which to accept, negotiate and work with the ever-present *tensions* embedded in the work. For me, as an emerging practitioner, these tensions posed significant quandaries on many occasions. First were tensions between the generative intentions of the methodology and the prescriptive demands of the issues addressed by clients or funders: between what the client thinks the participants need and the possibilities participants could generate, given the chance.



Third, tensions emerged between the emancipatory intention of enabling participants to name 'their world' (Freire, 1970, p. 88) and the need to 'contest these same voices' when they are tainted by their own oppressive bias (Blair, 2010, p. 117). This example highlights the tension of power and authority that exists in the role of the practitioner as both an agent for liberation and a potential colonizer with a 'privileged agenda' (Snyder-Young, 2011, p. 29). Whose stories are enacted, where a scene stops, which activities are conducted, which themes are discussed and how; answers to these questions are, in effect, decided by the practitioner. Therefore, as much as the methodology is transformative, much of that potential lies in the practitioner's ability to reflect his or her way through these tensions.

Reflection, then, enables a practitioner to dwell in the 'ambiguity and uncertainty' of the work (Kaplan, 2002, p. 141): on the edges of what could be and what is. Reflection enables a practitioner to 'work with the possible, not only the given,' (Kaplan, 2002, p. 200). I cannot say if anyone who participated in these projects was transformed in any way. I cannot say if any of the young women in Broome gained anything other than a nice break, a good laugh and some useful but didactic instruction through the aesthetics of theatre. I cannot say whether what I perceived as a small shift in Damian in case study one actually translated into action when he returned to his family. It is questionable whether *Relationship Status* generated critical reflection in the young people. However, if I am to continue with this work and call myself a 'transformative' practitioner', I must embrace reflective practice as 'a way of life' (Neelands,

2006, p. 17) and commit to 'the development of life-long dispositions and the ongoing and continuous self-inquiry' (Taylor, 2000 in Neelands, 2006, p. 17).

### **Future research agendas**

This study raised my questions that could guide further research into TO. Among them, two stand out.

First, continued research is merited into the effectiveness of using TO as a complementary tool for working with men who are violent. Research could explore the extent to which TO and other aesthetic and generative practices such as presencing, could offer 'oppressors' a medium for self-observation, re-creation, re-invention and re-enactment that is not yet fully tapped. Research into TO's therapeutic benefits could explore the extent to which it could complement and enhance the work of other therapeutic approaches, such as narrative, cognitive and behavioural therapy models. In addition, research could explore the potential of TO to offer an effective conduit for assisting participants in the often-difficult expression of emotions and feelings. Designing and formulating research within the academic parameters of reflective phenomenology and hermeneutical interpretation could also generate useful evaluation processes.

Second, the transformative possibility of TO and other practices dealing with complex and sensitive issues centre on genuine engagement. Further investigation is needed into what constitutes, enhances and sustains

engagement. While in all the projects I have conducted<sup>78</sup> engagement has been successful to a degree, engaging young people has often required disproportionate amounts of energy and focus that detract from the aesthetic and transformative potential of the practice. I have often found myself facilitating workshops with participants who have not chosen to be there, with the result that much of my effort focused on convincing participants that they would benefit from the. This was especially true of projects with young Indigenous people. More research involving phenomenological and hermeneutical tools that involve participants in the inquiry into their own engagement might offer insights into how to make the transformative possibilities of this work available to them.

Both these possibilities sit on my field of vision as relevant and important research agendas to further the body of knowledge for those working aesthetically and generatively with groups of people.

To conclude, I can say with certainty that this inquiry has caused dramatic shifts in the ‘tectonic plates’ of my assumptions about TO – how we learn, how we practise and how we ‘transform’. However, developing into the practitioner I aspire to be will not occur simply by uncovering and ascribing attributes that enhance the transformative possibilities, as I have done in this thesis. How I will do this will be determined by the uniqueness of each instance of practice and how I choose to walk along the ridge between the tensions that permeate the work. To recall Machado’s sentiment, I can only create this path by walking it.

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<sup>78</sup> Not only the projects presented here, but also the other projects and workshops I have conducted since the founding of Act Out

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## Appendix 1

### RELATIONSHIP STATUS A forum play

#### Characters:

Tanya	16 years old in year 12
Ben	17 years old in year 12 – Kate's boyfriend
Kate	16 years old in year 12 – Ben's girlfriend
Tommo	18 years old repeating year 12 – a mate
Gibbsy	16 years old – Ben's best friend
Mel	16 years old school friend – Kate's best friend
Mr. Collins	Ben's Step-dad
Mrs. Collins	Ben's Mum
Mrs. Foster	Tanya's Mum

#### Scene 1

*Kate and Mel are getting ready for Netball.*

Kate	Look up the latest Justin Bieber clip – I told you Dad got me a ticket, hey?
Mel	Only about 50 times!!
Kate	Why don't you try to get your Mum to buy you one?
Mel	You're joking, aren't you? She won't spend that much money on a ticket – it was hard enough getting her to buy me the jeans I wanted and they were only 80 bucks! She is so clueless. You're lucky your Dad buys you everything.
Kate	(laughs) He never used to – it's just since they broke up, he feel guilty I reckon! Have you got a top I can use?
Mel	Yeah, look in that drawer
Kate	I hate our uniforms! They're so gross. Did you find the clip?
Mel	Nah, but ...oh my God...come and have a look at this on...Oh My God!

Kate *(coming over to her friend's computer)* What? What?  
Oh My God!

Mel Who do you think took these?

Kate Who cares? It's sick! We have to post them on  
Facebook!

*(Kate gets her phone out and starts texting)*

Mel I don't know, I think it's pretty horrible...  
Kate She deserves it, she's a slut, she'll love the  
attention. Move over let's post it on Tanya's  
wall...hah, little bitch...done

*(getting up and walking away)*

Mel *(Mel plays it again all the way through)*  
Kate, wait...keep watching, you didn't see them all,  
look!...Kate! Come here, look!

Kate *(Comes back and stares at the screen in shock)*  
Shit!

## Scene 2

*At Football training Ben is huddling talking to  
Gibbsy. The coach (Ben's Stepdad) is trying to talk  
to the groups but they are being very noisy.*

Mr. Collins Alright, you boys, that was a good effort...hey boys,  
come over here – I'm talking to you

Gibbsy So you guys were at Blackie's on Sunday?

Ben *(talking to Gibbsy)* It's about a six foot drop mate.  
Tommo was like ripped and he jumped all twisted  
and copped a bruise on the side of his leg

Gibbsy Did you jump?

Ben Yeah! Course I did.

Mr. Collins *(Getting frustrated)* Listen here!  
Gibbsy *(gesturing towards the coach)* C'mon let's see what  
your old man's gonna say.

Mr Collins Come on – I'm losing my voice here

Ben Juls jumped too – she reckons she got water up her bum!  
Mr Collins *(shouting angrily)* Ben Collins shut your mouth and listen up!

*Gibbsy and Ben stared at each other and were silent. Ben looked around the other players and took his shirt off and stormed off.*

*Later at home*

Mr. Collins Ben, you come here young man, we need to talk

Mrs. Collins What's happened? He came in fuming and went straight to his room.

Mr. Collins What happened is that he's got no respect for anyone, and you don't bloody help...

Mrs. Collins Oh, now all this is my fault?

Mr. Collins *(shouting)* Ben, he's gotta learn to listen...he can't just do what he wants all the time, he needs to learn

Mrs. Collins What do you mean? Ben, come on up and talk to us, will you?

*Ben comes up, he's had a shower but is clearly still upset.*

Mr. Collins *(acting aggressively)* What's with all the stomping off like a bloody silly girl?

Mrs. Collins *(looking worried)* Ben, come on luv, answer your Dad.

Ben He's not my Dad! He's a dickhead and he embarrassed me in front of all my mates – you're a dickhead!

Mr. Collins *(reaching for him lifting his arm)* I don't have to put up with all this crap

Mrs. Collins Ben, don't be cheeky, luv.  
Mr. Collins He's a bloody disgrace – you spoil him and let him get away with everything...

Mrs. Collins Don't you start telling me what I'm doing wrong, if you weren't so angry all the time...

Mr. Collins I'm not angry all the time  
*(shouting angrily right in Mrs. Collins' face and pushing her out of the way)*

Ben Don't you shout at her like that, don't you touch her!

Mr. Collins What are you going to do about it, you little pussy girl? *(standing over him aggressively)*

Ben Mum, I'm going out...

Mr. Collins *(standing in the way)* you're not going anywhere you spoilt little girl, and you *(pointing at Mrs. Collins)* are not interfering this time, I'm either the man of this house or I'm ...

Ben You're nobody!

Mr. Collins Get your son under control or I'm leaving...

Ben No I'm leaving *(walking out and slamming the door)*

### Scene 3

*Mrs. Foster is sitting at home watching television and drinking a glass of wine. Tanya comes out of her room dressed up and ready to go out. She has her phone in her hand and is texting*

Tanya I'm going out Mum, OK?

Mrs. Foster You look pretty, come over here and give your old Mum a hug. *(She is slightly intoxicated)*

Tanya Hang on *(texting)*

Mrs. Foster Put your phone down love, and come give your old Mum a big hug. Oops *(she spills a bit of wine as she adjust herself on the sofa)*  
You can put it down for five minutes, can't you?  
Hey, bring me a cloth from the kitchen, will you, that's a good girl *(giggles)*.

Tanya *(walking over to her Mum and handing her a cloth)*  
Here, oh and I've left my school report on the kitchen table for you.

Mrs. Foster Already, a school report? Gee the year's going fast. It feels like you just started a few weeks ago.

Tanya No it's end of term already, in a few days.

Mrs. Foster Well bring it over! Don't make me get up and get it...go on luv, I want to see how my angel is doing.

Tanya *(Gets up and comes back with it)*

Mrs. Foster Look at all your As!! You're such a smartie – You even got an A for Maths! I used to be crap at Maths...Oh love, I'm so proud of you...I wish I'd had brains when I was at school I wouldn't have ended up alone like this *(drinking from her wine glass)*

Tanya Well, school sucks and I can't wait to leave.

Mrs. Foster A, A, A, A, A, mmm D, what's that for? Attitude?

Tanya I'm going, alright, I'm going to be late.

Mrs. Foster What's going on, why the D for attitude?

Tanya The teachers hate me, that's all, they are always picking on me

Mrs. Foster *(tipsy)* It's cause you're so smart, they're jealous, you show them luv...I didn't get on with my teachers, that's why I didn't stay on and when I met your father...well, it was all going to be OK...

Tanya Don't start with that story Mum...

Mrs. Foster *(getting up and going to the bathroom)*  
What's wrong with that story? Help me up luv, I have to wee... It's a lovely story, you wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that story *(she staggers and almost falls. Tanya comes over to help her up)*...my life would be so different ...you're a smart girl, you make sure you don't get left behind like I have...I've been left behind, you know

Tanya Here we go again, how much have you drunk, Mum?

Mrs. Foster I'm just having a couple, take the edge off the day...I've been up since five working my arse off, just like I have for the last ten years...I deserve a little drinkie poo *(giggling trying to walk to bathroom)*

Tanya *(Tanya sculls a couple of wine glasses while her Mum is in the loo, then shouts to her Mum)*  
Dad said he was going to take me to Nan's tomorrow...

Mrs. Foster *(Coming back out to the living room)*  
Ask him when he's going to help pay for the hole he left in the wall the last time he came around here. I don't know why you even bother seeing him Tanya...he's a

Tanya  
He's my Dad, I didn't make him my Dad, you should have thought of that before you got yourself pregnant with me...

Mrs. Foster  
Don't you start with me young lady...I work my arse off so you can go on to finish year 12 and then that father of yours just comes in and gets all the benefit, don't you go taking after him...

Tanya  
I'm going out

Mrs. Foster  
He should be ashamed of himself *(starting to sit down but having trouble)*

Tanya *(Coming over to help her so she doesn't fall down)*  
Mum, stop drinking, I think you've had enough

Mrs. Foster  
I can handle my alcohol luv, now be a good girl

Tanya  
OK, I'm leaving now

Mrs. Foster  
Yes, yes, have a great time! You deserve to celebrate...you clever girl *(slurring her speech)*

#### Scene 4

*At the party Gibbsy and Ben are holding beers and talking to other friends. Some people are strewn across sofas talking, some are sitting on the floor eating chips and laughing – it's a party – music is playing. They are speaking loudly over the music*

Gibbsy  
This is great mate! Cheers!

Ben  
Cheers!

Gibbsy  
Where's Kate?

Ben Mum wouldn't let her come. I'm not bothered; you know, out with the boys

Gibbsy You're a lucky guy – she's a top chick

Ben Yeah she's hot!

Gibbsy *(Looking uncomfortable)* Right – oh look here is Tommo, maybe he got some buds, I'm over drinking this goon.

Ben Tommo! Come over here! Grab a cup.  
*(Tommo comes in and says hi to a few others and then joins Ben and Gibbsy)*

Gibbsy How did you go? You know?

Tommo It was no good mate – it's all dry out there

Gibbsy Shit ! *(disappointed)*

Ben Well, we'll just have to drink more!

Gibbsy Shit!

Tommo *Reaching in to the front of his pants and pulling out a rolled, small plastic bag and tossing it to Gibbsy*  
Just kidding mate!

Ben *(Pretending to punch Tommo)* You're a legend!  
Where's the billy?

Gibbsy Under my bed.

Ben Look! Is that Tanya? She looks hot!

Gibbsy She looks drunk.

Tommo The drunker the better!  
*Ben and Tommo do a high five*  
*Gibbsy comes back with the bong and they smoke.*  
*Soon Tanya comes over.*

Tanya What's that you're smoking? *(She trips and lands on the sofa squeezed in between Tommo and Ben)*

Ben Comfy?

Tommo I am now.

Ben Not you arsehole, Tanya, you comfy?

Tanya Thanks Ben, yeah, can I have a smoke? *(She is clearly intoxicated and having trouble lighting the cone, she giggles)*

Ben Here let me help you.

Tanya Oh Ben, you're such a sweet guy. Thanks.

Ben *(Smiling)* No problem babe.

Tommo That's it. Hold it, hold it!

Tanya *(Blowing the smoke out)* Just what I needed, thank you boys!  
*Tanya gets up and is very unsteady on her feet she is giggling.*  
Woah... my head is spinning, I think I need to lie down *(she walks in the direction of the bedroom)*

*Tommo, Ben and Gibbsy watch her leave*

Tommo Shots!

Gibbsy I can't handle it mate

Tommo You faggot Gibbsy, what about you Ben, can you handle it?

Ben Put it right here bro *(extending his glass)*  
*Tommo pours a glass of plink for Ben and they scull.*

Tommo Gee that Tanya was looking hot!

Ben Where'd she go?

Tommo Through there mate – to the bedroom

*Tommo and Ben look at each other for a moment and smile, getting up at the same time... Tommo comes back and grabs his phone off the table*

Gibbsy What are you guys doing? She's unconscious, leave her alone.

Tommo Here – take the billy to Juls over there.



Ben                                      We are just mucking around, don't worry

*Gibbsy walks off to take the bong to another group.*

## Scene 5

*Ben and Gibbsy are waking up in a messy lounge room, littered with bottle and empty plastic cups and a chip bags*

Gibbsy                                  Ben, mate, wake up we gotta clean up and get going

Ben                                      Argh...oh man, my head...what time is it?

Gibbsy                                  Shit, look at this mess – I'll get a rubbish bag (going to the kitchen)

Ben                                      I got the dries, I need some water

Gibbsy                                  Well get up and get some, c'mon we gotta go before Dickhead gets back

Ben                                      When's your brother back?

Gibbsy                                  Don't know, he stays at his girlfriends on Fridays – he won't dob us in for having a drink, and I won't dob him in for leaving me here on my own. But we gotta clean up or Dad will know something was up – he's back from Tom Price tomorrow

*Gets up and goes to the kitchen and has a drink, Ben also has a drink and starts to boil kettle for a cup of tea. They look at each other and start laughing*

Gibbsy                                  What a classic night!

Ben                                      Sickest, mate

Gibbsy                                  How was Tanya? Gee she's a wild chick!

Ben                                      Tanya? Was she here?

Gibbsy                                  Can't you remember?

Ben                                      I can't remember anything after Tommo arrived with the buds. Didn't we spill the bong?  
*(They get up and walk over to the corner)*

Gibbsy    Shit I better put some bleach on that – it’s going to stink.

Ben     Don’t bleach it mate, it will damage it, just put dishwashing liquid on it. Have you got any essential oils?

Gibbsy    Essential what?

Ben     Oils, mate. Me Mum’s right into that shit and they smell real good. I reckon Eucalyptus or Lemongrass will cover up the smell.

Gibbsy    Lemongrass – where are you from?

Ben     What’s that behind the couch?  
*(Shifting it and pulling something out)* It’s a bra!  
*(Throws it at Gibbsy)*

*Tanya is standing in the doorway and looking at the living room. She is wearing a shirt that is too big for her.*

Tanya     It’s mine

Gibbsy    Tanya – you’re still here!

Ben     What’s it doing behind the couch?

Tanya     Give it to me!

Ben     What?

Tanya     Give me my fucking bra (she snatches off Ben and goes back into the bedroom)

Gibbsy    You really don’t remember *(takes out his mobile phone and shows him film clip)* This may jolt your memory.

Ben     *(watching in shock)* is that her...is that ME?

Gibbsy    Yeah, mate. You and Tommo, she was out of it.

Ben     What, unconscious? Man – that’s no good. ..Delete that mate – I can’ t have Kate finding out, she’ll kill

me, she'll break up with me for sure, we're, oh man, that's just shit!!

*(pacing)*

I can't remember hey? Nothing.

Tanya comes back into the room.

Tanya Delete what? What's that?

Gibbsy They didn't do anything illegal – they didn't touch you or anything

Tanya What's that? What are you looking at?

Ben Nothing Tanya – go home!

Tanya Don't tell me what to do!

Ben Why did you get so bloody drunk for?

Tanya What?

Ben You've got to delete that Gibbsy.

Tanya Delete what?  
*(she grabs the phone off Gibbsy and looks at it, growing angry and then throws it across the room, storms off and slams the door – she is crying)*

Gibbsy I can't mate, it's wasn't me that took them. Tommo sent them to me. Tanya, come back!

Ben What?!?! Who did he send it to?  
*(his phone rings telling him he has a text he checks)*  
Fuck! I've got to call him to delete it. *(He gets his phone out of his pocket)*

## Scene 6

*Kate and Mel are getting ready for Netball.*

Kate Look up the latest Justin Bieber clip – I told you Dad got me a ticket, hey?

Mel Only about 50 times!!

Kate Why don't you try to get your Mum to buy you one?

Mel   You're joking, aren't you? She won't spend that much money on a ticket – it was hard enough getting her to buy me the jeans I wanted and they were only 80 bucks! She is so clueless. You're lucky your Dad buys you everything.

Kate   *(laughs)* He never used to – it's just since they broke up, he feel guilty I reckon! Have you got a top I can use?

Mel   Yeah, look in that drawer

Kate   I hate our uniforms! They're so gross. Did you find the clip?

Mel   Nah, but ...oh my God...come and have a look at this on...Oh My God!

Kate   *(coming over to her friend's computer)* What? What? Oh My God!

Mel   Who do you think took these?

Kate   Who cares? It's sick! We have to post them on Facebook! *(Kate gets her phone out and starts texting)*

Mel   I don't know, I think it's pretty horrible...

Kate   She deserves it, she's a slut, she'll love the attention. Move over let's post it on Tanya's wall...hah, little bitch...done *(getting up and walking away)*

Mel   *(Mel plays it again all the way through)*  
Kate, wait...keep watching, you didn't see them all, look!...Kate! Come here, look!

Kate   *(Comes back and stares at the screen in shock)*  
Shit!

Mel   That's ...

Kate   I know!

Mel   What are...?

Kate Shut up! (*she grabs her phone and starts deleting her post*)  
How many people do you think he sent it to?

Mel look at the list...shit!

Kate She's dead!

Mel What? Tanya? What about Ben?

Kate Shut up!

## Scene 7

At School

*Teacher enters classroom and straightens up chairs then sits down at desk. Kate and Mel walk into classroom*

Mel Morning Sir

Kate Morning Mr. Dickson

*The girls sit down at their desks.*

Mel So did you get a chance to talk to him?

Kate No, just got my phone back this morning and I've got no credit

Mel Did you get the a text from Tanya

Kate Yeah, pathetic...he texted me too

Mel Well...if you want to talk to him, he's just walked in the door

*Ben walks in and looks until he finds Kate, who pretends she doesn't see him – finally he catches her eye and signals for her to get up and talk to him. Kate goes to Ben- a few moments later Tanya arrives.*

Kate Oh great! The slut!

Tanya Shut up Kate. (*She sits down near Mel*)

Mel (*To Tanya*) are you alright?

Tanya (in a low voice) No, not really.

Kate Oh, great, first you try to steal my boyfriend now you're trying to steal my friend.

Ben Come on Kate!

Tanya *(Standing up and looking at Ben)* If he's such a good boyfriend – why don't you ask him what happened?

Kate I don't have to ask him, I know what happened, I saw the photos.

Tanya Then you would have seen that I was unconscious!  
*(Tanya is very upset and starts crying)*  
I didn't do anything!  
*(She gets up and runs out of the room)*

Teacher: *(Coming back n the room)*  
OK – what just happened? Why did Tanya run out of the room?

Teacher *(The three young people start to speak at once)*  
Everyone stop! One at a time!

Mel *(sticks her hand up)*

Teacher Mel

Mel There was a party at the weekend and someone put photos of Tanya on Facebook and they weren't very ni...

Teacher Facebook?! Right, I don't want to hear another word...Everyone get back to your desks, let's do some work.

*Everyone freezes*

THE END