PBPL

Practice-based Professional
Learning Centre

The Open University

Final report from the PBPL funded project:

Using action-learning in the professional development of work-based practitioners

Project Principals:
Rajni Kumrai, Vipin Chauhan and Jane Hoy
2009

Using Action-Learning in the Professional Development of Work-Based Practitioners

**Report by Research Team
The Open University**

**Rajni Kumrai
Vipin Chauhan
Jane Hoy**

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**Contact
Rajni Kumrai
r.r.kumrai@open.ac.uk**

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Rajni Kumrai, Vipin Chauhan and Jane Hoy
Research Team, The Open University

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SECTION 1:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

1. This summary outlines the key findings and conclusions of a research project 'Using Action-Learning in the Professional Development of Work-Based Practitioners' (the 'Project').
2. The research was funded by and part of the Practice Based Professional Learning (PBPL) research strand of the Open University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).
3. The research was carried out by the Open University in partnership with Ruskin College, Oxford. It was coordinated and managed by Rajni Kumrai, Lecturer in Education at the Open University and the research team comprised Jane Hoy, independent consultant specialising in participative theatre and Vipin Chauhan, specialising in management and organisational development.

PURPOSE

1. The report is aimed at practitioners, managers and volunteers involved in the training, development and support of youth and community workers.
2. It is hoped that the research findings will contribute to further debates about the appropriate teaching and learning strategies for the training and development of professional qualifying and post-qualification youth and community workers and managers.

PARTICIPATIVE THEATRE

1. Participative theatre is used widely in the UK and Europe as a means of working and engaging with a wide variety of individuals, groups and communities especially those experiencing exclusion and marginalisation.
2. Our participative theatre workshops drew on Boal's Forum theatre[1] in which participants tell their own stories, develop knowledge, create a form of cultural capital through interaction with others and share strategies for dealing with difficult situations.
3. Apart from being a highly entertaining learning experience, participative theatre can support learners with different learning styles involving the whole body, mind and senses and learners begin to value their everyday experiences as well as those of the young people with whom they work.

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[1] Boal, A. (1992) Games for Actors and Non-Actors, 2nd ed., Routledge & Boal, A. (2000) Theatre of the Oppressed, Pluto Classics.

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RESEARCH AIMS AND SCOPE

1. The overall aim of the research project was to investigate how participatory theatre approaches, can be used to complement and augment teaching and learning strategies in practice-based learning environments. More specifically, the research team was interested in exploring further how:

   a. To enhance the leadership skill-set of youth and community practitioners and increase the transferability of their learning into work-based settings and across similar practices.
   b. Innovative teaching and learning strategies can be integrated more effectively into work-based and inter-professional core teaching methodologies.
   c. To develop opportunities for reflective practice through 'reflections-in-action' during the programme and follow-up semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
   d. To put the learners at the heart of the learning process.

2. The research sample was drawn from students at Ruskin College. There were two student groups. Group A: students on a Foundation Degree in Youth and Community Work (HE Level 5) and Group B students on a BA Hons Top-up year course (following a Foundation Degree) (HE Level 6).

3. The research methodology essentially comprised:

   a. Reflection-in-action interviews at mid-point using handheld recording devices.
   b. Semi-structured telephone interviews with Group A students and a small number of line managers and face-to-face interviews with Ruskin College staff.
   c. Focus groups with both Group A and Group B students.

KEY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. The project consisted of two day-long experiential workshops using participatory theatre approaches delivered in November and December 2008.
2. Both workshops reflected the broad curriculum areas students were undertaking at the time as part of their taught course: for Group A students this was 'team work' and for Group B, it was 'leadership'.

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WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

1. The first activity consisted of a briefing on the various games and exercises to be used by the facilitator, who in the traditions of participative theatre is referred to as 'the joker'.
2. The second type of activity was sociometric and gamesercises which were interactive and physical and designed to generate communication, trust, build relationships and be fun.
3. The third activity was preparing for the participative theatre itself.
4. The fourth was the participative theatre itself with stories based on lived experiences enacted by the students.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings from the **reflection-in-action interviews** showed that:

1. There was better appreciation of the space created to reflect on practice and the situations faced within the workplace.
2. Students got to know each other in greater depth and/or see each other in a different light.
3. The exposure to different group work techniques and exercises was useful and educative.
4. Some students became more confident in tackling oppressive practices and situations and dealing with challenging situations.
5. Students already were considering the transferability of some of the activities used in first part of the workshop in their work with young people and staff.

The key findings from the **semi-structured interviews and the two focus groups** showed that:

1. The opportunity to participate in a highly interactive environment about their lives, the ability to engage in change and the potential to take action on issues of concern to them was valued.
2. Individuals felt enabled to take calculated risks knowing that they were expertly facilitated and knowing that a safe environment had been created to help make this happen.
3. Students were able to explore power dynamics relating to qualified/unqualified status, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability and try out a range of solutions to the challenges they faced.
4. Students were able to talk about their workplace and share their practice with others in a dynamic way and develop a greater sense of teamwork, trust and co-operation.
5. Students were able to gain further and more penetrative insights into the dynamics of teams and groups.

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6. Students believed that the workshops had helped strengthen relationships between them, create greater group cohesion and break down some existing barriers.
7. For some students the range of skills and insights developed through participating in the workshops represented a profound sense of personal growth.
8. Students commented on how the learning brought to life some of the theoretical materials they had been studying (Freire's work, for instance).

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

In terms of impact on **student experiences:**

1. Students were able to give specific examples of how their practice may change as a result of this learning experience; in particular, the sociometric and gamesercises were singled out as experiences which could be adapted to a range of work situations.
2. Students felt empowered to deal with challenging situations in the workplace and felt that their leadership skills had been enhanced.
3. Students were able to draw on each others experiences, share these pro-actively and develop strategies collaboratively.
4. Opportunities were created for students to take part in shaping the methodology which helped create greater awareness of the ethical and professional issues involved in community research.
5. Many students felt able to reflect more critically on their professional proficiencies and for some, to extend the skills that are key to working in this Sector.

In terms of impact on **teaching approaches:**

1. The participative theatre approach complemented and gave added value to Ruskin College's established and preferred teaching and learning strategies. The teaching team at Ruskin College use a range of approaches including active experiential learning.
2. The College was keen to embrace the results of the research and explore how similar opportunities could be created for future learners. This could involve the use of external expertise in the short-term with a view to creating greater staff proficiency in participative theatre in the medium to long term.
3. The research team had all worked on the Open University's Foundation Degree in Leading Work with Young People work-based learning course, E218 'Leading Work with Young People in Practice' where the application of work-based learning into students' practice is a key feature. Our involvement in this project reconfirmed our view that action-based learning using theatre based approaches is a valuable form of social learning which can extend the professional development of youth and community workers.

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In terms of impact on **strategic change and learning design,** for the **Open University:**

1. The course materials for the Day School and Alternative Learning Experience component of E218, the second work-based learning course, are currently being reviewed with a view to incorporating some of the teaching materials arising from this project.
2. On an institutional level there is also scope for this methodology to be incorporated by other academic Units.
3. Central Units such as Human Resources and Regional Staff Tutor Forums may wish to consider the application of this methodology in their staff development, capacity building and equalities and diversity training.

And for **Ruskin College:**

1. The College is committed to exploring how this teaching methodology can be incorporated into future programme delivery more as an integrated teaching and learning design feature and to continue working with the research team on future developments.
2. The College is keen to embrace the results of the research and participate in the dissemination of findings to other practitioners.

In terms of **national and sectoral impact:**

1. Participative theatre has the potential of enabling the youth and community work profession to become more effective in addressing anti-oppressive practices by working through day today experiences faced by workers, volunteers, young people and communities alike.
2. Most training agencies offering youth and community work qualifying programmes use experiential and interactive teaching and learning strategies and the results of this research have the potential of offering these agencies another dynamic instrument to add to their teaching and learning toolbox.
3. The in-service training of youth and community workers could benefit from such a tool as could workers, volunteers and managers working in voluntary youth organisations.

KEY DELIVERABLES

1. A comprehensive Project Report (June 2009).
2. A poster summarising the project (June 2009).
3. A leaflet summarising the project (June 2009).
4. The development and launch of a dedicated project website on the main PBPL/CETL Website (June 2009).
5. Resource notes for lecturers (June 2009).

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6. A workshop presentation at the Annual Training Agencies Group Conference on "Creativity and Innovation in Teaching" (June 2009).
7. Presentation at the Annual CETL Conference (December 2009)

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PURPOSE

This report outlines the main results and conclusions of a research project 'Using Action-Learning in the Professional Development of Work-Based Practitioners' (the 'Project'). The project was funded and part of the Practice Based Professional Learning (PBPL) research strand of the Open University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), established to build on existing excellence within the Open University. The research was carried in partnership with Ruskin College, Oxford and coordinated and managed by Rajni Kumrai, Lecturer in Education at the Open University. Her research team comprised Jane Hoy, independent consultant specialising in participative theatre and Vipin Chauhan, specialising in management and organisational development.

The purpose of the research was to explore the role and place of participative theatre in the teaching and training of youth and community practitioners in higher education.

The report is aimed at face to face workers, managers, staff development professionals and volunteer coordinators involved in the training, development and support of youth and community workers, be this at pre-qualifying, qualifying or post-qualification stages.

It is hoped that the findings will contribute to further debates about the teaching and learning strategies appropriate and relevant to the training and development of professional qualifying and post-qualification youth and community workers and managers. It is hoped also that the findings will be seen to be relevant to the training and development of other qualifying and qualified professionals involved in human services such as social work, social care, nursing and play work.

PARTICIPATIVE THEATRE

Participative theatre is used widely in the UK and Europe as a means of working and engaging with a variety of individuals, groups and communities especially those experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. Arguably, in some sectors such as formal education, there is an established tradition of using theatre in education (TIE). TiE[2] starts with an educational topic and develops a 'performance' around it often using drama and involving pupils, teachers and ancillary staff in it. Performances may be designed to fit with

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[2] http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/theatreineducation/

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certain aspects of the curriculum or key stages. Alternatively, they may not be based on the curriculum but designed to enable pupils to enact their life stories through simulations and scenarios.

Within other sectors such as youth and community work, only aspects of participative theatre approach seem to be used and often in a piecemeal fashion through say, the use of role play. Within youth and community work, case studies, problem solving, journals and, more recently, creative writing have all been used to help learners value their experiences, energise learning and reflect on their practices.

Our participative theatre workshops draw on Boal's Forum theatre[3] in which participants tell their own stories based on real-life experiences, developing knowledge, creating a form of cultural capital through interaction with others and sharing strategies for dealing with difficult situations. Theatre involves the whole body and mind and evokes the senses. Apart from being highly entertaining it can support learners with different learning styles. Through the use of participatory theatre games, learners become involved in an emerging community of practice. They begin to value their everyday experiences as well as those of young people and to expand their capacity for reflection, action and change.

Suitable stories for participative theatre involve real-life dilemmas in which the teller or the 'hero' tells their own story in which they knew what they wanted but did not know how to get it or when they were not happy with the strategy they had used to deal with a situation. The aim of participative theatre in such scenarios is to strive for a change for the better and so the story has to be believable and of interest to the audience and members need to believe that they can do it.

The facilitator or 'joker' divides the group up into random groups so everyone gets a chance to tell their story. A number of stories are then chosen by the whole group to be enacted/re-enacted through participative theatre. In order to maintain boundaries and to avoid triggering difficult feelings the 'hero' is asked not to play her/himself but to consider playing their 'antagonist' or 'oppressor' as they have first hand knowledge of the person. The next steps in the process involve:

1. The group rehearses the story using the techniques learnt earlier.
2. The group enacts the story for the larger group audience or 'spect-actors'.
3. The story is re-enacted as individual spect-actors are invited by the 'joker' to stop the story at the moment they feel they have an idea of how they

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[3] Boal, A. (1992) Games for Actors and Non-Actors, 2nd ed., Routledge & Boal, A. (2000) Theatre of the Oppressed, Pluto Classics.

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can change the hero's action for the better (the convention is not to change the action of the other characters).
4. The hero stands down and the spect-actor is invited forward to try out their strategy in his/her place.
5. Everyone is asked what they think the issues are – what they can see - and the degree of feasibility of the intervention is discussed by everyone.
6. The process is repeated so more strategies for change can be tried out and discussed.

WORKPLACE LEARNING

The relationship between workplace and academic learning has been an area of much debate. Historically, workplace learning has been seen as a place of belonging to a 'community of practice'[4]. More recent perspectives have considered the significance of how biography and prior experience facilitate the inter-relationships between employees and their workplace environments[5].

This project explored these different perspectives. It aimed to shape the learning environment into a creative space in which all participants had the opportunity to share experiences from which they could learn and reflect as individuals and as a group. The desired outcome of this approach was to strengthen students' ability to deal with the challenges presented during the workshops and to enable them to transfer the learning to their work spaces.

This project builds on previous CETL funded projects in the area of youth and community work emerging from the development of the Open University Foundation Degree in Working with Young People in October 2005. The Foundation degree integrates work-related and work-based learning. Previous projects funded by PBPL/CETL have included how students move between theory and practice and a pilot study of an Award tutor project to support student learning in the workplace.

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[4] Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[5] Evans, K. and Kersh, N. (2006) Chapter 4 Learner Biographies, Workplace Practices and Learning in (eds) Evans, K., Hodkinson, P., Rainbird, H. and Unwin, L.(2006) Improving Workplace Learning, London: Routledge.

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SECTION 3:
AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

OVERALL AIM

The overall aim of the project was to investigate how participatory theatre approaches, could be used as an effective teaching and learning strategy in practice-based learning environments. The research sample was drawn from students at Ruskin College. There were two student groups who agreed to take part. . Group A: students on a Foundation Degree in Youth and Community Work (HE Level 5) and Group B students on a BA Hons Top-up year course (following a Foundation Degree) (HE Level 6).

One of the key objectives of the research was to develop and pilot an interactive programme of teaching and learning involving a series of simulated and facilitated activities based on real-life situations students faced within their workplaces. This enabled real-life scenarios to be generated and 'resolved' through participative approaches with the support of their peers, expert facilitation and some follow through as part of their routine teaching after the workshops ended.

PROJECT GOALS

1. To enhance the leadership skill-set of youth and community practitioners and increase the transferability of their learning into their work-based settings and across similar practices.
2. To understand better how innovative teaching and learning strategies can be integrated into work-based and inter-professional core teaching methodologies.
3. To develop opportunities for reflective practice through reflection-in-action during the pilot programme and through follow-up semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
4. To put the learners at the heart of the learning process.

STUDENT PROFILES

Students worked in a range of varied youth and community work settings:

> I work for the Youth Service which is now 'Young People and Families' and part of 'Children, Young People and Families Directorate.' This Directorate encompasses social services, the youth offending team, Connexions, youth services and teenage pregnancies. I am a full time youth worker and run a youth club which is also my base and we run evening sessions there. I also manage a satellite youth club on a council estate one night a week in another location.

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I actually work on a casual basis so I'm not full-time or part-time, but I am paid. At the moment I'm based with a small community association, working as a youth worker. Basically the funding is external funding from various charities and the local council. We work mainly with Bangladeshi young people, 13 to 19 year olds, both male and female. I deal with the males, and we have a female youth session run by a female worker. Basically we work with Bangladeshi young people on issues that affect them. During the summer holidays we did some work on knife crime which some of the young people were affected by and we covered topics such as stop and searches, we involved the police, basically things that concern them as Bangladeshi young people locally.

Well at the moment, I mentor young people aged 11 to 19. I mentor four young people weekly and this involves positive activities and building up a relationship with them. I work with them usually for a year. Although I work with them on a one-to one basis, we also do some group activities such as going to the leisure centre, the gym and swimming where other mentors and young people come together as a group. The work is funded by a special fund for the younger age range. Also, I'm at Ruskin, and hoping when I finish my course to move onto something more, because I only do mentoring part-time and am hoping to move onto a full time youth work job.

PROJECT RATIONALE

The research team was interested in exploring work-based learning and participative teaching for a number of reasons. The team's experience of working with adult learners in a range of higher education contexts had generated a shared interest in researching the lived experiences of part-time adult learners who had traditionally been a minority in higher education. The research team had been involved in programmes for training staff in further, adult and higher education and practitioners on youth and community programmes over the past two decades. This professional experience of teaching and learning shaped current research interests and concerns about how policy developments, theoretical discourses on equalities and how the dynamics of multiple oppressions can contribute to processes of inclusion and exclusion in higher education.

The team was particularly interested in exploring and facilitating the impact of participative theatre methodologies on learners. This was especially in terms of furthering their awareness and ability to identify, engage, influence, reflect and reshape their experiences of inclusion and oppression in their learning settings. These settings may range from their interaction with their peers in

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the teaching environment, in their work-place setting (their roles in a paid or unpaid capacity) and in their wider social relations in collective spaces or communities of practice.

A major interest of this project was to explore the extent to which action-learning through participatory theatre approaches could affect learners' understandings and abilities to influence change within and in their practice. Underpinning this interest was also the concern to ensure learners had opportunities to reflect on their learning particularly as learners on a professional qualifying youth and community training programme where the acquisition of critical reflective skills is essential to their professional and personal development.

The choice of using participatory theatre as a form of action-learning was based also on a concern to engage learners with issues of equality and opportunity, one of the four cornerstones that define the profession. Youth and community work practitioners are expected to engage with a range of young people and their communities through informal education and adopt approaches which are informed by a set of beliefs, values and ethical principles including a commitment to equal opportunity and the empowerment of young people.

Youth and community practitioners work increasingly with the more marginalised young people and their communities who often also experience institutionalised exclusion by public services such as education, housing, health, policing and social work. The sensitivity of practitioners working with young people and their communities to make sense of and navigate though institutional barriers is a critical element of their skills development and professional proficiency.

These starting points corresponded also with the team's own social philosophies, ethics and commitment to teaching and learning styles founded on the principles of inclusion, equality and partnership.

KEY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

FORMAT

The project consisted of two day-long experiential workshops using approaches derived from participatory theatre. The workshops aimed to provide participants an opportunity to:

1. Identify fresh strategies to manage more effectively their workplace environment.
2. Develop reflective practice skills through observation, experience and interaction with their peers.

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3. Relate learning to their youth and community work teaching, curriculum and assignments.

The workshops were delivered in November and December 2008 to students undertaking the Foundation Degree in Youth and Community Work (Group A) and the BA Hons Top-up course (Group B). The first workshop was for Group A and the second, for Group B.

Though responsive and interactive in design and delivery, in both workshops, there was a need to reflect on the issues which students were addressing at the time on their taught course. Broadly speaking, the theme for Group A students was 'team work' and for Group B, 'leadership'.

With one or two exceptions and as a result of feedback received after the first workshop, the core aims, programme and the interactive processes and methods used were similar on both days. The key components of both days comprised:

9.45-10.00	• Welcome
	• Aims and objectives for the day
	• Hopes and fears
	• A contract for the day
10.30–10.45	• Sociometry: some action learning games to enable participants to find out more about each other, their work and interests
10.45-11.30	• Developing communication skills using games and activities
11.30-11.45	**Break**
11.45-12.30	• Sharing stories and experiences of working in teams in the workplace – these experiences will form the basis for work during the rest of the day
12.30-1.30	**Lunch**
1.30-4.00	• Working on strategies for change in the workplace through (re)enacting some stories
4.00-4.30	• Practical evaluation using action learning methods
4.30-5.00	• Implications of the workshop for course work and assignments
5.00	• End and depart

It was hoped that by the end of the workshops participants would have:

1. Taken part in practical sociometric games and gamesercises in a safe but challenging environment.
2. Shared experiences and stories of leadership and supervisory situations in the workplace which were found to be challenging.
3. (Re) enacted experiences and stories and explored practical strategies for dealing with challenging situations.
4. Reflected on the underpinning ideas, concepts and materials in preparation for assignments, going back to the workplace and their course.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

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Having agreed a contract for learning on the day the workshops consisted of three kinds of activity. The first activity consisted of a briefing on the various games and exercised to be used by the workshop facilitator, who in the traditions of participative theatre is referred to as 'the joker'. The briefing was seen to be important as means of securing student buy-in, developing group cohesion and helping reinforce the importance of games and activities in awareness-raising and reflective practices.

The second type of activity was sociometric games and gamesercises which were interactive and physical and designed to generate communication, trust, build relationships and be fun. During both workshops introductory games were drawn from 'sociometry' a framework for understanding and mapping group dynamics and developed by psychotherapist, Joseph Moreno. The games used helped deepen communication between group members and fostered a greater interest in each other as a basis for later sharing of experiences.

The third activity was preparing for the participative theatre itself. Participants began expressing themselves using self-sculpted images (image theatre) from the human body as a means of representing feelings, ideas, thoughts and relationships which reflected the sculptor's impression of a situation e.g. one in which they were bullied or experienced oppression. Each participant was asked to share their own stories of challenging or oppressive situations which they had faced and had struggled to do so because of obstacles or antagonist(s). In this context, the 'story-teller' became the hero or the protagonist.

The story was then enacted for the rest of the participants who in the traditions of participative theatre are known as 'spect-actors'. The joker then told the spect-actors that the story would be played again but if anyone felt they would like to intervene and do something different from what the hero was doing (the convention is not to change the characters) then, they should stand up and say stop. The person playing the hero stood down and the audience member was invited forward to show their solution. The joker facilitated discussion about the feasibility of the intervention and the process was repeated so more strategies could be offered and examined. This way of forming stories provided a framework where oppressions were not reproduced but instead re-visited, analysed critically and alternative ways suggested for resolving them.

Boal[6] argues that this process 'makes thought visible' (p.137) and is a rehearsal for social change – the aim being not only to interpret the world but to transform it. Through active interventions in an unfinished piece of theatre, spectators are encouraged to move from passively empathising with

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[6] Boal, A. (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed, Pluto Press.

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individual characters to 'a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre….this practice creates an uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action'. (p.142)

An important principle underpinning the workshops was that each exercise had clear boundaries provided by structure and ritual with expert facilitation. The use of participative theatre provided students with an opportunity to identify life and/or work situations that were real to them. Students saw these scenarios as a challenge to them and felt the need to explore strategies for their resolution and in doing so made an active investment in finding a solution(s). Because the scenarios explored were of significance to the students who raised them, they were more inclined to invest their mind, body and in some cases, spirit into finding solutions and recognising their relevance for greater effectiveness in the workplace.

SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Sample Activity 1: Outcomes of a Thought Shower on Leadership

The text below came from a thought-shower on the notion of 'leadership' and what it meant to the students. This was one of the build-up exercises leading to the participative theatre activities.

- Influential
- Power
- Governing
- Supportive
- Flexible
- Respect
- Laissez-faire/laid back
- Responsibility
- Political
- Examples
- Trustworthy
- Abuse of power
- Dictatorship in charge
- Thoughtful
- Take the flack
- Control
- Authoritarian
- Shared
- Motivational
- Guidance
- Delegation
- Strategic
- Inspirational

Sample Activity 2: Scenarios

Students worked on several scenarios in both workshops and the main issues they presented related to some manifestation of oppression. The following scenario 'No Credit' exemplifies the kind of situations presented and reflections from the participants involved:

> Tariq is an experienced full-time youth worker based in a traditional youth club. His manager was always taking credit for the work of done by his staff team. On one occasion this manager presented one of Tariq's projects as his own to a local councillor. The staff team were angry about this and wanted to

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> challenge the manager for not being acknowledged as the people who had been the main contributors to the success of this project.
>
> In this scenario, the youth and community workers identified oppression based on gender, on seniority due to the length of service of the manager and on the authority the manager had over other workers due to his position in the organisation. They enacted the situation at the point where the manager was presenting the project idea to the local councillor. Students re-enacted the scenario offering solutions including grouping together to create a collective support network to challenge oppressive practice, engaging in dialogue where the issue of joint recognition was discussed.

After the workshop the student whose experience this scenario related to was interviewed. He was able to reflect on the multiplicity of learning gained from this activity which had clearly struck him as highly significant in his work relations. He was able to identify the value of participative theatre work as:

> 'I mean using drama as a medium is pretty good in itself anyway'.

He was able to relate the usefulness of the learning in relation to his course studies:

> 'I'm doing a management assignment you see. Now, yes, because one of the things we did in the scenario, I actually used my manager, my own manager, who basically is not treating me right, delegating everything to me, I'm doing all the work and he gets all the praise. So now, we, change that around a little bit - I'm a bit more assertive as a whole I think'.

He continued to reflect on the value of working with other students in exploring solutions:

> 'Everyone suggested the ways and means, without upsetting my manager, of getting what I wanted.'

Other members of the workshop also reflected on their learning arising from this scenario.

> '….it made you think there isn't just one way of dealing with it, and you could do lots of different things really and I think he thought afterwards, there are lots of other options for the way he could deal with it, and it was funny, not funny, but it was

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> interesting how the different takes that other people had on it depending on work they'd done before as well'.

The opportunity to relate elements of someone else's scenario as a form of reviewing one's own situation was possible through the re-enactments:

> 'We worked with one of the students - his problem was that his boss was nicking all his ideas. Not my boss but one of my co-workers has a tendency to take their opinions and make sure that they - if you said something - they tend to get in there first and say it - so I pulled him up on it where maybe I've just taken it on the chin - I don't mind-yeah definitely I saw different approaches and was able to do that myself really'.

These different perspectives illustrate how students were engaged in a transformative process which empowered them to explore solutions to oppressive work situations.

Also by engaging in re-enacting the scenario students were able to offer collective responses which itself was an empowering process. This collective form of learning and problem-solving has been viewed as a powerful expression of developing communities of practice (Wenger) as well as being a process of social participation. By collectively addressing issues of oppression in such learning environment, students were able to get support and shape their own responses.

> 'It really was very, very useful and really, really bonded us all altogether and yeah I think it worked. I think it was very good actually'.
>
> '....and the jumping in and the taking up of different roles were good because you get to see how different people might handle it'.

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The tables below outline the gender, age and ethnicity profiles of the students who took part in the workshops:

1   Group A Participants

In total 18 students took part in the first workshop:

Table 1: Group A Workshop Participants Profile		No.
Gender	Male	6
	Female	12
Age	20-25	2
	25-30	6
	30-35	3

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	35-40		1
	40-45		4
	45-50		2
	White	British	14
Ethnicity	**Asian or Asian British**	Indian	1
		Bangladeshi	1
	Black or Black British	African	2

2   Group B Participants

In the second workshop, a total of 10 students took part:

Table 2: Group B Workshop Participants Profile			**No.**
Gender	Male		4
	Female		6
Age	20-25		1
	25-30		1
	30-35		3
	35-40		2
	40-45		1
	45-50		1
	50-55		1
	White	British	6
Ethnicity	**Black or Black British**	Caribbean	2
		African	2

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OUR APPROACH

The project was managed by the research team who worked collaboratively with the staff team and students at Ruskin College. The overall student profile of Ruskin College represents students '….who are aware of the political aspects of social issues and who are committed to combating oppression and discrimination in society'.[7]

The research team's approach was to involve the staff team and students in the development of the pilot programme. A key element to working in partnership was the underlying shared belief of providing students with creative opportunities to address issues of social inclusion and exclusion.

The research team discussed and negotiated the programme with the staff team at Ruskin College. The methodology agreed was one that would enable students to engage in action-learning using participatory theatre. A key consideration in this approach was to complement existing teaching approaches already in use at Ruskin College. These approaches were interactive and experiential and based on delivering a curriculum which met the academic and professional requirements of the youth and community work sector.

Following exploratory discussions with Ruskin staff an outline programme was agreed which would complement the curriculum that formed part of students' core studies at the time. Two cohorts of students were identified and were invited to take part in the programme.

The first cohort, Group A, comprised 18 students at the time undertaking a module on management and organisation development. An integral component of their studies was the need to value cultural diversity, uphold the principle of equality of opportunity and challenge teams and organisations where discriminatory treatment and behaviours persisted. The second cohort comprised 10 students, Group B, who at the time was undertaking a module on supervision, management and organisation and one on research methods leading to the production of a research proposal.

The programme was designed to complement the theoretical base of both modules and drew on the module descriptors which specified the professional requirements for the Youth Work Sector. Opportunities to engage in research were incorporated into the programme for Group B. The research team involved this group in shaping research questions for their focus group as part of the focus group activities, exploring the nature of participant-led research -

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[7] Ruskin College (undated) BA (Hons) Youth and Community Work publicity leaflet.

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an aspect of their core curriculum. The programme also incorporated specific themes of management, supervision and leadership to connect student learning across the two cohorts.

RESEARCH STAGES

Stage 1

1. Design and development of action-learning programme using participatory theatre approaches and web-enabled resources.
2. Identification and consultation with Ruskin College to explore and agree learning needs of students, ethical agreements, outline programme and practical arrangements.
3. Design and approval of consent forms and distribution and collation of consent forms.

Stage 2

1. Delivery of pilot programme to Group A students using participatory theatre approaches and reflection-in-action accounts using handheld recording devices.
2. Refinement of programme and delivery of pilot to Group B students and reflection-in-action accounts using hand-held recording devices.

Stage 3

1. Design and refinement of interview and focus group topic guides.
2. Evaluation of the workshops through:

    a. Semi-structured telephone interviews with Group A students.
    b. Focus group with Group A students unable to take part in the interviews.
    c. Focus group with Group B students using a topic guide designed by them.
    d. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with members of Ruskin College's teaching team and the research team member delivering the participatory theatre workshops.
    e. Semi-structured telephone interviews with a small sample of employers.

Stage 4

The writing up of the research findings and the production of a research report for wider dissemination and further consideration.

Stage 5

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The dissemination of findings through:

1. Developing resources for PBPL/CETL website.
2. Attending and/or participating in a seminar.
3. Conference attendance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One of the fundamental principles of participative theatre is that within group settings it can facilitate the voices of the unheard, the less vocal and the marginalised.

The research team was keen to use as many different available opportunities to seek participant and stakeholder feedback in order to gather a variety of feedback as well as reaffirming the importance of action research as a process of critical reflection, for researchers and 'researched' alike.

In keeping with the spirit of the participative theatre approach, the research team relied essentially on qualitative methods. This enabled the team to gain more in-depth insights into how participants learn within the teaching environment and beyond that, how they develop their practice within their work-places. Thus the research team wanted to use a 'live' research methodology which reflected the interactive and responsive nature of participative theatre.

The research team was interested also in discussing with participants the usefulness of the learning experiences gained and their applicability to their professional practice as well as to their personal development. It was hoped that such an approach would give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences at the time, after the programme, and, on their return to their work-place.

1   Reflection-in-Action

At the end of the both morning workshops the research team conducted reflection-in-action interviews in small groups using hand-held recording devices. The aim was to capture participants' reflection of their experiences at the half-way stage and also provide a more structured space outside the workshops for independent, individual reflection.

2   Semi-structured Interviews

With Group A students the reflection-in-action interviews were followed-up by more in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews. Students were invited to take part in these interviews and asked to sign consent forms agreeing to do so. Each interview was between 15-30 minutes long.

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Some students had agreed for the researchers to interview their line managers about the outcomes of the workshops and any noticeable changes in individual performances. Again, those in agreement were asked to sign consent forms and give formal permission for the researchers to approach their line managers. *(See Appendices 1-5 for the questionnaires and focus group topic guides)*. Consequently, semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out also with three employers.

Finally, face to face interviews were conducted with two members of the teaching staff at Ruskin College who were directly involved in the delivery of the Degree programmes in Youth and Community Work.

3 Focus Groups

Group A students who were unable to take part in the interviews due to other commitments, were invited to take part in a focus group facilitated by one of the researchers and this was carried out during a teaching slot.

With Group B students, the research team held a focus group. This decision was made on the basis of earlier discussions with the College teaching team who wanted Group B students to engage in a group research activity as part of their current studies. At the beginning of the focus group, Group B students formulated focus group questions collectively as they would if they were external researchers and then proceeded to respond to these questions as research subjects who had taken part in the participative theatre. The focus group was facilitated by the research team and their responses recorded.

RATIONALE

The effectiveness of participative theatre as a method of learning and development is based on the principle that problems and challenges must be real derived from real life and that answers are not assumed. Learning from prior experience and being a competent reflective practitioner are established principles of youth and community work training and an integral component of professional qualifying programmes in this sector.

Kolb's cycle, for instance, is a 'must cover' element of most youth and community work programmes enabling participants to appreciate the value of the lived experience and the significance of being able to reflect upon this, arrive at an analytic understanding and informing actions and behaviours arising out of this.

Through reflective processes participants need to be enabled to see how the problems and challenges they face are a part of them in order to secure their 'buy-in' and for them to make some investment in finding solutions.

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Similarly, the youth and community work process requires workers to enable young people to reflect on their experiences, the issues they face, how they respond to their environment and the decisions and choices they make in response. This requires youth and community workers to have the skills and abilities to enable young people to undertake such reflective journeys:

> 'Reflection lies somewhere around the notion of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting. Reflective writing is the expression on paper/screen of some of the mental processes of reflection. Other forms of expressing reflection are in speech, in film, in graphic portrayal, music etc. The expression of reflection is not however, a direct mirror of what happens in the head. It is a representation of that process within the chosen medium - and reflection represented in writing, for example, will be different to that encompassed in a drawing.'[8]

An intrinsic component of the workshop and evaluation methodology involved students reflecting on their practices, values and beliefs. The reflective time during the workshops, the lunch-time reflection-in-action spaces, the semi-structured interviews as well as the focus groups provided the means for students to undertake guided reflections with the support of facilitators and the researchers.

> 'I found that really useful cos it was useful to reflect on what you were like yourself as a teenager but also to realise that, you know, lots of young people have different experiences and that we shouldn't judge them, we need to make allowances for them'.

STUDENT RESEARCH SAMPLE

1   Group A STUDENTS

Ten Group A students were interviewed (Table 3) and four students who were unable to take part in these interviews were invited to take part in a focus group (Table 4):

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[8] Moon, J (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning, Routledge Falmer: London.

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Table 3: Group A Student Interviewee Profile		No.
Gender	Male	4
	Female	6
Ethnicity	White British	6
	Other White	1
	Other British	1
	Black British (African)	1
	Asian British (Indian)	1
	Asian British (Bangladeshi)	1
Age	20-25	1
	25-30	3
	30-35	1
	35-40	0
	40-45	3
	45-50	2

Table 4: Group A Focus Group Participants' Profile		No.
Gender	Male	2
	Female	2
Ethnicity	White British	3
	Black African	1
Age	25-30	3
	30-35	1

2 Group B Students

In total 8 Group B students took part in the focus group:

Table 5: Group B Focus Group Participants' Profile			No.
Gender	Male		2
	Female		6
Age	20-25		2
	30-35		2
	35-40		2
	40-45		1
	45-50		1
Ethnicity	White	British	5
	Black or Black British	Caribbean	1
		African	2

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INTRODUCTION

This section focuses on the insights from the reflection-in-action interviews conducted at the end of the morning during both workshops. In small groups and using hand-held recording devices, participants were encouraged to reflect on their individual experiences, thoughts and feelings thus far into the day-long workshop. In doing so, the research team was interested in capturing individual perspectives and reflections in a structured space outside the workshop arena.

REFLECTIVE SPACE

Many students commented on the value of the morning in generating space for reflecting on their practice and the situations they faced:

> 'So I think I'll use it in my practice when I do some youth work. Although I haven't done any kind of games like that with the young people I associate with, mainly Asian young people - we're more focused on workshops so I think doing these games will be like an ice breaker'.

GROUP AWARENESS AND COHESION

For many students the workshop provided a crucial opportunity to get to know their peers in greater depth and/or see them in a different light:

> '....the bit I found interesting was when we all lined up in terms of length of experience and saw how much experience there was. I was quite shocked at where some people were on the line - I was surprised at how knowledgeable they are to how much experience they'd had....'.

> '....actually I have to say it's been one of the most valuable experiences that I've had. I'm one of the part-time students and so we were newcomers to that group. We were having really serious problems settling into the class and the activities were fantastic - they broke things down and it really has been, sort of, a turning point really in the learning, not just for us, the new students for that group but for the whole group'.

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LEARNING NEW WAYS

For many, the techniques and exercises used during the workshop were new and/or had been used differently to the way in which they had been accustomed:

> 'I wasn't familiar with any of those activities and it was a completely new experience for me. Although I've done a bit of role play it's nothing like that so it was a new experience'.
>
> 'I quite liked the one where we all greeted each other saying hello and then in a different language….I thought that was quite good to get young people moving around interacting with each other'.

Some students needed more time to digest what they had participated in and witnessed so far:

> 'I need to know what I've got out of it and understand it before I can work out how I'm going to share it with colleagues or young people but I do think it's a very uplifting sort of experience so I would like to look at how I would do that'.

THINKING ABOUT OPPRESSION

Some students felt they had developed more confidence in dealing with situations where they had been confronted with oppressive practices:

> 'I think the activities will help me in my practice because they've been a reminder to me that we're all at different places and I'm particularly thinking of an incident that happened early this week where I was witness to some quite nasty racist behaviour with a young person I was working with and initially I was very angry. It's just been a reminder that we're a product of our experiences and it's helped me to kind of reflect on where that person is at, at that moment and that you know it's not always somebody's fault when they're a young person and they've only been exposed to one set of beliefs and that's their parents'.

TACKLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Students also found that by sharing their experiences and seeing other perspectives they gained fresh insights into how to deal with problematic situations:

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> 'I had difficulty this morning with a certain situation and I wasn't going to come in today but coming into College and doing the session that we did made me reflect on my actions this morning. I feel that I've dealt with it in a better way than I would have a couple of years ago. If I had stayed at home perhaps I would have just been moody and still angry about the situation but coming in and talking about experiences I had, I had the chance to talk about what happened this morning, it was fresh and it was real and it was good and the people that were in my group were really reassuring and gave me some really good advice and actually made me reflect on what happened and I realise that I did the right thing. It could have gone really pear shaped so I'm really pleased with what I've learnt today'.

APPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE

Students appreciated the need to be trained over a longer period of time in order to deliver fully-fledged participative theatre workshops of the type they had experienced that morning. However, they were able to identify ways in which some activities could be adapted to their work with young people.

> 'I think by doing the activities this morning for us, you know for us, I think it puts us in the young people's shoes so I think if we're getting a lot from it we know that hopefully the young people will get a lot from it.'
>
> 'It's another tool that we could use in youth work to engage with young people'.
>
> 'I'm planning with some young people to organise a youth exchange and I expect that the Estonian group at the other end will be looking at using it (the activities) as well'.

For some, the techniques and methods were seen to be applicable also to strengthening working relationships with staff and volunteers:

> 'I think that some of them would be, like, quite useful if you've got a new team or if the team is not quite working how it should. I think it's quite a fun way of trying to get people to do something. I think it's a good way of doing it without actually just giving them orders and stuff, it's more like they're involved with what you're doing'.

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For others, an appreciation of the organisational and cultural context of the practice was seen to be important. Some students highlighted the tensions that can arise when youth and community workers are working in formal education contexts such as schools where youth work methods may be seen to run counter to formal teaching methods. Students working in such environments thought that the opportunity to apply the learning from the workshops may be limited:

> 'I don't think that I'll be able to use activities like that when I'm doing sessions with young people at College. They already think that youth work is bonkers so I don't think that actually using the theatre or games would be particularly productive with them because they already struggle to see the value of youth work in a kind of formal educational setting'.

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INTRODUCTION

This section outlines the key insights, views and perspectives arising from the semi-structured in-depth interviews and the two focus group sessions. As researchers we were able to generate in-depth data based on reflections after the workshops for this element of the research. We have tried to remain true to Boal's principle of giving a voice to the spect-actors by including a range of quotes from students to help express their views directly.

THE CENTRALITY OF INTERACTIVE ACTION LEARNING

Participative theatre is founded on the fundamental principle of engagement and participation by those who have stories to tell. Its rationale rests on the fundamental belief that individuals, groups and communities have the right to engage in dialogue about their lives, the ability to engage in change and the potential to take action on issues of concern to them.

The workshop involved a phased approach whereby students were encouraged to get to know each other better at the initial stages. This helped with further relationship building as well as creating a conducive and safe working environment. After this phase, with the support and guidance of the facilitator the group moved onto to more challenging tasks through examining a series of student generated workplace scenarios. Students were asked to reflect on what they thought of such a phased approach and the different forms of action learning in which they participated:

> 'When we first started I thought oh no, I just can't do any of this sort of stuff but actually it was really, really good, I really enjoyed it - thought provoking, they made you think, really reflective, made you think about why you were doing what you were doing, that's how I felt, it did make you reflect on everything really in your whole life, not just your working life'.
>
> '….you got to see the fun side of people, and the more relaxed side of people which adds to your perspective of them as human beings'.
>
> 'I think it was a really worthwhile day, I think it was very helpful, it, it opened you up to new ways of working. I mean I think even though, youth workers work in groups, you can get a bit fixed in your thinking of how to work with groups, and the things like the role-play where you, you interact and the statues

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> I think, those were really good ways to explore issues which I didn't know about and hadn't used before.'

However, some individuals were not comfortable with all aspects of the workshop:

> '….the only bit I didn't enjoy was when they were doing the bit about body language actually because you had to go and shake hands with somebody that you knew and the last act was to greet somebody like a long lost friend or relation, like you hadn't seen them for a long time, and I found that quite uncomfortable actually that last bit'.

COMPLEMENTING EXISTING TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Ruskin College's teaching and learning methodologies are rooted in interactive and participative approaches. This is based on the teaching and learning traditions of the College as well as an acknowledgement by staff that its target audience of mature students returning to study respond better to teaching and learning approaches which are interactive and experiential:

> 'The learning we do is very much along the active participation route anyway and the main part of youth work is participation. So that's how we learn - it's not the traditional method of you sit there and be talked at, so it fits in really well with what we already do at Ruskin anyway'.

PARTICIPATION AND RISK TAKING

One of the fundamental principles of participative theatre is participant engagement and the idea of the 'spect-actor'. No-one is a passive consumer of entertainment in the form of theatre put on by someone else and if you are present you also have the choice of determining and shaping how that theatre evolves. In this sense individuals were able to take calculated risks knowing that they were expertly facilitated and knowing that a safe environment had been created to help make this happen:

> 'It was very participatory – it was very get up and go – there was no sitting about and being talked at – and a lot of it was discussing things in smaller groups which I always think is good. And then coming together and sharing it and then discussing it as a bigger group which I think is a more beneficial way of maybe if you've got a big team of everyone wanting to have their say – as always some people not getting heard – I don't

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> think that happened throughout the day at all, I think everyone was heard.'
>
> '….some of the year 3s (Group B) come back to do a module – we sat on one side – they sat on another but that course, that session really helped to integrate the group together.'

The use of the word 'theatre' in some of the earlier publicity about the workshop initially had unsettled some students:

> 'I thought I was kind of expecting it to be more theatre-ish, more sort of pretend you're a dog…. I was a bit dubious about what it was going to be about really. The word theatre instantly made me think oh God what am I going to be doing, so it wasn't what I expected at all, I did cast judgements about what I thought it was going to be like before I took part'.

FAMILIARITY WITH THE APPROACHES

Students were asked to state the degree to which they were already familiar with the approaches used on the day and the context in which they had used or come across them previously:

> 'I've done sort of like role plays, we've done them in College and done them in other situations before but not quite the same way, it did make you think, I wonder if this could work in group work with young people. Myself I haven't had chance to do anything like it yet, so in future maybe I would'.
>
> 'Yes I have used some….maybe the role play. You know where we acted out scenarios – I've used that with young people many times. What we've done is, we get the group of young people, and it's almost like role reversal. One particular one we did was where two young people were the parents and one young person was the son or the daughter who had come home really late drunk. One became a police officer, one was a youth worker, and one was a teacher. So then, they all had to act out the scenario….'
>
> 'Not used them overtly. We've done like different adaptations of them but never really in that kind of it, it just opens your eyes to be able to see a different way of working really…. I've used role plays before but in that scenario that we used it, it was good to be able to get different people's perspectives of what it was'.

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ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Students were asked to reflect on how the workshop addressed issues of power and inequality and the degree to which their understandings had been enhanced, challenged or reinforced.

Working as a group on scenarios arising from real-life work situations they were able to explore a range of solutions to the challenges that they faced in their work. An underlying factor in their ability to manage challenging situations depended on organisational power dynamics and perceptions about them within the work-place be that dependent on their qualified/unqualified status, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and/or disability.

In terms of power hierarchies within the workplace:

> 'I guess there was a lot to do with power, as in, when you're doing, the counting exercise and when we're doing the group discussions on scenarios, that was quite interesting listening to other types of power within youth clubs and within groups, and how people dealt with those situations and about acting them out, and how people would perceive you, from acting a scenario out which was quite interesting, um, so yeah'.
>
> 'I mean there was one towards the end of the day which was sort of looking at different approaches in misuses of power - power inequalities in the workplace. That was quite helpful, again there were two things that I'm thinking of: one where there was sort of a role play and one again where people were sort of trying to enact through body sculpture the power in the workplace….as a practitioner obviously we've got power, we might be reporting back to social services who make a decision about whether they keep their children, or reporting back to the Youth Offending team, we have power in those relationships'.

In terms of race and gender power relations:

> 'I mean there was one drama session we did which may be on equality or whatever. A woman in the group had issues with her work because, discussing race I think because she was Black and she was kicked out of her work, there were issues, I think that was biggest thing as far as equality or discrimination or anything like that concerned….I felt when I did that, that I was shocked the fact that racism does exist in the workplace

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> whether we like to say it or not, but I felt that the concept of institutionalised racism is a fact and it exists, which was shocking because I thought we'd got rid of that ages ago, but in fact it still exists, we saw that piece of work, that that female member in the group had to go through in their workplace'.

And finally in terms of self-awareness and the degree to which issues of inequality and oppression are always 'live' in individual and collective consciousness especially for students on programmes where such issues are covered routinely:

> 'Really I'd be honest and say, I could see that behind it, but I don't think in our group we've ever had any problems with inequality….because of the course we're doing, maybe we take things for granted, maybe I take things for granted that we all feel equal'.
>
> 'When we were looking at different scenarios and seeing how , maybe even we at work, tend to do that, we tend to overlook certain things and just crack on with the way we're doing it and not take into account diversity, equality, sexist practice and everything like that really'.

SHARING PRACTICE

Students were able to talk about their workplace and share their practice with others in a dynamic way, extending Wenger's notion of a 'community of practice'. As a group they took part in exercises and activities which helped to deepen their emotional intelligence, a significant skills-set in working with others. This engagement led to developing a greater sense of teamwork and provided the necessary trust, co-operation and sensitivity leading up to the participative theatre work. Students reflected on how these activities and exercises had assisted them in thinking about group dynamics and team work in their work situations:

> 'The sculpture activity was good for me to realise the diversity within the group, to realise that everybody has different life experiences and been through maybe some difficult times in their past and as a group to adjust to everyone when we're working with each other'.
>
> 'For me personally I think that a lot of these activities that we've been doing would come in very useful within our own work in order to do team building and maybe to find out a little bit more about people rather than asking straightforward questions'.

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GROUP WORK SKILLS

Both workshops were conducted through exercises and simulations guided by the facilitator. They relied also on a combination of individual, small and large group activities with the intention of enabling students to gain deeper insights into the nature and dynamics of team and group work and individuals within groups:

> 'The session we've just finished is a management and organisation one. So the role play was good on that, because we were able to see different people in different circumstances – and maybe see how a group forms and things like that, so that side of things was I suppose quite useful on that really, looking at it now'.
>
> '….it helped me with one of my groups….I was having a few problems with the staff, initially volunteers there. It just helped me to deal with the situation better in the way I've spoken to people, the way I address people, the way I've sat and when I was talking to people and my expressions, and things like that, but my other side, the other team that I work with I've got a pretty good team and that's about relationship building and trust'.
>
> '….the biggest thing was the body language, it was a powerful thing for me and if anyone else used it, it would be good for their work, related to work….when someone expresses oneself with voice, you get an understanding of they're saying – but when they're using the hand or the eyes it's a lot different, it could mean a total different thing, which I did see at that session with some group members'.

GROUP LEARNING

Throughout the workshops students and teaching staff worked together in developing a collective supportive learning experience. Students commented on the benefits of this kind of learning had for them as a group:

> 'That session really helped to integrate the group together'.
>
> 'I think, the classroom, that kind of experience I think changed the environment dynamic of that group quite profoundly, in a quite a positive way'.
>
> 'I think it was really good, they weren't teachers that were saying we have the knowledge that now you're going to learn'.

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The College teaching staff who took part also commented on the way in which the action learning had helped create greater group cohesion and break down barriers:

> 'What I've found really positive is, from that experience is that, there's quite a lot of defence in that group, people won't say things because they thought they were going to have somebody else down their throats, and that really helped students be with one another in a way that was different from the way they were normally with one another. And I think the benefit of that is absolutely measurable'.

In one case the impact of this group experience was a major factor in helping with student retention:

> 'Monica, who felt very out of sorts in that group, actually said that if it hadn't been for that session she doesn't think she would have stuck it (the course). She felt that was the turning point in terms of her ability to cope with the year'.

LEARNING ABOUT ONESELF

For some students the range of skills and insights developed through participating in the workshops represented to them a sense of personal growth:

> 'It was interesting for me because it talked about, the means that communication is very important in whatever we do which means you can communicate in different ways by your body language or by telling people what the deceiving part of it is because people will get the wrong idea of what you're saying with your body language'.

> 'I was a bit shy to start with but as we got into the activities you know I loosened off a little bit and it started to become a bit more fun'.

> 'I found making ourselves or each other into statues and we had to think of our experiences as a teenager and share these experiences and reflect on these. I found that really useful to reflect on what you were like yourself as a teenager but also to realise that lots of young people have different experiences and that we shouldn't judge them, we need to make allowances for them'.

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LEARNING ABOUT OTHERS

Even some of the seemingly straightforward exercises and activities generated deeper thoughts and learning opportunities for some individuals:

> 'There was one that we had to organise ourselves into sort of a circle of experience….it was surprising how people, how things shifted, that people, people assumed that because they had a better paid job or a management job, you know, um, that they felt sort of superior….yet when we had to sort ourselves there were other students there that had 10 years more experience than them….it was just really good, it was really valuable, it was a real kind of, um, equaliser'.

> 'Even doing these simple things like taking a hand, and speaking your language, doing the drama thing about your childhood, although looking at it, maybe like I said, something young people do, in the youth session, or school students, people do in schools, and drama sessions, it's the way that a person expresses himself or herself, is for me, very powerful to see'.

> 'We had a simple handshake thing where we went round in circles and did a handshake and spoke in our languages, we did them in our languages, so I did Salaam, and others did in their languages, that was a eye opener for some, I mean, for me it was also, and there were few things, that it was, at the end of the day it was a learning curve I think'.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Group B students had recently completed a management module and the research team was interested in exploring what connections students had made between the workshop, their leadership and management module and their practice:

> 'I've always been an open door person, however, that's not helped me as a manager much – because a lot of my staff interpret that as an easy pushover….a couple of staff used to just phone up 2 hours before the session starts – I'm ill - and because I wasn't really dealing with it – I was soldiering on and carrying on, I was just putting pressure on myself - because if you're one staff down – you need every person that you can get.
>
> So we did a couple of scenarios where we put them in charge, put the other staff as in charge- then some of the other staff just disappeared. We didn't tell them that that was going to

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happen but basically that's what we did - we just disappeared and left two people in charge. We were on the site – they didn't know where we'd got to – so panic obviously set in – so afterwards on reflection we said – how did you feel. The thing is, we couldn't find you.

But the point was that's what I have to face when I'm here when other people don't come in to work – I'm stuffed – on my own, or with one other person.   We're running around like headless chickens – making sure everything's okay – so what do you think the point of this is then – obviously – oh yeah – I said if you're genuinely ill, you're genuinely ill, we're not saying you can't have time off, but you really do need to think about - we haven't got a workforce that's endless – with budget constraints you can only have so many staff so yeah, yeah, that worked very well.

So the scenario was that also, basically, there had been aggravation at the club, the week before – and this one person wasn't there – so he missed the brief at the beginning so he still wasn't aware that there'd been problems and who he needs to keep an eye on. But, that's when I put him in my situation – if it was you and I kept doing this, one, I'd be quite cheesed off and two, as a health and safety issue you didn't know that there'd been a problem the night before, because you wasn't here, therefore you don't know the full of what's been going on. So yeah, he sat back and thought yeah you're right. Yeah, everyone turns up on time now'.

OTHER LEARNING

Students were asked to identify what other skills and understandings they had gained as a result of taking part in the workshop:

'I'd say probably quite a timely reminder of how useful that kind of games and activities are. It points out the importance of using energisers in activities, I think that the 'blokes' who were running the day were quite canny as to watching the energy levels in the group and that's something I've kind of taken'.

'I think it was a really timely reminder that we're all a product of our experiences and that sometimes when you've been a practitioner in community groups for quite a long time you deal more with the way people are presenting themselves and the behaviour at that time, without remembering that that behaviour is actually a product of, kind of an amalgamation of

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lifetimes of experiences, and sometimes a lifetime's suffering. Yeah I mean that was a really, a really timely reminder'.

'I think it made me think about things from my childhood or my teenage years- I mean some of the things that we discussed, you make assumptions about other people, don't you, you meet people, you don't know them very well, you make assumptions about them. I think there were certain people there that I had made wrong assumptions about, and you know and just thought what would they know about being in trouble when you were a teenager, but when you actually talked to them, something about the way the course went, you, everybody was able to like speak out a bit more, where you wouldn't in a lecture, it made you be able to sort of speak freely, and I think there it made you think, it made me think anyway, afterwards, how some people aren't how you think they are'.

'Well, it was brought it home to me more when were doing the scenario, or doing an activity, how other people feel. You almost think about how people feel – so on reflection there might be something you said that might have upset someone – so its made me be bit more aware of what I say and when I say it.'

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INTRODUCTION

In this section we are interested in outlining some of the key ways in which the students stated that they would apply the learning and experiences gained from the workshops.

PARTICIPATIVE THEATRE APPROACHES

Students commented on how, though they had used elements of interactive approaches in their face to face work, they had not encountered the combination and inter-linking of such methods in one workshop as part of a composite programme. Whilst the purpose of the workshop was not to develop individual competence as facilitators of participative theatre, many were able to identify the ways in which they could apply the lessons learnt to their practice:

> 'I'd like to try out everything that we did on the day. I'd like to do it with the young people. Just so that it highlights some things for them and makes them think. Think before they open their mouth or think before their action – plus it's a fun way of getting to know everybody. Good ice breakers. Good way to get to know people.'
>
> '….we started to do stuff, things like round in circles, and then we had to do games like count 1 to 20, um, simple things like that, I think I would do with young people in my youth session.'
>
> 'Well it did make me think about, because we do have a stage in the youth centre I work at, you know, and we do have some quite, some dramatic people, so maybe, been thinking about maybe sort of doing some stuff, more drama-based stuff…'

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Students on training courses in youth and community work engage in learning which assists them to think about and reflect on their practice and develop skills to improve their practice. Their studies lead to formal professional qualifications governed by national occupational standards in this sector. A key element of their professional development is to interrogate and integrate the relationship between theoretical perspectives and practical application. Their ability to move from work-related learning to work-based learning is

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fundamental to their professional formation and their ability to develop as critical reflective practitioners:

> 'I thought it was a really good introduction to Boal and to that kind of form of theatre. I thought the warm up, the activities that we did at the beginning were things that I've either done before, or I'll feel I'd use myself'.
>
> 'It was a much more dynamic session than we're used to, a much more active session than we're used to, and I think it took on board, it did a bit of the Freire thing, you know in the sort of, the informal way that it was done, and acknowledging everybody within the group, I think it was a really good, they weren't teachers that they're saying we have the knowledge that now you're going to learn, you know so, I did enjoy'.

LEARNING ALREADY APPLIED

Students were asked to reflect back on the workshop and state how already they had applied the lessons learnt to their workplace:

> 'I definitely think that I've been a bit more assertive. With the role plays we were doing, we were talking about a time when maybe you haven't stood up for what you should do really. Definitely with some of my co-workers I've definitely put that more into practice after seeing how different people would handle different situations'.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The foundation degree is a professional qualifying course and designed to enable graduates to operate in managerial positions once they qualify. As such, the application of youth and community skills relating to not just face to face work but also accomplishing managerial tasks was seen to be essential:

> 'Elements of the exercises could be used or adapted and certainly I could pass on some of the techniques to be used with young people and my colleagues could do them but also in strategic planning meeting or team meetings, the, issues of leadership could be explored through some of the exercises'.
>
> 'But my boss is quite participatory anyway and I told her about it and she was interested in the methods that we used and things that we did. So it wouldn't surprise me if my boss would be interested in finding out a little bit more about some things in the New Year'.

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INTRODUCTION

This section summarises the more immediate and the anticipated longer-term impact of this project.

IMPACT ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

This project directly involved students and explored their learning experiences in a teaching setting and in the workplace. The impact of their learning was evidenced in a number of ways.

1   Becoming More Reflective Practitioners

Students were able to reflect on their learning experience through taking part in reflection-in-action during the workshops, through the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions following the workshops. The comments made by students in this report provide many examples of how they have been able to articulate their experiences of participative theatre-based approaches into a discourse appropriate for their professional development.

2   Moving from Knowledge to Practice

Students have been able to provide specific examples of how their practice may change as a result of this learning experience. Many identified examples of changes to practice involving developing their skills and trying out new skills in group work with young people. In particular, the sociometric and gamesercises were singled out as experiences that could be adapted to a range of work situations with young people involving different types of settings and target groups.

Students also felt empowered to deal with challenging situations in the workplace and further their leadership skills. The participative theatre scenarios work provided a safe space for students to explore collectively and resolve work situations which they found difficult to manage. They were able to identify many challenging situations and after enacting and re-enacting the scenarios, felt able to approach their workplace with fresh insights, greater confidence and skills in which to better understand, cope and resolve situations.

3   Developing Communities of Practice

By taking part in an intensive group experience, students were able to draw on each others experiences, share these pro-actively and develop strategies

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collaboratively. Through their collaborative responses and engagement they were able to develop a greater sense of themselves as a group with common values and sense of purpose. Through the workshop activities, students actively and willingly participated as a group and commented on how the workshops had strengthened their identity as a cohesive learning group.

4   Developing Research Skills

A module on 'Research Skills' was part of the core curriculum for Group B students. By taking part in this research project opportunities were created for students to take part in shaping the methodology. They were able to frame research questions in preparation of the follow-up focus group discussions and co-facilitate the discussions and were also key subjects rather than objects of the reflection-in-action interviews. Through this, greater awareness of the ethical and professional issues involved in community research emerged. The active engagement of students in designing aspects of the research was an unexpected outcome and provided the research team with a useful opportunity to connect more directly the research project with the teaching of research at Ruskin College.

5   Student Employability

Professional qualifying youth and community work students need to acquire leadership and management skills and a broader understanding and knowledge to be considered 'fit to practice' by the end of their studies. Students from both groups were undertaking modules in these areas and the research project complemented their ongoing studies and provided a more creative space in with to explore workplace situations. Most students were working already in a paid or unpaid capacity and were aiming to get a professional qualification which would enhance their prospects for promotion, salary increase and status. In this respect, the experiences gained through the workshop enabled many to reflect more critically on their professional proficiencies and for some, helped to extend their skills key to working in this Sector.

The energising element of the workshops and the group work activities motivated students to review their practices and consider fresh approaches to their work situations. For some students this was a powerful learning experiences leading to greater confidence to challenge tricky situations in the workplace and for one student led to a decision to remain on the course rather than to give it up.

IMPACT ON TEACHING

The Youth and Community Work Programme at Ruskin College is learner intensive and provides a holistic learning and pastoral environment for students. As such, and perhaps in common with many other Youth and

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Community Work programmes across the country, staffing and other resources is a constant challenge.

The College was an active and critical partner in this research and teaching staff were wholly supportive of the learning and development strategies and approaches deployed. It was recognised that participative theatre would complement Ruskin's established and preferred teaching and learning strategies and help enhance these further.

The College was keen to embrace the results of the research and explore how similar opportunities could be created for future learners. The fact that two of the members of the teaching staff had participated in the workshops and one was instrumental in doing follow-up work with students meant that this was not viewed as just an externalised activity.

Interviews with teaching staff showed that they fully embraced the methodology and planned to use elements of it in their work and talk to other members of the staff team about how else to build in this approach. This could involve the use of external expertise in the short-term with a view to creating greater staff proficiency in participative theatre in the medium to long term. It was recognised that existing teaching staff faced a number of logistical constraints and so the idea of introducing participative theatre as a learning and teaching strategy would require further dialogue.

The Undergraduate Degree programmes in Youth and Community Work delivered by Ruskin College and the Foundation Degree programme, Working with Young People delivered by the Open University are validated professionally by the National Youth Agency (NYA) and meet common standards and requirements agreed by the Sector. Both programmes have been validated academically by the Open University.

The delivery of the teaching programmes is mainly taught on site at Ruskin College whilst the Open University adopts an open supported learning model with teaching materials, on-line content, tutor contact and Day School experience (or Alternative Learning Experience). In these respects there are many academic and professional curriculum content similarities. The student profile is also similar with the tendency for students to be more mature, part-time and with previous youth and community work experiences.

Members of the research team had been involved at some level in developing course materials for the Open University's Foundation Degree in Working with Young People. This degree programme is modular with 4 courses of which two are work-related and two are work-based. In particular, the research team had all worked on the work-based learning course, E218 'Leading Work with Young People in Practice' where the application of work-based learning into students' practice is a key feature of the learning experience and assessment. Our involvement in this research pilot project as educators led us

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to reconfirm our view that action-based learning using theatre based approaches is a valuable form of social learning which extends the professional development of youth and community workers.

IMPACT ON STRATEGIC CHANGE AND LEARNING DESIGN

The Project has had many benefits for future teaching and learning strategies for both partner organisations.

1   The Open University

The use of action-learning to engage students to consider their practice more creatively is a methodology that can be applied to complement existing Open University teaching. The Working with Young People Award offers scope to integrate elements of this teaching and learning methodology into the two work-based learning courses and in future course design and Award developments. As a result of the overall evaluation of this Project, the materials for the Day School and Alternative Learning Experience component of E218, the second work-based learning course, are currently being reviewed with a view to incorporating some of the teaching materials arising from this project.

On an institutional level there is also scope for this methodology to be incorporated by other academic Units. The dissemination plans for this project will create greater awareness of the potential for transfer of knowledge at an institutional level. Equally, Central Units such as Human Resources and Regional Staff Tutor Forums may wish to consider the application of this methodology in their staff development, capacity building and equalities and diversity training.

2   Ruskin College

The College is committed to undertaking further work in this area and continuing to work with the research team in future developments. Plans for incorporating participatory theatre as a distinct teaching and learning tool within the College is dependant on resources, developing further expertise in this medium and time considerations.

The College is keen to embrace the results of the research and participate in the dissemination of findings to other practitioners. It is keen to explore how similar opportunities can be created for future learners.

Considerations which stem from this research seem to suggest that in terms of designing teaching and learning:

1. Participative theatre is a viable methodology within programmes which already embrace experiential and participative learning styles.

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2. Capacity building on participative theatre through training, staff development and ongoing networking and support is essential for building the confidence of teaching staff.
3. The value to students of such a teaching and learning strategy must not be underestimated.
4. The transfer of learning to the practice environment suggests that youth and community organisations may benefit from investigating the use of participative theatre for staff and volunteer development.
5. The proportional worth of learning and insights from an intense one-day participative theatre workshop programme might be greater than conventional approaches.

NATIONAL AND SECTORAL IMPACT

Members of the research team as well as the teaching staff at Ruskin College are committed to best practice in teaching and learning. As is demanded by the profession of youth and community work this includes addressing one of the key cornerstones of youth and community work – equal opportunities and anti-oppressive practices.

One of the most critical issues to have arisen from this research is that the exposure and understanding students were able to gain was based on their own lived experiences which formed the basis for the participative theatre scenarios. In this way alone, participative theatre has the potential of enabling the youth and community work profession to become more effective in addressing anti-oppressive practices by working through day-to-day experiences faced by workers, volunteers, young people and communities alike.

Most training agencies offering youth and community work qualifying programmes use experiential and interactive teaching and learning strategies. Again, the results of this research have the potential of offering these agencies another instrument to add to their teaching and learning toolbox. Similarly, the in-service training of youth and community workers could benefit from such a tool as would workers, volunteers and managers working in voluntary youth organisations.

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The project has generated a number of dissemination outcomes:

1. A comprehensive Project Report (June 2009).

2. A poster summarising the project (June 2009).

3. A leaflet summarising the project (June 2009).

4. The development and launch of a dedicated project website on the main PBPL/CETL Website (June 2009).

5. Resource notes for lecturers (June 2009).

6. A workshop presentation at the Annual Training Agencies Group Conference on "Creativity and Innovation in Teaching" (June 2009).

7. Presentation at Annual Open University CETL Conference (December 2009)

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The evidence gathered has demonstrated that the project was successful and that students benefitted from the experience of taking part in the participative theatre workshops. Despite the limitations of time, both workshops gave something of immense value to the participating students.

Students were able to use the space provided to reflect on their own attitudes, skills and practices and identify areas for further development and improvement. Although as a professionally qualifying course, their overall degree programme is founded on the principle of connecting the personal with the political and the professional, exposure to these issues in the space of one day was seen to be significant. They had the opportunities to review their responses to situations where they had confronted oppression in the workplace and to develop new kinds of knowledge through this process.

The scenarios encountered and worked upon, the group work processes used, the activities and games in which they engaged provided a compressed but comprehensive learning environment within the space of one day. This helped to capture quite pointedly their ongoing learning on their degree programme and helped create a more direct and focused connection between this learning experience and their work environments.

As part of their own individual development they became more acutely aware of others around them. Despite the fact that many had known each other for a period of time, this was the first time that many had had the chance to really understand the person underneath and appreciate what it must be like 'stepping into someone else's shoes'.

Participatory theatre seemed to have been experienced as a powerful transformative tool. The opportunities to enact and re-enact workplace scenarios and rehearse potential 'solutions' or alternative actions was found to be critical in empowering individuals into believing that they could make a difference. This is how profound the learning experience was for some of the participants.

With the help of their peers and facilitators, students were able to examine oppressive practices they encountered within their work and this was found to be especially useful for those who previously had not had the opportunity or safe space to explore them.

Participative theatre is a viable methodology within programmes which already embrace experiential and participative learning styles. The proportional worth of learning and insights from an intense one-day participative theatre workshop programme might be greater than conventional approaches.

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Capacity building on participative theatre through training, staff development and ongoing networking and support is essential for building the confidence of teaching staff. The issue of the transfer of learning to the practice environment suggests that youth and community organisations may benefit from investigating the use of participative theatre for staff and volunteer development.

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APPENDIX 1: REFLECTION–IN-ACTION QUESTIONS

1. How are the activities helping you to think about your practice?

2. What activities have you found most useful and why?

3. How familiar are you with the activities?

4. Share your thoughts about your participation so far

5. How might the learning experience be shared with others in your workplace?

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APPENDIX 2: Group A STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1   BACKGROUND

1.1   Can you tell me about your work setting - type of setting in which you work, your role, key responsibilities and how long you have been in your present job.

1.2   For monitoring purposes, can you tell me about your age, gender and ethnicity?

2   REFLECTION

2.1   What did you think of the different forms of action learning in which you took part? *(Prompt by saying activities and theatre work)*

2.2   Were you already familiar with any of the approaches used on the day? If so which ones and in what context have you used/come across them?

2.3   Reflecting back on the programme using action learning and theatre approaches, can you tell me how these approaches helped/is helping you in your workplace? Have you applied any of them? Give an example.

2.4   What other skills and understandings do you think you have gained as a result of being on the programme?

3   APPLICATION

3.1   How has this process of learning helped you/is helping you to understand more about leadership, supervising and managing others?

3.2   How has this process of learning helped you handle yourself differently in the workplace and in positions of responsibility?

3.3   How relevant or useful is such a way of learning for workers working with young people? Why?

3.4   How has this learning helped you with your learning on the course and with your assignments?

3.5   How has this learning helped you in working with others on your course?

4   FURTHER NEEDS

4.1   What would you like to explore further as a result of taking part in this programme?

4.2   Do you have any questions or other thoughts you want to share?

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APPENDIX 3: STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1 REFLECTION

1.1 What did you think of the different forms of action learning which were made available?
1.2 What do you think worked and what did not work? Why?
1.3 Were you already familiar with any of the approaches used on the two days? If so which ones and in what context have you used/come across them?
1.4 As a HE Y and C lecturer how effective do you think such teaching and learning style compares to more conventional approaches?
1.5 What other skills and understandings do you think students have gained as a result of being on the programme?
1.6 How have these approaches helped students' understandings and applications about equality and anti-oppressive issues?

2 APPLICATION

2.1 How has this process of learning helped students understand more about leadership, supervising and managing others?
2.2 In what ways has the programme has helped you to work through this curriculum area with students?
2.3 How much scope is there to integrate this kind of learning into mainstream modules on leadership/management/supervision?
2.4 Can you tell me how these approaches have helped/is helping students in the classroom? **Give examples where possible.**
2.5 How relevant or useful is such a way of learning for other workers training to/working with young people? Why?

3 FURTHER NEEDS

3.1 Would you adopt this approach in future teaching, resources permitting?
3.2 What other teaching and learning approaches would you like to explore further as a result of this programme?
3.3 Do you have any questions or other thoughts you want to share?

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APPENDIX 4: FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE: GROUP A STUDENTS

1   BACKGROUND

1.1   Can you tell me about your **work setting** - type of setting in which you work, your role, key responsibilities and how long you have been in your present job.

2   REFLECTION

Group recap: what sorts of activities did you do during the day?

2.1   What **did you think of the different forms of action learning** in which you took part? *(Prompt by saying activities and theatre work)*
2.2   What skills, understandings and learning did you gain from the day?
2.3   Were you **already familiar** with any of the approaches used on the day? If so which ones and in what context have you used/come across them?

3   APPLICATION

3.1   Reflecting back on the programme using action learning and theatre approaches, can you tell me how these approaches helped/is **helping you in your workplace**? Have you applied any of them? **Give an example.**
3.2   How has this process of learning helped you/is helping you to understand more about **leadership, supervising and managing** others?
3.3   How relevant or useful is such a way of **learning for workers working with young people**? Why?
3.4   How has this learning helped you with your **learning on the course** and with your assignments?
3.5   How has this learning helped you in **working with others on your course**?
3.6   How has the learning helped you to implement **anti-oppressive principles into your practice**? **Give an example.**

4   FURTHER NEEDS

4.1   What would you like to **explore further** as a result of taking part in this programme?
4.2   Do you have any questions or other thoughts you want to share?

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APPENDIX 5: FOCUS GROUP PROGRAMME: GROUP B STUDENTS

AIMS

1. To reflect on the 5th December 08 workshop programme, process and outcomes.
2. To take part in and help shape participant based research methodologies.

OBJECTIVES

1. To share with others the insights gained during the workshop day.
2. To experience research methodologies as a participant.
3. To reflect on ideas and concepts in preparation for your assignments.

SESSION

10.00 a.m. Welcome and introduction to the session

10.15 a.m. Exploring action - based research methodologies
Developing questions for the focus group

10.45 a.m. Asking each other questions about the programme, process and outcomes

11.30 a.m. Break

11.45 a.m. Group discussions on the programme

12.45 p.m. Summary of the session

1.00 p.m. End of session

FACILITATORS

Rajni Kumrai, Vipin Chauhan and Steph Green.

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