Although I have been immersed in learning how to bring social change and playback theatre together for the past 9 years, I am not sure at all how to write about this. For me, the question of how I can become a more effective agent of change is a life question, and is still very much a process I am in. I am grateful for the playback leaders who have shared their thinking and vision, especially Jo Salas, Bev Hosking, John L. Johnson, Jonathan Fox, and my co-director and dear friend, Pamela Freeman. And for all of you asking similar questions, and for all the inspiration I have received from your work. I am also deeply grateful for all the teachers and leaders outside of the playback community, who are too numerous to name but whose work has made a life changing impact on me.

So where do I start? As is so often the case with playback theatre, I will begin with a question: What is social change? I could begin by talking about power differentials, and individual, group and system levels of oppression. Or about how social change involves changing both beliefs and systems, so that access to resources is more just. That could be a valuable discussion, but for now I will start in another way. I have found the way environmental activist Joanna Macy frames social change very helpful in understanding the role playback theatre can play in social change work. In her book "Coming Back To Life", she describes the threefold path of social change, in which there are three dimensions of social change that must happen simultaneously. The first is holding actions, which includes direct action campaigns and other actions activists take to slow the destruction inherent in the current global social/political/economic system (which she refers to as an empire). Holding actions are critical but not enough. We can’t just stop the current empire; we need to build alternative structures. We need to develop new ways of governing ourselves, new education and health care systems, new fuel sources, new ways of growing food, etc. We also need to make a shift in consciousness, so that we don’t just remake the old in a “new” way. We need these new structures and systems to reflect a different paradigm, one that truly honors all life (not just human life) and values sustainability over unchecked growth. A worldview that places humans in relationship with all beings and the living earth, instead of “lord and master”.

Within this frame, I see lots of possibilities for how playback theatre can be a vehicle for social change. Playback theatre can be used to help sustain activists who are engaged in holding actions, and can be a practice for learning essential skills like deep listening, collaboration, and spontaneous action. The sharing of stories helps people move from their heads to their hearts, and can help contribute to coalition building by breaking down barriers. Playback theatre is in itself an alternative structure, and can be used to build community and help multiple voices to be heard in the visioning of a new world. The fundamentals of playback theatre are aligned with a worldview that honors diversity and all life and is inherently inclusive and generative. I know I have had the experience of healing and transformation within my playback work – both as an actor / player and as a teller. Although difficult to measure, I can look back over my life and see that my consciousness has indeed shifted, and playback theatre has played a part in that.

I have a few examples from the work I/we have been doing in Philadelphia that seem to be working. I will then share some thoughts about how the additional training we have found helpful in preparing for playback theatre in situations in which we are inviting strong social themes and conflict.

Case One: Waging Peace

It was a weekend gathering of activists, convened by Training for Change (TFC), a social justice training organization in Philadelphia, and I was one of the facilitators. There were about 200 activists in the room, and the United States had just invaded Iraq. The focus on the training was to strategize, and to provide tools and hope in the face of what looked like a major set back. After a day and a half of
A Note from the IPTN President,

Dear Friends,

I write you all from Philadelphia, where I have just returned from attending at the School of Playback Theatre in NY. Every time I have the privilege of attending an international gathering of playback practitioners I grow even more grateful to be connected to this community. On the one hand it seems totally natural to come together from so many countries, cultures, ages, experiences to do this work together. On the other hand I am more and more amazed at how unusual it is. As I ponder what the “real world” is, see a collage of imagines of our global community, a patchwork quilt of stories, deep sharing, ferocious play, honest dialogue, singing, music, and dancing. I know I sometimes take this form of theatre and the community that has grown in and through it for granted. I also sometimes take the trees for granted, and the fact that I have enough to eat. And like good food and the trees sustain me, so does playback theatre.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Interplay. Thanks to everyone who contributed to this edition, and to all of you for the many threads you bring to our collective.

With love,
Sarah

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

work, we decided to do some playback theatre. We wanted to use stories to teach about three types of non-violent direct action, and so we asked 3 tellers on a break if they would think of a story to tell, about a particular type of non-violent direct action. I was the conductor and we had no designated actors. There were 2 or 3 other people in the room who had previously taken a playback theatre class with me, so we did a few fluids and pairs to warm the group up. We then moved on to the stories.

The first story was told by a young person about how he helped to organize a sit-in at city hall to protest a proposed corporate takeover of the public schools. As he told his story, I asked for volunteers from the audience to come up and play the various roles (students, police, city officials, the mayor, superintendent of schools, bystanders, etc.). By the time the telling was finished we had close to 40 people on “stage”. I gave the performers some direction to help shape the enactment, and then (after a deep breath) said, “let’s watch”. The enactment was a bit chaotic as you might imagine, but it unleashed a tremendous amount of energy in the room. The younger activists, who often feel on the margins, felt heard and seen, and the older activists felt more hopeful seeing the younger generation in action.

The second story was told by an older activist, about a healing ritual that was created by her community after a transgendered woman of color was found dead. Although it was never confirmed, the evidence suggested that she was beaten by police and left to die, and the community was still grappling with the tragedy and how to respond. Again, I invited volunteers from the audience to come and play roles as needed. This was a smaller cast (maybe 18 players) and they brought to life the healing ritual described by the teller. They did not get all the details correct but they did create, in the moment, a relevant healing ritual for the people in the room. Again, it moved a lot of energy, as many of the activists in the room let themselves feel the grief and rage brought up by the event.

Days after the training I got a call from someone who had been there, who told me the playback work had restored hope in her. I was profoundly moved by how much the community of activists present needed time to celebrate their victories and tend to their inner work, and how unusual it was for them to take the time for just that. In the activist culture in Philadelphia (and I think in other places as well) there is so much urgency and need for direct action that activists struggle to take care of themselves, and end up burning out. So perhaps there is something playback theatre can offer activists, not to do the work directly, but to provide a healing container for activists to “recharge their batteries”.


Simon Gurnsey of Christchurch Playback Theatre Company prepared a financial report for the first ten years of the IPTN. This report was presented to the Board at the meeting in Shizuoka, Japan in September 2003.

The IPTN accounts are reported on in a 2 yearly cycle to match membership renewals. Since this report was done we have completed another cycle, the 2003-2005 membership cycle. Figures from this most recent cycle are still being finalised. All figures are converted to US$ to enable comparisons. Membership Secretaries for different regions keep track of the income from the region and manage their regions’ back account. For those members from a region that does not have a Membership Secretary, this task is carried out by the Membership Co-ordinator, currently Janet Tan from Hong Kong. Money is transferred between accounts as needed. For example, Interplay is currently printed and mailed from India, coordinated by Board Member Christi Sunny, and money is transferred from all regions for this purpose. Membership Secretaries report to the IPTN Treasurer, currently Marianne Tobler of Switzerland, who reports to the IPTN Board at the end of each cycle.

This report contains information on income, expenditure, and the balance of monies held by the IPTN. Our goal is to present the financial report to the membership in Interplay, following its presentation to the Board each two yearly cycle.

INCOME

There were four sources of IPTN income in the period 1993-2003, membership fees (93%), donations (3%), bank interest(1%), and currency fluctuations in our favour (3%).

Income has increased in each cycle since 1993 because of increased membership. Fees have not increased over the period. IPTN has different membership fees for members from different regions, attempting to match the value of IPTN membership to per capita income. See http://www.playbacknet.org/iptn/index.htm for a list of different membership fees for different regions. The total income for different regions is affected by the different levels of membership fees, rates of exchange, as well as the number of members in that region.

EXPENDITURE

A breakdown of expenses for the 10 years to 2003 shows half of all money spent has been for the production in Interplay (48%). Expenses for Interplay increased over this period and in the 01-03 period accounted for 70% of expenditure. Web expenses increased over the first ten years of IPTN as the web has become a more important way of publishing information. During the same period the expenditure on postage decreased.
Case Two: A Three-Part Performance Series on Race

As a company, we decided to take on the issue of race and racial justice. We dreamed up a series of public performances focused on race. Over a nine-month period we held three performances that culminated in a performance for white people and people of color (with an integrated cast), which took place near Martin Luther King Jr Day. Nearly 200 people came to the performance, and it was a great success. The feedback we got was that people really appreciated having a space to tell stories about race and they wanted more. And because there were 2 shows leading up to this one, and the focus of the performance was on race, we had no trouble staying with the theme. This was not so surprising given that the performance took place in the integrated neighborhood of Mt. Airy in Philadelphia. However, the series did lead to some invitations from less integrated communities to specifically ask us to perform and offer workshops on healing the wounds of racism. One other important feature of the series is that we organized unstructured networking time after each performance, and invited people and groups doing anti-racism work to come and set up information on tables, as examples of action people could take if they were interested. The work we are doing with race is ongoing, and is a model we hope to expand to other dimensions of diversity (like gender, class, etc).

Case Three: Theatre of Reconciliation: Playback as a Path of Peace

I offered this workshop at Pendlehill Quaker Retreat Center in Aug. 2005. Most of the participants were not playback practitioners or even actors. What they had in common was that they were able to speak about how it has to do with social awareness and the willingness to engage in the dismantling of the social construct as we know it.

Developing Our Skills

In playback theatre, we often work through identification — putting ourselves in the teller’s shoes — reaching for how we are alike. To go to the edge of our differences, to claim and even heighten them, may feel risky and new AND I think it is essential if we are going to live up to the dream of playback theatre in which every person has a real chance of being heard.

To hear the story of someone with a different social identity (ie. a person of a different race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc) we must know and understand the differences between us — cultural differences as well as differences in how we are perceived and treated by the dominant culture.

In the effort to include the social dimension of a story, we must become social historians and sociologists, and cultural anthropologists too. Social forces historically and presently operate through oppression and so we must become experts on oppression if we are to truly understand and portray the social forces present in a story.

I have often heard from people outside the U.S. that racism is a U.S. problem – “we don’t have racism where I come from”. I know that racial oppression in the U.S. is unique, in some ways, and the dynamics of mainstream, margin, rank, and privilege exist in every culture, society, group, family, playback company, etc. I encourage you to get curious about who gets more or less heard and valued in the place you live and work. Maybe it won’t look the same, but if you look you will find those with more power institutionally, and those with less. And there will be a story behind why, and history to understand and present conditions to them. And that learning is essential for anyone wanting to use playback theatre as a vehicle for social change.

Last summer, my colleague Pamela Freeman and I offered a course at the School of Playback Theatre called “Social Awareness in Playback Theatre.” In working with our troupe in Philadelphia, we have begun to develop practices and tools to supplement the basic training and ensemble building work that any company would do. The following are recommendations for developing company readiness for doing social justice work with playback theatre. They are broken into three categories, and I include them below as a starting point for any company looking to do social justice work with playback theatre. Some of the suggestions are more “U.S. centric” than others, and we offer them as a starting point. We hope you will alter them as needed.
Inviting tellers
· Improve on how we invite tellers - i.e. assess and adapt our organizing efforts before a PT event as well as how we invite tellers during an event - to address diversity dynamics (like rank and privilege) that make inclusion more difficult.

Know your community
· Analyze your community. Identify who’s in the mainstream and who’s in the margins. Identify the unheard and under-heard voices in our communities, and reach out to them directly. Build relationships and be patient.
· Learn your history and culture, and the history and culture of the people you want to include.

Skill development - inner and outer work in rehearsals
· Examine who auditions for the company, who comes to shows, and how the team is composed of people who are overtly racist or sexist, or anyone who is outside your company or community mainstream.
· Do the work necessary to play all tellers with authenticity and heart, which means working on our own social awareness and identity development, and learning about other cultures.
· Important to work on playing characters that are difficult to play, such as people from other races, people who are overtly racist or sexist, or anyone who is outside your company or community mainstream.

Some Closing Thoughts
In order to get some tellers and stories to the teller’s chair, we need to invite them directly. We may even need to invite tellers in advance, and/or ask for a particular type of story. The actors and audience need special preparation, like additional warm up time, meta-statements that bring in key historical or social information, and structured integration time. It takes time to go deep, and there are limits to what we can do in a single performance. And we need to do our own work, to uncover our hidden biases and expand our awareness and range. We need to have the strength to play all the roles in a story with humanness and authenticity – not “white washing” them, and not stereotyping them either. We need to be okay with messiness and contradictions. And most of all, we need to remain hopeful enough to step into despair and rage without crumbling or numbing out. One profound truth about living in this time is that we are in a global crisis. And I believe that playback theatre has something to contribute to what Joanna Macy calls “the great turning – revolution for the sake of life on earth”.

*For more information on breaking downs the walls of class, see: Bridging the Class Divide and Other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing, by Linda Stout, chapter 7 “Invisible Walls”

WHAT’S BEEN HAPPENING?

Emergency Playback
Playback Theatre Gulf Coast Relief Initiative

For the first time, the Playback theatre community has succeeded in bringing playback to a region suffering from a natural and social disaster. The provocation was the city of New Orleans, devastated by Hurricane Katrina, which damaged 80% of the dwellings in the city, causing hundreds of thousands to evacuate. The hardest hit areas were populated by African-Americans.

The Playback Theatre Gulf Coast Relief Initiative, which so far has involved two performing trips and one teaching trip to the area, served the membership of the following organizations in Louisiana: the Ashé Cultural Center, the Ixelle Baptist Church, the Audubon Monastery School, the Upstage Theatre, and Common Ground. We also initiated a permanent playback theatre group in New Orleans comprised of local theatre artists to carry on the work — NOLA playback theatre.

The program had a number of components. They included sending a team under the leadership of Paul McIsaac to the Gulf over Thanksgiving to perform for Common Ground volunteers and network for the future; conducting a 4-day training in playback in New Orleans, again with Paul McIsaac; holding a special workshops for people of color of our own playback theatre community (also taking part in this workshop was a representative from the Ashé Cultural Center in New Orleans), coordinated by Pamela Freeman and Jonathan Fox; and sending a second team to Louisiana in March, which performed in four community settings with primarily black constituents. We enlisted the local-based Neighborhood Story Project to provide documentation for this trip. We also utilized volunteer counselors from the Tulane University School of Social Work.

Conductor for this series of performances was Pamela Freeman, co-director of Playback for Change in Philadelphia.

In April Two 2006 we had a training seminar with Jonathan in Germerode in Germany. During these days we worked among other topics, on organisational topics and finally elected, out of the German Playback Theatre Teachers the school directors.

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For more on the project, including stories, comments, organizing principles and photos, see the School of Playback Theatre website at www.playbackschool.org/Katrina_March_Trip2.htm
The idea of doing Playback Theater crosses my mind in just about any group context in which I find myself. But when my fellow classmate and Drama Therapy intern at the McAuley adolescent psychiatric hospital suggested we do it as part of our drama therapy programming on the unit, I had serious reservations. Tami was very persistent, though, gathering three fellow students who were willing to become a company and getting authorization for it to take place every Wednesday afternoon after lunch. She also arranged for the students to receive program credit for this experience and managed to whip up a considerable amount of enthusiasm for it from our supervisor, making it easier for the nursing staff to support.

To say I had cold feet is to put it mildly. We could carve out very little rehearsal time in our busy student schedules; how could a company become ready in a matter of hours? Even... surely we needed more time together to feel grounded and competent to bring Playback to such a challenging environment.

About the environment: unpredictable, often hostile and full of unbearable pain and palpable fear. Unpredictable because the census was constantly changing, the average stay... or to others. The pain of lives coming apart created much fear that was often expressed as defensive aggression.

I know from experience that the context needs to be right for the goal of Playback to be achieved. The goal here would be to mitigate some of the hostility, defensiveness and fear by having adults (the Playback company and by extension, the staff who allows it to happen) enact their feelings with power, artistry, irony and humor. Would the audience even accept that adults could identify with them or would every Playback be rejected on the teen principle that “adults just don’t get it”? I had no idea. But my curiosity was piqued and I was carried along by my compatriots’ strong desire for Playback’s rewards and the prospect of learning from their growing skill as healing artists. Through trial and error, we came upon a way to Playback the audiences’ experience that was relevant, safe and aesthetic.

Though the story of our many blunders and rejections could be illuminating and humorous, I’d like to focus upon what we found that worked and my ideas about why. We... likely I’d focus upon what we found that worked and my ideas about why. We ended up relying on a variation of an exercise found in Renee Emunah’s book, Acting for Real, called “Emotional Orchestra.” We... up an “us and them” dynamic we could not overcome. The actors sat together, a part of the circle. I would introduce my classmates and say that we did not have anything planned, but would... on what the group tells us. (Very informal.) We would first do a warm-up to introduce our names and then we got started.

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With Tami sitting on the floor, in the middle of the circle, I would say, “Let’s watch.” After the final note of the orchestra there would be applause and then I would ask each teller if s/he felt represented in the orchestra. At this point I would say, “Ok, let’s do three more. Does anyone want to try it?” If someone did, s/he would merely switch seats with whoever was sitting next to the actors and we would choose, stand and go again. Sometimes, the audience person would want to portray his or her own feeling and this was allowed, asking afterward what the experience was like. We always made sure that every teller/feeling was represented, calling for additional ones to complete a trio.

I would often marvel at the skill that Tami would employ to give shape, contrast and an arc to each enactment. I witnessed Doug, Lindy and Sheila grow—finding nuance(s) of the simplest offering to make each experienced feeling unique, heartfelt and authentic—always with the right touch of irony and humor. This form made telling a lower(-)risk endeavor, it moved along at a good pace and it had a strong structure within which deep feelings could be shared. The form honored not only the individual voices, but mirrored the environment in general; so many voices desperately needing to be heard. It was gratifying to find a form that captured the essence of the whole experience for the patients.

Liz Muckley has been a Playback practitioner for almost 20 years. She just completed her Master’s Degree in Counseling Psychology-Drama Therapy at the California Institute for Integral Studies in San Francisco, California. She completed a year-long practicum at St. Mary’s Hospital/McAuley Adolescent Services—an acute in-patient facility for children 11-17 years of age, the site of this Playback adventure.
Molti della generazione che ebbero esperienza di tutto questo sono ancora viventi e hanno condiviso il loro invendicato rancore con quelli di noi che sono venuti dopo.

Detto questo, Edward continua la sua storia. Questa volta un vecchio che odia i giapponesi, proprio quello dei cinesi, ma questo gruppo ha realizzato una improvvisazione toccante della storia di Edward. E’ stato un vero peccato che il giapponese seduto accanto a me non potesse essere sentito, ma questo permetteva agli attori di prepararsi mentalmente alla storia che svolgeva. E’ terminato con un abbraccio mentre l’attore che faceva parte del cast diceva: “mio nonno si è PROPRIO sbagliato”

I attori volgono tranquillamente lo sguardo a Edward quando la scena è terminata. E’ la loro offera a lui. Lasciamo che l’offerta indugi nell’aria per un momento, finché una donna giapponese rompe il silenzio. Gli attori si mettono d’accordo per condividere la storia del loro paese, i giapponesi. Ed eccoci qui, condividendo storie importanti e abbiano anticipato cosa sarebbe potuto accadere nel momento in cui asiatici dei diversi paesi si fossero trovati insieme a condividere le loro esperienze.

Anche Kayo, il conduttore originario, parla. “Sento anch’io il bisogno di dire qualcosa. La nostra gente ha fatto cose terribili ai vostri paesi durante la guerra. Anche se è stato molti anni fa e anche se non siete stati in grado di farlo, io voglio chiedere scusa per le cose che i miei antenati hanno fatto nel passato. Voglio dire che non sono addormentato per le cose che i giapponesi hanno fatto alla vostra gente nel passato. Mi scuso a nome della mia gente”

I gruppi cinesi sono ancora in piedi. Tutti loro stanno apertamente piangendo mentre restituiscono queste scuse attraverso una scultura fluida.

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Una conduzione sottile: indurre una consapevolezza collettiva

Di Fred Harris

Playback: vi ricordate quelle volte in cui avete sentito così forte il riscaldamento del pubblico, oppure avete sentito l’ensemble degli attori particolarmente uniti? Bene, questo senso di consapevolezza collettiva non si manifesta spontaneamente, ma deve essere indotto. Quando una commedia è ben riscaldata, gli attori si muovono in sincronia con l’azione degli attori, comunicandone una medesima identità. L’una non esclude l’altra, le due formano una complessa unità. Il conduttore può aiutare gli attori e il pubblico a fare esperienza di comunità nel momento in cui, dando voce a questa duplice consapevolezza, in maniera alternata si rivolgono ora separatamente agli individui, come quando “provoca” una storia, ora all’intero gruppo, come quando chiede di alzare le mani ad indicare chi ha sentito una sensazione di consapevolezza collettiva sia basata sulla telepatia. Il rituale prevede che le persone condividano scopi, tempi e concentrazione. Il conduttore dovrebbe prestare attenzione a stabilire questi elementi per tenere insieme il gruppo. Lui o lei possono stabilire gli scopi mettendo in chiaro ciò che si aspetta dal pubblico e cosa il pubblico può aspettarsi dagli attori in una performance di Playback. Il ritmo del parlare e del muoversi del conduttore, come verrà detto più avanti, può strutturare il tempo. Attraverso la gestualità, scegliendo dove guardare intenzionalmente e amplificando le parole chiave nel racconto, il conduttore può aiutare a direzionare l’attenzione su un focus mano a mano che la performance va rivelandosi.

Rituale

L’importanza del rituale è spesso fortemente sottolineata nell’insegnamento del Playback. Il rituale prevede che le persone condividano scopi, tempi e concentrazione. Il conduttore dovrebbe prestare attenzione a stabilire questi elementi per tenere insieme il gruppo. Lui o lei possono stabilire gli scopi mettendo in chiaro ciò che si aspetta dal pubblico e cosa il pubblico può aspettarsi dagli attori in una performance di Playback. Il ritmo del parlare e del muoversi del conduttore, come verrà detto più avanti, può strutturare il tempo. Attraverso la gestualità, scegliendo dove guardare intenzionalmente e amplificando le parole chiave nel racconto, il conduttore può aiutare a direzionare l’attenzione su un focus mano a mano che la performance va rivelandosi.

Invito

Come un padrone di casa dà il benvenuto ai suoi ospiti in una casa accogliente, il conduttore invita il pubblico e gli attori ad attraversare il confine tra la consapevolezza collettiva individuale che ognuno esplica autonomamente e la consapevolezza collettiva. Per far ciò il conduttore ha il compito di preparare la strada alla consapevolezza collettiva entro la quale gli attori passano, portandoli, come un dito, alla sua unità soggettiva connessa al resto dei presenti nel teatro e lasciando che la separazione tra le persone scivoli in secondo piano appena il senso di unità emerge.

L’ultimo sacro

I membri del pubblico tenderanno a rispondere positivamente al conduttore che si avvicina loro attingendo al valore che li vede, come nota Martin Buber, come entità rappresentate con individuale di ciascun membro e la consapevolezza collettiva dell’intero gruppo sono dimensioni intersecenti di una medesima identità. L’una non esclude l’altra, le due formano una complessa unità. Il conduttore può aiutare gli attori e il pubblico a fare esperienza di comunità nel momento in cui, dando voce a questa duplice consapevolezza, in maniera alternata si rivolgono ora separatamente agli individui, come quando “provoca” una storia, ora all’intero gruppo, come quando chiede di alzare le mani ad indicare chi ha sentito una sensazione di consapevolezza collettiva sia basata sulla telepatia. Il rituale prevede che le persone condividano scopi, tempi e concentrazione. Il conduttore doveva prestare attenzione a stabilire questi elementi per tenere insieme il gruppo. Lui o lei possono stabilire gli scopi mettendo in chiaro ciò che si aspetta dal pubblico e cosa il pubblico può aspettarsi dagli attori in una performance di Playback. Il ritmo del parlare e del muoversi del conduttore, come verrà detto più avanti, può strutturare il tempo. Attraverso la gestualità, scegliendo dove guardare intenzionalmente e amplificando le parole chiave nel racconto, il conduttore può aiutare a direzionare l’attenzione su un focus mano a mano che la performance va rivelandosi.
Welcome on this EVE-ing, so I am Yves, your welcoming conduttore. However lets be conscious (and therefore careful) about criticism and feedback. Spontaneity and creativity taking risks can be so easily and seriously wounded.

Everytime they serve the food, their eyes smile. Despite all your emotions, emotions are not afraid to look stupid, are free from prejudices, are enjoying themsevles, are in contact with each other, are authentic. (Wendela) With love and a heart full of gratefulness and inspiration I leave here, thanks, thanks, thanks. I feel connected to the sea

“Come my Lord and in our flight, tell me how it came this night, that I sleeping here was found, with these mortalson the ground”

Playback … thank you that you exist all over the world

“Where but here; can we make mistakes and learn from them. However lets be conscious (and therefore careful) about criticism and feedback. Spontaneity and creativity taking risks can be so easily and seriously wounded.”

Playback gatherings are great mirrors for our Playback lessons that I got here, and for the ‘delicate warmth’ that I enjoyed, Congratulations, Love Petros

“Jusqu’ou peux s’etenohe Playback Theatre sans perdre Jusqu’ou peux s’etenohe Playback Theatre sans perdre...”

I love you. Jean Claude (With a picture of a snail).isDebugEnabled, scars, wrinkles, different eyes and the light from which Playback has shone in our lives, through our many mirrors. (Davina)

The above comment I wrote on the wall towards the end of the gathering. It was following a performance the night before with Robyn Weir, Veronica Needa, Heather Robb, Yves Postic and Sinead Maloney – a group of experienced Playback actors. I feel connected to the sea and I love you. Jean Claude (With a picture of a snail)

The Graffiti Wall
European Theatre: Bretagne, August 2005

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WHAT’S BEEN HAPPENING?

Connecting to the Heart

A Personal Reflection by Davina Holmes

European Gathering, Summer 2005

Last Summer I spent a fabulous four days in Bretagne, on the north-west coast of France, with 57 passionate Playbackers from all over Europe, as well as some representatives from the Asia-Pacific region. The gathering was hosted by Playback Paris, who had also recently started a group in Bretagne, and was facilitated by Yves Postic, Nicole Coquin and Genevieve Lambert.

My journey to this Playback event started in the South of France where I met Andras Zankay from Hungary and we travelled by car across France to the beautiful seaside village of Plougasnou. I had met Andras 6 years before at the York conference, and although we hadn’t seen each other since then, our friendship was cemented through our Playback connection, our stories, and as with many Playback friends, a depth of honesty which immediately connects to the heart. Our scenic drive was with much anticipation of what lay ahead at Plougasnou. We felt like we were driving to the edge of the world, and got very excited when we saw the sea and knew we were close. The sun was setting as we arrived, and we walked into a busy dining room to cheer of welcome, faces full of smiles and sparkling eyes. I looked across this sea of people and saw many familiar faces from York and from UK and France workshops, who I rushed to hug, as well as many new Playback faces. It felt like I was being welcomed home. I was excited and ready to play!

Following dinner, we all gathered in le chapiteau (a circus tent) which was to become our performance area, where we were welcomed by the local community with traditional Breton songs, musicians and dancing. It did not take long for many of us to join in to learn the traditional Breton rhythms and dances lead by local people from the village. It was then time to meet each other, as we stood forward in a large circle to introduce ourselves. This is always a part which I love as it is the first time one is seen and heard by everyone, and I recognised so many more people that I knew, once I heard them speak and found out where they were from. I also love hearing how Playback has grown and the number of companies which have been sown which I don’t know about. Representatives at the gathering were from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Russia, Denmark, England, Ireland, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. Many people were from the same company, with some companies from the Netherlands and Italy bringing their whole company.

Over the 3 days, we feasted on a delicious smorgasbord of workshops and were spoilt for choice. I always find it difficult to choose at Playback events, but I am learning to trust that I will be in the workshop I need to be in, and will always learn something. This was proven when I tried to change from a workshop that did not feel right at the time, and yet within minutes of being there I was singing with tears flowing, as I connected with knowing I was in the right place.

After an intensive first day of learning and meeting so many new people, it was a wonderful treat to go on a boat trip into the harbour, organized by Yves. The wind swept the heaviness of discussion and debate away from our various workshops, and left only wisps of wisdom on our salty smiling faces and gleaming eyes. On the boat, we talked animatedly about our Playback experiences, and left only wisps of wisdom on our salty smiling faces and gleaming eyes. On the boat, we talked animatedly about our Playback experiences, and left only wisps of wisdom on our salty smiling faces and gleaming eyes. On the boat, we talked animatedly about our Playback experiences, and left only wisps of wisdom on our salty smiling faces and gleaming eyes.

For me, it is in these conversations that I learn so much about what is Playback for me, from sharing my opinions and listening to other perspectives and experiences. I’m sure by reading some of these comments, you will make connections to your own experiences of Playback gatherings, when your heart has been touched and your mind stimulated by questions and wonderings.
Every time we deliver a Playback Theater performance, I am awed and touched by the truths and wisdoms of life revealed in stories told by people living lives of struggle and routine. One story calls out another; wearing a tapestry of stories. As the ninety minute performance progresses, a sense of unity is created in the audience; a feeling of being “glad to be alive” permeates the entire space. I often feel that as long as we show trust in the stories that arise and enact them faithfully, by the end of the show, everything will have taken care of itself.

However, although it is rare; there are times when we can’t entirely trust the flow of the performance without providing the occasional intervention. For instance, when our social responsibilities, knowledge, and skills as a professional Playback theater company are being challenged.

Playback Theater Company, Playback AZ, provided a series of four special classes with students in two 12th grade classes (12 to 13 years old) in an elementary school. The students had experienced collapse of class discipline, and bullying. The Central European School of Playback Theatre offers comprehensive training for playback theatre for people coming from Central and East European Countries.

In undertaking this process, each Playback AZ member had to reflect upon and learn the ethics of Playback Theater as stories of “bullying” were told by children. A story came up where a teller or the audience did not feel like they were being “lectured” by sticking to the narrative as delivered in the story.

We were confronted with questionable ethical points of view as the stories often contrasted those inherent in our values of Playback Theater. In other words, our dilemma was between acting unethical stories and valuing the role of PT, which was to “accept any stories by any teller”. The student who told the story wherein “Bullying was fun” needed to be heard as he told his experience, with innocence without any reflection, and his experience needed to be enacted out without criticism. Each time an unethical story was told, we were trying to contain the space and each time was a challenge for our performance. From this experience, we have finally arrived at the nexus of practicing PT with both focuses: accepting a teller and his or her story as told, and demonstrating social responsibilities towards the public. The following are examples:

As a conductor – being aware of bringing in the view point of “victim” after the story told by “the instigator”.

Specifically at the school performances, a conductor calls out asking for stories by the person on the receiving end of bullying, by saying “who has experienced being bullied?” In many instances, we seemed to be able to provide a balance by presenting both sides of the stories. However, there were times when the students were in complete silence. At this time, a conductor tried to elicit stories by asking “if you were the ones being bullied, what would it be like?” or providing the conductor’s own commentary, such as: “If it was me I would feel sad, angry and lonely, especially if no one seemed to care.”

As an actor – One of the actors may choose a role that can communicate an “objective stance” or a “fair and ethical” point of view.

In the “Pulling a chair is fun” story, the actor who plays a chair whispers comments such as “That’s not a good idea.” “It’s better not to do it.” “Are you sure?” “It might hurt him.” “It might hurt him.” “He got hurt.” “He’s amazing.” and/or “He is patient but he looks like he wants to cry.” In the “Hiding of the Shoes” story an actor portraying the stolen shoe could act and communicate. “I am here. Find me.” “That boy did it.” “It’s terrible.” “You are looking for me for a long time.” “Can anyone help him find me?” and/or “How can he go home without me?” It would be important that actors be cognizant in their acting so that the teller or the audience did not feel like they were being “lectured” by sticking to the narrative as delivered in the story.

Practicing Playback Theater often elicits paradox and dilemma that we can confront by employing varied methods, theatrical forms, and following complex social policies.
I am so honoured to be invited on the trip to tag about missing home because war is coming up. Everyone else began telling moments of missing home and family. Heng Chi, my friend, told me of his feeling about war, “it’s so cruel. People just fight without listening to each other. It’s very cruel and sad.”

Such experience demonstrated not only how the School could be more accessible to people with intellectual differences or cognitive understanding, it opened up a door to more inclusivity. We constantly think of what’s ahead and completing the story/workshop along the way. Such moments are value for everyone.

I have been asked so many times before the trip what do I think about Chosen Power doing deep stories. How well do they understand? Could they depict emotions? Is it possible... given moment, anyone could make mistakes, so would they. The main thing is, when we make mistakes, we correct them. We learn from them and then we move on.

My favourite moments this summer: Someone talked about missing home because war is coming up. Everyone else began telling moments of missing home and family. Heng Chi, my friend, told me of his feeling about war, “it’s so cruel. People just fight without listening to each other. It’s very cruel and sad.”

Chung Wing Kin’s portrayal of an orphan in a story with very strong feelings towards parents. After I shared my story of my dead father, Chung Wing Kin told Emily that I was sad. Later that evening, he shared with me a piece of meat (which I had to say no because I am a vegetarian.)

Chung Wing Kin was conducting in the Chosen Power presentation and I was translating for him. At one point, he was crying with the teller. Later, someone asked, “Can a conductor cry? What do you do if you start crying when you are conducting?” I smiled and said, “Everyone cries. If you have to cry, then you just have to cry. The thing is, as the conductor, if you are crying, maybe you should be prepared that everyone would then follow your lead and cry. The question is not about the crying moment. What we should ask is what’s next after that? We need to figure out who we are and what we should remain and who we should be. If doing playback theatre means becoming some super human who could shield one from emotions when it comes, I am sure it won’t still be thriving now.”

I think about being a human all the time. We should not be burden by any limitations but empowered by them to open up a larger space.

Thus, with much gratefulness to everyone who was present at the School, witnessing this beautiful summer, I would like to share with you my learning in the space for all to be creative.

I think a good leader should create one space like that. Yet I am also inspired to be the one who will facilitate the creation of the idea so that everyone is participating in the creation of the space of their own, in which they could be creative or not as they wish. I am so honoured to be invited on the trip to tag along, translate and learn more about this space that Chosen Power opened up for all of us. I am forever grateful and will be present for this experience.
Joka kerran tarinat presentationissamme ... tarintenäkymiemme kanssa. Toisin sanoen, ongelmallista oli kysyäitseltämme tarinatervelin tekijöinä: "Onko ok näytellä nämä ..." Kayo Munakata: 

Epäeettisten tarinoiden näyttelemisestä (käännös: Minna Hokkanen)


Ohjajana – tuoda tietoisesti esiin: "uhrin" näkökulma "yllättävän tarinan jälkeen.

Erityisesti koulutetussa ohjaajissa on taukoakin niin niiden tarinat, jotka ovat olleet kiusaamisen kohteena kysymyshallin: "Kelat teistä on kiussa"? Monessa tapauksessa näytti siitä, että pystymme luomaan tapaapun tavoin ehdoton taidon maailmaa molemmat puolet, Kuitenkin, olikin heikko, joten oppilait oli pitää tilinä pitäen. Tällaisissa tilanteissa ohjaaja yrittä yhdeksällä tarinaa esiin kysymyllä: "Jos sinua kuuluttaisin, niin millaista se olisi?", tai kommentoinnilla itse: "Jos minun kuuluttaisin, niin olisin surullinen, viihainen ja yksinäinen, etenkin jos kuukan ei tuntuisi välttävän." Näytelijänään – yksi näytelijostä voi valita roolin, joka kummunikoi: "objektivistisestä asemapia" käsini ja tuo esiin "reitin ja elettisen" näkökulman.


Tarinatervelöillä harjoittaminen nostaa esiin paradokseja ja ongelmia, jotka voimme kohdata ottamalla käyttöön eri metodeja, teatterillisia muotoja ja monitasoisia, sosiaalisia käytäntöjä.
I was interested to see in the December 2005 edition of Interplay (Vol X, No 2) the emergence of a discussion on ethics and playback theatre – a field that has long interested me. The rich variety of views that were shared inspired me to want to respond to Anthony and Dwight Conquergood’s words quoted by Nick Rowe that playback theatre can ‘bring self and other together so they can question, debate and be challenged by another.’ I have sometimes felt that playback theatre is so much based on goodwill (and an assumed consensus) that a challenging debate is not quite what we do. But the importance of ethics has encouraged me to take a risk and to do so I need to assert a position. So in the spirit of playback friendship, I will approach and hope you will follow me in a challenge to debate ethics.

I’ll begin by considering the ethical context of my work in the field of community mental health and how that relates to playback theatre. As a qualified counsellor, I belong to a well-tested code of ethics whichnderpins my practice. I ensure that there is a clear frame of reference and a contained therapeutic setting that gives confidence to all parties.

Although counselling isn’t entirely dissimilar to playback in that the client is the teller of their story, I have other qualities that differentiate my role. I am a listener, not a teller; I work in the context of an agreed relationship with my client; I can end our meeting at any time; I do not have a fixed programme of activities; I can work on a short-term, or long-term, basis. While freedom to end the meeting at any time is not a feature of playback theatre, there is a shared commitment to the process and a relationship of trust and confidence between the tellers and me, which is the main ethical consideration. As such, I strive to maintain that relationship, listen to the clients and help them to explore their inner worlds.

Returning to the values in playback theatre that Annette Henne describes as an inner attitude and defines as respect, honour and dignity, I am challenged by her statement that “In playback theatre, we cannot do anything else than be a benevolent loving mirror.” What if a teller told a story that conflicted with those core values of respect, honour and dignity? Once the teller is seated in the chair there isn’t really any way back and to simply mirror the story as it’s told would be to risk perpetuating the indignity, lack of honour and respect which is in itself an ethical dilemma. It may be that such an enactment will provide the teller with an opportunity to reflect at a distance and thereby see other possibilities – maybe? Traditionally, theatre has had a role of challenging the status quo while reflecting it. If the status quo were to be simply reflected, then change would not be seen to be taking place and one of playback theatre’s stated goals is to work towards promoting social justice, which I interpret to mean, at the very least, an enhanced understanding of difference. Playback actors are then faced with a challenge of staying true to a story they may find uncomfortable while seeking radical new perspectives that challenge the status quo – all in the moment – a challenge indeed.

This brings me to the point raised by Nick Rowe when he says that “There is always a risk that the difference of the other...”.

In my leadership class in 2004, Jonathan said to us, “A good leader will create a space that will let anyone be creative in it.” I hold dear to this advice and have every since learnt to think of a more people oriented approach when I do my playback workshop.

It was one year ago when I thought of asking if my friends of Chosen Power would like to go and do a workshop at the School of Playback Theatre in New York. I just got back from the “Staging Deep Dialogue” workshop and was pondering a lot on the question, “What is a deep story?”

Just before that workshop, I did a playback performance with Chosen Power at the 2nd Conference for the Mentally Disabled in Hong Kong. It had such a great impact on me that urged me to revisit my playback work. We had so many hands up in the hall that day during the performance. All of them had a story to tell and wished to be heard. I ended up running around passing the microphone just for them to tell. What they had to tell were the deepest stories I have ever heard in my entire life. All of them picked up the microphone and spoke into it in full confidence, “My name is xxx. I like to (swim/ cycle/ do handicrafts, etc.)” It was such a powerful experience. The hall was filled with statements of self identification. There was no literal story but so many deep stories were floating around. I was tremendously touched.

After that, I dived into the Deep Dialogue workshop and found myself immersed in stories about peace and war, reconciliation and such. They were, of course, stories with deep emotions and implications to a whole new social order. Yet, it did not make my friends’ stories about their personal interest any smaller.

There comes a time when we all think, “This is it. This is what I could achieve.” Or “This is my limit. This is how far I could go.” There is a benchmark for everything: our educational level, our total household income, our material achievement, our emotional quotient, etc.

When we teach, we were asked to assess our students. I was being requested to tell how my students are doing constantly. Do they have potential? Are they willing to learn? Are you sure they could do better than this? Is there any more room to improve? These questions popped up everyday from different kinds of people, with one exception. When I go and teach in “special schools,” schools that are made for children and young people with different abilities, the teachers or the parents would mostly said, “It’s so nice of you to come and teach them, knowing they won’t make any progress anyway.” Or “You could try but don’t be discouraged if they are not responding. It’s their problem, not yours.” Almost no one believes that these special talented people could do anything artistic, but I do. I do, because I remember what Jonathan said, “A good leader will create a space that will let anyone be creative in it.” So I strived for that space to be created. I worked with my participants to find out what is necessary to provide them such space, the space where they could be creative in it.

I started talking to people around me who have the same vision. Emily, I, working very closely with my friends of Chosen Power. When I told her about my thoughts of advance playback training for my friends, Emily said, “Why not?” We started planning. I hosted a workshop doing playback with them. They invited a few new friends who did not know playback before and I met Kelvin (another support person in this trip), who was accompanying his friends in the workshop. We soon learnt more about this space. With everyone’s differences despite the same “label”, we managed to help discover each other’s strengths and weaknesses through exercises and games. We experimented together and I took a big step in my conducting. I worked with this friend who was basically non-verbal. The first time he met me, he looked at me and introduced himself to me because his name is written on it. He responded to my verbal instructions in the exercises and was doing great all the time. Yet he had never told anything in the workshop. I was aware of it and had been thinking hard. How could I include him in the telling process? How could I create this space for him to tell and also be creative in the telling? It was a stretch for me as I am always such a verbally driven person.

The next week when we were doing fluid sculptures as warm up, I decided I have to give it a try. Thus I asked him, “Are you happy today?” He was looking at me, smiling. I said, “Are you happy?” He did not say anything. Then I asked again, “Are you unhappy?” What was supposed to be a “routine” checking question became crucial at this point. He nodded. To my surprise, I immediately double checked by asking the two questions again and again in different turns. He kept indicating he was not happy that day. So I knew I understood his question. Then I asked myself, how could...
Theatre needs to be reclaimed. It may be that the use of the term “Playback Theatre” should be a registered trademark in order to protect it from misuse. This returns me to my comparison with counselling. I first started counselling in the context of being a trustee of IPTN. This led me to think about the role of the therapist in the counselling process. I realized that the therapist's role is to create a safe and supportive environment for the client to express their feelings and thoughts. This is similar to the role of the facilitator in Playback Theatre. The facilitator creates a safe and supportive environment for the participants to share their stories and insights. Both the therapist and the facilitator use their empathy and intuition to guide the process and help the clients reach a greater understanding of themselves and their relationships.

So I would like to draw my contribution to a close by considering the question of identity and its role in Playback Theatre. Playback Theatre is a way of expressing one's identity and emotions through storytelling and acting out. It is a way of connecting with others and sharing experiences. However, it is important to remember that identity is not something that can be imposed on others. It is something that we each create for ourselves through our own experiences and relationships. It is important to respect the individuality of each person and to avoid imposing our own identities on others.

In summary, Playback Theatre is a powerful tool for expressing identity and emotions. It is a way of connecting with others and sharing experiences. However, it is important to remember that identity is not something that can be imposed on others. It is something that we each create for ourselves through our own experiences and relationships. It is important to respect the individuality of each person and to avoid imposing our own identities on others.
Suostunut ohjajaan todelliseen vuorovalikuttoon kertojasta kanssa saadaaksi tariaan esiin, vaikuunlinoi prosessia nauttiaksi valalla ja näyttäväksi itse tärkeäksi?

Myös kertojat kohtaavat rehellisuuden haasteen. Tarinateatterin tekijöitä kahdesta tuntua, kunnioittaa koska esiintymisen yhteydessä voidaan syntyä impulssia kertojan tarinasta tai pystyä vain meidän omiin juttuihin? Näyttämöllä toimimme yhdessä muiten kanssa, jopa tarinansa; syntyykö tämä impulssi todella kertojan tarinasta vai perustuukö vain meidän omiin juttuihiin?

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**Playback Theatre**

*by Raymond Hui Wai Man, Member of Chosen Power*

17 August, 2006

This is my first time to take up the role of team leader in the Chosen Hamlet Overseas Study Group. We learnt the form "Narrative V" in class. We also learnt how to do opening of shows, how to be a conductor, movement and dance. I realised that team spirit, working with each other and supporting with each other is a must in playback theatre. It’s also important not to discuss about the stories we shared within the form and not to give or receive gifts as a result of the sharing. I am pleased to have met Simon, a friend from UK, who taught me how to say "Good morning, how are you?" in British sign language. I also taught him how to say "Nei Ho Ma?" (How are you in Cantonese)

I have learnt how to find support from different countries in class and speak softer to my mates from Hong Kong. The most memorable thing was when I first told my story in class. It took me a very long time to think about what to tell. Besides telling, I also got the opportunity to become the conductor when we were performing for each other in class. I was very happy and satisfied about it.

The Hudson River Playback Theatre performance helped me to consult my learning in class. When I performed at the open house performance in Kazar, I learnt that not only I need to improve my movement, the movement has to be in tune with what is happening on stage too. We planned to perform in the open house show together in the same team. So in the end, only Hong Chi and myself went out to perform. Attention to performance

Wing King and Esther stayed as audience. I felt I have missed a part but I was also glad that Wing King got to watch me.

I need to slow down to listen after all the stories to the full story. Instead of rushing into scenes and start acting right away, I need to watch and follow my fellow players. This helped me to make less mistakes and be more sure about the offers my partners are giving me. I should respond accordingly. My partners and I argued but we also made up quite soon and forget about the whole thing afterwards. Sometimes when I was too tired I would ignore the support person. However, I would talk to him again later and listen to her translation for me. My support person is Michele and I hope I could be more focused in listening so that I could improve.

On Tuesday July 18, I thought I could do it on my own without my support person. I soon discovered that it’s not quite possible. Luckily, my support person immediately translated for me again and saved me from making mistakes. During the certificates presentation, Jonathan Fox said to us: We have already finished the knowledge of the playbook. I wish we could all continue to keep the spirit of playback and use it in more meaningful ways. We should never give up easily. I wish also to continue spreading the spirit of playback. To make progress, I shall learn about different ways of expression and read more books about playback. In the end, we realised that Wing King, Kate and I were all wearing green t-shirts. Since Kate had her camera with her, we decided to take a picture together.

The Trip to USA by Cheuk Heng Chi

30 August, 2006

Owing to language issue, our trip to take playback course in USA called for translation support from our support persons. However, we were all so exhausted because of the intensive training. It was very hot, too. Sometimes I would misunderstand my support person and did not do so well in class.

There were a lot of friends of different nationalities in class. Other than the language differences, there was not any other problem. Most of the time we were communicating through body languages or simply by working with each other. I have learnt a lot of skills and games. There were games I have played in Hong Kong before. I was most impressed by the form "Narrative V". I think I have made progress in communicating with my support person and I wish I could learn more communication skills.

Trip to USA by Chung Wing Kin

30 August, 2006

We went to New York to take the playback class. There were other friends in class. They were from Brazil, Canada, Israel, Greece, etc. We met a lot of new friends, went to class every day. We also had to make our own breakfast and do our own laundry. We need our support persons, Emily, Michele, Esther and Kelvin to work with us at all time. We all felt very tired but very happy. I tried to be the conductor but I did not speak well enough. I wish I could do better. I spent a lot in this trip. I will have to work very hard to return the money for the air tickets, tuition fees and pocket money to my mom. If there is another chance, I would still like to continue to learn more in the future.

Chosen Power July 9-10, 2006 Sharing

Esther, Chung Wing Kin, Emily and Michele’s trip to USA

2 workshop in USA, 2006


Canada/ Brazil / Met new friends / USA Workshop / Playback Theatre / Hong Kong —Taipei —New York —Introducing ourselves / High, middle and low / Change! Conductor / Musician / Help Cheuk Heng Chi / Evaluation / Actor / Improvise / Space / Studying (Cheung Wing Kin and Emily) / Food / Fruits / Michele / Pay attention (Cheung Wing Kin and Emily) / Body language by teacher / Chosen Power / Friends

Firemen / Grand Central Station / Raymond Hui, Cheuk Heng Chi, Michele, Kwok, Esther, Emily Fung, Cheung Wing Kin / Michele / Airport / Driver / School (Michele’s workshop) / Kwok, Hui, Cheuk, Chung —Forever

Men in bus / Michele, Game, Workshop, Playback Theatre / Michele / Playback Theatre / Narrative V (Cheung) / Conducting (Michele translates) / Car / Chosen Power / Noodles / Fruits / Playback Theatre / Work hard / Actor (Machine) / Drumming (Mingh Hsi as musician) / Pay attention / Michele / Workshop

Airport: Hong Kong, Taipei, New York / Sharing / Airport / Rice / Fruits / Noodles

Workshop: Teacher / Pay attention / Cheuk Heng Chi / Evaluation / Pay attention to performance

Gall’s birthday party / Chosen Power / Breakfast / Studying / School of Playback Theatre / Cheuk, Esther, Kwok, Hui, Cheung, Michele, Emily Fung

*This second article of Chung Wing Kin is extracted from his learning journal.

Kun tarinateatteri jatkaa kasvuaan ja muuttaa moni-mielenmukaisiksi, sen pilariin tulee yhä enemmän ihmisiä, joiden käsitys rehellisyydestä ei ole kovin kehittynyt. Tämä ei ole luomuo. Kasvatuksemmaksi, tai sen puuteessa, on monia tekijöitä, jotka voivat johtaa tähän tilanteeseen.

Saurin teoksi on ehkä nyky-yhteiskunnan materialistinen ja kilpailukerhon arvovärjästelemä. Itse asiassa vain harvat meistä kasvavat elämään rehellisyyden ja suorasaikaisyyden hengessä. Tässä mielessä tarinateatteri ja sen opetukset asetuvat vastakkain modernin elämän yhtenä kanssa - olla hengessä antelia, asettaa kertoja oman itsen edelle, jokäynnä kiinnostavien esiintyjiä kanssa, yöllä tarinoimme mysteerin edessä.

Voi olla, että tarinateatteri rehellisyyden välineenä on sen riitteenä yhtä tähtää, kuin tarinateatteri teatterina, ja myös sen keskeyttävä vetoelämään.


Suorasaikaisesti ja rehellisesti toimiminen naapuriryhmää kohtaan on eettisyn haastavaa silloin, kun he eivät toimikosmin meitä kohtaan. Tällaisessa vaikeassa tilanteessa pidämme kiinni eettisestä käytöstä, suojatessa mme tien toimintaa, ja omansuomatte parhaamme mukaan.
The character was the issue with these young men, tremendous fun. We laughed a lot. We played a lot! And yes there were some tears, but mostly what I remember is Hang Chi's...ness to one another. Those guys are awesome. I would be in a class with them again in an instant! Just give me the opportunity!

Humbled by this vulnerability by the Chosen Power members.

My eyes were opened this last summer. I live in the United States where we claim equality for all yet we live in complete...ion. I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to be in a class where ability was not a prerequisite for equality. I am

From Kate Ayers, who attended Practice at the School of Playback Theatre this summer at Vassar College

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The Presence of Outside Insider

This is nothing new when compared to the more advanced inclusive education system in the States, UK or in Northern Europe. It is very common for them to have an individual supporter in class. It is even granted and subsidized by the schools.

For the July trip to the New York School, we were in full conviction of adopting the principles of Universal Design in the learning environment. Thus the need for the supporter was a key issue. A small group of learner-supporters was needed. The supporter’s role and task is very dynamic and multiple.

From our experience, the one to one supporter is a must in order to cater for individualized learning. The combination of our sessions shows a classic model for supporting:

1. A supporter who is well-versed with Playback Theatre. And from time to time, she can even side-coach the learners.
2. A supportive supporter having strong social work training and known to the learners for more than 10 years. She helps attend to everyday life crisis and stabilize the individual's and the group's emotional ups and downs.
3. A male supporter for all of the male learners. This provides a peer and role model for the team to identify with. He is a friend to enrich the learners' social needs.

Regardless of the facilitating approach in the sessions, the 3 supporters have the prime task to bridge and enhance this inclusive learning. It is the role of the supporters, using the principles of Universal Design, to decode the process to the learners' learning environment.

But what is Universal Design? And what is its principle?

It was in the eighties when architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers collaborated to establish a set of principles. When one is designing products or environments, it has to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent, without the need for adaptation or specialisation.

The principles include:

**PRINCIPLE ONE: Equitable Use**
It has to be useful and marketable to people with different abilities.

**PRINCIPLE TWO: Flexibility in Use**
It accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

**PRINCIPLE THREE: Simple and Intuitive Use**
It has to be easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, concentration level.

**PRINCIPLE FOUR: Perceptible Information**
Information is accessible in different means.

**PRINCIPLE FIVE: Tolerance for Error**
It has to provide fail safe features and warnings of hazards.

**PRINCIPLE SIX: Low Physical Effort**
It can be adaptable to every physical condition with a minimum of fatigue.

**PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Size and Space for Approach and Use**
Provide appropriate size and space for different mobility and needs.

The rocky road of diversity

For anyone who wants to trace our path, you are welcome to step onto this rocky road of celebrating diversity and appreciating differences. What we have ventured is a process of being present and being visible. In order to realize a truly inclusive society, people with different abilities actually can learn together. From the industrialization of the society to the professionalization of knowledge and skills, the specialized educational systems and welfare services have segregated people against one another. Ironically, governments have had to rediscover this by investing a huge part of their revenue to do integrated projects and public education for the general public to be aware and understand the marginalized groups.

It is the vision and mission of the members of Chosen Power to create a more diverse and inclusive interactive environment. We challenge the traditional way of specialized teaching and rehabilitation process for more than twenty years. They are captive in the medical model way of looking at disability. They are supposed to learn to behave according to social norms and do their best to learn how to function like everyone else.

With the launch of the People First Movement in the seventies, the Diversity Movement advocated by people with disabilities in the eighties, and the Inclusion Movement in educational professionals in the nineties, a strong call for paradigm shift emerged: Individual characteristics and diversity in abilities are valued, appreciated and celebrated. What makes a person handicapped and not learn is a matter of the social barriers and systems. This social notion of handicap gives light for us to revisit our systems of learning and education, our construction of buildings and the environment; and even our political systems.

How can we install inclusive and dynamic facilitation in workshop sessions? How can we generate adaptations, adjustments and accommodations to cater for all walks of life? It is not only the language nor the cultural diversity issue. It is a call for rethinking of how we value an individual and what is the meaning of group learning.
We appreciated seeing Sarah Urech’s interview with us in the last Interplay issue, but regretted that the article was accompanied by Hudson River Playback Theatre’s logo and not Community Playback Theatre’s. We’d sent graphics which represented both our companies equally — important in an article about respectful cooperation.

Thanks for all your work and we do understand that minor glitches like this can happen—just wanted to set the record straight!

Judy Swallow and Jo Salas

Hudson River Playback Theatre, based two hours north of New York City, is looking for one or more experienced playback theatre actors for our busy company. Please visit www.hudsonriverplayback.org to learn more about our company. Click Joining the Company for more information about what we are looking for and what we offer. If you are interested please email Jo Salas at jo.salas@earthlink.net

A Chosen Journey to Playback

by Emily FUNG Wai Ying

Playback Theatre was first introduced to Hong Kong in 1996. In 1997, a Playback training class was organized and there were two participants with different learning needs (they were of different intellectual abilities). One of the learners was a member of Chosen Power. This class could be regarded as the first mainstream playback training class in Hong Kong. According to the member of Chosen Power, she had difficulty in understanding the sessions, yet she was afraid to ask. She was well accepted in the group but after the sessions, no one ever contacted her and of course she dared not to call anyone up.

In 1999, Arts with the Disabled Association Hong Kong (ADA) organized an artist in residency training course: A Playback Theatre Training with Community Touring. The course has intended to be an inclusive one: learners could be of different abilities as stated in the promotion leaflets. Six members of Chosen Power registered in the course. They met eight new friends from the community. At the end of the course only five of the ‘new’ friends stayed for the community touring. This marked the first integrated Playback Team in Hong Kong and their performances were well received by different communities.

After the touring, members enjoyed the experience very much. They related and served the community as individuals. They were no longer regarded as vulnerable groups in need of the theatre groups or volunteers to serve and perform for them. With this change of identity and role, though not exclusively a Playback Theatre Troupe as such, they just enjoyed doing playback whenever they feel like it. They include playback as one of their forms of advocacy activities, as well as doing short skits to different community groups and peers, stage performances for sharing at international and local conferences and very occasionally stage performances with other Hong Kong Playback teams. They are much honored to attend different Playback theatre training courses as organized by ADA in these seven years. Their learning has been mostly in a mixed and integrated setting.

From 1997 to 2005, the local Hong Kong scene has had some very interesting developments. Members of Chosen Power have informally created an integrated learning platform for playback learning and performance by being visible and participating in the regular training sessions and performances. They have created diverse ability learning environments. And yet the facilitation was still in the very traditional medical model of mainstreaming and teaching: one has to fit in the facilitator’s way of teaching, the curriculum and even the art form. The training is in no way as inclusive and diverse as to cater for participants’ different learning needs.

Realizing An Idea

In 2005 when Miss Michele CHUNG was conducting a playback training session for new members of Chosen Power, she suggested that it would be a good learning for the experienced team members to pursue their development at the School of Playback Theatre in New York by attending the ten-day Practice in Playback Theatre training.

When the idea was shared with the members, their questions were:

“When?”

“I am not sure if I can take 2 weeks leave!”

“How much does it cost? I have to check my bank account...”

“Who will do the English translation for us?”

All members were delighted. The only thing they had to work out was how to get a US Visa and check their bank accounts. As long as there were supporters, members felt sure that they could go anywhere and learn anything.

The parents wondered:

“How much? See if I can afford that!”

“Can they really benefit from the training?”

“Can my son understand?”

“Can my son mix with the fellow classmates?”

“Will they slow down or even mess up the whole learning process?”

“Will the other participants treat them fairly and equally?”

“Will the New York School accept their applications?”

“Money is not a problem, how to ensure their learning?”

“We cannot pay the supporters...”

Parents had practical logistical concerns. They also had doubts in their sons’ ability. They did not want their children to be a burden to others. Deep down in their heart, they were more than willing to support this ‘crazy’ idea. Parents silently cheering: what a delightful way to support their children to take an alternative college course.

Friends’ responses:

“Are you serious?!”

“I wish I can go!”

“How are you going to fundraise for this trip?”

“Will the School support your registration, the members have language and learning barriers?”

“Can I be the supporter? I will pay my share of fare.”

“So the members are going, so we will be classmates!”

From raising eye-brows to affirmation and exclamation, the ability awareness journey for this July 2006 New York Playback Practice tour was launched.

The Realization of Choice:

A team of 3 participants (Hang Chi, Wing Kin and Raymond) and 3 supporters (Michele, Kelvin and Emily) to the Practice Class was finalized by individual choice and committee endorsement. The 3 participants chose their personal
A Dialogue with Jonathan Fox in Tempe Arizona

Toward the end of the 2005 International Playback Theatre Symposium Nourishing Ideas Sustaining Communities, in Tempe, Arizona, in February 2005 Jonathan Fox (US) spoke in a dialogue with Fe Day (NZ), who was retiring from the Board of the International Playback Theatre Network. An audience of around 60 people attended and sat at round tables in the main conference meeting room. Their conversation ranged over topics which included embodied ethical issues in Playback, some of which are given here.

A good beginning

FD To start at the beginning – what does a Playback group have to do when they come into the space with the audience?

JF They have to make an entrance!

FD I’m interested because we’ve seen some quite extensive fluid sculptures being done by company members for each other... I wonder whether this ends up seeming narcissistic and not open to the audience?

JF Well – it just depends ... and I understand what you’re saying and I might not have the same quite the same perspective as you do but my feeling is that what’s important at the beginning is for the company to show that this is an aesthetic form; they also need to in some way stand there as themselves, you know that’s what we sometimes call the social interactive element (so usually the actors will introduce themselves as themselves - the tradition of saying something about yourself – the extent to which that is authentic and spontaneous is very important); finally they need to have a certain rhythm – that there be this sense of the ritual element of it – all those things need to be presented right at the beginning. So it’s a balance.

FD I made notes once on a company and exactly what they did in each second at the beginning and what I ended up finding was that you could see in a good beginning an incredible bongo-board balancing act of all these different elements – as if they might do something which was socially interactive but they’d quickly then do something that was aesthetic or something that moved the ritual forward.

Asking for roles in stories

FD Another thing I’m observing is people not getting roles in stories. ... conductors not asking for roles in stories ... what are your thoughts around that?

JF That reflects the evolution of the skills of the Playback actors. In the beginning we would tend to pick all the important roles. But as we have evolved with Playback we realized that it could be enough to pick at least one, the teller’s actor – although there’s no rule about it – there’s no rule about that. And I think that is important.

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JF Thank you.

FD Well it can happen, I mean...

JF That’s a very valid point of view and it’s good to state that.

To have the courage to go there

FD I have other things... that I really wanted to ask you about, and one is about despair... in my Playback lineage I was brought up that if someone talks in a story about a death or about someone who’s died – they’re asking to see it. We live in societies – certainly in New Zealand and the US – that are phobic about death, (it’s something that we don’t share enough, the witnessing of death), so I was sort of brought up to have a very staunch relationship to this theme and the way in which the influences on Playback the more I’ve come to see this as intrinsic to the form...

JF There’s a specific question there and that has to do with the portrayal of death on the stage. And I would agree with you – although there’s no rule about it – there’s no rule about any of the aesthetic elements of Playback. But if somebody mentions a death in their story – then chances are you want to portray that... and by not portraying it often we’re in some way avoiding something that’s very important about the story that may have more to do with our own reluctance.

FD Well it can happen, I mean...

JF I’m interested because we’ve seen some quite extensive fluid sculptures being done by company members for each other... I wonder whether this ends up seeming narcissistic and not open to the audience?

JF Well – it just depends ... and I understand what you’re saying and I might not have the same quite the same perspective as you do but my feeling is that what’s important at the beginning is for the company to show that this is an aesthetic form; they also need to in some way stand there as themselves, you know that’s what we sometimes call the social interactive element (so usually the actors will introduce themselves as themselves - the tradition of saying something about yourself – the extent to which that is authentic and spontaneous is very important); finally they need to have a certain rhythm – that there be this sense of the ritual element of it – all those things need to be presented right at the beginning. So it’s a balance.

FD I made notes once on a company and exactly what they did in each second at the beginning and what I ended up finding was that you could see in a good beginning an incredible bongo-board balancing act of all these different elements – as if they might do something which was socially interactive but they’d quickly then do something that was aesthetic or something that moved the ritual forward.

Asking for roles in stories

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I can give you a good example about this when I was in Eastern Africa, in Burundi, the country south of Rwanda that has some of the same ethnic history. I was working with a group of Hutu and Tutsi actors. In the group – well we did four performances and one of our people who was not acting told a story about the death, the death of his mother, and the actors did it in a very brief fluid sculpture. The next day in the next performance he was there again, not acting, and he told the same story again – and again, a different group of actors did it in a short form.

Now these were people who were learning Playback, but they were people who had all experienced traumas of their own, and so it was very hard for them to fully embrace the death, and when we finally in the intimacy of our workshop, with my holding, did the story a third time, the actors really did it fully and the teller was very satisfied.

So I guess I want to make a larger point, which is that for me it’s one of the richnesses and one of the whole purposes of Playback to portray the pain of life as fully as the teller tells and wants to see it. And this is not always an easy task. And there’s often a tendency for us to…what’s the word, make nice…

the teller themselves may introduce this scene in an offhand way sometimes.

FD Absolutely. I’ll give you an example: you would all have your own examples. And this is somebody who told a story about her daughter who as a young child developed cancer… and she was ill and sick for a very long time and the story was about a moment in the hospital where the mother was having to remove some bandages from her little girl – and they were incredibly painful – and the daughter had already gone through months and months of one operation after another. And even though she was very small in this moment the daughter was so despairing that she said to her mother: “Please just let me die.”

The mother told this story in a context where we knew that the daughter had gotten through this – that the daughter was recovering – a miraculous thing. It was impossible for the actors to do the story without bringing in the miraculous recovery, because the story had a happy ending. But that’s not what she told, and after the enactment she said, “You know you didn’t get it. What you didn’t was that as her mother I really didn’t know at the time what was right. I didn’t know whether maybe it was the best thing to somehow let her die.”

So this is an example of when we as pt performers couldn’t do it… but our work in Playback is to have the courage to go there. And it’s not an easy task.

**Working towards a world where we’re sitting with Africa**

JF This is a shift - on the subject of despair and our willingness to act out the truth, I want to say something about what the Africans aren’t here. This is not about being on the Playback stage, but it relates to it. The question is, what’s the story and to what extent are we willing to face this? And implied in that question is, what’s our responsibility and how much of an effort do we care to make?

With the generosity of a number of people who have enabled us to carry out a mission of trying to make the access to training as open as we can, we started to invite people from the developing world to come to Playback training – 100% Africans who aren’t here. This is not about being on the Playback stage, but it relates to it. The question is, what’s the story and to what extent are we willing to face this? And implied in that question is, what’s our responsibility and how much of an effort do we care to make?

FD By the time of the next show, held at the local state four years after, we had NO IDEA what we—the School of Playback Theatre and Hudson River Playback Theatre—did through donations and loans. People were generous and enthusiastic, but it was still a major task, and we didn’t raise nearly enough to pay for the actual time we put in.

JF We all thought—there’s a need, and there’s a way to do it, and we can do it. Let’s do it! Yes, let’s! We had NO IDEA what a monumental task it would prove to be.

Those of you who are in company can probably imagine the immediate challenge of filming a show that is going to be fixed forever on film, in its entirety. We know that playback shows are never perfect, but it’s easy enough to film a show and find a few interesting and successful excerpts. But a whole show? We were committed to showing the entire process, so that viewers could see how the scenes develop and interweave from everything that happens. Filming a complete playback show is comparable to making a movie in one extended take—something that’s virtually never done, and certainly never without script or rehearsal. (The wonderful film “Russian Ark” (about the Hermitage Museum), shot in one continuous take, was rehearsed in every detail for four years before the day of shooting!)

Now there was the question of aesthetic style. Some years ago I started telling a playback variant of the old light bulb joke: How many playbackers does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: 46. Six to change it, 40 to watch and say “Hmm. We don’t do it like that.” Every culture, every company, has its own way of doing playback theatre. We knew, making this film, that other experienced performers might say “Hmm. We don’t do it like that.” But we hoped that elements more fundamental than style would be relevant and useful to everyone.

Creating the context for Playback

**Audience member** Also I’m thinking about locally… just bringing Playback into neighbourhoods and villages and places that wouldn’t have the assets and people might never come. Next year I can see I’m talking of more than just a performance, but rather actually of generating Playback through neighbourhoods…

JF My comment about that is in the first 25 years our thinking was how to develop this method as fully as we could. In the last five or six years what I’ve put a lot of my thinking toward is the kind of challenge you’re talking about. With many projects 80% of the work might be before and after the show… creating the context – you know creating the programme – going somewhere and making enough relationship so that you’re invited to do Playback or do a programme with Playback. That takes organizing skills. It’s really where it’s at right now for many of us.