

Final Project Report: Developing Dramatic Enquiry for intercultural learning among UK HE students

1. Executive summary: nature of the project, main approaches taken and main conclusions reached

This reports summarises my project piloting an innovative, co-developed, drama-based methodology for researching the intercultural experience and learning of UK HE students. Dramatic Enquiry (DE) is a participatory, reflective approach to education developed and pioneered by the project partners, theatre company Cap-a-Pie. We co-developed a fictional scenario and a script for two half-day workshops for a mixed cohort of University of Leeds students, followed by individual written responses and individual/pair interviews. Following post-structural and neo-materialist theoretical perspectives, analysis indicates that the facilitated creative activities in the workshop generated an immanent intercultural ethics based on embodied and material engagement with an *other*, and enabled embodied, material and unfinalised ways of knowing. I therefore conclude that DE has the power to bring into existence different ways of knowing-through-being, and in this dimension it might contribute to a more ethical internationalisation of higher education.

2. Summary of project aims and objectives

Internationalised HE is, by definition, based on national boundaries. Internationalised universities inhabit a necessary-and-impossible space: they are inherently dependent on, while simultaneously attempting to transcend, national borders (see Marginson 2015). This tension is reflected in UK HE in the bounded, binary framings of students which remain prevalent - home/international, native/non-native, monolingual/multilingual. Research narratives of students' experience are frequently framed within these binaries, often with the intent to acknowledge and address structural disadvantage; however, the dependence on bounded categorisations may serve as a performative reinforcement of the boundary (see Gowlett 2013). Such reinforcement leads to reified positions of difference which fail to account for students' complex intersectional experiences (Doiz et al. 2013; Sidhu and Dall'Alba 2012), reinforce cultural essentialism and reification (Young, Handford and Schartner 2017; Hua, Handford and Young 2017), and can limit students' learning (Lehtomäki et al. 2016). This indicates the vital importance of an approach to researching and developing students' intercultural learning which acknowledges the need to work *on, with* and *through* the self/other boundary, in order to develop mutual responsibility for intercultural communication (Harvey 2016).

The project aimed to address and resist binary framings of students and their narratives by developing and piloting a methodology based on Dramatic Enquiry (DE). DE (elaborated below) is a participatory, reflective approach to education developed and pioneered by theatre company Cap-a-Pie. The research was co-produced with HE students and Cap-a-Pie, and the methodological framework aimed to facilitate

- a) generation and analysis of data on domestic and international students' perceptions and experiences of internationalisation and intercultural communication;
- b) an inclusive approach to students' intercultural learning and development.

It addressed the following research questions:

1. What can DE tell us about students' perceptions and experiences of internationalisation and intercultural communication?
2. What are the affordances and constraints of DE as a method for researching these perceptions and experiences?
3. What is the potential of DE as a tool to enhance students' intercultural learning and development?

3. Outline of methodology and project timetable

August/September 2016. Using my Bakhtinian dialogic perspective on language and intercultural learning as a theoretical springboard (Harvey 2016, 2017a; Bakhtin 1981), Cap-a-Pie and I created a fictional scenario around a device called 'The Translator', an integrated earpiece and contact lens that would automatically translate languages, dialects, jargon, gesture for the user, so that they would be able to understand anything and everything they saw or heard. We then developed a role and script for Brad to act out this fictional scenario, and to lead participants in the enquiry in a series of facilitated creative activities to explore their responses to it by engaging their own experiences and values.

November/December 2016. We ran two half-day workshops for University of Leeds students (n = 23 across the two workshops). Participants were self-selecting and recruited via an email distributed to all the Schools in University of Leeds. Although around 40 students responded positively to the email and said they would take part, only just over half of these attended the workshops. Students were included from a range of study levels, disciplines, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds – the only selection criterion was for them to be an enrolled student.

The workshop opened with Nathan, a scientist from the United Nations Industrial Development organisation, introducing The Translator and telling the participants they are scientific expert who have been assembled to consider the pros and cons of the device. He then asked them to think about a time when they didn't understand something. After the participants related their stories, Nathan asked them to elicit themes related to their stories and the device (e.g. communication, globalisation, knowledge, feelings). He then led the participants in a series of activities to creatively explore the themes: a 'fishbowl' discussion activity; making body sculptures in pairs to perform one of the themes (where one partner moves the other partner's body into position as though they were sculptor and clay); group tableaux (as for body sculptures, but in groups); writing poems; and generating philosophical questions, asking the group to choose one for a final discussion. Participants were then asked to complete a structured written reflection and were invited to individual or pair interview (n = 10). The complete dataset comprised the script, videos and photographs of the workshops, participants' poems (from one of the workshop activities), workshop observation notes, participants' written reflections, and interview transcripts.

January-October 2017. Data were analysed (see **Analysis of results** below).

May-June 2017. Cap-a-Pie and I translated the findings from this project (along with my findings from my doctoral research) into a work-in-progress public performance, *The Translator*. This was staged over two evenings in June at Slung Low theatre in Leeds, to a total audience of 109.

4. Analysis of results

Following Jackson and Mazzei (2012), I 'plugged in' the data to post-structural and neo-materialist theoretical perspectives to explore the concept of the *self/other boundary* which was at the heart of the script; to explore the boundaries between languages, cultures, people, and objects which were so prevalent in the data; and to explore the relationship between these boundaries and learning. These theoretical perspectives entail a relational, entangled approach to the data, which understands boundaries as both necessary and impossible; understands *things* as mutually constituted (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010); and understands the boundaries we draw as having ontological implications (Hekman 2010). The analysis cohered around the Deleuzian concept of *detritorialisation*, illuminating how these boundaries were productively unsettled and destabilised as part of the dramatic enquiry. The following findings will be expanded in the coming months as I write the project up for publication.

The key finding was that the Dramatic Enquiry workshops afforded a space for participants to think safely and productively about communication and mis/understanding, and their relation to learning. Participants were heavily reliant on a concept of 'language' tied to ideas of culture, nation and identity. Through the workshops, participants explored a fictional scenario through a variety of communicative and performative modes, and their understandings of language and communication started to become 'detritorialised' (following Deleuze and Guattari 1977) – uncoupled from the concepts to which participants so readily related them. This took place through the embodied and intra-active workshop activities, which generated an immanent intercultural ethics (MacDonald and O'Regan 2013; Frimberger 2016): not an abstract ethics based on essential difference or sameness (related to reified 'cultures', 'nations' etc.), but an experience of ethics based on embodied and material engagement with an *other*, and which recognises the other qua other.

5. Project conclusions/outcomes

I have drawn the following conclusions, based on my responses to the research questions.

What can DE tell us about students' perceptions and experiences of internationalisation and intercultural communication?

The dramatic enquiry generated reflection on the role of the self/other boundary in learning. It stimulated students to think about themselves *in relation* to others and as *becoming with* others, through their practices of communicating with and trying to understand others. These relational process of *becoming* offer a way to understand the participants' perceptions, experiences and encounters in the international university – the international university can be seen as a kind of borderland (Anzaldúa 1987), in

which students are trans-ing (Mylona 2016), or moving across, through and beyond boundaries with various different others (Harvey 2017b; Jones 2016).

What are the affordances and constraints of DE as a method for researching these perceptions and experiences?

The key affordance of the dramatic enquiry was the use of the fictional scenario. The fiction meant we could avoid linear storytelling from a particular position (Dennis 2008; Frimberger et al. 2017): rather than using students' stories as a *representation* of their identity, the fictional story became a basis for *performing* identity. It enabled embodied, material, and unfinalised ways of knowing for the participants, which have the potential to unsettle the dominant forms and systems of knowledge privileged in UK HE (Hall and Tandon 2017). It also has implications for the primacy of language to represent truths about reality, and for the relationship or *entanglements* between being/ontology, and knowing/epistemology (Barad 2007; Lather and St Pierre 2013; MacLure 2013), which become apparent when considering the second research question.

What is the potential of DE as a tool to enhance students' intercultural learning and development?

Understanding ontology and epistemology as entangled highlights the *performative* nature of education – 'how we learn is instrumental to *what* we learn' (Bayley 2016: 47). This has ethical implications, if we understand ethics as concerned with 'how humans should be in the world' (Tarc 2006: 44). The dramatic enquiry was not simply a reflection of the self/other boundary, but a *performance* of the boundary being constantly made and re-made, or a process of emergent becoming in continuous difference with others (Davies et al. 2013; Deleuze 2004). The dramatic enquiry drew attention to the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being, and this is its potential as a learning tool: learning itself was 'an experience of ethics' (Tarc 2006: 288). I therefore conclude that Dramatic Enquiry is a *performative ethico-onto-epistemological project* (following Barad 2007, and Gibson-Graham 2008) – it has the power to bring into existence different ways of knowing-through-being. I posit that it is in this dimension that DE might contribute to a more ethical internationalisation of higher education, one which may meaningfully acknowledge the necessity and impossibility of the boundaries on which it is based, and challenge the reductive and oppressive binary framings to which students are too often subjected.

6. Summary of next steps planned

6.1 Presentation of work

I was invited to present the project at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, and the Education Policy Discussion Group at the University of Leeds, both in November 2017. I also presented at the SRHE Annual Research Conference 2017, and I am liaising with Emily Henderson (University of Warwick) regarding presenting at an International Research and Researchers Network event.

Further to this, a number of collaborative events have developed from this project with my co-Newer Researcher Prize-holder Jennifer Leigh (University of Kent). With colleagues from UCL and Leeds we convened a roundtable on Embodied Research Methods in Higher Education at the 2017 SRHE Conference. This will be elaborated into a Creative Methods workshop at SRHE in February 2018, which will in turn be further

developed for a session at the NCRM Research Methods Festival in July 2018, for which we have been awarded funding. We expect to develop this work into a collaborative research bid (see 6.3 below).

6.2 Publication of work

I am currently writing an article for *Studies in Higher Education* (to be submitted January-February 2018), broadly addressing the first research question. A second article addressing research questions 2 and 3 will be developed for *Language and Intercultural Communication* in Spring 2018.

6.3 Any plans to continue with the work or proposals for further research which might compliment this project

Cap-a-Pie and I are currently working on a Leverhulme Research Project bid to further develop the public performance and to theorise it as a public intercultural *pedagogy of solidarity*. This will involve further Dramatic Enquiry work with university students to generate material for developing the performance.

With Jennifer Leigh, Nicole Brown (UCL IoE) and Jessica Bradley (Leeds Trinity University), I am developing plans for a collaborative RCUK bid on creative methods in higher education. This will build on our ongoing collaborative work (see 6.1 above).

7. Acknowledgements

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