

Case Study No. 2 - Creative Group Processes, University of Ulster

Name of module/ course: THS303C1 Community Drama 1: Creative Group Processes

Programme BA Theatre Studies

BA Humanities Combined

Institution: University of Ulster

Level: 2

Typical number of students: 16

Elements addressed by study

Area	Key Aspects	✓ if addressed
Developing effective group behaviour	Group formation	✓
	Training	✓
	Monitoring	✓
Assessing behaviours & processes within groups	Assessing preparation	
	operation	✓
	reflection	✓
	Assessing whole groups	✓
	individuals within groups	✓
Assessing group products	Assessing whole groups	✓
	individuals within groups	✓

Special Features:

This is an elective module, the first of four in community theatre practice. Its primary focus is on the practices of playback and action theatre. Both forms require spontaneity and ensemble improvisation. Playback Theatre actively involves members of the audience during the process of performance. Stories are told and the actors re-enact them immediately. Action Theater focuses upon the development of awareness. Performance content is an intuitive expression of the performer's response to her experience of the moment. Integration of the two forms is part of the

student's learning experience. Rehearsal and preparatory exercises for both have much in common. Thus key aspects and principles of community drama are exemplified in this module: group work, personal development, spontaneity, priority of process over product, and inclusivity.

Description of Key Aspects:

Students are led by the tutor through a range of practical workshop activities and experiences. They are then allocated randomly into groups to undertake a Playback theatre performance. They are given a group mark for this.

Students are also assessed individually for their peer evaluation of the work of another group's performance and their self evaluation of their own group's performance according to the principles of the Playback form.

The final assessment element is an individual essay, in which the student may draw on their experience, observation and reading to form the evidential basis of their discussion.

Analysis

The key element here is that the process of working together is made transparent by the improvisational response from each student in the particular role in which they are performing. At the same time, the whole group must work together in response to one another. So there are both individual and collective incentive structures.

The provision for individual written assessments allows the possibility of differentiating between students, militating against any 'free-rider' effect and testing individual student learning. The capacity to reflect upon and evaluate their own work and the work of others through self- and peer- assessment ensures that students are able to match theoretical principles to their own practice.

Evaluation

The module shifts students away from practices in which performance and assessment are separated out from their own preparation, thinking and reflection. Students practice the various methods and roles for collaborating as part of learning about the forms. The transparency of the processes of group collaboration in the moment of performance allows the process to be effectively assessed as it takes place. The assessment of the group piece does require a sensitivity on the part of the lecturers who are assessing to the various roles which students may take up.

The specificity of these theatrical forms may appear to limit the possible transfer to other contexts. However, improvisation is a common practice across the performing arts disciplines, particularly in dance and jazz.