Theatre at Work
The Characteristics, Efficacy and Impact of Participatory Actor-Based Applied Theatre in the Workplace

Submitted by Richard Mark Feltham to the University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama

In January 2012

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(signature) ........................................................................................................
Abstract

This thesis examines the use of actor-based Applied Theatre methods within the workplace. Typically such methods are employed for behavioural skills training with the intention of enabling staff to effectively perform their work roles in a context of rapid and fundamental change to work practices and structures. This research uses case studies and mixed methods and finds that whilst work-based Applied Theatre may be commissioned for reasons of efficiency, in practice there is also the potential for individual efficacy. Whilst competitive forces drive the imperative for increased efficiency, the practice opens a space where the human consequences of this pressure can be explored. Studies of Applied Theatre have ignored or excluded the workplace as a site of research and consequently applications of these methods are under researched and little understood. This thesis questions the exclusive assumptions of the academic field, presenting a more complex picture of the practice than currently appears in the literature. Whilst the workplace presents many tensions that must be negotiated, this research finds that the participative, embodied and dialogic qualities of the practice can enable a space for catharsis, negotiation, expression and learning not possible through other methods. These dialogic and participatory qualities are found to promote a social model of leadership and interaction that is progressive, facilitating a shift away from pervasive mechanistic command and control approaches to management and leadership. A central quality of this efficacy and impact was found to be the role of the workplace actor which has evolved beyond the delivery of performance and into innovative approaches that aim to increase the actor’s contribution to learning. This emerging hybrid role is defined here as the ‘pedagogical actor’, drawing on skills of calibration, feedback and facilitation in addition to delivering a credible performance. Case Studies include an examination of the use actor-based role-play within financial services company Friends Provident and Forum Theatre used by the multi-national 3M, in addition to numerous case examples.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 3

List of Figures, Tables and Images ......................................................................................................... 9

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. 11

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 1 ................................................................................................................................................. 23

  When is Applied Theatre not Applied Theatre? .................................................................................. 23

  The Problem of Work ............................................................................................................................ 32

Chapter 2 ................................................................................................................................................. 41

  Methodology and Methods .................................................................................................................. 41

  Case Studies ......................................................................................................................................... 43

  Gatekeepers, Consent and Access to the field ....................................................................................... 45

  Semi-Structured Research Interviews ................................................................................................. 47

  Transcription and Analysis .................................................................................................................. 48

  Case Studies and Case Examples ....................................................................................................... 48

Chapter 3 ................................................................................................................................................. 51

  Case Studies and General Points of Theory Arising From the Case Studies .................................. 51

  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 51

  Case Study: Friends Provident: A Critical Stage for Learning ......................................................... 53

    Process of Data Collection and Analysis .......................................................................................... 53

    Friends Provident – A history ........................................................................................................... 55

    Actor based Applied Theatre and the Voice of Change Programme ........................................... 55

  Case Study: Spotlight on the Actor ..................................................................................................... 85

    Process of Data Collection and Analysis .......................................................................................... 86

  General Points of Theory Arising From the Case Studies ................................................................ 109

    The Actor as Expert in Not-Knowing ................................................................................................. 109

    From Technical Rationality to Reflection in Action ......................................................................... 111

    An Embodied and Social Practice ................................................................................................... 116

    Dimensions of Applied Acting ......................................................................................................... 122

Chapter 4 ................................................................................................................................................. 135

  Provenance, Forms and Aesthetics of Participatory Actor-Based Applied Theatre ...................... 135

  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 135
Design, Delivery and Evaluation of Actor-Based Training .............................................. 135
Performance at Work: Forms of Actor-Based Learning .............................................. 143
Role-Play and the Dramatic Difference Through the Use of Actors ............................... 145
  Bespoke Role-Play ........................................................................................................... 151
Forum Theatre in the Workplace ..................................................................................... 165
  Forum Theatre Example 1: Association of Colleges Training Days for Work-Based Assessors ................................................................................................................... 168
  Forum Theatre Example 2: 3M, Forum Theatre and Performance Management ......... 178
Simulation Exercises ....................................................................................................... 185
  War Games: Outward Bound Exercises Take a Dramatic Turn. .................................. 185
  Making a Drama Out of a Crisis ..................................................................................... 187
Aesthetics ......................................................................................................................... 191

Chapter 5 ............................................................................................................................ 197
The Act of Work-Based Learning ..................................................................................... 197
  Connections Between Participatory, Actor-Based Theatre and Learning Theory in the Context of the Workplace .............................................................................................. 197
Drama at Work: Learning in the Knowledge Economy and a World of Accelerating Change ................................................................................................................................. 198
What is Learning? .............................................................................................................. 201
Behaviourism ..................................................................................................................... 204
Cognitivism ....................................................................................................................... 206
Constructivism .................................................................................................................. 209
  Social Constructivism ...................................................................................................... 212
Situated Learning ............................................................................................................... 214
Adult Learning Theories ................................................................................................. 215
Connections Between Identity, Habitus and Learning ..................................................... 216
Experiential Learning Theory .......................................................................................... 220
Social Cognitive and Self-Efficacy Theory ....................................................................... 225
Mind the Gap: Exposing dissonance between theory and practice ................................ 229
Learning and Intelligence ............................................................................................... 230
What Type of Learning is Taking Place? ......................................................................... 234
Learning to Reinforce or Change the Status Quo ........................................................... 237
  Learning and the Status Quo .......................................................................................... 237
  Learning and Change ..................................................................................................... 238
The Problem of Transfer of Learning ............................................................................ 239
Conclusion – The Act of Learning ................................................................................... 242
## Chapter 6

The Impact of Actor-Based Applied Theatre: Lessons in the Evolving Language of Work and the Expansion of Work-Based Literacy ................................................................. 245

### Introduction .................................................................................................................. 245

Organisations and Interpersonal Communication .................................................................. 246

Interpersonal Skills ............................................................................................................. 247

The Act of Leadership ........................................................................................................ 250

Leadership as a Social Process .......................................................................................... 251

Leadership, Empowerment and Hegemony ....................................................................... 254

Social Constructionism and the Role of Discourse in Change Processes ............................. 258

Metaphors as Ways of Seeing ............................................................................................ 263

The Paradigm Shift From Machine to Organic Network ....................................................... 265

Metaphorical Images of Organisations and Their Impact on Behaviour. ............................. 267

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 273

  A Social Model of Leadership ............................................................................................ 274

  Access to Discursive Channels .......................................................................................... 275

  Organisational Change ..................................................................................................... 276

### Summary and Conclusion .............................................................................................. 279

The Actor .......................................................................................................................... 281

The Participant .................................................................................................................... 283

The Organisation ............................................................................................................... 285

Problems and Possibilities .................................................................................................. 286

### Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 289