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Reasons to be cheerful: Resilience, structure and care-fulness in socially engaged practice.

In this paper, I will return to the research I conducted in 2012-2013, with Dr Katharine Low, into the teaching of socially engaged theatre practice. In this study, we considered the burgeoning opportunities to study Applied Theatre at MA level, and compared this with the pathway that many practitioners take, that of apprenticing themselves to more experienced practitioners, and/or just ‘diving in’. Considering questions of resilience, I will examine the ways in which practitioners can learn from, challenge and support one another. Drawing from filmed interviews with experienced practitioners who had not studied Applied Theatre, as well as from interviews with students I will explore the ways in which exchanges of learning can criss-cross generations of artists, often disrupting notions of experience and ‘eldership’, but sometimes confirming them. Drawing also from my own survey, ‘Reasons to be cheerful’ (2014) I will attempt to identify the aspects of the work that keep people going for often long working lives in socially engaged practice. While this survey revealed a dominant sense of satisfaction and nourishment for the artist, this needs to be set against awareness of what, in the 2013 study, one Lecturer in Applied Theatre described as a ‘vortex of anxiety’ evident in students as they began to unpick and explore complex ethical issues and precarious and sometimes dangerous contexts. Ahmed’s critique of binaries of oppressor-oppressed in Freire and Boal’s writing provides a frame through which to propose a complex web of teaching and learning, resistance and creativity, which supports artists and their collaborators.

<https://www.cssd.ac.uk/research-projects/how-do-we-teach-socially-engaged-theatre-practice>

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