

## Chapter 4

“This Island’s Mine”: How theatre-making and disability awareness can inform equality, diversity and inclusion in Higher Education teaching. <1>

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### Abstract <3>

Despite an abundance of schemes in higher education, disabled students experience disadvantage. In general, the academy takes its lead from equality legislation and establishes specialist teams to address ‘access’, placing access plans and agreements at the heart of disabled students’ experiences. This chapter problematises this approach with reference to critical disability studies. Through a detailed description of a workshop run by the author on post-colonialism and *The Tempest*, new ways of working are examined. He proposes that the achievement of excellent teaching for all can mirror the best inclusive theatre practice, where access is built-in rather than bolted on.

### Prologue – Setting the Scene <2>

Before the action of the class starts, I prepare the space. I’m lucky; I’m in a studio. There is no fixed seating and I have thirty minutes to prepare. Typically, when teaching in a UK university, the space is preconfigured in ‘sage on the stage’ mode (King, 1993) where banks of students face the font of wisdom. You’d be fortunate to have a five-minute turnaround.

This, however, is a ‘black box’ studio with some audio-visual equipment. The lack of natural light is compensated by the ability to control lighting. I can project images and I can play music. There are walls which I can reimagine, including moveable theatrical drapes. I have enough chairs for participants and a trestle table. I get to work. I have prepared a sign – deciding it will be handwritten. Cued by Harrison Owen (2008) and his advice about setting up Open Space Technology I appreciate that handwritten signs are friendlier, more welcoming and less corporate than something printed. The sign outlines the central question of the workshop: ‘How does understanding global issues affect our work on play texts?’,

written purposely in Plain English. I could have written: ‘An exploration of post-colonialism in *The Tempest*’, but it was important not to present a barrier of assumed knowledge. I have, after all, responded to students expressing their alienation from theory courses, who have told me that terminology and lack of familiarity with the canon present barriers for them. I have prepared something typed, but it is projected: the lyrics to Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song*. I scatter the chairs around the space randomly. I place other materials for work later in the session on the trestle table – pens, paper, masking tape, exercise books (for students that want to jot something down). I arrange the materials like a buffet, as if I’m setting up a party. I want the space to be convivial, to spark curiosity and to encourage conversation and creativity. Just before my guests are due to arrive, I play *Redemption Song* on repeat and realise that no matter how much you prepare, the value of the event will always be an act of co-creation with others. This triggers the good kind of performance anxiety I’ve experienced many times before a show. Teaching is performance; students are audience-participants who alternate between moments of reception and creation. Teaching space curation is often unexamined in universities, but as a dramaturg I can’t help but consider how time, colour, light, sound, image and text combine to set the scene. In a perfect world, I’d take smell and taste into account too, like a nervous house-vendor baking bread and brewing coffee before prospective buyers arrive. However, College rules state that no food or drink (except water) are permitted in this studio and I didn’t have the wit then to create a more welcoming smell with, say, essential oils.

In a way, this is a meta-chapter. Dramaturgy is both its core theme and informs its form. The paragraph above is analogous to the lead up to the performance itself. The meaning of any event is circumscribed by the journey to it. Just as a show’s impact depends on the crowd’s buzz in the foyer, so a class depends on the institution’s atmosphere and the

set-up of the teaching space. Correspondingly, this chapter has an opening that intends to welcome you the reader; it aims to intrigue so you'll read on. What immediately follows in this section acts as a prologue; providing you with a map for your journey, a sense of the themes and narrative to follow.

Dramaturgy is a notoriously slippery term, with broad applications. This is partly complicated by the dramaturg's role: in many theatre contexts it is discreet, with functions ranging from critical friend, to researcher to in-house philosopher (Turner & Behrndt, 2008). In practice, acts of dramaturgy are performed by many creatives, and are chiefly concerned with *composition*, arranging the different elements of performance. There are many principles that can govern dramaturgy. This chapter's structure and my own theatre-making practice, are concerned mostly with what Fiona Graham (2017) terms the 'concatenate pole' of dramaturgy, supporting the Aristotelian view that narrative structure is the drama's most important element.

I use the assorted elements to compose a journey for my audience/students. I want that journey to have a shape; a beginning, middle and end. I realise also that assumptions about audience may fit awkwardly with the notion of the active learner. However, audiences are never passive. Indeed, my own theatre-making has been informed by the work of theatre/drama practitioners such as Augusto Boal (1979) and Dorothy Heathcote (2015), who place interactivity at their practice's heart.

My dramaturgical approach to teaching is also influenced by Disability Studies. Drawing particularly from Swain and French's (2000) formulation of the affirmative model of disability I see benefits in disability consciousness for creating profound learning

experiences. This means that inclusive practices are built into teaching's design, rather than bolted on following individual adjustments. There is an obvious parallel here with the 'aesthetics of access' as articulated by Jenny Sealey of Graeae Theatre Company (Sealey and Lynch, 2007) and now widely practised by artists such as Jess Thom and Rachel Bagshaw and companies such as Cardiff's Hijinx. Here, elements such as audio description, sign language, captioning and a relaxed environment suitable for neuro-diverse people are woven into performance. In setting the scene for my class, the creation of a 'soft opening' was informed particularly by the movement for relaxed performance in theatre. This challenges many of university teaching's orthodoxies: the start time is relatively fluid; students can come and go as they please; they can interrupt; and they can participate at a level where they feel comfortable – including just observing rather than actively participating if that's their choice. Of course, for the class to maximise learning, I want the students to engage actively. So, it is my responsibility as the teacher-dramaturg to create a compelling and engaging journey for them.

This chapter's dramaturgy follows a classic three act structure. Act One parallels the script writer's notion of the 'inciting incident'; the impetus being to find better ways to teach students with hidden disabilities. Therefore, Act One harnesses the 'social model' of disability (Barnes, 2012) to analyse the barriers that those students face, particularly regarding conventional approaches to teaching theory. Act Two, characteristically the longest act of a traditional play, explores possibilities. I posit a different approach to designing teaching by digging more deeply into underpinning disability theory. This was the foundation for the practical experiment of *The Tempest* workshop itself, which I'll describe and analyse as it unfolded. Act Three will, as Dorothy Heathcote (2015) describes it, drop

‘from the particular to the universal’, seeking to name general principles underpinning an inclusive dramaturgy approach to university teaching.

Having set the scene and introduced our journey through a prologue, let us open the curtain on Act One.

### **Act One: What is: the managerialist-adjustment model <2>**

Caliban’s famous speech in *The Tempest* starts with the bold declaration: “This Island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, /which thou takest from me” (Shakespeare, 1999). This resonates not just with colonialism but with other thefts of rights. If we consider education as a colonised island, a case can be made that disabling barriers constrain and limit the non-normative student. Caliban goes on to declare that Prospero originally showed him kindness and even taught him “... how/to name the bigger light, and how the less, /that burn by day and night.” However, Prospero’s teaching came at a cost to Caliban, imprisoned in “this hard rock, while you do keep from me/the rest of the island.” In the neoliberal university, disabled students are attracted, recruited and offered support from disability-specific schemes, but still have lower levels of achievement and participation (Office for Students, 2019). There may not be segregated ‘special needs’ provision in universities, but *integration* is on non-disabled terms, and should not be confused with *inclusion* (Leite, 2012).

The social model of disability was a breakthrough in Disability Studies, particularly in the UK, as it identified the dominant medical model that emphasises normalising and curing disability, proposing instead a human rights focus on the physical and attitudinal barriers

society creates, preventing disabled people from full participation (Barnes, 2012). The social model has been critiqued and expanded but analysing disabling barriers remains a useful tool in addressing educational disadvantage. Ironically, the language of ‘access’ and ‘adjustment’ driven by equalities legislation reflects a generally agreed shift to social model thinking by the academy, but the universities’ measures are experienced as barriers by many disabled students mainly because they need to wrestle with bureaucracy. As Magnus and Tøssebro state: ‘... when applying for supports the individual will always run the risk of being met with suspiciousness and rejection, to be considered not deserving’ (Magnus & Tøssebro, 2015, p320). While mechanisms such as reasonable adjustment agreements are well-meaning, they tend to address physical barriers rather than the more complex area of disabling attitudes and psychological barriers arising through how disabled people experience ableism. While disabled students still struggle for concrete adjustments, there are discernible access improvements: a wheelchair user may have improved physical access to teaching spaces; a Deaf student to signing and captioning; a blind student to text-to-speech software; and a dyslexic student to their readings printed on coloured paper. Even without these measures, and despite financial arguments excusing lack of access, there is usually agreement that disabled students should have these concrete adjustments put in place ... when time and resources permit. Typically, however, few core studies incorporate as role models the work generated by disabled people. Furthermore, in, say, literature or theatre studies, rarely are representations such as Dickens’ Tiny Tim or Shakespeare’s Richard III systematically critiqued from a disability perspective. Disabled students’ peers and teachers may also unwittingly display unconscious bias: a chronically ill student may be perceived as lazy; a student with ADHD is criticised for talking too much; a Deaf student must navigate an ‘eyes-closed visualisation’ exercise.

When I was considering how to improve disabled students' experience at Goldsmiths, it was quickly clear that the vast majority of disabled students had what are frequently termed 'invisible disabilities'. Indeed, all the Reasonable Adjustment Student Agreements (RASAs) produced for undergraduates in my department, Theatre & Performance, for 2020-2021 indicated that all our disabled students declared 'invisible disabilities'. These were mostly concerned with neurodiversity (46%) – a term which I use to include dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autism - or mental health (50%). The Office for Students (2019) recommends that universities and colleges respond to the needs of disabled students by adopting the social model of disability. While its terminology broadly aligns with that model, closer examination reveals characteristics aligning more with medical model thinking. Diagnosis and medical evidence are mandatory for obtaining 'reasonable adjustments'. Documents are framed by outlining a 'condition' or 'disorder' to be verified by people Vic Finkelstein terms as 'professions allied to medicine' (Finkelstein, 2001, p7). The adjustments can be read therefore as a 'cure' to a 'problem'; a way to normalise impairment. Indeed, there is now a standard menu of adjustments purporting to adequately address needs such as considering assignment deadlines, recording lectures, allowing for lateness/absence and alerting lecturers not to put a student 'on the spot'. This is what Sheila Riddell and Elisabet Weedon refer to as 'managerialist methods' to tackle disability inequality (Riddell and Weedon, 2014, p39). I argue that most university disability access processes reflect a 'managerialist-adjustment' model.

Are, however, disabilities as 'invisible' as claimed? Certainly, neurodiversity often presents as behaviour deemed aberrant in traditional academic settings and is often coterminous with episodes of mental distress. Clearly, for example, Jeff Gawthorpe's description of his ADHD symptoms while a student, shows that his 'invisible disability' would have been apparent:

I've been to GPs dozens of times both exhibiting and describing the core symptoms of ADHD: racing mind, inability to relax, fidgeting, feeling overwhelmed, terrible sleep quality, anxiety, and treatment resistant depression. (Beckett, 2017)

Despite adjustments, a student with these experiences is often unable to suppress their manifestations. Moreover, the act of trying to suppress behaviours to appear 'normal' is likely to worsen poor mental health. Correspondingly, a student with a fluctuating chronic health condition such as inflammatory bowel disease or diabetes will have their stamina and cognition impaired at different times. The structures of university life, governed by timetables, deadlines, preparatory reading, scholarly writing conventions and often complex navigation of rooming arrangements, present barriers to full participation. There is a presumption that the prototypical student will easily navigate these default organisational arrangements and that what is needed is adjustments to the status quo. The managerialist-adjustment model is therefore a 'bolted on' approach, requiring the non-normative, disabled student to conform to institutional norms, often in ways that are not possible for them.

Unsurprisingly, students with 'invisible disabilities' will feel pressured to appear 'normal'. There are stigmas (Goffman, 1990) clearly associated with these disabilities, which UK studies confirm leads to the added barrier of fear of disclosure (Ridell and Weedon, 2005; Stanley, et al., 2011) with most students, according to Jennifer Marie Martin (2010, p259) not disclosing their mental health issues to university staff. This shows that the roughly one in eight of Goldsmiths' Theatre & Performance students who officially declare a mental health condition to gain reasonable adjustments is likely to be significantly underestimated.

Dramaturgical performance analysis can further examine disabling barriers in typical university learning experiences. Whitmore's (Whitmore, 1994, p16) semiotic approach shows that an audience constructs or decodes a performance's meaning depending on, for example, their education, cultural heritage, social experience, mood, physical impairment, and concentration ability. Audience members and learners approach events with their own individual 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss and Benzinger, 1970, p8). For many educators, this means designing classes so that learning is appropriately differentiated. By contrast, the dramaturg will take a less individualised approach, aiming to build a sense of community based in shared identity, friendship and celebration - key elements for students' university experience. Consideration of these elements is missing in the managerialist-adjustment model of disability, as disabled students navigate the added barriers of stigma, disclosure and the emotional labour of burdensome bureaucracy.

Analysing the scenography of typical lecture theatres (that almost always, ironically, constrain theatricality) reveals a specific learner-teacher relationship: the teacher-performer presenting to receiving students; the plethora of electricity points for laptops; the neutral-coloured walls with little stimulus; fixed seating; the ubiquity of PowerPoint. The space beyond the lecture theatre is often unwelcoming too, particularly for neurodiverse students: the signage can be confusing; the noise and bustle unnerving; and the 'cost-effective' turnaround times between lectures tight.

Many lecturers know how to provide narrative shape to the given time for a learning experience, typically just short of an hour. This is often hampered by the notion of 'delivering learning outcomes' – terminology that is rarely problematised. The 'delivery'

aspect assumes that the lecturer's primary role is akin to the postal service: deliver the 'learning outcome' package to the doorstep. The reception of the 'outcome' is the primary, highly problematic, metric by which successful teaching is often measured. If the 'learning package' is not received, it is arguably not always the fault of either lecturer or student, but a systemic problem baked into an inadequate pedagogy.

By contrast, concatenate dramaturgy is contingent on an emotional journey where a diverse audience reaches plot points together. Teaching theory, intellectual insights can be treated as analogous to plot points, each building on the last. If significant numbers of students do not grasp key insights, their experience will be frustrating and might even activate anger. This frustration can be compounded by the need to bring prior knowledge to the learning experience, most often in the form of preparatory reading. Here, many students experience the barrier of unfamiliar terminology, which is particularly problematic for, say, dyslexic students and those whose focus and concentration is affected by their impairment. If the drive to 'deliver learning outcomes' means that a lecturer feels compelled to embed challenging preparatory reading, a parallel can be seen with an audience member's first bad experience of Shakespeare where it was assumed they were already familiar with the text.

The question then arises: if the managerialist-adjustment model does not adequately enshrine students' disability rights, is there a more inclusive approach?

## **Act Two: What if theory was taught using the principles of inclusive dramaturgy? <2>**

As Clarissa Hope Lynch states in her interview with Jenny Sealey (Sealey and Lynch, 2007, p62): 'Access is embedded in every production to enable accessible performing and

spectating' through a multi-sensory narrative of spoke/signed languages and visual/aural technology. In relaxed performances, audience members can arrive and leave, and involuntary sounds are incorporated spontaneously. These examples show how artists go beyond the social model of disability, with its emphasis on addressing an ableist deficit, and are more aligned to the principles of universal design (Center for Universal Design, 1997) and Swain and French's 'affirmative model' of disability.

Swain and French (2000, p569) describe the affirmative model as depicting non-tragic, positive social identities which address 'the limitations of the social model through the realisation of positive identity encompassing impairment, as well as disability'. Their affirmative model shows that being disabled brings benefits to the learning experience. This is clearly the case for neurodiverse students, often adept at the kind of divergent thinking that can deepen conceptual learning. Again, artists can signal new ways of thinking. Benedict Phillips' (2005) work centres on his experience of dyslexia and includes his 'lexic to dyslexic dictionary'. His performance piece *The Agenda of the Aggressive Dyslexic* (Phillips, 2020) has taken his practice to higher education. In witnessing Phillips' residency at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, fellow neurodiverse artist, dyspraxic dancer/choreographer Abi Watson (2019) described how Phillips reversed the medical and deficit discourse of dyslexia by conceiving of memory as a coil of cassette tape and emphasising the strengths of three-dimensional and visual thinking.

People experiencing poor mental health can also frame their experiences more affirmatively in learning environments. Perhaps more so than in other areas, students experiencing poor mental health are locked into the medical model of disability; it is challenging for them to accept fluctuating conditions when they want to return to earlier times without mental

distress. They are often caught in dualistic thinking about their identity, between hoping for a permanent state of being 'well' and fearful that their mental health status is their defining characteristic. Again, arts practice can illuminate more inclusive ways of working. Rather than looking to erase students' experience, or exposing them to the pressures of disclosure, the teacher can encourage a more nuanced sense of identity as part of the group. In theatre studies and other arts practice, a collective identity as artists can be useful. Hui et al. (2019, p297) praised the benefits of the non-medical and non-stigmatising environment of a community arts and mental health project, where 'people may perceive themselves more positively, and develop a sense of belonging through their artistic activities'. Artists can bring elements of autobiography to their work, while maintaining agency over their level of disclosure. Teachers must therefore create a safe environment, with clear confidentiality boundaries, opening invitations that validate personal stories as a key part of learning and without pressure for students to disclose.

For teachers, the next step is to design university learning experiences informed by the innovations of disabled and community artists (often we are both) where, as Glass, Meyer and Rose (Glass, et al. 2013, p107) assert; 'The arts push us to recognize and consider the multiple, flexible ways in which people learn and interact with the world'.

The concept of 'universal design' complements the affirmative model by moving on from the social model. The concept was first developed by designers, architects and engineers as 'the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design' (Center for Universal Design, 1997). Universal design therefore negates the necessity for disabled people 'to "declare" a disability for a socially just, respectful and adaptable workplace, leisure facility or educational institution to emerge' (Brabazon, 2015, p26).

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## **Returning to the studio <2>**

Over ten minutes, six students come into the studio in ones and twos. I have invited all students, but especially encouraged those that self-define as disabled. Of the six, five identify as being neurodiverse and/or experiencing poor mental health; one is non-disabled, but interested in experiencing a more inclusive approach to teaching. There are students here that identify as dyslexic, dyspraxic and ADHD, with mental health diagnoses that include PTS, eating disorders, anxiety and depression. As host, I greet them, prompt talk about *Redemption Song* and point out the lyrics projected on the wall. They either sit or stand, moving chairs around to configure relaxed conversations. I ask them if they know the song; they all do and know it's about slavery. We talk about the line: "emancipate yourself from mental slavery". Christine says that for her the line is about: "recognising your family, your background, will have some very ... difficult history. Terrible things have been inflicted on you, back generations. But also good things. Don't let the shadows rule your mind." There's a murmur of recognition.

When we've settled, I point to the handmade sign on the wall: 'How does understanding global issues affect our work on play texts?' and ask if they will agree to discussing this question for the next couple of hours. I remind them of the ground rules we've agreed in previous sessions: that this is a relaxed space, people can come and go; that there are no right answers; that we're primarily looking at a practical way to explore theory ... but not to worry about that for now. I always start in a circle, so we gather our chairs. Although

I'm leading, I want to establish a sense of parity. As the session progresses, I know that I will also take part. Personal stories will play their part in our exploration of the topic.

Pedagogically, I take a cue from bell hooks (1994, p186) and her analysis of teachers sharing their experiences: 'Sharing experiences and confessional narratives in the classroom helps establish communal commitment to learning'. I frame this simply by saying: "I won't ask you to do anything I'm not prepared to do myself." It is important for me to be open about my own positionality – after all, we are talking explicitly in this session about race, and our mutual interest is disability. I am a cis, white, straight, middle-class man – so already, there are potential tensions in terms of building trust and rapport with a group where none of the participants share all these characteristics. However, I am a disabled Jew. This is an intersectional identity which I can partly conceal. I am open from the beginning of the workshops about my disabled identity as someone experiencing chronic illness. Although for some this would have become clear when I was undergoing radiotherapy and needed to walk with a cane, the barriers I experience are often hidden. My disclosures about chronic illness are important: I may experience periods of exhaustion; my diabetes can manifest in cognitive fog; and my stoma may mean a bag leakage where I must leave the room suddenly.

Disclosure is not just to create mutual recognition, but also to model the benefits of 'coming out' as disabled and the affirmative aspects of impairment. My Jewishness is also known to students, largely as they study my solo show *Wot? No Fish!!* (Braverman, 2013) and I don't suppress the mannerisms and Yiddish-inflected vernacular that is part of my personality.

A core aim of the session is to build what the theatre anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) would term *communitas*, a sense of temporary community. So, I ask an open and friendly question to the students in a circle: "how are things this week?" Barbara, whose communication style is fun and garrulous, launches into a monologue about their workload:

“I’m sooo stressed,” they say, “I’ve got two essays I’m totally lost with; I’m loving my practical project.” There are nods of agreement. Others pitch in about their workload too, with the core narrative that practical assignments are the “reward”, the essays are like “eating your greens”. This provides me with a natural segue into the main session. “I hope,” I say, “that by working practically this afternoon, we’ll blur the distinction with theory, but as you know, this is an experiment to see if these techniques work – so please let me know if there’s any terminology we use you don’t understand.” Just as an overture in a musical or opera, or the call and response rituals of stand-up comedy, traditional storytelling or rock gigs establish a community of attention, I judge that the group are now ‘in the room’. The disparate energies that inevitably form the beginning of any class have now been converted to a greater sense of common purpose. The welcoming environment and circle check-in have done their jobs, and we are ready to launch into the content. It may have taken half-an-hour for this to be established, but it is not time wasted.

I change the projection to a Peters’ projection map of the world, showing the true proportions of land masses. “Do you notice anything different about this map?” I ask. Initially, students comment that it “looks weird”, until someone says: “Britain looks small,” and so a conversation ensues about maps and how they affect how we think about nations, continents and cultures. Dominic adds that he has seen a map shown “upside down, which makes you think about how the North is assumed to be dominant.” We talk about the map that showed the British Empire in pink and how surprisingly large Kazakhstan is. I then invite students to recreate the continents on the floor of the studio with signs and masking tape. I say: “Let’s start by going to where we are now.” As a group we tightly cluster on the tiny patch that is the UK. Without making it explicit through words, we are experiencing being on the margins of a much bigger world. Because the exercise requires us to be tightly huddled, this exercise

has a sense of intimacy. As Drama students, the group is comfortable with touch – I make a mental note that not all groups would find this easy and that this first physical exercise could, in other circumstances, jeopardise group cohesion. Then I say: “Now move to where one of your parents was born.” The group scan the floor-map and I can see them considering which parent to choose. Christine, Dominic and Barbara stay in the ‘UK’, trying in a tight space to distinguish different regions. I join Christine in what we decide is London. Dominic places himself a fraction ‘north’ of us in Sheffield; Barbara stakes a claim for a slightly westward Devon. Meanwhile, Eva has found ‘Poland’, Zac has gone to ‘Hong Kong’ and Sofia to ‘Thessaloniki, Greece’. Already fragments of family stories are emerging. Barbara, so often the initiator, says her mum is still in rural Devon and can’t understand why Barbara will “never go back there”; she’s a confirmed Londoner now. I chip in that my identity is pure East London, but my Mum, although born in Hackney, migrated across the North Circular Road to a leafy suburb when she was a child (I use the term migration ironically, but deliberately). Zac says his mum came from Hong Kong, but his dad is Indian. It was a difficult choice where to place himself for the exercise, but his mum talks more about her ‘homeland’, Dad is reticent about his life in India. Eva, new to London, in contrast to Barbara, finds herself feeling “like a foreigner”, despite London’s diverse communities. And so, the stories of family tumble out; there are nods of recognition and gentle prompts for people to amplify. We then expand the exercise across past generations. We go to where our grandparents came from, and great-grandparents. We find out that part of Christine’s family were the Windrush generation, another branch came from India too – she has this in common with Zac, to their mutual surprise. Christine, it transpires, is encyclopaedic about the patterns of her family migration. She tells us how part of her family wasn’t “originally from Jamaica”, that they’d been taken as slaves from West Africa. “Old pirates, yeah, they rob I!” Sings Dominic. We laugh, recognising a connection made. I tell the group how my great

grandparents came from different parts of the Pale of Settlement, including Poland.

However, as I move to Poland, I can see Eva is deep in thought. “No,” she says, “my great grandfather wasn’t in Poland a lot of the time. During the war, as a child, he was sent to Siberia.” She goes on to tell the family story of displacement, that her grandmother made a dramatic return to Poland, but that she was told that her great-grandfather had a terrible childhood, torn away from his home. “Until now,” she says, “I thought I was the only member of my family ever to move from Poland – but, no, you see, I’d forgotten about my great-grandfather!”

We then shift the focus of the game from the past to the future. We visit places where we wouldn’t like to end up and discuss why, say, Afghanistan or Columbia are considered dangerous. We visit places we’d like to live and discuss why the USA is so often perceived as a ‘promised land’. At each phase of the exercise, I give the stories and opinions space to breathe. The group are exploring communalities and difference, unwittingly discussing their sense of place and, underpinning it all, within each story we start to understand that geopolitics has had a huge effect on our sense of self.

We shift back into a circle formed across ‘the Equator’, dropping from the particular to the universal (Heathcote, 2015). This is a playwrighting reflex, as well as fundamental to Heathcote’s process drama. Good plays have strong controlling ideas, which thoughtful dramaturgy brings subtly to the surface, so the flow of characters’ emotional journeys isn’t unsettled by an ‘author’s message’. As an example, the moment in Arthur Miller’s (2013, p46) *Death of a Salesman* when the protagonist Willy Loman stoops to pick up his new, younger boss’ lighter, in one movement sums up the worker’s loss of dignity under capitalism. Kolb (1984), in another parallel between dramaturgy and teaching, alerts us with

his cycle of experiential learning to the way conceptual tools surface following concrete experience. It's worth noting here that traditional university teaching methods often start with concepts – which can so often be alienating - rather than having them *derive* from experience. I frame the discussion to look at the reasons people move around the globe; which are choices, which are desperate needs, which are forced? It's only then that we define colonialism, referring to the room around us as our map of the world. We see where European powers took control of other parts of the world, and how that intersects with our own stories.

Now is the time to introduce our play. I say we will look at *The Tempest*, but don't assume that students know the play. We move our chairs to face the screen and, in role as cinema-goers, watch a short, animated version of *The Tempest* story. We split into pairs and I invite the group to work now as actors, preparing to perform the short section of the second scene of the play where we first meet Caliban, starting with the famous "This island's mine..." speech. Despite being Drama students, I'm aware that some members of the group could feel unsettled by the text and the job of reading aloud. Each pair has their own separated space, and they are invited to find any position they find comfortable to read the passage. I chunk the exercise into stages. Firstly, "just have a read together," I say. I float between the groups. If they are tripping up over unfamiliar language, I lightly coach them. Then I call them to attention to think about the power relationship between Caliban and Prospero; they are to mark up their scripts with status numbers between 1 and 10 to explore the power dynamics. One pair says this is a difficult task; isn't Prospero always a 10 and Caliban always a 1? It's then that we discuss the role of interpretation; that they can experiment with different power differentials. We acknowledge that, hugely problematic as it is, Prospero is threatened by Caliban's alleged attempt to "violate the honour of" his daughter, Miranda.

We discuss parallels, that those in power feel threatened by, as one student puts it, “dilution of their precious gene pool”. Having marked up scripts in this way, we shift into performance mode. The scene is projected so there’s no need for script in hand. As pairs try out the scene, the others become audience-directors. The key question is: what meaning can we generate from this text? Zac says he’s fascinated by Caliban’s last line in the section: “the red plague rid you for learning me your language.” “I resonate with that,” he says, “I feel that I’ve been denied my real language.” He expands. “Well, in drama we have to do this – read Shakespeare – learn all that. My form is hip-hop, but it’s not seen as proper drama.” A thought then occurs to me. I ask the group if they mind if we look at something else, something not in my lesson plan. So, we return to our cinema-goer formation and I show Jonzi D’s (2015) TED talk. In his talk, Jonzi starts with the provoking question: “Why is hip-hop not part of the national curriculum for performing arts?” He goes on to discuss his own journey through hip-hop performance; his encounters with dominant Western dance forms through his training; the fraught decision to turn down an MBE because of its imperialist connotations. At one point, he says: “I ended up leaving the London Contemporary Dance School with this body, this hip-hop body, colonised,” punctuating the end of this sentence with his arms posed in a ballet third position. The students erupt into laughter.

Our final practical exercise is to try out rehearsed readings of the scene. Each group scours the internet for images of colonialism, which they project as creative juxtapositions. The images include a white volunteer teaching children in India, a Union Jack flag and a bible. We talk about how these images could inform a production of *The Tempest* that brings out its post-colonialist themes. “What if Prospero’s book was a bible,” says Maria. As she speaks, I can see her contemplating the role of the missionary in colonisation.

Finally, presented almost as an afterthought, I project a couple of quotations from theory texts:

Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate  
(Said, 2003)

Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality - finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards.  
(Fanon, 2008, p9)

I ask: “If you now had to write an essay about post-colonialism and *The Tempest*, would you be able to link this theory to the meaning of the play in production?” The students all say that they have a grasp now and that an essay would be easier. However, having to read the whole text is still a barrier, it still feels like “eating your greens”. This tells me that the centrality of the scholarly text in university teaching will continue to be a barrier for these students. Nevertheless, the ideas have excited the group when unpacked practically and accessibly. We’ve made a start, but there’s more work to do.

### **Act Three – What Next? Being realistic in changing university teaching. <2>**

As Tara Brabazon (2015) suggests, a university can choose between a concept of universal design assuming a plurality of users at the outset, or a policy of retrofitting when disabling

features of a policy, idea or architecture are removed. Although Brabazon is primarily concerned with ‘architectures, ideas and policies’, by extension we can apply this thinking to teaching methodologies. Universal design would entail a change in thinking where the prototypical student is no longer non-disabled. This would challenge several shibboleths, particularly that theory is substantially ‘delivered’ through preparatory and follow-up reading. Alternative methodologies, where reading complements a much more multi-layered approach, would need to be employed by teachers who have, almost by definition, succeeded in navigating ableist systems. Applying universal design principles would entail substantial added labour for teachers with already heavy workloads, underpinned by a shift in their consciousness that questions fundamental pedagogic assumptions. Furthermore, the managerialist-adjustment model determines administrative structures too; access agreements have been enshrined as the primary practice to address disability equality. Retrofitting is therefore a more achievable first step to provide a gateway into embedding universal design principles in the future.

Inclusive dramaturgy offers useful tools for retrofitting existing courses. It can guide teachers through ways theatre-makers design events to simultaneously resonate with individual audience experiences and create *communitas*. Teachers can give greater consideration to creating a shared group identity by greeting students as ‘guests’, as we might an audience. The teaching space can be reconfigured with music played, senses of touch and smell judiciously used and convivial chat encouraged. Recognising that a class, like a play, takes the student on an emotional journey, teachers can find ways to validate personal testimony, shared safely and confidentially, with teachers prepared to share their own stories too. We can focus intellectual content towards deepening understanding of ourselves within the wider world, aiming for shared insights and pleasurable ‘light bulb’ moments, where the

class reaches the same point in the 'plot' together. Teachers can embrace more embodied learning experiences too, with exploration and articulation through image, poetry, sound and symbol, lifting ideas from the page and so motivating students to engage with their readings. In this way, we begin to address the psychological barriers to learning that so often result in anxiety, feelings of inferiority, shame, fear of disclosure and the anger that arises from exclusion.

The craft of dramaturgy is a complex consideration of how every element of performance combines to compose an experience, with the audience as co-creators. The best performance and teaching both generate a delicate balance of invitations for individuals to generate their own meaning and a celebration of community. The best performances and classes are also memorable; they come back to us for the rest of our lives, not as regurgitated facts, but as multi-dimensional lenses to better understand the world. As teachers, we often struggle to design experiences where students don't just grasp something fleetingly with the instrumental and temporary purpose of gaining the best possible grades, but that have the kind of lasting impact of the best performance. If we start to perceive disabled students affirmatively as co-creators that bring powerful divergent contributions, our teaching can inspire everyone in the room.

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