

# Voice in Radio



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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
References to the work of others has been cited and indicated  
throughout.

Jon Preston

Title page photos: **Participatory Community Radio** projects

## Abstract

“Voice in Radio” is a practice-based thesis. It reflects on a series of participatory media projects involving community groups and secondary school students working together to produce radio shows. The thesis offers an analysis of those projects through the academic prism of ‘voice’, a term defined in both the personal and socio-political senses. Further, it reflects on the possibilities for voice offered by Participatory Community Radio (PCR) practice. Having devised and led this practice, I occupy the position of a ‘reflexive practitioner’ in the study.

The thesis is presented as a linear narrative: through PCR, a participant hears their own physical voice as others do, externally; they first become accustomed to and then comfortable with the sound of their own voice; they gain agency, becoming able to vocalise their stories through the radio project work; they gain further agency through socio-political Voice as their work is aired in a series of radio shows.

The participant groups are from a selection of cohorts encompassing a ‘West Indian Senior Citizens Luncheon and Social club’, a boys’ secondary school, a hospice, an Arts school and a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The data presented were collected through a mixed methods strategy. Project work and participant reflections are offered, together with comments from associated professionals. This material features in both written and aural form.

The ideas of authors including Berry, Chomsky, Couldry, Coyer, Dowmunt, Mayo and Rodenburg are drawn upon to establish the project work within a framework for discussion. Conclusions are offered on the possibilities of PCR in a neo-liberal economic and cultural climate specifically in relation to empowerment, voice and exchange.

An hour-long audio CD accompanies the written thesis as an illustration of the PCR practice under review. Combined, these two elements offer an investigation into “Voice in Radio”.

## Acknowledgements

My first thoughts are of all the participants in PCR, whether or not they have featured in this final account of the work. I salute them for their bravery in stepping well outside their comfort zones. I also pay tribute to all those who assisted me in studio on these projects. Students, ex-students, staff from the Arts school and those from beyond all brought their skills and best efforts to the PCR work. And without the PCR work there would be no thesis. I thank the Arts school for supporting my study. And I thank Stuart, the Principal. His unwavering commitment to Arts education, and his positioning of Community work at its heart, offers a significant beacon of hope in an increasingly challenging economic and social climate. He fights for work like this, which helps us all lean into it.

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Finally, love and big hugs to my wife Alicia, who took up the slack in my absence, and to my children Solomon and Josette. Thanks for sharing me with 'Voice in Radio' for such a long time.

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<b>Audio CD</b> <b>“Voice in Radio”</b>	<b>Located inside the thesis back cover</b>
CD Track	Duration
1. The Luncheon Club and the Boys	19’13”
2. The Hospice	22’09”
3. The PRU	18’28”

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## Introduction

'Finding your voice is crucial to all of us. Being able to name and describe your world is the pre-requisite to being able to understand it, to re-imagine it and change it. This is power'

(Porter, 2007, p91)

**J** 'That piece, "this is how they see me, but this is who I am", what was it like writing that piece and then performing it?

**WI** It felt like we were saying who we are and telling people who don't understand... because people see us like 'op-outs' and like people who aren't no good to the community ...but when we tell them who we actually are and we're not just bad kids...it might make people change their mind about how they see us...

**J** How does it make you feel doing it?

**WI** It makes me feel like I'm showing people what I can do and what I can achieve rather than just being something that's never going to achieve anything really, yeah.'

(13 year-old PRU student and PCR project participant)

**Gt** 'If you don't have your *voice* then you don't have *yourself*. And these kids need to have themselves. They need to be in charge of themselves... so they have to learn to use their voice to be able to demonstrate resilience and to empower themselves.'

(Head of Site, KS3 PRU)

“Voice in Radio” is a practice-based thesis. It comprises an account of reflexive findings in relation to participatory radio project work, named as ‘Participatory Community Radio’ (PCR), and an hour-long audio CD to illustrate the practice itself.

The focus of the enquiry is ‘Voice’ as defined in both physical and socio-political terms. A framework constructed through the ideas of Freire, Brecht, Boal, Berry, Couldry, Chomsky and others will situate reflections on my PCR practice as it has developed over time. In reviewing a series of school-based participatory projects involving community partners, participant work and reflections will be offered as data alongside contributions from associated professionals and research notes from the field. As I occupy the position of both reflexive practitioner and embedded researcher within the thesis, the study also follows my development in both roles. Instrumental, methodological and ethical considerations will all be referenced, before concluding as to the possibilities offered by PCR in relation to ‘Voice’.

## **0.1 Background**

### The root

The first time I remember hearing my own voice back was from the tinny speaker of a Boots cassette tape recorder. I was perhaps six years old and it had been given to me and my sister for Christmas. My sister was younger, shyer and happy to let me take charge. Having pushed the required combinations of buttons and boldly introduced myself to a carefully positioned plastic microphone, I rewound the cassette, pressed play and waited with nervous anticipation. I didn’t recognise the voice that I heard but I knew it had to be me, given what it was saying. After a few more ‘takes’ I became more familiar with how I sounded and adapted my vocal delivery to suit the output from the machine. At the time, I was having some fun with new technology. Given my trajectory, first into radio broadcasting and then into secondary school teaching, I might now reframe those vocal experiments: At that tender age, courtesy of my mum’s generosity at Boots and my sister’s encouragement, I was embracing my public voice.

This anecdote only resurfaced for me during my post-graduate PhD study. Since embarking on this thesis I have been obliged to reflect in some depth upon my own practice as a 'radio teacher' and to situate that work in a wider academic context. It was through the process of developing my 'line of enquiry' that I remembered that first encounter with a recording kit. Reflecting on it enabled me to define my study area of interest: taking that first moment of public encounter with one's hitherto internally-heard voice as my starting point, I chose to explore the connection between voice in the literal sense and Voice in the socio-political sense.

### The route

In 2008 I began to consider studying for a PhD. At that point I had been an Arts school radio teacher for twelve years and prior to that a freelance radio broadcaster. Over the years I had developed an outward looking, 'community' aspect to my school radio work and was seeking further study. I approached the then 'PACE' (now STaCS) department at Goldsmiths and embarked upon a PhD research course with the broad aim of exploring my own work in more detail. Writing now in 2016, I still teach radio at the Arts school. My thesis study has morphed into a practice-based thesis and I feel able to define myself, for these purposes, as a scholar practitioner. This thesis will situate my participatory community radio (PCR) work within a theoretical context whilst also exploring it as a practice. Its narrative is underpinned by 'voice' and it will encompass exploration of two senses of that word, the physical and the socio-political. The specific type of work under review began in 2008, building on the wider practical radio teaching that I had been engaged with since 1996.

This is a practice-based thesis with the practice at its centre. Thus, from that first moment of hearing their voices back to their delivery of a radio show to an audience, the responses from project participants comprises a significant portion of the data upon which I offer my findings. I also include some extracts from a field diary and offer both content and feedback from participants in the practical submission on an accompanying CD. My radio broadcasting background has informed this audio piece and I have been keen to produce a practical submission that engages the listener as well as reflecting the practice.

My aim is for the writing and the audio, in combination, to offer food for thought as to the possibilities of Participatory Community Radio practice in relation to voice.

## **0.2 'Participatory Community Radio' (PCR)**

### A definition

Participatory Community Radio (PCR) is the term I have used to describe my practice. 'Participatory' because it sits within the field of 'participatory media' (Downmunt *et al.*, 2007); 'community' because it involves school-funded projects that bring in groups from the wider 'community', the participants of which are of groups defined by that institutional centre (the school) as such. These groups could also each be assigned more bespoke definitions of 'community' (Mayo, M., 2000) but for now I use the umbrella term as shorthand in this context; and 'radio' because the project work under examination involves that medium, both in production terms and in dissemination to an audience: thus **PCR**.

### The site for the work

The site for the work is the school, named here as the 'Arts school', in which I am employed as a full-time teacher. Within that timetable I have two hours a week reserved for Community Radio Outreach work, with the mandate to seek out and bring aboard community partners through radio work. The school has a centralised Arts curriculum, established as part of its founding ethos in 1991. Within that is a media department, through which radio production is delivered to Key Stage 4 (KS4) and Key Stage 5 (KS5) students as part of the school's curriculum. Additional to curriculum demands, the school has consistently responded pro-actively to increasing requirements from central government that schools engage with their local communities. Successive school principals have secured funding through initiatives such as 'London Challenge' and 'Leading Edge' to successfully support a comprehensive programme of community engagement projects. The environment of this particular school, its 'culture', is therefore open to visiting participants. Historically partners have included 'Special Needs' schools, old people's homes, adult day centres, a hospice, primary schools, a drug rehabilitation centre and many others. In short, the

school has a long and successful tradition of 'looking outwards'. It is within this institutional ethos that PCR work has been able to develop.

### The PCR project template

The projects under reflection all involve invited groups from 'the wider community' learning radio production skills onsite in the school's radio studios. Almost all of the PCR participants are new to radio production at the project outset and so the practice has to manage expectations whilst enhancing skill. 'Care' in the work is referenced in Chapter 2 but a short explanation here of the mechanics of the work seems useful.

A typical project cycle will run as weekly, two-hour sessions over six weeks. This time-frame allows for meaningful engagement from participants whilst taking into account other demands they will have in their lives. The initial commitment of six sessions has proved manageable for most and allowed for a reasonable level of technical instruction as well as the building of good working relationships within the project groups. Members of the groups may return more than once and, in some examples, participants have done a number of projects. The 'aim' of these projects may have evolved over time but the essence has remained constant: to 'skill-up' participants in radio production, with a final radio show at the conclusion of each project. The projects are structured and teacher-led at the outset.

In more detail, a typical project cycle may run as follows:

All project members assemble in a reasonably-sized radio studio room and sit in as much of a circle as is possible. A 'starter' at the beginning of each session involves participants and students introducing themselves and then talking to the group. In the first session this involves sharing 'three things about me' but as the weeks progress the starter exercise could be 'a challenge I met this week', or simply 'a word that describes how I feel now'. This exercise establishes the precedent of speaking aloud in front of the group, which is the first stage in sharing one's voice, and goes on to encourage exchange within the group.

The aim of the first project session is to foster engagement and a feeling of achievement in the participants. After the warm-up, a technical lesson quickly follows in which participants learn to drive the radio mixing-desk. This happens in two groups,

with all the participants rotating through the driver's seat. The initial task is to set up, play and cross-fade CD tracks. As confidence grows, more tasks are added so that by the end of a couple of these training sessions, participants will have driven the desk, presented on the microphones and used the record and playback computer. Another part of the participant process is hearing their voices back as quickly as possible and so, having learned the desk, they then rotate to drive and record as their colleagues perform pre-scripted jingles. This exercise also provides a quick and effective way to involve the students in a joint endeavour with the participants. Further, it also allows the participants to employ their new skills quickly to produce a tangible outcome, thus affirming their learning and fostering an immediate sense of achievement. By the end of the first session the group have new radio skills, on which they recap through a plenary, and jingles which we all listen to as an end-of session 'work-share'. Positive feedback about the sound of those voices is usually forthcoming from within the group and I will facilitate that if necessary, to encourage the participants as they begin to 'find their voice' in a radio context. Finally, sitting back in the circle formation as at the start of the session, each session has a 'debrief'. This is a space where participants can vocalise their feelings on their project experience and, if necessary, name any issues that may have arisen so that they can be addressed and resolved. It is most usually a space for the celebration of achievement, with a look ahead in preparation for the next session.

This pattern of skills-reinforcement and collaborative 'content creation' work with students is repeated in some way in each session, with the tasks becoming more sophisticated each week. For example, in week 2 the participants may practice a poem they have brought in to record and their student partner may help them with their vocal delivery. In a later session the pair will spend some time talking together about a list of topics, the content of which will form the basis for a longer recorded interview. As the final show approaches, radio scripts will be incorporated as the participants learn how to deliver a live show with the pre-recorded inserts and jingles they have created along the way. The penultimate week sees a practice or 'dry-run' of the full radio show and the final week is dedicated to that final live show. Participants will rotate their roles during the show, with each either driving or operating the play-out computer for pre-recorded inserts. All participants will also present live at some point

during the show. Students will act as 'shadows' or support and stand-in in the event of a participant being absent. CD copies of the show are distributed among the participants within a week or two, complete with a photo montage on the case cover of the group at work. Where possible, each participant features at least once in those pictures. By the end of a project, participants will have gained a working knowledge of basic radio production skills. They will also have experienced significant working partnerships, both within their own cohort and also with the student helpers, who have both supported their learning and shared meaningful communication with them.

There have been two main developments in the practice along the way: combining more than one 'community group' on a single project, initiated as an attempt to explore how effective the work might be in an inter-generational setting; and the increasing inclusion of Arts school radio students as helpers/participants in this work, as a way of extending 'exchange' once it had been established as viable with the pilot group, as reported on in Chapter 3.

### **0.3 The case studies in the thesis**

The three projects under evaluation involved: senior citizens from a West Indian Luncheon and Social club working with 12-14 year old boys from a local boys' secondary school (2009 – 2012); patients from a hospice working with Arts school students (2013 – date); and students from a Pupil Referral Unit, again working with students from the Arts school (2013 – date). The final shows from all three projects were broadcast live on the school radio station online during the project. In addition, some participants also joined the school's yearly radio broadcast, delivered to the local borough on FM through a Restricted Service Licence (RSL) and worldwide online. The original project shows were also repeated during the broadcast to a larger audience. Reliable FM listening figures are not available but online figures are measurable and confirmed an international listening audience in excess of 500 'unique listeners' for the school summer broadcast. This number excludes listeners from within the school itself. Participants also received a CD copy of their final show(s) at the end of each project which they then shared with family and friends as they wished.

## The chapters of 'Voice in Radio'

### 0.4 Chapter 1: Literature review

This chapter opens by following my reading journey around notions of community and alternative media, including references to broader community and participatory arts work, before focussing on the history and development of radio. It is noted that, from its earliest days, radio as a means of communication has existed within a tension: strategic control of its dissemination has been sought by power structures and resisted by individuals and smaller groups. Peter Lewis (1986) outlines the historical development of the medium in "Media Power – from Marconi to Murdoch" and in "A Passion for Radio", Bruce Girard (1992) offers examples of radio having a technical accessibility that allows it a particular democratic potential - radio being both more accessible for producers and more easily accessed by some consumers than TV or print. Thus, individuals and communities have utilised radio as a force for agency and empowerment for many decades and there is a well-documented history of its utilisation as a tool of both resistance and social change. I cite examples of the power of radio, utilised for both the good and the bad. I then locate my specific PCR practice within the development of radio as both a mainstream and community medium in the UK. Referencing these examples, I go on to propose that this transformative possibility of the medium can also empower individuals and 'communities' in a specific PCR context. Through my PCR practice and the accompanying data, I set out to demonstrate that the potential of radio to change lives exists in local projects as well as national struggles.

Exploring 'Voice in Radio' as the central theme, I will reference broader notions of 'voice' through practitioners including Cicely Berry, Patsy Rodenburg and Augusto Boal: Berry sees the physical voice as a representation of the person as a whole (Berry, 1994), whilst Boal places Voice within a more applied context of political agency (Boal, 1995). These two aspects represent the two narrative parts to my thesis: Hearing and owning one's "public" voice; and then sharing it within and beyond a participatory group, developing one's agency through voice. In addition, Nick Couldry places Voice in a socio-political media context (Couldry, 2010), which I will also use to frame my own

PCR practice; whilst Noam Chomsky and others celebrate the importance of alternative media as an outlet for the marginalised voice more generally (Chomsky, 2007). Chomsky's ideas, too, help contextualise my practice as I attempt to identify opportunities for voice within the PCR projects under review in this thesis.

## **0.5 Chapter 2: Research Methods**

As a teaching practitioner of some twenty years' standing, I have sought to empower student broadcasters with the tools they need to work in the radio industry should they so choose. More recently, as a reflexive practitioner in participatory community radio, I have been seeking to trace my journey in the field whilst simultaneously reflecting upon and extending my practice. I have found my position in the study evolving as I have attempted to reconcile the professional and self-imposed demands of leading projects as a teacher with the obligations of best-practice as an academic researcher. Having given of my best to both roles, it has become a hugely rewarding journey and I have learnt as much from my difficulties as I have from my successes in this dual venture.

Developing a research strategy, I employed a mixed-methods approach, starting with traditional data-gathering techniques by drawing on my knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods. I started with questionnaires, data from which elicited themes for further exploration. I was able to identify trends but I recognised the limitations of quantitative research in this context: I needed more qualitative detail on the stories behind the numbers.

Therefore on the back of this early quantitative research I began qualitative data-gathering, initially through semi-structured interviews. Data that subsequently emerged went on to inform my practice and I embraced the classic action research cycle of 'Action, Reflection, Modification' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Through extending my research methods, I hit a specific vein of inquiry around participant 'exchange' that helped with the development of my thesis work whilst, at the same time, extending my PCR practice. The two strands of the work, the PCR and the thesis, became symbiotic.

I continued to collect data through small focus group debriefs and much longer one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I ensured that the sound quality of the recorded data was high in order to both illustrate the practice and to facilitate the participant Voice as effectively as possible through the practical submission.

I had begun my study acutely sensitive to the potential academic conflicts in my being a teacher-practitioner-researcher. However, as I will expand on in this chapter, I felt increasingly justified in using my research skills in parallel with my developing practice to document this work: I came to view myself as a researcher-practitioner - in the right place at the right time for this particular project.

### **0.6 Chapter 3: Early practice and findings**

Prior to my thesis study I had engaged 'first-generation' elders from a 'West Indian luncheon and social club' in community radio work. The addition of boys from a local secondary school extended this process to include inter-generational exchanges. I embarked upon this first series of projects with the initial aim of 'airing the marginalised voice'. The idea was to train and empower a specific demographic group that had traditionally been underrepresented in the 'mediascape', (as I subsequently came to conceptualise it, through Dowmunt, 2007, p3). This was the focus of the work I was doing as I started my thesis.

Although the original driver behind this work was to broaden the radio programming on the school radio station I was running, as projects with this inter-generational group continued I became witness to unlikely yet highly successful collaborations. Data emerged that illustrated how participants 'found their voices' and also listened to each other. This listening formed an important part of the exchange and allowed for a broader understanding across a wide age gap. The emphasis at the time, in both the project and the subsequent data collection, was on 'generational exchange through participatory radio'. Through further reflection, the focus has been more specifically upon the exploration of voice and exchange through PCR.

## **0.7 Chapter 4: Voices from the hospice**

The successful airing of the marginalised voices from across the generations, with attendant positive feedback from listeners and participants alike, alerted me to a fuller appreciation of the potential of PCR work for empowerment and exchange. This next chapter reviews an important development in my Community Radio Outreach project work: hospice work. Seeing that exchanges could work effectively across a generational divide encouraged me to bring current Arts school students aboard this next series of projects, a potentially yet more challenging development.

I recognise that there are many important, diverse aspects to hospice work. I also note that there are often media representations around terminal illness that, however positive in intention, are still effectively defined by that illness. 'Hospice' carries taboo.

This PCR work offers another possibility: that the participants are engaged in a different type of exchange, sharing their stories and their current work with their new Arts school peers. This exchange between the two groups, the patients and the students, offers a deconstruction of the hospice taboo. In this chapter I offer data that suggests these marginalised voices gain agency through the Participatory Community Radio work. The accompanying background is that these voices, consigned to a terminal illness, are indeed in their latter days and so voice as archive is also referenced in the work. However, the focus in the chapter, as in this thesis, is on voice in the present.

## **0.8 Chapter 5: Voices from the PRU**

Having extended the intergenerational aspect of the PCR work through the hospice project, and emboldened by the successful integration of the school students in the work, I looked again at how to facilitate voice and exchange with another marginalised group. I found a cohort for whom voice was something to be reclaimed in a positive context: students at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). These school-excluded youngsters are marginalised voices with taboo and negative discourse abounding. They have voices that are often both utilised and heard in negative ways. These students are typically disenchanting and disengaged, having lost much both in their home stories and their

educational ones. I speculated that if there was a way for them to hear their voices differently and to experience different responses to their voices, both individually and socio-politically, these participants may be able to unlock their agency in a more positive way: they may find a different way to be heard.

This project maintained the idea of 'airing the marginalised voice' which underpinned each of the projects. In there too was the role of 'exchange' provided by the Arts school students. These two aspects combined again to offer the possibility of a positive exchange between two groups that was then relayed to a wider listening audience. However, the emphasis on audience shifted. Unlike the other two projects, the status of these PRU students was not made explicit to the wider audience. Therefore the de-stigmatisation and the allowance of possibility for these students were most obvious in relation to an informed circle of professionals and those in their family or social circle. Through this work there may be benefits for the participants in terms of self-advocacy, teamwork and listening but at its heart, this chapter is about reclamation of voice for these young participants.

### **0.9 Chapter 6: Linking the Voices in Conclusion**

This chapter summarises what PCR has to offer in relation to Voice and exchange in reference to the projects under review. Reflecting on all three projects it identifies commonalities and bespoke elements from each of them, linking these back to the relevant literature. Reviewing the work holistically offers an opportunity to explore these projects as valuable sites of voice and exchange.

### **0.10 Chapter 7: Final Reflections**

In this final chapter, I recognise how the evolutions of both my thesis and my practice have become intertwined. Articulated reflexively, I draw upon aspects of the 'learning journey' facilitated by my doing this thesis.

### **0.11 Practical submission**

This hour-long piece of audio on CD illustrates my PCR practice. Formed of three 20-minute sections, this 'sound submission' contains clips from project shows, feedback from participants and explanatory links from me to help contextualise these clips for the listener. Further, this audio submission may extend one aspect of the practice by offering the featured 'marginalised voices' to a new audience.

### **Summary**

Through this thesis I consider how Voice may be linked to empowerment and how unlocking Voice may unlock agency. I consider the evidence that may demonstrate radio as a technical and aesthetic medium within which this process can happen. In conclusion I reflect on the transformative potential of Participatory Community Radio; I draw a conclusion on the extent to which this participatory work can offer 'empowerment'; and I reflect on the role this type of work can play in linking those two elements of expression for participants, the personal 'voice' and the socio-political 'Voice'.

# Chapter 1: Literature Review

**Introduction:** This chapter traces my 'reading journey' as I attempted to find a broader academic context within which to site my Participatory Community Radio (**PCR**) practice. There were several points at which I alighted along the way, with some lines of enquiry discarded reasonably quickly and others carried through to help contextualise and frame the practice. I offer the journey chronologically here in order to explain how a focus around 'voice' emerged in this thesis.

## 1.1 Exploring 'Community'

My starting point was to explore the term 'Community Radio'. I began with the contested concept of 'Community': what does 'Community' actually mean and how might it be applied to radio?

I was introduced to the idea that the term 'Community' was linked to abstract concepts as well as physical or geographical locators: 'communities of identity', for example the Black Liberation movement, the Gay Liberation movement and Women's Liberation (Mayo, 2000). Even at this early stage of reading I found ideas relevant to my own practice. Mayo describes how community professionals aim to empower people to analyse their own needs and their own strategies, tagged 'cultural action for freedom', an ethos 'that has informed a range of community programme projects' (Mayo, 2000, p6). However, Mayo warns that 'workers within projects need to address the issue of their own identity – a critical awareness of self....Without this, they risk distorting their professional interventions with their own cultural assumptions...Such awareness is central to empowering practice,' (Mayo, 2000, p7). This immediately offered me a useful reference point in relation to my own role as a participatory media practitioner. The proposal to develop 'solidarity within difference' (Mayo, 2000, p48) further resonated with my Participatory Community Radio work, having 'exchange' between erstwhile separated groups at its heart. Mayo also notes that 'within communities there are people who are experts on their own situations: expertise that

can be enhanced through a range of initiatives such as community media initiatives' (Mayo, 2000, p34). This concept, too, would provide me with useful guidance as to how I might conduct the projects as they began to involve increasingly hard-to-reach cohorts. Having ascertained that communities can be grouped under brackets of 'interest' or 'need' as well as geographic location (Mayo, 2000, p39), and having explored some of the labelling within the broad term 'community', it followed that I might explore some of the labelling presently relating to forms of 'media'.

## **1.2 Situating PCR within a 'mediascape'**

### Alternative media

In his introduction to the *Alternative Media Handbook* (Downmunt, 2007), Downmunt works with two broad media labels: 'mainstream' and 'alternative'. He further notes that the primary aim of commercial media is to deliver audiences to advertisers or sponsors, and that even 'most non-commercial or publicly funded mainstream media are competing in the same market place and so their social functions tend to be distorted' (Downmunt, 2007,p.2). This broader context is further developed by both Chomsky and Couldry, as I will reference later in this chapter. However, Downmunt's definition of 'Alternative Media' was again immediately useful: 'the media produced by the socially, culturally and politically excluded' (Downmunt, 2007, p.3). He qualifies this by noting that 'complexities of relations between the radical and the mainstream have been significantly increased by the proliferation of digital media and the convergences offered by the internet. We now live in a '*mediascape*'" (Downmunt, 2007, p3), a term I was to find most helpful when placing the PCR work in a wider contemporary media context. His analysis places alternative media in relation to existing power structures but he recognises with it an aspect of autonomy, stating that 'all alternative media work exists and flourishes in the various spaces of 'relative independence' from, and negotiation with, institutional power', further arguing that 'a lot of alternative media activities are almost 'social movements' in their own right.' That 'the book is a conversation between theory and practice because the authors too believe that ultimately 'the answer lies in practice (Couldry, 2003b:41)' (Downmunt,

2007, p10) affirmed my belief that PCR work could have a relationship with academic discourse. In my attempt to place my own practice, it was a useful start.

### The arena of UK community radio

Kate Coyer outlines the progress of community radio in Britain, encompassing pirate stations alongside effective lobbying of the Community Media Association (CMA) for an opening up of the airwaves for local groups (Coyer, 2007). She concludes that 'it is important for communities to have access to the airwaves in our analogue now as well as our digital future.' (Coyer, 2007, p24). Given that 'airing the marginalised voice' was a key element in much of my radio work, both community-based and BBC network, I was able to situate this work within a longer narrative of the lobbying and campaigning undertaken by the army of practitioners of 'alternative radio' for a more democratic access to the airwaves. Coyer states 'the right to communicate is at the heart of democratic society. This includes the rights of 'citizens' to collectively or independently create their own media.' (Coyer, 2007, p.118). Furthermore she defines 'access' as meaning content and infrastructure: both producing different types of content and getting the airwaves opened up to allow distribution of that content to audiences. She notes that control or regulation of the airwaves is political, with commercial or public service institutions getting precedence over community groups here. Writing in 2007, Coyer was upbeat about the health of community radio in Britain, as Richard Barbrook had been 20 years previously. His manifesto for the development of community radio offers:

'What is subversive about community radio is the way it can challenge the division between broadcasters and consumers in our society....The radio station should educate its listeners so that they can themselves become contributors to programming. The ability to make specialist programming will provide focus for and contact within ethnic, cultural or political groups. A station based around one neighbourhood or appealing to one community can become a notice board' (Barbrook, 1985, p72).

This section of reading also offered me a reflection of what I was attempting to achieve through my radio practice. It helped situate my work, at least partly, within the broad field of 'community radio'.

### 1.3 Defining PCR work through a broader political framework

In the search for a wider philosophical framework in which to situate the PCR work, I found Hobsbawm's analysis of the accelerating process of globalisation as described by Mayo (Mayo, 1997, p2). 'In this developing 'global village' old patterns of human relationships were disintegrating.' Mayo proposes that 'conscious strategies for development for transformation and social justice require women and men with critical consciousness' (Mayo, 1997, p3). She introduces the need for the development of critical consciousness in individuals, named as Freire's concept of '*Conscientisation*' 'in order to take collective action for liberating forms of change' (Mayo, 1997, p3). Mayo continues that 'cultures of resistance form part of wider movements for adult community education to promote critical awareness and understanding. And cultures of resistance can contribute to building self-esteem and self-confidence in the possibility as well as the necessity for social transformation' (Mayo, 1997, p13). Outlining her approach to such 'Lifelong Learning', she advocates that 'it should be based upon active community participation and empowerment: bottom-up 'people-centred development', defining such an approach as 'transformational' 'because this would involve the fundamental transformation of economic, social, political (including personal) and cultural relations in society' (Mayo, 1997, p21). Mayo places this idea within the broader work of Freire, Gramsci and Gelpi, embracing the position that education should be utilised to empower 'learning participants' to be able to challenge seemingly all-pervading, existing hegemonies (Mayo, 1997).

Being a new reader to these ideas I was keen to apply them to my work. At that point I was involved with what I might describe as an education programme for a group of senior citizens from the marginalised demographic of first generation West Indian females. I further noted Mayo citing Freire: "The oppressed and exploited also need educators committed to processes of dialogue, between theoretical learning and experiential learning, between theory and reflective practice." (Mayo, 1997, p26). I would later attempt to apply Freire's concept of *Conscientisation* to the PCR project work in my reflexive writing and, although I couldn't name myself as such at the time, the 'educator' as described above would mirror my own transformation as I moved into action research.

I also encountered the contested area of 'participatory action research' through reading of a variety of projects designed to give local communities input or 'voice' in social policy initiatives (Nelson and Wright, 1994; Akilu, 1994; Townsend, 1994). Encountering debates around participatory approaches to international development and urban regeneration (Chambers, 1998; Bebbington *et al*, 2008; Gaventa, and Tandon, 2010) alerted me to a field that I felt may only be tangentially connected to mine but still resonated in its emphasis on attempts at meaningful community participation. At this stage then, I was exploring ideas and initiatives around 'empowerment' with the aim of relating them to my own practice. I was introduced to the contentious nature of participation (Mayo and Craig, 1995) as it might be championed by both the voluntary/NGO sectors and by international institutions such as the World Bank. Whilst community participation may be seen as 'part of a wider strategy to promote savings...and to shift the burden of resource provision away from the public sector towards communities' (Mayo and Craig, 1995, p4), there is also a perspective that argues in favour of this 'self-help' approach: that 'once empowered, poor people who had previously been relatively powerless could become agents of their own development. With the gift of knowledge, the powerless could gain the tools for self-reliance' (Mayo and Craig, 1995, p5).

Although I was looking to apply concepts of 'empowerment' to the experiences of participants on the radio projects, I could see the vastly different context within which my own work was happening. The radio projects were neither situated in an urban regeneration initiative nor part of a project aimed at addressing rural poverty. They were in the field of participatory arts work, to which I will return shortly. Nevertheless, I was still keen to explore the potential for empowerment within the radio project work under scrutiny.

On reflection, I was attempting to shape the theory to fit the practice. It is not an uncommon phenomenon, as I understand it (Becker, 1986). As you will both read and hear, there were certainly elements of empowerment present in the work, in particular personal empowerment. However I have also been able to critically assess limitations to the PCR work in regards to broader notions of empowerment, as discussed in subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, I do revisit Freire's Conscientisation

theory (Freire, 1972) as it might be applied to PCR in more detail again later in this chapter and review the suitability of that application in this PCR context during my penultimate chapter.

#### **1.4 Community Radio in a political context**

Having explored community and radio, the next leg of my reading journey was to look for examples of how radio might create, foster and affirm communities. My reading found the most vivid examples of these to be in pre-transitional political settings: work done by activists through radio in both the Philippines of former President Ferdinand Marcos and apartheid South Africa (Girard, c. 1992).

Radyo Womanwatch in the Philippines acted as part of a 'broad collection of organisations of concerned women' active in the last days of the Marcos regime during which they had to 'make use of each broadcast hour to reach out to women' (Sarabia, c 1992). The CASET Trust in South Africa distributed radio shows by means of a succession of recordings on cassette. This was activist radio by hand: cassette copies of ANC radio broadcasts were distributed by activists at rallies and meetings, subsequently being shared within communities. It was revolutionary radio by tape (Gorfinkel, c.1992) and an illustration of how radio can be disseminated to a compartmentalised audience whilst still retaining its impact.

These examples, and others (Browne, 2012; Coyer, 2006; Thomas, c.1992; Barbrook, 1985), are evidence of the ability of radio both to reach audiences in a direct way and also to unify groups in a joint purpose. Furthermore they illustrate the possibilities one might identify in the employment of radio in a localised, educational and 'community outreach' context. Thus, my early reading confirmed the long and effective history of radio as a tool for transformative action, empowerment and change in a wide variety of international settings. I will return to the story of UK Community Radio later in this chapter. However, at this early stage of my reading I was also keen to look for evidence of community project work that resonated with my own.

## 1.5 Participatory Community Arts project work

The 'junction' of community and the arts is a particularly busy one. My own history has included some 'Theatre in Education' (T.I.E.) work as a Drama undergraduate and I have engaged regularly as audience in alternative theatre work. Thus I returned briefly to literature around the use of theatre for constructive community engagement. An American text on community theatre written a century ago identifies the "banishment" (Burleigh, 1917, p xix) of stage footlights as facilitating the possibility for fundamental change in an audience and the hope that it marked the dawning of theatre 'as an institution of the people' (Burleigh, 1917, p xi). This manifesto suggests community theatre as 'a house of play in which events offer every member of a body politic active participation in a common interest' (Burleigh, 1917, p xi). In a more contemporary context, I was already aware of the long tradition of community engagement work within U.K. theatre, specifically the Albany Theatre in Deptford, The Bubble Theatre in Rotherhithe and the Theatre Royal Stratford East, all in London. I also knew of the historic work of the M6 T.I.E. Theatre Company in Bolton. Drawn as I was to exploring more specific examples from community theatre, (Gard and Burley, 1959; van Erven, 2001), at this point in my reading journey the main resonance for my work was in the participation from those who had little or no previous experience in the particular art form in which they would participate, whichever that may be. That said, my background in theatre study continued to inform my reading and I return to key political theatre practitioners later in this chapter.

A comprehensive report on Participatory Arts (Matarasso, 1997) offered a list of positive outcomes of such work, including claiming it as 'an effective route for personal growth, leading to enhanced confidence, skill-building and educational developments which can improve people's social contacts and employability' (Matarasso, 1997, vi). A number of these outcomes resonated with my pre-thesis observations on the benefits of PCR work for project participants. Although the complete list of positive outcomes cited by Matarasso in his summary (p.xi) are desirable to claim for the PCR work, the most obvious is associated with voice. 'For many adults we spoke to, one of the most important outcomes of their involvement in the arts was finding their own voice or, perhaps, the courage to use it. Indeed, 62% of adults said that the opportunity to

express their ideas through an arts project was important to them' (Matarasso, 1997, p17). This finding was a pointer towards concepts of voice as I would come to explore them. The case studies in Matarasso's report are many and varied, with sixty referenced in detail. They are situated across different arts fields and include an internet radio project in New York, USA; Museum outreach projects in Nottingham, one involving a reminiscence group with Afro-Caribbean elders; and the fèisean (Gaelic festivals) movement in North West Scotland (Matarasso, 1997, pp8-11).

This and other literature on participatory arts projects offered similarities with my practice in respect of the engagement and care of the participants. One example is the use of the circle for a music project group: "In a circle everyone is equal, people can't disappear and they have to engage with the activity" (Moser and McKay, 2005). A creative writing project in a prison also resonated with my own work, using autobiography to nurture creative writing by asking inmates to describe themselves in short sentences, each beginning with the letters of their first names (Crowley, 2012). This mirrored an exercise I initiated with the PRU students on a radio project, as reported on in Chapter 5.

In this initial scoping of the field I was identifying attempts at empowerment through arts work, summarised more ethereally by Augusto Boal in the seminal *Theatre of the Oppressed*: "I Augusto Boal, want the spectator to take on the role of Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own space and offer solutions...to go beyond our cultural norms" (Boal, 1979, xxi-xxii). I was to find an important concept through Boal in my understanding of the 'arena of radio', as I recount later in this chapter. At this stage of my reading however, I was beginning to identify a tradition of the blurring of artist and audience; and a tradition of community engagement through the arts.

I now went in search of reports and evaluations of specific community projects that might offer some guidance in further situating my own PCR practice which, at this point, was inter-generational. The work of 'Magic Me' (Langford and Mayo, 2001) mirrored my own, early practice-based discoveries. I recognised their stories of the transformative effect of putting together intergenerational groups who would not normally encounter each other. For example, the Mosaic project that joined primary

school children with a Senior citizens' Day Centre: "They have created beautiful mosaic panels for the school and the centre...instead of shouting through the windows, they (the schoolchildren) wave" (Langford and Mayo, 2001, p6). Alongside the testimony from the participants and the project leaders, the shopping list of project aims, objectives, strategies and tips read familiarly (Langford and Mayo, 2001, pp12-14). There were other projects too in which I recognised the type of work I was doing (Rooke, 2012; Lally, 2009; Coyer, 2007). Seeing the steps one had developed in one's own practice along the way formalised into a suggested 'recipe for success' on community projects, or as reflective accounts of lessons learned, was both affirming and useful. The notes of these practitioners resonated as authentic and were clearly born of their experiences. That few of the projects referenced were radio was not so important. The dynamics between staff and different participant groups were familiar and supportive to me as a community project practitioner.

The literature I had found in this area, and the work I was referencing, had the concept of 'facilitating voice' in its participants embedded within it. On reflection, I became able to see how PCR sits within this tradition. At the time though, I simply found affirmation in discovering I was not alone.

## **1.6 Participatory Media work**

Even closer to home, I alighted upon participatory media work done through the Media and Communications department at Goldsmiths College (Dowmunt, 2007 b). By now I was in search of a way to 'measure the outcomes' of my PCR practice. The work of 'Hi8tus', participatory community film work, pointed to a framework for evaluation within the context of funding and the associated need for measurable outcomes. The identification of 'soft skills' alongside the more tangible end-product offered an 'empirical road map' for data collection (Gidley, 2007, pp53-55), an idea I develop further in the next chapter. I also recognised in Hi8tus an ethos that ran through my own practice, in particular the desire to hand over control and authorship to participants within the media production process. The empowerment of participants through the teaching of technical media production skills echoed the aims of my own practice. Dowmunt identifies a theme recurrent in many Hi8tus projects where

'participation in media projects by people who have been excluded can often transform people's self-perception, building confidence, a social voice, educational breaks and, sometimes, employment opportunities' (Dowmunt, 2007 b, pp10-11). Although the Hi8tus 'practice focus' was Film and TV, these outcomes chimed with those I hoped might be afforded project participants through my community radio practice.

Although not able to name them as such at that stage of my reading, I also began to encounter concepts of 'voice' as they might be applied to my own study. The Hi8tus work and other projects covered in the 'Inclusion through Media' initiative (Dowmunt *et al*, 2007) offered me this perspective.

'At the heart of my understanding of the Inclusion through Media agenda are the interrelated issues of voice and power, which together add up to democracy...Finding your voice is crucial to all of us. ...Being able to name and describe your world is the pre-requisite to being able to understand it, to re-imagine it and change it. This is power.' Porter goes on to qualify that 'power in this society relates to money' but also says that powerlessness drives people out of active engagement in society and towards other routes ('drug dealing') to get money/power. 'One of the keys to (active) engagement and a sense of empowerment can come from developing the skills to express yourself and be heard' (Porter, 2007, pp 90-91).

This text would return to me with some clarity during PCR project work involving students from a pupil referral unit.

### **1.7 The development of the medium of radio**

Although it was important to read beyond the specifics of radio, I reasoned that a fuller appreciation of the story of the medium itself would be helpful in a broader framing of the PCR work under investigation. Thus, seeking out the history of the development of radio, I tracked the salient evolutionary stages of both the technology and the content as they wrapped themselves around each other.

The creation and development of the medium was driven by the technological developments in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe and America, on the back of the Industrial Revolution in those countries (Lewis and Pearlman, 1986;). Invented through a combination of economic drivers and the human desire to communicate, radio existed with inherent tensions for many decades. Developed as an effective means of instant communication, its military uses built to a crescendo in the two World Wars. The intervening periods of 'peace' saw the surplus of hardware being used for more benign, domestic purposes. However, even in those early years of the medium, Radio became an arena in which power struggles between elites and their subjects were played out. Control of output and dissemination mirrored the societal power struggles of the times, with the corporations of America succeeding in controlling the airwaves of that continent as a condition of sale of the technical components needed to broadcast. In Britain, the Reithian BBC established a different type of monopoly that did keep the channels of communication, the airwaves, out of market-led private corporate hands. Nevertheless, within that broadly worthy ethos to 'Educate, Inform and Entertain' (BBC core values), the paternalistic nature of an institution that has endured until now has historically brought with it a host of issues around control and dissemination (Lewis and Pearlman, 1986, Chapter 1).

In radio's story, there has always been a tension between the technology, power elites and the wider population in regard to dissemination. The development of mainstream radio in the UK ran alongside that of the efforts of enthusiastic amateur broadcasters to claim the airwaves: pirate radio stations, for example, offering us 'the parallel story that runs alongside that of the BBC, Clear Channel and Capital Radio' (Coyer, 2007). Coyer argues that 'it is from these amateur engineers and radio activists that we have seen some of the most important advances in technology and policy.' She traces such pioneering spirit back to the 1920's when 'early patent laws locked amateurs out who did not collaborate (sign up to) a corporation (such as RCA) because crucial technical transmitter parts were licensed to a few large companies.' Like Lewis, Coyer goes on to identify that mainstream UK and US radio went in somewhat different directions, with the BBC emerging as a non-commercial public service broadcaster whilst America emerged as a wholly market-driven commercial system (Coyer, 2007, pp16 -17). A retrospective critique of the 'golden age of radio' in the US is offered by Michele

Hilmes (Hilmes, 1997), citing the use of voice through soap operas and dramas as well as other offerings such as action adventure and variety shows before that material moved across to television in the 1950's. Hilmes notes that a lack of archive has consigned this material to the margins but she argues that it helped forge a national identity in America throughout that period of time.

Alongside this mainstream radio movement in the US, there has been a long tradition of alternative, community radio (Walker, 1970). The commentators I encountered credited KPFA in Berkeley, California as the oldest listener-sponsored radio station in the world, having provided an alternative to the commercial stations in the San Francisco Bay area since 1949. In a contemporary context, Brandy Doyle outlines the American story in her chapter 'Low Power Community Radio in the US: The Beginnings, the first Ten Years and Future Prospects'. She says that despite the monopoly of commercial radio in the US, 'in every era of American radio, advocates have fought, sometimes successfully, to gain a sliver of the airwaves for non-commercial radio' (p34). She outlines these movements – named as 'free radio', 'micro-radio' or simply 'pirates' - and says the sum of which 'opened the way for a policy shift that eventually created legal low power radio' (p36). The Local Community Radio act was signed into law in January 2011 by President Barack Obama (p34) with the subsequent proliferation of low power FM stations representing 'a rare victory for communities controlling their own media infrastructure' (Doyle, 2012, p48). The story of community radio in the UK is different, a narrative partly-shaped by the existence of BBC radio (Gordon, 2012, p.11), and I will return to it later in this chapter.

There is some potency to referencing the BBC, as this enduring public broadcasting institution currently finds itself in a state of some transition (Mair, *et al*, 2014). This is in part due to sustained attack from the new Conservative government in Britain. However, this period of change has been ongoing since the time of ex-Director-General John Birt and the introduction of the BBC 'internal market' of the 1980's. This neoliberal, market-led climate in the UK has always been at odds with a service funded through the direct taxation of a licence fee. It was helpful, then, to find the thoughts of Bertolt Brecht on Radio. By recreating a 'snapshot' of the medium in its early years and

tracing its subsequent development, I can better articulate what would be lost by further attack on BBC public service broadcasting, which of course includes radio.

### **1.8 A voice from those early days – Brecht on Radio**

‘The question of how art can be utilised for the radio and how the radio can be utilised for art - two very different questions - must at some point be subordinated to the much more important question of how art and radio can be utilised at all.’ ‘If we are right, or judged to be right, then the question will be answered in the following way: art and radio must be put to pedagogical purposes’ - Bertolt Brecht (Brecht, 1927b)

Brecht was a German, Marxist theatre practitioner who saw art, in particular the stage, as a political platform. Relayed through a series of transcribed writings, Brecht’s views on radio are of an era in which, in his opinion, the technology was far ahead of the content, with ‘production methods ...looking around anxiously for raw materials’ (Brecht, 1932, p41). His critique of the diet of output offered to radio audiences at that time was withering: ‘I strongly wish that after their invention of the radio the bourgeoisie would make a further invention that enables us to fix for all time what the radio communicates. Later generations would then have the opportunity to marvel at how a certain caste was able to tell the whole planet what it had to say and at the same time how it enabled a planet to see it had nothing to say at all’ (Brecht, 1927b, pp 37-8).

Brecht’s view was that radio offered much as a tool for communication if it were to be utilised effectively. In his text ‘Suggestions for the Director of Radio Broadcasting’, answering a piece in the newspaper *Berliner Borsen-Courier* from the director of the Berlin Broadcasting Studio, he starts as follows: ‘In my view you should make radio into a really democratic thing.’ He goes on to advocate that the radio apparatus be moved to the Reichstag to relay parliamentary sessions to the population at large. He also proposes that instead of ‘the dead reports, that you can produce *interviews* right in front of the microphone in which interviewees have less opportunity to prepare carefully thought-out lies, as they are able to do for the newspapers.’ Advocating ‘debates between recognised specialists’, ‘lectures with discussions in large or small

spaces' (Brecht, 1927b, p35), and 'debates about raising the price of bread or the disputes in the municipalities' (Brecht, 1932, p43), he clearly hoped for a radio service that offered an arena for the exchange of ideas.

Instead, he bemoaned the early days of radio, reflecting that 'in this Tower of Babel, cacophony and dissonance came forth that could not be ignored. In this acoustic department store it was possible to learn to breed chickens in English, accompanied by the strains of the Pilgrim's Chorus and the lesson was cheap as tap water'. His thrust was that radio needed to look for a 'purpose in life', suggesting that 'radio should step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers.' 'Radio must make exchange possible' (Brecht, 1932, pp 41-44). From these typewritten notes of Brecht's for oral delivery we can glean a sense of those early days of radio output as heard by a political theatre practitioner the relevance of whose ideas have endured.

My extensive quoting of Brecht is driven by the belief that my work chimes with his vision for radio: that the medium of radio should have pedagogical purpose. From a much broader perspective, I suggest that the public service remit of the BBC eventually produced much of what Brecht sought from the medium: Radio did come of age.

### **1.9 The climate for success**

This model of public service broadcasting, producing content without the specific prism of commercial, market-led drivers, underpins the practice of participatory radio as I have developed it at the Arts school. Given that the work is funded through the school budget, it sits within a supportive economic micro-structure. Reading about the differences between radio in the US and the UK in terms of content and structure, both in the past and now, warrants reference as to how my practice has developed within an educational micro-culture that celebrates participatory community work as a worthy outcome in itself, relatively free from the harsh drivers of neo-liberalism that Britain and the US have experienced since the early 1980's (Peet, 2007, pp111-112). Britain's Conservative government, in power since May 2015, set out to pursue a neoliberal agenda with fervour. The ethos of my 'site of practice', the Arts school, has until now offered some shelter from these economic policies and thus facilitated the

work that has allowed for, amongst many other things, the development and facilitation of Voice through participatory radio work. However, the increasing pressure to show 'outcomes' in education has in turn put pressure on the Arts school. The allocation of resources is constantly under review and only recently there was robust internal discussion as to the benefit of the school's community work. This work continues for now, championed by the school principal. However, the waves of pressure from neoliberal economics continue to pound at the door.

### **1.10 The power of radio**

There is something about radio's ability to influence that has always interested me. The medium's historical use for propaganda purposes, in particular, highlights its power in shaping and directing a population's thought and action. 'In a world where information was the preserve of the literate urban minority with access to newspapers and books, the first radio broadcasts of the 1920's...did bring about a radical transformation in the nature of social communication. Often this transformation was democratic, but it had its dark side as well. Little more than a decade after the first radio stations went on air, Adolf Hitler made effective use of radio as part of his strategy to propel himself to power' (Girard, c.1992, p1).

Exploring further this 'power', this ability of radio to shape events, led me to explore the medium's role in the Rwandan genocide of the early 1990's, (Chalk, 2000). Most striking was the authority with which a radio station, Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTL), directed the genocide against the Rwandan Tutsi population. Chalk points to the low literacy levels in the country and the role radio traditionally plays as an outlet for information in such social contexts. The Rwandan statistics are striking. Adult literacy was at 50% but between 400 and 500,000 AM/FM/Short wave radios were in homes and offices, with transmitters covering 90% of the population at the time of the genocide of 1993. According to Chalk's account of the various reports on the genocide, both by NGO's and the UN, opinion is divided on the importance of the role of radio in the atrocities. However, despite these differences in perspective after the event, Chalk says that 'even these critics admit that the broadcast of Mille Collines played a large part in co-ordinating the genocide' (Chalk, 2000).

As a radio practitioner, I found the influence that radio was able to exert over a listenership in this context extremely sobering. A fellow BBC World Service radio broadcaster, Keith Somerville, felt similarly: ‘that radio should play such a role was an anathema to someone like me who had worked for years in the World Service and was wedded to the motto on the BBC coat of arms that ‘nation shall speak unto nation.’ Somerville goes on to recognise that the BBC World Service was ‘like most other news, a form of propaganda even if it was a soft, benign and well-intentioned one’ (Somerville, 2012, p. ix).

In my case, with my ‘teaching hat’ on, my professional advocacy of ‘voice in radio’ encompasses an ethos that leans towards participant broadcasters finding and using their own voices to express themselves in an authentic way. However, I found an uncomfortably grotesque example of this in the Rwandan context. The DJ’s on RTLM rejected the more formal presentational style on offer from older, established radio stations in favour of a more colloquial style of delivery. Chalk’s reflective analysis illustrates well the connection the audience of Hutu listeners felt to this more authentic colloquial style and content: the RTLM DJ’s would urge their listeners to “clean the cockroaches” (a coded reference to the Tutsi populace) from their areas or “reach for their attics” (where their cutlass weapons were kept). This would go out over radio RTLM as part of a diet of community-style, localised broadcasting that appealed on a cultural level through the playing of local music, with the DJ’s presenting in local slang dialects (Chalk, 2000, pt 1, ch. 6) In other words, a cultural diet of radio produced by any pirate radio station for its community in Britain at any point over the past forty years.

Politically the phenomenon of localised broadcasting should be one to be celebrated but Chalk’s account is a sobering reminder that with power comes responsibility. And radio as a medium does have power. ‘Hate Radio’ has appeared again in Kenya more recently just as it appeared in Nigeria in the 1960’s and has done in other settings too. ‘Hate Radio’ is a reminder that the radio airwaves are still contested arenas in the battle for hearts and minds during a conflict scenario.

## A significant shift in focus

Searching out testimony, albeit in different guises, to the power of the radio was to try and get closer to understanding its role in the empowerment of participants. It was at this point I took a two-year 'interruption to study', from early 2013, three or so years into my thesis work. My reading thus far, and my instruction in academic research, had been most interesting but I was still searching for a clear focus to the thesis. I turned from academia and chose instead to return to my PCR practice, for this was where my primary interest lay. It was during this period of interruption that, by extending my sites of practice, I began to appreciate the importance of something I named broadly as 'voice' in the PCR project work. This significant shift in focus offered me a fresh line of enquiry when I returned to my study at the start of 2015: was there something that PCR could offer that would explain its possibilities in empowerment through finding one's voice? As I reflected further and narrowed my focus, I needed to explore a further concept: what might I mean by 'voice'?

### **1.11 What do I mean by 'Voice'?**

I have witnessed the moment participants hear their own voice played back to them in high definition sound many, many times. Almost invariably that first encounter is an uncomfortable one for them. Cicely Berry, voice coach for the Royal Shakespeare (theatre) Company explains this discrepancy neatly (Berry, 1994). Describing the skull as akin to an echo chamber, with sinus cavities working alongside bone and tissue to create the internal sound the speaker hears, this sound differs from the one heard of the same voice when replayed externally. Berry explains: 'The simple physical reason is that you hear your own voice via the bone conduction in your head, so the vibrations you hear are different to those heard by other people via outside space.' Berry then adds that 'in certain spaces you get a considerable feedback of your own voice, and if you cup your hands round your ears you get an approximation of what other people hear.' In that event, we hear ourselves as others hear us. One's relationship with one's own voice is about more than the physicality of it though, and Berry's outline of the process by which an individual may arrive at their own particular voice encompasses four main components: 'What you hear; how you hear it; the physical make-up of a

person and the agility of the muscles involved in speech making; and how you unconsciously choose your voice in the light of your personality and experience.’ She goes on to refer to the other important element in voice: listening. ‘To develop the voice you have to become aware of it...listening to find out how you are getting across to other people...perhaps it will also make you listen to other people more accurately’ (Berry, 1994, pp 22 - 24).

A more socio-political analysis of voice is offered by another voice coach, Patsy Rodenburg (Rodenburg, 1993). She laments the shift away from ‘oracy’ in UK schools and the bombardment of us all by the proliferation of visual and online media outlets (Rodenburg, 1993 pp23-4). She describes ‘an age of cacophony and image saturation’ (Rodenburg, 1993 p37), concerned that ‘we all know the power of television. What we have not yet sufficiently discovered is the way it has stopped our need to use words’ (Rodenburg, 1993 p38). Rodenburg identifies a culture of power-talkers, experts and authority figures towards whom any challenge seems daunting for the ordinary person. She states, perhaps a little euphemistically, that ‘once upon a time, dialogue rather than monologue was a dominant mode.’ (Rodenburg 1993, p67) She suggests that ancient power took the form of the leader of a Greek chorus – ideas were declared to stimulate public debate. These days, she suggests, ‘the power talker’s big message is a barrier: don’t talk back’ (Rodenburg 1993, p67). Applying this to the tone of modern politics, whereby an audience is talked at without the option of meaningful dialogue, she concludes that ‘we simply have to learn how to overcome the speech barrier and start to find a new voice. And once having found it connect it with the word’ (Rodenburg, 1993 p84).

In her latest book (Rodenburg, 2015), Rodenburg quotes a recent poll in America wherein the respondents put speaking in public as the single thing that frightens them most, ‘above loneliness, financial worry...even death!’ (Rodenburg, 2015 p9). She goes on to identify the ‘natural’ voice and the ‘habitual’ voice. ‘We are born with our natural voice, first heard at the primal scream. Life and our subsequent experiences should ideally enrich and broaden the natural voice, transforming it into a powerful instrument of self-expression. But life batters and restricts us in such ways that most of us settle into what I term an “habitual voice”’ (Rodenburg, 2015 p25). Adding in an

additional political note, she links the personal and the political: 'Many of us have been taught not to feel easy about expressing our words and sounds openly. Our society likes to control the volume and keep us vocal hostages; it doesn't want to hear the thoughts and opinions of certain groups like children, women and minorities. Too often we only like to hear the voices of so-called first class citizens, well-bred and well-toned. Ironically it is usually the other classes of citizens whose voices still retain the habits of natural release.' (Rodenburg, 2015 p30)

Although both Berry and Rodenburg write primarily for theatre actors, I take the analysis as applicable for participants in the PCR practice: they are extending their agency by becoming broadcasters and using their voices to do so. The narrative link I then employ in this thesis is to extend their individual voices and re-frame them within the notion of a collective voice. The mid-point to this link is the Aristotelian definitions of 'voice' and 'speech': that 'voice' is the sound and 'speech' is the interpretive use of sound for meaningful communication. Thus the transition is made from physical voice to socio-political Voice.

I found this Aristotelian mid-point through Nick Couldry's 'manifesto' on Voice (Couldry, 2010). He explains that, for Aristotle, 'voice' was communication of basic sensations whilst 'speech' was the medium of political deliberation and action (agency) (Couldry, 2010, p3).

Couldry applies this by identifying these two aspects of voice as follows: firstly, 'the sound of a person speaking', - though he qualifies it by saying that 'the (physical) usage doesn't capture the range of ways, not necessarily involving sound, in which I can give an account of myself.'; secondly 'the expression of opinion or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged.' (Couldry, 2010, p1). In more detail, he says voice is 'the process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions', extrapolating that 'to deny value to another's capacity for narrative – to deny her potential for voice – is to deny a basic dimension of human life.' (Couldry, 2010 p7)

Thus my reading journey had finally alighted upon a voice, Couldry's, which offered a theoretical framework for both academic enquiry and reflections on my practice. This was a rewarding moment.

Couldry is unequivocal in positioning a current 'crisis of Voice' as an inherent product of neo-liberalism in America and the UK. Couldry argues that not only are voices of alternatives to the current market-led socio-political philosophies silent but that the very nature of neo-liberalism ensures that they are at best marginalised and at worst eradicated. He makes the economic case for the paucity of alternatives offered up by contemporary mainstream UK media outlets and clearly feels that this lack of Voice afforded by existing power structures to the vast majority, who are disenfranchised from real autonomy over their own lives, will only become more complete as time goes on. (Couldry, 2010, p82) Thus, he proposes that Voice meaning 'representation leading to articulation of alternatives' must be offered in alternative arenas to the mainstream ones: Couldry proposes that those in opposition to neoliberal values need to seek out alternative arenas in which to bring their challenges to orthodoxy. "Informal acts of citizenship that transform...modes...of being by bringing into being new actors and creating new sites and scales of struggle" (Isin, 2008, p39 ; Couldry, 2010, p145).

There is more to explore from Couldry on Voice. For example, his deconstruction of how neo-liberalism has shaped our current broadcast media 'diet' in the UK in particular, in juxtaposition to PCR which proposes to offer an alternative to that 'diet'. Couldry says that the space where we often look to find voice, the mainstream media, 'works...to amplify or at least normalise values and mechanisms important to neo-liberalism and, by a separate movement, to embed such values ever more deeply within contemporary cultures of governance.' He cites the march of reality TV and the working of contemporary forms of government under ever more intense media pressure: the 'sound-bite culture'. He emphasises that he is not making claims about the general inter-relationships between mainstream media and neo-liberalism, but he is isolating 'two important domains where media might be expected to increase Voice, but where on closer inspection they do not' (Couldry, 2010, p73). Couldry does note the possibilities offered by the 'alternative media infrastructure' (Gilbert, 2008, p96) emerging online, suggesting that it will 'generate new voices, new conditions for voice', though he also points out that this online alternative is 'still... not the media that most people consume or with which governments, on a daily basis, engage' (Couldry, 2010, p74).

As I reflected on Couldry's concerns about a 'crisis in Voice', I recognised that the emphasis in my own practice may be different. For me, 'Voice' is simultaneously both a personalised, individual discovery and a broader, socio-economic and political concept. I am interested by whether the PCR work as practiced by me can be an arena in which participants can 'find their voice', literally. However I also wonder whether the work they produce, showcasing their exchanges and telling their stories, can provide an alternative 'site for voice', as Couldry suggests is needed. It may chime with his proposal that 'we may need, quite simply, to do new things' (Couldry, 2010, pp 145-146).

### **1.12 The grammar**

I had to decide on how to refer to the two meanings of 'voice' as they were emerging – the physical and the socio-political. For shorthand, I offer this insert on how I write each in this thesis: 'voice' refers to the physical meaning of the word; 'Voice' refers to the socio-political sense of the word. As this thesis proposes that, for PCR participants, the finding of one can lead directly to possibilities for the other, there are areas in the writing where the word may inhabit both senses. In that event, I have chosen to capitalise or not depending on the emphasis towards one sense or the other of the term 'voice/Voice'.

### **1.13 Airing the marginalised Voice**

In exploring the notion of 'media access', the (in)ability of individuals to tell their stories, I reached for the voice that had introduced me to such concepts in my teenage years: Noam Chomsky. He argues that the media has been established as an integral part of a capitalist economic system and outlines the various strategies, by design and operation, through which it supports that system (Chomsky, 2002). I went to a documentary film which follows him to various community radio stations and local community TV outlets and where he outlines these theories (Chomsky, 2007): I sought out and listened to Chomsky's Voice as aired through a succession of 'alternative sites' (Couldry, 2010).

In the film, Chomsky expounds a clear philosophy on the pragmatic role of the media within a capitalist society. Stating that 23 (reduced to 5 in the revised film shot in 2007) corporations control 50% of the media outlets in the USA, he suggests that “what keeps the media functioning is not the audience, it’s the advertising” (Chomsky, 2007, 42’). He argues that corporations deliver audiences to other corporations, and that the view of the world relayed therefore suits the corporate need for customer creation. His analysis draws from the American media experience but it has resonance for Britain too. “The US has a pre-requisite of concision – putting your point across in a couple of sentences. The beauty of concision – you know, saying a couple of sentences between two commercials...is that you can only repeat conventional thoughts.” In this corporate media world, Chomsky says, “time isn’t available in the current sound-bite delivery” to credibly discuss more complex alternatives to existing orthodoxies (Chomsky, 2007, 1hr 47’).

Chomsky offers the example of listener-supported Community or Campus radio stations as one antidote, naming these as a growth sector in the US with 800 such stations existing nationwide at that point: “If there’s a listener-supported radio station, that means everyday people can get a different way of looking at the world, not just what the corporate media want you to see: Different picture, different understanding. Not only can you listen to it but you can participate in it and add your own thoughts and learn something. That’s the way people become human: human participants in a social and political system.” (Chomsky, 2007, 2hrs 16’)

Chomsky’s ideas offer an illustrated complement to Couldry’s assertion that there is a current ‘crisis of Voice’ inherent in a neoliberal, market-led socio-economic system: one that not only denies ‘Voice’ but also denies the concept of ‘Voice’ as defined by Couldry. I also cite the film because, although a US-based analysis, I found it an inspiring example of Voice through ‘alternative sites’, as proposed by Isin, Couldry and Downmunt.

### **1.14 A cross-reference to UK Community Radio**

Although Chomsky's ideas were politically resonant, they were multi-national in their analysis. I wanted to see how they might be applied to a UK radio context and in particular to the story of community radio in the UK.

Peter Lewis (2012) outlines how 'a decade before the pressure for community radio built up outside the mainstream, both BBC and commercial radio advocates were discussing radio's potential for community involvement' (p9). Tracing the political development from the 1951 Beveridge report via the Pilkington report of 1962 which launched BBC local radio as championed by Frank Gillard, he notes that the initial successes of the BBC and Independent Local Radio (ILR) sectors stopped the development of a more localised community radio movement. However, he also writes that by the time the campaign got underway in the late 1970's 'commercial imperatives' in ILR stations had become 'dominant' (p11). Lewis references the 'Local Radio Workshop' as a campaign group involved in the creation of local programming and as having lobbied London's local radio stations for more coverage and airing of local content (Lewis, 2012, p14). These were initiatives aimed at getting radio kit into communities and relaying those voices (Partridge, 1982). The Islington Radio Project, set up in 1980, facilitated programmes from local groups such as the music and poetry collective African Dawn; and Friends of the Earth, who produced a programme about the debate on nuclear issues intended for distribution on cassette (p28).

'Commonsound' in Sheffield was another such Radio Workshop group, making content for local radio outlets including a weekly access slot to BBC Radio Sheffield (p30). Partridge goes on to offer a practical guide to setting up a community station which includes 'a possible democratic structure for a community station' (p42) and the technical specifications for a community station (p46). With a realistic costing and a contact list for radio workshops and community radio projects (Partridge, 1982, p57), it is evidence of the drive to support a structure for voice outside the outlets on offer at that time, namely the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority stations.

From accessing this history of community radio in the UK I could appreciate how, in socio-political terms, the medium of radio had developed against a background of

community advocates demanding that it be utilised to facilitate local and community voices both inside and outside mainstream UK radio outlets.

This process still continues and, in the last decade, Community Radio has grown significantly in the UK (Fleming, 2010). Fleming traces this expansion back to the 2003 study “New Voices” which recommended a third tier of radio alongside BBC and Commercial radio, then enacted in the Community Radio Order of 2004 (Fleming, 2010, p43). Thus, the community stations of 2016 are legislatively secured for now, though of course they are not offered economic survival by that order. Fleming goes on to outline that the 2004 order carried various stipulations including ‘that they (the radio stations) are local services provided primarily:

- a) for the good of members of the public, or of particular communities and
- b) in order to deliver social gain rather than for commercial reasons or other material gain of the individual involved in providing the service.” (Fleming, 2010, p43)

Fleming goes on to explain ‘social gain’ in terms of ‘training, encouraging linguistic delivery, support for vulnerable members of the community, and even some economic impact at a local level’ (Fleming, 2010, p44).

To some radio professionals, anecdotally, the label ‘community radio’ can imply that social function is prioritised at the expense of quality of output. Fleming addresses this: ‘Although the social gain aspect of community radio is important, it is clear that far from detracting from the quality of programming this is encouraging stations to find innovative ways to combine the two. This includes many stations working with local authorities, health organisations, and other advisory and charity groups.’ (Fleming, 2010, p49).

This discourse around quality of output was an important one to engage with because, for me, it would be central to possibilities for Voice through PCR. As I discovered, this ‘concept of quality’ (Carpentier, 2011) may well have been used historically to marginalise voices infrequently heard on mainstream radio output. Carpentier outlines three major discourses on quality: ‘Democratic quality’ – access to the microphone and the airwaves; ‘Professional quality’ – the dilemma between the need for technical quality/well-made programmes and the content afforded by a breadth of participants;

and 'Negotiated quality' – notions of quality become an ongoing dialogue between participants, producers and even the audience. Carpentier concludes that although 'the professional/amateur opposition is in part fed by the idea that only professionals can produce quality at the levels of the aesthetic, technical, professional, social and even democratic', he finally states that his case study 'offers a very specific but important approach by focussing not on how quality can work against participation, but how participatory practices can enhance and even (co-) define quality' (Carpentier, 2011, pp 340-346).

This 'concept of quality' is revisited in the conclusion of this thesis, both with specific reference to the practical submission and in relation to wider instrumental considerations for the PCR work under review.

### The 'Pirates'

Control of access to the airwaves represents arguably the most holistic meaning of the term 'contested' one might find in this thesis. Along with a history of working in BBC and Community radio, I also have experience of working in what one might euphemistically refer to as "the unlicensed community radio sector" or 'Pirate radio stations'. Radio folk simply call them "Pirates." In my view this sector, both in the UK and beyond, has as rich a history of broadcasting as any other. However, because of the illegal context in which it operates, its history has been far less methodically documented. Nonetheless, in relation to concepts around voice in radio, it must be mentioned in this chapter. Happily, I did recently find a comprehensive account of the Pirate radio scene in London. (Hebditch, 2015). In this written history of pirate radio stations, Peter Hebditch lists over four hundred in London alone between 1965 and 1990. As well as celebrating this 'history of voice in radio' he pays due respect to the early days of commercial radio in London. He describes the arrival of both Capital Radio and LBC in 1973, noting an adventurous music policy under the former Beatles producer George Martin alongside fifteen-minute dramas, shows targeted at different audiences at different times of the day and 'minority-interest' shows after 10pm (p 50). However, audiences did not leave their previous stations in sufficient numbers and, despite changes in the programming, both stations were on the verge of bankruptcy a year after they had launched. They survived but, as Hebditch suggests,

perhaps 'although there are things to be commended about the programming on the early ILR stations, the fundamental problem in London was that one music station and one talk station was never going to be able to satisfy everyone. London was diverse not only in its geography but in its people too. Thus the history of the pirate stations continued, with cat and mouse games with the various 'men from the ministry' (p52) punctuating a rich and enduring example of 'voice in radio', albeit largely music-based (Hebditch, 2015).

### Utilising radio in a community setting

I was already familiar with developments in UK radio that involved participation from local communities through education and training. Two UK sites in particular resonated, in Manchester and London. I had close involvement with First Love Radio in Deptford, South London during the late 1990's; and a professional association with broadcasters who moved from Frontline Radio, a Manchester pirate station, to ALL FM in Levenshulme. I also worked briefly with the radio activist Phil Korbell at the start of my freelance radio career back in 1989, when he was building a community radio scene in Manchester and airing local voices on BBC Radio Manchester through his weekly show. Phil was committed to getting local voices on air and went on to co-found Radio Regen, an umbrella group under which two local community stations were established: the aforementioned ALL FM, and Wythenshaw FM. His work crystallised the balance to be struck between 'access' and 'social gain' and I remember how community was always the central thrust of his work, as I later re-discovered in print: "We completely underestimated the need to resource and properly 'do' the community side of it. We didn't set up a radio station we set up a community centre. By that I mean the needs of the volunteers were nothing to do with radio... we could have had the best programmes being made by a small group of skilled volunteers but if they weren't representative, if we didn't have the whole range of the community involved, then it wouldn't be community radio" (Fleming 2010, p45).

I was therefore well- aware of the possibilities for social access offered by community media work. However, at the outset of my studies there was less literature on such radio work than has subsequently emerged. A notable recent arrival has been the comprehensive 'Companion to Alternative and Community Media' (Atton, C., 2015).

This offers further reference points for my own PCR practice as well as dovetailing with some of the concepts I had discovered in the earlier part of my reading journey. Atton's 'Companion' covers work from a wide range of alternative media practice and the terms of reference in his introduction are familiar, with his description of the work he covers 'showing how it is possible for those who are not part of formal media structures to participate in media discourse, to become reporters of their own reality, to become experts in their own social settings' (Atton, C., 2015, p2).

There are a number of radio examples, including 'Haiti Grassroots Watch' (Regan, J., 2015). The chapter outlines how Regan trained university students and 'community radio members' in investigative journalism to produce radio documentaries, keeping track of how effectively post-earthquake aid money was being used. She describes the work as having been influenced by the traditions of Freire, as 'teaching was incorporated into almost every aspect of reporting and content creation, from coaching sessions on the dirt floors of makeshift studios rebuilt after the earthquake...to the one-on-one accompaniment of journalism students' because she was increasing 'the capacity for critical thinking' as well as the technical and journalistic skill sets. (Regan, J. p327)

Heather Anderson's chapter, '*Prisoners' Radio: Connecting Communities through alternative discourse*' identifies how, as isolated institutions, connections are not fostered between prisoners and the wider community to which they will return. She sees how this work can act as a conduit, as well as 'generating alternative discourses and understandings about the incarcerated (Anderson, H., 2015, p426). She goes on to point out that while many examples worldwide, including Jamaica, South Africa, Australia and the Gaza Strip, broadcast on local community stations, in the UK this work takes the form of prison radio rather than content broadcast to the wider community.

In Janey Gordon's '*The Economic Tensions faced by Community Radio Broadcasters*' she outlines the different funding sources for community radio stations, referenced in the light of the new opportunities for Low Power broadcasting in the US. She states that each of these can come with caveats or demand compromises in regards to programming (Gordon, J., 2015, pp250-254).

## Where does PCR fit into all this?

By accessing literature around alternative radio in both the UK and the US, I became more aware of the richness of those two parallel stories. However, I noted that the practice upon which I was reflecting, PCR, did not fit easily into the broad category of 'Community Radio' as defined by the leading advocates in that field (Partridge 1982, p14; CRA, n.d.). It was dawning on me that the PCR practice under consideration was happening in a different arena and so I went exploring in another direction.

### **1.15 Radio as an arena for Voice: like theatre?**

Returning to my localised Participatory Community Radio (PCR) context, the discovery of Cicely Berry's thoughts on voice saw me alighting at a 'happy junction' on my thesis journey. 'Happy' because some of the ongoing PCR project-work was beginning to feel rooted in participatory theatre work at that point. I was starting to name aspects of the work as enabling participant ownership and intervention. Thus, in the spirit of extending the theoretical framework within which to situate the PCR work upon which I am reflecting, I turned to a pair of theatre practitioners: Bertolt Brecht, as already introduced, and the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal. Both of these practitioners used theatre as a means of social and political intervention and I alighted upon them too, looking for pedagogical links to my own participatory media practice.

Having already quoted Brecht at length on radio, I now borrow from his philosophy of 'Epic Theatre' and his theatrical technique of 'Verfremdungseffekt': making the familiar strange in order to deconstruct it for the purposes of consciousness-raising (Brecht, 1927). For example, in a Brechtian production the backstage area might be left open for public view or the actors may be seen onstage donning different costumes, emphasising them as actors playing a part rather than the illusion of them actually *being* their allotted character or role: in short, removing the pretence of reality. The purpose, according to Brecht, is to make the familiar strange and thereby awaken the critical faculties of the audience, rendering them more able to make active choices around the scenarios they watch played out onstage. It resonates with my PCR work as follows. By removing the mystery of the radio production process, participants may be

able to actively engage in their regular media diet with a more critical consciousness. They may also be more able to find their own voice on the radio projects as opposed to one they feel needs some construction to allow it to 'belong on the radio'. I also consider the possibility of a link here with Freire's idea of Conscientisation: the raising of consciousness within a populace, enabling them to effect change for themselves (Freire, 1972).

Another practitioner I explore in attempting to situate the PCR work is Augusto Boal. There is a strong element of Voice in Boal's Forum theatre approach to social problem-solving: the encouragement of participants to find their voices and use them, thus facilitating empowerment and unlocking agency (Boal, 1995). There may be resonance in that journey for the PCR participants who also encounter, become familiar with and then utilise their voices for self-expression and meaningful exchange.

There may be further resonance with Boal's work in his rejection of theatre as a 'sacred space': 'In the beginning the actor and spectator coexisted in the same person. The point at which they separated, when some specialised as actors and others as spectators, marks the birth of the theatrical forms we know today. Also born at this time were 'theatres', architectural constructions intended to make sacred this division, this specialisation. The profession of the 'actor' takes its first bow. The theatrical profession that belongs to the few should not hide the existence and permanence of the theatrical vocation which belongs to all. Theatre is a vocation for all human beings: it is also the true nature of humanity.' (Boal, 1995, p14).

I view the medium of radio in the same way: all voices are welcome for they are signifiers of humanity.

Boal also identifies what the stage offers as an arena: 'Like a powerful telescope, the stage brings things closer'. In theatre, Boal names it as one of the three properties of the 'aesthetic space' of a stage: 'the telemicroscopic, which magnifies everything and makes everything present which might otherwise escape our gaze.' (Boal, 1995, pp27-28) Accepting that radio is an aural medium for both the audience and the participant, we might substitute 'telemicrophonic' for 'telemicroscopic' and 'hearing' for 'gaze'.

Accepting this cross-reference between the two arenas of participation, the radio and the stage, Boal's perspective will be revisited for further reflection at the conclusion of this thesis.

### **1.16 A 'circle of Conscientisation'**

If I was able to cross-reference one Brazilian political activist with my PCR work, as mentioned earlier in this chapter I struggled more with cross-referencing a second. I was keen to make a link between Freire and the possibilities of empowerment offered by PCR to the participants. At the stage at which I alighted upon him, I was open to exploring possibilities in relation to his theory of Conscientisation. I review this in the light of my findings in the concluding chapters and so, for now, I offer my thought process around this cross-referenced idea as it came to me at the time.

The exchange between participants during the PCR projects under reflection may be politicised through the way Freire conceptualises 'Conscientisation': by facilitating an exchange between the participants themselves and then facilitating a further exchange between those voices and a listening audience, the PCR work seems to offer the possibility of what one might term a 'circle of Conscientisation'. This might be best articulated as 'a raising of consciousness' by the project work itself, facing inwards for the participants and facing outwards for the audience. In addition, as previously explained, this new understanding of the media production process by the participants offers at least the potential for a more critical understanding of these processes in their everyday media consumption. It may even offer them the necessary skills to then be able to deconstruct the wider 'mediascape' independently, long after they have left the radio studios. I offer the possibility here and also for further consideration subsequently in this thesis.

### **1.17 Finally**

My reading thus far broadened my field of enquiry, named 'Voice in Radio'. I could now appreciate more fully where my PCR practice may sit within the arenas of

Community and Media. However, although this wider reading had given me a broader, textured understanding of that positioning, the breakthrough in my study came when I was able to identify the emergence of both the physical 'voice' and the socio-political 'Voice' as key elements in my PCR practice. I can now utilise these reference points as I move forward to reflect upon Participatory Community Radio work involving three specific projects: a group of teenage boys meeting seniors from a West Indian social and luncheon club; Hospice patients meeting sixth-form students; and Pupil Referral Unit students also meeting sixth-formers.

I look forward to you reading of those encounters and hearing those voices.

## Chapter 2: Research Methods

**Introduction:** This chapter is an account of how I developed and implemented my research strategy. It traces my journey from teaching-practitioner to ‘scholar practitioner’ (Pearson & Bradbury, 2006, p. xxv). As this is a practice-based thesis, ‘strategy’ covers a summary of my developing practice as well as the research strategy I designed and implemented in order to reflect upon that practice. It also covers ethical considerations, both in relation to the research and to the practice itself.

Through this account I narrate the evolution of my research; the research structure with discussions on both epistemology and ethnography; data collection; the role of evaluation in community projects; validity; the framework for my evaluation; exchange; supervision; ethical considerations; and reflexivity as a practitioner-researcher.

### 2.1 The evolution of the thesis

The narrative of this thesis, ‘Voice in Radio’, was not so precisely the initial focus for my study. Having been engaged in PCR work for many years, at the outset of the research I was keen to record more formally the value and relevance of this work to participants in more general terms. The focus on ‘Voice’ emerged more specifically as the study progressed.

Embarking upon this PhD study, I was introduced to academic discourse and research methods through tutorials and two research methods courses run by Goldsmith’s College Graduate School. Embracing and reflecting on these new ways of thinking, I began to consider how to address the need for more precision in my ‘research question’: what specific hypothesis did I want to test? I began by exploring notions of radio practice as facilitating empowerment, fostering community, offering challenges to hegemony, and then by asking what PCR had to offer participants in relation to these concepts. These questions shaped my early research work and are referenced in

the first findings chapter. However, in order to think these questions through further, particularly in relation to my professional work, I took an interruption to study from February 2012 to February 2014. I used this time to reflect and to extend my sites of practice. I was, however, still gathering data throughout this period of reflection.

Following this interruption to study, I returned with two significant changes to the focus of the thesis. The first was its structure: this would now be a practice-based thesis in which I would reflect on my PCR practice. The second was the theoretical framework for that reflection: Voice in Radio, employing the term 'voice' both literally (Berry, 1994) and socio-politically (Couldry, 2010). Reflecting on the data I had collected, I also recognised the significance of the 'exchanges' occurring between the participants on the projects and so that phenomenon also appeared more specifically on the agenda for this thesis.

The focus of the research, therefore, became the participants and the practice. A listening audience is 'out there', as evidenced by listening figures I reference elsewhere, and 'audience' has a place in the theoretical framework of Voice within which this writing is situated. However, I note firmly that this 'audience' is not the main subject of this particular study. Rather, the focus is upon Voice per se.

## **2.2 The research design: a mixed methods strategy**

In broad research design terms, I started my reflective work using quantitative research and then honed in on emergent themes using qualitative research to elicit depth of response. In the initial phase of quantitative research, to scope the field, I used anonymous questionnaires, completed by a number of participants on the first project. These involved both those from the boys' school and the senior citizens from the Luncheon Club. This was an attempt to ascertain common patterns to their experiences across their different demographic backgrounds. These commonalities, and differences, then informed more detailed, qualitative work going forward.

Behind this broad description of my research route is my understanding of how these two basic designs may sit within more specific, methodological approaches to research.

## The research structure unfolds

The two research courses, Quantitative Research Methods and Qualitative Research Methods, run at the Goldsmiths Graduate School taught me about a variety of methodical approaches. The Quantitative Course emphasised to me the importance of the quality of the initial data, secured by the quality of the research design (Seale, 2004). The 'weighing' of data in the light of variables also struck a chord with my research work (Polgar and Thomas, 2000). A quantitative approach in this initial phase of enquiry allowed me to ascertain how participants were experiencing PCR (Robson, 2002). By extending the questionnaire to all my radio students at that time, including the Arts school students, I was able to extend the sample size significantly. I was also able to measure specific PCR responses against overall findings. This allowed me to judge what responses were common to the project work and what might be more specific to certain groups. For example, at that point I was interested to find out if enhanced feelings of empowerment correlated with age. The data that came back will be discussed further in the next chapter. There were also patterns that emerged regardless of the varying demographics of the respondents. For example, it emerged that the project work had improved both team skills and self-esteem for the vast majority of respondents. These findings further informed my lines of enquiry as I moved to the next stage of my research.

In delivering an initial snapshot of what was happening for participants on the projects, the questionnaires were successful. However, the limitations of this quantitative approach were also evident. I wanted to explore in more depth the experiences of participants on the projects and so moved on to a qualitative approach. I also initiated a field diary. This 'mixed methods' approach (Bryman, 2004) was in response to my learning about the possibilities offered by the Graduate School Research courses. I needed a space to reflect upon my own experiences of the work in my role as a researcher, away from the sites of my practice: the field diary afforded me that space.

This 'evolution of methods' is affirmed by Joseph Maxwell (Maxwell, 2013): 'You need to *construct* and *reconstruct* your research design. Qualitative research design ...is a 'do it yourself' rather than an 'off the shelf' process, one that involves 'tacking' back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing their implications

for one another. In addition...You will need to continually assess how your design ...influences and is influenced by the context in which you're operating, and to make adjustments and changes so that your study can accomplish what you want' (Maxwell, 2013, p3). This very much describes my experience of my 'research design' as it unfolded during the study: it was often at least as reactive as it was proactive in its structure.

The Qualitative Research Methods course had introduced me to Grounded theory, Discourse theory, Feminist Theory, Marxist Theory and other variations on the theme of political and social perspectives (Bryman, 2004). By the end I understood better how to gather data and the variety of ways it could be analysed (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Gathering material from participants and others involved in the PCR work, transcribing and then analysing this data, I was able to draw upon my learning from these courses. In summary I had gained a critical understanding of the strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative research methods from the Graduate School research courses, together with an appreciation of how these approaches could be applied in practice.

#### The emergence of 'action research' in my method

By shifting the emphasis of my inquiry to my PCR practice and situating it within the context of 'Voice' and 'exchange', my research gained a significantly sharper focus. As the study progressed I came to a fuller understanding of how I was working with many elements of the research design named as 'action research' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Identifying action research as a broad church or 'family of approaches', Reason and Bradbury write that 'for some, action research is primarily an individual affair through which professionals can address questions such as "how can I improve my practice?"' This was an important moment in the development of my research structure: I was able to encase my research methods within an academic framework that also supported my desire to reflect upon my practical work, both in terms of the practical processes involved in the projects and the outcomes those processes produced. I found resonance in this approach to research. 'Action research is therefore an inherently value laden activity, usually practised by scholar- practitioners who care deeply about making a positive change in the world. As such it is unlikely that we find

comfortable homes inside academia with its norm of disinterest (or value on the status quo). Nonetheless, many action researchers work well with the creative tension of the boundary space between academia and practice.’ (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, pp xxii - xxv).

In the term ‘scholar-practitioner’, I was offered a label by which I was able to describe my evolving academic identity.

I noted that the tone of the writing by Bradbury and Pearson, along with their passionate advocacy of this form of academic research, read as semi-evangelical at times. I neither did, nor do hold with their rejection of more traditional forms of academic research in social science. They articulate the ethos of action research most seductively, with a clear rejection of ‘pure research’ and instead rooting research in action, with its stated aim being ‘to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world’ (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p2). Although unwilling to ally my work to such a grand claim, given that my study had evolved and was very much about hearing from participants and then moving both my practice and my enquiry forward as informed by their responses, there was still much resonance to be found in the writings of Bradbury and Reason.

Given that the focus of my enquiry was “Voice”, in this instance “in Radio”, and that the link between being ‘human’ and having ‘Voice’ had been mentioned on various occasions by participants during the research, it felt appropriate to attach even the more ‘ethereal’ suggestions from Bradbury and Reason to the work under examination. Offering ‘some order within the diverse field of action research...(they name) three broad pathways of action research practice - first, second and third person research/practice skills’ (Reason and Torbert, 2001, p.xxv) which I could also apply to my own work.

In their concluding chapter, Bradbury and Reason write that ‘A mark of quality in an action research project is that people will get energised and empowered by being involved, through which they may develop newly useful, reflexive insights as a result of a growing critical consciousness. They may ideally say “that was our research and it helped us see ourselves and our context anew and to act in all sorts of new ways”. We may therefore say that as action researchers we must ask questions that inquire into

and seek to ensure quality of participation and relationship in the work' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p344). This reference led me to reflect on the place of the research for the PCR participants: might they gain even more from the PCR work by being asked to reflect upon it by the research? I chose not to actively pursue this line of enquiry but I do note the echo of Freire's Conscientisation theory (Freire, 1972), something I will return to again towards the end of the thesis.

In summary, then, I felt that there were enough resonant elements in my PCR work and the associated research for me to feel able to declare that my research, though of mixed-methodology, borrowed firmly from the 'diverse practices of action research' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p1).

### Ethnographic considerations

I had enjoyed many discussions with my fellow PhD students around the table during the Qualitative research methods course, though I had not defined any of these in terms of a 'world view'. I continue to prefer bespoke analysis instead of broad sweeps though, as a result of the courses and the associated discussions, I can now reflect upon epistemological positions critically and even offer mine as it stood.

In his chapter 'What is Ethnography?' (Hammersley, & Atkinson, 2007), Martin Hammersley describes 'Positivism' as an approach to research methodology akin to the study procedures of the natural sciences, particularly Physics, and their use of experiments (Toulmin, 1972).' This chimed with my initial, quantitative approach to the research. However, I initially imagined that the second, qualitative research phase would require a more bespoke, 'Naturalist' approach. As Hammersley outlines, 'Naturalism demands that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher.' (p7). He cites Matza's definition of Naturalism, 'the philosophical view that remains true to the phenomenon under study' (Matza, 1969:5) and goes on to suggest that a first requirement of social research according to naturalism is 'fidelity to the phenomena under study, not to any particular set of methodological principles under study'. He adds that Naturalists see no fixed laws to human behaviour: That behaviour in people is inexorably linked to their contexts and histories. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007 pp.6-8)

Given that I was working with groups who had a variety of histories and were a long way apart in age, I anticipated a diversity of responses. The organic nature of the study, alongside the absence of one specific philosophical research position going into the work suggested to me that I was working from a 'Naturalist' perspective at this point. However, as I proceeded with the semi-structured interviews for more of the participants, I reflected upon whether the data I collected would be any stronger for my having an in-depth understanding of the PCR participants' day to day patterns of living and their wider social contexts? As a researcher I had spent time at their institutional sites and with the first group, from the West Indian Luncheon and Social club, I had more: I could add in my wider knowledge of the Caribbean, affording me some appreciation of a broader context within which to situate the data. However, this extra outsider/insider knowledge was not uniform across all the groups and I concluded that I should therefore limit my findings to the responses produced from the data itself and the work produced by the participants on the projects.

In more depth, my reasoning was thus: the focus of this study is Voice; the site is a radio studio; and the participants are from a variety of ages and backgrounds. There is a commonality in my argument that they are all from 'areas of marginalised voice' as suggested by Chomsky (2003), Dowmunt (2011) and Couldry (2012) but their specific demographic differences are not central to my enquiry. They are all, for the purposes of this study, defined by me as 'marginalised voices' with one of the outcomes under reflection being the airing of those voices to an audience. All of those voices in equal measure.

Therefore, despite all the demographic differences of the participants, and in spite of the organic nature of the research design, I reflected that the overall framework of enquiry may have had less of an ethnographic leaning than I had first considered. In other words, these 'voices' had been gathered by virtue of a series of constructed opportunities, which in turn had been available due to a confluence of favourable conditions: an Arts school with a leadership team supportive of 'community work'; agreement from the various gatekeepers at the specific community institutions; my positioning within the learning equation. Little of this was structurally determined but rather was the coming together of a series of facilitating factors. This manifestation of

voice and exchange wasn't already happening and I then came across it: these particular sites for voice were 'constructed' from the outset.

#### Is any of this ethnographic study?

Given that I had initially attempted to get some understanding of the PCR participants in their contexts through my practice, I reflected that in the early part of my research I was borrowing elements from 'ethnographic' study in my role as researcher.

Hammersley's position that 'ethnography' does not have a standard, well-defined meaning' is supplemented by his outline of 'what ethnographers do'. At first reading, the list does not apply to my research. One named aspect for example, which states that 'people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts rather than under conditions created by the researcher', seems to exclude my PCR work. However, there are elements that may lend themselves to an ethnographic approach, in particular the emphasis on the organic development of the research as opposed to a research design that is 'fixed and detailed' from the outset. Also, that 'such studies are fairly small scale...to facilitate in-depth study.' In addition, Hammersley goes on to cite Maxwell (2004b) in stating 'that ethnographers employ an open-ended approach, and Malinowski's 'foreshadowed problems', namely that the task is to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another and how they see themselves' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp2-3). This idea could apply to some radio pieces produced on the project by participants, featured later, as they are autobiographical and reflective. Therefore, because the work and the participant responses to that work are both under review, alongside consideration of how producing the work affects and informs the way the participants see themselves, I suggest that there are elements of ethnographic study in this research design. This is despite my overall understanding that this was not an ethnographic study involving lengthy, discreet, non-interventionist observation. Although I was researching existing situations, in that the classes had run for many years before the research started, I primarily inhabited the 'teacher' role for the participants in the study. Therefore I cannot claim to have been the impartial outside observer Hammersley infers is needed by that definition of ethnographic study.

### **2.3 Gathering the data: My methods of data collection as they developed over time**

As referenced earlier, my initial data gathering was through the use of questionnaires. These were distributed amongst each of the early participant groups over a period of a year or so, with some being filled in retrospectively by those who had been engaged in previous projects. Completed anonymously, they were then collated and analysed and the results used as an initial guide towards possible areas of focus for further in-depth study. The structure of the questionnaires was a mix of closed questions; statements with options for responses to indicate agreement or otherwise; and a space available for final, bespoke participant comments. In retrospect, the questionnaire was limited in that it was designed to suit a double purpose, something I will return to in the next section when discussing my approach to the evaluation of the data. I will refer to the results of the questionnaire in more depth in the next chapter along with other data I collected from the participants, gathered as follows:

From the outset of my PCR work, I conducted debriefs at the end of each project day as a matter of good practice: this gave participants a chance to ‘tell their story’, share their experience and bring some form of initial closure to a session. As time went on and the thesis became more dominant in my mind, I recognised the value of the comments and observations made by the participants about the work in these debriefs and they began to double as a forum for evidential observation. Although I had always flagged up my study to each project group, for a long time during these debriefs I made only mental notes rather than written ones. This was so as not to confuse the participants by transforming from teacher into field researcher during these sessions. So, away from the sessions, I wrote my observations in my field diary, starting in March 2011. This enabled me to record my reflections on the project sessions and the debriefs without the pressures of either participant gaze or ongoing curriculum time constraints.

This strategy of ‘participant observation’ developed further as the thesis progressed. At each project-end I created a small focus group after the final show. Realising the value of these discussions in data terms, I took the decision to make them a formal part of the data-gathering process. Even before my interruption to study, I was keen to record participant responses in high quality sound definition. This was allied to my

sense that, though not yet overtly named as such, 'the participant Voice' was becoming the central theme. I was keen those Voices be preserved in a form with which they could continue to communicate by being heard. Thus project debriefs incorporated formalised recording sessions, with me switching roles to become researcher-technician and record the data from the participants - a switch that was fully explained to all those involved.

Sometimes these focus groups were mixed and at other times they were of a single 'community group'. This enabled me to get high quality recordings of the participants' responses and to capture interplays between them. I also took the opportunity to get comments from 'institutional figures', for example teachers or learning support staff, when possible. On occasions, after the end of each project, I would visit the groups in their institutional settings to get further reflections from them in semi-structured interviews. The interviews would be done away from the body of the wider community group and were usually conducted individually. Within these visits I would also get interviews with relevant and informed staff, again semi-structured, with the aim of recording a wider context to the participants' work. This variety of data collection methods and interviewees is an example of my use of 'triangulation' as outlined by Maxwell (2013, p128) and feeds into 'validity', to be referenced later in this chapter.

All the research interviews were recorded to broadcast standard on portable radio kit, to preserve the effectiveness of their delivery to any potential future listeners. This was something I always explained to the participants before their interviews. I did often reflect on how the presence of recording kit and in particular a microphone would have an impact on the responses. The effect of the camera on subjects in documentary film is more written about but, although not directly applicable to radio work, there are parallels with a microphone. However I reasoned that, on balance, this impact did not outweigh my decision to go for good quality recordings. In addition these were radio project participants who understood the presence of a microphone and had grown accustomed to it. That presence may have made the institutional figures reflect more on their own articulations, emphasising that they were being interviewed in relation to their professional role, but that did not strike me as too

obstructive when it came to gathering good data on the subject of participants in the field of the marginalised voice.

#### **2.4 An approach to evaluation: negotiating the potential pitfalls**

Having outlined both the mechanics and the theoretical considerations involved in my data-gathering, I now explore considerations around evaluation. As I will illustrate, evaluation can have a disproportionate impact upon both research and, in action research scenarios, the actual participatory work under consideration.

As mentioned already, I reflected that my questionnaire design was limited in relation to the thesis. Institutional pressures within the Arts school had led me to believe I needed to record responses to the radio work to justify the continuation of radio studies at the school. It was not so much that these were under immediate threat but there was an institutional climate in which I felt obliged to justify their existence. This was partly created by external funding pressures as the national education budget was being revised downwards at an alarming rate. Within that context, the funding for the Community Radio Outreach work was under review with the withdrawal of funding from, first, the London Challenge grants and then the Leading Edge (Creative Partnerships in Schools) initiative. Thus, I divided the questionnaire into two parts, the first of which allowed for a general affirmation of the work and the second, which asked participants what benefits they felt the project had given them. Although I do feel that the questionnaire was diluted in its effectiveness as a result it did still offer me some useful data as a starting point for further reflection.

Further reading confirmed that the relationship between my project and the design for its evaluation was a challenge common to other researcher-practitioners. Paul Clements writes of the evaluation of community arts projects that 'evaluation is not a negotiated process to engender democracy but is there to serve a specific function' (Clements, 2007). He refers to his experience as an external assessor on a prison education programme, whose objectives were to use arts to 'help break negative attitudes and behavioural patterns in order to aid rehabilitation'. As well as the various logistical impediments to him 'getting right in there' without compromising the project

work, he also outlines how his role as evaluator was 'to advocate the programmes to funders and find evidence to confirm social impact'. He says 'the role was to measure and describe rather than to judge'. Clements later states 'my independence was compromised through pressure to advocate the success of the programmes, their positive impacts and outcomes'. He argues for an embedded, transparent form of project evaluation that takes account of local contexts, one that is open to the participants from the outset and built around the principles of 'purpose, place, process and product'. This transparency, he argues, should extend to the political reasons behind the evaluation so that the evaluation can be measured in that light: in essence, reflexivity in evaluation. His final conclusion is that 'the evaluator is awkwardly placed between funder, manager, animateur and participant', requiring 'a keen political awareness and reflexivity' in order to negotiate that position to the benefit of the participants. The article looks hard at the place of evaluation within a project and concludes that it is always compromised (Clements, 2007, pp327-334).

This theme of the place of evaluation in participatory community project work was also present in two case studies I looked at: Rivercross, a collaborative project between a participatory media unit and a mental health team (Coult, 2009); and Sweet Tonic, a singing-based participatory arts initiative based in the south-west of Sydney, Australia (Lally, 2009). Each offered a different example of how evaluation is integral to a participatory project. The Rivercross narrative seemed to unravel as the project went on, with the outcome being driven by the need to secure further funding for what, in my opinion, was a questionable project in this context anyway. There was a noticeable lack of participant voice mentioned in either the project account or the research data and, though the logistics around mental health patients in regard to long-term engagement may account for this, there was little evidence of participant engagement in either the work or the evaluation.

The Sweet Tonic article, on the other hand, goes on to outline a number of positive aspects of that work, evidenced by the testimony of those involved: a sense of belonging, sense of purpose, sense of group solidarity, increased cognitive power, raised self-esteem, redefining of sense of self within traditional family roles. The author, Elaine Lally, makes a claim for all of these elements in the Sweet Tonic project

based on evidence gathered from a participant questionnaire, her own observations and subsequent follow-up interviews. Further, she cites the difficulty in applying a statistical, scientific approach to data-gathering around arts projects when they are evaluated in terms of instrumental outcomes in social policy: 'The conceptual problem is that some researchers have been looking for a linear relationship of causality when the relationships between input (arts and cultural projects) and (social) outcomes is much more indirect and diffuse than that.' Lally then calls for 'a rehabilitation of qualitative research from accusations that its materials are anecdotal' (Lally, 2009, p.40).

This theme of how evaluation might measure impact is also picked up by both Chrissie Tiller and Allison Rooke (Mayo *et al*, 2013). Set against the context of the shift from state-funded support to third sector delivery of social services, the book explores the role research might play in supporting organisations engaged in facilitating and developing active citizenship by measuring and reporting on their work.

Chrissie Tiller's chapter, *Participatory Arts and Community Development: Taking Part*, (the conference in 2010 on the South Bank and at Goldsmiths College bringing together arts practitioners from across the arts world) traces the climate in which participatory arts has negotiated its continued existence against a backdrop of shifting allegiances from funding bodies (p137). As part of this dynamic, and echoing Lally's observations, Tiller cites 'Use or Ornament?' (Matarasso, 1997) on measuring the impact of participatory arts on communities: 'Methods, which appear suitable to social scientists, cannot easily be used by arts workers and community groups for whom evaluation, however important, is always secondary to achieving a programme (Matarasso 1997.15).' This resonated with my position as a teaching practitioner and was a position I was keen to hold even as I evolved into a scholar practitioner.

Tiller's chapter accounts for the 'un-conference, *Taking Part*', which brought together national and international arts organisations, third sector partners, the voluntary sector and researchers in 2010. It seems to have been a moment of soul-searching for those engaged in community participatory arts practice as they looked hard at the role they'd played in the 'inclusion agenda' - perhaps at the expense of proposing radical alternatives. 'Arts organisations... felt they were increasingly struggling to do nothing

more than meet the social impact outcomes set by public funding bodies and government targets.’ (Tiller, 2013, pp137-8)

Developing her account of the desire from delegates to work under an umbrella of reclamation and record, Tiller finishes the chapter with this reflection: ‘At the end of the two days...we agreed on the importance of asserting, especially in difficult times, the value of what we are doing artistically, politically and socially. We accepted the importance of taking on the responsibility to document and write our own legacy; lest others write it for us.’ Further resonance for me was that my thesis, at its heart, had always been about recording the participatory radio work in which I have long been engaged. I had wanted to record, and write, the legacy of the work. Tiller’s final salute to the type of participatory work to which I remain fully committed reads thus: ‘There is a long struggle in front of us to ensure our communities continue to have access not only as audiences but also to the means of production in the arts.’ (Tiller, 2013, pp 137-146)

My intention is for this thesis to form part of that struggle.

Committed to the PCR work as I am, I felt that the recording of this work must sit within an integrity that would hold it as a valid account. In her chapter, ‘Contradiction, Collaboration and Criticality: Researching Empowerment and Citizenship in Community-Based Arts’, (Rooke, 2013) Allison Rooke concludes that there is ‘a clear need for critical research and reflection which explore the possibilities of reclaiming evaluation as an informative, generative, critical and non-partisan activity in the context of contemporary social and cultural policy. In a political and social climate which emphasises the need for empirical justification for monies spent on social intervention and the arts, the question of how to differentiate between evaluation which is an extension of ‘cost/benefit’ analysis and evidence-based policy and that which is an opportunity for critical and collaborative reflection is pressing’ (Rooke, 2013, p167). I took affirmation of my stated desire to record the PCR work from this and reflected that, as best I could, I needed to attempt a faithful recording of the nature of the work and its outcomes for the participants in relation to Voice and Exchange: As best I could, I would attempt to record and report on this work without an eye towards the extent to which my research work was securing longevity for my

practice: I hoped that the value of the PCR work as a positive experience for the participants and an 'alternative site' for Voice (Couldry, 2013, Dowmunt 2011), would speak for itself.

## 2.5 Validity

A key aspect to the integrity in my work is to present both research data and subsequent findings that have 'validity'.

Maxwell defines validity as 'the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account.' He goes on to say that 'this term validity does not imply the existence of any 'objective truth' to which an account can be compared. However, the idea of objective truth isn't essential to a theory of validity that does what most researchers want it to do, which is give them some grounds for distinguishing accounts that are credible from those that are not. Nor are you required to attain some ultimate truth for your study to be useful and believable' (Maxwell 2013, p122).

Maxwell also identifies 'validity threat' as 'a way you might be wrong', naming two specific validity threats, 'Bias' and 'Reactivity'. This was a helpful reminder how as a researcher, integrity in data is so important. In more detail, 'Researcher bias involves the selection of data that fit the researcher's existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that 'stand out' to the researcher (cited by Maxwell: Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shweder, 1980). Maxwell argues that eliminating this bias is impossible and thus advocates transparency.

He goes on to explain 'Reactivity' as 'the influence of the researcher on the setting or the individuals studied'. One can try and control for differences between researchers, using a quantitative 'variance theory' approach (using different researchers working to a pre-agreed research plan), but in essence, 'eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible (cited by Maxwell - Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and to use it productively.'

Maxwell further clarifies that 'reactivity' is 'what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) called 'reflexivity', the fact that the researcher is part of the world he or she studies – is a powerful and inescapable influence; what the informant says is *always* influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation' (Maxwell, 2013, p125).

Having initially felt compromised as the researcher by my primary position as the teacher, I began to see that dual role in a more positive light. I reasoned that as a researcher I was unable to work completely objectively in the field and therefore I could best use my access to the participants responsibly, noting that such access was available precisely *because* I had worked with them as their 'radio teacher.' This dual identity now moved from being a 'research burden' to being a 'research advantage.' In addition, Maxwell's 8-point 'validity tests check list' only served to reinforce my belief in the ability of the research to establish its validity, given its 'design' or structure. These included Intensive long-term involvement that can 'help you rule out spurious associations and premature theories. '; and triangulation or 'Collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods...this strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops.'(Maxwell, 2013, pp126-128)

All these considerations offered a grounding upon which I could collect, analyse, evaluate and report data for the thesis.

## **2.6 A framework for evaluation**

Although the focus of my inquiry became more specific over time, I had to make some choices from the outset as to what I was looking for in relation to evaluating the PCR project work.

The specific challenge of evaluating participatory media project work is discussed in 'Inclusion through Media' (Dowmunt *et al.*, 2007). Chapter 3, 'Beyond the numbers game – understanding the value of participatory media' (Gidley, 2007) states that "hard outputs' (such as numbers completing a project for example)...do not always adequately reflect the value or outcomes of participatory work.' I was intrigued to find

a 'three-step model of engagement' referenced for use when thinking about using media as a tool of engagement: the kudos of involvement and the related importance of brand; participant ownership; collaboration within a 'pack' model, an informal, non-school, non-curriculum setting more usually found in Youth Service-type projects. These three elements echoed my experience of the path the project had taken pre-thesis, when I was working with the secondary school boys' groups in isolation. The chapter cites the findings of Tim Crabbe, who made a long-term study of six youth engagement projects (Crabbe et al., 2006) in the above elements and more. It was affirming for me to find others recording outcomes I had also seen, involved as I had been for some time in participatory media work:

One example was a familiar moment I had often seen, described thus: 'In most of our case studies, either participants have articulated or we have been able to witness the moment when participants transcend a 'youth club' ethos and start to view themselves as professionals, often spoken about in interviews as when they feel they have achieved a certain sharpness in their game, a certain level of quality.' With this resonance in mind I felt I could borrow from the 'Inclusion Through Media/Hi8us' experience of evaluation, though I recognised that I would need to apply it in my own specific context. I noted 'the 3 types of skills participants gain through engagement with media work: 'hard' craft skills, 'soft' life skills and creative skills.' (Gidley, 2007, pp 48-56)

Gidley's work here helped shape my early research questions and gave me a framework in which to reflect upon my early data. As my thesis developed, the focus shifted away from the skills that participants acquired and onto voice. However, through that shift the progression in participants 'viewing themselves as professionals' was to be a consistent feature in all of the projects.

## **2.7 Exchange**

I have already mentioned the term 'exchange' in relation to the PCR work. My first encounter with this concept came through a comprehensive report in which a number of examples of using the Arts as a catalyst are described (Rooke, 2012). This report on

a 'collaborative art and social research project' documents the use of art as a tool used to achieve a number of specific aims around inclusion and the elderly. Working collaboratively, the concept of a 'skills exchange' is used as a means of realigning existing power relations between clients, staff, institutional structures, artists and the wider public. As the work in each of the 'research clusters' is described, the consistent element that comes over is the role of arts practice in opening up channels of communication, both within the group and to the wider world.

Arts practice was used as a focal point around which to organise elderly voices, whether through the making of a film, an exchange of painted art or the use of photographs. The evidence of the impact of this strategy is in the personal accounts of the participants and it is in these that the authentic research data seems to reside. Much of the reflective testimony speaks of increased communication between groups within each setting suggesting that, at least in those moments, power-relations were, at least partially, realigned. Staff, artists and clients are all quoted to this effect. Stepping back from the warmth of some of the testimonies and looking strategically at care of the elderly, the move from a delivery model to an exchange model is systematically documented. The report is the evidence presented to support this exchange model as an alternative way of running elderly care services. It reads as demonstrably possible. All this was done by virtue of having a creative ingredient, in these cases arts practice, as a catalyst for communication (Rooke, 2012).

On reflection, I now see that reading about these exchanges and the manifesto for the wider use of arts as a 'site for exchange' had been one more step towards my realigning both the structure and the narrative of my thesis. I recognised again that my participatory radio practice provided a site for exchange and any sustainable thesis of mine would need to have practice at its heart.

## **2.8 Supervision: preparing the way for a practice-based thesis**

Having already traced the development of my thesis from 'traditionally academic' to 'practice-based', I further note how that change required a supervisory adjustment. I was keen to bring someone with a radio background into the centre of my circle of

academic support. As I've stated, it was becoming clear that, given the importance of the practical work to my reflections, I somehow needed to move this into the thesis. Committed to the value of the work and to recording it academically I successfully negotiated a restructuring of the thesis to that of an AVPhD, as pioneered by the Goldsmiths Media and Communications department: a practice-based thesis. Traditionally visual, this was a departure into new academic territory for both that department and my own, STaCS. However, in the spirit of valuing and celebrating pioneering academic ventures, a 'culture' I had always hoped Goldsmiths would provide, my revised proposal went forward and I took a new second supervisor aboard, Goldsmiths radio specialist Tim Crook. Thus my practice became a more central focus and with it a framework of action research as a research method.

During my interruption to study I had continued with my PCR work and developed my 'practice base', an evolution I will cover in my findings chapters. In addition, I kept my field diary going as 'self-study-in-the-midst-of-action' (Torbert, W; Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p209). I will also reference this diary again in my finding chapters. However, in reference to the dawning of a practice-based thesis, I revisit this diary entry about a Thursday morning 'audition' for prospective project participants at the Pupil Referral Unit for 11-13 year-olds.

"30/11/2014 – The scene that greeted me as I arrived around 9.15am on the Thursday morning was a short line of pupils being individually scanned for metal weapons. It was a chilling scene, actually, which reminded me of what we are doing here: the importance of the work."

On reflection I can appreciate my prioritising the PCR work at that point of writing. I clearly felt it offered an urgent, positive intervention in these young peoples' lives, or at least the possibility of such an intervention. However, I now recognise that by that point in time I had 'crossed the Rubicon'. At the time I had been unsure about picking up the study again. The continuation of the diary indicates that I did want to resume; and on reflection I believe that keeping the diary going helped me in my resumption. Furthermore, although I did not appreciate it at the time, the practice was now folded into the thesis and the thesis would now help shape the practice. This symbiosis

became acutely apparent during the interruption to study, as I will detail in chapter 5 and revisit in the conclusion.

## **2.9 Ethical considerations**

Writing with hindsight, I can see the span of events as recounted in this chapter in perspective. However, these events were all part of a process of evolution for the study and not part of a pre-planned strategic design, specifically followed in detail from the outset. The research course had introduced me to a number of scenarios that had alerted me to the significance of ethical considerations in research (Oakley, 1981; Hey, 1997; Swain, 2004; Heath *et al*, 2007). My approach to ethical considerations was initially informed by these lessons and augmented by my own professional ethics as a teacher. However, they also subsequently evolved through experience, as events unfolded on the projects. From the outset though, at the centre of my considerations were the PCR participants, some of whom were also to become the subjects of my research. I was always guided by the key principal to professional research ethics: ‘Do no harm’.

### Negotiating research relationships.

As PCR project leader, I had an established relationship with the participants, students and staff who would become involved in my reflective research. However, I was mindful that this new element to that relationship would demand careful thought from me in regard to the ethics of academic research.

Maxwell (2013) recounts his difficulty as an embedded researcher in an Inuit community and the dynamic that living with a selection of families had on his ability to gather data across the wider community. That ‘the relationship you have with any participant in your study is a complex and changing entity’ is borne out by Maxwell’s account of it being a contested area. He describes Tolman and Brydon-Miller (2001) following the participatory, action research model that saw ‘research generate knowledge that is useful to the participants as well as the researchers’. There is also a critique cited (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, 1997) that ‘criticized the tendency, even in qualitative research, to treat relationships as a tool or strategy for

gaining access to data, rather than as a connection (p135). They argued that relationships that are more complex, fluid, symmetrical, and reciprocal – that are shaped by both researchers and actors – reflect a more responsible ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science (pp137-138) Maxwell himself says of this: ‘In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationships are the means by which the research gets done’ (Maxwell, 2013, pp 91-92).

This was pertinent to me because, as mentioned, my relationship with ‘the researched’ had an extra dimension by virtue of them being participants on the PCR projects I led. I was their teacher. However, perhaps my position is not so different from either Maxwell or the action researchers in that we all have to take account of our positions and reflect on our findings in the light of our particular contexts. Perhaps, ironically, it has been clearer for me to do so as the relationships with my research subjects are more transparent from the outset.

The duality of my role underlies the importance of the following two sections here. It is an ongoing dialogue which I have shared with myself and my supervisors at regular intervals. I will endeavour to further outline the relevant, ethical aspects of this dynamic in a methodical, structured way.

#### Gaining consent: Institutions and participants

As a practitioner I seek consent from the participants and those in their institutional settings who are responsible for their participation in the PCR projects. Each of the four community institutions involved – the Senior Citizens Luncheon & Social Club, the Boys’ secondary school, the Hospice and the PRU have their own checks and balances for involvement with outside projects. For example permission letters went home to parents for those under 16, and announcements were made at the Luncheon Club affirming the authenticity of the project and introducing me. For my part, I made contact with the institutions in advance, outlining the project and the anticipated outcomes, listening to their thoughts about how best to proceed.

Once a project has run successfully, trust is increased and a template is established upon which we can improve where necessary. As the project leader, I bring with me

the support and the ethos of the Arts school: I am able to contextualise the aims of the project, if required, and explain how it serves us too. No money changes hands between the institutions and the Arts school. The cost of delivery is borne by the Arts school's budget and the logistics of 'permissions', transport and input on continued participation is held by each of the 'community' institutions. Continued project participation is a jointly-negotiated decision in which each institutional party has a final say.

### 'Care' in the work

I approach the potential participants to talk the project through with them before I invite them aboard. Almost invariably this happens at their institutional sites. I then wait until they agree to come aboard before considering them to be participants. I inform them of the commitment required but also tell them that they can leave the project at any point. I try to reassure them of the support they will receive on what, to many, is project work well-beyond their experiences. I structure the sessions to stretch them but will often consult with accompanying institutional staff and my own student helpers on any issues that arise. I also have staff within the Arts school that can support me. These include a 'Community' line manager and the school Principal, who has a long track record of Community engagement projects from within the school. Thus, the projects have care in-built as a consideration and I am supported, enabling me to ensure that care is delivered as effectively as possible on these projects.

In each of the pre-project meetings the thesis is also referenced and revisited subsequently on appropriate occasions. My position on consent for both the project and the thesis is the same: participation is conditional upon both institutional and participant consent. Negotiating participant consent in relation to the thesis sits alongside this pathway.

### Participant consent in the research:

In an article from the British Educational Research Journal (Sue Heath *et al*, 2007), Heath states that 'the recently revised ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) define informed consent as 'the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to

the research getting underway' and state unequivocally that the attainment of informed consent 'is considered the norm for the conduct of research (BERA 2004, p6)'. She adds that other social science associations have similar guidance, 'bolstered by reference to other key ethical principles such as the avoidance of deception, coercion and harm, alongside assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.' The paper itself explores the concepts of autonomy and agency within children in regard to research, highlighting conflicting attitudes on the issues around gatekeepers and parental permission and visiting debates on young people about 'their competency to make up their own minds concerning their potential involvement.' The thrust of the article highlights the tensions that may exist in certain fields between the wishes of the gatekeepers and/or parents in opposition to the rights of children and young people to participate autonomously in research. It concludes that 'our findings cause us to reflect upon the degree to which we as researchers are complicit in the denial of children and young people's agency and competency by continuing to seek access via sites where the right to opt in or out of research on one's own behalf is known to be frequently denied or diluted.' Heath proposes that researchers be bolder in challenging existing orthodoxies in regards to consent and inclusion of the views of young people in academic research, whilst recognising the risk to the uptake rates and resistance from gatekeepers to this approach (Heath *et al*, 2005, pp 403-415).

I cite this text at some length because it allows me to outline my approach to consent within that discourse. I experienced no resistance from 'gatekeepers and/or parents' to their young people being involved in this study but it heightened my awareness of the need for absolute care in this area.

As the thesis has evolved, my approach to consent became more methodical but my overall practice in this regard has remained uniform from the outset: from the point at which my study was first underway, it was flagged to each participant group at the outset of a project. I did not go into great detail about it at that initial point because I saw my primary role as teacher or project leader. I saw no value in adding another layer of conceptual material into an already demanding lesson. However, as the projects neared completion I raised the research again, emphasising the BERA conditions as quoted above. I further emphasised, whenever the topic of research was

raised, that it ran in parallel to the project and was certainly not a condition of participation in the PCR project. I also informed the institutional gatekeepers at the outset of the thesis research, assuring them that I would seek participant consent at appropriate points and again, that such consent was not connected to participation on the project. In explaining the nature of the research, I would précis in an age-appropriate way. In practice, there was willingness from all participants, without exception, for any material from them that I might want to use for my thesis to go forward. With the hospice project, however, the period of time for reflection, after the initial request, was occasionally of some length. I will refer to this in more detail during the relevant chapter.

This willingness to participate in the study was also supported by staff at the various sites of practice, the 'institutional gatekeepers'. Permissions were then sought by me from parents or guardians of all children under 18. The final consent, and of course the most important one, was confirmation again from the participants themselves. I ensured that when permission was being sought elsewhere from gatekeepers and parents/guardians, all participants were kept fully informed of this process. They were told clearly that they could withdraw their consent should they wish to and that they were being asked by me for their consent. The absence of any obligation to give that consent by virtue of them having been on the project was again emphasised. Consent was given in all cases. Consent was also built into the questionnaires by a prefacing paragraph explaining their purpose and taking completion as consent around that material, with anonymity built in.

Thus the work produced on the projects, including photos and debriefs, became available for use in the thesis. This included broadcasts in which participants were identifiable. After some thought, I concluded that the broadcast material and accompanying audio clips of research would not be made anonymous in the practical submission. The participants had already claimed and utilised their voices in a public arena, namely on the radio, during the projects. Therefore, it seemed less problematic to allow their identifiable work and reflections to go forward for another, arguably less public audience in an academic thesis. This was agreed with the participants, though I assured them that I would maintain their anonymity in my writing.

## The ethics of the practice and the research: 'Care' in project design

As the practice itself is also under review in this thesis, it seems appropriate to explore ethical considerations around the work itself and to then site that within the ethics of reviewing that work for this thesis.

I always take care to ensure the project structure is robust, thus supporting the participants. I am careful in choosing the Arts school students who come aboard from the pool of volunteers, using my professional knowledge of them and seeking collegiate input where I feel it is needed, or affirmation, where I am already confident of my selection. I ensure lines of communication are open at all times with institutional staff and management and, ultimately, I listen to and observe the participants. Their well-being and experience is the first priority.

The projects take place onsite within the health and safety structure and considerations in place at the school. The one project that took place partly off-site, the KS3 PRU referenced in a subsequent chapter, was delivered where their own health and safety policies were in place. Ahead of all the projects, I informed relevant Arts school staff and students about the project visitors with the aim of fostering a safe and welcoming climate into which these participants would venture. Thus, consideration for participants' safety and welfare was already in place ahead of visits to the vibrant, busy hub by senior citizens, students from a PRU, or hospice patients in wheelchairs or carrying oxygen bottles. Reviews happened in debrief and additionally with accompanying institutional staff and Arts school students. In short, care has been taken to ensure as positive an experience around the work as possible for all the participants. Although I have mentioned pressures on evaluated outcomes at the beginning of this chapter in reference to the questionnaires, I have subsequently been able to develop this work in a reasonably unpressurised, supportive school climate with the overt backing of the school leadership.

One central purpose of the projects is to encourage Voice. In my experience, that will only work in a supportive, trusted environment. And that needs care.

## 2.10 Reflexivity

I continue to return to this dual role, teacher and researcher. I agree with Maxwell that any researcher disturbs the field and so the way forward is to understand and work with that disruption if possible: 'eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible (Hammerlsey and Atkinson, 1995) and the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and to use it productively' (Maxwell 2006, p126). I go on to suggest that this positioning worked to the benefit of the data collection process: I was able to co-exist as the teacher and an 'embedded researcher'/reflective practitioner.

That said, in summary I declare my position in this thesis reflexively through the following:

- I presented myself as the teacher to the participants at the outset of the projects, also referencing my thesis and my research.
- I recognised that my primary relationship with the participants was as a project leader.
- I believed that my position as a teacher in a school would be likely to have an impact on participants, though not necessarily in the role of researcher. However, there was an inherent power-relationship of which I needed to be mindful when embarking upon my research journey.
- The responses from the participants would be framed within the prism of my asking the questions and me being the project leader.
- My ability to access these participants in such a direct and open way to collect data was there by virtue of my having worked with them on the projects.
- My area of study was around the practice and I used a combination of research methods to ascertain my final reflections of the PCR work.
- Others will judge this work and include my declarations in their weighing of it, additionally bringing their own perceptions and experiences. These, in turn, will act as their prisms.
- This work will be 'read' and be heard differently by each who comes across it.

I should like to emphasise that I bring my own history to this work. As both practitioner and researcher, my reflections and interpretations are shaped by this. To disclose a full biography would be overly-detailed, though my introduction carries some information about me. I now offer myself as the facilitator of the work about which you will read and of the voices you will hear. You too will bring your history to these 'readings'. Thus I propose to continue with these 'prisms' in mind.

### **2.11 What's Ahead?**

Having situated the PCR work in the fields of Voice and exchange, and offered an evolved research structure and contextualised mandate in which I conducted that research, I look forward to your reading on. First up is an intergenerational project involving a senior citizens' club working with a boys' secondary school. Following them are hospice patients working alongside Arts school students. The final project has young people from a Pupil Referral Unit, again working with Arts school students.

These are the voices that will be heard through both the text and the practical submission.

## Chapter 3: Early practice and findings

### The West Indian Senior Citizens' luncheon club and the secondary school boys

**Introduction:** This chapter reports on my early findings and then reflects the transition in my study.

At the outset my focus was on broader concepts around community (Mayo, 2000) and empowerment (Freire, 1972; Dowmunt, 2010) in relation to my Participatory Community Radio (PCR) practice. I was not focussed on concepts of voice, or at least I was not able to name them as such. However, in reviewing the thesis data holistically it soon became clear that the potential for empowerment offered through participatory media work (Dowmunt, 2010) was strongly linked to concepts of voice as I had subsequently encountered them (Berry, 1994; Couldry, 2010; Rodenburg, 2015).

This chapter begins with the results of the questionnaire used to clarify themes for further exploration in the PCR field. It then reports on a subsequent series of semi-structured interviews and focus group responses. It takes account of a field diary, initiated to supplement the other data collection, and goes on to reference the practical submission before offering concluding thoughts about this early stage of the study.

### 3.1 The questionnaire

At this stage of my research, I was scoping the field.

This first research exercise was aimed at finding out how participants experienced the radio work: were there commonalities of experience regardless of age or gender? I was keen to know specifically if the participants had experienced feelings of improved self-esteem having done the project work. I also wanted to know how they had experienced the team-based nature of the work. Further, given the ethos of participatory media work (Dowmunt et al, 2010), it seemed pertinent to explore if there was any sense of active citizenship or empowerment felt by those groups in

particular. I put the whole questionnaire out to the widest possible sample within my practice delivery which included students from the Arts school as well as ‘community participants’: (see appendix i )

The issue of ‘grateful testimonials’ was minimised by the questionnaires being distributed via gatekeepers, answered anonymously and then collected again at a later date. In addition I had emphasised my request for honesty in the responses. At the time the purpose of this data was to get a taste of what was happening for the participants through the project. It was not, in itself, an in-depth picture.

### Questionnaire findings

There was an almost universally positive response concerning the enhanced self-confidence offered through participation on the various radio projects and subsequent contributions to the school radio station.

#### **“Working on (Arts School FM) developed my confidence”**

Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree
44%	54%	3%

Closer analysis of the data showed that the group most positive about this element were the Seniors from the Luncheon Club (see appendix ii) but, overall, I was able to identify a clear benefit for participants in this project work in relation to self-esteem: in relation to my reading, it hinted at the possibility that ‘cultures of resistance can contribute to building self-esteem and self-confidence in the possibility for social transformation’ (Mayo 1997, p13). In any case, it was encouraging data worthy of further investigation.

I was keen to explore how enhanced self-esteem might lead onto empowerment for participants.

**“Participating in (Arts School) FM made me feel I can have an impact on the world around me”**

Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree
30%	43%	26%

There was a positive response from participants to this question, though not as positive as to the self-esteem felt to be offered by the PCR project work. Again, the senior citizens were most positive about this statement. There were extraneous factors that might have explained a more mixed response from the younger, student cohort (see appendix iii). Having said that, 73% still responded positively to the statement, a figure that provides evidence that participation in community radio can still be seen to produce feelings of empowerment, as advocated by its proponents (Coyer, 2007). In review I noted that a feature of localised or community radio is the potential for citizen empowerment (Fleming 2010; Barbrook, 2005), offering a site for Voice to those that can be marginalised by mainstream media outlets (Downmunt, 2007; Couldry, 2010). These early findings were offering reference points for my subsequent focus of enquiry.

One of the elements in radio work I had long-identified was the collaboration between participants, regardless of demographic differences. Radio, it seemed, facilitated exchange. I also knew that the age-based, generational differences quickly became less prominent during project work: post-show debriefs on previous projects had already indicated an important meeting ground of shared experiences between the generations. The questionnaire results confirmed that a radio project could offer a site for exchange across a significant age-gap.

**“Working alongside people of school/retirement age was a positive experience”// “I enjoyed working alongside older students on the radio station”**

Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree
62%	38%	0%

This echoed outcomes from the work of Magic Me (Langford and Mayo, 2001) and the Modalities of Exchange report (Rooke, 2012) where participatory arts projects had provided a positive site for exchange between different generations. Although all the responses were positive, it was the senior citizens group again who responded most positively to the statement (see appendix iv).

At this early stage I interpreted the positive responses from the participants as indications that both empowerment and exchange were present in this work. I would explore these themes further in qualitative work with participants. I should add, with hindsight, that my identification of 'empowerment' in the work was rather premature. I will return to this theme later in the thesis. In addition, although largely focused on the participant experience at this research moment, I also had in mind that this PCR initiative was 'radio work' in a wider sense. In my view, work with a potential audience and a purpose: to 'step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers' (Brecht, 1932). Thus, subsequent qualitative enquiries would also explore how the participants felt about being those 'suppliers' and then being heard by listeners: how they experienced finding their voices and then using them on the radio. It was from this line of enquiry that the specific narrative of the thesis would emerge and voice would become the link between the different stages of the PCR practice.

### **3.2 Qualitative responses**

#### An introduction to the data

The following data is from a set of interviews conducted with the four female luncheon club participants from a specific intergenerational radio project completed in 2011. This was one of a number of similar projects that had run since 2008 also involving local secondary school boys. The boys had been referred by their school Special Educational Needs (SEN) department by virtue of having 'emotional and behavioural difficulties'. Their responses are featured in the practical submission alongside those of the women.

Three of these women had migrated from the Caribbean many decades ago. At the time of the projects and the associated research, one was in her mid-sixties, one in her

seventies and one was eighty-two. The fourth was born in England soon after her mother's arrival here. She was in her mid-sixties at the time of the projects and research. All the women belonged to a 'West Indian Luncheon and Social Club', identified from now on as simply 'the Luncheon club'. The boys were twelve or thirteen years of age and of African or Caribbean descent. The participant ages and ethnicities are relevant in that these were voices rarely-heard for any length of time on the radio. In a neo-liberal voice-denying climate (Couldry, 2010) I was keen to explore, through gathering data on the project, how these participants experienced using their voices to be heard by themselves, their participatory peers and a wider audience.

### Gathering the data

The interviews with the women were semi-structured and took place three months after the project ended at their luncheon club. They lasted around 45 minutes each and explored the women's experiences of the project and any legacy they may have felt from it. Each woman had a slightly different project history, as the whole initiative had been running for four years at this point. The interviews with the boys and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) staff member were also semi-structured, being conducted onsite in the radio studios a few weeks after the project-end.

The extracts presented subsequently in this section reference the emergent themes of the thesis. They help tell the story of the pattern in participant responses around the two themes subsequently named as 'Voice' and 'exchange'. There were other aspects that also emerged through the wider data, such as the project's positive impact on 'well-being' in the seniors and enhanced classroom learning and focus in the boys. However, the data reported here is specific to the emergent themes of this thesis: voice and exchange.

### The respondents

**'I'** was in her early 70's. She had participated in two radio projects.

**'C'** was 74 years old. She joined the radio project for the winter session of 2011.

**'D'** was 82 years old. She had participated in three training sessions but, at the point of research, had yet to complete a live show. Subsequent to the interview however, D

completed her first set of live shows including one Outside Broadcast from the club itself when she presented live in front of an audience of peers.

'R' was 67 years old. She participated in the original project in 2008, which involved just seniors from the club. She returned at irregular intervals only, otherwise committed as she was to family child care.

### The emergent narrative of the thesis

In the extracts below, each participant is responding to questions about their involvement in one or more of the projects, including their full participation in live radio shows, and their experiences of listening back to the recordings of those shows. The interviews were conducted at the Luncheon Club several weeks after the Christmas 2011 project was completed.

It was through these early responses that the field of enquiry in the thesis developed. The proposition of the thesis emerged through the following stages of voice:

- Finding voice - hearing your own voice as others hear it; becoming accustomed to that sound;
- Sharing voice - sharing your voice with the rest of the group;
- Achievement - interacting and creating radio content through voice and exchange;
- Empowerment - broadcasting that content on the radio and sharing that content with peers, family and friends.

However, although this linear narrative outlines my proposal as to what PCR can offer to participants in relation to voice, I would add some nuance to my claims about 'empowerment' as revisited in the concluding chapters.

Overleaf are short extracts from the interviews, categorised under the headings I have described as the stages of voice in this PCR context.

## Finding Voice

During the radio projects these women went through a journey in relation to their voices which then enabled them to tell some of their own stories. This marked their encounters, each for the first time, with their own 'public' voices: the voice the outside world hears (Berry, 1994, pp22-23). That they didn't like the sound of their own voices is a most common reaction (Rodenburg, 2015, p9).

**R** 'When I heard my own voice for the first time I didn't even recognise it (small laugh). It didn't sound like me at all. But after a couple of times listening to it then I said "Yes". I was quite pleased.'

**I** 'Everybody said they like my voice (small giggle) But when I talk to myself I say "uh oh", but when I listen to my voice it sound different (laugh) (quieter) It sound different.'

**D** 'It was strange to hear my voice (chuckle) because, you know, you don't hear your own voice, so when you hear it, it was strange.

**J** Are you glad you've heard your own voice?

**D** It is good..to hear it... to know how it sounds..'

**C** 'I've always said that I don't like my voice, but when I heard it..well, it wasn't too bad (small laugh).

**J** Was it strange to hear it back first of all?

**C** Yes because erm you don't really hear your voice..normally.. so I always said that my voice doesn't really sound like a woman's voice (small laugh)..yeah but..eh it's ok.

**J** Why did you not like your voice before, or think you didn't like your voice?

**C** I just don't know. I just not when...because when you talk you probably hear something different from what the other..from what the other person's hearing, but when it's recorded and you listen to it you hear what the other person hears (small laugh)

**J** Was it something that had been commented on before, when you were younger perhaps?

C No not really..not really. It's just me. (small laugh) It's just me."

These excerpts illustrate the respondents recognising a difference between their inner and public voices (Berry, 1994, p23). Beyond that, one can note their increased confidence in their public vocalisation which in turn offered the possibility that they would exercise their 'right to communicate' and 'collectively...create their own media' (Coyer, 2007, p117), which they did indeed go on to do through their project show. This increase in confidence in the sound of their own voices, articulated across all four of the interviews, helped them embrace their public voices and marked an important step towards them broadcasting, being heard by others.

### Sharing Voice

The next stage in the emergent thesis narrative was the active decision by participants to share their public voices with those close to them through the playing of the show recordings. This allowed the participants to be perceived by their families and friends in a role different to the one they had inhabited for so long. It might be suggested that, for these participants, this was the start of a transformational process as defined by Mayo, with 'learning participants' able to challenge seemingly all pervading, existing hegemonies. (Mayo 1997, p26): having heard themselves in a different way they were now ready to let others in their own family and social circles do the same.

**'I'**

I 'The day of the broadcasting I was wondering what my voice (was) going to be like..and if..anyone out there hear my voice they're going to (have) said 'Oh how horrible that voice is', or thing like that. But after doing the broadcasting, go home and listen to it I said 'Oh, doesn't sound that bad as I thought I would' and then when my children and come around and few of my friends came around on Christmas, New Year's...I played it and they listened to it and they said "Oh, that's not bad. You do well. You done well".

...when it started to play and I said to one of my friends "Do you recognise that voice?" and she said "It's sort of, but I don't sure" and then my grandson pick it up and said "That's Grandma!" (laugh)

**'R'**

R 'My grandchildren and children have heard it and they thought it was quite good. They were pleased that gran..nanny could do something like that, because they didn't expect me to do anything like that. My voice sound really strange, not like real nanny (small laugh)

J What did they say?

R "Oh nanny, your voice sound really posh...(laugh)... on the radio", yeah...so that gives me a lot of encouragement.'

### Achievement/Empowerment

This section is about participant achievement, empowerment and the resultant agency from having experienced PCR work. Through the short extracts below, it illustrates the agency PCR offers by virtue of its specific technical, physical and social construction. Additional to these 'instrumental' aspects of the project is the act of 'being on the radio'. The women talk of that being far beyond their own expectations, particularly at their time of life. By achieving it they captured hard-won autonomy in relation to their voices, though their enhanced agency started on the project a good while before their final radio show.

The act of finding their public voices in itself offered these women enhanced agency in the 'project moment'. The school radio station, existing as part of an 'alternative media infrastructure' (Gilbert, 2008, p96), then offered a modest platform through which they could be heard: participatory media working to create messages that offer alternatives to the mainstream 'mediascape' diet (Downmunt, 2010). The voices of these women interacting with the secondary school boys offered 'a different picture, a different understanding' to those listening (Chomsky, 2007, 2hrs 18mins). In addition, access to this platform became an act of intervention in the tradition of Boal: a 'sacred space' (Boal, 1995, p14), in this case radio, was made available for forum-type communication.

Although I cross-reference the literature here, I do so with a caveat. Events in the 'project moment' are clearly valid but I must resist making epic claims about empowerment for these participants. I note the possibilities offered by the achievements as I heard and saw them occurring in the projects. Nevertheless, the

extract below does illustrate the feelings of empowerment engendered by such project work as articulated by the participants. In these women's responses we can detect clear evidence of feelings of empowerment, as named by Mayo (2000), Dowmunt (2007) and others: 'Nothing is quite so free and enlarging as a liberated voice' (Rodenburg, 2015, p14).

This is how the women experienced it:

**(C)**

**C** 'I know I achieved something I never thought I would, that's the only way I can put it.

**J** Have you had that feeling before?

**C** Not really. Not really..( laugh) not really... when I started..the first day I started this thing, I never thought it would be something I would do to..have a recording, you know. (laugh) Maybe a younger person they would easily go after something like this but.. for the older people we might say "I don't think I'll be able to do that"..you know

**J** But you've done it

**C** Yeah. Yes, I've done it (laugh). Yes. Uhum.'

**(R)**

**R** 'It's not something I would ever, ever thought I would ever do, listening to radio for years and years, you never thought you would sit there and be, you know, erm..( 2 secs) actually sitting in front of a radio station and be...speaking on a microphone. Never ever experienced it, think I would in my whole life...

...even when we got..I got the tape and listened to my voice I thought "that cannot be me, it cannot be me on the radio," so that was ..mm..that was good. That was good

**(D)**

**D** 'Some people getting old and they say they can't do this, can't do that, but for me now and going on the radio like that, saying something, it gives me more confidence, see, that I can do something, and I always like to do something . I don't think of age. I have a young mind. Old body. (laugh)'

(I)

J 'Was it a big thing for you to go on the radio?

I It was because ..as I said I didn't expect to go on radio and seeing that..I was sitting down in the driving seat and doing every little bits and pieces there, it let me feel good..and it just let me feel like, "Well, if you want to do something and you put your mind to it, you can do it." So that was it..(quieter) that was it.'

The real sense of achievement felt by these women is wholly understandable when one considers the tasks they completed. They succeeded in carrying out complex technical manoeuvres as well as using their voices 'on the mic', both from scripts and in more organic exchanges. These responses from them suggest their achievements through voice in radio offered them a real sense of empowerment that, in turn, offered possibilities around enhanced agency. This was succinctly articulated by (R):

R It's kind of broadened my outlook on things actually, it has done that. Because it's..it's not something you think you would have done but having that opportunity to do that is just broaden your horizons that you can do anything now! You've been on the radio, you can do..you can challenge anything now. Yeah.

This may also be a good moment to reference the power of radio, with its long, enduring history as a medium (Lewis, 1986). Radio had necessarily played a significant part in these women's lives, given their own longevity. That they were now able to 'appear' on the radio, to be heard on the radio, carried a significant weight of achievement for them specifically.

### Inter-generational exchange

Having identified what PCR offered the participants in relation to the more expected participatory media outcomes (Dowmunt *et al*, 2010), this chapter moves on to the issue of 'exchange'. This also emerged as an aspect of this work that demanded to be taken forward in the study. It became clear to me that this was one of the 'ingredients' I had long-identified as a positive element but had been unable to name. Subsequently

understanding it to be present in other participatory arts projects (Langford and Mayo 2001; Rooke, 2012), I was curious to know what place 'exchange' had in PCR. It became increasingly clear that, though initially viewed by me as a by-product of the project work, it was in fact central to the success of its functioning and its outcomes. I came to realise that 'exchange' was woven into 'voice' in these projects.

Intergenerational exchange was offered by the project structure as the women worked alongside boys aged between 12 and 15. They also worked with radio trainers who were in their late teens or early twenties. They engaged in the life of the Arts School each time they came onsite for their radio lessons. And finally, during the school broadcast they worked within a wider radio station that was largely peopled by teenagers. In other words, these women were fully immersed in an intergenerational experience during these projects.

All four women spoke positively of their experience of working alongside the schoolboys, managing technical challenges together, sharing stories and building working relationships. These extracts give a representation of their feelings:

**(D)**, talking about the recorded interviews with her designated secondary school partners on themes such as their holiday memories and their experiences of school:

**J** 'What was that like, to be talking to the boys about your stuff and listening about their stuff?

**D** Well, I like to talk about my life in Jamaica...

**J** So what was it like to share those stories with the boys?

**D** I think they learn a lot from us, they learn to see..and they can, you know, they can picture what it's like, y'know?

**J** Were there points at which you lost sight of the age thing when you were working with the boys. Did it not feel actually that there was sixty or seventy years between you?

**D** No, no, no, ..because I love, I love young people

**J** So did it always feel like they were that age or did it feel like you were on a similar level?

**D** I know they are younger than me but when we come to talk together you don't remember about age, yes?'

**(I)** overcame her initial trepidation of working with young teenagers to embrace the positives of the exchange:

**I** 'Coming there and seeing all these young girls, young boys and I said "Oh my gawd, for my age, what am I doing in here?!"

**J** What did you think when you first saw them?

**I** When I saw the boys them I was saying, I was thinking "Oh..I'm wondering if they will cope with us as elderly"....but seeing that we are much older people they were fine with us and we also was fine with them. You know, we get on well with the boys them. They work with us fine.

**(R)** did the project without the boys first time round. On her latest summer project appearance she worked with them for two sessions before the final shows:

**R** 'When I went back and saw the boys from the college they were.. much younger (laugh), they were far younger, erm, but yeah it was quite good. I thought it would be 'oh they're quite young so how am I going to get on with this lot?' but it was quite good. I didn't feel nervous or anything working with them../.. I just came in with them and we just did what we have to do.

**(C)**

**J** 'What was your experience of working with the boys?

**C** Oh I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much. And they were nice lads. Well-behaved.

**J** Was there a point at which the age didn't actually seem that relevant?

**C** No it didn't... yeah, it never really bothered me, you know, to work with them.

**J** It's quite interesting isn't it? That the age barrier..or the age difference did seem to melt away within the project. Did it feel like that to you?

**C** Yeah. Yeah. Because you're just another person when you work with one of them. It's just another person. Uhum.'

Each woman paired up with a boy for a recorded conversation which would be played during the final shows. (C) went on to describe a significant moment during the recorded conversation about Christmas memories she had with one of the boys:

**C** 'Well it was ...it was ok, erm..sharing. I lost my mother when I was a child..a school girl and it was just that little time you know, when I remember you know, because she died in April, so the last Christmas before that was the last Christmas I spent with her, but apart from that everything else was alright.

**J** In terms of when you were...

**C** Yeah when she died I was just a school girl. Just touched my teens.

**J** Oh wow.

**C** Yeah, so..

**J** So did..did you talk about that on the radio?

**C** Yeah when erm (K) asked something about the last Christmas... memory about Christmas and I said "the last one I spent with my mother" ..and then he said "I won't go any further" (small laugh) Yes

**J** He said..?

**C** Yeah "I won't go any further", so I don't know if that's on the tape, mmm.

**J** That's quite..that shows quite a sort of trust in terms of sharing that stuff

**C** Yes, yes yes yes. Well it was a long time ago but still...you never forget really

**J** Sounds like he handled that quite well

**C** Yes yes yes, because he just didn't say any else about it, just "I won't go any further"

**J** Did you appreciate that?

**C** Yes. Yes. Very much. Uhuh. (small laugh)'

This last extract illustrates meaningful exchange between the two age-groups. All the women had stated that age receded as a factor when the group was embarked upon the show work. In my view, though, this was a striking example of two people interacting on a very human level.

The link between voice and exchange is encapsulated well in the moment described above. Here is an exchange between two individuals communicating meaningfully despite the stereotypical expectations that they might not. They are using their voices to do so, and that exchange gives voice to the existence of such communication: that it happens, is recorded, aired and shared gives both participants added agency through that process. I offer it as an early example in this study of an 'informal act of citizenship that transforms modes of being by bringing into being new actors and creating new sites and scales of struggle' (Isin, 2008, p39; Couldry, 2010, p145).

#### Feedback from the Secondary school boys

So far the focus of this chapter has been from the women's perspective. The secondary school boys also talked of the bond they felt they had developed with the women, the challenge that offered to their pre-conceptions about older people and what the project offered them in terms of self-esteem, improved focus and self-confidence. Some of this data is articulated in the practical submission, along with the contextualising clips from the SEN Learning Support worker who managed the logistics of the project from that end and accompanied the boys throughout the work.

### **3.3 The supplemental field diary**

As explained in Chapter 2, having embarked upon my thesis in the autumn of 2010, and after a number of years of practice in PCR, I started a field diary in March 2011. Being so close to the work as a project leader, I felt that I needed a space in which to reflect upon the work contemporaneously and with a degree of separation; in essence, a place to reflect as a researcher on what I'd observed whilst teaching. It was to become a key tool for me in the action research element of my study, allowing me to 'see myself and my context anew' and 'seek to ensure quality of participation and relationship in the work' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p344). Thus, it also became folded into my own journey as a reflexive practitioner.

Given that I am the author of the field diary, I cannot claim that it offers the traditional triangulation of an outside observer with the aim of enhancing the validity of the data already offered in this chapter (Maxwell, 2006, p128), though I do note again the view

that any researcher disturbs the field of research (Hammerlsey and Atkinson, 1995). Thus, I offer these diary extracts as a cross-reference to the earlier qualitative extracts. However, I also offer them as notes from an 'aide-memoir' to help illustrate what was happening on the projects. As ever, I further note my involvement with the work described and accept the weighing of the data that must accompany this transparency.

In that spirit, I offer the following shorter extracts to illustrate specific points. The first is about the value of the projects to these women in regard to autonomy. It transpired during the project that the women were economical with the information they gave their families about their participation:

"... 'C' says she's very vague with her husband about what she's doing on a Monday afternoon – both ladies agreed that their people just wouldn't 'get it' – though she has confided in one of her grandchildren. Both ladies (had previously) brought cameras and wanted pictures of them at the desk, but I asked last week who'd seen the pictures and that was when it emerged that they hadn't shared this information with (pretty much) anyone. It got me wondering why.....Perhaps they just want to keep this bit of their lives to themselves. Perhaps it's as simple as this is their time."

To expand on that diary extract I suggest that, away from the traditional roles and demands of their home lives, the project offered the women a different exploration of agency. The radio studio offered a discreet space to liberate voice and to explore enhanced agency. The confidence to speak and act was not easily won but the technical and social hurdles they overcame to do so affirmed their efforts. The projects nurtured these developments. The women took risks by doing so, not least of which being the approbation of their families and peers. Only when they had succeeded within the studio could they then risk airing the recordings to family and friends, which they did successfully. Interestingly, the audience in the school or online did not seem a limiting factor to their adventure. The practical submission has two of the women talking about this, so you can hear their story there.

The second extract illustrates what the women brought to the boys in terms of exchange. Given that the shared background of almost all the participants was either African or Afro-Caribbean, there were cultural reference points. However, alongside

respect for their elders demanded by those cultures, there was a maturity demanded of the boys by virtue of the collegiate nature of the work:

“The boys have responded positively to the ladies and it certainly gives a nice balance to them. They are a cross- (mixed) year group, with different ages, and they are by and large less ‘boisy’ than they were at the start. I’ve noticed that the peer banter from those all-boy ‘secondary school’ groups is quite pronounced when they start out. However that tends to fade with the progress of the work, and I think it’s softened even further in the company of the ‘Luncheon’ ladies.”

It was noticeable that these boys, with ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’, worked extremely positively with the women. The SEN staff member noted it too, suggesting that one factor may have been that they were relating to them as the grandparents they often didn’t see because of family breakdown or geographical separation. In any case, firm collegiate friendships were formed between the two groups. It was heart-warming, as illustrated in the final extract offered below.

*“Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> Dec*

The Family Christmas Show came together nicely, with three ‘Luncheon’ (YW, I and C) and four ‘secondary school’ (N, K2, K1 and K3) participants making the final show.... There was a definite bond between them. They supported each other in the process...The debrief confirmed a mutual respect and a shared experience that made the age gap (about 50 years) irrelevant, or at least of minimal relevance.... Overall, the project again provides evidence of the efficacy of radio training and broadcast work in providing a context or a setting within which intergenerational exchanges can take place and be shared with the wider world.”

#### The value of the diary

Use of the diary to reflect upon the PCR practice marked the first action-research cycle of my work (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). These notes helped me reflect upon both my practice and the relationship of the PCR work to the study.

At that stage of the thesis, in 2011, I was seeing ‘empowerment’ as a central theme and noting the development of soft skills that such participatory media work facilitates

in participants (Gidley, 2007, p.53). The diary helped me record findings that echoed Gidley's summary of soft skill outcomes from participatory media work: and the broader notion that project participation by 'people who have been excluded can often transform people's self-perception, building confidence (and) a social voice' (Fountain, 2007, p10). As a researcher, I found the diary to be a helpful reference point and one that offered a useful contemporaneous perspective as I looked for a more appropriate theoretical framework within which to place this practice more specifically.

However, something else was happening through my reflective writing at the time. As I then reviewed it, and there was plenty of it, I realised that the demands of the study were threatening my ability to continue the practice. I was becoming overwhelmed by the weight of the extra work associated with the thesis. At this point, after some soul-searching, the practice became my priority. I took an 'interruption to study' without any firm plans to return to the thesis. To echo Couldry and Downmunt, I felt increasingly that 'the answer lies in the practice' (Couldry 2003, p.41; Downmunt, 2007, p10).

With hindsight I can see the most important aspect of the diary at that point in time was the reflection it gave me of the PCR work as a practitioner. By virtue of having undertaken the study I was better able to see the possibilities for PCR in more challenging contexts: the practice template had been built and I was now ready to apply it elsewhere. Now, of course, that 'interruption' becomes folded firmly into the action-research cycle, for I continued to write the diary even as I believed I had parted company from this academic study: it was still important for me as a practitioner to reflect upon my practice with the aim of both recording and improving my practical work.

Perhaps the most far-reaching value of the diary was in illustrating to me that, like it or not, it was too late to deny the changes in my perspective: I was now a 'scholar-practitioner' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.xxv).

### **3.4 The practical submission (CD)**

As referred to in the introductory chapter, the written part of this thesis offers a theoretical analysis to accompany my PCR practice and reflections upon the practice itself. The accompanying practical submission has two purposes: it complements my writing by illustrating my PCR practice; it also adds to the practice by circulating the Voices to an extended audience. Although the content of the written and the audio submissions overlap at times, my intention is that the writing and the sound enhance each other to offer a fuller appreciation of Participatory Community Radio in relation to Voice and Exchange.

There is a commentary on the practical submission in the concluding chapter of the thesis. However, it is appropriate to reference the first part of the CD here as it directly relates to this first PCR project. The section below also acts as a précis for the longer explanation of the format of the audio submission, as offered at the end of the thesis.

#### The Luncheon Club and The Secondary School – selecting the voices

In selecting examples to illustrate this first project work, it seemed most sensible to select the work around which the most data had already been collected. This was to be from the two PCR projects completed in 2011. I decided to go for a selection that best illustrated the stages of a ‘typical’ project cycle. Thus there are two scripted jingles, which I use early on to introduce the participants to their external voices in high definition sound. Then there are the conversations, structured by the participants on a chosen theme. Finally, there is recorded feedback from the participants and an ‘institutional voice’, a staff member, to add some context. I have added in links, my voice as a ‘scholar-practitioner’, to add explanation. I have also used my experience as a radio practitioner to make this a ‘listenable’ piece of work by adding in some music and mixing the whole audio submission as well as possible.

I have not selected what I consider to be the ‘best’ material produced on these projects, as defined in technical terms. It is a more pragmatic selection of work, chosen as an illustration of my practice at that point in the study.

### 3.5 In conclusion

From the evidence I have offered in this chapter, I suggest the PCR projects involving participants from the Luncheon Club and the Boys' school facilitated effective inter-generational exchange: it offered 'solidarity within difference' (Mayo, 2000, p47). In addition, it showed how this form of radio 'can challenge the division between broadcasters and consumers in our society' (Barbrook, 2005, p72) and facilitated a 'transformational' experience for the participants, with added echoes of 'lifelong learning' (Mayo 1997, p17) for the Luncheon Club women. It bridged a generational gap, replicating outcomes in other inter-generational participatory arts work (Langford and Mayo, 2001). Through the early research, themes of Voice and exchange came to the fore as it became clear in the data that these participants were rejecting the erstwhile possibility of them being 'vocal hostages' (Rodenburg, 2015, p30). They were free to experiment and reclaim their voices in a project environment specifically designed to offer them that possibility. My appreciation of that process, through wider reading and reflection on the data, helped subsequently shape both my practice and this thesis.

Although clear now, at the time of the work considered in this chapter my academic perspective on the project had been led by concepts of community, identity and opportunities for empowerment (Mayo, 2000). These had afforded me an academic framework through which to view the project outcomes but they did not offer me a distinct definition of what was happening in those radio studios. They were just not precise enough. The emergence of Voice and exchange as themes at this point helped focus my thoughts on the direction the thesis might take, should it continue.

Meanwhile, I reasoned that PCR practice had much to offer in terms of voice and exchange. As I gave much thought as to the next sites of practice, a personal experience led me to instigate contact with a long-standing community partner of the Arts School. Thus the next PCR project was born involving a local hospice. This was to be the Lifetime Radio project and it is the subject of the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Voices from the Hospice

**Introduction:** This chapter reports on the PCR initiative involving patients from a local hospice and their collaboration with a small group of post-16 Arts school students. The data offered is comprised of focus group interviews, longer qualitative interviews and contemporaneous field diary notes. The analysis begins by placing the work within the context of the literature explored in Chapter 1. This then gives way to a more in-depth exploration of the conditions that facilitated and nurtured voice in this particular project. Finally there is an exploration of the possibilities for empowerment as offered by the PCR work in a hospice context. In combination with the practical submission, this chapter informs a broader appreciation of the role Participatory Community Radio practice can play in relation to voice in a hospice context. Although the broader themes of ‘Voice and exchange’ run through all of the projects, the emphasis in this chapter is on the importance of creating the conditions in which the ‘participant voice’ can be nurtured, with more focus upon ‘exchange’ and ‘agency’. Although the content produced on the project is explored in some detail through one particularly striking example, the focus of the written reflections here is more on how those voices were facilitated rather than what they said. That ‘content’ features more prominently in the hospice section of the accompanying practical submission.

### 4.1 Extending the ‘field of practice’

During my two-year interruption to study I extended the scope of my PCR practice by working with participants from more ‘hard-to-reach’ cohorts or ‘lesser-heard’ voices, belonging to ‘the socially, culturally and politically excluded’ (Dowmunt, 2007, p5). This drive in me to ‘air the marginalised voice’ was a long-established one, having been a feature of my radio broadcasting work before I started teaching, and so it was a logical progression that as a teaching practitioner my PCR work should alight upon voices such as those from a hospice.

The Arts school had a well-established connection with a local hospice, having collaborated on art and drama projects via its Community Education department over previous years. The Arts school Principal was immediately supportive and put me in touch with the hospice worker he felt would be 'best-fit', allowing this part of the PCR journey to get underway.

#### **4.2 'Care' in the work**

My experience from initiating and developing previous projects helped me to design my methods of practice-delivery on this new initiative. As referenced in the 'recipe for success' in the Magic Me work (Langford and Mayo, 2001, p13), care was needed in setting the project up to ensure the project foundations were secure. As outlined in the Methods chapter, my developmental approaches were made systematically through 'gatekeepers'. With no background in the care of the terminally ill, I had no real experience of how either the physical or psychological impacts of their illnesses might affect their capacity for this kind of practical radio work. I therefore communicated fully with the relevant parties around pastoral care and logistical considerations, including access to the site and the possibilities in terms of the project content. We discussed the duration of the sessions, the need for breaks, water or food.

Permissions for use of the material by both the school as a broadcaster and me as a researcher were also part of this ongoing dialogue. I was closely guided by the professionals from the hospice in these areas. This was a sound strategy because when issues arose, as they inevitably did on such an interactive project, there were already open channels of communication through which answers could be found.

Given that the project would also include Arts school students, I also ensured the school was fully informed at all stages. The school site staff members were briefed in case any sort of medical emergency arose and key staff were alerted about the onsite presence of hospice visitors. It is perhaps indicative of the culture of the school that the Principal made specific mention of the arrival of hospice patients to all the pre-16 students in the weekly assembly on the first day of the project. I hadn't expected that

to happen but was impressed to note the warm yet unfussy reception these new recruits received as they arrived on site.

In the spring of 2013 the first 'Lifetime Radio project' got underway. I had chosen the name as a celebration of the hospice ethos, for this work was to be about life. At the time of writing there have been four such projects and as a practitioner I have learned through each one, folding those lessons into my practice as I have gone along. I wrote, reflected and refined my practice, following the Action Research model as outlined by Bradbury and Reason (2006). Although the whole hospice radio initiative is referenced in this chapter, it is the third project in 2015 that largely features here: this was the project that at the time of writing felt the most methodically researched as a study and, at that point, also perhaps the most advanced in its practice.

### **4.3 Finding 'community' at the outset**

At the outset of the first project in 2013 I was struck by the notions of identity that the hospice groups brought with them. Those first participants had been drawn from two different hospices and the opening project session saw them meet for the first time. I had been warned that they felt ownership of their particular groups and hospices. Hospice worker (Mn) told me it would be 'interesting' to see how they mixed. With that in mind, in that first session I trained them in their separate groups to begin with and then joined them together for a jingle recording session. By the end of that first day they were swapping experiences of their conditions and sharing moans about their respective institutions. It was notable, if predictable, that their shared vocabulary at that point was around their illnesses. This was the initial 'community of identity', their shared experience of being terminally ill, and there was no doubt in my mind that these people were 'experts on their own situations' (Mayo 2000, p24).

### **4.4 Introducing the data from the third hospice project**

The following were among those who participated in the projects and subsequently allowed both their work and their responses to be used in this study. (Ce) was a

Jamaican-British woman in her late 70's who was a hospice patient by virtue of her advanced cancer. (Ma) was an 18 year-old female Arts school student of African descent. (Cr) was a woman in her mid-forties undergoing chemo-therapy for cancer. (Tr) was a woman in her mid-fifties who was in the advanced stages of lung cancer and used an oxygen bottle for support. (Ti) was a female hospice patient in her mid-forties who had lung cancer. (Mi) was an 18 year old female Arts school student. (Hn) was a Jamaican-British man in his late fifties with end-stage cancer, mobile only in a wheelchair. (Hy) was an 18 year-old male Arts school student. (Mn) was the female community education hospice worker first attached to the project. She was later promoted to a managerial position and managed (Mo), a male community education hospice worker, who came aboard the third project to provide support pastorally.

My field diary entries were, by now, more focussed towards the areas of exchange and voice. I have used extracts from those diary entries sparingly, though they have been of much use in transporting me back to the work and offering me the researcher's perspective after the event. Similarly, both my focus group data and qualitative interview data were more focussed on the notions of voice and exchange with specific reference to these projects. As always, I offer these data with the understanding that they will have been influenced by my dual position as project leader and researcher. However, I also offer the view that my close and prolonged access to these participants was afforded me by my having led the project. Therefore I suggest that these data be weighed with both these considerations in mind.

#### **4.5 The ethos of PCR in a hospice context**

First I offer this field diary entry to explain how I viewed the need for Voice in this particular PCR context: what I felt voices from a hospice could add to a 'mediascape' from which they were often absent.

**Diary entry:** 'There may be taboo around terminal illness. Certainly anecdotally I can attest to the initial "I'm doing some work with (the hospice)" as needing more explanation. Initially sympathetic faces become more actively engaged when I walk them through the work. The word 'terminal' can be so...final. Which it is of course in that sense: You have a condition from

which you will die. The discourse around this can be all-encompassing. The work that I've had a sense of the hospice doing is around dignity in death; having a good death; saying 'goodbye' properly. However, as I've been doing this work I've realised it's got another element to it. Currently it's best articulated by 'Tr', a patient with lung cancer who walks with an oxygen bottle close by. She said in an early debrief "When I first came to (the hospice) I thought I'd come here to *die* but now I realise I've come to (the hospice) to *live*." This certainly chimes with my intention when I set the project up two years ago. I named it the 'Lifetime Radio Project' and the ethos was very much about the here and now.'

'I brought (Arts) school students aboard as participant helpers and hoped that part of the experience for the participants would be the forming of new relationships with young people. I particularly liked the idea that, near the end, there could be new beginnings. I also hoped that the young people may be able to respond positively. They did, invariably confirming that their pre-conceptions around the terminally ill had been challenged and rebutted. I have reflected more recently that when terminal illness is aired in the broader media, it is self-defining. Even positive stories, of which there are many, are defined by the finality of the illness. Cancer sufferers write of their experiences, raise money, raise awareness and share their bravery with a rightly admiring public audience. I don't question the veracity or value of this at all. However, I do note that the terminal illness is the defining feature of these voices. I suggest that in the participatory project that I have established, which facilitates a public voice, the illness does not have to be the defining feature. It may be if the participant so chooses but equally it need not even be mentioned. This work is about exchange and voice, not about terminal illness. It airs the voice of the terminally ill but there is agency involved that has autonomy and self-determination.'

Reviewing this extract now I can see how it helps explain the work within the theoretical framework I explored in the Literature chapter. Namely that the PCR work offered an alternative site for these voices which in turn offered an alternative narrative to that afforded about terminal illness by the current 'mediascape' (Dowmunt, 2007, p5). In addition, I suggest that elements of 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1972) may have been present within the exchange between the two groups, the patients and the students. There was certainly a positive sharing or 'exchange' within the group which I will reference in more depth later in this chapter.

#### 4.6 The potential to reclaim voice through PCR

Keeping voice uppermost in my analysis for now, during an early group ‘get to know you’ session one participant (Tr) told a story which illustrates what PCR work can offer participants in relation to their own voice. (Tr) told us how she had worked at a large Croydon-based Swedish furniture store for many years. Some time into her tenure she had been given a ‘Tannoy’ (public address system) shift at customer services. A frazzled husband had asked that a message be put out for his wife, who was still somewhere in the bowels of that Scandinavian institution. (Tr) had duly announced, as requested, that this man’s wife should “hurry up” because her husband was indeed waiting for her at the exit of the store. “I got into so much trouble with the management for that!” she told us. “I was never allowed on that Tannoy again. *Never.*” It was a story that came out immediately after she’d told us emphatically that she “can’t stand the sound of my own voice.” The story stays with me because (Tr) said she didn’t really feel comfortable hearing her own voice back at any point during the project. However, she kept coming back and participated with gusto. Even in the final debrief, she still said that she had a difficult relationship with her own voice, as this excerpt illustrates:

J ‘Tell me a little bit about listening back to your voice or hearing your *voice*.

Tr Well that was awful. It still is. (small laugh).. It’s *horrible*. Absolutely, it was daunting but I’ve done it and (.) yeah and I’m *pleased* I did it.

J And has it got *easier* listening back to your own voice, I wonder?

Tr(..) (Sounds a bit nervous here) Not really, no, it was *easier* to *do*, not so much the listening back.

J What’s the bit that you’re most proud of in the show?

Tr Umm, I like my interview...and I think I’m proud of everybody else as well... The *entire show* is something to be proud of.’

Despite her continuing discomfort with her own voice, (Tr) was happy to give permission for her work and her responses to be used in this thesis. She often said that her experience on the project was largely a positive one and she got much from it, as

further extracts will illustrate. Perhaps it is all the more important that the project also enabled this reluctant voice to be preserved, for she spoke most fondly of those she leaves behind, including her former work colleagues, and they will surely be glad of it.

#### **4.7 Establishing an arena for voice through exchange in a hospice context**

Given the limited reach of a school radio station, it would be optimistic to expect a huge cultural shift in attitudes to hospice and end-of-life simply by virtue of the Lifetime Radio project. However, the project could offer another perception of those diagnosed as terminally ill through their own exploration of their voices and their subsequent exchanges with their student broadcast partners. It is the detail of how those voices were nurtured and developed that now becomes the focus of this chapter. Given that one starting point for this thesis was that the reaction of those hearing their own voices back for the first time is invariably negative (Rodendurg, 2015, p9), how might one reasonably elicit stories and exchanges from those who are in very poor physical shape? How might a suitable arena for voice be established in the context of a hospice project? The first part of the answer lays in the exchange between the students and the hospice patients as described here by the hospice worker (Mo), in attendance on the project as pastoral support.

##### ***(Mo) on 'exchange':***

**Mo** 'I think it's really nice to see intergenerational work...and it kind of creates a platform for this intergenerational dialogue to take place because..it's about something that's bigger, which is the project, so it's not just them sitting in a room speaking, which might not be as effective. It's more effective because you're creating a show, and because you're on radio, and because you have this end product that you're working towards, so now you have to collaborate to work together to reach that end product and that makes the conversation more effective because you become more invested and more open to that kind of sharing.'

The Community Education lead at the hospice added her perspective on this element of the project, noting how it sustained the participants despite their initial reservations about joining something involving young people.

### **(Mn) interview on 'exchange'**

**Mn** 'In the past..when we've worked with the (Arts) school for quite a few years now and in the beginning I would hear some of the patients say "Oh, we don't want to work with teenagers, we've got *nothing* in common" and (breath) equally (Arts) School students might think "oh it's a bit *boring*, coming to a hospice, elderly people, it's gonna be a bit depressing" and yet they formed the most *amazing* friendships and connections.. um.. in a most *unlikely* setting. So I think that's really empowering.. for *both*. It's a mutual benefit.'

It was these relationships that underpinned the PCR work, sustaining the participants as they embarked upon a journey way beyond their comfort zones. At a time when the patients might easily have been in need of the familiar, these relationships played a significant part in the facilitation of voices from the hospice by encouraging them along the way. The patients were able to relax and move beyond their terminal diagnoses on the project because of their relationships with the Arts School students.

### **4.8 Building relationships through meaningful exchange**

There is an additional aspect to this exchange that I didn't fully appreciate until it was spelt out to me by a participant during one project: that it allowed for the forming of meaningful relationships within fixed boundaries. For someone with a terminal diagnosis, that opportunity is most valuable. One participant, a patient (Ti), had talked of the difficulty she'd experienced in forming new relationships whilst having a terminal cancer diagnosis. "People don't want to invest in you once they find out you've got cancer. It's really hard to make new friendships, or start new relationships". She was a middle-aged woman who had had an active social life and who was able to share her experiences of clubbing with the student with whom she was working. That exchange is featured in the practical submission. It was a meaningful, well-defined and safe exchange for both parties involved, with each talking of the positive connection they'd felt between them. The student (Ga) credited the patient (Ti) with deconstructing some of her anxiety around people with terminal illnesses and the patient drew much comfort from recognising her younger self in the student. This bond was replicated in many of the pairings in these projects but it was most poetically

illustrated by these two, 'the raver and her apprentice', as featured in part two of the practical submission.

Another significant pairing was between a former secondary school male science teacher (Hn) and a Year 13 (18 year-old) male Arts school student (Hy). (Hn) was in the end-stage of prostate cancer, wheelchair-bound and heavily medicated for pain relief. (Hy) was nearing the end of his secondary school studies having undergone a turbulent year in his domestic life. (Hn) had arrived in England from Jamaica at the age of 10 and, now in his late fifties, was to be leaving behind a wife and children. (Hy) was managing the pressures of a girlfriend, a concerned mother and his impending written coursework deadlines. Both men supported Chelsea FC. Their post-show reflections illustrate how they'd formed an effective bond in the short space of time they'd worked together and the pairing was most significant in relation to voice because it produced some remarkable content, as discussed later in this chapter and featured on the practical submission.

The exchange between the students and the patients acts as a catalyst through which voice can thrive. Although unable to document all the remarkable exchanges on this project, I offer excerpts from both the field diary and post-project interviews below to illustrate one last example, between an eighteen year old female student of African descent and a seventy-nine year old Jamaican woman.

#### ***Diary extract on 'exchange', (week 5 of 6)***

'I am witnessing some remarkable exchanges between the students and the patients. "Where's my 'daughter'?" asked (Ce) before (Ma) arrived this week. To see the gentle way that (Ma) supports (Ce) in the driving is to see something quite special in human terms and skilled in practitioner terms. The rapport between (Cr) and (Mi), with (Cr) recognising much of herself in (Mi), is heart-warming.'

#### ***(Mo) on (Ce) & (Ma) exchange***

**Mo** '(Ce) and (Ma), was um..(3) very beautiful because it was very tender, it was very different from the other ones. I think because (Ce) is also very *grandmotherly* so she was automatically going to treat this young girl in a very *grandmotherly* way, and the young girl was going to respond to *her* in a very grand-daughterly way so there was a much more *tender* dynamic between them than the other ones, and it was very beautiful to watch. Also because I think

that can be very *inspiring* to see somebody who...for (Ma)..to see somebody who, at a young age, emigrated to a country and dealt with a lifestyle that is *way* more difficult than those young kids are dealing with.'

**(Ce) debrief**

J 'And finally a word in terms of the work you've done with the students here, particularly with (Ma). How would..

Ce (simultaneously) She was a lovely person

J ..you categorise that?

Ce Absolutely lovely. (.) (inhales) Patient with me without being patronising, and she made me feel *absolutely* comfortable. It wasn't *putting up* with an old woman, I was *somebody*.

J Did you feel an age difference there or did it feel less..time specific?

Ce I didn't feel an age difference because she didn't *allow* me to..I was just *somebody* with her..that she was giving a hand to. Mmm.'

**(Ma) debrief**

J Tell me a bit about working with (Ce).

Ma 'Oh (Ce)'s amazing. She's *great*. Um. It was so interesting hearing everything she had to *say*. It was really inspiring how she spoke about life and she taught me a lot of things about how to look.. how to be positive. I learned that..from *all* of them actually, that cancer doesn't mean that (.) your life should *end* and that I just see how positive they are about it and how they laugh about it and stuff and it's really inspiring.'

#### **4.9 The favourable conditions that facilitated 'agency through voice' in a hospice context**

Much of the literature around community broadcasting in Chapter 1 references how that particular form of radio invites community participation. Examples from South Africa (Gorfinkel, E c.1992), the Philippines (Sarabia, A.L., c. 1992), and North America (Thomas, B., c.1992), all illustrate how effective radio can be as a tool of change through participation. Similarly, the campaigning history for community radio in the UK

has created the platform on which small radio stations can exist (Barbrook, 2005; Coyer, 2007; Fleming, 2010). In relation to this thesis, radio as a curriculum area was valued at the Arts school; it thrived under a funded broadcast and online licensing; and eventually there developed under its wing the meeting of 'community outreach' and 'radio' in Community Radio Outreach, the initiative through which PCR has developed.

None of this was on the participants' radar but it is one of the conditions through which these participants' voices were heard, exchanges were had and agency gained. Under summary headings, the following extracts offer more detail on some of the other elements that allowed voice and agency to combine on this particular project:

It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> project involving the hospice...

**Extract from interview with (Mn), Community Education hospice lead:**

**J** How have you seen the project develop, because we're in our third year now..

**Mn** I think in the beginning I was...um challenged by the fact of finding patients that would be physically able to get to the (Arts) school by themselves and I felt that restricted me in terms of opening it up to more people. And it's developed over the years to me realising that actually I could call on Transport and get different groups of (less mobile) patients in, which is good because I don't like to *exclude* people that I think would really benefit from the project.

I think ...they had a voice in the first few years but I feel that their voice had been kind of broadened and that's what I'd be keen for the project to develop as, for them to have a *bit more* voice in it.

**J** What do you mean by that?

**Mn** I think (with the cohort in the featured 3<sup>rd</sup> project) there were... deeper stories or maybe more personal stories that people are very willing and want to voice ...

**J** Can you think why that might have happened?

**Mn** I think partly because of the people I identified might be involved in the project, both patients and (Mo) being in it.

**J** Tell us a bit more about that

**Mn** They ... wanted to have a voice and say something. And so the opportunity was offered and they *grabbed* it. I think that happens a lot with projects here (at the hospice). There'll be some amazing, fantastic projects but only certain people will grab it and they'll grab it because they're *ready* for it.'

#### It was radio...

It was remarked upon by someone who had heard a piece from the indomitable ex-science teacher (Hn) that he sounded 'robust'. The image they had of him did not correlate at all with the reality I had given them, namely that he was wheelchair-bound, medicated on morphine, approaching death. 'I imagined him to be one of the older Jamaican guys in my local pub, full of life and vitality. That's how I picture him. That's how he sounds!' The medium of radio offers some refuge from public scrutiny, which in turn offers some power to the person speaking. The absence of a camera allows for the voice, not the image, to represent the person. This is clearly relevant for those dealing with the ravages of a terminal illness, be that end-stage or chemotherapy. I suggest it offers them a power which, in turn, enhances empowerment. Perhaps this is linked to agency in this particular context.

#### The patients were on fixed timetable...

**Mo:** 'I think that when you're working with patients in palliative care the *archiving* of your life becomes *really important*. So the *product* of the things that you make take on a certain *agency*..because it now becomes about *legacy* and it becomes about what you leave behind and that's quite powerful...it sort of opens the floodgates of all the things they wanna make sure that they perhaps..are able to *say* before they're not able to say it any longer....there was very little *reservation* to participate quite *intimately* in the discussions.'

This observation from (Mo) leads onto an intimate disclosure made by the 'indomitable science teacher' and patient (Hn) about his impending death. (Mo) felt that it was the teacher in him that had allowed it to happen:

**Mo:** 'In his.. interview.. *perhaps* (he) took it upon himself..to feel like..his *disclosure* was a form of *teaching*'

This last extract brings us to the first real reference of 'content' in the project. I feel bound to note that the programme 'content' also included poems, original, published

or occasionally both; interviews about holidays, happy times, family, best jobs, worst jobs, fears, hopes, love, loss, childhoods, adulthoods and plenty more; songs; jingles; jokes; messages to friends and family; and some of the nicest studio links you might ever want to hear. However, for sheer arresting power, a piece recorded between (Hn) and (Hy), the Jamaican-born South London school science teacher and the eighteen year-old student, was hard to beat. You can hear it on the practical submission, though the more detailed discussion happens here.

#### **4.10 The disclosure that crystallised the project**

(Hn) recorded a conversation with his project student partner (Hy) in which he shared his thoughts about his own impending death in relation to a friend who had died recently. Given that the ethos of the project was to celebrate life, it feels ironic to focus on a piece voiced by a patient participant specifically about death: both his own and a recent loss he'd experienced. However, this short radio piece has now held my attention for a long time. It sits centrally at a notional intersection of physical and socio-political voice so cleanly that I cannot marginalise it in this study. It is a most affecting listen and, anecdotally, has had a notable impact on those who have heard it. It lasts just short of four minutes and in it (Hn) talked of the serenity he saw in his dead friend's body. He talked of 'pain' being the 'real monster' and of how he viewed death, implicitly his own, as a release. That this man could articulate so succinctly his condition, of which he was certainly 'the expert' (Mayo 2000, p24), was central to the ongoing success of the PCR hospice initiative. It was an autonomous airing of voice that I believe will have significant impact going forward. It will continue to have agency even though the author, (Hn), is now sadly deceased. And perhaps that exemplifies the power of radio and the possibilities for empowerment offered by the PCR work under examination.

For a long time after the recorded event itself it felt important to understand how it had happened, as it had caused me some anxiety as a practitioner at the time. I had not expected any recording to take place in what was supposed to be an exploratory, bonding exercise at which I hadn't been present in the studio. I had been concerned that whatever had been recorded, and it took me a week to listen to it myself, risked

damaging both the disclosing patient and the receptive teenage student. It presented me with a succession of ethical dilemmas, not least when the disclosing patient (Hn) told me a week later that he'd been on such a high dose of morphine that he couldn't remember what he'd said. In summary, I negotiated each of those hurdles to our mutual satisfaction, securing informed consent from both parties, and the piece made it into the final project radio show. It also made it into my thesis, again with informed consent having been obtained, and features in the practical submission. I wouldn't have designed it that way but the voice came out anyway. Of course.

#### **4.11 Voice in Radio: offering 'empowerment' in a hospice context**

Ideas around empowerment were also prevalent in my reading: how community radio 'can challenge the division between broadcasters and consumers in society' (Barbrook, 2005, p72); how, in participatory media, 'finding your voice is crucial to all of us...this is power.' (Porter, 2007, p91); the sense of 'self' one gains from 'owning' the physicality of one's own voice (Berry, 1994, p49); the importance of 'the process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions' for 'to deny value to another's capacity for narrative - to deny her potential for voice – is to deny a basic dimension of human life' (Couldry, 2010, p7). These references link voice to empowerment.

Thus, it is with respect for those involved that I suggest empowerment takes on a poignant emphasis in the context of terminal illness. For the participants in the hospice radio project, their voices and their ability to tell their stories offered a possibility for empowerment at a time when they had severely diminishing control over their own lives. Although this view is framed in a more bespoke, personal sense rather than a socio-political one, attitudes to end-of life care are a pertinent social issue. Thus, the voices from the hospice offer both a personal sense of empowerment and a positive representation of those nearing the end of their lives. I therefore suggest that the act of producing a live radio show, with the ability to tell their stories and share their exchanges, facilitated agency for the participants and offered an arena for empowerment. The following is an extract from my testimony as a researcher of how that looked on the day of the live show, the culmination of the project.

***Diary extract on agency in the show:***

**(An account of) The Final Show and the debrief**

“It’s a ‘yes’ to the CD. It’s in. The piece. It’s got to happen. Definitely! It’s good.”

This was (Hn), sitting in his wheelchair in the (school) foyer. He was bright-eyed, animated and it was the first thing he said when I saw him in the foyer after we shook hands. (This meant the piece he’d recorded about death could be played on the live show to run that day).

The show itself got started at 11.45am and finished at 1.25pm, including the break. We took some time to read through the scripts as a warm up. The size of the task ahead of them dawned on me intermittently. I purposely didn’t dwell on it but four terminally ill people were being asked to present, drive and maintain the necessary concentration and physical effort to do these sophisticated tasks.

I’d scripted the whole show but left a blank space for (Hn) to respond to Ce’s ‘back-anno’ - her live studio link- after his short piece on death with (Hy). (Hn) paused ahead of his response, which was simply “Yes...man haffe keep it real.” That each time it (his pre-recorded piece) played, we all listened with a thoughtful respect, absorbing the words of this eloquent spokesman makes me think this piece had a power that will endure. For me, this is voice in action.

I did my best to manage the debrief for both ‘audiences’, the internal one of the participants and the external one of the thesis and its consumers. Therefore, having interviewed each hospice participant I reasoned that they needed to hear from the students, even though time was tight and they were tired. (Hn) had wheeled out by then but the others heard the voices of their new colleagues. Each partner mutually celebrated their colleague and there was a huge amount of mutual affection and respect flying around. It was a real exchange within the notional ‘circle of Conscientisation’.

Data from inter-participant interviews offer evidence of the facilitation of agency, the empowerment, offered and acted upon by all involved. There was also some useful data offered subsequently by both hospice workers, (Mn) and (Mo), on agency. These reaffirm the strengths of PCR work in relation to empowerment in this particular, hospice-linked context.

**(Mn) interview extract on 'empowerment'**

J 'What do you think the patients themselves get from this radio project?

**Mn** I think it *challenges* them but I think at the end of the project they feel really pleased by their achievements. Um..very often in the past I've sort of heard people say "oh God, the *technology*, I've never thought I'll be able to do that" and by the end of it they *have* produced and written and contributed to a radio show that's *aired*. Um...their voice is heard by not just one other person but ..but *lots* of other people. They can show off about it to their families and say they were on Brit FM and that's really cool. Um..it's *empowering* and I think that once they've done something like this they think that "well actually it's..it may be towards the end of my life but I can still do new things."

**(Mo) interview extract on 'empowerment'**

**Mo** 'I think they were quite intimidated by the process in the *beginning* because it came across as *technical*. ..it wasn't being sat in front of a mic being interviewed, it was actually running things and learning about things ...they become uh *co-creators* of the output, become more invested and then became quite excited to be involved .'

These extracts illustrate how these participants engaged fully in the PCR project work. As (Mn) put it earlier, "the opportunity was offered and they *grabbed* it....because they're *ready* for it." Reflexively I am able to state that the nature of this specific cohort made for emotional attachments that have made my editing of their material a longer-than-usual process.

Accepting that it is unworkable to include much of the material produced by the patients in this thesis, I still feel bound to include this excerpt from (Ce), the British-Jamaican female participant in her seventies who kept attending the sessions despite clearly experiencing significant physical pain. She entered into the spirit of the work with an open heart and a courageous attitude, mastering the technical complexities of radio broadcasting, offering her stories of family and her nursing work to the wider world and forging a meaningful connection with her student partner. She used her strength to share her voice and in a debrief interview, overleaf, she advocates articulately for PCR in relation to agency and legacy.

**(Ce) debrief**

**J** 'So first of all (Ce), what did you get from doing the project do you think?

**Ce** Well, being in the terminal stages of cancer, one lives every day with the reality of death and this has proved to me that one doesn't need to die before you're dead. It's given me a constant hope to keep on living, to put something into every day because there is something to get back.

**J** Tell me about um when you first joined the project. What did you think?

**Ce** (Breathes in)(..) I felt ahh that I was going a little bit over my head because with (breath) taking the medication it does make you a little bit drowsy and it takes that (.) sharpness off your mind(.) But no-one was unkind to me when I you know slipped up and did something silly (breath) so I enjoyed it.

**J** Mmm . what (.) *surprised* you about your achievements on the project?

**Ce** Just that I managed to stay the course.

**J** What are you most *proud* of in terms of your work on the project?

**Ce** That I have something to *leave* (.) for my children and grandchildren. They can actually (.) *hear* me and um I've got something else done (a series of photos) they'll actually *see* me being interviewed (breath) and that they *will* realise that, as I said earlier, that there is *living* to be done (breath) in whatever circumstance you find yourself. You can..you can *do* something.

**J** Would you do more radio if you had the..

**Ce** Yes

**J** .. chance? (gentle laughter from others in the background)

**Ce** (steady pace) yes, yes, yes, yes.

**J** For now, thank you (Ce)

**Ce** Thank you.

#### 4.12 Voice from a hospice

There is material broadcast in the mainstream media that represents voices such as those heard on this project. The BBC Listening Project recorded and aired a conversation between a dying parent and their child, for example. However such voices are rare and, generally, scheduled away from a prime-time, mass audience. The BBC piece was transmitted in the late evening on Radio 4. So, does this PCR work do 'new things' (Couldry 2010, p145) in regards to voice in a hospice context? The hospice Community Education lead (Mn) offered this response:

##### **(Mn) on Voice**

**J** 'In terms of the voices that we hear on the programme, um maybe stepping back from it slightly or...I'd be interested, you know, as you work very much in the field...Is it unique, is it useful, is it valuable to have those voices aired on radio, and if so why?

**Mn** I'm not sure if it's unique..um..it's really valuable. It's good for other people to hear voices from different people in different situations in society....it's really valuable for patients but it's not..I suppose it's going back to what I was saying, it's not just about being heard by a group in a room that's not recorded, it's actually..it's recorded on tape, they can listen back to it, it's good for legacy, you know. Somebody's voice is really *powerful* um..so some of the people involved in the project have sort of said "Oh, you know I've got this on tape now. I can, you know, my *family* are listening to it. I'm still around." Sort of like, "My voice is really *important*."  
  
...And voices *change*. And there's sort of things you can pick up from a voice and a resonance and a rhythm of a voice that give you a...something *else* about someone. You don't necessarily have to *see* them but there's something that you get from that voice. It can be quite *powerful*.'

#### 4.13 Framing the voices from the hospice

As discussed in chapter 1, Chomsky argues that mainstream media content is intrinsically linked to purpose and economy, two factors which dictate the nature of such content (Chomsky, 2007). Couldry cites the explosion of 'Reality TV' in the last decade as an example of content that reinforces the illusory 'quality' of content whilst, at the same time, proving to be profitable in production terms by attracting a huge advertising audience offset against relatively small production costs (Couldry 2010,

pp81-2). Both theorists advocate alternative outlets as the spaces from which alternative content can be produced and alternative voices can be heard. The conditions of production need therefore to be alternative in order to facilitate alternative output. In the context of this study, the PCR projects facilitate those voices and the Arts school radio station provides the outlet. The school, with its support for Community work and its links to the hospice, sustains the alternative conditions within which this hospice project happens. It is important to name and understand how these hospice voices, this alternative content, came to be heard.

From the outset then, this work was firmly positioned in the arena of 'alternative media' and I suggest that the exchange it facilitated matched Downmunt's assessment that such activities in this field 'are almost social movements in their own right' (Downmunt 2007, p10). Alongside the social impact of the project on the participants, I can revisit Coyer's belief that 'the right to communicate is at the heart of democratic society' (Coyer 2007, p118) and again Barbrook's assessment that community radio 'can challenge the division between broadcasters and consumers in our society' (Barbrook, 2005, p72). This work offered all of these possibilities from the outset. It might have been too challenging to pursue these outcomes in a hospice context but the direction of the work, and the ethos behind it, demanded it be attempted. I believe this chapter demonstrates tangible possibilities for voice in this end-of-life context.

#### **4.14 In Summary**

The data offered in this chapter demonstrates progression in the PCR work. Extending the project cohort to combine hospice patients with Arts School students enabled voice to be found, developed and disseminated in a different direction to that offered previously with the Luncheon Club and the boys' secondary school. These 'hospice voices' had a specific urgency about them which was able to be catered for because the PCR work was at a more advanced stage. There were logistical elements to the project's success that were now available because of the project work done previously through PCR: willing and receptive partners from both institutions; the skill-base available from the staff and students; and the readiness of the participants to seize the opportunity for voice offered to them. These elements came together in a dynamic

way to highlight the clear presence of personal empowerment experienced by the participants on the project. Thus, the possibilities for 'empowerment through voice' became a more obvious outcome of PCR work in this particular context.

Instrumentally the introduction of the Arts school students into this particular initiative, and the subsequent shared project work, afforded all the participants the opportunity to move beyond the identities they had brought into the studio on the first day of the project. I suggest that they formed a cohesive unit around the radio work, sharing stories, exchanging dialogue and reaching across a generational divide to develop 'solidarity within difference' (Mayo, 2000, p47). By the end of the project all the participants talked in debrief about the bonds they'd forged in partnership through a shared goal of producing a radio show. Given the social learning curve for all involved and the technical progression for the hospice patients, I might suggest that in reference to the 'Consentisation' theory of Freire, the radio studios provided both a space in which the critical consciousness of the participants was raised through a sharing of voice and exchange; and a stage upon which their voices could be heard, both individually and in the process of exchange. To borrow from Boal's concept of the 'aesthetic space', 'the telemicroscopic' (or as I may term it, 'the telemicrophonic') made this reality 'present which might otherwise have escaped our gaze' (or 'hearing' in my parallel interpretation), (Boal, 1995, pp27-28). In other words, the radio studio acted as a stage upon which the realities of their lives, their stories, could both be told and listened to. This narrative thread to the work, the development of voice, was present in all of the PCR projects. However the forging of an identity beyond the 'hospice patient' label through exchange and voice was particularly notable for me in that first piece of work initiated in 2013.

The importance of care in the PCR work came to the fore even more obviously with this cohort. Creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment in which the participants could work was the priority from the outset. The importance of 'realisation of content', the production of audio for broadcast, was inevitably relegated in the context of working with very vulnerable participants. However, an interesting juxtaposition arose from the imperative to secure the content as effectively as possible precisely because these participants were close to their end. This balancing of

priorities tested me ethically, both as a practitioner and a researcher. The strategy I employed was to share the responsibility, enabling the project to be well-supported by advice and relevant expertise. In developmental terms, this PCR work added to a working template that could be carried forward to other challenging contexts, thus facilitating more opportunities for the airing of the marginalised voice.

'Legacy' has an important link to concepts of voice in this project, particularly for those involved. It should be respectfully noted that there is a legacy from the work that carries huge value to a small but significant group of people. The friends and relatives of the departed have access to the voices of those they have lost. Given the focus of this thesis, I can only suggest that this aspect of the PCR work is worthy of a significant, separate study. However, I will briefly visit this theme again in my final chapter.

### **Coming up....**

In parallel with this hospice-linked development of the PCR work, I was developing my practice with another group of marginalised voices. The next chapter will report on how the project transferred to the setting of a Pupil Referral Unit, where the aim was to help those specifically-marginalised young people reclaim their voices as positive means of self-expression. Those are the voices from the PRU.

## Chapter 5: Voices from the PRU

**Introduction:** This chapter offers reflections on the third PCR initiative under review, involving students from two sites of a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). One project comprised Key Stage 3 (KS3) pupils and the other comprised Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils. KS3 covers ages 11-13 and KS4 ages 14 – 16. Although the data presented will illustrate some ‘commonalities of outcome’ with the projects in the previous two chapters, a different emphasis emerged in relation to voice during this PRU work. It became less about getting voices ‘out there’ into the ‘mediascape’ (Dowmunt, 2007) and more about the nurturing and development of the individual’s voice as a tool of self-expression and empowerment (Berry, 1997). Airing these PRU voices on the radio did challenge the orthodoxies of output offered by the mainstream media, as the airing of these PRU voices was facilitated by a school-funded community outreach project rather than the sponsorship of a corporation for economically pragmatic self-interest (Hermann & Chomsky, 2002). However, as this chapter will illustrate, data from this project revealed a shift in emphasis within the PCR work. At their core, these PRU projects allowed for the reframing of voice: the young participants had had early, negative life-experiences which had shaped their relationship with, and utility of, ‘voice’. These radio projects offered them another, more positive way to use those voices, their voices, and perhaps ‘in Freire’s terms “to get the oppressor out of their own heads”’ (Mayo, 2000, p7).

This chapter starts by referencing the negative discourse around this cohort in general and, alongside that, the challenges they faced in their communication with others. It goes on to review the PCR in relation to the development of communication, voice and empowerment in the particular students who took part in the projects. It then reviews in depth one specific task on the project, designed to liberate voice in this cohort. Finally it revisits ‘exchange’ in this context, showing how that element of PCR work continued to prove integral to nurturing and facilitating development in the participant voice.

## 5.1 The project in context: the discourse around a PRU

The students in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) are youngsters who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream secondary schools. PRU's exist as part of an offer of 'alternative education' that Local Education Authorities are statutorily obliged to provide for such students. During my 'interruption to study' period I had identified these students as 'of interest' in the context of extending my PCR work. I reasoned that students who had fallen foul of the expected codes of behaviour in their school lives may have been heard negatively by others and so may have negative relationships with their own voices. I wanted to explore whether PCR work might offer them a chance to change that relationship, a chance to reclaim their voice.

In the thesis 'Rebels without a Voice' (Jones,L; PhD, UL, 2012), Dr Jones traces her attempts to cultivate the student voice in the PRU she leads as the Executive Principal. She writes that 'the discourse of the excluded student includes terms such as disaffected...or the more pejorative: hooligan, delinquent and criminal' (p29). Jones goes on to identify 'discourses of deficit' accompanying exclusion that 'result in a group of young people who have great difficulty communicating effectively, particularly with those in authority.'(p29) Attempting to use the vehicle of the school's student council, Jones proposes that 'helping students to develop their own voice empowers students and helps them to gain confidence and be their own advocates.' (p35) Her action research thesis goes on to outline the limitations a school council initiative can offer in the context of a PRU, though still confirming that confidence and self-respect, together with knowledge about their rights, is crucial in confounding negative discourses. Her research suggests the need for 'a new interpretation of voice which is about establishing a voice, writing a script and making choices' (Jones, 2012, p154).

This chapter will explore how far PCR work supports the direction Jones advocates in regard to developing 'the student voice' in a PRU context: can a PCR project help these participants find a new register for their voices? The main focus of review is a KS3 project from Spring 2015, though data from a previous project with KS4 PRU students is referenced first.

## 5.2 'Having the conversation' at KS4

The ability to communicate in different registers and contexts, as referenced above by Jones, was a skill identified as lacking in their students by staff attached to the KS4 PRU radio project from Autumn 2014.

There were seven KS4 students and two staff from the PRU involved with this particular PCR project. By the project's end, as a practitioner, I was struck by the effect the project work had had on one particular student, (Jde). A 15 year-old female student with a history of aggression towards both staff and peers, (Jde) presented initially as most reluctant to even speak in front of the group in the radio suite. She just sucked her thumb and curled up into a ball. Given this start, I had very modest expectations around her progress in regards to both voice and exchange. However, once she had mastered the technical aspects of the work, particularly 'driving' the radio mixing desk, (Jde) began to flourish. By the end of the project she had completed all the tasks to a high standard. She had become a willing, cooperative team member. In short, she had made remarkable progress. I asked about her progress in a debrief with the lead PRU staff member (PI).

(PI) 'It's been a rollercoaster journey with (Jde) since she started here. Very loud, in your face, shouting over people, not listening. "I've got my point, I don't care." She really struggles to express herself in a controlled way. It's always coming from a place of frustration.'

'She responds well to calm, positive feedback on things. The radio studio was very conducive to that. The physical environment of it. Padded, it allowed her to be quiet. The Year 13's (Arts students) weren't going to "go nuclear" on her. (Jde) could allow herself to be calm, polite, engaged and successful, which we saw lots of, and we have here too (back at the PRU) since then.'

He summed up that '(Jde) was able to use her voice with more control as the project went on.'

(PI) saw the impact on his working relationship with this student.

'We have better communication now. Methodical conversations have become a lot easier. The main problem with (Jde) was having the conversation with (Jde). She was always capable of doing the work. Now we're having that conversation.'

There were other arenas of exchange. For example, I encouraged the staff to record a series of jingles, 'driven' (technically engineered and recorded) by the students. By going on the microphone and facing their reservations about their own voices, the staff demonstrated to the students that they too were prepared to take risks, encouraging affirmation and support between the PRU staff and pupils. This process was repeated in the KS3 project to similar effect.

After this KS4 project the feedback from the students was entirely positive, with increased confidence and increasing familiarity and comfort with hearing their voices as a common theme. There are plenty of stories that illustrate the 'classroom-retention' aspect of the work. There was the female student who was 'on the run' from the authorities and who 'came back in' on condition she could finish her radio project work; and the report from the staff that attendance was unusually consistent among this cohort during the period of the radio project; the reflections from (PI) that the whole process had bonded the group in a way that sustained them well into the year. Unfortunately though there was also a sad tale about one of the students who had made the most significant progress, the student (Jde). Her proximity to a gang-related killing, albeit as a bystander and subsequent state witness, was a reminder of the limitations of this work in relation to empowerment and progression: it was no 'silver bullet'.

### **5.3 Extending the work to KS3**

From the first KS4 PRU project in 2013 I could see that PCR work had potential value and benefit for the participants. However, I had wondered whether there was even more timely intervention work to be done with the KS3 students. I reasoned that success on the project might feed positively into their school experience, which had longer to run than their older counterparts. Therefore, I had also reached out to the KS3 PRU site and Spring 2014 saw the first project with that cohort. It was a 'pilot' and was such a learning curve that the most meaningful data came largely from the field diary I kept and subsequent debriefs with staff. However, as a scholar practitioner it helped me clarify both my purpose around PCR in a PRU context and my strategies to achieve the outcomes towards which I aimed.

I had gathered some feedback from the students themselves on that first pilot but not very much. In project terms we'd got there but it had been an intense, stressful journey. There was some evidence of the emergence of voice but at times this was lost in the aggressive, dysfunctional and hard to manage behaviour of the participants. As staff we reflected that we'd been too ambitious with this younger cohort, though it had delivered me important lessons about what I was doing and why I was doing it, one of which I now recount.

I had found one young student particularly challenging. I later discovered that he was suspected of having Foetal Alcohol Syndrome; he subsequently reflected himself that he may suffer from Tourette's syndrome; and he was apparently proving a serious handful, running drugs up and down his housing estate. All this was after he calmly called me a "fat f\*\*king pr\*\*k" and then a "fat f\*\*king c\*\*t" in response to my request that he do something reasonable like sit down. My own immediate, rather explosive response was to remove him from the project.

However, as I stood at the bottom of the radio studio stairs, having fumed my way down them, I suddenly realised the huge mistake I was about to make. I recalled that this boy had a history of being excluded. Indeed, he had been excluded from his primary school and had come to this PRU from a KS2 PRU site. I remembered that the whole point of the project was to promote inclusion and engagement through voice. He had used his voice inappropriately but, at that moment, his best chance of changing his register was to stay on the project. To 'turf' him out would have been my failure not his, though he may not have seen it this way. He may have felt it as yet another incident in a long and familiar pattern of negative encounters with school authority. I suddenly felt, again in that moment, that the success of the work hinged on him coming back onto the project. I managed to pull myself back from being part of the voice-denying (Couldry, 2010) problem and opted to be a part of the voice-facilitating (Chomsky, 2007) solution. I invited him back aboard the project, with an apology for the verbal force of my response. Happily he climbed back up the stairs and started to use his voice more positively. It happened over three years ago and yet I can still recall it, as a moment, most vividly. I utilise it as a reminder of how difficult moments pass and the projects continue.

The debrief on that project with the (now ex-) Head of Site was also instructive. She was able to contextualise the students' challenging behaviour in relation to their wider lives: 'There's so much going on in these kids' lives that it's difficult. They find it difficult to talk without swearing and street words. They find it very hard to differentiate between different social situations. A lot of these kids behave like this because this is how they're treated outside of here. This is a safe place for them.' She went on 'sadly, what a lot of them want to do is fail because it's what they're used to.'

#### External factors beyond my control

I have reflected on those first two projects in academic year 2013/14 and have wondered why subsequent projects needed less 'behaviour-management' of the participants. One variable may be that the Head of Site had been replaced ahead of the second round of projects. Her successor came in from mainstream education. The former Head of Site had believed strongly in restorative resolutions, putting the emphasis on the PRU students to understand where they had transgressed and make amends. From my observations the new Head of Site was much clearer with her boundaries, firmly naming specific expectations around student behaviour proactively. She also sent a cohort to audition for the later project whom she felt would engage with the work most readily. These two variables may explain the change in behaviour of the newer participants. However, I also think that a project template from which to work helped bring a confidence and experience to my delivery that in turn helped keep everyone a little calmer.

#### **5.4 Spring, 2015: relocating the KS3 project to the PRU site.**

##### Shifting the project location...

An important conclusion from the debrief of the first KS3 project was to appreciate the negative impact on their behaviour of taking these students off-site. With such chaotic lives away from the PRU, consistency and routine provided valuable stability for these youngsters. They may not always have felt positive about their school but it was a constant in an otherwise changing background. It therefore felt important to introduce 'new' initiatives to them incrementally. In consultation with the new Head of Site (Gt)

it was therefore decided that the first few project sessions for this new group would be run at the KS3 PRU site.

### ...and emphasis

With each project I had become even clearer about how this PCR work could be about the reclamation and development of youth voices from specific and challenging social contexts. They were also voices that deserved to be heard and so they would still be aired on the school radio station. However, I surmised that first of all they needed to be heard by their owners: these young people needed to hear how they sounded to the outside world.

### Setting up a 'classroom studio'...and teaching at the PRU

Once the final project group was established and the classes started, I was able to set up portable recording equipment that allowed for listen-back through good quality speakers. This worked well in investing the classes with a sense of professionalism. The kit emphasised that it was 'for real', and allowed the students to hear their voices back in hi-fidelity sound. This new structure of delivery, away from the radio studios at the Arts school, seemed to offer an answer to the erstwhile problem of uprooting younger PRU participants too quickly. I was also able to bring a couple of older Arts School students along to assist, preserving the element of exchange present in the other PCR work.

(Sr), the PRU teacher assigned to this project, saw the benefits of this new logistical approach:

**Sr** 'Yeah, I think it actually worked really well ...I think for the students in particular at *this school*, just ..getting to know somebody new (is difficult) but at least in their own environment, it was kind of on their *turf*. So I think things were brought in to the project slowly and ..kind of built up at a pace where they were able to cope with it.'

The classroom sessions were delivered within clear boundaries, an approach supported by the new Head of Site, (Gt).

**Gt** 'I thought the way that you were in terms of very *strict* on the deadlines and the expectations and the idea of like "this is how much time we've got", they took to that really

well and they recognised that and there was a little messing but ...there was no *messing*, *really*. There was *banter*, there was a relationship, so there was a humour but it was very clear about 'this is what needs to happen, let's move on. I thought that was good.'

'I thought the way that the space was used as well that we had here was.... I call it my multi-purpose room, 'cos I try and make it have different edges to it..and I thought that was used effectively. And I think that helped. So it was a real working room. You came in and someone was doing a bit over here, someone was doing a bit over there, but it was all *serious*. That was good.'

This sense of purpose and industry is important to reference in this context. These students often struggle to settle in a classroom. The sessions were two hours split only with a 20 minute break. The students referred to their ability to focus in remarkably straightforward terms:

**(WI)**

**WI** 'Well usually I get quite frustrated and tired at school after two hours of working but this was quite fun so I enjoyed doing it and we were always concentrating, we were always doing something fun and interesting so (laugh).'

**(Pg)**

**J** '(Pg), what are you normally like over that time span, two, two-and-a half hours?

**Pg** Well normally when it's boring, I don't want to stay but today I wanna like stay for another like three hours or so cos it's been really fun and um yeah I like doing fun stuff.'

**(Kv)**

**J** 'Was it difficult to stay focussed for that length of time? I mean how did that work?

**Kv** No it wasn't difficult cos I was enjoying what was doing, like I enjoyed the (Arts) school lesson and yeah, it wasn't difficult at all.'

This engagement in the lessons feels worthy of a mention because it raises the possibility that the lesson content offered something to the students that they could immediately see as worthwhile. A sense of ownership in the lessons also played a part, as observed and articulated by PRU staff member (Sr):

Sr 'I think I was really taken aback by how... *focussed* the students were... how committed they were and how seriously they took the work. They definitely exceeded my expectations of how...committed to the project they were. And I think maybe it was to do with them really being a *part* of it. Them being able to bring themselves, as in their voice and their ideas you know ...for that to come into a positive light, for them to be able to use their *ideas* in a way that could be shaped into a radio project. Because they had their poems and they had their interviews with each other and their scriptwriting, so it very much felt like *they* were very much the body of the project which I think really helped them to be part of it and own it in a way.'

This observation about ownership and engagement is important in relation to voice. It suggests that ownership and reclamation of voice - the experience of the students exploring their own voice, sharing their voice and having that voice heard - engaged rather than disengaged them; that they responded positively to a project centred on voice.

### **5.5 The 'stages of voice' in PCR**

To revisit the definitions of the term 'voice' in this thesis, the meaning oscillates between the 'physical voice' (Berry, 1994) and the 'socio-political voice' (Couldry, 2010). To recap further, the narrative for the thesis starts with the physical voice and expands to include the socio-political voice.

On the PCR projects, hearing one's voice back is the first stage of the process that ends in self-advocacy and 'telling one's story'. This is the process by which the 'socio-political' voice can be heard by others: by both the project group and a wider audience. The wider audience will be family, friends and other professionals in that student's circle, though it also includes the audience listening to both the online radio broadcast at the time of the project show transmission and the show-repeats during the annual school summer radio broadcast.

Again, the shift in emphasis...

On reflection, securing a wider radio audience for these young voices has become less important to me as a practitioner, perhaps because the personal agency each

participant gained now seems so significant in itself. At the time I offered them out 'on air' because they added to the 'mediascape' (Dowmunt, 2007) in which we rarely hear from these marginalised voices. Extending that ethos, they offered a truth that I believe should be heard on air despite not coming from seasoned radio voices. Some might argue that it takes time and training before you can go 'live' on the radio. However, I believe this forum is one that can be utilised for all, not preserved as a 'sacred space' (Boal, 1995, p14). Just as Boal was clear that the stage should not be the exclusive preserve of professional actor, I argue that the airwaves should be open to all voices, seasoned and novice. These suggestions are offered within the paradigm of the medium of radio, with the implicit reach of the medium to a worldwide audience via an online broadcast. However, as stated, it became clear to me that the work in this project was more about the reclamation and development of voice within a much more localised setting, a realisation I will revisit in the concluding chapter.

## **5.6 Hearing your voice back**

The moment of hearing one's own voice back as other's hear it is always the great leveller in this work. There is almost universal discomfort across all the PCR participants at this point. As with all the other PCR projects, despite one unusually positive response about this process from a student with Asperger's syndrome, the pathway mirrored the one below:

**Pg** 'Well, it's always funny to hear your voice back but then I got used to it and then I think it sounded good.'

The impact of the students hearing their voices back was reflected upon by the Head of Site, (Gt), who felt that the process had value in terms of self-advocacy. I offer a short excerpt here and point the reader towards the practical submission for a fuller account of this and other data from this PRU project.

**Gt** 'So I think that for our kids...the whole idea of the radio project is quite powerful, especially the playback. "What did you just say? What do you sound like?" That's good for them.

**J** Do you think that can then push them forward in terms of being able to advocate more effectively for themselves, I wonder?

**Gt** I think so. Definitely. And I think it makes them more considered. They have to consider more what they *sound* like. 'What *message* am I giving out to somebody?'

## 5.7 Listening

As with all the PCR projects there were a number of elements designed to develop the use of voice, both in the physical and socio-political senses. The early tasks allowed the students to get used to hearing their own voices back. They became accustomed to others hearing those voices through the shared playback. In addition, the technical demands of recording the jingles and the poems meant that the group members had to listen to each other. In the moment of recording, they each, in turn had to ensure recording levels, microphone position and 'on/off' were all done correctly. The older Arts school students and other staff provided more 'audience' with whom the voices would be shared. All of this was intended to take the fear out of sharing their 'public voice' and indeed improve their use of their own voice as a tool of communication, as advocated by Cicely Berry in her 'Finding your Voice and Using it' (Berry, 1994).

Staff member (Sr) articulated the benefit to her students:

**Sr** ... one of them literally having to *hear* the other person in order to be able to record it effectively was really interesting because a lot of the time maybe that doesn't happen so much.. the listening. So I think the listening was also really important, and I think the fact that staff members and peers were listening to them, very, very literally...but then also metaphorically as well.

So, having established a way of working that would engage the students and then getting them to overcome their reservations about speaking aloud and hearing their voices coming back at them, the next step was to hear something of their 'stories' from them.

## 5.8 Finding your voice and using it: "This is how they see me, but this is who I am"

The structure of the final shows was much the same as the other PCR work: Poems, conversations and jingles. However, there was one item specific to these PRU projects.

Simple in its concept, it was an overt attempt to facilitate voice in the participants in a different way from their previous, all-too-often negative experiences around using their voices (Jones, 2012). The aim was to give them an autonomous space in which they could be heard. Their task was to write a minute-long piece entitled “This is how they see me, but this is who I am”. This was about participants reclaiming voice and challenging the PRU stereotypes (Jones, 2012). It is one of my favourite pieces in all of the PCR work. Deceptively simple, it required participants to reflect upon their public and private personas. It might be described as a variant on the notion of an ‘external’ and an ‘internal’ voice (Berry 1994, p23), the concept with which they were becoming familiar. However, this exercise demanded self-reflection and arguably was a ‘tough ask’ for KS3 students who had been rejected and excluded. It was a challenge observed by the Site Head, (Gt):

**Gt** ‘The *challenges* that that presented for some students was quite interesting...students are very good at putting forward a *presentation* of who they are, or who somebody else thinks they are, or who they want to be, but when it comes to reality, even something as simple as saying something positive about themselves, they struggled with. I felt like if it was being *negative* (they) may have had more to say but to be *positive* ....was a struggle.’

It’s a theme echoed by teacher (Sr):

**Sr** ‘I think I was quite shocked by the general *theme*, kind of across the board more or less, that there was this kind of idea from the *kids* that people see them in a general negative light...with these kinds of negative traits, violent aggressive...but really they had these positive aspects that other people couldn’t see, that was kind of like peeling away layers of how they may feel underneath. It was a big learning curve because I wasn’t aware of that...I think that helped me to understand them a little bit better and gave them an opportunity to actually voice that.’

Content: The pieces as voiced...

This is a good place at which to again point you, as the reader, towards the practical submission. Part 3 of the CD holds a selection of material produced by the PRU participants and relevant comments from associated staff. However, I offer two pieces overleaf from the KS4 PRU project referenced earlier, as further illustration of this particular item.

**(Ntn)** KS4 Autumn 2014

“When people see me they think I’m a street rat, a thug and a thief but this is who I really am. I’m helpful when I’m at home. People think I don’t care about nothing but I *do*. People see me as what, where and how I act. They instantly see me as a *bad* person. I do have a temper *sometimes*. People might think I am cold-hearted but if I was on a bus and I saw someone in trouble I’d help. I’m a friendly person. I think I’m fun and I think all my friends like me for who I am. I wouldn’t change myself for no-one. I love my dogs. I am a dog person. I care about my family too. I am (Ntn) and this is who I am.”

**(Jd)** KS4 Autumn 2014

“How people see me depends on how I feel. Sometimes people think I’m shy and timid. Other times they might think I’m rude. That’s how they *see* me but this is who I am. I’m funny, determined and smart. Before the ‘Sound of the Manor’ I never had any radio experience but I kept trying and was determined to do my best. In the future I want to be an entertainer like Kevin Hart. I want to be in movies. I’m independent but that doesn’t mean I’m anti-social. I’m a perfectionist and I like to get things right the first time. When people are happy with what I’ve done it makes me feel happy. I’m a loving person. I might come across as anti-social but if someone needs me I’ll *always* help them. People’s opinions don’t matter to me. My opinion of me is the only one I care about. I’m (Jd) and this is who I am.”

Given that I have suggested the *process* here was most important for the PRU participants in particular, I also include excerpts of their reflections on this particular exercise.

**Kv** ‘I surprised myself cos I didn’t really think I was going to *do* that, I didn’t really think I was going to start on that but then at the end of the day I started on it and I finished it and it felt good.’

**Pg** ‘Yeah, um, it took me quite a little bit of time um to write “this is how they see me but this is who I am”, but um when I actually sat down and thought about myself and thought about how people actually *see* me but really this is who I *am* .. I.. think I did a really good job. I felt

like I've achieved a lot of stuff and I hope people can see this and erm know that just cos we go to 'centre', whatever, we're really good kids.

**J** How did you feel when you'd finally written that piece?

**Pg** I felt very proud of myself.'

**WI** 'Sometimes that's more easy because it's a poem that you writ before. You've had time to edit it. It's different to when you're actually speaking and like you know that it's going out live. It's different from reading a poem out because a poem, you can edit it and when you have to read it out it can be like a final piece but you've got to kind of *improvise*, like *speak* on live air.'

What interests me in this last response is that it echoed what the Head of Site liked about the structured approach to the tasks in relation to the students' voices. This student prepared his talk and delivered it after some thought. He had control of it. As (Gt) put it:

**Gt** 'What I... observed going on with the students was that they were *considering* the things that they said. So, it was about...speaking with purpose, having a clear objective and also...*limiting* what they say. So there was a need to *think* about what was being said before they said it, even if it was just about not sounding foolish. There was that aspect of it which, for me as an English teacher, is great because it means they are considering language. They're being very...*considered* about their vocabulary, how they express themselves the *speed* of which they...um.. express themselves, so that they are *understood*, and that's quite powerful.'

To summarise, it is clear from the responses of both the head of site (Gt) and the students, that the exercise "This is who I am..." had value in relation to voice. Within the framework of a given title and duration to guide them, the participants could use their voices to describe themselves. The playback allowed them to hear how they sounded and to share that with the rest of the group. Their radio shows containing these items, either going out live 'on air' as they did or in playback to family and friends, validated their voices and aired them to a wider audience. Rather than being told who they were, as their relocation to the PRU certainly had, they were allowed an opportunity to define themselves publicly in their own terms, in their own voice.

Couldry talks of neo-liberalism creating a 'voice-denying' culture and that 'to deny value to another's capacity for narrative – to deny her potential for voice – is to deny a

basic dimension to human life' (Couldry, 2010, p7). I suggest that these PRU students had been in a voice-denying situation, one that by accident or design but certainly by circumstance had meant that their relationship with their voice was at best unclear. I suggest that this simple exercise, 'this is how they see me, but this is who I am', offered a key step in the process of encouraging these young people to reclaim their own voices.

### 5.9 Feelings of Empowerment

As a practitioner, I judge the success of the work partly in the context of it being a radio show that 'aired the marginalised voice'. However, reflecting as a scholar-practitioner I believe the impact on these participants was primarily in them *being* heard: the process of making the journey from being microphone-shy to being on the radio was the key achievement for them. As I explored this with them in the research interviews, there were clear indicators of their feeling empowered by successfully making this journey themselves:

**WI** 'It is a positive thing to have people listening to you. Um, it kind of makes you feel good in a way because..they're listening to your work and like listening to things that you're doing ...

**J** How does it make you feel doing it?

**WI** It makes me feel like I'm showing people what I can do and what I can achieve rather than just being something that's never going to achieve anything really, yeah.

**J** What do you think you got from doing the project?

**Pg** More confidence and um just like... like a feeling that I can do *anything* basically. Like, if you put your mind to it...like, yeah.

### 5.10 Empowerment

Couldry, Berry and Rodenburg all discuss voice in relation to power. I will revisit this idea again in the next chapter. However, I do note that the conditions for the social,

economic or political 'empowerment' of any individual or group are many and varied. Any further significant discussion of the broader theme of 'empowerment' is beyond the remit of this thesis. Nevertheless, on the evidence presented here, finding and using one's voice does offer some element of empowerment on a personal level. It may also offer empowerment on a socio-political level but the evidence presented here so far is not of that occurring for this group. In more detail, a part of this equation is in the reception of those voices: their impact upon a listening audience.

#### Audience response

The focus of this study is also not the wider audience response to the aired material, though the presence of an audience and the potential impact of these voices are noted as relevant. Further, the affirmation felt by the participants from being heard by family, friends and professionals in their lives is an important element in PCR work. This is a localised, personalised empowerment for these participants and it offers something that may surely be in short supply for excluded students: they have something of their own making that is tangible and positive to share with those around them (see appendix v).

#### Finding voice autonomously

I feel bound to reference the poem this student (Pg) wrote for the project (see appendix vi) and which is featured in the final section of the practical submission. She wrote it unprompted and it was clearly an outlet for her feelings as well as an opportunity to declare her history; to tell her story. The radio project offered her the opportunity to record it and the radio show offered her the platform to air it: it is a succinct example of the thesis narrative as it encompasses both her physical and the socio-political voices. It is an example of autonomy in voice.

I cite Rodenburg again here to add some wider context to this example of 'voice in radio' from the thirteen year old (Pg): 'Many of us have been taught not to feel easy about expressing our words and sounds openly. Our society likes to control the volume and keep us vocal hostages; it doesn't want to hear the thoughts and opinions of certain groups like children, women and minorities. Too often we only like to hear the voices of so-called first class citizens, well-bred and well-toned. Ironically it is usually

the other classes of citizens whose voices still retain the habits of natural release.’  
(Rodenburg, 2015 p30)

For my part, I continue to be impressed by the time and trouble this participant took over shaping her piece of ‘voice’ in this context. I am equally impressed by the clarity and honesty of the content. I am reminded that this student disclosed in interview that she had been excluded for ‘behaviour, being rude, running out of classes and fights’. This piece allowed (Pg) to offer a different version of herself to the world.

The Head of Site, (Gt), articulated clearly how she saw the PCR work fitting into the students’ armoury of empowerment. Increased confidence through affirmation combined with enhanced communication skills offered her students valuable tools with which to gain more control over their futures.

J ‘...it’s a bit of a kinda no-brainer question this but why is it important to you that these young people find and develop their voice?’

**Gt** Cos if you don’t have your *voice* then you don’t have *yourself*. And these kids need to have themselves. They need to be in charge of themselves ...my big word here is ‘resilience’ and my students have to be really resilient. They have to be more resilient than any other child I’ve ever worked with because they have been *excluded* and they have to go back to school with that label, and they have to be resilient to prejudices that are gonna come their way and they’re gonna have to be resilient to how they’ll express themselves when someone’s unfair to them because the wrong move can see them back here.’

‘So they have to learn to use their voice to be able to demonstrate resilience and to empower themselves.’

This response offers clear articulation of the empowerment offered by the PCR work in this context. Although such broadcast material also offered a clear alternative to the output from capitalist corporations that deliver audiences to other corporations (Herman & Chomsky, 2002); and this type of radio output also had much resonance with “You Radio”, created ‘in order to deliver social gain rather than for commercial reasons’ (Fleming 2010, p43), the centre of this work felt closer to more localised, personalised notions of empowerment. These ‘experts in their own situations have their expertise enhanced’ through this PCR work (Mayo, 2000, p24). I suggest that through engaging with the PCR work, the PRU students are able to advocate more

effectively for themselves having had both the practice and the skills-development through this project work.

### **5.11 Exchange: raising expectations and broadening horizons**

As with the other projects, there was an element of exchange that helped the project along significantly. This exchange acted as a catalyst, helping the work happen more dynamically. Staff member (Sr) viewed it as offering positive role-modelling for the PRU students by the Arts school students.

**Sr** 'The (Arts) school students were fantastic. I think maybe they bridged the gap a little bit between the staff, as in yourself and myself, and the students. I think it was really good for the students here to see students who were only a little bit older than themselves but, you know, really focussed on studying and careers, and for it not to be their kind of staff-student dynamic; that actually it became more of a kind of...collaboration between all, you know, the students here (PRU), the (Arts) school students and, you know, us as staff members. And actually there kind of became something quite *equal* about it.'

In addition, the link with another institution felt important to her:

**Sr** 'I think for the kids here to have that link with yourself, with people outside, with the (Arts) school, with other kind of professionals is really positive for them in ...not feeling that they're trapped in a school where... they've been kicked out from their main schools and nobody wants them...actually making links with other people and having to work with other professionals and adults and students, as in the (Arts) school students, actually maybe opens their...horizons a little bit.'

(Gt), the Head of Site, also saw horizons being broadened by her students' encounters with the older Arts school students:

**Gt** 'You brought the (Arts) students here who, in their everyday lives they (PRU students) may not see, or they may not communicate with and so that was powerful in itself ... I think there was a little bit about them feeling comfortable, like 'I'm OK with this person who's completely different..from me ..and I'm cool with that... and I can communicate with them.' And I think that they liked that.

Although this section sits as an addendum to the main focus of the chapter, namely 'voice', the role of 'exchange' in the work outlined earlier is important to record. To

recap, this exchange acts as a catalyst for the emergence and development of voice in the participants. Perhaps one might even see it as the dress-rehearsal for the PRU participants before they embark on an exchange with which they have far less control: the implicit exchange with their audience of listeners and beyond that, onto other exchanges in their daily lives. The part played by the older Arts school students has a different emphasis in these PRU projects in comparison to the earlier work featured in this thesis. They work more as facilitators and role models here rather than as more active partners of exchange with the hospice patients, as described in the previous chapter. The role of these Year 13 Arts school students in this PCR work continues to be integral and should continue to be recorded and respected as such.

### **5.12 In summary**

PRU students experience schooling in a specific, alternative context. They have both rejected and been rejected by a mainstream school system that then has the power to relocate them. Simply by being at a PRU they are constantly reminded of their disempowered position in that equation. Thus, the relationship between this PCR project and voice differed from the other projects reviewed in this thesis: here it was more closely aligned to personal growth in relation to voice. In simple terms, allowing them to “have their say” within a different professional, structured context enabled them to discover a new and effective way to communicate. At each stage of the project their voices attained increasing power, firstly in relation to the students themselves and then enhanced by a listening audience. Therefore the project offered these students an element of personal empowerment that was all the more important for it being a rare offering in their context.

Instrumentally, it reflected the progression offered by other participatory media work. ‘One of the keys to (active) engagement and a sense of empowerment can come from developing the skills to express yourself and be heard’ (Porter, 2007, p91). As well as helping the students reframe their own voices, it further offered them a way of listening to others: ‘To develop the voice you have to become aware of it...listening to find out how you are getting across to other people...perhaps it will also make you listen to other people more accurately’ (Berry, 1994, pp 22 - 24). The primary

achievement here then may be seen as the students' enhanced ability and willingness to listen; and to use their voices in a controlled, articulate manner.

However, from a broader media perspective, the project does deliver these erstwhile marginalised voices into some part of the 'mediascape'. They are broadcasting on a radio that is heard around a school and beyond, as well as by their friends and families as recordings. That process does, inevitably, further enhance the empowerment experienced by the participants. To cross-reference further, the project broadcast model reflects the arena for voice offered by alternative, listener-supported radio stations of the U.S.: 'not only can you listen to it but you can participate in it and add your own thoughts and learn something. That's the way people become human: Human participants in a social and political system" (Chomsky, 2007, 2hrs 16').

I suggest that the material in this chapter illustrates the potential of PCR in relation to the development of voice in PRU students. I note that such a project cannot succeed in isolation: school management teams that were both sympathetic and supportive to the aspirations of the project, whilst at the same time being willing and able to support the work with firm expectations around student behaviour, allowed the work to thrive.

Finally, I believe the PCR work cited here offered each participant the opportunity to reclaim their voice from a history of negative discourse and responses; and the affirmative, confidence-building nature of the work was offered at a key time of transition for these KS3 students.

The next chapter in this thesis, 'Linking the Voices in Conclusion', will attempt to draw together some commonalities and identify some bespoke elements in the PCR work from across all three of the projects under consideration. Then my final chapter will reflect back upon my practice as it has evolved; my emergence as a scholar-practitioner; and how those two elements have combined to enhance my field of Participatory Community Radio.

## Chapter 6: Linking the Voices in Conclusion

**Introduction:** Having explored Voice in Radio in three different PCR contexts, this penultimate chapter offers an overview of the work under consideration in relation to literature cited earlier in this thesis. That literature now offers me helpful reference points as to what PCR can offer participants; and of course what it may not. To aid a reflective analysis, common outcomes are identified across all three of the projects. The chapter then identifies a different emphasis for each project in relation to concepts around voice, before placing the PCR work in a broader, media context.

### 6.1 Common outcomes:

#### Empowerment?

The self-confidence and affirmation gained by the participants through the projects is clear from the data. It is therefore tempting to use that data to make greater claims about the ‘empowerment’ of participants through PCR: might PCR facilitate broader ‘empowerment through radio’ as articulated by advocates of the medium in a defined ‘community radio’ context (Barbrook, 1985; Coyer, 2006; Fleming, 2010; Carpentier, 2011); or even as envisaged by Brecht in radio’s infancy (Brecht, 1927 & 1932)? On reflection, and based on the evidence presented in this thesis, it feels tenuous to claim that PCR has empowered these participants in the way Freire envisaged through his theory of Conscientisation (Freire, 1972) or even in a ‘Lifelong Learning’ context (Mayo, 1997). I do not reject the notion that the radio project work may well offer a start on a journey of empowerment for participants. They may choose to take the skills they have learned on their project, along with the social experiences they have had through a meaningful exchange across demographic lines, and employ them in future scenarios. Making these choices for themselves would then mean that PCR would have played a role in enhancing their agency and empowering them. However, in my view PCR does not, indeed it cannot, offer life-changing empowerment by itself. This somewhat sobering realisation has encouraged me to move away from grand socio-

political claims about PCR work and towards the detail of what this form of participatory media work *can* offer a participant. And the answer to that, I believe, is to be found in the arena of ‘voice’.

### Is that really what I sound like?

The starting point for the narrative of this thesis was the moment at which participants hear their own voice replayed in hi-fidelity sound. Even before my study commenced I had often heard participants receive their first playback with variations on the response “I can’t stand the sound of my own voice”. The evidence from almost all the responses in this study confirmed that there is a recoiling from the sound of one’s own ‘public voice’ (Berry, 1994; Rodenburg, 2015).

Given this consistency of initial response and the subsequent consistency of acceptance of their own voices, I believe it was the composition of the PCR project work that enabled this transformation in participants’ relationship with their voices: the articulation of their personal, autobiographical material in the end ‘won out’ over the discomfort of hearing their own voices aloud. It may be a testament to the care in the work that such a wide demographic of participants was able to achieve such similarly positive outcomes: small pre-recorded tasks leading onto longer, more sophisticated pieces, all then fitting together to make a final ‘live’ radio show. The initial affirmation of voice within each of the groups then enabled them to share their voices with a wider audience, both through radio broadcasts and the airing of recordings to family and friends. This steady, considered and consistent project structure mirrored the best practice of other participatory community work as I had encountered it through the literature (Langford and Mayo, 2001; Lally, 2009; Rooke, 2012). Participants were reassured at each stage of the process that their work, in this case through their voice, was valid both in terms of how they sounded and what they said. This facilitated a steady development of voice in the participants, with the goal of them broadcasting live on the radio being reached by the conclusion of each project. These were first-time broadcasters who managed to produce speech radio shows built around their ‘voices’ in both senses of the word. It is an achievement to be celebrated in a wider climate of ‘voice-denying’ media (Couldry, 2010).

### How did I sound to you?

There is plenty of testimony from participants confirming that their final radio programmes were well-received by family and friends. In this element of the data, the problem of 'grateful testimonials' arises, whereby the participants are told by their known audience what that audience think their participant friend or relative wants to hear. However, even with that variable in the equation the feedback is worth considering, for it points up a pertinent reflection in regards to voice for the participants. The women from the Luncheon Club spoke of how their families were most impressed by how they sounded 'on the radio'. Similarly, the secondary school boys reported positive responses from home. The hospice families have not been asked, as yet, but the PRU students also gained affirmation from their voices being heard at home. The pertinent point here is that, to the listening circle of family and friends, those voices did not sound any different from usual. They were as they'd always been, for they were the external voices as always heard by those listeners. The voices only sounded different for the participant. Therefore, the exchange happening between participants and their listeners involved those voices being *heard* in a different way. They were being *listened to* in a different way. Because the voices were part of a radio show, constructed to engage and maintain a listening audience, the participants had a platform from which to be heard. And the content, the stories and exchanges between the different participants, were new to those listening. The participants were conscious of how they *sounded* but the listeners - the family, friends and peers - were listening to the *content*. The content was strong, the form was fluent and therefore they sounded 'professional'; 'good'; they were 'pleased that nanny could do something like that.' The participants had all taken a risk by offering their voices in a more public arena and their audience had offered them affirmation. That affirmation had in turn engendered feelings of empowerment by confirming their skills as broadcasters.

To recap more succinctly, having become comfortable enough with their own voices to continue their project work, the participants produced audio material that was well-received by their audience. They received positive feedback from airing their voices. Therefore they left their reservations about how they sounded behind to embrace the

positive impact of what they said: in other words, the project participants made the transition from their physical voice to their socio-political Voice. As discussed at the start of this chapter, this offered them the potential to extend their agency in the process. Indeed, as they were broadcasting to an audience perhaps that act in itself was one that secures a claim of 'extension of agency'.

It therefore feels reasonable to claim that this thesis demonstrates how PCR work allowed for a personal development in voice, in turn facilitating a sense of empowerment in relation to socio-political Voice. It is important to proceed along this line of argument in a measured, realistic way. I note firmly that my suggestion is that the participants were offered a *sense* of empowerment in relation to socio-political voice. If we accept Chomsky's analysis of the western media as integrated into a capitalist infrastructure, an arm of the corporate infrastructure that serves to sell the products of the other corporate arms (Herman & Chomsky, 2002); if we accept Couldry's extension of this view that the current neo-liberal climate and the associated media is 'voice-denying' (Couldry, 2010); if we look realistically at the impact small projects like these under review in this thesis can have when weighed against the more epic forces of containment at play, one has to be modest in one's suggestions: these PCR projects have offered the participants the *potential* for empowerment by extending their *potential* agency through their use of voice in radio. However, I have come to believe this in itself is a valid socio-political outcome.

#### Offering a model of good practice

I have also come to a position whereby I see the PCR work, and the socio-economic micro-climate of the Arts school within which it has survived, as a small-scale model of good practice. The PCR work under review has existed outside the stark commercial construct identified by Peet (2008) and Couldry (2010). There are other localised, institutional pressures associated with the work but in essence its content is unencumbered by commercial concerns: it is able to exist as a tool for the development of voice within a media (school radio station) context. In addition, the work fits Downmunt's definition of alternative media, as it 'exists and (arguably) has flourished in a space of relative independence from, and negotiation with, institutional power' (Downmunt, 2007, p10). Given the feedback from all of the cohorts - the

Luncheon Club women and the secondary school boys; the hospice patients and the teenagers; and the PRU students and their Arts school counterparts - on the positive exchanges between them through the project work, it does seem to offer the potential for a transformation of 'personal and cultural relations in society' (Mayo 1997, p21), albeit on a small scale: the understanding and even the relationships fostered between the different participants by each of the projects could be described as 'transformational' in the project moment. Again, it must be emphasised that the evidence only really points to the *offer* of a longer-term transformation in these inter-demographic relationships. Time alone would be able to verify that. However, from the 'project moment' there is plenty to celebrate.

#### Facilitating and recording the exchanges

A consistent feature in the data from all three projects was the participants' positive experience of 'exchange'. This element of the work has become prominent in my analysis of what PCR had to offer participants and is worthy of some focus here.

The participant mix on the projects was 'constructed'. These people would not normally work together on a joint enterprise; they were brought together by the project. The project design facilitated the sharing of stories and the sharing of voices within the groups. The specific design of this PCR work also ensured participant involvement in all areas of the production process, meaning that the participants shared every aspect of the work. This bonded them as 'team-mates', minimising demographic differences and emphasising common achievements such as successful driving, recording, shared jingle performing and reasonably in-depth interviewing. Through the project, they shared increased agency in the moment; and they shared the increased potential in relation to their longer-term action. Further still, in each of the three projects this shared experience also produced numerous exchanges 'off the mic(rophone)'. This sharing or exchange is not the preserve of participatory media work (Rooke, 2012). However, in my view the emphasis on voice in the work helped the process along tremendously: the participants were sharing across a demographic in a way not normally facilitated by a media-led climate that reinforces negative stereotyping (Chomsky, 2004). They were learning about each other through voice in

radio, as the findings chapters and the audio CD illustrate. It is a story worth recapping here for the purpose of further reflection.

The Luncheon Club women and the Secondary school boys talked of seeing each other's demographic differently by virtue of having encountered each other in the new environment of a radio studio. They worked towards a common purpose of a radio show with new colleagues who were real-life, three-dimensional examples of 'old people' or 'teenagers' respectively. The radio studios became a meeting place for these groups and the radio projects became a forum within which they could exchange their stories and share a common purpose. This dynamic also held true for the hospice patients, the PRU students and the Arts school students. The shared experiences improved understanding of each other for all within the groups. The recording and airing of some of this process also offered the possibility of improved understanding of this process to the listening audiences. This is the idea I still tentatively offer as a self-termed 'circle of Conscientisation', even though I have now pulled back from wider claims of empowerment that might accompany that theory (Freire, 1972): this 'circle of consciousness' faces inward for the project group and outwards for the listener as the exchanges are enacted, recorded and then aired.

On a slightly tangential note, this PCR work might also be described as existing in the field of Alternative Media in that it is 'media produced by the socially, culturally and politically excluded' (Dowmunt, 2007, p3). It is the record of a 'learning journey through exchange' for the participants. As it was subsequently broadcast to include a listening audience in that journey, it earns its place somewhere in a definition of 'media', with Dowmunt naming its type as 'alternative'. Given the small scale of the PCR initiative, putting these erstwhile separated groups together through this alternative media activity hardly constitutes 'almost... a social movement in its own right' (Dowmunt, 2007, p10). However, as a model for future reference, it glimpses both possibilities offered by this kind of work: a positive exchange across a diverse demographic and an audience's access to that event. It can happen, and it can be heard to happen.

## Extending 'community' through the work

Having looked at the exchanges on the project through the prism of media and participation, it feels important to decide whether this work had anything to offer in relation to the wider concepts around 'community' as I encountered them at the start of my reading journey.

My starting point for this reflection is that the building of relationships on these PCR projects mirrors outcomes referenced elsewhere on effective participatory community work. Both *Magic Me* (Langford and Mayo 2001) and *Modalities of Exchange* (Rooke, 2012) reference this aspect of participatory arts work, the notion that any reasonable artistic endeavour on a participation project will bring disparate groups together. This idea is further developed by the stimulus to this exchange being the employment of 'a creative ingredient...as a catalyst for communication' (Rooke, 2012).

As stated earlier in this chapter, in each of the radio projects communication between the participants was a key element in their success. Again, unlike other 'creative ingredients', the tasks on these projects were specifically designed to encourage and facilitate verbal communication. As a result of this shared communication, and the radio show outcome, each project can perhaps be said to have offered the possibility of 'solidarity within difference' (Mayo, 2000) as participants from different backgrounds shared common experiences and communicated positively with one another. To develop this idea briefly, the recordings offered a possibility that this 'community' had longevity beyond the project-end. To have a record of these exchanges gave the participants the ability to revisit their experiences, which the data tells us they did. Thus the recordings have acted as a reminder for each participant of their ability to reach out beyond their own group: to use their own voices to communicate and also to facilitate the voices of others. It may seem a little conceptual but there does seem to be some echo of 'community' in this process.

As Chapter 1 illustrates and this chapter confirms, my whole reading journey informed my further understanding of the PCR work with which I had already been engaged for some time. It was useful to explore concepts around 'community' and 'empowerment' in relation to PCR. However, as Chapter 1 also confirms, it was the realisation that

'voice' was central to the project work that crystallised for me how I might further explore Participatory Community Radio in the context of a thesis.

## **6.2 The place of 'voice' in each of the projects**

Although all the projects had voice embedded within them, as this next section will illustrate each one had its own nuanced relationship to concepts of voice.

### Luncheon Club/Secondary school: Affirmation

The first PCR project reflected upon in this thesis was also the first undertaken chronologically. At that point in my practice, the most notable aspect of the work seemed to be the inter-generational exchange between the participants. The data offered in chapter 3 certainly illustrated that, with the inter-generational exchange being a notable outcome of the project. However these participants discovered another aspect to their agency, a finding that came to the fore in relation to the Luncheon Club women. It was most striking that two of them disclosed, in between their guffaws, that they were doing the project without their families' knowledge. It became clear through the data that the project site, the Arts school radio studios, offered a safe space in which these participants could explore their own voices, both physically (Berry, 1972) and politically (Couldry 2010; Rodenburg, 2015). The feedback from these women highlighted how far outside their traditional roles, as seen by their families and even themselves, they were venturing. That they were going 'on the radio' to speak, to tell their stories, was consistently noted as a positive by them in the feedback. The project offered them a space to take on and explore an experimental voice. That they could then offer proof to their families and friends of their achievements affirmed their work, offering elements of autonomy and feelings of empowerment for them. As one participant noted, 'I know I achieved something I never thought I would' (C., Luncheon Club).

The data shows that it was also equally notable to these women that they had mastered the technical aspects of the work, such as driving the radio desk. This gave them the confidence to work with the secondary school boys on equal terms which in turn gave them confidence when conversing with the boys, both on and off air. The

secondary school boys also found a positive way of articulating with elders, being heard by and working alongside them. In this first project then, voice was developed as a shared experience between the participants and then offered out to a listening audience as an example of inter-generational cooperation. It was also received by participants' families and friends as an engaging radio show. A further level of affirmation was then received by the participants as they were congratulated for being 'on the radio'. In contrast to the next project, the hospice, the benefits of this work for the participants seemed to exist very much in the present. They took affirmation from their successes and enjoyment from their exchanges. These outcomes reflected the participatory media projects recorded in 'Inclusion through Media' in that PCR was able to 'transform people's self-perception, building confidence (and) a social voice' (Downumt and Dunford, 2007, pp10-11). Further, it enabled these participants to find their voice, something named by the Inclusion through Media agenda as 'crucial to all of us' (Porter, 2007, p91); and it enabled erstwhile estranged groups, senior citizens and teenagers, to listen to each other, an act directly related to concepts of voice as encountered on my reading journey (Berry, 1994 pp22-24).

#### Hospice: Footprint

The benefits of the PCR work as felt by the participants in the hospice project are documented in both chapter 4 and the practical submission. Despite my retreating from grander claims around empowerment for PCR, I believe this particular project did offer tangible personal empowerment in relation to voice for a cohort whose choices were rapidly diminishing.

'Voice as legacy' is not the focus of enquiry in this thesis. I might add that ethical considerations steered me away from exploring this aspect of the work in any depth. To explain further, although anecdotally I understand that the ability to be able to access the voice of a departed loved one can offer comfort in bereavement, I chose not to follow up with interviews of family and friends of the participants. As a practitioner the PCR work involving the hospice was fully focused on the present, with the relationships and empowerment offered in the moment of the project work at its core. As explored in the methods chapter, as an 'embedded researcher' I was already negotiating a second, researcher's role alongside my position as project leader. The

relationship I had with the participants was already ‘a complex and changing entity’ (Maxwell, 2013, p91). To seek conversations with loved ones about the power of the project for them on into the future would have risked disrupting the primary relationship with the hospice participants even further. To look beyond the work as it was functioning, to explore the power of the voice after death, would have been counter-intuitive in the ‘project moment’.

However, as an academic writing now in reflection, I wish to tentatively explore that ‘post-death’ aspect here, if only briefly:

In considering to the facilitation of a participant’s voice, it can be appreciated most clearly in this hospice context how PCR project work might enable the ‘power’ of that voice to live on after a participant has passed away. The radio show format enables voices to be heard by an audience and a recording allows them to be replayed as an archive. Thus, they continue to have agency as recordings to any new audience that may encounter them despite the passing of the participants. This became most evident to me when replaying the clip between (Hy) and (Hn) in which ideas around death are explored in a very open and articulate manner, as featured in both chapter 4 and the practical submission. The thoughtful, sometimes emotional responses of subsequent listening audiences to that particular piece offer anecdotal evidence that these voices, that exchange, still has impact even though (Hn) himself has now passed away. Other data in Chapter 4 tells of the positive reactions from family and friends to still having those voices around and, in reverse, the comfort expressed by the participants that they were leaving something for their family to remember them by. This extract from hospice Community Arts lead (Mn) exemplifies that well:

‘Some of the people involved in the project have sort of said “Oh, you know I’ve got this on tape now. I can, you know, my *family* are listening to it. I’m still around.” Sort of like, “My voice is really *important*.”’

Despite this brief exploration into voice as legacy, in the main the data from the hospice project highlights the ‘here and now’ benefit of the work for the participants. The work itself offers both affirmation and the reaching of new horizons, with most participants having done radio for the first time. This is how it was for the Luncheon Club/boys school projects. However, there is an additional element of ‘exchange’ that

is particularly important for this cohort in the context of their terminal diagnoses. The structure of the project affords them the opportunity to build new relationships within safe boundaries with a younger cohort, the Arts school students. That exchange is reciprocated by the proximity offered to end-of-life experiences: it may inform and empower student participants ahead of scenarios closer to their own social and family circles, or offer them some sort of resolution on experiences they have already had. Again, all of this might be available through any combined community arts project outcome (Rooke, 2012) at the hospice but the sharing of voices required by PCR puts communication between the participants at the heart of its success. This is not to diminish the communicative power of other creative work as a means of self-expression in a community context, but rather to point up the opportunity for a direct outlet of expression that a voice-based project offers.

A voice is a unique instrument of expression. In this hospice context, it is the tool with which the participants are required to work. They have to converse as part of the project from the start. This project design offers a simple solution to the possible awkwardness or taboo around terminal illness that might otherwise be present. The human relationships between the participants take it on from there. Once that communication process is underway, the recording and subsequent replaying of the voices on the PCR radio show means that these successes in communication and exchange can be revisited, adding both longevity and legacy to the work as the voice continues to be heard. As throughout this thesis, the term 'voice' is used as a binary: physical and socio-political.

#### PRU: Reclamation

The outcomes from the PRU project work include those common to the other projects: airing the marginalised voice; exchange across groups who are otherwise unlikely to collaborate or even meet; affirmation and confidence building; listening. The extra emphasis with this cohort was in their re-learning or discovery of a new register in which to communicate. As articulated by the PRU staff in project debriefs, one barrier to progression for these young people can be their inability to communicate in context-appropriate registers (Jones, 2012). The project work asked them to engage with new ways of articulating within a set framework of expectations: listening and

responding within an interview situation; monitoring levels when recording others; co-delivering jingles from a script; articulating their own definitions of themselves. Crucially, they were then able to review their voices, to hear how they sounded to the outside world. This made the process active and, hopefully, ongoing. They were then heard across the Arts school in their live radio broadcast; later on the radio by others, at their own school by their peers; and also in home situations, where they may well often not be heard under normal circumstances: all these outlets added elements of agency to this work. Further, by hearing their show replayed in different contexts, and receiving positive affirmation in each, the PRU participants were able to gain some sense of their potential for agency as offered by their new-found ability to communicate in a different register: in this case, the register of a radio broadcast. For them, PCR offered the chance to be heard.

Another key ingredient here was the 'listening'. This is named as an important element to voice in the relevant literature, referenced earlier in this chapter and reproduced here in fuller form: 'To develop your voice you have to become aware of it...listening to find out how you are getting across to other people...perhaps it will also make you listen to other people more accurately' (Berry, 1994, pp22-24).

It is worthy of an extra note that a class from the KS4 PRU recently set up a school radio show on the back of the PCR radio project work. Named by them as "Radio Lockdown", it was apparently quite straightforward to create by virtue of the radio production and programming skills already in place from their PCR work at the Arts school. This offers an example of the possibilities of progression offered by this work and such green shoots will be monitored with interest. I might invoke Boal at this point, with his rejection of the 'sacred spaces' as the preserve of the initiated and the professionals (Boal, 1995). My contention was that the voices from the PRU had a right to be heard on air, as had all the voices. Thus I restate my cross-reference from Chapter 1, that the 'forum' of radio offers a similar platform to that of the theatre (Boal, 1995, p14): all voices are welcome for they are signifiers of humanity.

### 6.3 Voice in Radio

The emphasis of this chapter has so far been around community, empowerment and voice in relation to Participatory Community Radio. Underlying these elements is the potential for transformational social intervention offered by PCR. However, as a scholar-practitioner I reside firmly in the medium of radio and my reading journey also helped me explore the story of radio in some depth, giving me a context within which to situate the work I do. In the final two sections of this chapter, I situate this PCR work within that broader context of the medium of radio.

#### Taking affirmation from Brecht

A number of factors offer radio as an accessible medium for voice: the relatively low production costs; the absence of a picture and the associated range of production demands a visual dimension would bring; the potential for access by both an online and on-air audience; the relative ease of operation in production terms in comparison to TV, thus allowing for participant control with associated offers of autonomy and personal empowerment. Given all these factors, one can appreciate how radio offers opportunity as a tool for voice and exchange, particularly for erstwhile marginalised groups. Along with other forms of community radio such as 'You Radio' (Fleming, 2010), in my view PCR offers a response to Brecht's proposal that 'art and radio must be put to pedagogical purposes' by 'organising its listeners as suppliers' (Brecht, 1927b).

#### Advantageous conditions of production

To expand, there are some unique advantages offered by the medium of radio as compared to television or film in this particular participatory media context. Although participants are inexperienced in media production, the relatively straightforward production skills required in PCR projects quickly enable them to be fully involved in the production process. This, in turn, fosters a team spirit whereby participants depend on each other to help produce a good-quality audio outcome. This then engenders trust within the groups, which supports more meaningful disclosures between participants, both off and then on air. There is also an ethos of autonomy fostered on the projects, mirroring the desire to hand over authorship to participants within the

media process espoused by the Hi8tus work (Dowmunt *et al.*, 2007). The absence of a visual aspect, beyond photographic records of the work, offers another advantage beyond fewer production demands. Radio offers a semi-anonymity that works well for the specific cohorts on these projects: in the closed nature of the radio studios, where they can learn the technical lessons in small groups; and in the performance-end of the equation, where physical appearance is immaterial in relation to audience reception. As already discussed, I have been struck by the audience reception to one hospice patient's (Hn) piece about death and pain. His voice carried weight and authority. He was able to articulate with powerful resonance despite being very poorly and in a wheel-chair. Like all the other participants, his physical appearance was immaterial in relation to the power of his contribution to the programme. Radio offers the ability for contributors to move beyond audience judgements about their physicality. It is a specific advantage for those involved in this work for it affords them more power in their communication to the wider world. The 'power' of radio as a medium is darkly referenced in the Literature chapter (Girard, c.1992; Chalk, 2000; Somerville, 2012). It is heartening to be able to reference it as such a positive force in this context.

#### **6.4 Limitations to airing the Voices – who is the audience?**

Although this thesis looked to demonstrate the strengths of PCR work in terms of participant empowerment, limitations to that empowerment have emerged on reflection. In my view, these limitations are imposed by factors beyond the practice itself: they are borne of an inability to secure, for now at least, dissemination of these participant voices to a significantly wider, mainstream audience. However, further consideration as to whether wider dissemination is actually desirable for this practice gives me pause for thought. As with the dilemma I faced wearing the 'two hats' of researcher and practitioner, recounted in Chapter 2, my views on this depend on whether I consider this as a 'radio activist' or as a participatory media project leader.

Although there are several hundred online listeners for when these PCR programmes air during the Arts school summer broadcast, I fully accept that there is not currently a huge audience consuming this material. My view on needing to address this aspect of the work has oscillated between a desire to find more platforms for the content

produced by the work in order to add to the 'mediascape'; and recognition that the project work itself serves the participants well as it is, with a localised, largely bespoke audience as part of that experience. I will explore this 'dilemma' again through the prism of the 'scholar-practitioner' in my final chapter. I note here simply that the continuation of this PCR work may involve seeking the further dissemination of these voices but, equally, it may not.

### The concept of quality revisited

There has been a broader discourse around quality in the PCR work as content with which to engage. How that quality links to opportunities for dissemination is also worthy of reflection.

In further reference to the literature covered relevant to dissemination of media product, I do suggest that the project work has succeeded in 'finding spaces' within broader restrictive conditions (Dowmunt, 2007) for the voices from all of the cohorts to be heard. To recap, the analysis offered by Chomsky that corporate media outlets reinforce dominant ideologies and that commercial pressure on air time prevents lengthy exploration of complex ideas (Chomsky, 2007) is supported by Couldry in his discussion of sound-bite culture in broadcasting (Couldry, 2010). Both analyses emphasise the lack of space for voices such as the PCR participants to be heard on-air. In layman's terms, advertising space in a show by terminally ill patients or excluded secondary school kids might be a 'hard sell' to a mainstream audience. Even public service broadcasting (BBC) scheduling demands would prohibit the time needed to fully air these voices and preserve their context. However, I hear them as a compelling listen. I do therefore believe that the 'space' (Dowmunt, 2007) afforded by the PCR work has value as articulated by Fleming in relation to concepts around community radio, both in relation to 'social gain' and 'innovative broadcasting' (Fleming, 2010). The PCR work also has resonance with other advocates of community radio: that radio 'challenge(s) the division between broadcasters and consumers in our society' (Barbrook, 2005); and 'the rights of citizens to collectively or independently create their own media' (Coyer, 2007). Crucially, I believe it stands as an example of 'how participatory practices can enhance and even co-define quality (Carpentier, 2011, pp340-346). In my view this is not a question of 'quality versus participation' but rather

an offer of 'quality *and* participation'. As a PCR practitioner I was always keen that both the technical and the content-based aspects of the final shows be as high as possible. I felt this would affirm the participants work and offer the best chance for their voices to be heard, as an audience would hopefully stay with the shows. Thus, I suggest that the PCR on-air content also offers a challenge to the voice-denying structures at play, which seem to define so much of the current UK media output (Couldry, 2010). In other words, in my opinion it deserves to be heard.

For now, my response to the question 'who is the audience?' is to tangentially suggest that an audience can grow. In the way that recording the hospice voices establishes legacy for those participants, so creating the practical submission offers suggestions for further PCR work as illustrated. This, in turn, might create more material of this kind and possibly more audience demand. However, I feel bound to suggest that being heard by a localised, familiar audience perhaps offers participants more value than may a broader, anonymous listenership. Knowing that the work was to be accessed by a mass audience would surely at least change the participant experience. The data illustrates that the experience is a positive one in relation to voice at present, so as a PCR practitioner I am increasingly hesitant in searching for a mainstream platform. To illustrate the duality of this discourse for me, I conclude with this: whilst not being driven by audience figures for its justification, I appreciate how the work would add to the 'mediascape'. Finding a larger audience to hear the work would be a positive development in relation to broadening the UK media diet.

In the meantime, this combined written and audio submission records PCR as part of a tradition of participatory arts work; an attempt to 'write our own legacy; lest others write it for us'; and 'to ensure our communities continued access not only as audiences but also to the means of production in the arts' (Tiller, 2013, p146).

## **6.5 In summary**

I believe in the power of radio for transformational ends; and I believe that this thesis demonstrates how PCR can offer a step towards empowerment for project participants by facilitating 'voice in radio'.

Although history holds examples such as the use of Hate Radio in Rwanda (Chalk, 2000) to illustrate the negative possibilities of the medium, there are many positive examples to inspire us. I reference the Philippines, South Africa, the USA (Girard 1992) and accounts of community radio across the UK (Coyer, 2007; Fleming 2010) as illustration. Through my PCR practice I have demonstrated how radio can be used as a tool for empowerment and exchange in a localised community context. I have answered the call that 'radio must be put to pedagogical purposes' (Brecht, 1927, p28); and in this instance I believe I have done so by 'bringing into being new actors and creating new sites and scales of struggle' (Isin, 2008, p39; Couldry, 2010, p145). Although the project participants are 'marginalised voices' in regard to mainstream media output, I believe that the quality of their practical outcomes as listening content are audio evidence that they need not be so (Carpentier, 2011). I suggest that the practical submission of this thesis supports the assertion that they can produce content that is 'informative, educational and entertaining' (BBC core values, Reith, 1928); and that the written element of the thesis supports a strategy by which these voices can be nurtured and developed.

To reiterate, I suggest that PCR is an example of doing 'new things' in relation to voice (Couldry, 2010).

However, alongside the more academic construct around the work under review, I offer the heart of the PCR work as a more straightforward narrative: the discovery and subsequent sharing of voice. For the community participants reported on in this thesis, these projects have introduced them to their own voices and those of others; offered them a forum in which to tell their stories and learn new registers of communication; and given them a platform from which to be heard, both in the moment and in memoriam. These PCR projects have offered the participants possibilities of empowerment through voice, should they seek or take those opportunities in the future. It therefore feels most appropriate to finish this chapter by re-citing the participants themselves as advocates for the possibilities of this particular field, named as Participatory Community Radio, in their specific contexts:

### Luncheon Club participant (C)

**J** Talk a bit about... the confidence you think it might give you, this project...

**C** Well..what shall I say, now?... (small laugh), it gives me the confidence to know that I can...you know.. work with people and to *do* something like *this*, which...I never dreamed that I would, you know, *do*, so... it makes me feel a little bit more confident that maybe I could go on to do something *more* than this.

### Hospice participant (Ce)

**J** What are you most *proud* of in terms of your work on the project?

**Ce** That I have something to leave for my children and grandchildren. They can actually *hear* me and I've got something else done (photo), they'll actually *see* me being interviewed ...(breath)... and that they *will* realise that, as I said earlier, that there is *living* to be done... (breath)... In whatever circumstance you find yourself...you can *do* something.

### PRU participant (WI)

**W** It kind of felt like we were saying who we are and telling people who don't understand... because people see us like 'op-outs' and like, like people who aren't like no good to the community and stuff, but when we like *tell* them who we actually are and we're not just bad kids...it might make people change their mind about how they see us.

**J** How does it make *you* feel doing it?

**W** It makes *me* feel like I'm showing people what I *can* do and what I can achieve rather than just being something that's never going to achieve anything.

The next and final chapter will offer reflections on how completing this thesis has affected my developments as both practitioner and an academic: what impact has 'Voice in Radio' had on Participatory Community Radio?

## Chapter 7: Final Reflections

**Introduction:** I have been ‘dancing and wrestling with scholarship’ (Back, 2002) from the moment I embarked on this thesis. Now, finally, I can reflect on that process. As the PCR participant voices have developed through radio, so my voice has evolved through completing this thesis. So whereas Chapter 6 offered conclusions about the research, this final chapter offers a more personal reflection on my journey since starting the work that became “Voice in Radio”. I write here as a radio broadcaster, a PCR practitioner and an emerging academic scholar, offering some thoughts about the impact of the study on the practice and the practice on the study. In other words, I am exploring the symbiosis between those different elements of my work and attempting to locate myself within that equation.

### 7.1 Those early bike rides in the rain...

Perhaps the most overt learning curve on my journey has been the academic one.

I still vividly recall those dark winter evenings cycling to my research courses after a long day at work. I hold my high marks on the quantitative course with pride and have never read (of) a survey or report in the same way since. I hold the phrase ‘lies, damned lies and statistics’ at the ready, always, while I look at how to weigh the latest well-timed policy report release. I consider that insight, courtesy of the Goldsmiths Graduate School, to be a gift for life. I miss the open-ended conversations of the Qualitative research course, as I discussed concepts and interpretations with colleagues in a tower that, whilst not ivory, offered comfort against the urgencies of everyday life.

I encountered theories and theorists that would not ever have been ‘on my radar’ but for my study; I have finally understood the role of existing literature in the development of a new thesis; and I have learned the skill of applying that broader theory to specific practice, in this case PCR. I have learned to ask the questions. More importantly still, I have learned to listen to the answers, whether those come from the

data, the literature or the participants themselves. This new 'prism', and I can articulate it no better than the ability to look at something in a slightly detached way, manifests most clearly in my understanding of what PCR has to offer to its participants.

Surrounded by epic ideas and impressive theories, there is a temptation to make grand epic claims for one's own work. How-else might a thesis hold its ground or make its mark? I felt compelled to prove that PCR work offered empowerment to its participants and an answer to the current 'crisis in voice' whilst simultaneously offering itself as a way of unpicking an unholy capitalist media axis. Well, perhaps not quite but I did feel a pressure to 'claim big'. Of course, this reflects the pressure on 'evaluation' more generally as discussed in Chapter 2. It was only when I realised that, in this case, I was the instigator of this pressure that I managed to look again at what the data was telling me; and to credit the work with the more modest but equally important claims I can now make on its behalf.

## **7.2 Spreading the word...one step at a time**

To develop my view on the dissemination of the radio content produced by PCR, as initiated in the previous chapter, I offer the following thoughts.

Through the process of completing this thesis, I have accepted that a beneficial participant experience in PCR does not rely on the work having exposure to a mainstream, public audience. This has allowed me to reframe what PCR work offers to marginalised voices. I had believed that the political importance of this type of participatory community work lay primarily in the airing of marginalised voices to a mainstream audience. I still recognise the importance of that possibility from a political perspective (Chomsky, 2007; Couldry, 2010; Rodenburg, 2015) as detailed in Chapter 1, but I have come to more nuanced conclusions as a PCR practitioner.

The most dynamic process in the work as I've seen it unfold, and perhaps even the most significant outcome, has been in the exchange between the participants as they have been finding their voices. The radio studio has become the arena in which this exchange happens; and the radio medium, both live and recorded, has become the repository in which the work can be heard and re-broadcast. This exchange, across

generations for example, exists in good quality recorded form by virtue of the projects. Therefore I do believe that this type of work offers unique possibilities in relation to content.

Indeed, I have come to understand that the depth and originality of the material that has emerged from these erstwhile marginalised voices could very possibly *only* be produced through project work like this. I cite the BBC's Listening Project as a counterpoint to the PCR material in its content-gathering approach. Ostensibly 'eavesdropping' on conversations between 'ordinary folk', BBC production values and schedules demand significant intervention and reconstruction by programme makers of these 'natural' conversations. The participants in the Listening Project are 'done to'. In stark contrast, PCR is an active, 'doing' project model for participants. By controlling more aspects of the production process themselves, including the technical ones, the participants' experience of the PCR process adds significantly to their feelings of empowerment. This in turn adds to their confidence in contributing to content through both their self-expression and their exchanges. Additionally, learning together with others on the project offers a bond that further facilitates the exchange. All these elements combine to create the conditions by which meaningful content can be produced – and exchanged - by marginalised voices through PCR.

Discussions about who should hear this content are also more nuanced than I anticipated at the outset. I have come to an understanding that the definition of 'audience' may be looser for PCR work than it is for more mainstream radio work. For these participants, an audience of friends and family has in itself produced feelings of affirmation and personal empowerment. That is not to say that I do not see the value of airing these voices to a much wider audience. As a broadcaster I absolutely do. It is simply to say that as a PCR practitioner, the success of the project work does not rely on that audience. The *potential* audience is enough pressure for these new broadcasters to experience in the project moment. I have had many thoughts about how to secure a wider dissemination of their work but even that aim requires more consideration, as I will outline later in this section.

Finally, the design of the project work requires not only voicing but also listening. Thus, the medium of radio dovetails with the project design to ensure that voices are

actually heard within each group. For the participants, the audience 'out there' beyond the studio walls is initially less important than the audience within the studio: the audience of project peers. There is subsequent affirmation available beyond the group but the affirmation from within the group forms the foundation from which participants gain the confidence to speak out. The project design allows participants to share their voice within an initially safe environment, until they become accustomed to the way they sound to the outside world. From there, empowered with a voice and the technical skills to process it in radio, potential new broadcasters are created; new voices are afforded the potential to be heard. This potential is initially realised as output on a school radio station with a modest listenership and within family and friendship groups. I believe that wider dissemination could be possible because the quality of the content and the production both stand up. It is authentic, well-produced audio that is new and interesting. Free of the pressures of industry media production, the PCR production process is able to nurture and then deliver these infrequently-heard voices in broadcast-quality audio. This process is also relevant to the 'concept of quality' as discussed in the previous chapter. To summarise my position in that discourse I believe PCR demonstrates that community arts work does not have to be a trade-off between artistic quality and community engagement. I believe that these projects can not only have both but, in the case of PCR, that both are important.

I have come to these views from the perspective of being a scholar-practitioner who has evaluated the PCR participant experience in some detail. Disseminating these voices to a wider audience would change the participant project experience significantly but it may well not enhance it. However, as a broadcaster on a mission to air the marginalised voice, I feel politically that these voices must be heard by a wider audience. Thus, not for the first time, I face the reality of 'wearing two hats' or inhabiting two roles in relation to this work.

### **7.3 Negotiating the roles and the recording levels**

Negotiation between roles has formed an important part of my journey. I brought many years of experience as both a broadcaster and a teacher to my research, with all the accompanying professional and instinctive considerations. Embarking upon a thesis

gave me another set of considerations to work with, sometimes at odds with those I had at the outset.

For example, although I understood the obligations on an academic researcher to 'do no harm', working with hospice patients meant I had to constantly review my data-gathering strategy. As a scholar-practitioner I felt it important to obtain well-recorded feedback for the thesis. However as a project leader I wanted to 'protect' my hospice participants, to ensure their well-being above all other considerations. All of the research was done with consent and clear liaison with the hospice staff but there were still moments when I had to ask myself difficult questions.

There was also the moment during one of the PRU projects when I realised that, by ejecting a participant for using an admittedly aggressive mode of communication, I was about to become a 'voice-denying' factor in that young man's already troubled life. Following through as a class teacher, in the project moment, he would have been gone. In the context of the thesis he had to stay. I decided to keep him aboard and used as much skill as I could muster to give that choice to him. Perhaps it also taught me a valuable lesson as a class teacher; or at least reminded me of the highest standards of student-engagement to which I would like to hold myself, regardless of how offensive a register a disruptive student managed to find through their voice. Ambitious maybe, but still worthy of some pause for thought the next time I am referred to in good old 'Anglo-Saxon' by a troubled teenager.

My third example of inhabiting and negotiating role is in the piece about death from the hospice participant as featured in the practical submission. To summarise what I have already covered in Chapter 4, had I not been doing this thesis that piece would not have featured in that particular final show and possibly not even have been recorded.

These examples tell me of the direct impact the thesis had on the practice. They also remind me that to work most effectively as both the project leader and a researcher on these projects, I had to remain as flexible as possible in the project moment. As time went on, I often recalled the view that all researchers in some way disturb the field in which they work (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Maxwell, 2013).

Alongside ethical considerations like the ones described above, I was keen to ensure that both the project material and all the feedback were recorded in broadcast-quality sound. To begin with this was the instinctive approach of a radio producer. However, as the thesis progressed and voice emerged as a focus, it felt important to ensure those voices would be heard as 'cleanly' as possible. This was also a radio producer's instinct but, pedagogically, good quality recordings offered them power; 'the power of radio' as referenced in Chapter 1. I was always aware that to get these broadcast-quality recordings would mean a more intrusive method of data-gathering. I consoled myself with the idea that these participants were already used to talking into a microphone. It was a choice I made early on in the process and one I stuck to consistently. It was the position I took between the role of researcher and radio producer.

This inability to shake off my radio background and its inherent values in relation to sound production came to a head in the final mix of the practice submission. I may have taken a risk by submitting the practical in its current form. However, the lesson I learned through the process of submission was that I cannot produce an audio submission unless it works for me as a listen. There is a rationale to constructing the practical mix in its current form, which I offer now.

#### **7.4 The practical submission - developing as a radio practitioner**

It took three years of initial study and then an interruption to realise how central my practice was to my thesis. Having recognised my need for a significant shift of emphasis in this study, I was relieved to be able to formalise that shift through a realignment of supervision and the re-designation of the thesis as practice-based. However, this transition asked a new question of me: how might I balance my instincts as a radio broadcaster with my obligations as a scholar-practitioner in a thesis context in order to best-illustrate my PCR practice? The audio submission offers one direct answer. However, in this thesis context, I also offer a commentary in order to explain the construction of the practical submission.

## Explaining the mix

As a producer of radio content for some twenty five years, it is a challenge for me to deconstruct or explain all the decisions I have made around the composition of the practical submission. This is because I put radio content together using a combination of instinct and experience. I know what outcome I want a piece to achieve and construct it to that end. However, a thesis submission may demand a more cogent explanation of the decisions made around a production and I offer that now.

My starting point is in the possibilities radio offers to a listener as a medium. In Sean Street's lyrical exploration of radio in relation to poetry (Street, S, 2012), the aesthetics of radio are explored through various examples of radio practitioners and historic radio moments. Street cites sound-recordist Chris Watson on that which sets radio apart from TV: "There's a strong analogy with poetry; it strikes directly into your heart, your soul and your imagination in a way that the two-dimensional visual image doesn't." (Street, S., p106). This direct impact on an audience of a well-produced collection of sounds helps explain my own passion for putting audio together to tell stories to an audience.

I was keen for the practical submission to engage its audience. Although I produced it primarily as an academic submission for a thesis, it is not intended solely for the examiners' ears. I also want it to speak to a broader audience, perhaps one that may not as a matter of course reach into the library stock of theses. However, it is not a radio show and I have not produced it for radio broadcast. Rather, it uses the *aesthetics* of a radio show to illustrate a collection of clips that have been compiled to best represent my PCR practice. It is mixed with both care and a rationale, the only way I know to prepare audio.

And so to the construction:

It runs to an hour in duration, with each PCR project featured being allocated around a third of that time, a structure that offers equal weighting to each PCR cohort. Each section begins with a piece of music, the lyrics of which fit thematically with broad references to voice: the first is 'Voices inside my Head' by The Police; and the second is 'Help me lose my Mind' by Disclosure featuring London Grammar, with the oft-

repeated line “Talk to me....”. The youthful-sounding gravitas of the instrumental ‘Drifting Away’ by Faithless at the start of the PRU segment helped set the mood for a cohort initially disempowered and disengaged. I hope, of course, that through that segment I have demonstrated how they can become more engaged. The subsequent re-appearance of the Police track at the conclusion offers some symmetry to the listener as well a reminder of the narrative of the thesis, the transition from the internal voice to the external one (Berry, 1994). There was one more piece of music included, ‘Here comes the Sun’ sung by Nina Simone. Chosen specifically by a hospice patient as an accompaniment to her interview, that music was an extension of voice for that patient as it spoke for her in that show. To my ears it helped humanise the experience of having a terminal condition for the listener, particularly with her accompanying explanation, and so I left it in at some length. I found it very poignant in that context and, given the intensity of the material in that section particularly, I reasoned it would offer some space for reflection before moving the whole piece along for the listener.

The inclusion of jingles from each of the shows was to illustrate some of the fun had by the participants during the project work. I hoped this sense of fun might also be mirrored in my links: I wanted the ‘flavour’ of the PCR project shows to be reflected in the practical submission of the thesis. The content from those shows is, at times, quite profound and the juxtaposition to be heard at points in the audio submission may seem a little incongruous to some ears. However, my intention was not to be flippant or trite but rather to invoke the spirit of the project in a respectful, three-dimensional and faithful way.

Finally I offer a short rationale of the links. I felt that the clips needed explaining, or at least contextualising, in relation to the project work from which they were extracted. I used the opportunity of links to guide the listener through examples of the work as selected. I have used my experience as a presenter and my perspective as a scholar practitioner in an attempt to make these links relevant and engaging.

For me as a radio practitioner, the construction of any sophisticated piece of audio is done first through the methodical selecting and editing of the clips. The fine-tuning then occurs through listening over and over again to it, with adjustments to the mix or the

edit helping it all knit together. It must, for me, engage the listener. In this case, these are at first the examiners. After them, I hope that it offers inspiration for would-be PCR practitioners; that it can act as a template for social action in radio. Your ears will decide how well I succeeded in those aims for you.

### **7.5 Moving forward**

In summary, as a scholar-practitioner I offer this thought to all the doctoral students still wrestling and dancing: be prepared to change your mind. It actually makes for a more interesting thesis experience all round.

For my part, as a PCR practitioner I offer this final reflection: The 'mediascape' continues apace as being 'voice-denying' in the extreme. With the effects of a dedicated neo-liberal economic agenda being felt across UK public services there is an imperative to create and protect spaces for voice, in particular those with testimonies that have been marginalised: those most disadvantaged by the current neo-liberal economic climate. With its relatively low cost, production accessibility and potential for listener access, Radio will continue to offer itself as an arena for voice. Within that, I believe PCR projects can enable those marginalised voices to meet, speak, exchange and be heard.

For me the work continues so do, please, keep listening.

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## Appendix

Appendices (i) – (iv) refer to supplemental data in relation to chapter 3.

(i) Those asked for feedback in the questionnaire were:

Code	Group	Number	Participant details
10	Year 10 Arts school media students	15	Year 10 (14 & 15 years old) Arts school students who were studying Media as a main subject (There were 15 who had participated in the most recent project rotation and all responded)
12	Year 12 Arts school media students	29	Year 12 (16 & 17 years old) Arts school students who were studying Media as a main subject (There were 31 who had participated in the most recent project rotation and 29 responded, two having subsequently left the course).
Pi	West Indian luncheon club members	17	The senior citizens' West Indian Social Club. These were participants from three years' worth of projects. Of those who had participated during that time (around 25), 17 responded. Others had stopped attending the club or gone abroad and one had passed away.
SM	Year 6 Junior school pupils	4	The local junior school presented an ethical challenge in that the participants were 10 – 11 years old. The gatekeeper here was the headmistress and she was happy to manage the questionnaire distribution on my behalf. Ten year 6's would participate every school year-end before moving onto secondary schools. Of the last cohort at that time, only four were reachable by the headmistress.

Se	Arts school ex-students, Radio station seniors	3	Radio station seniors. Ex-students, who had returned by invitation to help out as trainers and producers. There were only three respondents as they were working on the station at the time.
SJ	Boys' secondary school – AEN referred	12	The local Secondary school boys, aged between 12 and 15 when they took part, referred by their school because they had emotional and behavioural difficulties. These responses were from boys who had participated in the previous two and a half years. Of the twenty or so who had done so, twelve were still available to fill in questionnaires.
<b>Total</b>		<b>80</b>	

*Fig 1. Questionnaire Participant details*

The questionnaire offered a series of statements, constructed accessibly and age-appropriately, which allowed for three responses: 'agree strongly', 'agree' or 'disagree'. The statement questions were drawn from anecdotal evidence around radio work feedback sessions; recorded evidence from initial focus groups studies; and my own thoughts around what agency might be found by participants through such project work, both within a broad educational context and the field of community radio theory (Coyer, 2007; Fleming 2010).

Almost all the respondents were from the most recent school radio station broadcast at that point, summer 2011, but a few of the community respondents came from previous years' projects. It felt valid to include their experience because the work was similar enough from year to year and I believed the data to be of use in informing further qualitative study.

(ii) The headline table figures suggested an even split within the two positive categories. However, the seniors of the Luncheon Club had the highest percentage within their cohort opting for 'agree strongly' (76%) rather than 'agree' (24%) in response to the statement.

(iii) One might be slightly surprised at the less-than-unanimous results here. Interestingly, a further breakdown of the numbers reveals that those least in agreement with the statement were the Arts school students, with 43% of the year 10 cohort and 37% of the year 12 cohort disagreeing with the statement. In contrast, 62.5% of the senior citizen cohort agreed strongly with the statement and only 12.5% disagreed. Might some of this disparity be explained by the context in which state school students found themselves at this point in time, late in 2011? Cuts to student funding both in relation to the Educational Maintenance Allowance and the introduction of University fees had just been announced. This may have been felt as too great a force by the Year 12's to allow for any feelings of empowerment produced by access to the airwaves. This is a speculation of course, and not pursued in this study as it was not the main focus.

(iv) These statements were put to the three groups working in the 'community' bracket. The responses were split 50/50 between 'agree' and 'agree strongly' in all bar the senior citizens' group, in which they were 75% 'agree strongly' and 25% 'agree'.

(v) PRU Participants talking about feedback on their radio show:

**(WI)**

**J** Has anybody else heard the show?

**WI** Um..I think my mum's listened to it (small laugh) and my dad, but..

**J** What did they say?

**WI** Yeah. They said it sounded good. It sounds like a proper radio station and they said yeah, it's a good skill to know...for a radio station, presenting

**J** did you talk to them about it at all?

**WI** Yeah. I told them all the driving and the interview as well and they said yeah, it makes it... and when I told them about the two different jobs, they couldn't tell. They thought I was just in the one room. Speaking on a microphone like *this* (portable kit), making a little thing, but when I told them I was actually up in the studio, like a proper studio, they were like "Ah yeah, that's why it sounds *professional*. (small laugh) Cos it does actually sound quite good, yeah.

**J** So how did you feel when they were listening to it?

**WI** Um.. Um.. I felt..kinda proud because it was like..a finished piece and it was like my *work* .

**(Pg)**

**J** Have you listened back to the show?

**Pg** Yeah, I listened back to it..um..yeah, I basically listen to it every day and it sounds like a real radio show, the way the music comes in and the way it fades in and out but I'm really happy with the way it turned out.

**J** Has anybody else in your family heard it?

**Pg** Yeah, all my family's heard it and they've gave me a lot of praise for it

**J** And how does that..feel?

**Pg** It feels very good..and nice.

**J** Are they..were they surprised?

**Pg** Um, they were surprised how it sounded so good, like it was *actually* on a radio.

(vi) **PRU student (Pg)'s self-authored poem:**

“See my friends dying got me frightened, crying  
Thinking it’s the life that I’m finding  
Got my grandma praying. She’s stressing  
Still won’t learn my lesson,  
Surprised at Christmas even if I get one present  
But she loves me. Been taking me to church  
From a little baby. Never picked up or will I never smoke weed,  
Not trying to go to jail, trying to live free,  
Got prayed for so many times,  
Got to point when I can’t even deny  
Mum’s stressing. Can’t even sleep at night.  
If I give a key to my heart  
You can see the empty parts  
Right back to the past,  
Thinking ‘how long will it last?’  
Brought up by my aunty,  
‘Couz’ and my Granny,  
Not by my Mummy,  
I never see sunny,  
Always see dark,  
Get angry very fast.

Got people thinking that I'm nuts but I messed up my life  
But my Grandma say "Pray and you will survive".  
Try and do this drumming thing,  
Football was my thing,  
Then my *actions* threw that right in the bin.  
See my sister go to college,  
Sat down, did the work,  
Never answered back, all she did was earn.  
See my brother go to Uni,  
Never had a good relationship but he *knew* me,  
Knew me when I was crying,  
Knew me when I was upset,  
Sometime he used to take me to my bed.  
Trying to live the best of me,  
Left in a hospital,  
Mummy never took care of me,  
Sending me two little messages on Facebook.  
Said 'Z'. Never replied.  
Tick tock,  
When you gonna come?  
When you gonna explain?  
When you gonna make all this pain go away?

Got told back then that you was my Mum,  
Got told back then when I was having fun,  
Then everything stopped. Went downhill.  
No-one ever asked how I felt.  
I felt lonely. I felt sad.  
Dem times couldn't even turn to my Dad,  
Didn't want to know me,  
Left me in a hospital sitting with my Aunty,  
Living in this nightmare,  
It's a fright year,  
Can't even shed a tear,  
Cos my life here  
Always doing bad from good  
When I know I shouldn't be,  
Never hearing the teachers clearly,  
Always want to be the clown in a class,  
Have things trapped in my heart from the past,  
But that ain't me.  
I'm a nice girl,  
When I wanna be,  
Get to know me,  
Join the family."