Triangle Theatre/ University of Salford School of Arts & Media

Report by Stephanie Collier, Independent Producer, January 2015.

What we wanted to find out – our aims, objectives and desired outcome

The aim of the Performing Care workshop was to bring together the School of Arts & Media, and the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences at the University of Salford. Specifically, it was to combine learning objectives for MA students on the Nursing /RN (Adult, Mental Health or Children & Young People) course and Level 6 students studying for a BA (Hons) Performance: Drama and Theatre.

A workshop on methods of effective communication was requested by members of the Nursing Staff. The desired outcome was to enhance the Nursing students' communication skills, interaction with others and importance of communication in the work place in a care setting.

An immersive format was proposed and designed by Dr Richard Talbot (Senior Lecturer in Performance, School or Arts & Media and co-artistic director, Triangle Theatre), based on a tried and tested workshop concept and format designed with Carran Waterfield (Artistic Director of Triangle Theatre). Beginning with *Whissell & Williams Training Camp* (2003) this model has been applied in museum education contexts in the Midlands and during induction week for performance students at University of Salford (since September 2010). The archive can be viewed here: www.triangletraining.wikispaces.com

The principle objectives were for the two groups to work collaboratively, and to find a different way in which to develop the nursing students' communication skills outside of the lecture theatre, initially via role-play, but, following consultation with Richard Talbot and Malcolm Raeburn (Senior Lecturer in Media Performance, School of Arts & Media), an immersive method involving sustained interaction rather than one-off exercises was proposed.

What did we learn? (Summary)

Below is a brief summary of what we learned through the workshops. The remainder of the report looks at the findings in detail and provides common trend, data and quotes collected from the feedback.

Across all the questions that were asked of the participants, three predominant themes were identified:

- Communication
- Hierarchy
- Teamwork

What was surprising it that not a lot of participants mentioned patients and clients within their answers which you may expect to be a more prominent theme in Nursing.

We also learned that the workshop format could also be improved. This is discussed in further detail below under "Recommendations".

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What we did to achieve our aims, objectives, targets and desired outcomes

Angela Lee (Nursing Lecturer, School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences), organised for the workshop to take place in an early phase of the nursing student's course, taking place in the first semester of their first year of study on 5th November.

Talbot coordinated the drama students as workshop practitioners to perform in role under supervision of 'Mr Whissell'. He liaised with Waterfield who was brought in during the latter stages of the workshop design and delivery but not for the actor training period.

The following steps were taken prior, during and after the workshops:

Prior to the workshop

- Angela and Richard briefly met with the nursing students 4 weeks prior to the workshop, 8th
 October.
- Richard outlined what would happen in the workshop.
- Richard introduced the *Whissell & Williams* concept to the participants without giving too much away, explaining who exactly would be involved.
- Consent forms were handed out and collected so that permission was given for filming and for pictures to be taken on the day of the workshop.
- The consent forms also allowed for information to be gathered at the end of the workshop and kept securely on file, for future reference.

Workshop Practitioners

- The performance students had witnessed the *Whissell & Williams* 'regime' in action, in the figure of Mr Whissell and Level 6 students in the roles of 'Miss Williams' during their own induction in 2011.
- Angela and Richard met with the drama students and Carran Waterfield the day before the workshop to devise the final detailed content of the workshop.
- Richard supplied all the performance students with written descriptions of potential exercises and an outline of the workshop methodology, two weeks before the workshop.
- Richard and Angela met the performance students during a one hour seminar to discuss the types of activity that would be beneficial specifically for the nursing participants to undertake as part of their course.
- The performance students trained with Richard as 'Mr Whissell' on two dates, once to receive basic training, develop costume ideas and understanding of their position within a fictional hierarchy.
- This session was followed up by email messages from 'Mr Whissell', from Carran in role as Mrs Williams and from Richard, separately setting tasks, framing roles and explaining expectations for the next session.
- At the second 2 hour session the students were required to deliver one or two of the Whissell & Williams regime's standard exercises to each other and for two Salford University

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alumni, Georgia Orzel and Abi Finch of Freebird Theatre, Salford. The students remained immersed 'in character' throughout these sessions. At the end of this session, the students visited the spaces which would be used for the workshops and set them up.

• Finally the students met Mrs Williams on the day of the workshop for an 'inspection'.



Regime Officers (Ashley Gadsby & Lorna Jones) © Triangle 2015

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Workshop Structure

- On the day, there was a morning session and an afternoon session of the same workshop. In the morning, exercises were run in two separate rooms, for two groups and in the afternoon in one room for one group.
- Each session was 3 hours long.
- The morning group had 33 Nursing participants in two groups of 16 and 17, and an afternoon group of 16.
- There were 7 members of the *Whissell & Williams* regime in addition to Mr Whissell and Mrs Williams:

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HDH/001 - 'Miss D Williams' - Dora Hill

HDH/002 - 'Miss D.J. Williams' - Danielle Jameson

HDH/003 - 'Miss K Williams' - Katie Potter

HDH/004 - 'Whissell' - Luke Yale

HDH/005 - 'Whissell' - Ashley Gadsby

HDH/006 - 'Miss L Williams' - Lorna Jones
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HDH/007 - 'Miss C Williams' - Chloe McLaughlin

- Mr Whissell was played by Richard Talbot and Mrs Williams by Carran Waterfield
- There were several group tasks throughout each session. These tasks consisted of:
 - o Playing with Status
 - Playing with Role
 - Giving Instructions
 - Speaking while doing a Task
 - Doing a Task in Silence
- There was a 10 minute comfort break in each session

Post Workshop

- At the end of each workshop, there was a short 10-15 minute question and answer (Q&A)
 session where each participant was asked what they thought about the workshop and what
 had struck them the most in their learning
- The feedback forms were handed out after the Q&A session to participants.
- The feedback forms were emailed to the workshop practitioners after the event.

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How we collected and collated information.

The feedback from the workshops was collected in three ways. The first was a brief Q&A session after the end of each workshop. This was filmed. In addition, a feedback form was handed out to all participants and collected immediately after. See Appendix 1 – Feedback Form. The third was a feedback form sent to the workshop practitioners after the workshop via email.

Some of the participants were not able to fill in the questionnaire at the time and had to leave at the end of the workshop activity or Q&A session. Angela collected the remaining feedback forms at the nursing student's next session just over a week later. 5 questionnaires were returned after the event.

84% of participants returned their feedback form.

The feedback form for the workshop practitioners was sent via email after the workshops and the practitioners were given some time to return these.

63% of practitioners returned their feedback form.

Where there was scope for collating numerical data from the feedback forms, this was done by calculating percentages from the number of people who filled in their feedback forms. The total number of participants and practitioners who took part has been disregarded in this part of the analysis as their answers are unknown.

For the participant's feedback, the remaining answers from the completed feedback forms were all grouped together by answer in one document. Following this, the answers from each question were grouped in to themes and similar types and topics of answers.



Regime Officer with Participants (Dora Hill) © Triangle 2015

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What did we find out?

Participants

There were a mixture of nursing students working in specialist areas. The majority of the nursing participants were specialising in mental health at 56%, 34% were specialising in Adults, and 10% in Children & Young People.

The three main things that participants **enjoyed** about the workshop were:

- Working with others, getting to know others, teamwork
- The structure of the workshop. I.e. things that related to given tasks, being in a role and playing a character
- Fun many commented that the workshop was fun and light hearted

Other themes that participants enjoyed were the opportunity to reflect or think, experiencing something new or different, communication, hierarchy and being out of their comfort zone.

* * *

The three main things that the participants least enjoyed about the workshop were:

- The structure of the workshop
- Bored, tedious and repetitive
- Confusion and clarity required not all participants were sure of what was happening and what they were meant to be doing

Other themes identified that participants least enjoyed were, nothing (i.e. there was nothing they didn't like about the workshop), communication, the timing of the workshop within the course, feeling awkward and being taken out of their comfort zone.

* * *

When asked *What have you learnt through today's workshop?* three very clear themes were represented in the participants' answers. These were:

- Communication in general, and specifically verbal and non-verbal communication
- Hierarchy, Status and Roles can and cannot be important at times
- Teamwork is important

Some more specific topics were also highlighted such as, the need for identifying a task or goal, and giving clear instruction.

* * *

The fifth question asked *How has the workshop affected your training and your view of the role of a Nurse?* Again, this brought up the importance of communication and was most commented upon. Hierarchy and Teamwork were once more raised as topics. In addition, the participants also saw themselves *performing* the role of a nurse rather than just being a nurse.

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* * *

What questions has this raised for you as a student of Nursing? Likewise, this question underlined subjects such as communication, teamwork and hierarchy. Additionally, this question also highlighted how they see themselves within hierarchy, their role within a team and their status, how people may view nurses, as well as issues relating to responsibility, confidence and assertiveness.

* * *

With regard to whether the participants thought the workshop had benefitted their professional development and training, a resounding 78% said it had benefitted them. 20% were not sure and questioned whether the workshop was relevant to them. Only 2% didn't answer this question and no one said No, this didn't benefit them.

* * *

When asked if they would change anything about the workshop and why, the majority of answers related to:

- Structure and organisation some participants felt it didn't run very smoothly
- Purpose and objective some participants weren't clear on this
- One person commented that they would have preferred to know more in advance.

It is worth noting that 12 of the participants who filled in the forms did not answer this question (29%).

* * *

88% of the participants of those who filled in the feedback forms said they would recommend the workshop to other students at the University of Salford. 10% said they were Not Sure, 2% didn't answer and 0% said they wouldn't recommend the workshop.

Those that said they would recommend the workshop gave the following reasons:

- Fun, enjoyable, entertaining
- Different
- Getting to know others on the course
- Improved their communication

* *

Further comments again drew attention to the fun they had during the workshop but also complimented the workshop practitioners, their costume and ability to stay in character throughout the session.

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Workshop Practitioners

There was only a small number of Workshop Practitioners who were part of the *Whissell & Williams* "Regime", 8 in total. Of those 8 practitioners, 5 returned feedback back forms (63%). From these feedback forms it is therefore difficult to determine the difference between common themes and coincidence.

The following is worth noting:

- The practitioners found the workshop days both mentally and physically challenging.

 Despite this, they also saw the benefits such as pushing themselves out of their own comfort zone and developing as a performer.
- They enjoyed working with non-drama students.
- The practitioners were conscious of how they were being perceived:
 - "the regime wasn't respected"
 - "Seeing the workshop as a messing around session rather than a session that parted skills to them"
 - "During the performances, I was presented with several view-points, both positive and negative, towards the work within the performing arts, which was interesting in terms of where mutual respect is given, and by whom."
- This perception however, is contradicted as the participants in the final comments section as the practitioners were complimented highly.
- There were too many practitioners.
- Wearing costume can help you stay in and take you out of character quite quickly and this can be used to enhance the performer's focus.
- Several commented in various ways on the preparation time and lead up to the workshops. This is discussed in more detail under "Recommendations".

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What did the participants say?

Here are a few extracts from the feedback forms:

What did you enjoy the most about the workshop?

Working alongside the other student nurses and learning in a fun environment

Working together as a group. The experience of interacting with characters in role. The opportunity to reflect upon the way I perform roles in real life.

It was light hearted and fun.

Getting to spend some time with peers out of the lecture setting

Being out of my comfort zone trying something new.

Fun, illustrated a point about communication

What did you least enjoy about the workshop?

Not having a clear sense at the beginning of why we were doing what we were doing.

The initial weirdness – it did not make sense for the first hour or so.

Felt awkward at first – that settled quickly.

The initial resilience to take on a role.

Observing at times became boring.

What have you learnt through today's workshop?

The importance of communication skills – esp non verbal.

How much hierarchy affects social identity.

Importance of team work and communication (verbal & non-verbal)

Body language and non verbal communication

Team working and hierarchy stereotypes are difficult to overcome

The importance of all types of communication

Reinforced the fact that communication is key and that hierarchies can be seen differently through different peoples eyes.

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How has the workshop affected your training and your view of the role of a Nurse?

Always be aware of how you are communicating not just with patients but also colleagues.

The role of a nurse is exactly that and there is a performative aspect to it.

Good communication is key. Need to be aware of non-verbal communication and just because it makes sense to you doesn't mean it makes sense to everyone.

Roles aren't clear but everybody is important in different manners.

The nurse has important role, but needs to be a good communicator & work as part of a team.

Be more assertive.

Highlighted people's ideas of certain roles / occupations. The nurse has to face a lot of challenges regarding position (hierarchy), performing duties and communication with colleagues in teams.

How important communication is on the impact of patient / client

It has helped me lay more emphasis on communication approach. This will help me in training and further in life when practicing.

What questions has this raised for you as a student of Nursing?

How much do we successfully work as a team

How can I learn to perform the role of the Nurse?

What my role is within MDT and who is responsible for various tasks and making sure completed.

Just how important all members of the team are.

How do I come across?

How can I be more assertive?

Why do we have hierarchies?

Dilemma of hierarchy in the NHS

Poor communication can cause problems. The problem is people at higher status often don't realise if their commands are misunderstood.

Why people view certain roles e.g. cleaning and tea maker as being insignificant when it's all important.

Who is more important in hierarchy when it comes to meeting a patients needs.

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Has today's workshop benefitted your professional development and training? Please state why and how.

Yes

Highlighting group work

Helped me with confidence

Made us more cohesive as a group of students

Value of all people working in hospitals / community

Made me more aware of my body language

Insight in to other people's points of view

Looking at my own skills and what I need to improve

Feel more confident in my ability to speak in front of a group

Development of carrying out my nursing role by working collaboratively with others.

To be aware if the various barriers in communication

Every member of a team is very important irrespective of their roles or duties.

Not Sure

Some things were slightly irrelevant

If there is anything you would change from the workshop, what would this be and why?

The pre session explaining what we were to be doing. A lot of us were dreading it because we didn't understand.

Consolidating the purpose of each task

More structured.

A bit more organised.

Good as is.

For the actors to have a little more awareness of the nurses roles / hierarchy. Better organisation of workshop.

The organisation – some parts didn't run smoothly.

Could be done in less time.

Some of the session was a little repetitive, introduce a variety of role plays

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Would you recommend this workshop to other students at the University of Salford? Please state why

Yes

It's fun and helps you get to know fellow students

It's good fun, a different way of learning

To gain better understanding and practice in communication

Enables some reflection

It was a welcome break from reading.

Lectures on communication don't allow the same level of "putting in to practice"

Enjoyable, good icebreaker for the group

Enjoy the interaction, helps to break up between theory and practice

Not Sure

I think it's one of those things that you take out what you put in. Maybe that isn't for everyone.

Further Comments – if you have any further thoughts about the workshop, we would like to hear them. Please fill in this box below:

Excellent, fun experience! We enjoyed ourselves. The regime stayed in role beautifully!

Honestly, at some points I thought it was a waste of time but it came together at the end. Point out to people that it will make sense or/and come together later.

Good acting – enjoyed how they kept in character and the accents were continuous throughout.

I love the fact that the trainees were consistent in playing their roles. Trainees played their roles brilliantly.

Thank you!

Thought the guys from the workshop were very enthusiastic and it was nice working with them.

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What did the Workshop Practitioners say?

Here are a few extracts from the feedback forms:

As a theatre practitioner, what did you enjoy the most about the workshop?

seeing how the students had taken to the process

The opportunity to create a character and remain in character for an extended duration of time.

I could further develop the character I had created for myself and try new things out on a new audience

it was a fantastic opportunity to work with a group of people that weren't drama students

I really enjoyed the challenge of staying in role for the entirety of the different workshops with the two groups. I felt it was both enjoyable, yet challenging enough, to be mentally demanding. It developed me as a performer, and I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the reactions from the participants in the workshops

As a theatre practitioner, what did you least enjoy about the workshop?

I am used to this but it is very physically as well as mentally exhausting... I suppose it is difficult when certain (not all) students were clearly not as involved as others but I understood that as non-drama students they probably felt uncomfortable

I felt that some of them seemed a little ungrateful of us... I felt that there was too many performers involved within the sessions, and at times I felt a little obsolete in the tasks/performance.

I felt that there was too many performers involved within the sessions, and at times I felt a little obsolete in the tasks/performance.

As a drama student, what have you learnt through the Whissell & Williams Regime, prior to and during the workshop?

That it is possible to sustain a character for a long period of time, and what doing so requires both physically and mentally. I have also learnt theatre can be found in a variety of forms.

Little things like wearing a certain type of costume or exercises help you too get back into character... I have also learnt clowning techniques specifically on how to create a larger than life character and the comedy that can come from doing this which has been my favourite part of this.

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[from a new member of the regime] ... I feel that you require a great deal of support when conducting a workshop in character.

Throughout the workshop, and the training that went alongside it, I have learnt much more about the demands of immersive theatre, and the challenges it throws up for performers.

How do you think the Whissell & Williams Regime affected the students Nurses? (E.g. What did they find easy? What did they find difficult?)

I think they were baffled but game for the experience. I am not sure they all could see the application of the process for their work.

I think it aided them in their communication skills and they appeared to have fun. However, I think some of them were a little perplexed at the workshop.

I think they found the regime in general intimidating as they are not used to being around such 'people', but I do believe this was a good thing getting them out of their comfort zone as they will meet many different types of people in the real world and therefore have learnt or will learn to deal with this in the future.

I think that they found it quite hard to concentrate and contribute for the whole amount of time and would have benefitted from a break-outside of the room

The group found the latter exercises on non-verbal communication difficult to grasp as we as performers were quite confused as to what they entailed. This partly was due to the limited rehearsal time that we had; a day. I didn't feel it was relatable, and thus a better, more bespoke, exercise could have been devised as opposed to using existing ones used by the company in other projects.

If there is anything you would change from the workshop, what would this be and why?

smaller groups

I'd possibly make them more aware of who the company are as a whole as I think this would help them understand the point of it all.

I think some of them were confused as to why they were there and why such flamboyant characters were there to do the workshop, I did hear a few say this and were guite embarrassed.

It became clear to me half way into the session that not all of the nurses knew each other. I think they would of benefitted from a warm up exercise where they can introduce their names.

The amount of performers that were involved with the sessions.

The rehearsal period that we had to work with in the lead up to the project itself.

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Would you recommend this workshop to other drama students at the University of Salford? Please state why.

Yes

As it provides a good opportunity to work on characters and with people who are not drama students

Yes absolutely, in my first year I was nervous and scared and having the regime allowed me to make friends as well as provide light comic relief and therefore put me at ease especially as everything was so overwhelming... This was predominately a communication workshop aimed at nursing students but I think for drama students this would work well for say characterisation skills, performance skills as well as communication skills. Perhaps this could do well for drama therapy? The regime provides entertainment and allows others to make friends as it did for me and help others gain confidence.

I have loved working with the Whissell and Williams Regime and I have always wanted to ever since I worked with the Regime in my freshers week. I find the work extremely rewarding. Whilst working with the Regime I found myself working with people that I hadn't worked with before, and because we were working in such close proximity we have made very good friends. I would highly recommend this extremely rewarding workshop.

Not Sure

... I would however recommend people in future year groups to jump at the chance should the regime ever be brought back. It has truly been one of, if not the, singularly most enjoyable experience at Salford.

Further Comments – if you have any further thoughts about the workshop, we would like to hear them. Please fill in this box below:

It needs more time for deeper focus and deeper collaboration with the student nurses staff/lecturers.

I know this work has potential for development as an interdisciplinary leaning method. I think there needs to be more time given to preparing the students so they know what to expect but not to give everything away.

Thank you for letting me be a part of this, I always wanted to since I saw this in my first year as said before I made friends and it helped me through a very scary and difficult week coming to university for the first time. I have really enjoyed it and believe I have gained more performance skills I can develop for future reference.

If there's any further work, then please do count me in! It's been amazing, funny and highly surreal. A one off, unique experience.

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Recommendations:

The feedback forms highlighted a few areas in which the workshop could be refined. From this feedback, the following is recommended:

- In the lead up to the workshop, produce a hand out with information about workshop so its purpose is clear, but without giving too much away. The workshop still needs to be of a performance and improvised nature so that is continues to be a role play.
- The ratio of participants and theatre practitioners needs to be addressed. I.e. there needs to be fewer theatre practitioners in relation to participants. Everyone's time and opportunity to be involved in the workshop needs to be at maximum for all to benefit.
- The tasks within the workshop could be more specific to Nursing. More preparation with the Nursing staff and the Whissell and Williams practitioners would be advantageous.
- The tasks could be timed and also consolidated after the completion of each task.
- The workshop could be placed earlier within the timetable of the course of study so that students get to know each other earlier in the course.

Although this workshop was for the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work & Social Sciences at the University of Salford, from the feedback it is apparent that there is scope for this type of workshop to be used for other purposes, other university disciplines and for collaboration between disciplines. For example:

- Team building exercises
- People getting to know each other at beginning of project or at the beginning of employment
- · When a team has broken down and needs rebuilding
- Improving individuals or groups communication skills verbal and non-verbal

The workshop format could be refined for these above other purposes and for other groups of people. For instance and specifically at the University of Salford:

- Those studying or are employed within Human Resources Management
- Those studying or are employed within Communication

Furthermore, the following groups of people could be explored and approached for future workshops, out with the university and with local businesses and communities:

- Students
- Teams
- New managers
- Those working at a new level of responsibility
- Those wanting to enhance their communication skills
- Those who required confidence building and assertiveness training

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Conclusion:

We achieved our main aims and objectives of bringing together two disciplines within one University. It was clear from the feedback and from all those who contributed to the workshops that there was a collaborative effort. The nursing students enjoyed the experience and the drama students were able to practice and consolidate their skills as theatre practitioners.

It is clear from 78% of participants saying they have benefitted from the workshops and 88% saying they would recommend the workshops to other students, that the workshop format should be continued in its current state, as *Whissell & Williams*. Likewise, 60% of the practitioners said they would recommend the *Whissell & Williams Regime* to other drama students. The workshop format could be refined and adapted for use across other disciplines within the University of Salford such as the College of Business & Law and Salford Business School. Similarly, the workshop format could also be used as a training tool for staff of the university and local businesses.



Participants and Regime Officer (Danielle Jameson), © Triangle, 2015.