

Devising Theatre from Personal Narratives: Investigating Tensions for Participants in a New Zealand Community Theatre Experience

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Abstract

Devising a piece of community theatre is an exciting undertaking for all involved, yet this collaborative process is not without its tensions. This paper explores the tensions identified by participants arising from the use of personal narratives in a community theatre event that focused on personal and cultural identities. Implications for practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: *community theatre; devised theatre; personal narratives*

“What is this constant appeal of wanting to begin from the germ of an idea, and develop it into a full-scale piece of theatre? It is the need to say something, to express oneself, to give a voice to ideas, thoughts, and feelings about the world.” Oddey (1994, pg 200)

Exploring cultural identity in a New Zealand context was the focus of a community-based theatre work in 2008. Facilitated by a theatre graduate visiting New Zealand, this devised project explored the theme of cultural identity through the genre of physical theatre. A group of twelve participants completed the performance project and the performance text was examined as part of the director’s academic study. My involvement in this project was that of performing/devising participant and, later, as researcher. Inspired by my perception that this experience was having a significant impact on participants and by my work as a drama educator, I sought permission from the director to investigate the experiences of participants. I wanted to discover more about the educational and social impact of the project. This article presents one aspect of this research: an exploration of the tensions participants experienced in relation to the use of personal narratives, and the implications for theatre practitioners.

Community theatre is a performance form that traditionally encompasses art, political activism and the empowerment of communities. Professional and non-professional participants work together and artistic goals sit alongside social and political goals (Freire, 1996; Boal, 1979; van Erven, 2001). Devising, as a collaborative practice, typically employs a more democratic approach to leadership than the traditional authoritarian director. Devised work often draws on the participants’ personal stories and this collaborative creation requires the development of a group’s intuitive sense to determine whether the material was working or not (Robert Lepage in Magnat, 2005).

The process of devising is about the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit. The process reflects a multi-vision made up of each

group member's individual perception of that world as received in a series of images, then interpreted and defined as a product. Participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation and experimentation (Oddey, 1994, pg1).

Participants bring their personal stories, perceptions and experiences to this creative process, often in response to questions posed by the facilitator/director. When the questions posed by a project concern narratives of identity (personal, family, cultural), they are deeply personal, emotional, much more than facts about individual's lives (Denzin, 2003). In a New Zealand context, Māori recognise collective identity and, therefore, personal narratives are narratives of iwi (tribe), of whakapapa (*genealogy*), representing tūpuna (ancestors), hapu (sub-tribe) and whānau (family) (Bishop, 1998). In an exploration of autobiographical narratives in performance, Park-Fuller (2000) outlines a number of challenges, which may be experienced:

1. the struggle to tell and the struggle to create one's self through the telling;
2. the struggle to know one's own experience and the struggle to beget the truth of the past and influence the future;
3. the struggle to escape expert mediation (autonomy), the struggle of mediating (accountability), and the struggle to balance the groups one represents; and
4. the struggle to participate and to distance oneself, and the struggles to embrace and to criticise. p38

This study investigates the participants' experience of the challenges Park-Fuller so clearly outlines. In coming together as a community to share these stories for the purposes of making theatre, the space the participants enter through their sharing is a liminal one; a "betwixt and between" place one must cautiously enter and return from (Turner, 1986b). While facilitating a kind of therapy may not be the intention of a project, when participants are asked to reflect on their identity, childhood, family and community cultures, the psychological terrain will activate similar processes, leading participants into the psyche, into memory, emotions and into constructions of self.

Despite the ambiguities and risks the act of telling is not without its benefits to the teller. In acts of telling, speakers often come to understand events in new ways, in ways of their own construction, and such self-generated knowledge can serve to liberate them from the diseases they suffer (Park-Fuller, 2000, pg 25).

In the telling of personal narratives, there is a construction of identity. If the telling happens within a group context, there is a co-construction and this is the case when an artistic practitioner engages with and shapes these narratives (Lapadat, 2009). Furthermore, the depth of these personal disclosures may be influenced by the group experience (Cunningham, Strassberg & Haan, 1986). The promise of the collaborative approach is the opportunity for participants to take responsibility for, and control of, the ways in which they are represented and the stories that are 'told' and to make new discoveries about their lives (Aston, 2000). The risk is that in the construction of the performance text, stories may be misappropriated; their use may result in exposing the participant to harm or misrepresent those concerned. Questions arise as to the ethical responsibilities theatre practitioners have to keep participants safe as they enter this terrain.

Denzin (2003) explains that the experiences of existential turning points, or “epiphanies”, often sought out in these projects, have a storied nature themselves – a beginning, middle and end. The implication is that an artistic representation that disrupts the story alters the personal meanings, the representation of identity(ies). For Denzin, the following questions arise – “Whose story is being told (and made) here? Who is doing the telling? Who has the authority to make the telling stick?” (2003, p35).

There are a number of tensions that exist in this community art-making process – several commentators stress that a balance must be found between a respect for the stories shared, the way these present and represent others and the artistic development of the work (Wooster, 2009; Park-Fuller, 2000; Schirle, 2005). Clarity around the roles, expectations and the goals of the work is also advised. Schirle (2005, pg97) recommends posing the questions, “What is the intent of the devising project? Why make this? Who is it for? Why does it matter?” to help to define the kind of leadership a project needs and the responsibilities of the director, of the participants and who is to be accountable for the structure and the performance values of the work. The answers to these questions will depend on the particular community and context a project occurs in, and the development and rehearsal processes will be informed by these answers.

Despite the possible tensions outlined here, Park-Fuller argues that when working with personal narrative, it is the “numerous levels of contestation that, in turn, account for its dramatic power” (2000, pg 38). Lepage himself suggests that it is the chaotic ground of devising that yields powerful theatre (Magnat, 2005) Thus, these practitioners seem to suggest that the rugged territory of devising in community theatre may be just the kind of grit needed to form the pearl.

In the theatre project this research investigates, involvement spanned approximately eleven months and involved three performance seasons. Participants met weekly for several months, discussing topics related to culture, life in New Zealand and childhood memories and then devised short pieces of theatre, drawing on physical theatre conventions in response to questions and provocations the director provided. The performance text was extensively reworked between the first and second performance season. The opportunity for a third season arose once the project was underway and this occurred in another city. Performances were not taken back to participants’ cultural communities but rather took place in academic and professional theatre communities. The fact that the performance text was examined as part of the director’s academic study had implications for the roles, power and ownership of the performance text, although discussion over ownership, roles and power was never addressed during the development period.

Participants in the theatre project came from a variety of cultural backgrounds – including Māori, European New Zealanders, French, German, Chinese and Pacific Island. They ranged in ages from 19 years to early 50’s. Eleven of the twelve participants took part in this research; the twelfth participant declined, stating she felt negatively about her experience. This qualitative research study met Massey University’s criteria for a low-risk research project. Participants gave informed consent and had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection phase. Because this paper is exploring the tensions in the project, specific details of the theatre project have been omitted to protect both participants and the director. Participants were invited to respond to questions in the form of a questionnaire or through a face-to-face semi-structured interview. Data collection occurred

after the director's examined performance had taken place, when the performance text was in a final form. Those who chose to be interviewed received transcripts for editing and have given consent for these to be used.

Methodology

As a phenomenological study of the experience of participating in a devised community theatre project, the questionnaire/interview questions investigated a range of dimensions which might allow for rich description of the nature of this experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994; van Manen, 1990). These included: the motivation for participation, previous experience in theatre, the impact of telling their story, the challenges and most difficult aspects of their involvement, what participants had learned about themselves (if anything), what they had discovered about other cultures, their view on the place of community theatre to build diversity and their most valued outcomes. Data was coded *In Vivo*, in order to honour the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2009). It was important to allow their words to speak for themselves, given my own participation in the theatre work. Initial coding was used to analyse the emergent themes in the data. The data was then split/clustered around these themes and analysed for richer phenomenological description (van Manen, 1990). The findings presented here centre on one of these themes: the tensions participants reported in relation to the use of personal narratives.

This study concerns a specific project and context, therefore its findings may not generalise to other contexts. It was not possible to have the "unsatisfied" participant's voice included, which may also have limited these findings. The director's experience was beyond the scope of this study and, while her response to the findings would be most valuable, due to personal circumstances this has not been obtained. A further, potential limitation on the study may be due to the researcher being a participant in the project – which may have meant that participants withheld certain aspects of their experience due to my involvement and/or the data that confirmed my own experience, resonated most powerfully, to the point of limiting the analysis. Conversely, it may be that due to the relationship I had formed with them over the course of the project, participants were more candid about their experiences.

When the ground a community theatre practitioner wishes to explore concerns the personal and cultural identities of participants, issues of ethical responsibility and issues of ownership over stories arise (Park-Fuller, 2000). An examination of tensions experienced by participants contributes to an awareness of these issues. I have limited the commentary around the data to enable the participants' voices to speak for themselves as much as possible. The broad research question discussed in this paper is: What tensions are experienced in a collaborative theatre project that draws on personal stories and experiences of participants? The following section outlines the tensions identified in the data, presented (loosely) in chronological order as the theatre work progressed to performance.

An Exploration of Findings

Disclosing personal narrative

I will if you will

The first tensions evident for participants in connection with personal narrative were around the expectation that these stories would be shared at all:

- (Participant B) I didn't actually think in the beginning that the project was going to be quite that personal – I thought it was going to be more about the ethnic and the cultural, the symbolic and abstract you know... as opposed to more personal stories.
- (Participant K) Initially I felt oh no, my story is a bit dark, how can I share that? I was aware of the shame still surrounding the circumstances of my birth and the disconnection to my bloodline.

Group discussions facilitated by the director's questions allowed an increasing level of trust to develop and a subsequent willingness to share in response to the sharing of others:

- (Participant C) I started to talk more when I began feeling more comfortable with some people. And people's true stories really inspired me to share my story with each other. For Chinese people, we don't really talk about deep inside feelings according to our traditions. We want to show our very best from outside appearance. When people started to talk about their own stories, it made me feel like wanting to be part of it. I started to open up time by time. It was very big step for me to take. It was also such good feelings to share things and show my trust.

The data illustrates a greater willingness to share struggles and victories in order to know and be known. It also reflects greater vulnerability is possible in these times, as participants, encouraged by the disclosure of others' intimate stories, share their own:

- (Participant B) A few weeks into it, not knowing these people in the group for very long and all of a sudden you're pouring everything out, I think we all gave out stories that were really personal and things you wouldn't normally tell. I thought it was really good because obviously we had all built up a level of trust amongst ourselves to be able to do that and also as a group having to perform together, it made it easier.....But I do remember X talking about his story and the aspects he chose, because I know him well, hearing him encapsulate his childhood in 3-5 mins, how it could come across ... that's the danger when it was encapsulated – the danger you could be misrepresented and then you can start to form views about people that are useful or not that useful but because of the group I guess you felt open enough that no one was going to use that against you somehow...

The topics explored in this project are not necessarily encountered in the course of everyday life. They demand a deeper level of personal reflection.

- (Participant E) I made discoveries about myself through my own story and confronted myself with a few issues. I needed to sit down and think about some things. Also learning from other people's lives that is really rich, things I didn't know about, NZ history and Māori side of things. Sometimes you do wonder why you are here.

For a number of participants the stories shared were not experienced as a collection of facts and observations, but something living and emergent. This reflects an iterative engagement with our personal stories and reveals something of the liminal nature of the work:

- (Participant F) And funnily enough, it was like my mother was there when I did it – so it was really, really powerful. That fulfilled something I was really not expecting and it has been a huge weight off my chest. It’s also reconciled me with quite a bit of the shit I went through in the last fifteen years, kind of closed the loop – like I’ve acknowledged it and its been given its place, and now I can move on. So it’s been really quite therapeutic, which was quite unexpected.

This data also highlights the difficulty in working with powerful stories that emerge in the formative stages of devising. This relates to my own experience as a participant in the project. Stimulated by the questions raised by the project, a series of vivid dreams full of Māori imagery and a number of adoptions in my family, I enquired further into my whakapapa. The outcome of this exploration – the discovery of our ancestry – completely changed the understanding my mother and I had of who we were (and thus qualified as one of Denzin’s epiphanies – 2003:34-35). When the director expressed an interest in incorporating this story into the project, I agreed. Building on the symbolic/archetypal images of one of the dreams, we developed (fictionalized) a number of metaphorical dimensions of my story. The power of these fresh discoveries resonated deeply. I was, however, resistant to the given circumstances of my character being fictionalised to such an extent that it no longer felt like it represented my experience. The personal style of the other participant stories and the fact I was still processing what I had uncovered meant I was resistant to losing it completely.

Interpersonal tensions: narratives in the collaborative context

Sometimes others don’t want to go where your narrative is taking you

In this collaborative setting, tensions arose between participants when selecting the material to be developed theatrically. Refusing to allow others to explore particular aspects of their personal stories challenged both interpersonal relationships and the creative process. One participant struggled to be open to certain Māori content others wished to explore. This was a clear source of tension given that there were three Māori participants in the group and three pakeha who wanted to explore this dimension of their personal and cultural identity. One participant talks about bringing an artefact to the group which captured some of her personal story, including ties to Māori:

- (Participant B) I used that to describe my story and then the group to start working with my story ... and I was paired with X. When I met with her, I found she was not interested in talking about any aspect of that [artefact], she said it was too Māori, “I don’t want to go there”.

The participant concerned was aware of her personal resistance to Māori content and understood that this was a block of sorts to the devising process. She commented:

- (Participant A) My perceptions and responses to other cultures is still as it has always been, open and accepting. The culture that I have come to not accept as much is Māori. It has been rammed down our throats that we MUST accept it. My attitude to Māori culture has gone from total acceptance when I was younger to some resistance as I have got older and I have been exposed to Māori culture probably more so than a lot of people of my generation through my performing arts

training/where I grew up/where I was schooled etc. I am not racist, I resist the blanket approach to “our” culture and the dissing of everything European (generalization I know).

It is interesting to note that this resistance came from an experienced deviser/improviser and may indicate tensions that go beyond the scope of this paper. Although the ensemble had improvised around this artefact in a previous session, and there was a strong connection to the personal and cultural identity of another participant, resistance was evidently strong enough to supercede assertions she made to the group elsewhere about the importance of accepting offers. This tension threatened the project itself as a number of participants considered dropping out:

- (Participant J) I will say something – if we hadn’t had that meeting that night, I would not have come back. Narrow-mindedness around the Māori content but also about trying to do things and be judged on it or be told no you can’t do that, that’s stupid.

Others experienced the tension without this level of personal vulnerability – seeing it as a cultural tension:

- (Participant H) A number of remarks came back to me about there being too much Māori culture and stuff but I’ve grown up with that sort of shit. So in some ways it’s no surprise to me.

Interpersonal tensions experienced in the rehearsal phase also reflect the vulnerability and/or depth of feeling generated in the collaborative exploration of personal narratives. Some participants were affected by the perceived insensitivity others demonstrated to the emerging work and the depth of connection individuals had to it:

- (Participant I) I think I’ve had two nights where I’ve gone home crying because people haven’t cared as such. And what we are doing...it’s huge, it’s bigger than us and it’s something where we need that environment of caring. Because we’ve shared so much with each other. It has been something I’ve found difficult.
- (Participant K) Another time we rehearsed [my story] one member was really stony-faced. Afterwards I went off and had a cry. I felt really hurt that she was so stony-faced and I was putting out this big, personal thing and she was oblivious, impervious, and that hurt. It felt like she was treading on something precious of mine in a way, and it made me think that I better find a way to be with this so I can share this bit and no matter what people think about it, I can be okay.

This data also highlights the tensions the participants may experience when they are performing stories that have both personal and theatrical “emotional charge”; in other words, when they are connecting with terrain that has personal/emotional resonance and is also functioning within the performance text to provide a similar “charge” for the audience.

When asked how it was to share this with an audience...

- (Participant F) Telling my story in this work has been majorly big for me. ... Its been harder for me to actually physically do it ... for example, last time because I was really choked up by the tension, I was almost crying when I was doing it, which was not good for me and not good for the show. But it's been incredibly fantastic for me to actually say it but particularly I needed to do it once. If I had done it once, I could have stopped there...

Furthermore, in some instances relative inexperience on the stage may increase their vulnerability:

- (Participant J) Oh God. It was different. I just focused on the role. It was my truth. I tried really hard not to think about it. I just focused on every step. My idea was to stick with you. If had thought about it, I would have panicked. Also because of what was going on in my own life – the last time I went back stage and nearly cried my eyes out because I'd become caught up in the emotion. ... So because of everything going on... it felt sad. And I hoped someone would get something out of it, that's all.

Play-building – dramaturgical tensions and personal narratives

How I tell my story will impact how you see me, know me and know those I come from.

Decisions over content and form were negotiated with participants to some extent, although in this project the final say lay with the director. This was due in part to the fact the director was being examined on the work and to the leadership role the director took in the project. In this performance text, a number of participants presented their narratives in the style of personal testimony, while other stories were partially fictionalized and shaped to provide action and a narrative “through line”.

As the director attempted to weave the material into a piece that was coherent dramaturgically and theatrically, further tensions arose for participants. Tensions found around the use and theatrical development of personal stories in the theatre work reflect all of Park-Fuller's struggles (2000).

The ‘struggle to escape expert mediation (autonomy)’, and the ‘struggle to participate and to distance oneself’

This data reflects a desire to participate but also the desire for participants to preserve autonomy – to be able to maintain ownership:

- (Participant H) Because we are doing this as a group, I think this should be a group thing. It should be the stories of the groups told by the group. At the end of the day it was meant to be community theatre, put together by the cast of that community. With guidance from someone who was a theatre practitioner.

In other examples, tensions arose for participants offering something of their personal story in a way that felt safe but which clashed with the director's vision at the time:

- (Participant B) The director said that while she found my story interesting, she didn't actually want to include it in the whole piece because the style of it was so different from the rest – more poetry than theatre. That's when I thought, yeah okay, you're the director of this but where does that stop and start in terms of allowing me to tell my story, like I thought everyone else was... It was a type of rejection. I had purposefully written it in that style to hide behind the words a bit. I'm not being as free and frank and chatty as the others – because maybe I don't have the confidence to stand there and say certain things.

The way participants' stories are told, the way they are represented in the performance text, is a potential source of tension due to the construction of Self that occurs in the telling. Park-Fuller expresses this as the 'struggle to tell and the struggle to create one's self through the telling':

- (Participant B) In Version Two, [the director] decided I was going to move people and the direction from the director was to "be architectural" and I felt that was a judgment on who she thinks I am, which I'm not... And yet that was her direction to the cast – "be this thing that I know X was once and that I think should be an important part of who she's expressing she is.

Park-Fuller's 'struggle to balance the groups one represents' is also indicated in the data. There is a level of accountability to wider groups at play, which impacts on the level of flexibility participants can offer to the ensemble and director.

- (Participant I) To be completely honest, a lot of the Māori stuff I've felt uncomfortable with. Because I'm a huge believer in "If you are going to do it, do it right" or if there's a place for it, that's cool. So I've muted myself – no one's said anything. Initially what bothered me was using little bits in pieces where they didn't really feel appropriate. I'm not so concerned with offending someone [Māori] because it's a play. I get that. We're acting. But things like the karanga – that I felt if we are going to do it, it needs to have that big call because it's a welcoming thing when the karanga is performed on the marae to guests who have come to the marae for the first time. So it needs to be with passion. And initially I felt it was a token thing; the reason behind its use...

Given the construct of collective identity that Māori traditionally observe, this is a dimension as important as any representation of a personal story might be. Tension over the representation of family relationships is another manifestation of this struggle:

- (Participant K) I know there was this transfer going on, where the ownership of our stories became part of the bigger theatrical story – but we are still deeply connected to them. We worked on mine to theatricalise it. Changes made to it at times did not sit right with me ... I would have liked to contribute more of my own words but they were dictated to me. My mother came and sometime later said how taken aback she was – because she thought the theatricalising of my character's mother in the piece was actually how I had experienced the real situation. But it was only up the stakes for the piece! I had mentioned this beforehand but she was still so triggered by the performance. I felt I had betrayed her in a way, for the sake of some theatre piece.

The development of personal stories to be included in the performance gave rise to the ‘struggle to know one’s own experience and the struggle to beget the truth of the past and influence the future’ for some participants:

- (Participant J) I felt really fake. There was like two parts to me; there were two parts. I was there but it took ages for me to feel safe. And the only reason I felt safe was because I personally connected with a couple of people. The stories didn’t feel right with me, there were bits missing... I also I found it difficult to condense a lifetime into a few minutes, without clear instruction.

Finally, the ‘struggle to embrace and to criticise’ is also evident in the data in both a personal and collective sense. Here a participant grapples with “embracing and critiquing” relationships within her narrative but also grapples with her willingness to allow the performance text to reveal this or to do this collectively:

- (Participant B) When it came to building the play, the director said “you’ve got to tell that story about how your mother...” and she laughed.Â My father would have no idea I know this story and for me to stand on stage and for my parents or other family members to come and see this, and for me to refer explicitly to that and it’s me doing it...

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study illustrate that, during the course of a devised project dealing with cultural and personal identity, participants may experience a number of tensions arising from the work with personal narrative. Working with personal stories can be an extremely challenging process for some, as these findings reveal. This study also finds that, in the development of an ensemble that focused on narratives of personal and cultural identity, group dynamics encouraged deeper levels of disclosure and therefore vulnerability. Some participants in this study did not anticipate the emotional and relational struggles they experienced. This data indicates that participants did experience a level of trust in the group that allowed them to explore deeply personal experiences related to their personal and cultural identity.Â This may be seen as a sign of a successful group process but also as a signpost to proceed with care.Â A number of tensions later occurred around perceptions of how other members of the ensemble were responding to this personal material.

As the artistic vision of the director and the development of the performance text unfolded, further tensions arose for certain participants.Â When a performance text includes personal testimonies rather than fictional characters, the ties to personal meanings are even stronger (Aston, 2000).Â This study found some participants only experienced tensions when their stories were later altered in the performance text and other tensions arose due to the significance of the personal narratives to the wider groups participants belonged to.

Questions around how theatre practitioners can ensure a responsible level of care for the emotional and psychological safety of participants arise from these findings. While a level of tension may be seen as inevitable and even helpful to the development of an artistic work, a balance must be found to avoid excessive distress or stress on relationships, which may damage the ensemble and its ability to function effectively (Park-Fuller, 2000).Â In this case, respective roles and responsibilities were not clarified during the rehearsal or

performance process and led to some uncertainty about the ownership of the work. A number of participants in this study did not express their discomfort to the director and no explicit provision was made to invite such expression. Negotiating the way personal stories are presented within the development of the performance text itself and giving the option to withdraw/edit at certain points (without perceiving this as a withdrawal of good will) may help to ensure the ownership stays with the group; if that reflects the desired intention of the work. Clarity about the desired intention and purpose of the work will help to minimise tensions and potential confusion around ownership (Schirle, 2005). A transparent process during the shaping of the work is also a way to honour the trust formed in the initial stages of the devising process.

In situations where the practitioner is being examined on the performance text, there is likely to be increased pressure on the director to take ownership for the work. In order to successfully negotiate these tensions, a level of awareness of both the artistic demands and the needs of participants is required. This is a challenging task for any practitioner, especially when faced with increasing responsibility as performance nears. Supervision of this kind of project must bear these tensions in mind.

These findings suggest that theatre practitioners should give careful attention to the way ensemble groups are initially “contracted.” Taking time to explore the kinds of questions posed by Schirle (2005) with a new ensemble may reduce tensions and protect the ensemble and the work. Given the presence of Park-Fuller’s struggles in this data, educating groups about the potential to experience these struggles, and provision for dialogue around this, could be part of setting up a project. Agreement as to how the group will manage tensions could also be contracted. It is important to note that the experience of tensions by participants did not preclude most from viewing the overall experience as significant and positive.

Conclusion

Given these findings, a number of questions arise for practitioners: Why work with people’s real stories? How deep should exploration go? What obligations does a practitioner have to ensure the safety of participants? What obligations, if any, might a participant have to the group/director in allowing a shared ownership of stories? How do we honour both participants and the performance text? Delving into issues of personal and cultural identity within the confines of an ensemble encourages individuals to engage deeply with personal stories. This focus and the ensemble context gave rise to a number of tensions for participants, who at times found themselves grappling with emotionally-charged aspects of their story and the constructions of self that occur in the telling of these stories. Tensions were experienced as participants moved from devising to performing theatre from this material, highlighting the need for practitioners to be both responsive and democratic in their approach. As indicated in both the literature and these findings, the significance of personal narrative and the potential tensions in working with these artistically and collaboratively, means that establishing a way of working and of communicating throughout the process (including ways to raise controversial issues and resolve conflict) is vital. This is not, at all, to argue that vulnerability ought to be avoided. Perhaps it is vulnerability itself (as Lepage and Park-Fuller suggest) that increases the chances the experience will be significant. The challenge is to develop effective processes in order to manage these tensions in a way that ultimately satisfies the artistic ambitions of the director,

preserves the integrity of the ensemble, the work itself and the dignity and well-being of participants.

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Biography



Tracey-Lynne Cody

Tracey-Lynne Cody teaches Drama Education within preservice teacher education programmes at Massey University College of Education. Her current doctoral research investigates a range of rich drama practice in New Zealand classrooms with a particular emphasis on the artistic-aesthetic learning process. Tracey-Lynne has an ongoing interest in community theatre, devised theatre and drama as inquiry across the curriculum.