

Reflective Report on Summer One Game Theatre Research

My research is essentially practice-based so it develops my leadership from two aspects: theory making and practice conducting. Leadership bridges my research in theory and practice. I come to realize to lead is to understand the relationships between to think and to do.

- Theory Making

Leadership in theory making lies in the magical 'starting from zero'. Inspiring raw ideas are nourished by hard work and passion for the subject that interests you - acceleration of knowledge as strong bedrocks is key to build up something of your own. Then to organize them into a system of theories that can be starting points for a long-term and dedicated research requires insight, creativity, and respect to forerunners in this field. I study theatre in college but at leisure I study game/play as a form of art myself. It is not hard to draw a great deal of connections between game and theatre and is definitely worth a try to combine the two, as I anticipate, to make them evolve each other. Having a set of preliminary ideas in my mind, the next is to learn modestly from my predecessors since there is already a well-developed genre called 'interactive theatre/performance'. There are works from outstanding artists who share the idea of synthesizing game and theatre but there seems to be no established theories of a formal marriage of these two for now. So to design each practice session, I start with literature review drawing on a wide range of game, theatre, and sometimes more generally, anthropological theories. It is essential to jump out of the box of mere theatre but to apprehend the wider and usually overlooked connections between game and theatre from higher levels to make my research revolutionary.

- Research Preparation

Research Design

Research design is the very point of departure for conducting a successful research. Practice-based research is not alien to me as it is how we study theatre from on-ground production. Hence I worked out the research methodology very soon: the whole research consists of six sessions covering a series of relevant topics that overall structure game theatre; each session starts with literature review and making hypothesis and next step is to test made hypotheses in a practice workshop; a reflective report is necessary to end each session to look back upon the whole process and distill tested hypotheses into relatively solid theories. Though when it comes to making specific plans, e.g., timetable, flexibility proves priority - one has to be ready to adapt plans to changes and it is part of leadership. Especially for this year, unsettling 2020, everything is disrupted by the pandemic, which makes it hard for me to secure space and participants for my research. I had to revise timetable, target participants, and institutions I planned to work with, during which optimism and patience helped a lot. During research workshops, there were also from time to time one or two participants absent or even quitting from the project - hence making plan B and always making sure everything goes on as normal is what I considered first. I even tweaked the research methodology in the midway according to the responses I collected from my participants whom I often listened to about how they felt about the research conducting.

Ethical Procedures

Another significant lesson I took from research preparation is ethical procedures - a research must be done in a decent and responsible way. Initially the target participants of my research were high school students most of which might be under 18. This makes my research, according to the ethic research guidelines from School of Creative Arts, identified as 'should be censored strictly and be done with highest alert'. Potential physical risks during workshop, social distance, and data protection, to name but a few.

Accessing Research Resources

Besides, while acquiring necessary resources for my research I was reminded of the importance of networking. Thanks to Sinead English's networking session, for the first time I learn to portray my potential networking 'web'. To acknowledge the importance of 'plan' before we approach anyone relevant to our research is stressed in her session. To list whom I know, what will I ask, and how to reach them – especially the 30s exercise of preparing your story to introduce yourself – these are really significant lessons for my leadership development. Less significant things can be purchased thanks to the research fund provided by Laidlaw Programme but there are more beyond the reach of money. A workshop space, in my case, is quite difficult to access given the current circumstances that most activities in indoor public space are restricted. I started from my primary, secondary, and high school and my request for room was all turned down. So my last resort was people around me - friends and families. My father bridged me and an owner of a nice dance studio who was not interested in money but asked me to teach drama at her place in exchange of the space. I agreed and by holding the drama summer school successfully I built up a good work relationship with her who would welcome me to do any further educational experiment at her place in the future. Instead of treating this like a 'cold business of space renting', I made it reciprocal and found myself a long-term partnership.

● Research Conducting

Me and My Fellow Researchers

Now it comes to conducting research which in my case is presiding practical workshops. The ultimate goal of my workshops is to encourage a true spirit of experiment, to make my participants be zealous and curiosity to discover within my general frameworks. Therefore, I stressed this in each session from the very first day: 'you are more than a mere participant of my project; this thing is also yours and you are my fellow researcher without whom I can't experiment on my own to find out the manifold connections between game and theatre.' I believe my sincerity helped as they took initiatives to bring up new thoughts and approach me to point out problems in research conducting. The methodology change I mentioned before is the best instance of such spirit. After the third session they came to me and was very honest about their feelings: they felt it was time to move on from case study and level up as they already felt they have grasped most knowledge of this level. So a small tweak was made to bring forward the next stage, i.e., guided experimental production where I led them to experiment by producing short pieces of game theatre. With hindsight it was a good decision. Otherwise they wouldn't have prepared themselves for independent production in

the final session as there were just six workshop sessions in total.

Take Care with Sensitive Subject Matters

Another good pointer comes from my supervisor who reminds me of being careful, sensitive, and respectful with representing anything in theatre. Theatre is an alternative reality where people feel free to confess, express, and communicate and we theatre makers must honor it. In the second session my participants were encouraged to embody their real stories like impressionists (personal memories) by producing lighting effects on a sheet of paper. Instead of touching on something personal or controversial (such as political stance), 'personal and collective memories of our city' is selected to be the outlet of their visceral emotions. My participants loved it with one reason being that it stimulates us to reexamine the environment we live in and dig out something magnificent we have been missing everyday. I managed to make the process of sharing personal stories progress quite slowly and smoothly - they were led to start with making memorial images by themselves. When they feel ready (to know if they do counts on my careful observation), they can pair or group to relate themselves to others. This is a necessary ice-break for the final collective production. By feeling first for themselves and gradually for your partner and for others in a big group, my participants felt safe and respected, which fosters a good vibe for creation and cooperation. Though there was a mistake I made in the final independent production the topic of which I choose for my participants is 'exorcism'. Obviously this topic treads on the realm of 'religion and belief' that deserves a lot care from the workshop facilitator and I, however, focus more on its being worth researching about. That Chinese society is generally atheistic is taken for granted by me and that is why my supervisor emphasizes that to be a professional theatre maker we must alienate ourselves from our life, culture, and social systems. 'Alienation' in theatre is a technique to produce special theatrical effects but in research conducting it also helps you to be fastidious and tread lightly.

Time Management

Though for me time management seldom becomes a problem, it is still helpful to learn about procrastination from the weekly meetings with my fellow scholars thanks to the Action Learning Sets. Beyond encouraging each other to overcome procrastination, it helps me to know when and why it happens on us. To acknowledge the fact that I myself might be quite immune to it but it is not same case with everyone teaches me to be a considerate and caring lead researcher who must keep an eye on my fellow researchers and participants when they encounter procrastination issues.

- Respect

My initial fallacy is that to work out theories that exceed forerunners in this field and prove them to be valid in praxis is the absolute core of 'leadership'. In fact, to be an extraordinary researcher that leads and influences people includes more and one of the most important is respect. Respect the giants on whose shoulders you stand and your supporters/fellow researchers by whose help you are able to conduct your research. A research leader is never a star. The latter shines with his/her team behind the curtain while the former always puts any support force in the foreground.

