

Creative Exchange Peer Leadership Network

PRODUCT 3: A DOCUMENT TO ILLUSTRATE OUR ETHICS & PURPOSE

TASK 1: INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK ON QUESTIONS (extracted from the work prepared by Janna, Jennifer & Emily from the Working Group on Ethics & Purpose)

- What is ethical practice with/in refugees and the Arts?
Providing information, providing a safe space, using
- Where does use of stories play a part of cause difficulties?
When facilitators/artists, lead decisions, rather than participants
When there isnt enough time for participants to reflect on the consequences of making a piece of work based on personal stories
- What is the purpose of the work that we do?
Build the skills, confidences and capacities of participants
Promote opportunities, equality and respect for diversity
- Who is it for?
Its for the participants
Its for audiences
Its for facilitators/artists (though I think often this isnt acknowledged and when this happens it can lead to problems. Artists/faciliators aren't neutral, they have an impact)

The WK on E & P decided that there were two useful strands of ethical practice and purpose to discuss:

- *Use of personal stories and traumatic/past experiences as inspiration for work*
- *The question of sharing cultural and multi cultural art forms*

Within this, three pointed questions help us to challenge these strands:

- *Who is the work for?*
- *When is it right to draw on personal experience? Is it ever right?*
- *Linguistic definitions and uses, in particular definition and self-definition of 'refugee'*

1. Who is it for?

Personal stories/past experiences

- Why do we ask people to tell stories?

Personal stories are rich resources for making art

Idea that telling your story is a therapeutically useful process (but often not the case)

- Why do we make the professional decision to avoid telling stories?

Because we feel its exploiting someone's pain for the sake of pleasing the audience/making dramatic art

It needs to be the informed and educated decision of the participant

The 'refugee story' part of a person is not the whole person

- What purpose to artistic recreations of true stories have?

Record important and momentous events

Be political/increase public understanding

Therapeutic

Can make good art

- When does someone have the responsibility to decide when and how stories are told?

When its their story and when they understand the possible consequences for themselves and others

- Is the cathartic/emotional experience of stories for someone other than the teller's gratification?

Yes for others involved in the work and for the audience

- Is there ever justification for telling stories as release/political statements/social justice tools. Who should make this decision?

Only ever the people who own the stories. No it is never justified unless the individual participants are happy and have a full understanding of the consequences

- Are there different rules for work with young people?

Yes in the sense that levels of knowledge and understanding may be lower.

Sharing cultural art forms

- Who is receiving the artistic experience (is it for the 'refugees' themselves or for the host community to feel better about 'an active demonstration of multiculturalism'?)

It should be for all involved, not one or the other....

- Do people really want to 'mix up'?

Some do some don't

- What is the value of providing culturally specific work?

The value is building cultural knowledge and understanding; building cultural relationships; building respect for other cultures; protecting and promoting distinctive cultural histories.

- How well attended are mixed cultural events for 'refugees'?

Depends on so many things but the ones ive been to in London have been quite well attended.

- Are there times when mixing is appropriate and times when it is not?

Very difficult question. There are times when vulnerable communities need their own space.

- Being individual rather than 'common human' can guard against stereotype?

Sorry I don't really understand this question

- Being a group is supportive?

Yes it can but not necessarily it depends on the group itself.

2. When is it right to draw on personal experience, if ever?

Personal stories/past experiences

- Should memories and work drawing on memories *always* be avoided?

no

- What are no go territories?

There are no absolute no go territories, everything has to be negotiated.

- What is cathartic? Is it the same for everyone?

Anything can be cathartic, no its not the same.

- Is protection the same for everyone?

no

- Where does the urge to tell stories come from? Should we stem the urge or encourage it?

3. Use of 'refugee'

Personal stories/past experiences

- When does work with refugees promote the artist rather than the refugee?

Cant say when exactly but what is important is:

- a. What methodologies are used....participation
- b. Project objectives mean process has an artist-led agenda
- c. What training and support is given to facilitators/artists
- d. Artists' motivations

- When does this balance change?

When projects really are participatory, creative decisions taken by participants.

- Why particularly with 'refugees' do we avoid the experience of stories? Is it to do with being perceived as vulnerable, disenfranchised, 'poor'? Would we expect the same rules to be applied to other similarly labelled groups?

Because their experiences often involve so much personal loss and suffering. It is not our role to ask them to tell us or anyone about that.

- How much does defining oneself as a refugee shape personal identity?

Refugees often self-define as a refugee in one situation but not in another. Identity is complex and changes all the time.

- Do my experiences define me?

Yes and no!

- Is there any justification in using the word refugee for funding purposes?

Yes for funding.

- What is a refugee?

Sharing cultural art forms

- When is the label in terms of publication, production and publicity actively useful?

When it is important to communicate who made the art because we are trying to change or challenge an idea that the audience has about refugees. Sometimes this is not important though. Categories/labels and art often don't sit comfortably with each other. Art is best at challenging categories....

- When does the label compromise quality (ie in 'refugee' literature?)

Other questions to ask directly to Study Visit hosts / yourselves:

- What do you define as a refugee/asylum seeker and how do you monitor this within your work?
- What is the expressed purpose of your work?
- Where did the need to work with 'refugees' come from that led to this project?
- How do you define, deliver and monitor ethical practice?

THANK YOU !