

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?
- Where does use of stories play a part of cause difficulties?
- What is the purpose of the work that we do?
- Who is it for?

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?

In my work, personal narratives or stories are rare since 'group-working' for us is about forging new and up to date identities constituted by the current work

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

I have never had to decide that someone's story should not be told

- What purpose to artistic recreations of true stories have?

The purpose could of course be simply to illustrate and describe the experiences but they could also be used in a metaphorical sense thus allowing a person the

scope to explore their experience with others in a way that may be more appropriate than simply illustrating the experience.

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

I should say that personal stories do not really turn up in our work in the way that is suggested in this questionnaire. The expression of a personal narrative or story in our music and theatre work comes through in non-literal ways. The stories are shared with others (public) through the final art product.

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

Any sharing of personal experience is primarily for the benefit of the group in my work. Whilst it is a closely related field, I don't believe that we practise 'therapy'.

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

Every person I think, should have the opportunity to share their stories with others whether it is in a community context or through the workspaces that we provide in our work but in terms of the use of those stories, it must always be with the explicit agreement of the individual – however, making political statements is not something that I feel is ever part of my work remit.

- Are there different rules for work with young people?

There are different rules for all people but those are employed depending on the nature of the project work and most importantly, on the needs of the individuals that are present in any one project. I don't think it is possible to create a list of 'rules for working with young people' for example.

Sharing cultural art forms The following 3 categories are really not applicable to my line of work but I will answer the questions that I think relate most closely to it.

- 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'?)

x

- Whose *need* is it? (box ticking/feeling better/relieving suffering?)

x

- Is it ever done in the name of 'duty'? Is this a bad thing?

x

- Do people really want to 'mix up'?

Yes. Refugees and Asylum Seekers are a tiny proportion of the people here in Scotland and there is plenty of evidence that people do want to 'mix up'

- What is the value of providing culturally specific work?

Everyone has a right to access services through which they can create cultural output that expresses the meaning that are relevant to them

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

When proper contact is made and the relevant support given (crèche facilities, transport etc.) the attendance is high.

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

When an event is of importance and relevance to people, the question of mixing is secondary. If people want to come (have a reason to come) they will.

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

No. Stereotyping of a person is done by someone else. What matters is how effectively one communicates one's picture of oneself.

- Being a group is supportive?

Yes. Groups offer both the criticism and the support of other people. My work is all about creating new 'group' identities constituted by the component parts of those individual contributions. I do not focus on self narratives.

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

Personal stories/past experiences

- Should memories and work drawing on memories *a/ways* be avoided?

No. The idea of avoiding personal narratives is anathema to me. If someone has a personal narrative to contribute, it is one of the most valid things they can bring.

- What are no go territories?

I have no 'NO GO' territories when it comes to stories.

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

x

- Is protection the same for everyone?

x

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

We should never stem the urge to tell stories if we want to be honest practitioners who can bring this material out as a benefit to individuals and groups. We are not censors. It is our job however to think carefully about how those stories are used in any final artistic or cultural product and to guarantee that it is done with the active and knowing participation of the generator of those stories.

3. Use of 'refugee'

Personal stories/past experiences

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

It would do so when the artist is working as an artist and not as a facilitator of other peoples' art.

- When does this balance change?

When artists are given a clear remit to work on creating art with the material generated by others or created by others with the artist's help.

- 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?

x

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

I would ask a refugee that.

- Do my experiences define me?

Yes they can...if you make them. 'Me' however is only ever manifest in relation to the perceptions of others

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

Yes. If the funder's definition of their target group is 'refugee', then we must believe that that is what they mean.

- What is a refugee?

In legal terms, a refugee is someone who has refugee status according to current Borders and Immigration Policy.

Sharing cultural art forms

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

When it is useful for funders and analysts, then we would use the term appropriately in that context but as a way of assigning characteristics to an individual or group of people then obviously it is not appropriate for any purpose that we may be serving.

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

As above

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?

I work with individuals and groups and their nationality or immigration status is only relevant when they occasionally disappear from our cities.

- What is the expressed purpose of your work?

Access to the generation of group and self-meanings through artistic and cultural output – most notably through music.

- Where did the need to work with ‘refugees’ come from that led to this project?

The need came from the fact that they existed alongside everybody else.

- How do you define, deliver and monitor ethical practice?

That is not a singular question and I couldn’t possibly answer that here but the answers to it I’m sure will come from the other literature that we have compiled throughout the PLN year.

THANK YOU !