

Institution: Aberystwyth University
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: <i>Capel: The Lights are On: Generating New Ways of Thinking That Influence Creative Practice.</i> A public, site-specific performance forming part of a practice led AHRC funded research project with CSSD London.
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The site-specific performance <i>Capel: The Lights are On</i> increased public understanding of the importance of place and belonging and empowered people with learning disability to articulate cultural capital and heritage through creative intervention. It impacts on civil society and cultural life. It reached a diverse audience of first time and regular theatre goers, people with learning disability, and professional artists. Beneficiaries include its audiences, its participants and the wider circle of professional support, families, friends, and the community of Ceredigion. It facilitated better understanding of rural Welsh life. It temporarily re-opened a former focal point for community and cultural life. It revealed ability rather than disability by making equality between participants clear.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p><i>Capel: The Lights Are On</i> was a site specific performance in and around a former village chapel in Ceredigion, West Wales. Authored by a member of the <i>Cyrrff Ystwyth</i> Dance Company between October 2011 and June 2012, performances took place on 13, 14 and 15 June 2012. The performance formed one third of a practice based output for the AHRC funded investigation <i>Challenging Concepts of 'Liquid' Place Through Performing Practices in Community Contexts</i> (2011- 2014), on which Ames and Pearson (Aberystwyth University) are Co-Investigators (CIs) [3.1].</p> <p>Specific to this research project is an enquiry into the experiences of place and belonging in a contemporary yet marginal society. The research asks how the particularity of a site can be opened by performance that produces highly personalised responses from a disabled artist. The research shows that the resonances of former social practices can be recovered and interpreted creatively, challenging assumptions about learning disability, such as the notion that people with learning disabilities are unable to understand what happens around them and unable to contribute meaningfully to society as dependence on others signifies inability and social problem rather than social contributor. [3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7]. The research shows how this work contributes to mainstream theatrical practice and challenges a perception of the demise of communities.</p> <p>The research process focuses on an annually self-selected member of the group <i>Cyrrff Ystwyth</i> who offers a theme for devising performance. As verbal language is often not readily available to a person with learning disabilities, movement is usually the primary mode of explanation for the lead member's ideas. This person then works as the choreographer whilst the researcher takes a dual role, bringing into play a directorial function in order to both learn how the leader is working and to co-create a public performance. The research then looks at what kind of performance is made by choreographers with learning disabilities and what such performances might offer mainstream theatre and dance and contribute to understandings of disability, place, and identity. The performances serve as a medium of direct communication with diverse audiences in Ceredigion and contribute to greater understanding of life ways and personal experiences amongst people who do not usually take public roles. Issues of autonomy, responsibility, creative opportunities that are extremely challenging and collaborative practice are inherent in the process. The researcher disseminates information further by presenting at academic conferences and publishing in academic journals. The research is outward facing and all participants are informed about, and engaged in the research. <i>Cyrrff Ystwyth</i> engaged in this research as industry partners with Ames acting as director and Co-Investigator. Other industry</p>

partners are *Half Moon Young People's Theatre* in London and *Oldham Theatre Workshop*. Dissemination is still underway at the time of writing. The research is rooted in Ames' previous engagement with diverse sections of the population across west Wales. During 2004 – 2007 Ames worked throughout the three counties of the west of Wales in primary schools, with youth groups, in day care settings and other public and community contexts developing performance and performative responses to specific issues with specific groups and individuals and mentoring school teachers in the delivery of dance on the National Curriculum. The current research seeks ways to develop a practice that enhances the quality of individual and community life and civil society. Since 2005 two learning disabled authors have created six full length works examining themes of rural Welsh life. The focus is on how work made by learning disabled people might contribute to and develop notions of skill in performance [3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7]. In peripheral social contexts the research produces a voice that demonstrates an alternative interpretation of community arts practice. [3.2]. *Cyrff Ystwyth's* output is created by people with learning disabilities. The research generates new ways of thinking that influence creative practice and cultural life and is in turn informed by people with learning disabilities as well as the academic research community. [3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7]. Thus the research contributes to personal development and supports new forms of artistic expression that contributes to the cultural life and civic society of this area.

Cyrff Ystwyth has been making work with Ames since 1988. Adrian Jones, a person with learning disabilities is author of *Capel: The Lights are On* and has been in the company from the beginning. The longevity of the work underpins this output. The endurance of the research has afforded participants developmental opportunities as artists and shifted roles and perceptions within their communities. All company members self-select to join and all bring complex personal histories and reasons for their involvement. Whilst many are people with learning disabilities many have been and are working as carers. The work presents alternative experiences for, and relationships between, people who are cared for and carers. *Cyrff Ystwyth* is embedded within the cultural fabric of Ceredigion through the personal experiences of its participants and audiences over 25 years. This commitment to a community and a practice presents deep layers of narrative, history and expression that offer a view of a particular way of life expressed through theatre over time.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Mackey, S. Ames, M and Pearson, M (2011 - 2014) *Challenging Concepts of 'Liquid' Place Through Performing Practices in Community Contexts* AHRC funded research project. Principal Investigator; Mackey, S. Co-Investigators; Ames, M and Pearson, M. Partner Organisations; Half Moon Young People's Theatre, London. Oldham Theatre Workshop. *Cyrff Ystwyth*, Aberystwyth. (Number AH/1000364/1) Total grant to Aberystwyth £39,276.00.

3.2 *Capel: The Lights Are On*: DVD of process and performance. Listed in REF2.

3.3 Ames, M (2013) 'It's a Ghost': The uncanny in rural Welsh identity'. *Studies in Theatre and Performance* No 33, 1. [DOI: [10.1386/stap.33.1.29_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/stap.33.1.29_1)]

3.4 *Brighton Beach* by Edward Wadsworth and *Cyrff Ystwyth*: DVD of performance. [Listed in REF2.]

3.5 Ames, M (2011) 'Performing Between Intention and Unconscious Daily Gesture. How Might Disabled Dancers Offer us a New Aesthetic Sensibility?' *About Performance* 11.

3.6 *Work* by Adrian Jones and *Cyrff Ystwyth* DVD of performance. [Listed in REF 2.]

3.7 Ames, M (2011) 'Working with Adrian Jones, dance artist' *Journal of Arts and Communities* 2, 1. [DOI: [10.1386/jaac.2.1.41_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jaac.2.1.41_1)]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Chapel: The Lights Are On presented cultural heritage through new artistic expression to people with learning disabilities, academics, farmers, artists, residents of Bronant and other parts of Ceredigion, Welsh and non-Welsh speakers. It opened a former site of collective identity and foregrounded the capacity of an individual to develop an aesthetic and a continuing relationship with his culture (Evidence 5.1). The work was developed by Adrian Jones, working for one hour a week over nine months. Fourteen people participated in the making of the work. With indirect involvement from families, the professional support framework as well as key local individuals, around 100 people were involved. The marginal position of people with learning disability in relation to those without is both implicitly and, through the performances, explicitly critiqued and adjusted.

The researcher proposed an approach that ordered the site with the material. Rehearsals on site were conducted over two weekends and the week of the performances. Moving the company outside of the studio where work is usually performed opened the communities of Ceredigion to innovative theatre practice that these audiences would not usually engage with. Evidence states that the work was: 'a creative and innovative combination that would almost certainly have been outside of the experience of most members of the audience' (Evidence 5.1). The appearance of performers with disabilities alongside trained dancers, athletes, mixed ages and those with no training provoked audiences to consider disability and ability, theatre and community in rural Wales (Evidence 5.2 DVD 1 58:28 – 59:27). New ways of thinking about equality and creative practice were generated. From the evidence the following is stated: '...at the end of the day they are people and have exactly the same talents as everyone else' (evidence 5.2 DVD 2 49:12 – 50:18 and DVD 3 21:58 – 24:00).

Further evidence offers the following: 'In this context performance art, which is often perceived in rural cultures as an intrusive fad, a cultural imposition, came into its own as the legitimate medium for investigating the way in which individual identity flows around and within cultural and concrete constructs' (Evidence 5.1) and: 'Cyrff Ystwyth is a group which deals with everyone in the same way. Everyone is treated the same way because of the discipline which is in the dance, and people, disabled people, able bodied people, people learn so much from disabled people and vice versa' (Evidence 5.2 DVD1 4:49 – 5:22). The cultural precedents of these communities were remembered and current discourses of 'belonging' and action were questioned as the company engaged in rehearsal on site. Who is cared for by whom, who makes authoritative statements and what bodies and capabilities carry our cultural memories were questions provoked by performance and the presence of the company at work in the village.

The output exemplifies new approaches to site specific dance that contribute to wider public understanding of the importance of place and history in the present (Evidence 5.2 DVD1 43:26 43:52) as well as making explicit the creative capacities of learning disabled people in contributing to the community's understanding of itself (Evidence 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5.).

Evidence states that: 'Their action in re-entering and repossessing the Chapel during the period of performance challenged not only the contemporary culture of marginalisation and impotence, but also the limitations and restrictions which operated in the past' (Evidence 5.1). The site, closed since the early 1980s was no longer activated by community practices. The output produced a renewed connection with the chapel. The performances opened the various aspects of the place and at the same time revealed the surrounding village. Bronant hosted audiences from other places. Rather than a sense of loss, people reported that familiar yet long since forgotten emotions emerged and a sense of belonging and a removal of barriers between site and between people. Evidence offers: 'The place which I thought was Adrian's also belonged to me' (Evidence 5.4 and evidence 5.2 DVD 3 18:00 – 21:56 and 51:31 – 53:02).

Beneficiaries include the participants in *Cyrff Ystwyth* and their families and support workers. Testimony evidenced positive impact on their daily life such as increased confidence and pride, particularly amongst performers (Evidence 5.3). Key users of the research such as the Calvinist Methodist congregation of Chapel Bronant who witnessed a re-engagement with their chapel

were consulted throughout the process via conversations between the Deacon and the researcher (Evidence 5.4). The opening of the redundant chapel was facilitated through this disabled artist's practice. Evidence states: 'Bringing him out of the institutional enclosure back into his own community and giving him the power to comment on, and in his own terms, analyse, the disjunctions from which all his neighbours suffer, was in itself a dramatic challenge to a prevailing malaise'(Evidence 5.1). Former social practices were evident in the choreography by Jones as he responded to the themes. Evidence 5.4 states: 'It was felt that the performances created a very strong link between place and belonging and this link was powerfully conveyed with passion and feeling by members of the performing cast, this being particularly poignant for chapel members in the case of Adrian Jones, one of the disabled performers, as he himself is a chapel member' and (Evidence 5.2 DVD 1 57:33 – 58:20 DVD 3 17:3 – 18:56). Challenges to perceptions of learning disability are evidenced in the interviews with participants (Evidence 5.2). Presenting cultural heritage is evidenced in letters, for example: 'Historically the Nonconformist Chapel was the cultural and religious centre of these communities...' (Evidence 5.1). (Evidence 5.2 DVD1 49:11 – 50:32 and 57:01 – 59:26 and DVD2 interview 3 9:13 – 24:44).

Through constant dialogue with support workers and in particular Canolfan Padarn (Evidence 5.6) the Ceredigion Social Services day care centre for people with learning disabilities and Mencap, understanding of learning disabled people's capabilities were made apparent. (Evidence 5.2 DVD 1 49:11 – 50:23, DVD 2 13:03 – 16:14 and 16:53 – 18:12 and DVD3 42:08 – 43:27) Evidence also states that:

'Firstly I believe the project is fantastic, I myself have experienced individuals with a learning disability develop into confident performers' (Evidence 5.3) and:

'Because of the varied skills of the performers the project captured the audience and got them thinking about the creative capacities of individuals who do have a learning disability, also getting them to consider disability and ability' (Evidence 5.3).

The links between the University and external organisations were developed and strengthened. The management and staff at the Centre have agreed to carry out the Informed Consent to Participate in Research process on behalf of the researcher and as a way into developing this critical aspect of research engagement invited the researcher into a closed discussion group with staff and service users. Issues of consent and refusal were discussed over several meetings and the researcher compiled a discussion document for staff training at the end of the series of weekly meetings. This has since been used by centre staff and has helped in addressing their requirements for understanding the dynamics of informed consent. This was made possible through a Strategic Insight Programme Project that Ames applied for entitled 'Investigating the Requirements towards an Assessment Method to Demonstrate Informed Consent'.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Letter from cultural community activist and member of the co-operative running the local pub
- 5.2 DVD: Interviews with audience members who are family members or carers, and participants in the project.
- 5.3 Letter from Service Manager Ceredigion 2, Mencap Cymru
- 5.4 Letter from Deacon of Chapel Bronant.
- 5.5 Letter from individual social worker with permission from service users.
- 5.6 Contact for corroboration – Manager of Canolfan Padarn