

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 35: Music, Dance, Drama, and Performing Arts</p>
<p>Title of case study: Breaking the silence: using testimony and theatre to improve the practice of care</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>New techniques developed from research into verbatim theatre have (1) helped families affected by child sexual abuse by a) giving them new ways of ‘working through’ the trauma of their experiences and b) improving communication and dialogue with the relevant agencies of care; (2) developed in social work professionals, through new training methods, a greater understanding of a) sexual abuse and its impact on families and b) how to train social workers in this field; (3) been extended and adapted for student nurses, to facilitate new approaches to training, empathic engagement and reflective approaches to practice.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>A specialist in applied theatre at Central, Amanda Stuart Fisher’s current research began in 2004 by looking at the theatrical enactment of stories of actual lived events. From this emerged the challenge of dealing theatrically with trauma, a condition which is seemingly ‘unspeakable’: resisting articulation, unable to be assimilated to cognition and functioning as a postponed or ‘belated experience’ (Lacan 1994, Caruth 1996). A series of ensuing research inquiries explored whether theatre can enable individuals to ‘work through’ traumatic events of the past. These insights were tested in the production of a verbatim theatre play about child sexual abuse, which in turn became a vehicle for impact.</p> <p>The first phase of the research (2004-2010) explored the methodological problems inherent in theatrical attempts to bear witness to lived experience and trauma. Stuart Fisher’s applied-theatre work with Camden Young People’s and Clean Break Theatres proposed a modelling of the playwright as ‘community storyteller’ (output 1). An analysis of Yael Farber’s South African testimonial theatre methodology confirmed that while story-telling might facilitate social cohesion, some events of historico-political trauma resist direct narration (output 2). The role of empathy and the relationship between testifier and listener/playwright led to an exploration of the dangers of identification and possible appropriation. Practically, the research sought to shape a theatrical mode of ‘empathic unsettlement’ (LaCapra 2001). This research was argued both philosophically and aesthetically, as seen in outputs from this phase that engage with Badiou’s ethics of the event (output 3), the theatremaker as a form of community witness (output 4), and the limits of verbatim theatre (output 5). These publications have been cited widely (Kuppers, P. (2007) <i>Community Performance</i>; Neelands, J. (2007) ‘Taming the Political’ <i>RiDE</i> 12(3); Bharucha, R. (2011) ‘Problematising Applied Theatre’ <i>RiDE</i> 16(3); and Prendergast, M. & Saxton, J. (2013) <i>Applied Drama: A facilitator’s handbook for working in a community</i>).</p> <p>Building on these insights, the second phase (2010-2013) modelled a practice to remedy the problems Stuart Fisher had explored. Her method was to write a verbatim play challenging the taboos around the issue of familial child sexual abuse. To test her process and its viability she worked with a partner closely engaged with trauma management in families: Mosac, the leading support organisation for non-abusing parents and carers of sexually abused children. Mosac’s particular problem related closely to Stuart Fisher’s research inquiry, in that it needed to resolve the difficulty of discussing sexual abuse of one’s own children and/or where the perpetrator is known to the victim and/or is a family member. As a model of potential practice, the play, <i>From the Mouths of Mothers</i>, used witnessing techniques to negotiate the relationship between taboo and ownership</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

in encountering childhood sexual abuse. Performed initially for Mosac's clientele and stakeholders, the project's challenges, its therapeutic value and the questions it poses to dominant understandings of verbatim theatre are analysed in Stuart Fisher's 2011 article in *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (output 6).

The quality and significance of this research have been recognised in the invitation to Stuart Fisher to co-edit (with Alison Forsyth, Aberystwyth) a special issue of the journal *Performing Ethos*: 'Acting Out Trauma' (2013).

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

Unless otherwise specified, materials are available either electronically or on paper on request.

- [1] Stuart Fisher, A. 2004 'The Playwright in Residence: A community's storyteller', *The Drama Review* 48(3): 135-149. Peer-reviewed journal article, output type D, DOI 10.1162/1054204041667712 Submitted for RAE 2008.
- [2] Stuart Fisher, A. 2008 Introduction to *Theatre As Witness: Three testimonial plays from South Africa*. London: Faber. ISBN 978-1840028201 Chapter in book, output type C.
- [3] Stuart Fisher, A. 2005 'Developing an Ethics of Practice in Applied Theatre: Badiou and fidelity to the truth of the event', *Research in Drama Education* 10(2): 247-252 Peer-reviewed journal article, output type D, DOI 10.1080/13569780500103992 Submitted for RAE 2008.
- [4] Stuart Fisher, A. 2008 'Bearing Witness: The position of theatre makers in the telling of trauma', in *The Applied Theatre Reader*, ed. T. Prentki and S. Preston. London: Routledge. ISBN 9780415428866 Peer-reviewed chapter, output type C and listed in REF2. Submitted for REF 2014.
- [5] Stuart Fisher, A. 2011 'Trauma, Authenticity, and the Limits of Verbatim', *Performance Research* 16(1) 'On Trauma': 112-124. Peer-reviewed journal article, output type D and listed in REF2, DOI 10.1080/13528165.2011.561683 Submitted for REF 2014.
- [6] Stuart Fisher, A. 2011 "'That's Who I'd Be, if I Could Sing": Reflections on a verbatim project with mothers of sexually abused children,' *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 31(2): 193-208. Peer-reviewed journal article, output type D and listed in REF2, DOI 10.1386/stap.31.2.193_1 Submitted for REF 2014.

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

Mothers offered an exemplary model for focusing on the family and thereby enabling both **families** and **carers** to gain greater understanding of sexual abuse trauma. This then produced new ways of training carers.

A. New understanding

The problem faced by Mosac was that the silence and taboo around familial child sexual abuse hinder therapeutic support of **families**, delaying appropriate social, health and legal interventions. *Mothers* established the first step towards impact by enabling the voice of the families to be heard by social and health workers, teachers and policy makers. Victims and carers **learnt how to break the silence**. As one of the participating mothers said:

Doing the play, seeing it, it was like a funny way of counseling to me.... It's made me look at things in a different way. Whereas before I'd have avoided looking at these issues, now I'd find a way of addressing them. It was a good way of dealing with it. Seeing it acted out like that. (source B1)

Breaking the silence was a definable impact of *Mothers*, as Denise Hubble, Mosac's Clinical Services Manager, explains:

The idea of addressing that which seems to 'lie beyond words' is something that is often discussed by my clients, and Mothers is a direct aid in doing

Impact case study (REF3b)

*that. We do not have another means of addressing the 'lies beyond words' as effective and sensitive as the play. In that, it is the most useful tool for communication we have This play has **helped professionals and facilities gain a deeper insight** into how sexual abusers operate in our society Most children do not disclose ... that makes the need of finding a way to narrate the experience all the more acute for social workers, caring professionals, and policymakers as well. We have found Mothers to be a helpful tool with all these groups. (source A1)*

Piloted at Central with a Mosac audience (July 2007), *Mothers* was performed in September 2007 at the Mosac AGM, a training forum for social workers:

It gave me good insight into the experiences of these women, and other women and children who are in similar circumstances....I think this play would benefit anyone working with non abusing parents of sexually abused children. (source B2)

In May 2013 *Mothers* was the centrepiece (at the Pleasance, Islington) of Mosac's awareness-raising week. 79% of the 491 who saw it said it altered their thinking about the families affected (sources B3 and B4). A health care worker said:

It informed [her] further in [her] understanding of the mother's point of view'. Another said: 'A valuable.... play/life story – I believe that this is essential in being able to increase belief and awareness of abuse'. A teacher said '[It] makes you more aware of a child's needs and signs. It will make me work with caution and compassion if I come across a family/child who has been affected by sexual abuse (source B4).

Published for this event, the script remains in use by Mosac (source B5).

B. New training

Following specialist recognition of the efficacy of witness-based drama, the research insights were next used to develop **training regimes for nurses and social workers**. When Stuart Fisher discovered that carers neglected their *own* experience she initiated collaboration with the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing (KCL) to develop and test (May 2011) a new form of nurse training, involving both trainees and their tutors. A subsequent workshop (January 2012) assembled specialists from Barnardos, Camden Carers, Mosac, RHUL, UEL, Queen Mary, and the Nightingale School. For over 60% this training changed their thinking about and approach to the practice of care (source B6). Ian Noonan, Programme Leader in Mental Health Nursing, said:

[the KCL workshop] gave the students the opportunity to see their practice ... in a new way. They were quite simply bowled over by the process. One student wrote ... "I realised for the first time that I was struggling with competing feelings of compassion and apprehension". (source A2)

Building on the work with nurses, Stuart Fisher collaborated with the Department of Social Work, RHUL, to create a new training programme (delivered May 2012 and 2013). Social workers who participated said it changed their approach to child sexual abuse issues, with the effect that they 'think more about the persecutory nature in which we question or work with non-abusing parents', 'try to do more of what I know is important – open mind – empathy' (source B7). Anna Gupta, Head of Social Work, RHUL, said:

The workshop has encouraged us to think differently about the way we train social workers to support families affected by child sexual abuse and the evaluations from students ... [suggest] that they too have changed their

perception towards support in child sexual abuse situations.....a highly useful learning tool ... and one we could not get from any other source (source A3).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**A. Testimony sources**

These are available on request either on paper or electronically.

1. Denise Hubble, Clinical Services Manager, Mosac
2. Ian Noonan, Lecturer in Mental Health, Florence Nightingale School of Nursing and Midwifery, Kings College, London
3. Anna Gupta, Department of Social Work, Royal Holloway, University of London

B. Event data

These materials are available on request in hard copy.

1. 'KW,' from a transcript of an evaluation meeting between those Mosac clients whose stories were depicted in *From the Mouths of Mothers*, 13 September 2007.
2. Evaluation forms from the 2007 reading of *Mothers* at the Mosac AGM.
3. Ticket sales figures for the 2013 production of *Mothers* at the Pleasance Theatre, Islington
4. Evaluation forms for the 2013 production of *Mothers* at the Pleasance Theatre, Islington
5. 2013. *From the Mouths of Mothers*. Twickenham: Aurora Metro Books
6. Evaluation data for the January 2012 Caring Practitioner workshop held at Central with Stuart Fisher, Barnardos, Camden Carers, Mosac, RHUL, UEL, Queen Mary, and the Nightingale School (KCL).
7. Evaluation forms from the May 2012 and May 2013 workshops held at Central with the Department of Social Work, Royal Holloway, University of London.