

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: Drama
Title of case study: Applied Theatre as Intervention in Wellbeing
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Exeter Drama's research in Applied Theatre has had impact in the improvement of community understandings of mental health, providing professional development for medics and teachers, and providing and informing training in applied and community theatre. This case study outlines the impact of last twenty years of research and performance practice in applied theatre, developed by Honorary Research Fellow (2005-) and former senior lecturer (1990-2005) John Somers, and continued in the work of Fiona MacBeth, Kerrie Schaefer, Sarah Goldingay, Anna Harpin, and Jane Milling. Somers developed new approaches to community theatre and has given presentations on this work internationally. Impact has also been achieved through Somers' founding of the applied theatre company <i>Exstream</i> (Exeter, 2001) and under his direction Exstream achieved a reputation for excellence through the development of interactive theatre, raising awareness of issues related to wellbeing, mental health, and creativity within the community.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research into Applied Theatre has focussed on the use of theatre as a means of raising public and professional awareness of the cultural contexts and experience of illness. Somers' work has been groundbreaking in modelling, analysing and developing a form of interactive theatre that effectively engages audiences and communities (professional or geographical) in narratives of illness and stress. This research is done through both creative practice and publication. From 2002-6, five interactive plays, authored and directed by Somers, were core to this practical research, performed and toured by the company, <i>Exstream</i>, established in 2001. Of these, <i>On the Edge</i> (2004) (3.6) has proved the most significant, touring nationally (123 performances to more than 5000 people). 79 performances were in schools, colleges and universities where the audience was aged between 14 and 22. In addition 44 performances were held for teachers and mental health professionals as a part of continuing professional development or at conferences (5.1)). This practical research is significant for its focused aim in raising awareness of early stage psychosis through a combination of theatre performance and subsequent classroom interaction. Somers collaborated with psychologists and psychiatrists in creating this work, resulting in a fruitful exchange across disciplines.</p> <p>The 'compound stimulus' of play and teaching package was tested through <i>On the Edge</i> and other productions. An independent evaluation of the Wellcome Trust funded research project, <i>On the Edge</i>, confirmed the efficacy of Somers' methodologies concluding that 'data show increased student awareness and knowledge of psychosis following completion of the programme' and that 'Students appear to be better equipped to seek help' (5.1). This test-bed production received the following awards: Southern Region Health and Social Care Mental Health Award (2005) National Institute of Mental Health in England (NIMHE) Positive Practice Award (2005), NIMHE Service User Involvement Award (2005).</p> <p>Somers' publications and papers have detailed the findings of the research and helped to disseminate these discoveries further in peer-reviewed publications (3.1-5).</p> <p>Somers' development of community theatre has also been innovative, including twelve theatre projects and the foundation of a community theatre school in Payhembury, East Devon. This work is distinctive in identifying ways to widen the skills base in the community and to improve levels of engagement and participation in theatre activity through targeted training, informing publications (e.g. 3.2).</p>

In addition, **Somers** founded the journal *Research in Drama Education*, the leading international journal in the field, and is founding director of a related triennial international research conference that attracted researchers from thirty-two countries in 2008 (its sixth meeting) and which has become the premier international research event in Applied Drama. Prior to awards made within the impact period (4), Somers' gained an **American Alliance of Theatre and Education Special Recognition Award** (2003).

Somers' establishment of Applied Theatre as a major research field in both publication and practice has established a strong grounding for developing theatre's impact on wellbeing, healthcare and medicine in the Drama department at Exeter. Our Centre for Performance, Sciences, and Community has been formed to support this work. At present, there are ongoing funded projects being undertaken by **Harpin (2010-)**, **Goldingay (2010-)**, **Milling (1995-)**, and **Schaefer (2007-)** which will lead to further impact in this important field.

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

All publications are published in peer reviewed journals, and/or international scholarly presses. Reference 6 was externally funded by the Wellcome Trust, after rigorous peer review.

1. Rowena Passy, Carly Mays, Graham Carr, Glenn Roberts, John Somers and Jos Dawe, (2010) 'Raising Awareness in Schools' in *Promoting Recovery in Early Psychosis*, Shiers, D. et al (Eds) London: Blackwell, pp.116-124.
2. Somers, J. 'Theatre in communities: a bonding agent' in *Drama w STOP-KLATCE*, Stop Klatka, Warsaw, (2010), pp. 106-120.
3. Somers, J. 'Drama and Wellbeing: Narrative Theory and the use of interactive theatre in raising mental health awareness' in *Dramatherapy and Social Theatre: necessary dialogues*. Jennings, S (Ed) London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 193-202
4. Somers, J., Roberts, G., Dawe, J., Passy, R., Mays, C., Carr, G., Shiers, D., Smith, J. (2007) 'On the Edge: a drama-based mental health education programme on early psychosis for schools' *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 1: 168–176
5. John Somers and Michael Balfour, (Eds) *Drama as Social Intervention* (2006) Captus Press: Canada.
6. *On the Edge* – award-winning interactive theatre programme on early stage psychosis, 2004. Funded by The Wellcome Trust for a national tour 2004-5 (£165,000).

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

Improving people's understanding of mental health

On the Edge (3.6) and other works 2002-6 tested a Theatre-in-Education methodology, comprising both play and related learning activities. The methodology has become an important reference point and has continuing impact, through published reflection (3.1,3,4), revivals and new projects based on this tested approach.

Somers was instrumental in supporting the establishment of the Polish Association of Drama Practitioners (Stop Klatka), who translated *On the Edge* into Polish as *Na Krawędzi*. This toured Poland in a fourth version (2008), funded by the Polish Ministry of Social Affairs, with 700 young people taking part in the project, and Somers as consultant (5.3).

Somers was invited to create an interactive programme on self-harm at The Drama Studio LABYRINT, Brno, Czech Republic, in association with Masaryk University, based on his previous research. This programme was delivered seven times from 2008-9, to 326 spectators, mainly young people. In 2010, in the same context, Somers developed a programme on aggression for Roma children. This was analysed and evaluated by researchers, confirming its effectiveness, and

was delivered ten times, usually in schools, reaching 397 spectators.

Somers' created a further programme for the veterinary profession, *Help for Helen* (2011, London Vet Show at Olympia) and a video (with Ben Sherriff) *Breakdown Breakthrough*, available online. Both raise awareness of mental health issues.

Providing professional development for medics and teachers

In 2009, *On the Edge* was adopted by the National Early Intervention development programme led by NIMHE and Rethink, building on previous experience (5.1), as part of their National Anti-stigma Campaign. It toured in 2009 and 2010 with their support (with funding of £15,765 in 2009 and £16,714, 2010) to UK teacher training institutions as part of an 'Education Not Discrimination' mental health awareness workshop for trainee teachers, trainee head teachers and Social inclusion leads. Participating teacher training universities were Manchester, Sussex, Leicester, Birmingham (Newman University College) and Brighton. A *Teachers' TV* programme comments on the role the workshop played in informing teachers, which '**could really impact on a lot of lives**'. A Consultant Psychiatrist regards *On the Edge* as '**far and away the most effective vehicle**' for '**improving relationships between young people, schools, families and mental health professionals**'.

Providing and informing training in applied and community theatre

Internationally and locally, Somers' work has been significant in stimulating and informing applied and community drama:

- As a consultant on Stop Klatka's institution of the only Applied Drama School in Poland, delivering its first training programme in 2011. His article (3.2) is regarded as is '**very important for drama practitioners in Poland**' (5.3). His work at Warsaw University has led to a relationship between researchers in Exeter with the Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialisation (for example, Schaefer presented and was consulted on community theatre there in 2009) (5.4).
- Stimulating and advising on the creation of professional Theatre in Education networks in Greece and Asia. A Japanese researcher comments '**The opportunities he has created have given birth to a network which is stimulating co-operative research in Asia and in other parts of the world.**' (5.2), while in Taiwan, it is suggested that his work initiated '**the beginning of a successful use of educational theatre**'(5.6). In Greece, '**one can easily trace his impact**' on drama and education (5.5).
- The company, Exstream, has provided opportunities for recent graduates to develop applied theatre skills and many are now working in related contexts: Laura Newton, project director for Exeter Forum Theatre, working with homeless people, in association with Wolf & Water, Devon; Carly Mays, a Community Engagement Officer for The National Trust; Peter Vanderford, DAISI (Arts in Schools); Pavla Cveckova, life skills teacher, Malawi; Sanjay Shelat, actor, TiE for Wrigleys.
- The Community Theatre School in Payhembury has continued to develop as a model for spreading theatre-making skills in communities. Original work has resulted, such as *New Talking Heads*, a series of performed and videoed monologues, *Foresight* supported by £10 000 from the National Lottery in 2008 and *Hollyhayes*, a sophisticated community theatre production on a farm in Payhembury in 2011.

Indicators: Awards: Lifetime Achievement Award from the Turkish Drama Association, (2011); Shortlisted in 2011 for the Association of Theatre in Higher Education (North America) for the Award for Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement

Invited lectures and workshops: over 20 during the Impact period (2008-13) in Europe and the Middle East.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**Individual corroboration: mails/letters/documents sent to institution**

1. Professor, Tokyo City University, Faculty of Human Life Science (e-mail supplied to institution)
2. Artistic Director, Stop Klatka (Polish Association of Drama Practitioners) (e-mail supplied to institution)
3. General Secretary, Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr), Member of IDEA – International Drama/Theatre & Education Association (letter supplied to institution)
4. Joint report on Somers' work in Czech Republic, drawn up by Artistic Director, The Drama Studio LABYRINT, and Lecturer in Theatre, Masaryk University, Brno (document supplied to institution)
5. Assistant Professor, National Taipei University of Art (e-mail supplied to institution)

Public documentation of impact

1. Student Applied Drama Research Group, Warsaw University, Institute for Social Prevention and Re-Socialisation, website:
http://www.ipsir.uw.edu.pl/en/students/student_research_groups/student_applied_drama_research_group
2. Peer-reviewed published scholarly book chapter detailing data quantifying impact on teachers and student participants in *On the Edge* programme.