

<b>Institution:</b> University of Greenwich
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 – English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Activating the Reminiscence Theatre Archive (ARTA)
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Reminiscence theatre's primary goals are to improve the well-being of senior citizens and promote intergenerational dialogue. ARTA has successfully engaged 100 marginalised older people, 13 young volunteers and over 200 others since 2012. The project has created a new model of reminiscence theatre by proving that archive material can be used instead of live interviews. It has learned the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and found creative solutions to the problems. It has also given the <a href="#">Reminiscence Theatre Archive</a> a long-term 'living' future. Finally ARTA has disseminated good practice internationally through a website, articles, training events and conferences.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Reminiscence Theatre is a sub-set of applied drama which performs new shows based on the verbatim memories of older people. It brings the history of ordinary individuals alive, supplementing and challenging traditional historical narratives. Pam Schweitzer founded the Age Exchange Theatre Trust, the first full-time professional theatre company to specialise in making reminiscence shows with performing to senior citizens. Between 1983 and 2005 the trust performed 30 different plays across the UK, often in residential care homes. Schweitzer created the Reminiscence Theatre Archive to hold the trust's oral history transcripts, play scripts, photographs and production documentation. To assure its sustainability and promote its reach, in 2012 she donated it to the University of Greenwich which had been teaching applied drama and making theatre based on oral and local history since 2006. Heather <b>Lilley</b> and Harry <b>Derbyshire</b> wanted to investigate whether new reminiscence theatre could be created from archive as well as new interviews: they wanted to activate the archive to give value to the community beyond the academic.</p> <p>ARTA has since combined research and practice by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating a theatre company of volunteers to make plays from the archived reminiscences and perform them to older people</li> <li>• finding out what the strengths and challenges of this approach are, and developing techniques to make the approach as effective as possible</li> <li>• documenting the findings as part of a larger programme of research into how Schweitzer's archive and its activation can inform the future practice of reminiscence theatre (<b>Lilley and Derbyshire</b>, 2013; and see <a href="http://reminiscencetheatrchive.org.uk/index.aspx">http://reminiscencetheatrchive.org.uk/index.aspx</a>)</li> <li>• disseminating good practice internationally.</li> </ul> <p><b>Lilley and Derbyshire</b> (2013) found that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performers of the archived material can make more meaningful connection with elderly audiences if they interact with them, eliciting new narratives;</li> <li>• plays based on the memories of a previous generation are still meaningful, helping audiences recall memories passed on by their parents' generation, thereby linking them to the past as well as to the present and future</li> <li>• the plays not only stimulate memory but offer reassurance that life experiences such as theirs are being preserved and engaged with by younger generations.</li> <li>• archive-based dramas are most effective when combined with new accounts collected from interviews, workshops and post-show reminiscence sessions. Such a lengthy process helps</li> </ul>

create community as much as improve the aesthetic object itself, memory becoming less an individual possession than collectively owned.

- Old age and memory itself are resignified for all participants, becoming associated less with loss and endings than with the continued vitality of a community.

Reusing and expanding the archive also throws its contents into relief, allowing for reinterpretation of events and creating sites of contested memories. Nicholson has criticised some reminiscence theatre practice for 'not really [capturing] the aesthetic of memory, its instability and its contingency, with the effect that the past [is] presented as rational and ordered'; by contrast, **Lilley** and **Derbyshire** have shown how important it is to encourage reflection and re-evaluation of the transcribed memories through engagement with new audiences, new creative practices and new technologies.

**3. References to the research** (REF1 submitted staff in **bold**, \*\*REF2 Outputs)

Lilley, H. & **Derbyshire, H.** (2013). Re-performing Memories: Using The Reminiscence Theatre Archive as a Resource for new Intergenerational Work. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 4(2). 101-205. **DOI:** 10.1386/jaah.4.2.191\_1

This article appears in a double-blind peer-reviewed international journal.

The extent and value of the Reminiscence Theatre Archive are detailed in Jackson, A. (2013). Mapping the archives: 3. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18(1), 58–61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2012.756173>

**4. Details of the impact**

Reminiscence theatre has two primary goals: to improve the mental and physical well-being of senior citizens, especially those with dementia, and to promote intergenerational dialogue.

ARTA achieved these through:

1. Activating the Reminiscence Theatre Archive, developing a new model and performing in sheltered housing units and to the general public
2. Enhancing relationships between the elderly people themselves, and with their wardens and carers, and with the young volunteers
3. Creating a sustainable and active future for the Archive
4. Sharing methodology and influencing practice.

**1. Activating the Reminiscence Theatre Archive**

The project has created a new model of reminiscence theatre by proving that archive material can be used instead of live interviews. It has learned what the strengths and weaknesses of this approach are and found creative ways to deal with problems. After testing out the material with practitioners and the general public, the company toured the work to 5 sheltered housing units in Woolwich and Greenwich (2012/13), performing and engaging in reminiscence sessions with the elderly audience. Extracts from the shows are available at [http://reminiscencetheatrearchive.org.uk/category\\_idtxt\\_topics.aspx](http://reminiscencetheatrearchive.org.uk/category_idtxt_topics.aspx)

**2. Enhancing relationships**

Both the young people and the elderly spectators described the positive impact of intergenerational conversation on their knowledge of the past and understanding of present social situations; residential wardens learnt more about their residents, enabling enhanced person-centred care; and the elderly residents were able to share fresh memories in a structured and thoughtful environment. The sessions provided valuable reassurance to elderly residents that the social realities of their generation are not forgotten. The centrality of the elderly residents' experience also reenergises their relationships with fellow residents, family carers and wardens.

**3. Sustaining the archive**

ARTA is one of the very few large-scale reminiscence theatre projects in the country, and the only active one in the London area. It is a sustained project which has successfully engaged 100 marginalised older people, 13 young volunteers and over 200 others including academics and practitioners, since it started formally in 2012. A 'Friends of the Archive' programme is engaging the public in the archive, and in the process of preserving it by training local and international volunteers in archiving practices such as transcription and digitising.

**4. Sharing methodology and influencing practice**

Through research dissemination, training programmes and international networks, the value of the archive and the methodologies it documents have had an impact on the practice of reminiscence theatre, care of elderly sheltered housing residents and dementia care programmes.

- **Archive Symposium** (2012) brought together local community members who have connections to the archive material either as interviewees or family members; theatre practitioners, archivists and oral historians; academics from 10 UK Universities; and representatives from international reminiscence organisations. The event created space for exchange between those with first-hand knowledge of the material and methods, those with an academic interest in the material and those looking to develop existing care of the elderly.
- **International training events** (2012/13) are influencing current practice in reminiscence and dementia care. A new training course and apprenticeship scheme in Reminiscence Arts in Dementia Care has been developed for the European Reminiscence Network, hosted at the University Drama programme's dedicated facilities (October 2012). 12 community arts practitioners were enabled to devise new methods for engaging dementia sufferers and their carers in arts activities, and spent 6 weeks working with staff and elderly people with dementia. This pilot scheme is part of a 10-country partnership supported by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme (Grundtvig Adult Learning) with a view to extending and sharing the European Reminiscence Network's experience of running a two-year project, "Remembering Together: Reminiscence Training". Following the pilot's success, Lilley and Schweitzer hosted a second training event (Jan 2013) for 15 dementia care workers from across Europe.
- **Invitations to share practice through conferences**, including Lilley at TaPRA (Sept 2012) and Prague's European Reminiscence Network meeting (Nov 2012). The Reminiscence Theatre Archive Company was invited to perform at events hosted by the Memories of War Archive (Sept and Dec 2012) and at 'Performing the Collection: action and reaction in taxonomic space', National Maritime Museum and Stephen Lawrence Gallery, University of Greenwich (Nov 2012).
- The [open access ARTA website](#) is key to dissemination. Representative archive materials are available online, organised in a way that reflects the findings of **Lilley** and **Derbyshire**, with suggestions for how to use them effectively and opportunities for user feedback. The resource's multi-disciplinary focus on oral history, reminiscence theatre methodology and dementia care work has no equivalent and provides a much needed resource that enhances the study of applied drama, arts and health and community theatre practice.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 1 Director European Reminiscence Network, donor of Reminiscence Theatre Archive
- 2 Manager of Sam Manners House
- 3 Manager of Minnie Bennet House
- 4 Manager of Bill Walden House
- 5 Volunteer of the Reminiscence Theatre