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How can Applied Theatre projects support the wellbeing and resilience of young people within secondary schools?

It is often young people who experience social change in the most direct and brutal way.

John Retallack, playwright
(Retallack, 2007: 10)







IN THIS SESSION WE WILL BEGIN TO:

Explore the Resilience Framework in relation to a (very gentle) drama exercise

Explore what is meant by the term Applied Theatre using 'Brainstorm' as one example of applied arts practice

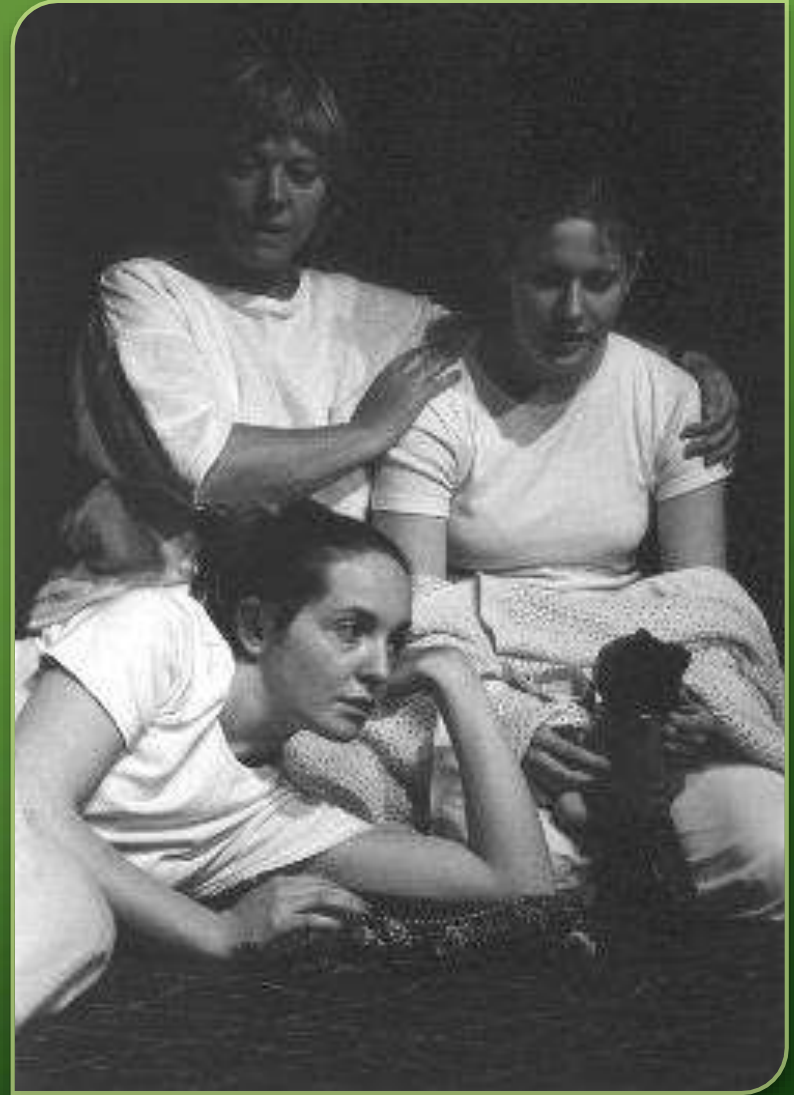
Discuss ways in which Applied Theatre and the Academic Resilience Approach connect to one another

Consider the ways in which we could use the Resilience Framework in creative subjects in educational settings



LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME:

- Artist educator/playwright/facilitator/secondary school teacher/mum
- Ran my own theatre company – theatre applied to a particular context: 'W@rn'
- MA in Applied Theatre (or Theatre: applied)
- Interested in connections between theatre/drama and ARA – how they inform one another; how they might work together



Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 www.boingboing.org.uk

	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
		Help child/YP understand their place in the world		Being brave	
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Solving problems	Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
		Keep relationships going			
	Being safe	The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Access & transport	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope		Fostering their interests	
		Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Calming down & self-soothing
	Responsibilities & obligations				
	Exercise and fresh air	Focus on good times and places	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Enough sleep	Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Lean on others when necessary	
	Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new	Develop life skills	Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Being free from prejudice & discrimination	Make friends and mix with other children/YPs			
NOBLE TRUTHS					
ACCEPTING		CONSERVING	COMMITMENT		ENLISTING

WEB OF CONNECTIONS – PURPOSE, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ADAPTATIONS:

- In your groups please discuss the possible learning outcomes from the following exercise and how it might be useful in the context of your own work. If relevant connect the exercise to some of the categories from the resilience matrix.
- To create points of connection - belonging: what we have in common; accepting and listening; core self – knowing self
- Inclusive in a variety of settings – belonging: hospitals/clinics, elders, children, mental health and well-being
- Get to know one another in a non-confrontational way – learning: how to play collaboratively; coping: following the rules of the game, having a laugh
- To create a collaborative art work in short space of time - belonging – working together; core self – understanding others, know self, foster talents



WHY ARE DEFINITIONS IMPORTANT?

Applied Theatre

Applied theatre is perhaps most helpfully regarded not as an academic discipline nor as a specific set of dramatic methods but as a discursive practice – as a way of conceptualising and interpreting theatrical and cultural practices that are motivated by the desire to make a difference in the world (Nicholson)

Ethics and Values (Systems Theory)

- How we practice – how to create a fair and inclusive space; to whom the drama might be ‘applied’ to, power relationships
- What we practice – content, exercises, framing, recording – negotiate or impose?
- Why we practice – intentions: liberate or dominate (not really binary – complex!) Whose social and political values does the application of theatre making serve and represent?

RESILIENCE: TWO DEFINITIONS

‘In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.’ (Dr Michael Ungar)

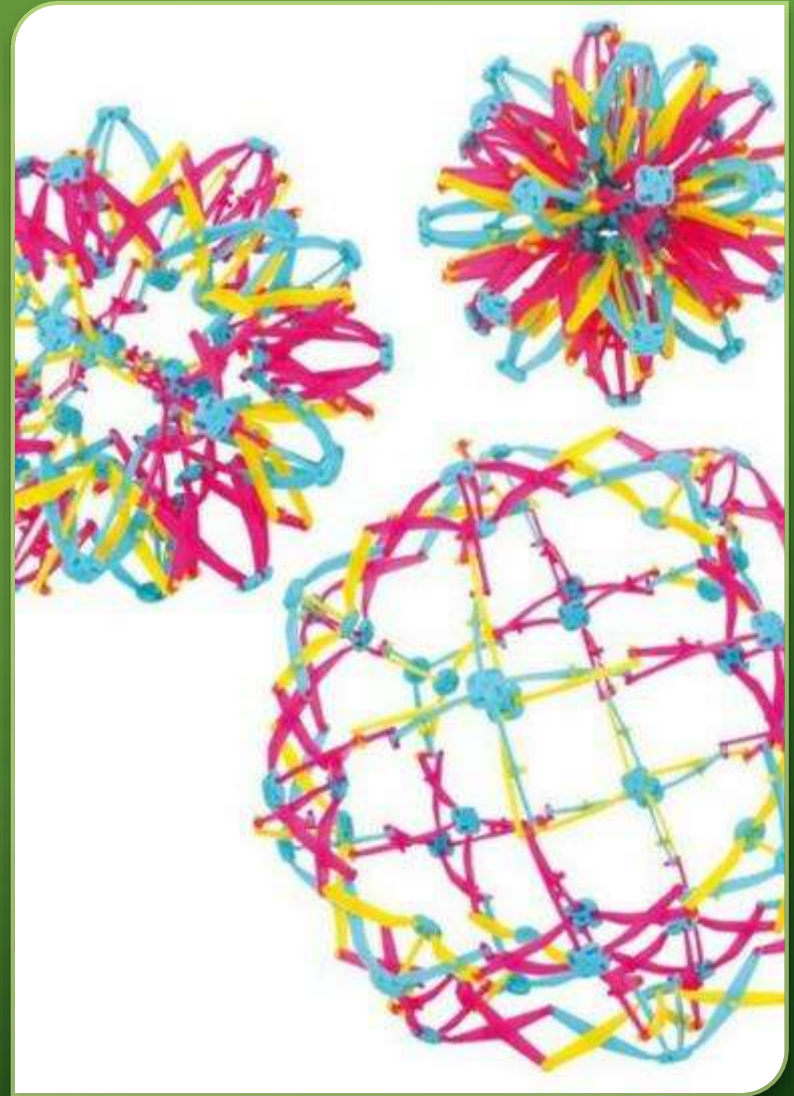
‘The kinds of things we need to make happen (e.g. events, parenting strategies, relationships, resources) to help children manage life when it’s tough. Plus ways of thinking and acting that we need ourselves if we want to make things better for children.’ (Aumann & Hart, 2009, p. 11)

IN PRACTICE

The theatre has to go out into the community, know the people, know its community, feed that back into the work they make and *you change the work you make because of the people*. And therefore the people want to come and see it, *because you're not putting it on for their good*, you're putting it on because it's got them in it. Then that feeds the people because the people have seen something amazing and then it keeps doing this figure of 8.

Stella Duffy OBE writer and theatremaker.

Co-director of the Fun Palaces campaign for cultural democracy



ABOUT THE ORIGINAL 'BRAINSTORM'

- Inter-generational – work with university researchers
- Young people drawn from the local area (Islington – diverse and unequal area) and referred by teachers, youth workers and social workers
- It is art not social work – young people are treated as theatre makers, own experience counts; performed in theatres and filmed for TV.
- Script and lessons freely available (or they were!) so work is widely disseminated
- Research process –
 - young people learn about themselves and their brain
 - Separate study suggests watching the play affected audience attitudes towards youth crime

BRAINSTORM



ACADEMIC RESILIENCE APPROACH AND APPLIED THEATRE

‘WHAT DO THEY HAVE IN COMMON?’

DISCUSS

APPLIED THEATRE

Social inequality can refer to unequal distribution of resources, power, inequality of opportunity and also encompasses recognition/identity. A social inequalities perspective challenges the notion that inequality is inevitable and seeks to interrogate the way power works... [to] create change that creates healthier more connected communities (Ledwith, 2016: 2-3)

NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION

1. Adapting: making austerity more liveable and workable
2. Challenging: speaking or acting against austerity
3. Imagining: becoming advocates of alternatives and wider structural change

(NEF, 2018)

IN PRACTICE: APPLIED THEATRE & RESILIENCE

- Relational
- Creative
- Socially engaged theatre which facilitates and creates spaces to re-integrate into society
- Participants as co-creators of theatre and research
- Support participants to (re)gain control over how they are represented in mainstream media and popular culture
- Facilitate conversations and communication based on common values
- Researcher-in-residence



HOW CAN APPLIED THEATRE PROJECTS SUPPORT THE WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

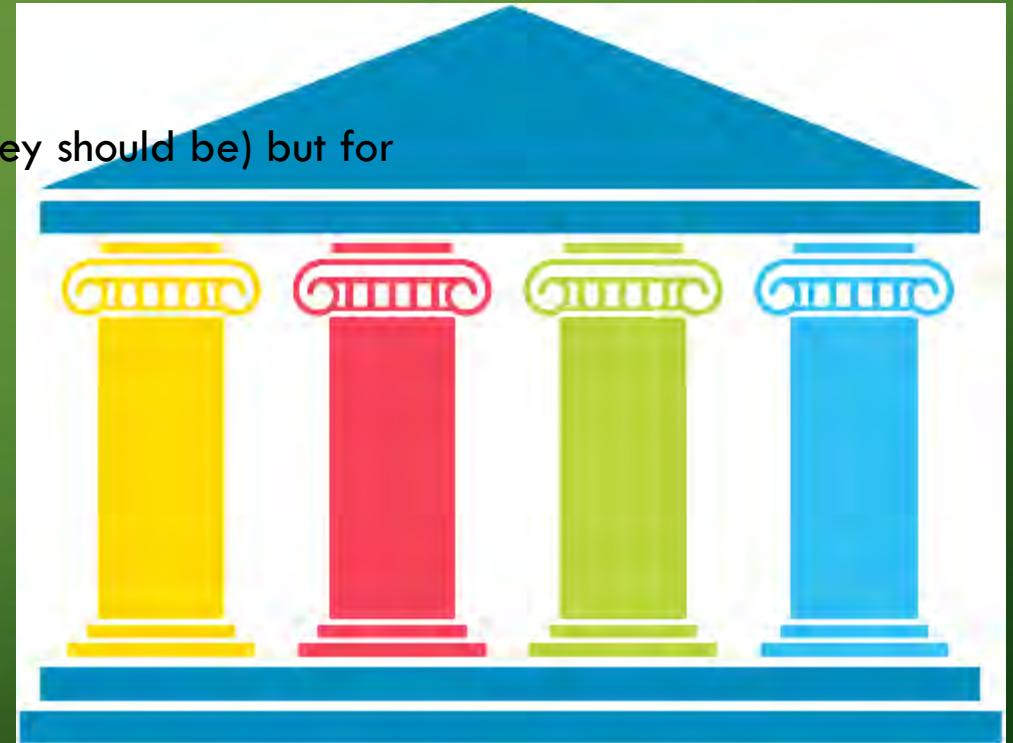
4 pillars of Education – Dylan Williams

Categories can be disputed and each one interrogated (and they should be) but for today:

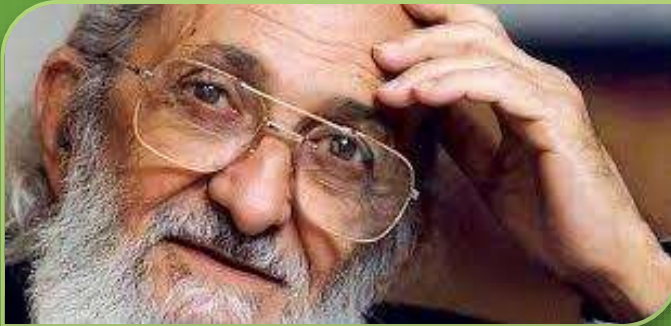
- i. Personal empowerment
- ii. Preparation for citizenship
- iii. Cultural transmission

and creation

- iv. Preparation for work



PAULO FREIRE - LIBERATING PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS



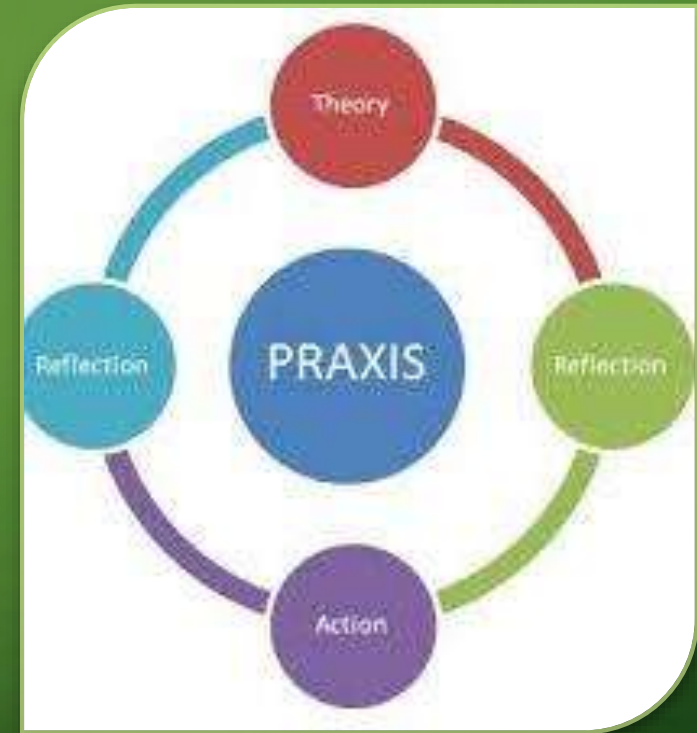
LIBERATING PRACTICE V. BANKING METHOD

facilitator posing problems and raising questions generated by the students

(generative themes)

HEAVILY INFLUENCED AUGUSTO BOAL (GCSE)

Major influence on drama teaching and teacher training



Reflection and action cycle = praxis

WHAT IS HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

- World Health Organisation definition:

“A state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

- Problematic because it ignores geo-politics and ecology
- Biggest factor in health and wellbeing is poverty



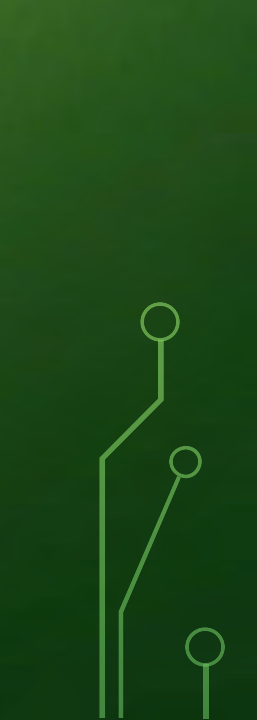
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH





GOING FORWARD

Using the Risk Table (Rifkin, 2010) to assist you, how might you use the Resilience Framework in:

- **Creative subjects**
 - **Educational settings**
 - **Research**
 - **Your own practice?**
- 
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SOME (CAUTIOUS) CONCLUSIONS AND A DREAM

As an artist facilitator I advocate a universal practice grounded in Freire's social pedagogy and social justice perspective, involving both scientific and aesthetic exploration and experimentation:

- Has to be aesthetically pleasing and truly theatrical to get ideas across
- Generative: questions from young people – explore the possibilities together there isn't one message/answer
- Challenge the diminishing liminal space for arts – thinking, dreaming, wondering, imagining
- Working with ARA in a whole school approach; research involving the arts
- Performance to an invited audience - start conversations e.g. between parents and children to support resilience in their relationships

SELECT THEATRE COMPANIES

- <http://www.companythree.co.uk/brainstorm#brainstorm-1>
- <https://www.fallenangelsdancetheatre.co.uk/>
- <https://www.outboxtheatre.com/about>
- <https://graeae.org/>
- <https://www.thepaperbirds.com/>
- <https://www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk/>
- Most theatres and theatre companies now have outreach community/educational programmes
- The following (amongst others) offer qualifications in Applied Theatre: RCSSD, Goldsmiths, London Southbank University, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, University of Leeds, Birmingham City University

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