Changing Practice?
– exploring the potential contribution of applied theatre training to capacity building for NGO workers in China

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Abstract

There has been a rapid growth in civil society in China, as a consequence of economic reform and the opportunities created by political reform in the early nineties. In the last 20 years, the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has significantly expanded. The increasing workforce in the field creates a demand for training. Research shows that more than 10,000 NGO workers attend different kinds of courses for capacity building each year in China. With this background, applied theatre has been introduced, as one approach to training, into the NGO capacity building program in China. However, there is lack of research on how applied theatre training can contribute to the profession of NGO workers. This study aims to investigate its impact on NGO workers’ capacity building through designing, implementing and analysing an applied theatre training workshop.

This study adopts a blend of reflective practitioner research and action research as methodology centring on an applied theatre training workshop with a group of Chinese NGO workers. It draws from adult education literature in the area of experiential theories of adult learning and pedagogy, and the growing literature related to applied theatre and drama education. Both of these literatures raise theoretical issues concerning holistic learning and mindful and reflective practice, and a wide range of relevant categorisations of learning paradigms, fields and modes is canvassed. The research addresses the following key questions raised initially from previous practice:

Does applied theatre training contribute to capacity building for NGO workers in China? If so, how, and what factors might support or inhibit its effective application?

As a practitioner-researcher, I designed and conducted a series of workshops with a group of 24 NGO workers in southern China over ten weeks from March to May in 2011, which were divided into three phases. Based on my understanding of the potential application of applied theatre in Chinese NGOs according to my previous field experience, I selected
three genres (Theatre of the Oppressed, Process Drama and Participatory Theatre) to introduce in this training workshop, one in each phase. A number of qualitative data collection procedures, which served both teaching and research purposes, were employed at different periods of time. The data sets were coded and analysed through mixed methods and coding, entailing some aspects of a grounded theory approach, as well as strategies like content and narrative analysis. This unusually diverse range of strategies was used in order to track and make sense of the multiple levels of meaning emerging from participants’ verbal and nonverbal data generated in the study.

The study identifies three categories of learner based on different levels of prior applied theatre experience. It reveals the distinct differences in the participants’ response to applied theatre learning, according to their previous experience and the explicit benefits to the participants’ personal, pedagogical and reflective learning (i.e. generic learnings). It seeks to deconstruct the applied theatre training workshop experience in order to explore different kinds of learning generated and their relationship to each other in the process. On examining the participants’ learning in the experience by using John Heron’s experiential learning model, it emerged that a blend of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing/learning in applied theatre learning experience had become embedded. Each kind of knowing/learning built a specific kind of capacity to learn which strongly supported the learner’s construction of three different kinds of generic learning.

The findings underpin that the accumulation of applied theatre learning experience for developing frames of reference was significant in the growth of an applied theatre practitioner. The study goes on to map how the generic learning generated in the training workshop plays the most critical role in enhancing the learner’s agency, both personal and professional, in order to sustain their practice and learning in applied theatre and improve their capacity as NGO workers. It also suggests that the facilitator’s own theory and understanding of practice need to be carefully considered, planned for and managed within the training process.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

I. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

III. the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

____________________________________
Yi-Man AU
Dedication

To my beloved parents for their endless care and love, and for giving me freedom to grow into the person I want to be.
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I wish to express my sincere appreciation to those who have contributed to this thesis and have supported me in one way or another during this long, challenging and amazing journey.

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Chapter One   Introduction

This is an introductory chapter where I indicate the relevance and importance of conducting this study as well as my appropriate positioning and experience to investigate Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) capacity building through applied theatre training. The development of NGOs and the current NGO training scene in China is described, and is followed by a review of the notion of capacity building in NGO literature. I also state the aims and rationale of the overall project and the research questions. This chapter closes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Starting my journey in China

I knew nothing about Chinese NGOs until my first job in China. As an experienced applied theatre practitioner from Hong Kong, in 2004 I co-facilitated a 1-day Forum Theatre workshop in Beijing with a group of NGO workers from different provinces organised by Oxfam Hong Kong (OHK). Participants in small groups created dramas on development issues. We chose one out of them to demonstrate a Forum Theatre process. The workshop was very successful and received much positive feedback from participants as well as the organiser. At that time, OHK had newly set up a team in China to promote Development Education through NGOs. We found that there are many compatible elements between development education and applied theatre. Both value the qualities of participation, interaction, experiential learning, expression, dialogue and action. Since then, OHK has become an important supporter of the promotion of applied theatre in China. In five years, there were six Training-the-Trainer (TtT) workshops on applied theatre and I was involved in five of them. Another seven projects organised by NGO partners included applied theatre techniques as part of the training. Three People’s Theatre Forums were funded. In 2007, OHK supported 30 NGO workers from China to attend the International Drama and Education Association’s World Congress held in Hong Kong.
Apart from the collaboration with OHK, I have also been regularly invited by other local or international organizations to work with Chinese NGO workers. The workshops lasted from one to four days. I usually worked for nation-wide training programs for all NGOs, whereas sometimes I worked for an individual NGO as part of its professional development. In the past six years, I conducted around 18 TtT workshops in China and worked with nearly 450 NGO workers from different NGOs. Some participants are still closely in touch with me and active in applying theatre in their works. They are keen on further learning and seek whatever opportunities to gain more understanding. However, I have lost contact with most of them and I am not sure if they still use applied theatre in their work or whether its application is effective.

Since 2004, the journey in China has been ongoing. Applied theatre training continues to be organized in the NGO field. The techniques now are not only integrated into the work on development education, but are applied in different aspects of the field. Several applied theatre groups are established and applied theatre practitioners invited from overseas to provide training for the local communities. Some NGOs have even started to train their clients to use applied theatre.

Questions raised from my journey
Unlike other places in Asia such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan where the participants of applied theatre workshops come mainly from a teaching background, in mainland China NGO workers are the dominant group of participants because of the funding sources. They are keen to learn any new skills for their work. They treat the training as a capacity building opportunity. As one of the earliest applied theatre practitioners working in China, I began to wonder: does applied theatre training contribute to capacity building for NGO workers? If so, how, and what factors might support or inhibit its effective application?
1.2 The background of the research

1.2.1 NGO in China

NGO is a term imported from the west to China. It first appeared in a document of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. Because of the different natures, boundaries and orientations of NGOs, it lacks a unified definition in the field but NGOs ‘generally share the common properties of being non-governmental, non-commercial, public and voluntary’ (Wang & Liu, 2009:6).

The contemporary discourse of Chinese NGOs started in the mid-eighties. Although the term NGO is used in the early stage there are also many other terms used in the field dependent on the legal status and the emphasis of the organisations. Chan (2005:24) mentioned that legally established NGOs exist in China in the form of ‘registered intermediate organisations’. There are three types of these registered groups called ‘social organisations’ (shehui tuanti), ‘non-governmental non-profit units’ (minban feiqiyedanwei), and ‘foundations’ (jijin hui). Many people call unregistered NGOs ‘grassroots NGOs’ to highlight their bottom-up nature. NPO (non-profit organization) and volunteering group are also other popular terms. In recent years, the term ‘philanthropic organisation’ has growing currency in the field partly in order to increase the acceptability of public and entrepreneurial sponsors.

The multiple nomenclature draws attention to the confusing and sensitive identities of NGOs in China. Although there were different names and purposes involved, in this thesis to assist the focus of the discussion I will employ NGO as a general term to refer to the field my research participants were working in. Without simplifying the situation, I will carefully consider how the legal status and the particular emphasis of organisations affect the people involved in this complex field.

1.2.2 Development of NGOs in China

Starting from the late 1970s, China has dramatically changed its economic structure by
expanding the scope of markets and private ownership. Howell (1995) mentions the rapid changes in the economy that have set in motion a process of social transformation. This creates a new landscape of wealth distribution, which has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In addition, the rapid economic growth entails further layoffs, the downsizing of government bureaucracy and the shedding of more government functions (Saich, 2000:128). The functions of traditional work units have been eroded. These economic reforms have brought even more social problems like unemployment, inequality, and increased pollution, but at the same time have greatly reduced the state’s welfare commitment. This has generated the need to expand the social organisation sector to take on these functions on behalf of society. On the other hand, the general improvement in living standards, the time and space allowed for private and social lives are also another force that has created opportunities for NGOs to develop.

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has decided that ‘small government, big society’ would be a trend in its political reform. Social organisations would be encouraged to play a more active role in society. Furthermore, the NGO forum at the UN International Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 introduced to the general public the Western concept of the NGO. NGOs predominantly arose during the latter half of the 20th century and attracted broad attention (Wang & Liu, 2009). The first NGO Research Centre was set up at Tsinghua University in 1998. The International Conference on the Non-Profit Sector and China’s Development was held in the following year. Different areas opening up favoured the development of a burgeoning NGO sector. Within a decade, the number of registered NGOs has significantly expanded from 107,304 in 1991 to 446,000 in 2010 (official website of the Ministry of Civil Affairs: www.chinanpo.gov.cn). According to Wang & Liu (2009:13), ‘the various social activities found within the myriad forms of NGOs have reached an overall size of approximately 3 millions’. Deng (2010:188) mentions that the estimated number of unregistered NGOs in the country in 2010 may be around 1-1.5 millions.

However, the Chinese government did not really allow NGOs to expand freely. Especially, after the Democracy Movement in Tiananmen Square, it took the view that NGOs could
become an independent force that could threaten the regime (Chan, 2005). The government therefore imposed strict legal and administrative controls over NGOs. According to Chan, the 1998 regulation stipulates that only one organisation of its kind is allowed to register within the same administrative region. This has largely limited the growth of social organisations in China, including NGOs. The regulation also stipulates a practice of ‘dual supervision’ in which each organisation must find a relevant professional management unit that will be its ‘business supervisory unit’ and then it must register with the civil affairs departments at different levels. This high bar registration system makes it very difficult for a large number of NGOs to gain legal status and so they remain unregistered, where they can only be a subsidiary to the registered social organisations. Although the government relaxed the legal and administrative controls on some of the service-oriented NGOs, the advocacy groups and NGOs working in sensitive areas such as labour or human rights issues are still under close scrutiny and some of them suppressed.

Apart from the difficulty with registration, the lack of funding and capacities are another two main predicaments facing the development of NGOs in China. Chinese NGOs are highly reliant on a government subsidy or foreign funding. However, the government subsidy will only go to the registered NGOs or their subsidiaries. As the government has been withdrawing its financial commitment to social organisations, registered NGOs have turned to the outside sources. The financial situation is even worse for the unregistered and grassroots NGOs due to a lack of bargaining power to compete with registered or bigger NGOs. Chan (2005) also remarks on the serious difficulties for NGOs in raising donations from communities that lack trust and public-spiritedness, while the state does not provide tax deductions or other institutional support that would encourage donations. Although the scene is changing following the 2004 Regulations on Foundation Administration which allowed the setup of private foundations to increase local funding sources for NGOs, resources to many NGOs are still limited. The unstable financial sources make Chinese NGOs put most of their efforts into striving for survival.

Lack of capacities is another major constraint on the development of Chinese NGOs.
There is widespread criticism of NGOs’ deficiencies in resource mobilization, organisation and management skills, coordination and crisis response capacity. NGO is a new profession in China and there is no prior reference point about how to run a social organisation. According to Wang & Liu (2009), investigations show that in NGO societies and foundations more than 90% of employees have not received professional training. Furthermore, the general wage level is too low to attract talented professionals entering the field. This hinders NGOs from providing quality service to the public and makes it difficult to gain credibility for their healthy development.

1.2.3 NGO capacity building in China

According to one of leading Chinese NGO scholars, Professor Jiang-gang Zhu (interview, 2011), starting from the late 90s, there were three stages of development of NGO capacity building in China. The first was the directly imported stage. The training just simply duplicated the courses from Western NGOs. The second was the critical and reflective stage. NGOs found that the ‘imported methods’ were not fully fit and appropriate for local practices and started to search for their own ways of capacity building. The third was the adaptation and creation stage. Local NGOs tried to localise the western courses as well as creating new courses for capacity building.

Now, there are generally two channels of training for NGO workers: first, accredited degree courses provided by universities; second, non-accredited courses/workshops provided by local and/or international NGOs. Because of the high prerequisites and the cost, only an elite few can get training via the first channel. For most NGOs, the second channel has become their main source for training opportunities. The first local NGO training organisation was founded in 1998 in Beijing. Since then, there have been an increasing number of foundations that have expanded their support for capacity building organisations and programs. In the last 14 years, about 8-9 NGO Support Organisations were set up in different cities to provide trainings (Zhu, interview, 2011).

In general, the training content is focused on the organisational level. Recently, a textbook on capacity building, published by the National Management of Social Organisations
Bureau (國家民間組織管理局) in 2011, identifies the capacities of social organisations as including the abilities for internal governance, strategic management, fundraising, financial management, human resources management (including staff and volunteer management), social marketing and public relations, project management and creditability management. Reviewing the course contents of different NGO Support Organisations, their programs do cover a large proportion of these management-driven capacity building aims. For the training at an individual level, some organisations will offer training courses in facilitation skills and leadership training to organisational heads. Although there are a few programs in recent years that have tried to provide relatively longer training to individuals, at the time of conducting the field work in China the courses are still predominantly short-term, from a few hours to a week’s duration. These one-off courses usually have no follow-up or any continuous relationship between the trainers and trainees afterwards.

On considering the practices in China, it appears that the course designs always reflect the rationales of training providers. Based on reviewing the subjects of the courses provided by most training organisations, the first priority is to help NGOs to survive. They think good management and accountability are the keys to sustain the organisation and get support from foundations and the public. Therefore, their training programs tend to focus on the organisational level. Some are concerned to strengthen particular beliefs and values of NGOs in order to build a stable civil society in China. Their training content then will include quite a considerable amount of exploration of the development of the NGO and its function in society. Apart from these priorities, the training sometimes will be directed by the funders’ agendas. For example, the first applied theatre workshop I conducted in China was employed by OHK to introduce participatory strategies for promoting development education.

Since the cost of staff training is usually not covered by funding, a lack of resources makes it very difficult for the individual NGO to design and create their own training program. In 2009, I interviewed 30 NGOs in Beijing, Kunming and Guangzhou; almost all organisations relied on external training. Furthermore, the organisations’ heads normally
have no concrete plan for internal training. For them, ‘training’ meant informal mentoring and learning by doing. Staff very seldom receive well-planned and systematic individual training and sometimes not even immediate support. So, they can mainly rely for their professional growth on independent learning.

I understand the urge to survive among NGOs and the urge to strengthen civil society are core concerns in this developmental stage in China. However, I wonder to what extent the dominant courses on teaching about how to run an efficient social organisation can really help to nurture a person working in the field? So, how is an individual NGO worker to maintain good practice, when they are working in such an unstable internal and external (political and social) situation that lacks training and support?

Although there are extensive reports on Chinese NGOs starting from mid-1990s, a significant recent literature reflects efforts to understand Chinese NGOs from the perspective of political science or sociology. These studies always focus on a state or organisational level, for example, exploring state-society relations and Chinese modern organisations, exploring the relationship between civil participation and NGO development, exploring the development of NGO and its potential influence to democratization in China. A number of scholars even mention capacity building as one of the major difficulties for the Chinese NGOs, because the impact of capacity building is still poorly documented.

Capacity building is an import concept in China. Though Chinese NGOs are seeking ways for localised practice, they do recognise the importance of capacity building. Because of the relative absence of discussion on this notion, I think it is useful to explore the concept of capacity building from Western literature in order to gain more understanding to facilitate further discussion.

**1.2.4 Notion of capacity building**

The language of ‘capacity building’ has become ubiquitous among international funding agencies over the past 15 years, referring to both government and non-governmental
organizations (Hartwig et al., 2008). In the NGO literature, the word has gained a ‘buzzword’ status. However, capacity building remains a concept of enormous generality and vagueness (Black, 2003; Eade, 1997; Hartwig et al., 2008; Morgan, 1998). It has become a catch-all concept and there is widespread concern that in encompassing everything it lacks coherence. It can be a process, an outcome, a strategy, a methodology, an approach or an activity. The various definitions of ‘capacity’ range from a description of an external intervention to a discussion of a process of change; from macro to micro level of support, including ‘soft’ (motivational and process) or/and ‘hard’ (technical) elements.

Generally, there are two areas of discussion on capacity building in the literature.

a. The first is about capacity building for the beneficiaries. According to Bolger (2000), over the past fifty years with the dominant role of donor-led projects, inadequate attention to long-term ‘capacity’ issues has resulted in limited sustainable impact in priority areas. Black (2003) criticizes the dominant activities for concentrating mainly on technical and communications interests within the capacity building discourse. This reflects the imperatives of traditional social systems theory, which identified with ‘functionalist’ constructs of capacity building discourse that cannot help to reduce poverty. He points out the minimal representation of emancipatory interests which Habermas describes as ‘the human need for freedom from subjection, oppression and alienation, and this feeds politically liberating activities’ (Moore cited in Black, 2003). Increasingly there is a call for a shift in the conceptualisation of ‘capacity building’ from a mechanistic resource-transfer mentality to a systemic understanding of, and approach to, change. ‘Thus capacity building is an approach to development not something separate from it. It is a response to the multi-dimensional processes of change, not a set of discrete or pre-packaged technical interventions intended to bring about a pre-defined outcome’ (Eade, 1997; original italics). Whatever approaches people choose to build capacity, currently there is more consensus that any capacity building initiative should be: owned and driven by participants; organised yet flexible; long term and process oriented; based on shared values and build on strengths; context specific; enhanced by strong working relationships; and multi-faceted. One of the typical views on development in the field:
Development is about women and men becoming empowered to bring about positive changes in their lives; about personal growth together with public action; about both the process and the outcome of challenging poverty, oppression, and discrimination; and about the realization of human potential through social and economic justice. Above all, it is about the process of transforming lives, and transforming societies.

(Eade and Williams cited in Eade, 1997:24)

There is a classic saying in the field that can be a representative principle to describe this area of capacity building: ‘Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, feed him for a lifetime’. That is why development practitioners have shifted to a more long-lasting, process-oriented and participative way of capacity building.

b. The second capacity building discussion in the literature is about the NGOs themselves. According to James (2002), capacity building in NGOs can occur on four different levels: individual, organisational, inter-organisational and societal. Different levels of intervention can be focused on different goals. Hudock (1999) identifies a range of goals from capacity building as an end in itself to capacity building as means to broader ends. Capacity building will be seen as an end in itself if its initiatives focus on the provision of material and/or technical support which enable NGOs to carry out their immediate goals of project-related services. At the other end of the spectrum are those initiatives which treat NGOs purely as a means to achieving broader ends to create a strong and vibrant democratic culture (Hudock, ibid.:33-34). These levels are inter-linked with each other. You cannot build a more vibrant civil society without developing an effective coalition of organisations. A good inter-organisational relationship relies on different single and strong organisations. This leads ‘organisational development’ to become a popular subject in NGO capacity building interventions. However, organisations consist of people and organisational change is based on individual change. ‘Individual change is at the heart of all capacity-building…’ (James, 2002:6; original italics). Like the analogy illustrated by INTRAC, a leading international NGO training organisation, capacity building intervention is like a drop of rain that lands in water to create the
ripples that flow outward to bring about change on a broader level starting at an individual level. NGO workers whose capacities are enhanced at personal level will have potential power to act on and affect their environment and ultimately may trigger social change. The importance of the individual level of capacity building is also a key for providing better service to the beneficiaries.

From the above review, it may be seen that there is a clearly growing concern with the concept of people-centred development in capacity building either with beneficiaries or with NGOs. The inclusive language, such as cooperation, participation, ownership, empowerment, multi-stakeholder dialogue, power-sharing and democratic processes permeates the capacity building discourse. I think the relationship between the capacity building for the beneficiaries and the capacity building for NGOs is inseparably interconnected.

…development must start in somebody’s sense; development is not about things you see…, it is about the way somebody is developed in their thinking.

(Rural fieldworker, cited in Kaplan, 2000)

So, how can these concepts be put into practice? Can NGO workers build capacities in others that they don’t have themselves? How can they equip themselves with the capacity building for participatory people-centred development?

As change agents working in ‘a risky, murky, messy business, with unpredictable and unquantifiable outcomes, uncertain methodologies, contested objectives, many unintended consequences, little credit to its champions and long time lags’ (Morgan cited in Lusthaus et al., 1999), the capacity required of them is inevitably a big challenge. The personal nature of change is complex but necessary.

[The human dimension of] capacity-building requires shifts in people’s behaviours and attitudes…Capacity-building is as much about letting go of the old as it is about taking on the new. Change, and therefore capacity-building, is not an easy thing for anyone. It engages people’s emotions, their fears and desires…Capacity-building also alters
people’s relationships with others and thereby touches on very sensitive issues of power.

(James, 2002:3)

Foley (2008) mentions critical or analytical thinking as essential to any transformative process. It needs to be allied to something more fundamental and intuitive, some form of sensitivity, inquisitiveness, creativity, or change in consciousness. Morgan (2006) draws from a wider literature review and reading of cases in the NGO field and conceptualises the notion of capacity with the following five core capabilities:

- **the capability to act and self-organise**: to do that with attitudes and self-perceptions which come from a complex blend of motivation, commitment, space, confidence, security, meaning and values and identity;
- **the capability to generate development results**: a. to improve their own capabilities and to help develop the capabilities of those with whom they work, and b. to fulfil programmatic goals;
- **the capability to relate**: to work with other actors within the contexts and to form alliances or/and partnerships;
- **the capability to adapt and self-renew**: to master the change and the adoption of new ideas;
- **the capability to achieve coherence**: to integrate structures inside the system.

(8-16)

Furthermore, Kaplan (2000) calls for two paradigm shifts in capacity building practice: from the tangible to the intangible; from a static model to developmental reading. To develop thinking, there are new abilities that NGO workers need to develop, but not skills that need to be trained. The following are his list of abilities the NGO practitioners need to develop:

- **the ability to find the right question** which may enable an organisation to take the next step on its path of development, **and to hold a question** so that it functions as a stimulus to exploration rather than demanding an immediate solution;
- **the ability to hold the tension generated by ambiguity and uncertainty** rather than seek immediate resolution;
the ability to observe accurately and objectively, to listen deeply, so that invisible realities of the organisation become manifest;
the ability to use metaphor and imagination to overcome the resistance to change, to enable an organisation to see itself afresh, and to stimulate creativity;
the ability to help others to overcome cynicism and despair and to kindle enthusiasm;
integrity, and the ability to generate the trust which alone will allow the organisation and its members to really 'speak' and reveal themselves;
the ability to reflect honestly on one's own interventions, and to enable others to do the same;
the ability to 'feel' into the 'essence' of a situation;
the ability to empathise (not sympathise) so that both compassion and confrontation can be used with integrity in helping an organisation to become unstuck;
the ability to conceptualise, and thus to analyse strategy with intelligence.

Although these capabilities (Morgan) and abilities (Kaplan) are at the organisational level of capacity building, I do believe individual practitioners working in organisations should also develop that same wide range of relevant capacities in order to support the development of their organisations. Kaplan (2000) further suggests that people working in the NGO field are ‘artists of the invisible’.

The more radical response is to consider ourselves 'artists of the invisible', continually having to deal with ambiguity and paradox, uncertainty in the turbulence of change, new and unique situations coming to us from out of a future of which we have had as yet little experience. This more radical response would imply that we need to develop a resourcefulness out of which we can respond, rather than being trained in past solutions, in fixed mindsets, and trained behaviours which replicate particular patterns and understandings instead of freeing us to respond uniquely to unique situations.

Capacity-building is an art, not a science (CDRA, 1995). Capacity development is likely to be a complex voyage of personal and collective discovery that evolves over time.
1.3 Research methodology

Concerning the demand in the NGO literature mentioned above for increased capacities in people-centred development, the organisational level can only make an inadequate response. As I said earlier, an organisation consists of individual workers. It is hard for an organisation to have all these democratic and participative values without having their staffs equipped with the abilities to learn, to reflect, to engage, to feel and to imagine etc. These discrepancies are part of the scene that is happening in Chinese NGOs, which pay less attention to the discussion about individual workers’ capacity building. In my experience as an applied theatre practitioner, coming in to China to conduct training workshops with NGO workers, it became apparent that applied theatre shares many similar values with a people-centred approach in NGO capacity building. Applied theatre has established practices in which exploring the potential for human change is possible through structuring a dialogic, open, aesthetic, interactive and reflective space to create multiple embodied experiences for participants (Edmiston, 1992; Neelands, 2011; Nicholson, 2005; Taylor 2000; Verriour, 1984). Therefore, I think there should be a place for applied theatre to contribute to NGO capacity building. That was the prime reason for starting this study, and led to the formulation of my research question:

**Does applied theatre training contribute to capacity building for NGO workers in China? If so, how, and what factors might support or inhibit its effective application?**

This study centred on an applied theatre training workshop with a group of Chinese NGO workers, and adopted a blend of action research and reflective practitioner research as a methodology. Action research is a ‘participatory process’ that ‘seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others’ (Reason and Bradbury, 2008:4) and that too is part of the essence of applied theatre itself. Through a careful and systematic inquiry guided by action research, I wished to investigate how the design and implementation of an applied theatre training workshop might impact on NGO workers’ learning and capacity building. The training workshop lasted for three months.
and was divided into three phases where one selected genre (Theatre of the Oppressed, Process Drama and Participatory Theatre) was introduced in each phase. The iterative process of doing action research generated various data from phase to phase of the action-based cycles, that informed both the immediate teaching and also provided data for post-project analysis. In addition, as a facilitator I was myself a participant insider in the training process, one whose thoughts and actions strongly influenced the participants’ learning. I have considerable sympathy with Taylor’s view that the applied theatre practitioner should take reflective practice as an ‘on-going and continuous self-inquiry’ (Taylor, 2000) in order to develop their own practice. In order to gain more understanding of my own practice as an applied theatre training facilitator, in this study I also apply reflective practice to document my thoughts underpinning the practice and the depth of my own reflection alongside the teaching method. These were methods that not only prompted continuous self-inquiry but also opened a dialogic, creative and human space for the investigation of NGO workers’ capacities and skills within an applied theatre practice.

This thesis has the intention of making explicit the process of learning about and through applied theatre, in order to contribute both to the practice of NGO capacity building—especially for individual workers—and to show that applied theatre training can provide trainees with an effective pedagogy for human change. Furthermore, through this research, I would like to find out the necessary considerations for planning training workshops as well as mapping my impact on others’ learning.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into twelve chapters. The following is the outline of each chapter.

Chapter Two and Three
These are the literature review chapters that address the two key concepts underpinning this study: adult experiential learning and applied theatre. Chapter two starts with a brief
introduction of adult learning followed by a review of the role of experience as discussed in the adult learning literature. Different prominent models of adult experiential learning have been described in order to construct an integrated understanding of adult experiential learning. This chapter also talks about art as an experience and its implications for adult learning. In chapter three, I firstly research the meanings ascribed to applied theatre in the field; then I explore the aesthetic dimensions of this dramatic form followed by discussions on the potential of applied theatre learning for human development, both in general and in those specific genres selected in this study. This chapter closes with a consideration of the applied theatre training workshop contexts and pedagogical experience which play roles in participants’ learning journey.

Chapter Four
This is the methodology chapter that states my rationale for applying the blended modes of reflective practitioner research and action research. I elaborate my practice-led research framework and attempt to illuminate how the process of conducting practice-led research grounded in action research and reflective practice further developed my professional role as a practitioner-researcher. Last, I state in detail the research design including the rationale and planning for the training workshop, how the data collection, analysis and reflection were incorporated and embedded, and the way in which practice-research tensions were dealt with in the methodology.

Chapter Five
This is the introductory chapter for the data analysis where I outline the structure and the detailed contents and process of the training workshop, describing the particular features of each of the three phases of the training: Theatre of the Oppressed, Process Drama and Participatory Theatre.

Chapter Six to Eight
These are the data analysis chapters which are divided into three parts. Chapter six shows the identification of three categories of learners in the training workshop as well as expounding their learning responses in each phase. Chapter seven explores in detail what
the applied theatre training achieved in terms of techniques, skills, rationale and pedagogy, as generated in each category of learners according to the modes of learning they applied in the process. Chapter eight examines the three distinct kinds of generic learning occurring across all the categories. Two cases will be shared to demonstrate how generic learning influenced individual change in practice after the training.

Chapter Nine
This chapter examines the facilitator’s voice in order to make explicit my personal theory of practice and understanding of applied theatre; and explores the participants’ responses to my pedagogy, and its benefits and challenges in their learning process from their perspectives.

Chapter Ten and Eleven
These are the discussion chapters that reveal the findings of my study. Chapter ten deconstructs the learning experience in the applied theatre training workshop as a whole by applying Heron’s experiential learning theory. In this, four kinds of knowing/learning that are interwoven in the experience are recognized. I analyse the possibilities of each kind of knowing/learning to generate a specific kind of capacity to learn that directly contributes to enhancing generic learning. Chapter eleven further discusses the relationship between the applied theatre learning and the traces of growth of the learners; and how the generic learning contributes to develop learners’ personal and professional agency to sustain their practice and learning.

Chapter Twelve
This is the concluding chapter that starts with my reflection on my personal theory of practice and its influence on the participants’ learning. Then I review the learning from this study and address the learning back to my research question on exploring the potential of applied theatre training workshop to Chinese NGO capacity building. Finally, I provide suggestions about the implications of this study and some possible areas for future research.
Chapter Two  Literature Review: Adult Learning

As I earlier stated, my research interest is to explore the potential of applied theatre training in contributing to NGO workers' capacity building. Last chapter, I explored the main purpose of NGO capacity building being to enhance abilities for better practice. Since there are different levels of capacity building taking place in NGO development, due to the scope of this study I will limit the discussion to the individual level. I will focus on studying the applied theatre training workshops as a training approach to individual NGO workers' development although I am fully aware there are more aspects which should be considered for effective NGO capacity building, such as the social, communal and corporate dimension of this particular type of work, dealing as it does with communities.

For the purposes of this study, I take capacity building to be a learning process which involves the goal of changing one or a mix of skills, knowledge, attitudes or ways of thinking. Therefore, in this chapter, apart from reviewing the literature in applied theatre to examine its contribution to this learning process, I will also investigate the discipline of adult learning theory to help me understand in more depth how adults learn in/from experience. Following this, I will briefly look into some art theories for adding another dimension to understand art as learning experience. These two disciplines will actively play a role in providing a multiple lens to explicate the practice of applied theatre training as an experiential learning process for the NGO workers in their capacity building.

2.1  Adult learning

There is a general consensus about the ‘messiness’ of theorizations of adult learning. In the last three decades, researchers, scholars, theorists and practitioners have found it hard to organise the fragmenting, diversifying and expanding field of adult education (Brookfield, 1986, 1995; Foley, 2004; Elias and Merriam, 2005; Beckett, 2010; Merriam
Despite the plethora of journals, books and research conferences devoted to adult learning across the world, we are very far from a universal understanding of adult learning. Even though warnings are frequently issued that at best only a multitude of context and domain specific theories are likely to result, the energy expended on developing a general theory of adult learning shows no sign of abating.

Reviewing the adult learning literature, I find that it is really easy to get lost in the diverse discussions. Some writers talk about principles, theories, pedagogical procedure, assumptions, concepts, philosophy, and the characteristics of learners. Scholars have been trying to organise the discussion around traditional learning theories, various philosophical foundations, paradigms and lenses. While existing theories such as the andragogical model and its application (Knowles, 1970), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) are undergoing further development, new theories are gaining credence, like embodied learning (Freiler, 2008), somatic learning (Kerka, 2002), neuroandragogy (Wilson, 2006), learning in the digital age (Kidd & Keengwe, 2010) etc. Sometimes, different theories will cross-reference but they do not always build on each other. Fenwick and Tennant (2004) reassess this situation:

The understanding of adult learning processes has undergone dramatic changes over the past few decades. New theories informing adult learning continue to appear, existing theories get attacked or reinvented, while educators must wonder where, amid all the argument, lies the best approach for their practice.

So, in researching and understanding adult learning, people are creating a kind of mosaic for it. Different theories are adding bits and pieces to help us increase knowledge of adult learning. Furthermore, in some contexts there is an amorphous quality to the way adults learn. With this already-complex field of adult learning, there is no one-size-fits-all philosophy or theory of adult education. The choice of a paradigm or a perspective is a matter of which one best reflects the specific practice.
In this thesis, I will narrow my attention down to adult experiential learning since applied theatre learning is fundamentally a kind of experience-based learning. It is helpful to include adult learning in/from experience as a scholarly reference in order to understand the learning in applied theatre. In the following sections, I will first explore the role of experience in adult learning; then review the models of experiential learning and highlight the core notions in the discussion about experiential learning in the field. Applied theatre as an aesthetic learning experience is the core examination of this study; therefore in the section after, I will also bring in a brief discussion of aesthetic learning theory to enrich the currently inadequate discussion about learning in the arts within the mainstream literature of adult experiential learning.

2.1.1 Role of experience for adult learning

Although there is an absence of consensus on adult learning, many will agree ‘experience’ is its defining feature.

If a single concept marks out the learning of adults from the learning of children, it is experience. The pursuit and accumulation of learning, and its refinement, by adults, is usually underpinned by some assumptions about integrity and persistence of experience.

(Beckett, 2010:114)

It was John Dewey’s theory of experience that laid a foundation for the role of experience in learning, which has attracted many adult educators. His classic book, *Experience and Education*, first published in 1938, challenged traditional education which neglected the personal experience possessed in learners’ lives. For him, experience is a successive lifelong event for human growth. The two principles of continuity and interaction combine to frame his theory. The principle of continuity of experience means that every current experience is connected to the past which affects the quality, application and adaptation of the subsequent experiences. The principle of interaction means the learners have to actively interact with their environment and live in a series of situations to let experiences develop. Dewey states (1938:44), ‘[c]ontinuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an
experience’. Dewey reminds us teaching and learning should pay attention to the continuum of the students’ experiences and their social nature. This impacts significantly on advocating experience as the bedrock concept of adult learning.

The role of experience in adult learning is mostly treated as a resource and a stimulus for learning. Lindeman (1926, cited in Brookfield, 1995) is widely quoted in the field when he claims, ‘experience is the adult learner’s living textbook’. As an individual has lived longer (than a child), s/he has already built his/her own way of being and seeing the world, others and himself/herself from past experiences. Another leading adult education scholar, Knowles (1970:44) who was one of the first to shape the subject of adult education by defining his andragogical model of assumptions, states people grow with accumulating ‘an increasing reservoir of experience’ to become their own ‘rich resource for learning’.

These typical sayings about the role of experience in adult education echo Dewey’s theory. It is clearly spelt out that learning is never in isolation from experience but builds on it. Learning is generated when the past and the present experience are linked. Tennant and Pogson (1995) categorize experience as a resource for learning in more detail; for them, there are prior experience, current experience and new experience that together provide input for learning to take place. However, Dewey (1938) notes that there is difference between quality and mis-educative experience. Past experiences can serve as a help or hindrance to current learning. Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993:8) stress:

Earlier experiences which had positive or negative affect stimulate or suppress new leaning. They encourage us to take risks and enter into new territory for exploration or, alternatively, they inhibit our range of operation or ability to respond to opportunities.

Experience as the driving force that will link new ideas to the previous experience, to generate new meaning from old experience or transform it, whereas the habitual ways we draw meaning from experience can be a barrier to learning. Brookfield (1995) argues ‘the quantity or length of experience is not necessarily connected to its richness or intensity’. Therefore, the previous experience of an adult learner is also called first-order experience (Malinen, 2000) as ‘the adult’s unique and autobiographical history which constitutes the
boundary structures for learning’ (61) or internal experience (Moon, 2004), as the sum of prior experiences of a learning subject plays a vital part during the experiential learning process. In the next section, I am going to explore some prominent models and perspectives offered in adult experiential learning literature.

2.2 Adult experiential learning

There is a vast literature on experiential learning (that also uses the terms experience-based learning, practice-based learning, embodied learning) consisting of different focus, concepts, ideologies, practices and teaching strategies. The discussions on learning through experience are based on very diverse contexts such as formal and informal education, and workplace learning, and they generally take place in daily life. Like other adult education theories, adult experiential learning has no unified definition and common understanding. In this literature review, I am neither going to dig into the arguments on the definition of experiential learning nor take learning from experience in a broad sense as a life phenomenon. I limit the scope to the exploration of key models and concepts to describe using experience for learning in order to understand how the main theorists view the relationship between knowledge generation and the powerful process of learning. I will start with the dominant constructivist paradigm of adult experiential learning (Fenwick, 2000) which views learning as being generated through cognitive reflection. As mentioned above, adult experiential learning is a complex phenomenon with an eclectic nature, so this dominant paradigm cannot capture all aspects of experiential learning. Different views in the field each help us to understand a part of ‘the whole’. Some parts overlap with each other; some parts have their distinct focus on understanding experiential learning. Therefore, in order to further understand the subject, I will explore the literature through a range of concepts: learning in experience; situated perspectives; and embodied learning – meaning holistic learning through the body and feelings/emotions. These divisions are not mutually exclusive concepts but they highlight different aspects of adult experiential learning.
2.2.1 Learning through reflection

The work of Dewey is one of the ‘backbone philosophies of reflection’ (Moon, 1999:11). He emphasizes that reflective activity is a fundamental component in experiential learning. He stresses the difference between ‘having’ and ‘knowing’ an experience (cited in Alexander, 1987:128).

In order fully to know about the experience, for Dewey, reflective thought is the key to make it meaningful. He defines it as ‘[a]ctive, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends…’ (1933:9). Reflective activity is an experiential learning loop that generates a ‘proper outcome’ (knowledge) to inform the next action.

The paradigm of learning through reflection on experience is very much rooted in Dewey’s theory. The learner’s intentional and conscious mental activity is the centre of the knowledge generation process. The individual attends an experience and reflects on it thereafter for generalizing concepts which in turn guide new experience. Learning is constructed through this on-going process. The following are typical experiential learning models within this paradigm. I will start with the widely applied Kolb’s model (1984), which is recognized as the basic coordinate of experiential learning. I then follow by discussing another model developed by Boud with his associates (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993) which adds more detail to the consideration of experiential learning under the umbrella of this reflective paradigm. Schön’s notion of reflective practice (1983, 1987), which places great emphasis on adults’ reflective learning through experience, will be explored thereafter.

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle

Kolb (1984) develops a theory to provide a model for describing how people with different learning styles learn by integrating their experiences with reflection. His experiential learning theory defines learning as ‘the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming [experience]’ (ibid.:41). For Kolb, there are
two structural dimensions of the experiential learning process.

This first is a prehension dimension that includes two dialectically opposed modes of grasping experience, one via direct apprehension of immediate concrete experience, the other through indirect comprehension of symbolic representations of experience. The second is a transformation dimension, which includes two dialectically opposed modes of transforming experience, one via intentional reflection, the other via extensional action.

(Kibid.: 58-59)

Kolb believes learning is a tension- and conflict-filled process. Reflection is a cognitive process of analysis. New knowledge, skills and attitudes are achieved through confrontation among four adaptive learning modes – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation; this manifests itself as a four-stage learning cycle. The cycle as a central principle of Kolb’s theory describes how experience is translated into concepts, which then turn out to be a guide for experimentation and the creation of further experience. Firstly, the concrete experience provides the learner with a basis for the second stage, reflective observation, to follow. Thirdly, the reflections and observations are assimilated and the learner gains further insight to consolidate a theory or model from abstract conceptualization. Finally, the theory and model will be tested in active experimentation and new implications will be produced for forthcoming experience.

The four learning modes are also identified as abilities that are polar opposites. Kolb and his associates (2001) mention that learners have to constantly choose which set of abilities should be used in a specific learning situation. They suggest that individuals grasp new information in a number of different ways:

- through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality.
- through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization – thinking about, analyzing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide.
In transforming or processing experience some individuals

- carefully watch others who are involved in the experience and reflect on what happens, or
- jump right in and start doing things.

According to Kolb and his associates (ibid.), ‘the watchers favor reflective observation, whereas the doers favor active experimentation.’ (228).

Learners develop their preferred ways of making choices based on past life experiences, different development stages and the demands of their current environment. The preferred ways will be characterised by patterns and Kolb calls these ‘learning styles’: convergers, divergers, assimilators and accommodators. Kolb believes that knowing one’s own learning preference and capability may help to increase learning effectiveness from experience. His recent work with Yeganeh (2012) has developed a series of deliberate strategies and practices for learners to maximise their abilities to master the process of learning from experience.

Fenwick (2000) highlights the core of Kolb’s theory:

> Experience alone does not teach. Learning happens only when there is reflective thought and internal ‘processing’ of that experience by the learner, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, that links the experience to previous learning, and that transforms the learner’s previous understandings in some way. (19)

**Boud’s reflection model in experiential learning**

Similarly to Kolb, Boud acknowledges it is fundamentally through reflection that experience turns into learning. The model he developed with his colleagues has introduced further enrichments, and originated in two stages of development. In the first stage, Boud working with Keogh and Walker (1985) started with a model focusing on the process of reflection after experience. After applying the model through many practices, in the second stage, Boud and Walker (1990) further extended their model to exploring the action during the experiential process and also include a detailed description of the
learner’s preparation before the experience. Absent in Kolb’s cycle, the model considers the impact of learning derived from the interaction between the learning context and the learner; and also recognises the role of feeling in the reflective process.

As a whole, there are three stages of engagement discussed in the model about the experiences prior, during and after the learning event.

**Prior to the experience**
Concerning the learner's preparation for the experience, the model takes three considerations into account. First, the learner’s personal foundation of experience (i.e. life history, previous learning experience, values, conceptual frameworks, capabilities etc.) and intent (i.e. The goals, reasons, agendas that the learner brings to the event). What the learner brings to the experience has an influence on what is experienced and how it is experienced.

Second, the learning milieu – the social, psychological and material contexts in which the learner is situated. It includes the norms of behaviours, rules and expectations, history and ideologies of the culture in the learning event. ‘Learning is a function of the relationship between the learner and the milieu and is never something determined by one of these elements alone’ (cited in Boud & Walker, 1990:66). A particular milieu informs learner-particular ways of learning, which directly affects the choice of the learner’s response in the experience.

Third, learning skills and strategies that involve learners equipping themselves with physical devices and learning-to-learn skills and strategies that assist them to notice what is happening in the experience and enable them to intervene effectively for maximizing learning.

**During the experience**
It is the learners’ engagement and presence with the milieu that form the kind of learning experience. Through noticing, intervening and reflection-in-action, learners capture their
own concern in the learning according to their intents and previous experience. Noticing is an act of becoming aware of what is happening in and around oneself. It is steered by both the interior and exterior worlds. The internal world within the learner involves attending to the feelings and thoughts which will directly or indirectly influence their actions and interactions. In the external world, the learner is required to pay attention to the nature of the learning event and the elements in it. Intervening ‘refers to any action taken by the learner within the learning situation affecting the learning milieu or the learner’ (ibid.:73). Learning from experience is an active process. The learner will not only notice but also act and interact in the process and generate new potentials in the learning process. Reflection-in-action, taking Schön’s notion on reflective practice, describes the process as working along with noticing and intervening to explain the events and make decisions on the interventions. Although this process is mostly invisible, this ability within the situation will help the learner to recognise the feelings and thoughts which lead to action. These are the three important characteristics that will enhance the learning effectiveness from the experience and collect data for reflection in the next stage.

**After the experience**

This is the very important phase after the learning event when learners can step back and stand aside to overview the whole experience and extract meaning from it. The model suggests the reflective process is not only about thinking, but essentially involves feelings. It contains three elements in this stage of engagement. The first two elements prepare the ground for freer evaluation: returning to experience – recapturing all lived experiences happened in the event; attending to feelings – utilizing the positive feelings and removing obstructive feelings. The third element, re-evaluating experience, involves four aspects of the process. Association is linking the new information to the familiar and already-known concepts. Integration is seeking relationships among the new and the old. Validation is determining the authenticity for the learner of the new ideas and feelings which have resulted. Appropriation is personalizing the new knowledge so that it becomes part of the learner’s own conceptual framework.

Both Kolb’s and Boud’s models give common concern to the learners’ background and
their prior learning capability. The later also extends the consideration to experiential learning in the context of learning. In addition, the mention of the role of feeling in Boud’s model also introduces an attention of the affective domain in the reflection process. However, the main focus of learning generated in experience is still very much reliant on cognitive processing.

**Schön’s Reflective Practice**

Schön (1983, 1987) introduced his notion of reflective practice in the same period as the two models mentioned above. He also recognises the role of reflection playing a central role for learning to occur. Although his study is mainly focused on workplace learning, the applications are not limited to specific professions. Instead, Schön’s ideas of learning through reflection on- and in- action are commonly used in experiential learning beyond the workplace. Reflection-on-action is the general concept in adult experiential learning theories that emphasises thinking about the experience after it has happened (Kolb’s model particularly stands for this). In contrast, reflection-in-action is taking place simultaneously with practice while the practitioner is engaging in the experience. Boud does borrow the concept of reflection-in-action in his model but the learning he describes is still mainly acquired in the reflective process after the learning event.

Experience/Practice is not a static learning event with ‘well-formed structures’. Schön is critical of the technical rationalism based on positivist philosophy, which ‘holds that practitioners are instrumental problem solvers’ (1987:3). Actually, the prior knowledge (familiar theories and techniques) is not always enough to support practice that operates in a complex, uncertain, unique, unstable and value-conflicted situation – i.e. ‘indeterminate zones of practice’ (ibid.:6). Schön (1983:50; 1987:22) identifies there is an implicit nature of knowing-in-action that practitioners carry for handling their daily work spontaneously. It implies theories-in-use that embed practitioners’ values, strategies and assumptions for practice. When the practitioner experiences a surprise that the know-how in action is not fit to use at the action-present, s/he might respond to reflect in the midst of the action. Reflection-in-action will lead to trial-and-error experiments on the spot. Moment by moment testing and adjustments in order to solve an immediate problem
during the action may develop new ways of understanding, reshape the existing knowledge and/or generate new strategies for on-going practice. The capacity to hold ‘a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation’ (1987:31) is the core practice to gain professional expertise. Knowledge is not merely generated after reflecting on experience, but it is also constructed during the experience through reflection-in-action. Schön broadens our perspective of the role of reflection in the relationship between knowing and experience. Reflection is the critical means to keep learning alive, he states:

Through reflection, he can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience.

(1983:61)

The models and concepts discussed above are complementary to each other, leading us to have more holistic understanding of the constructivist paradigm of experiential learning based on learning through reflection.

Applied theatre, a central focus of this study, is a social art form. Its learning is fundamentally related to and influenced by the people involved and the place/context in which the learners are situated. Therefore, exploration of the understanding of experiential learning here is not limited to the individual dimension but involves the situated perspective. This situated concept is also a common alternative argument to learning through reflection in adult learning theories.

2.2.2 Learning in experience: situated perspective

In contrast to the reflective constructivist paradigm whose main concern is on individual internal mental processes of learning, the situated perspective focuses on the socially interactive dimension of learning. Situated theorists perceive learning as the process of co-participation in the context, not just in the heads of individuals. Wilson (1993) makes this point clearly,
In the situated view, experience becomes activity and takes on a much more dynamic relation to learning. Adults no longer learn from experience, they learn in it, as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations.

(75; my italics)

Unlike Boud’s model considering the learner-context interaction as learning experience supplying just the learner’s own reflection, in the situated perspective the knowing and doing is not separable but integral. It does not exclude reflection as part of the learning process but that is not its primary focus. The knowledge is not acquired after the experience as a way of coming to know about it; it is embedded in the action, taking in the social world, and is always under construction. This situated view distinctly highlights the role of context, activity and the importance of social interaction as the powerful experience where learning occurs.

[Situated] cognition exists in the relations among people acting in culturally organized settings; that is, learning and knowing are recursively structured by people interacting with each other in tool-dependent settings to solve real problems in the everyday world.

(ibid.:76; original italics)

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) use the ideas of ‘tools’ and ‘enculturation’ to elaborate the interdependent relationship between situated knowledge and learning. Knowledge is thought of as tools, people have to actively use it in order to fully understand it. People will ‘build an increasingly rich implicit understanding of the world in which they use the tools and of the tools themselves’ (33). Since the tools are framed by the particular accumulated insights of communities, learning is also ‘a process of enculturation’. Learners are:

[g]iven the chance to observe and practice in situ the behavior of members of a culture, people pick up relevant jargon, imitate behavior, and gradually start to act in accordance with its norms.

(ibid.:34)

This implies that in situated cognition, learning is primarily embedded in doing. Situated
learning theorists examine learning in communities and in the process of practice to support the claim. In the following, I will state two main concepts that arise out of the paradigm centring on the notion of situated learning.

**Learning as participation: communities of practices**

Lave and Wenger (1991), drawing on the view of theory of social practice, emphasize learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted; objective forms and systems of activity, on the one hand, and agents’ subjective and intersubjective understandings of them, on the other hand, mutually constitute both the world and its experienced forms. (51)

Within these complex relations, they situate learning by recasting the central characteristics of apprenticeship in terms of legitimate peripheral participation. They assert legitimate peripheral participation is a two-way bridge between the production of knowledgeable skill and identity and the production and reproduction of communities of practice (Lave, 1991). Participation is the basic form of social practice – implying that understanding and experience is inseparable.

According to Lave (ibid.), in order to become a full participant (old-timer) in the community, the newcomer learns through a social process of increasingly centripetal participation based on legitimate access to ongoing practice.

To begin with, newcomers’ legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an ‘observational’ lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the ‘culture of practice’. An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs.

(Lave & Wenger, 1991:95; original italics)

Newcomers develop a changing understanding of practice over a period of time working with fellow community members who have different levels of knowledge and experience
in the subject. Learning how to act, behave and talk as practised experts is the knowledge and skills that are encompassed in the process of constructing an identity as a full practitioner.

Lave and Wenger recognize knowing-through-participation is at the core of learning; the learner structures resources for learning not merely from teaching but from the whole community including near peers and exemplars of mature practice. Community itself is a living curriculum in which the place of knowledge is situated.

**Learning-in-practice through situated perspective**

Other than locating learning as participation in the communities of practice, Beckett and Hager focus their situated view of learning particularly on practice itself in the workplace. For them, practice is a source of learning that is more than learning propositional and/or technical knowledge (knowing that). They (2002) state:

> Practice involves a richer set of phenomena: a body of knowledge, a capacity to make judgments, a sensitivity to intuition, and an awareness of the purpose of the actions are all involved in some way.

(31-32)

They emphasise the important value of practical knowledge (knowing how), learning in action and they also extend it to develop a new epistemology of practice based on an amount of empirical evidence (Beckett, 2000, 2008; Beckett & Hager, 2000, 2002; Hager & Beckett, 1998). They are concerned with the ‘what and how workers learn from experience of work’. Learning in the workplace is highly situational and context-specific. They identify five characteristics of learning in the workplace that are also human general life experience:

1. the contingent (rather than exclusively formal, sustained, and systematic studies);
2. the practical (rather than exclusively the theoretical);
3. the process (rather than exclusively the assimilation of content);
4. the particular (rather than the exclusively universal and a priori as the ‘context’);
and

5. the affective and the social domains (rather than exclusively the cognitive domain).

(Beckett & Hager, 2000:301)

These features define learning in practice as an evolving process which is organic and relational to learn powerfully from interacting with each other. The notion of organic learning values the workers’ whole-person learning experience in practice, not reduced narrowly to cognitive learning. It vividly recognises that the social and affective dimensions of human experience are all intertwined in practice.

The workplace context shapes the learner’s attitudes and values. ‘Our selfhoods are, perhaps, constructed first by each other (that is, socially and emotionally), from which our individuality then flows’ (Beckett, 2000:43).

In daily work, workers construct their practical knowledge through making a number of decisions in ‘hot actions’. Exercising practical judgments as the centrality of experiential learning develops workers’ better know-how for further work. A concept of anticipative action to build a richer notion of know-how is introduced. While doing practice, the worker at the same time is trying to anticipate a certain outcome. It arises through training at work showing not only skill but also confidence.

The confidence to ‘try’ is thus an emergent aspect of our actions, made apparent in our extension of the pattern to new situations. We have made judgement to go on—the very doing-with-confidence which is enacting of the judgements.

(Beckett & Hager, 2002: 72)

The confidence is the human agency that produces, in the Aristotelian term, phronesis (practical wisdom), which is derived from practice and the constant reflexive relationship between know-how and know-why (Beckett, 2000). This learning process equips workers with holistic competence at work. Inferential understanding emerges from judgements-in-context articulating both know-how and know-why while practising at work.
Beckett & Morris (2001) touch on the call for ‘bringing back the body’ to recognise the ontological performance which aligns with Beckett’s notion of organic learning. The embodied action is the fundamental material for learning in practice/experience, which the proponents of both the reflective and situated perspectives omit from their discussion. There are an increasing number of voices in adult learning literature beginning to discuss the affective/embodied/holistic aspect of experiential learning. As these areas are also concerns of applied theatre learning, they must not be neglected here. In the following section, I will focus on two alternative views: a. learning through embodiment; b. holistic learning model (although some elements of both overlap with the reflective and situated views of experiential learning).

2.2.3 Learning through embodiment

In an article called ‘Re-membering: the return of the body to experiential learning’, Michelson (1998) argues that the dualism underlying experiential learning splits the mind from the body; the implications of this include the rejection of ‘the connectedness of knowledge to the body and thus loses sight of knowledge as a product of corporeally and emotionally grounded human life’ (218). Experience is an ongoing reworked process through our emotions, senses and physical responses in addition to cognitive thought to inform our knowledge of self and others. Fenwick (2003) shares a similar view and calls on ‘reclaiming and re-embodying experiential learning’. She and a number of other critics supports Michelson’s argument and point out that the experiential learning theories, to a certain extent, have neglected the central splitting of body and mind in their discourse. ‘The body in some respects has been somehow banished from learning, along with the body’s enmeshments in its social, material and cultural nets of action’ (124). She comments on the mainstream ‘reflection-dependent understandings of experiential learning’ that split doing (experience) and thinking (reflection). Fenwick (ibid.) makes a clear claim: ‘the moment of experiential learning as occurring within action, with and among bodies’ (129, original italics). An embodied approach to experiential learning treats the sensual body as a site for learning instead of being a raw producer of data, where the mind still has the dominant role for generating knowledge.
Experiential learning is undoubtedly embodied in nature. The embodied view stresses we should not place all our emphasis on the rational, cognitive and social mind at the expense of bodily competence as a way of knowing in the experiential learning process. Lawrence (2012) states ‘[w]ithout embodied knowledge, we cannot experience the full range of epistemological possibilities’ (71). In nearly two decades, a number of adult education scholars have drawn attention to embodied experiential learning (Kerka, 2002). Freiler (2008) discusses several directions that the discourse on embodiment in adult education is taking, and reaches a general definition of embodied learning. She says:

…embodiment is defined as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through a felt sense of being-in-the-world. It also involves a sense of connectedness and interdependence through the essence of lived experiencing within one’s complete humanness, both body and mind, in perceiving, interacting, and engaging with the surrounding world. Simply stated, embodied learning involves being attentive to the body and its experiences as a way of knowing. (40)

In recognition of Polanyi’s concept of personal knowledge (1958), embodied learning theorists see the tacit embodied (experiential) knowing as the primal way of accessing knowledge (Lawrence, 2012). The knowing begins in the body before the learner can be consciously aware of it. The foundational construction of learning should not be excluded, otherwise we will miss the intuitive nature that is of central human importance. The growing amount of embodied learning literature shows the increasing understanding of the conceptual insights about the interrelated knowing process through bodily experience. To give some examples: a study of a group of miners at work found a body-place situated relationship (Somerville, 2004), which illustrates the connection of the sensory-rich body during interactions with the environment; Cheville found the importance of the relational aspect in embodied learning through studying a participatory team involvement of a group of women athletes (2001); Freiler (2007) facilitated a series of experiences of embodiment with a group of nursing students, in order to study the process of developing a sense of embodied awareness bridging the traditional boundaries of knowing.
Calling for the return of learning to its roots, Lawrence (2012), editor of a special volume of *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* on contesting the Cartesian dualistic belief of the mind being separate from the body, identifies six major themes from the collection of articles which are representative of the wide scholarly interest in embodied learning. These include:

a. Body wisdom  
b. The role of the body in holistic learning  
c. The role of the body in increasing awareness of self and others  
d. The body in experiential and transformative learning  
e. Body pedagogy  
f. Challenging dominant ideology through decolonization of the body

These studies make explicit the impact of bodily competence in adult experiential learning and promote concern for the enrichment of human learning potential.

### 2.2.4 Holistic learning: Heron’s up-hierarchy model

In addition to the cognitive and situated theorists on adult experiential learning, Heron (1992) considers distinct aspects of feeling and imagination as part of learning through experience. That concept provides an insight for this study. Heron specifically compares his theory to Kolb’s concept. He critiques the pivotal experiential learning theory, which condenses learning ‘simply into experience and reflection; or to experience, reflection and action’. He describes experiential learning as:

...holistic in this significant sense that it integrates within the learning process perception, inner reactions such as emotion and imagination, outward action, and reflection. Its primary dynamic is the movement between the poles of first-hand personal encounter—knowledge by acquaintance—and reflection. Experiential learning is the process of being sensitively tuned in to that encounter and then reflecting on it.

(Heron, 1999:41-42)

For him, what he calls holistic learning is about personhood. He stresses:
Experiential learning, both in theory and practice in current educational method, involves minimal notions of what a whole person is; whereas holistic learning asks critically what this minimal model leaves out.

(ibid.:40)

What are left out in the minimal model, he suggests, are capacities like intuition, psychic and spiritual ability etc. In his ‘theory of personhood’, Heron (1992) describes four primary and interdependent modes of the psyche: affective, imaginal, conceptual and practical. Within each mode, there are two polarities, an individuating function and a participatory function, positioned on a continuum. The affective mode includes feeling and emotions. The imaginal mode contains intuition and imagery. The conceptual mode involves reflection and discrimination. The practical mode consists of action and intention. Both functions of each mode are subconscious, operating within a person’s psyche. The individuating function makes ‘for experience of individual distinctness’ whereas the participatory one makes ‘for experience of unitive interaction with a whole field of being’ (15).

Four ways of knowing—experiential, presentational, propositional and practical—emerge from these four modes of psyche, and they are presented in an up-hierarchy form (Figure 2.1). According to Heron (1992, 1999; Heron & Reason, 2008), experiential knowing is a base touchstone of the other three kinds of knowing. It is a deepened state of awareness which is present and direct face-to-face encounters with person, place, process, thing. It is knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through emotions, empathy and felt resonance. It is primarily connected to the affective mode of the psyche with additional support from the imaginal. Presentational knowing arises from the encounter of experiential knowing, by intuitive grasp of the significance of imaginal patterns that interconnect perceptual imagery. Affirming art as a mode of knowledge, presentational knowing is expressed in various forms of expression like movement, dance, music, drawing, sculpture, story and drama. The imaginal mode of the psyche interacting with the conceptual operates in this kind of knowing. Propositional knowing is the traditional realm of ‘knowledge about’. It is the intellectual knowing of ideas, of theory.
Expressed in verbal or written statement, it has to be consistent with the logic of dialectic. The conceptual and practical modes of the psyche function in this knowing. Practical knowing is knowing how to do something. Interacting between the practical and affective modes of the psyche, it consummates the sequential emergence of the other three ways of knowing.

![Diagram of John Heron's Conceptualization of Ways of Knowing]

**Figure 2.1 John Heron’s Conceptualization of Ways of Knowing.**

Note: This figure (Yorks & Kasl, 2002) is adapted from Feeling and Personhood (Heron, 1992), Figure 2.2 (p.20) and Figure 8.3 (p.174).

No one way of knowing is superior to the others. All four are interrelated with and built on each other. Heron uses a tree as a metaphor for elaborating his up-hierarchy model:

> An up-hierarchy works from below upwards, like a tree with roots, a trunk, branches and fruit. It is not a matter of the higher controlling and ruling the lower, as in down-hierarchy, but of high branching and flowering out of, and bearing the fruit of, the lower.

(Heron, 1999:46)

Experience for Heron is not a ‘noun’ but a ‘verb’. He treats all four ways of knowing as the whole learning experience – from the pre-verbal stage of implicit learning to the most
articulated form of language expression. His model does not account for either the embodied or the situated/contextual aspects of knowing. To a certain extent, like the cognitive theorists, his model is also quite individual-centred. He puts the focus in the learning process on the personal dimension. He does not talk about the situated aspect of learning but he does briefly mention the impact of environment on the experiential knowing. What distinguishes his model is the emphasis on feeling as a primary source of knowing; and he also recognizes presentational knowing through different expressive art forms. Adult education scholars Lyle Yorks and Elizabeth Kasl (2002, 2006) extend research on the role of presentational knowing into an epistemological bridge to foster transformative learning and encourage educators to practise a more holistic pedagogy. Seeley (Seeley & Reason, 2008), in her thesis of an extended epistemology of presentational knowing, identifies four relevant elements and explains it in detail. Applied theatre emphatically shares and validates this notion of a holistic way of knowing.

2.2.5 Integrated understanding of adult experiential learning

One may say that experiential learning scholarship is like the famous elephant and the blind philosophers. Cognitive and situated theorists alike touch parts of its features and try to define the whole. They highlight different areas of it for studying under their particular close lens, either from the individual or social perspective. Actually, the two views are not necessary isolated. Billett (1996) offers a bridge to reconcile the cognitive and socio-cultural theorising. He stresses that thinking and acting cannot achieve learning on their own and the two perspectives on learning are complementary with each other to co-construct and transform knowledge. Moreover, the understanding of embodiment and holistic learning contributes to add layers to explore the nature of experiential learning.

Experiential learning has no fixed form. Learning experiences under different contexts, situations, and natures of practice are different in their shape. No one way to describe, interpret and explain experiential learning can fully capture how the learning happens. We are still in the process of building our understanding of it. Jarvis (2006) explains that the study of human learning will be in the way of ‘every theorists add little bits of it…humanity is an unfinished project’ (199-200).
However, all these ideas are significant reference points to help me investigate applied theatre learning experience. As a development from the theories of embodied learning, in the next section, I will review some art-theory literature, which has a long history of recognising the holistic nature of learning through/in the arts and its relation to human nature. I believe this will provide an additional dimension to the dialogue on applied theatre learning experience later in the thesis.

### 2.3 Art as experience

So far, this review of adult experiential learning has been generalised. There is no specific kind of experience that has been part of the discussion above. The knowledge gained in the adult experiential learning theories mentioned is rather propositional and practical. The reflective constructivist paradigm emphasises the learning (knowledge) generated from reflection; learners have to reflect the direct experience and analyse it into propositional knowing-that. The situated view concerns learning as enculturated in the context; learners acquire the know-how from being in the situation or in practice. Applied theatre as a kind of artistic experience will probably involve these two kinds of learning as well as its distinct mode of aesthetic knowledge (which is addressed and defined below and in the next chapter). Though embodied and holistic learning perspectives remind us to address the affective and emotive aspects in the experiential learning process, their arguments are still limited.

In the past decade, there is indeed a growing concern about the role of art in adult education literature (Lawrence, 2005; Hayes & Yorks, 2007; Clover & Sanford, 2011). Increasing number of scholars recognise the contribution of the arts in facilitating effective adult learning in different contexts. However, most of the discussions are about the instrumental value of using art as a teaching medium. As yet there has been little exploration of how the core theories of the arts themselves may be important as a key to understanding the application of the arts in the learning process. This brings me to the final section of this chapter. I would like to add another complementary dimension by
exploring some widely-known art theories which elaborate art as an experience and its relationship to the generation of learning/knowledge.

**Art as symbol of feeling**

Langer (1953) sets up her theory by differentiating the discursive and non-discursive symbolic expressions of mankind. The symbol-making function is the fundamental process of the human mind to formulate understanding. Language, as a form of symbolisation, is the prime instrument of expressing ideas and thoughts. We use words to give form to our outward experience and develop conceptual frameworks. However, Langer (1966:8) stresses, the ‘inner experience’ and ‘the life of feeling and emotion’ is an inaccessible part of reality. The discursive language ‘cannot shape any extensive concepts of feeling’.

Since the inner life of any human being is ‘nameless’, we need other symbolic sources to express the subjective aspect of human experience. For Langer, art is the answer.

The arts, like language, abstract from experience certain aspects for our contemplation. But such abstractions are not concepts that have names. Discursive speech can fix definable concepts better and more exactly. Artistic expression abstracts aspects of the life of feeling which have no names, which have to be presented to sense and intuition rather than to a world-bound, note-taking consciousness.

(1957:94)

Art as an expressive form objectifies subjective feeling and makes it visible and perceivable for our contemplation and understanding. Langer (1953) defines it as: ‘art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling’ (40). She further explains art is not an actual feeling of the artist but it is ‘a developed metaphor, a non-discursive symbol’ that expresses/projects the images of feeling.

What does art seek to express? I think every work of art expresses, more or less purely, more or less subtly, not feelings and emotions which the artist *has*, but feelings and emotions which the artist *knows*; his *insight* into the nature of sentience, his picture of vital experience, physical and emotive and fantastic.
Art as embodied aesthetic knowledge

In a similar view to Langer, Reid also recounts the importance of the role of feeling in human experience and its crucial connection to the arts. He thinks it is a mistake to only validate propositional truth as knowledge-claim and exclude the subjective aspects of knowing like feeling. For him, feeling is the immediate experience throughout conscious life working closely with thinking and action as the complex wholeness in human organism.

Feeling, I am suggesting, can feed, nourish, enlarge and enrich the content of that thinking. This in turn can, retroactively, affect the concrete realisation of the values. The concern is with feeling, thinking, acting-distinguishable of course, but thought of now not in abstracted separation from one another, but as related, as interacting in the way that only the parts of an organism (here the psychophysical organism) can interact with one another. They contribute to each other, modify each other and the whole, so that thinking, feeling, knowing, and action, working together, can become a function of the whole organism.

(Reid, 1977:176)

Feeling is not just what is generally identified with ‘affect’. Reid reminds us feeling is also definitely cognitive in nature.

Feeling, on one side of it, is feeling-of, and on the other side, it has a content-at this low level, sensation-content. There is never just feeling: feeling awareness could not be without being feeling of something.

(Reid, 1977:168)

It is not cognition that helps us to know; the ‘cognitive-affective-feeling’ is intrinsic and plays a vivid part at some stages of the knowing and understanding. He underpins the idea to recognise art as a way of knowing creating non-propositional aesthetic knowledge that calls on the holistic use of resources of human being (1969, 1973, 1977, 1985). He affirms ‘[i]n the experience-knowledge of works of art feeling and knowing are inseparable’ (1985:118).
Reid (1969) has a different view from Langer on art as the projection and expression of feeling. Art expresses life-feelings but also creates art-feelings in the aesthetic experience of creating a work of art. The art-feelings are new and fresh in structure and specific to the meaning embodied in the artwork.

Our feeling-experience of it is new and individual, concrete because it is feeling of that total situation and no other… what is experienced is the particular individual affective import of that work—however dependent the intelligent apprehension of it may be upon other felt life-experience.

(ibid.:63, original italics)

His idea is in line with Dewey’s theory of art that both the objective and subjective are transfigured from the essence of the content and integrated in an experience. Art involves the exhibition and realization of the maker’s selfhood.

What is expressed will be neither the past events that have exercised their shaping influence nor yet the literal existing occasion…Immediacy and individuality, the traits that mark concrete existence, come from the present occasion; meaning, substance, content, from what is embedded in the self from the past.

(Dewey, 1958: 71)

For Reid, the knowledge of art is a special kind of practical knowing-how that can be mainly guided by artistic or aesthetic intuition (1969:215). We cannot ‘talk about art’ to learn, although the propositional talk can help the maker work more effectively in their next experience.

Critical and other propositional talk about art is talk about it, not talk of art. There is no talk of art as such. Knowledge of art is a knowing which intrinsically contains no talking, no propositions in any sense in which we have been using this word.

(ibid.:217, original italics)

He stresses we do art ‘not by learning “truths about” art, but “on the job”, by being involved in the art’ (ibid.:216). The understanding knowledge of a work of art is genuinely shown in ‘performing’ practical competence.
Learning in the aesthetic experience

In Langer’s theory of art, every work of art is an abstracted symbolisation of human feeling. Artists produce and sustain the symbol/illusion from the world of actuality and transform their motif into the works of art to create ‘strangeness, separateness, other-ness’ (Langer, 1950:519) for our contemplation, reflection and understanding. The content of the significant form of art is a semblance that is opposite to the ‘make-believe’. It is the ‘make-not-believe’ (Langer, 1957:42; original italics). The arts disengage us from the usual meanings we make of the familiar world by creating new images of reality. The normal forms are then ‘freely conceived and composed in the interest of the artist’s ultimate aim—significance, or logical expression’ (Langer, 1950:519-520). Working in the arts gives us insight from the ‘vital import, or artistic expressiveness’ (Langer, 1957:60) of the essential felt-life experience. Through the inward process of making an outward image, the works are made public as an objective symbol of the feeling, both to the makers and the others. It is ‘an objectification of subjective life’ (ibid.:9; original italics).

This working process is the driving force of creation in art:

it is the education of vision that we receive in seeing, hearing, reading works of art—the development of the artist’s eye, that assimilates ordinary sights (or sounds, motions, or events) to inward vision, and lends expressiveness and emotional import to the world. Wherever art takes a motif from actuality…it transforms it into a piece of imagination, and imbues its image with artistic vitality. The result is an impregnation of ordinary reality with the significance of created form.

(ibid.:72)

Art as symbolic expression makes us go beyond our vision of the actual experience which extends our knowledge.

In recognition of the nature of immediacy in aesthetic experience, Reid (1969) suggests using the word ‘embodiment’ instead of ‘expression’ as more appropriate to capture the attentive apprehension of meaning in the arts-nature of aesthetic experience.
'Embodiment’ stands for the conceptual analysis of the aesthetic of art, affirming that in the aesthetic there is a unique union of content with material form, so that in aesthetic experience content and form are not distinguished... Embodiment can receive all that expression has to offer it; then the creative transformation occurs, the *fiat* of embodiment.

(Reid, 1969:87; original italics)

Reid refers to aesthetic embodiment as something in active operation and the things expressed encounter ‘a sea-change into something rich and strange’ (ibid.:88-89). Making art in the unknown is a discovery process that broadens our epistemology.

*What* the artist discovers through making is not properly known till the making has been completed... art-making *is* truly creative—we have to realize that the *telos* is changing all the time whilst the artist is working in dialogue with his medium. There is evolution whilst he works; and it is not simply the unfolding of a plan, but *creative* evolution.

(ibid.:122; original italics)

He claims this process of creative evolution is ‘the ongoing imaginative adventure’ (1973:71). Imagination is what Langer calls the ‘primitive human power...that engenders the arts and is in turn directly affected by their products’ (1957:70). Works of art make the images that we imagine become visible, concretized and particularized.

Dewey (1958) uses a metaphor of ‘journey’ to describe the aesthetic experience. He says ‘we journey for the delight of moving about and seeing what we see’ (198). Imagination is the gateway in this journey directly interacting between the old experience and the here-and-now occurrence.

The work of art... unlike the machine, is not only the outcome of imagination, but operates imaginatively rather than in the realm of physical existences. What it does to concentrate and enlarge an immediate experience... the meanings imaginatively summoned, assembled, and integrated are embodied in material existence that here and now interacts with the self. The work of art is thus a challenge to the performance of a like act of evocation and organization, through imagination, on the part of the one who
The making of a work of art as an imaginative journey enlarges the immediate experience of the artist which ‘the material of experiences is so rendered that it becomes the pregnant matter of a new experience’ (ibid.:294). The process is a unique aesthetic experience that allows us re-viewing of the past, which challenges thought and creates new learning and possibilities.

Though the art theories of Langer, Reid and Dewey have originated from different ideas and thoughts, they perceive the cognitive functions of the arts as a learning experience are subtly related and congruent. Eisner (2002, 2008) who describes the functions and contributions the arts serve for the enlargement of human learning can share this kinship. He states, first of all, the arts provide conditions for us to notice the world around us and the nuances in it. It brings a new way of knowing through reading images and trains habits of mind to be aware of things originally experienced unconsciously. Secondly, working in the arts involves tolerating ambiguity and suspending judgement based on set rules. Something new is nurtured from the unknown. It brings us fresh perspectives to perceive and interpret the world of understanding. Thirdly, the arts as expressive form often generate empathic feeling that makes action happen. To empathise with others is a kind of ability to understand others’ experience and a root of compassion. Finally, the arts closely connect with our subjective feeling. Working in them can give us the means to look inward to what we feel and believe, to discover our inner emotional selves: in Eisner’s (2002) words, exploring our interior landscape. And also in the process of creation, the arts can be a vehicle to turn our internal self into the visible works which allow us to inspect our own thinking. He emphasises learning in the arts ‘are a way of enriching our awareness and expanding our humanity’ (Eisner, 2008:11).

Winston (2008, 2010) shares Eisner’s emphasis on the importance to humanity of the aesthetic experience. But he puts his core concern more broadly: that beauty is a fundamental human need. He quotes Danto, ‘[b]eauty is an option for art…But it is not
an option for life’ (2008:80). Nevertheless, the value of beauty is still the central concern of art. To close this section, I would like to include the moral vision of beauty from Winston (who is, significantly, both an educator and a dramatic artist and theorist). I believe this aspect, rarely mentioned by other authors, will add further insight into my understanding of learning experience of beauty in art.

Reclaiming beauty as a potential force for good, Winston argues ‘beauty is powerfully formative and intrinsically associated with virtue’ (ibid.:72). Through a process of what Iris Murdoch calls ‘unselfing’, people will openly connect with virtue which leads them in the direction of unselfishness. Murdoch defines ‘unselfing’ as:

…what happens when we forget about ourselves, our anxieties and our day-to-day preoccupations and is at the heart of the experience of beauty.

(cited in Winston, 2010:50)

Winston reminds us that ‘unselfing’ can only be achieved when the contact between the object and the subject of the experience is in balance and harmony. In that, ‘[w]e lose ourselves to find in ourselves a renewed sense of coherence to our lives’ (ibid.:53). Winston stresses that, providing energy for good action, the soft values (like love, sympathy, trust, gentleness, etc.) will be found in beauty with life-enhancing qualities. He reiterates this point from Wendy Steiner that beauty

help[s] us become connected with life and with the ‘other’, rather than detached from them, and enable[s] us to recognise and value those things which are our dearest concerns.

(ibid.:64)

Values create motivational force to support continuing learning in the aesthetic experience. We gain knowledge through practice driven by our desires shaped by beauty. This is ‘real knowledge’ underpinned by the sense of values that Winston appreciates it is necessary to create in the purposeful artistic experience.
2.4 Implication of learning in the arts to adult experiential learning

Learning in the arts reminds us that feeling is one of the important aspects of human knowing. It is tacit in nature but irreplaceable in creating human understanding from experience. This aesthetic domain of knowing has been little explored and largely overlooked by the adult experiential learning theorists of either reflective constructivist or situated perspective paradigms. Art theories can be another perspective to fill that gap.

For the constructivists who see experiential learning as a conscious mental activity, knowledge is generated through reflective thought in and on action. Although they do mention the senses and feeling in the learning process, these aspects are either one of the learning styles to grasp experience (like Kolb) or a complementary element to assist effective reflection (like Boud et al.). Art theories tell us that affective knowing in experience plays more than this merely supporting role. As Reid stresses, cognitive and affective knowing are inseparable. When we define learning from experience, we cannot neglect feeling as an integral part of knowing. The human mind functions in a coherent system without splitting cognition and sensation, but working together. As Oakeshott (1933) cogently argues,

[t]here is no sensation unmodified by apperception; for everything in sensation is presented, not in utter isolation, but as part of a system of experience, as part of ourselves. And separated from this system it loses its character as experience. (17)

The situated perspective theorists emphasise the social interactive dimension of learning and centre their concern on the impact of the environment and the culture in which the experience is situated. Where the learner is a member in the learning context, we equally should not ignore their subjective feelings and thoughts in the learning process. These play both outwardly social and inwardly personal parts in learning through experience. Learning is supported by individual meanings, values and desires to decide what it is worth to learn in a situation. Again, Oakeshott (ibid.) reaffirms this view,
[a] self, replete with opinion, prejudice, habit, knowledge is implied in every actual experience; and to exclude this self from any experience whatever is an absolute impossibility. (14)

As stated above, perspectives on embodied and holistic learning have growing currency in adult experiential learning, but their theories are still under-developed. The insights drawn from what has been researched and explored in art theories can strengthen and support the arguments on perceiving learning and knowing as a whole. Actually, Heron already uses reference from Langer’s theory to build his learning model. The aesthetic domain of learning plays not only a role in learning about the arts, it is a way of knowing which can share light on all adult experiential learning.

In this chapter, I have reviewed core paradigms and two increasingly divergent views of experiential learning in adult education literature. I then have moved on to add an angle from art theories that defines art as a specific kind of experiential learning. Together, the foci of these different perspectives provide multiple lenses to examine the learning experiences in the applied theatre training workshop. In the next chapter, I will look closely at how the applied theatre and drama education literature address learning.
Chapter Three Literature Review: Applied Theatre and Drama Education

In the last chapter, I explored how the adult learns through experiential learning and specifically reviewed the concept of art as a learning experience. In this chapter, it is time to look closer to review the central principles of applied theatre. In the following, I will firstly explore the meaning of applied theatre in the field, and then investigate the aesthetic dimensions of this dramatic form followed by the discussions on the potential of applied theatre learning for human development, both in general and in the specific genres selected in this study. Finally, I will also give consideration to the applied theatre training workshop contexts and those pedagogical experiences which played roles in the participants’ learning journey.

3.1 Defining applied theatre

Applied theatre is a term that has been gaining currency since it was coined in the last decade of the twentieth century. There has been an ongoing debate about its inclusiveness. Previously its literature, principles and practice were embedded in the complementary and overlapping movements widely known as ‘drama education’ (or drama-in-education - DE or DiE) and ‘theatre for development’ (TfD), from which movements the term ‘applied theatre’ as a definable and distinct practice have emerged. There is still some slippage, much overlap and some contestation about the terminology among the three fields (and adjacent areas of study and practice – see below), and some of the scholarship and practice – and they also have in common many of their foremost writers and practitioners. However, there is now a general understanding within in this broader field to use the term applied theatre as an umbrella or collective term to describe different theatre practices or creative processes applied to educational, institutional and community contexts. The common features are that it is a kind of theatre practice:
● which is not working in traditional theatre venues but in a variety of social and informal settings;
● in which the participants and/or audience, who may or may not have drama experience or skills, are actively involved in the process;
● where work is created and/or performed arising from the concerns and issues of the specific groups;
● which usually aims to serve personal, social or community change.

Apart from the common features, some scholars/writers/practitioners in the field make a distinction between applied theatre and applied drama.

While there are similarities with applied drama, what one tends to find in the latter is dependency on conventional British drama in education strategies to teach about issues, events, relationships. Applied theatre is powered by a strong sense of aesthetic education and is usually centred on structured scenarios presented by teams of teaching artist-facilitators.

(Taylor cited in Nicholson, 2005:4)

This notion of seeing applied drama as process-based and applied theatre as performance-based it seems has supporters, like Prendergast & Saxton (2009); the Applied Theatre practices examined in their edited book included Theatre in Education, Popular Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre for Development, Prison Theatre, Theatre for Health Education, Community-based Theatre, Museum Theatre and Reminiscence Theatre which predominantly include performance elements central to the practices. Another recent book called Theatre for Change (Landy & Montgomery, 2012) also differentiates Applied Theatre from educational drama in the same vein as Taylor and Prendergast & Saxton. Ackroyd (2007) was one of the first to call out:

I want to use the term ‘applied theatre’ as a term, not a form or practice. I want to use it to be inclusive of a range of practices. I want it to enable analysis of those many practices, pretty or ugly. (10)

Nicholson (2005) points out that there is no neat separation between process and
performance-based work, and most of the practitioners in the field acknowledge a productive consonance between the two. She made her choice to use Applied Drama for the main title of her book. She explains, ‘many people outside the theatre business tend to associate ‘theatre’ with specialist buildings, lights, costumes and so on, rather than the more diverse and less showy practices often associated with applied drama/theatre’ (5). It is the same in the Chinese context. It is a matter of translation. Actually I called the workshop in Chinese ‘applied drama training’. I acknowledge that applied drama and applied theatre are flexibly used in the Chinese context, well aware they are used sometimes differently in the western context. Apart from using drama and theatre to describe the activities interchangeably in this thesis, for the training itself, I would rather call it ‘applied theatre’, as it is most widely known and used in Western literature and the English-speaking world. However, I don’t want the reader to be confused as to what I mean about applied theatre or even to think that my practice is different from applied drama. I recognise that both process and performance are important elements of applied theatre/drama, and which term is used depends on the objectives and contexts of their applications. Therefore, the working definition will be based on a general consensus about the characteristics of the practice: Applied Theatre/Drama describes a broad set of dramatic and theatrical practices as well as a creative process for a specific group of participants and/or audience in a specific context with specific objectives beyond the art form itself, usually taking place in non-theatrical settings and involving interactivity.

3.2 Aesthetic dimension of applied theatre

In last chapter/section, I talked about art as an experience being a process of creation. Through working with the medium, a work of art is created for our contemplation beyond what has previously existed. The creation of dramatic form is a realm of illusion. Langer (1953:306) states that drama is the poetic illusion that makes the semblance of life through the act. An act, she said,
whether instinctive or deliberate, is normally oriented toward the future. Drama, though it implies past actions (the “situation”), moves not toward the present, as narrative does, but toward something beyond; it deals essentially with commitments and consequences.

(ibid.: 307)

Drama creates a virtual future which is ‘a product of imagination’ rooted in the theatrical present moment.

The “now” created by poetic composition is always under the aegis of some historical vision which transcends it; and its poignancy derives not from any comparison with actuality, but from the fact that the two great realms of envisagement—past and future—intersect in the present, which consequently has not the pure imaginative form of either memory or prophecy, but a peculiar appearance of its own which we designate as “immediacy” or “now”.

(ibid.: 308)

These essences sketched by Langer are the key aesthetic features of dramatic form. The illusion isolates the actual living moment and presents an unfolding ‘future’ in a visible imaginary world by using the dramatic present. Neelands (1998) delineates this unique kind of action-oriented art form in a condensed description of presentational theatre, that is also shared by applied theatre.

Theatre is the live experience that is shared when people imagine and interact as if they were other than themselves in some other place at another time. Meanings in theatre are created by the actor, for both spectators and other participants, through fictional and symbolic uses of human presence in time and space. These may be enhanced by the symbolic use of objects, sound and lights. Theatre is understood through its conventions which are the indicators of the ways in which time, space and presence can interact and be imaginatively shaped to create different kinds of meanings. (150)

Actors (people who imagine and interact) are at the heart of all forms of theatre/drama. They use the dramatic elements to create an as-if world which suspends belief from the real world to convey aesthetic meaning. In order to pretend, they need to work with their imaginative capacity. Through the dramatic action, the image in mind is externalised and
expressed in the aesthetic space. Different from the percipient in other art forms, the spectator in theatre/drama is not merely a viewer. To a certain extent, the audience-percipient contributes actively to creating the art form as it occurs through using their imagination. The drama education pioneer Richard Courtney (Booth & Martin-Smith, 1988) describes his experience as a theatre audience also as both imaginer and actor.

I am engaged in activity which is both “in imagination” and “with imagination” in a curious and particular way. Not only are my imaginings other-directed, by the player and the dramatist, and self-directed, as I identify with the protagonist; but I also directly contribute to the making of the dramatic action. (107)

He also stresses, ‘[f]or drama, whether it be imagined or acted, is the way in which man transcends himself and participants in other forms of existence’ (ibid.:109). This embodied existence through special act of imagination brings both actors and audience-percipient to engage with what is going on by holding the real and the fictional worlds in mind at the same time; in Gavin Bolton’s term, they are in dual consciousness (Bolton, 1984:141).

Applied theatre is undoubtedly rooted in the aesthetic dimension of presentational theatre mentioned above but it also has two distinct characteristics that make it a powerful educational experience for the people who are involved in it: first, the roles of participant; second, the form of drama used.

The first distinct characteristic of applied theatre is that the participant has no clear-cut role as either actor or spectator. They play multiple roles of playwright, director, dramaturge, actor or audience. The following highlight stated by Neelands (2011) sharply explicates this feature.

All present are assumed to be ‘players’ as well as spectators of their own and others’ acting in response to the demands of the imagined world. It is not a form of drama in which it is assumed that only some of us can act whilst the rest can only watch and react. It is a direct rather than directed form of drama that requires social and artistic
acting together in order to create imagined worlds and events. Without the social and artistic actions of those present, nothing happens and nothing is made. (170)

The second distinct characteristic is the use of spontaneous forms of drama, mainly improvisation. Most of the applied theatre is not pre-scripted in the way in which Langer (1953) describes where drama unfolds the virtual future as a ‘destiny’. ‘The future appears as already an entity, embryonic in the present’ (311). Improvised drama requires the participants to act in the immediate given circumstances in drama. They have to ‘think on their feet, make spontaneous decisions, exercise independence, and respond to the unexpected in a flexible, creative way as dramatic invention does’ (Moffett cited in Neelands, 2011:171). The result of the drama is unknown and always open to possibility. ‘[I]t is about journeys and not knowing how the journeys may end’ (Heathcote, in O’Neill, 2015:53). In this participatory form of drama, people involved are always working in a process of becoming.

These two powerful characteristics coupled with the aesthetic nature of dramatic form open up a great potential for human development in applied theatre that is discussed in the next section.

3.3 Applied theatre and its potential for human change

People use applied theatre in different contexts with different agendas and objectives. The evolution and practice of applied theatre is fundamentally rooted in drama. The drama educators and theorists over time have provided an articulation of those key principles that are at work in applied theatre. Therefore, in this section, I will include both literatures to explore how drama/applied theatre and/or drama in applied theatre perceives the benefit for human capacity. If there is one single aim for applying theatre/drama, it is to make or bring change through the practice. Dorothy Heathcote, a pioneer in drama education, firmly conveys this point,
The most important manifestation about this thing called drama is that it must show change. It does not freeze a moment in time, it freezes a problem in time, and you examine the problem as the people go through a process of change.

(Heathcote, in Prentki & Preston, 2009:200)

The essence of the applied theatre is to allow participants to be the actors as well as the spectators, engaging in the process cognitively and affectively, subjectively and objectively. They are the creators and the audience of their own drama and also the respondents to the drama other people make. They have opportunities to take on various roles and to step into different shoes. Courtney (1995) remarks that the spontaneous nature of doing drama raises the participants’ consciousness.

In improvisation, when our imaginings are performed they become infused with feeling. A dramatic act is thinking and feeling in a practical way. Its purpose is to transmit felt-meanings to others and it does so metaphorically; we feel ourself to be a metaphor (“a costumed player”), and that the act is metaphorically powerfully—drama creates consciousness and self-consciousness. (32)

Furthermore, holding double reality in mind when playing in role, the participants are able to see their experiencing as an object to be reflected upon for generating new knowing.

To take on a role is to detach oneself from what is implicitly understood and to blur temporarily the edges of a given world. It invites modification, adjustment, reshaping, and realignment of concepts already held. Through detachment from experiencing one can look at one’s experiencing anew.

(Bolton, 1985:156)

Through interaction between the two worlds of the personal and the dramatic, the embodied imaginative act generates emotion for learning. Bolton (Davis & Lawrence, 1986) points out that drama requires the participant to work along with emotional engagement in order to make meaning. When experiencing drama, ‘participants are often required to qualify their actions by recalling an appropriate dispositional (adjectival) characteristic’ (113). They may identify their own disposition with the characters’
emotion as a mental projection for raising self-awareness. Or they may experience dispositions other than their own; through living through the process their emotion changes as things happen to them. If the dramatic experience is intense, concentrated and significant, it will stimulate the participants to look at the emotional disturbance for their further reflection. Bolton asserts, ‘[i]t is only through feeling that we can achieve change in understanding’ (ibid.:108).

This helps also to develop the mental powers of heightening the participants’ awareness. Heightened awareness is also one of the key characteristics of the process of aesthetic engagement, as it is defined by Bundy (2003a, 2003b). In her research, she indicates that animation, connection and heightened awareness are the keys to aesthetic experience. Through animation, participants become more alive and more alert to their self-awareness and the world around. The drama works only if they engage with the idea of the work, at a metaphorical level. The idea can connect to the association made by participants that links the fictional context to their real world existence. The potential of new knowledge emerging will occur in the process of experiencing heightened awareness. Participants can focus not only on the events in drama but also can think of the relationship between the events and the outside world. Holding this awareness in their imaginative state, people can ‘break the domination of our ordinary habits of conception and perception’ (Elliott cited in Bolton, 1984:141). Drama provides opportunities to see things in a new light and possibly leads to change.

Reflection is essential in all forms of applied theatre for helping participants to synthesise and consolidate the experience. Heathcote (Wagner, 1999:75) notes,

[a]s participants look at what they’ve lived through and felt on the inside, they gain the double effect of knowing internally and reflecting on the product of their knowing… Reflection is what makes awareness, knowing, or feeling into something that can be touched and assimilated for later use.

She emphasizes, ‘without [reflection] there is no learning from the experience’ (Johnson & O’Neill, 1984:209). Various timings for reflection in applied theatre have been
suggested. Patrick Verriour (1984) states in brief:

reflection can occur either during a period of collective discussion about the dramatic experience or perhaps while [participants] are engaged in thinking, speaking, writing, reading, or drawing as an integral part of the drama process. (125)

In ‘as-if’ dramatic contexts, participants are free to examine a multitude of meanings as well as reflect on them through action. Reflection in applied theatre is not purely a mental activity; it is visualized, articulated and shared. Knowing can become more tangible and concrete for further exploration. The existing thoughts and images in mind can be revisited, reimagined and reframed for new insight.

Drama is an art form oriented in the concrete experience of action. It ‘articulates inventing, anticipating, recollecting, hypothesising, creating, musing and day-dreaming or any other mode of imagining through the medium of concrete action’ (ibid.:142). Action, in James Thompson’s term, is a marking of and a marking from the body.

Our action is a series of received ‘bits of behaviour’, mediated cognitive/affective responses, learnt scripts, tried and tested shrugs, practiced movements, hardwired outbursts and controlled performances. These are its raw materials, the marks, utterances and substance of the moving body. We create our lives with this matter and become ourselves as we do so…we may become ourselves as we act…

(Thompson, 2003:60)

The activities used in applied theatre training are flexible and diverse. It incorporates various types of experience by providing new physical routines (in games and exercises), new action resources (the acting of unfamiliar characters in new locations) and the experience of reworking a range of dramatic action (through participation in theatrical rehearsal, improvisation or performance) for the participants. These experiences emerge from the hidden textures of participants’ bodies as they perform as well as leaving traces on those bodies. The works in this training are created through embodiment and also create new marks on the body which produce resources for life.
Applied theatre is based on an inter-active process. The drama process involves not only individual action but the interconnected actions of participants. Participants can be marked by the conduct of others. They express and externalise their thoughts and images in mind. ‘What is individually understood can be socially tested and modified through the medium of public language and action’ (Bolton, 1984:154). Participants see the alternative actions and responses to the actions from others. They may take this as their own reference, imitate it or copy it. Furthermore, they can gain more self-understanding when they see themselves in others’ responses. Individual differences will be channelled into collective actions. Ultimately, it is what the individual draws from the collective meanings that matter; they find part of ‘I’ as well as the ‘NOT I’ through their ‘inter-action’.

In addition to this social interactive process, there are other important qualities which Bolton (Davis & Lawrence, 1986:262) claims are a by-product of the dramatic experience, like concentration, trust, sensitivity, cooperation, patience, tolerance, confidence, respect, perception, judgement, social concern, coping with ambivalent feelings, empathy, and responsibility. These attributes foster individual change. A sense of self-advancement reinforces personal growth. An increasing self-efficacy helps participants to have a feeling of competency to adopt change.

Nicholson (2005) defines the metaphor of personal change through the interplay between thought and action in applied theatre as ‘transportation’. ‘Transportation is less fixed—performers are ‘taken somewhere’, actors are even temporarily transformed, but they are returned more or less to their starting places at the end of the drama or performance’ (12). She borrows Richard Schechner’s words, ‘a series of transportation performances can achieve a transformation’ (ibid.).

Change is not a promise in applied theatre, but it does create the potential and foundation for human change. Even though Nicholson is cautious about the notion of drama bringing permanent transformation, she is still very positive:
Transformation is a gradual and cumulative process, the result of learning and negotiation with others, a progressive act of self-creation. In the process of transportation, the outcomes are clearly focused but not fixed, change may take place gradually. (ibid.:13)

A positive belief about drama is explained by Bolton, one of the most distinguished theorists, scholars and practitioners in the field:

…art is to do with a way of knowing, and knowing more deeply. It seems to me that an art, in the main, must be dedicated to bringing about change. Either a maker of art or as a responder to art, I can hope for new insights. And when the art form is drama, which draws on the complexities of life directly for its material, it is not unreasonable for me to expect some gain in understanding of life, my life and other people’s.

(Bolton, 1984:153; original italics)

3.4 Three selected applied theatre genres

There are diverse genres in applied theatre practice and each individual approach has its specific philosophy and tradition for the applications. Some may aim at creating performance with/for the participants; whereas some may merely focus on the interaction among participants in the dramatic action which the theatrical output is not necessary. ‘[G]ood practitioners complement their knowledge of theatre-making methodologies with an awareness of what it means to work in particular contexts’ (Nicholson, 2011: 244). I have chosen three different genres in the training workshop based on my own understating of the potential applications in Chinese NGOs according to my previous field experience; and to diversify the strategies introduced in the training so that participants have more variety of choice for their own uses. Apart from the common factor of the potential for human change in applied theatre discussed above, the three genres included in the training workshop also have their own aesthetic pattern in the creation of their artwork, and particular features for facilitating change, which I am going to review in the following section.
3.4.1 Theatre of the Oppressed

The Theatre of the Oppressed is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.

(Boal, 1995:14-15)

The Theatre of the Oppressed has two fundamental linked principles: it aims (a) to help the spect-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for his situation, so that he may then be able (b) to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre.

(ibid.:40)

The above quotations are extracted from the writing of the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal, who created and worked in this particular kind of applied theatre from the 1970s. The heart of his work is to break down the passivity of the spectator for them to become ‘spect-actors’, transforming the act in theatre into the action in real life. He asserts that ‘theatre is the capacity that all of us have, as human beings, to observe ourselves in action’ (1996:47). The ability of self-observation is a language we already possess. Theatre of the Oppressed was created to help people develop the capacity to use this language better.

The self-knowledge thus acquired allows him to be the subject (the one who observes) of another subject (the one who acts). It allows him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking.

(ibid.:13)

Boal calls the nature of drama which allows participants and percipients holding two worlds in mind at the same time as ‘metaxis’. Theatre of the Oppressed puts it at the centre of its practice. Participants interplay between ‘the image of the reality’ and ‘the reality of the image’ (1995:43). Linds (1998:74) exemplifies the operation of metaxis in making an image, a core element of Boal’s applied theatre practice:
The two worlds of metaxis in ourselves are autonomous. Metaxis occurs in the artist’s body and is embodied. Self and mind are woven through the entire human body and through the web of relationships in which that self takes shape.

Then we play with the reality of the images before us. The protagonist must forget the real world which was the origin of the image and play with the image itself, in its artistic embodiment. The protagonists must practice in the second world (the aesthetic), in order to modify the first (the social).

This playing with the embodied image in the fictional world is the essence of the image theatre Boal proposes. The imagination and experimental thoughts disrupt the taken-for-granted world; the possible self, others and reality are emerged in-actions for the participants’ learning something unknown before.

Theatre provides an aesthetic space where things are more plastic, dichotomous and magnified. Time and space can be condensed or stretched at will; memory and imagination can be liberated. We are not only ourselves, but are the actors and the characters – the subjects who tell the story as well as the objects to whom the things have happened. ‘Theatre is telescopic because it brings close what is far away and makes bigger what is small’ (Boal, 1996:49). Therefore, this aesthetic space creates a powerful platform to look into our situation and to analyse it. We extrapolate from reality towards another reality which is called fiction in theatre and we play with the image. ‘We have changed the image in the fiction of a theatre but we are not fiction’ (ibid.). We are active participants and observers in rehearsal for the real world when the aesthetic space disappears, transforming the fiction: we transform ourselves into ourselves.

‘I-now’ perceives ‘I-before’ and has a presentiment of (anticipates) a ‘possible-I’, a ‘future-I’.

(Boal, 1995:28)

In Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal’s emphasis is on extending and amplifying all the levels of our perception. Knowledge is acquired from theatre not only through words but also via the senses. In seeking to expand our capacity to recognize, to apprehend and to learn
in theatre, ‘we dedicate ourselves to seeing what we are looking at, to listening to what we are hearing, to feeling what we touch’ (2006:29). A systematisation of exercises (physical monologues), games (physical dialogues) and techniques of image theatre, which are the arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed, can serve for all of us the purpose of development of the capacity to express ourselves through theatre.

Participants usually bring as starting materials their lives, feelings, stories, experiences, and experiences of oppression and this includes personal values and beliefs. They will directly expose themselves and their thinking within the group and explore the ideas from shared an understanding. Therefore, Theatre of the Oppressed is: ‘plural theatre, theatre of us, not only I’ (Boal, 1996:52). It is a work for collective learning. Individual story is negotiated in relation to its similarity with other participants. One story becomes ‘our’ story. The feature of analogical induction gives us different angles to consider each situation; multiple readings offer possible points of view to allow a distanced analysis for reference. Furthermore, in the process of examining the reality collectively, we can see beyond the situation. We can move from the phenomenon to the law that regulates all phenomena of the same kind, so as to explain other phenomena that may occur; Boal calls this feature ‘ascesis’ (1995:26). The participants can see deeply through to the systems behind the scene and develop a new understanding, new knowledge, and more importantly, to become ‘actors’ in life.

Potential change occurs in Theatre of the Oppressed based on participants’ discovery and reflection. Learning something new gives alternatives and more choices in life; this knowledge can change participants who might also change the people around them.

3.4.2 Process Drama

Process drama is a term that describes a kind of complex, structured improvisational dramatic event. The leader and the participants jointly contract into an imaginary world, stepping into others’ shoes in order to ‘contemplate what might be possible as we aspire for clarity and meaning’ (Taylor, 1998:14).
The current understanding of process drama is indebted to two influential figures in the field, Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, who provided insights into drama as an effective medium of human learning. In the experience of emotional engagement and the release of imagination through the lived-through process, drama creates a cognitive/affective learning potential for gaining new insight and understanding.

According to a leading practitioner and writer of process drama (in theory and practice), Cecily O’Neill (1995:12-13), the key characteristics of process drama include that it: generates a fictional world which will be inhabited for the insights, interpretations, and understanding it may yield; is based on a powerful pre-text; is built up from a series of episodes which are both improvised and composed or rehearsed; takes place over a timespan; involves the whole group in the same enterprise; and, has no external spectators but participants are an audience for their own actions.

A ‘pre-text’, a word that O’Neill coined and has become common usage to describe ‘the source or impulse for the drama process’ (ibid.:xv) launches the first moment of the action, establishing location, atmosphere, roles and situations within the drama. It gives an invitation to the participants to enter into the context and involve themselves in active role-taking. Participants need to be willing to suspend their disbelief and temporarily accept an illusion, to co-create a fictitious world with the facilitator and together to interrogate and transform ideas, values, attitudes, and visions within the world. Taylor (1998) puts it:

> process drama places the students on the inside so that they can be caught up within an artistic event (learning in), which helps them generate their own meanings (learning through), so that they can better direct, control, and submit to the encounter (learning about). (49)

A significant experience can only be acquired from good quality of work. Process drama needs to be carefully structured. According to O’Toole & Dunn (2002), structuring process drama includes three phases: initiation (participants building belief in roles), experience (participants actively experiencing and constructing meaning in the dramatic
context) and reflection (participants making their insights and learning explicit). A process drama is not necessarily in the form of linear narrative, as the aim is not just to tell a story, but to identify and explore in depth important moments within a narrative, to piece together a group understanding of the significance of the story. It is therefore constructed in a number of different segments by interweaving drama conventions (Neelands & Goode, 2000), always including various kinds of spontaneous roleplay, along with theatrical and rehearsal techniques. The episodic structure allows the gradual articulation of a complex dramatic world and enables it to be extended and elaborated through different frames. The whole group will be engaged in the same encounter collectively, to examine an event and crystallize the layers of meaning.

Unlike other applied theatre genres in which reflection is always organized after the dramatic event, in process drama reflection takes place both in-role and out-of-the-role, within and beyond the drama. Various discursive and non-discursive reflective elements are purposely built in to strengthen the dramatic experience in order to enrich the quality of participants’ reflection for learning. What makes this genre special is the use of ‘reflection-in-role’. Bolton (1979:127) stresses it is ‘the most powerful form of reflection’ since ‘things are happening and as words are spoken, their implications and applications can be articulated legitimately as part of the drama itself’. Taylor (1998) cites Muir’s elaboration of that: when participants are reflecting on the situation in role, they will be aware of what they are doing while they are doing it, that she [the teacher] aims to bring about knowledge and change. It is with this key concept of the self-spectator that the objectives of knowledge and change coincide, because what is being created is not simply knowing something but knowing how you have come to know it through what you have done. (60)

Participants in process drama, shifting their mindsets to play with different identities, are allowed to reflect within the immediate interactive experience and act on their reflection at the same time. This engagement of the affective, critical, metacognitive and creative thinking embodied in the dramatic event potentially develops their capacity for high order thinking.
A typical strategy of process drama is Teacher-in-Role which also makes this genre different from others. The facilitator in process drama will frequently enter the fiction and interact with the participants in role to deepen their response and commitment. The use of this strategy will alter the teaching and learning relationship by shifting the facilitator’s power and status (the one who knows and owns the knowledge). Participants are co-authors in creating the drama: they can be empowered to go beyond their normal roles and develop their agency.

In process drama, participants release their imagination, significantly extending their boundaries of reality by working in the fictional context. Unlike the theatre of the oppressed, participants in process drama will not ask or be asked to play themselves and use their real life stories to create drama. In process drama, reviewing the experience within and after coming back from a dramatic world, the characters, situations, events and issues that have been explored are like a mirror to illuminate the real world. However, the reflection from the ‘mirror’ is not merely a reference but a self-disclosure for examination and lived imagination. It may ‘bring a kind of dissatisfaction with us, a degree of alienation’ (O’Neill, 1995:152) which is part of the process necessary to discover something new, and the preconditions for positive change in participants’ lives.

3.4.3 Participatory Theatre

Some domains of applied theatre place the art of theatre performance as the major element in the practice, such as theatre-in-education, forum theatre, outreach theatre, prison theatre, museum theatre, community theatre, theatre for development and agit-prop. Though they may have different structures and locations of work, agendas, rationales and target audience/participants, to a certain extent they do share similar social, educational and interventional goals for change as Jackson (2007) affirms,

[m]ost are intended to signify forms of theatre practice that aim to effect a transformation in people’s lives, whether that be the activation of a process of attitudinal or behavioural change on the part of the audience or the creation or consolidation of consciousness about the audience’s place in the world, more modestly,
the *triggering of curiosity* about a specific issue.

(1-2; original italics)

In contrast to the two genres just mentioned, participatory theatre is a performance-based practice. Jackson (ibid.) restates how the theatrical experience embeds rich educational potential.

By reshaping, intensifying and fictionalizing experience, the possibility is offered of seeing freshly, with new eyes and new understanding, free from the inhibiting constraints of examinations, institutional authority and externally imposed rules. Permission is given to look again, to reconsider, to find new connections between the actual and the possible, the given and the imagined, the personal and the social; and to investigate alternative pictures of the world, of other, perhaps better, ways of living our lives.

(146-147)

However, unlike the audience-performer relationship in a traditional theatre, where audience members bring their own experiences and understandings of the outside world, sitting quietly in the dark, making their own meanings out of the onstage materials without communicating with the performers, participatory theatre goes further to involve its audiences/participants both mentally and physically. Participation encompasses,

theatrical activity that sets out to transgress the traditional boundary-lines between stage and auditorium and to generate an engagement from the audience that is overt and direct, and will often be physical, active and sometimes verbal in form.

(Jackson, 2007:136)

There is a wide spectrum of participatory formats in this genre. O’Toole (1976) categorises three types of participation based on his observation in theatre-in-education.

*Extrinsic,* where the element of participation is separated from the theatricality.

*Peripheral,* where the audience is invited to contribute in order to add to the theatricality without affecting either the structure and nature of the play or its own basic function as audience.
Integral, where the audience perspective becomes also the perspective of characters within the drama, especially when the audience members act as well as being acted upon.

(88; original italics)

Jackson (2011:236) adds Forum Theatre to the list to differentiate this form of participatory theatre which has ‘a very specific set of goals and working methods…and distinctive in its encouragement of the audience (or ‘spect-actors’) to influence the outcomes of the drama’.

According to Prentki (1998), the Theatre-in-Education movement from the 1960s and Theatre of the Oppressed founded by Augusto Boal in the 1970s are two pioneer movements in participatory theatre, which promote audience participation as a pivotal feature.

Theatre-in-Education teams bring learner-centred pedagogy to school ‘through participatory practices which were devised from a starting-point in the lives of the children’ (ibid.:424). Diverse strategies have been developed to break from the normal routine of traditional theatre, as Vine (2013) states, the audience could be actively engaged as the subjects in the learning process but simultaneously be challenged to take a critically objective view of their experience, recognizing themselves as part of the same social reality from which the contents of the TIE programmes were drawn.

(63; original italics)

Actors in this form will usually play an additional role beyond performers. They have to take up the functions of teachers or facilitators in the meaning-making process as they research and design the learning journey by incorporating interactive strategies; they also facilitate the whole process often from within their roles as characters in the drama. This role is sometimes called ‘actor-teacher’ (Kay & Baskerville, 1980) or ‘Theatre in Education actor’ (Williams, 1993).
In Forum Theatre (which is also one of the major strategies used in the later stages of Theatre of the Oppressed) audience members are encouraged to intervene in the rehearsed or improvised drama at a crisis point to give advice to the characters in order to find out possible solutions for the issues concerned. Boal observes the development of this form has been ‘a constant search for dialogical forms, forms of theatre through which it is possible to converse’ (cited in Jackson, 2007:183) with the audience. Facilitators in Forum Theatre, called ‘jokers’, are usually not acting members (Boal, 1970, 1979, 2002). They take the position of a direct link between the audience (the real world) and the dramatic action (the fictional world); their role is also to motivate and enable the audience to practise their power to intervene, to act.

Creating a space for dialogue, which in a broad sense is a major aim of both Theatre-in-Education and Forum Theatre, is activated by the theatre piece. It will happen when the audience is directly engaged in the discussion of the problems in the drama, seeking their resolution. Once this happens, the embodied voices released are diverse, which stimulates further conflicts of thought, leading further debate and to critical reflection. Jackson (2005, 2007) stresses the power to sustain and enrich the dialogue of the aesthetic working interdependently with the instrumental, that is at work in participatory theatre.

The performance (that is, the theatrical performance) is the crucible in which existing dialogues are opened up—brought into a particular, heightened and sharpened focus—and new dialogues are added: dialogues between actors and audience; author (the text) and audience; characters and characters; and characters and audience-in-role (as in TIE and forum).

(Jackson, 2005:113-114; 2007:187)

It is worth here clarifying the distinction between audience participation in the play or performance itself, which is what is referred to here, and common to both Theatre-in-Education and Forum Theatre, and community participation in theatre. There is another kind of participatory theatre which does not rely on the audience-performer interaction format or alter the orthodox separation of performers from audience. This is most usually found in theatre for development, community theatre and youth theatre. Participants are
not the audience but the ‘artists’ actively engaged in the theatre-making process, working along with the applied theatre practitioners. Pompêo-Nogueira (2002) argues that this kind of theatre ‘appears to be the most esteemed contemporary Theatre for development’. In her own context of Brazilian community theatre, it is.

Theatre by the people represents a process that involves the community throughout the process, including the making of the drama, which is based on themselves and their problem. Here the community is asked to be involved for the identification of the problem until the final performance.

(107; original italics)

The practice is based on a perspective that theatre is for everyone and it can be made by any people. Participants are not passive recipients; through artistic production, they can voice their concerns, do their own thinking, and present their own views. Participants share stories, and then refine, reshape and rehearse it to represent to external audience with the help of the ‘co-intentional deviser’ (Pammenter, 2013:97).

This was a dialectical process of reclaiming ownership and autonomy… it begins the process of conscientisation, through imagination and creativity, that may lead to a people-centred practice of self-development.

( Ibid.:94-95)

To democratise the creating process, Sinclair (2006) develops a Community Theatre Matrix ‘as a way of understanding the evolution and development of a community theatre event’ (36). The Engaged Space, as a crucial organising principle for the practice, is a central idea in her model. She proposes: agency, pedagogy, artistry, pragmatics and critical reflection to be the key elements contributing to the collective art-making process, and community theatre practitioners should be aware of these.

[Engaged Space] can encompass a wide range of interactions and a diversity of inputs and can accommodate the artistic and the social, the pedagogic and the therapeutic and also, and sometimes most importantly, the practical.

( Ibid.: 44)
The possibility of community enactment and change will evolve beyond the space of participatory theatre. Prentki (2011) describes theatre by its nature as development. ‘The experience of creating such theatre can be the critical first step in a much longer process that might lay claim to that ambitious epithet, transformative’ (46).

3.5 The applied theatre training workshop

In this study, the people involved are not merely participants coming to experience applied theatre but they have a clear agenda to learn how to use it. In order to gain more thorough understanding of this dimension, in this final section I will turn the focus to look at the contexts and the pedagogical experience entailed in learning about applied theatre and explore how the literature talks about its impact on the learning process.

3.5.1 Training workshop contexts

Drawing from O’Toole’s seminal work (1992) *The Process of Drama*, he explores in-depth the multiple contexts at play and being negotiated in the process of creating any drama. There are four levels of context identified by him.

- The real context—the background, prior experience, interests and beliefs brought by the individual participant.
- The context of the setting—the particular place and space that the drama takes place.
- The context of the medium—the coming together of the participant group.
- The fictional context—the world created into the drama.

Apart from the fictional context, which operates within the dramatic fiction, the other three represent the external world outside the drama. Discussions in previous sections mention that it is through the dual collision of the real contexts of the participants, in constant interaction with the fictional context in the process of drama, that meaning is created, and impact for generating change in understanding. Learners need to engage deeply in the ‘aesthetic space’ created by different fictional contexts. The efficacy of the
aesthetic space is grounded in what Nicholson’s (2005) defines as creative space:

Creative spaces are those in which people feel safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability. It is creative moments of transition that enable participants to move out of restricted spaces—literally or symbolically—and beyond identities that are fixed and codified by particular spatial practices into new forms of social identification.

(129)

However, in the training workshop, the real context is not only the consciousness of the ‘luggage’ of their prior experiences that participants bring with them, to be managed as a bridge to a fictional context. It also plays an independent role as a space for trainee learners to consolidate, coordinate and connect their learning experiences. In an applied theatre training workshop which involves three different genres, for example, a fictional context will not be created in every session. The practitioner and participants will spend a relatively longer time in the real context – the training workshop context. Borrowing a definition from Richard Schechner (2002:198-199), training is a process where specific skills are learned and practised. Workshop is a process where materials are found, invented and played with. In training, learners acquire techniques through practice in organic act of the craft. It is an organic training which does not mean only to acquire behaviouristic skills. Learning is by immersion and imitation and is not rigid. For the workshop, Schechner said, ‘[p]robably the most prevalent kind of workshop is used to ‘open people up’ to new experiences, helping them recognize and develop their own possibilities’. Learning applied theatre combines both concepts. On the one hand, learning applied theatre’s skills and techniques, as in any art, one has to learn from experience and practice; on the other hand, a workshop should help the participants looking toward ‘the new’ both personally and artistically (ibid.:199). The applied theatre skills and techniques are not a set of rigid and fixed strategies; learners should discover their own ‘new’ both in the fictional context and the real context.

Spaces situated in a training workshop are a dynamic social practice that is produced and reproduced through social action and interaction (Lefebvre, cited in Nicholson, 2005:129).
In term of learning, the social interaction becomes more complex and multi-layered. In the real context outside the drama, the participants will not only deal with relationships but also personal agendas and collective learning objectives. In the fictional context, they don’t just bring themselves in to interact with the contents and materials but also will remain distanced enough to observe how the methods are being operated and being managed. Therefore, the ‘spatial practices’ in the real context, including the contexts of the setting and medium of the training workshop, are crucial elements for facilitating learning. In applying Lefebvre’s term (cited in Nicholson, ibid.: 127; original italics), ‘[s]patial practices are the patterns which structure the social world, and relate to people’s perceptions of the world and the different social purposes space fulfils’.

3.5.2 Pedagogical experience in the real context

There has been extensive research on ‘drama as pedagogy’ focusing on documenting and theorising the process of the participants’ active and experiential engagement within drama (Bolton, 1979, 1984; Wagner, 1999; Taylor, 2000; O’Toole, 2009; Anderson & Dunn, 2013). These discussions are central in illustrating the drama’s values in ‘pretending (in order) to learn’ (O’Toole and Dunn 2002). The pedagogical experience outside the fictional context is usually placed in the background. For example, the literature will talk about the suspension of the power relationship between student and teacher at the moment of the teacher being in role that can empower and activate the student’s learning in the process (Morgan & Saxton, 1987; O’Neill, 1995; Taylor & Warner, 2006; O’Toole, 2009; etc.). But it is rare that the literature extends the discussion to include mapping their necessary relationship in the real context. In order to understand the whole learning experience in the training workshop, it is equally important to explore the pedagogical experience outside the drama.

Applied theatre training workshops conducted in community settings are usually facilitated by teaching and learning through practice. Monk et al. (2011) name this model of pedagogy as ‘open-space learning’ which highlights the nature of openness in the site of learning. Providing an evidence base, they make explicit the implicit pedagogical experience of people in higher education learning through practical workshops, which is
also applicable to other workshop practices in the community. They define workshop as ‘a teaching and learning session that takes place in an environment in which participants can engage actively with the learning materials that are that session’s focus’ (ibid.:117). Four main characteristics of this pedagogic model they note:

- Perception of knowledge—participants engage actively and are free to explore the learning materials for their own knowledge; they ‘exist as neither performer nor passive listener and observer, but as full participant in the discovery and creation of knowledge’ (ibid.:120).

- Relationship between facilitator and learner — the facilitator is willing to set aside their power in order to build up a laboratory where knowledge is not fixed and can be experimented on and owned by the learner as producer; ‘their ownership of the knowledge that they have created becomes more fully embedded in their consciousness’ (ibid.:126).

- Context of setting—the general physically open space in the workshop arrangement gives potential to liberate the participants’ body and mind through the creative embodied work; a learning site without chairs— ‘which forces any group entering the spaces to address their own physicality and that of others in relation to that of the space’ (ibid.:119), without hierarchical implications.

- Context of medium—participants working in creative work as an ensemble that pursues their purposes in a social learning situation; ‘the ensemble depends for its success on the individual, eccentric talent operating in an atmosphere of trust and support, but the ensemble is a collective, and one that allows the individual to flourish as a learner’ (ibid.:125).

Monk et al. link in significantly with the central notion of openness. They organise the whole idea of this model of learning within the concept of the metaphorical ‘trans-’ space.

The open space becomes transgressive, as traditional barriers between facilitator and participant are suspended in the active and reciprocal engagement of participants, and the idea of ‘failure’ is honoured; transitional, as the work exists between clearly defined spaces and, as such, is always in the process of forming and re-forming so it is
always provisional and never closed; trans
cendent, as the work moves beyond the
typical focus on auditory learning styles that dominates the modern university; trans-

erational, as the space offers a mode of understanding that relies equally on an intuitive
and physical response as it does on the rational processing of information; trans-
actional, in the sense of an open and free exchange of ideas in which participants
do not compete to bank knowledge as private capital but freely exchange and
collectivize their learning; and most importantly, transdisciplinary, as normally stable
discipline boundaries are suspended in the interaction of participants’ subject
knowledge with OSL methodology.

( Ibid.: 4-5; original italics)

3.5.3 Pedagogical experience as ritual knowledge

An important aspect of my hypotheses underlying this project are that the pedagogical
experience in the workshop will create a new relationship between the people, the space
and the art form. This inside-out learning approach brings the participants new language
to express themselves through artistic and aesthetic means. In the learning space, they and
their thinking will be visible and shared, which can foreshadow possibilities or new
understanding. The possibility of these effects is underpinned and borne out in the drama
literature. This is close to what Neelands (2009) means by his observation of how a group
of young people learn in drama, in that the ongoing experience of being together in drama
will contribute to change. He affirms, ‘[t]he effects of being together in drama [go]

beyond a drama box. They [are] part of a public and participatory process of changing
cultures and attitudes’ (181).

Since training workshops like the one devised for this study happen on a regular basis,
they become for the participants’ sets of ritualised practices. According to Schechner
(2002:45), ‘[r]ituals are a way people remember. Rituals are memories in action, encoded
into actions’. The ritual carries messages of a way of learning that participants are living
in for a period of time and is possible. Courtney (1995:45) reminds us ritual has close ties
to learning in two ways:

- Our ritual actions help us to learn about the ritual and its implications.
- Our actions with any media, if they are pregnant with felt-meaning, have a ritual
quality and, thus, we learn about both the medium and the message.

He recognises ritualization has an impact on how we think. It ‘provides us with practical examples of metaphoric thinking in action. It enables us to learn such thinking by experience’ (ibid.:48). The embodied experience may potentially become ‘ritual knowledge’. Jennings (1982) notes, ‘[r]itual knowledge is gained through a bodily action which alters the world or the place of the ritual participant in the world’ (115). He proposes three interrelated aspects for people to gain knowledge through ritual; these can provide insights into understanding the participants’ learning in the pedagogical experience provided in the applied theatre training workshop. They are:

1. Ritual knowledge is gained by and through the body… It is not so much that the mind “embodies” itself in ritual action, but rather that the body “minds” itself or attends through itself in ritual action.

2. Ritual knowledge is gained not by detached observation or contemplation but through action. It is in and through the action (gesture, step, etc.) that ritual knowledge is gained, not in advance of it, nor after it.

3. Ritual knowledge is gained through the alteration of that which is to be known… Ritual knowledge is gained not through detachment but through engagement—an engagement which does not leave things as they are but which alters and transforms them.

(ibid.:115-116)

In the training period, the new ritual knowledge emerges from the living space, which interacts with the participants’ embodied knowledge that they have brought from previous personal, social and cultural experiences, to create a different layer of possibility for change.

This chapter started by defining the applied theatre practice that is at the centre of this study by describing the debate about the terminology and its development. In laying out the groundwork of the aesthetic dimension of applied theatre, two distinct features of the form (i.e. that it is participatory- and improvisational-based) have been pointed out which contribute to the educational influence in applied theatre. This review considers a wide
range of applied theatre and drama education literature in general, besides that relating directly to the specific genres selected in this study. Much of the literature indicates how the applied theatre provides a participative, dialogic, social interactive, creative, aesthetic and reflective space for creating human change. The concept of a training workshop as an open-space learning context, and the pedagogical experience of learning about applied theatre have been addressed to further explore what kind of impact the perceptions and definitions of knowledge and the embedded learning methods, that are outlined in the literature, will make an impact on participant’s capacity building.

In summary, there is no one existing theory and model in the literatures of NGOs, adult learning or applied theatre that is adequate to apply in the investigation of capacity building of NGO workers through/in applied theatre training. Therefore, these two chapters of literature review have served the purpose of visiting different prominent models of adult experiential learning, art theories, and the discussions in the field of applied theatre and drama education for human change. Together, they give me a multiplicity of perspectives towards understanding how an adult learns in/through experience as well as through applied theatre learning and practice. In the next chapter, I will address the research methodology and design of this study, along with the research framework and the details of data collection methods.
Chapter Four  Methodology, Research Design and Research Methods

4.1 Methodology

4.1.1 Introduction

As I teach, I continue to search and re-search. I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. I research because I notice things, take cognizance of them. And in so doing, I intervene. And intervening, I educate and educate myself. I do research so as to know what I do not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what I discover.

(Freire, 1998:35)

This study is practitioner research centred on an applied theatre training workshop with a group of Chinese NGO workers. The research takes a reflective practitioner approach to address the following key questions raised from my previous practice:

Does applied theatre training contribute to capacity building for NGO workers in China? If so, how, and what factors might support or inhibit its effective application?

Through a close and systematic inquiry, I wanted to develop a greater understanding of my practice in order to generate new knowledge for improving it. This whole study is fundamentally driven by the questions raised in my previous teaching. I took on this research to help me ‘notice things’ that ‘I do not yet know’ in order to improve my practice. As soon as I decided to put my practice as an object of the research, I had already started to intervene in my own teaching. I used my teaching as a source to ‘educate myself’ about the practice I have been doing. Therefore, first and foremost my intent was to employ a methodological approach that directly aligned with my regular practice. I was looking for a research methodology as an effective guide integrating into my practice, not separate from it, to connect closely with what I have been doing and enhance my existing capacity.
Alongside my habitual role as practitioner (artist and teacher) a new role therefore emerged, that of researcher. This raised from the beginning the possibility of tensions. I was forced to ask myself: what is the difference between being a practitioner and being a researcher? Do I need to change my regular practice? Will the practice lead the research, or the research lead the practice? A responsible and ethical practitioner needs to be concerned that the research agenda should not override the teaching agenda. My decision to set up a ‘special’ (as with research purpose) but authentic training course using volunteers who were aware of my research agenda addressed the immediate ethical issue, but still left me with the responsibility to my practice agenda and theirs, which was to deliver applied theatre training with a view to increasing their capacity as NGO workers (their agenda), and improving my own ability to do so (mine). Accordingly, I positioned my primary role as practitioner – literally ‘practice-led research’ as recently coined and defined by Haseman and others (Haseman, 2015). However, because of the very nature of applied theatre training, this did not necessarily conflict with my research role – on the contrary, I found that had the potential to complement it, providing I could find an appropriate ‘practice-led research’ approach and methods. Both action research and reflective practitioner case study offered opportunities, enhanced by each other.

As this chapter will show, I selected these two standard qualitative methodologies, both common in arts and education research, because both action research and reflective practitioner research strongly align with the nature of applied theatre practice itself. The blending of these methodologies strengthens my existing reflective and inquiring capacity to lead the entire research process. I will first briefly talk about my practice as ‘shadow’ action researcher and ‘shadow’ reflective practitioner in my regular practice and my need for enhancing capacity to conduct this study. Second, I will elaborate my practice-led research framework and attempt to illuminate how the process of conducting practice-led research grounded in action research and reflective practice further developed my professional role as practitioner-researcher. Last, I will state in detail the research design including the rationale and planning for the training workshop, how the data collection,
analysis and reflection were incorporated and embedded, and the way in which practice-research tensions were dealt with in the methodology.

4.1.2 Reflective practice and action research in shadow

Conducting applied theatre training workshop is one of my regular practices. As a responsible practitioner, I engage in reflection after each workshop. I review the effectiveness of the workshop structure, the appropriateness of the contents, the methods of facilitation and the participants’ responses in the process. Occasionally, I will have additional data obtained from informal conversations with participants, feedback forms and/or questionnaires to assist my reflection about participants’ learning in the training workshops. I sometimes write down the results of these reflections, sometimes just keep them in mind. Usually, my learning from reflection on previous practice is the initial reference point for planning the next training workshop.

The well-known ‘plan-act-observe-reflect’ cycle of action and the process of reflection on practice are the basic principles underpinning action research and reflective practice. However, I am just a ‘shadow’ action researcher and reflective practitioner. The limited level of reflection in my regular practice, the fragmented data and information, and my arbitrary documentation and inquiry are inadequate to help me understand exactly what and how the participants learn in the process and the impact of the training workshop on their work – which is the purpose of this investigation. I recognise that these inadequacies, without formal research methods, hinder my own improvement in understanding my practice. This study is framed as practitioner research grounded in both action research and reflective practice. I find the epistemological and methodological orientations of these two research strands can effectively help to turn my shadow ability into a living capacity. They inspire, inform and strengthen what I have been practising. They provide a rigorous guide and framework to work in the research process. Habits of practice can become the informed, committed action of praxis. Most importantly, the research and practice are closely connected in the design of the study itself, as I will elaborate in the following sections.
4.1.3 Underlying research framework

The literature is unclear and blurred in terms of distinctions between action research and reflective practice. On the one hand, they have different foci of discussion and usually they do not mention each other. On the other hand, they do have closely akin and overlapping concepts (such as the emphasis on reflection). This will be dealt with below in detailed analysis of the two approaches (4.1.7, 4.1.8). On further reviewing the literature about the nature of the relationship between these two notions, it becomes more problematic.

Some writers specifically differentiate these two research strands. For examples: McMahon (1999) distinguishes action research from the reflective practitioner model through its ‘intent to solve a particular problem’ involving ‘strategic action’.

Such strategic action is not integral to the reflective practitioner model of learning and teaching... That the reflective practitioner model involves going through part of the action research spiral…does not make it action research. (167)

Taylor (1996), who is an advocate of reflective practitioner research, takes a clear and opposing stance from the methodological perspective:

…there is a significant difference I would like to make between the action research model and that informed by reflective practice. Whereas action researchers tend to emphasize evaluation, rather than ongoing reflection, as a culminating activity, i.e. one plans, one acts, one evaluates, then one plans again, reflective practitioner researchers are concerned with documenting and understanding the tacit and known knowledge base which enables reflection-in-action to occur. (28)

In contrast, Elliot (1991) perceives these two approaches as equivalent.

This kind of joint reflection about the relationship in particular circumstances between processes and products is a central characteristic of what Schöns has called reflective practice and others, including myself, have termed action research.

(50, original italics)
Bryant (1996) agrees with Elliot’s argument; he applies Ebbutt’s definition of action research connecting it to Donald Schön’s theory of reflective practice. He conflates the two in ‘action research as reflective practice’ sharing the same concern.

In action research as reflective practice, given the concern with change there is always an interest in the outcomes of action but, at the same time, given the concern with understanding, there is an equal interest in the ‘knowing’ or informal theory which is implicit in the ‘doing’ or action. (115)

These diverse viewpoints are associated with multiple understandings, conceptualisations and methods of inquiry within these two strands. Like other traditions in practitioner research, they have been developing a diversity of ideas and models throughout the years of practice in different contexts. Despite their differences, these two approaches actually share epistemological orientations with each other and with this study. Both have the aim of improving practice.

4.1.4 Relationship between knowledge and action

To a certain extent, the epistemology of action research and reflective practice are both grounded in what John Dewey identified as the importance of human experience in generating knowledge. Dewey’s notion of ‘learning by doing’ hugely impacts on educational practice and research. It promotes the concept of using the professional experience of teachers and other practitioners as a source of knowledge about teaching. Knowledge locally produced is essentially connected to practice and informs practice. Gaventa & Cornwall (2006) states the practical relationship between knowledge and action in action research.

…while knowledge is not for its own sake, neither is action; rather, the process is an iterative one. Through action, knowledge is created, and analyses of that knowledge may lead to new forms of action. (77)

Along similar lines, Donald Schön, who coined the term ‘reflective practice’, emphasizes
‘research is an activity of practitioners’. Theory and practice are not separated in the process of producing knowledge.

It is triggered by features of the practice situation, undertaken on the spot, and immediately linked to action. There is no question of an “exchange” between research and practice or of the “implementation” of research results, when the frame- or theory-testing experiments of the practitioner at the same time transform the practice situation. (Schön, 1983:308-309)

This notion is crucially in line with the knowledge generated in applied theatre which is fundamentally practice-based. The ‘ephemeral, transitory and elusive qualities’ of applied theatre (Taylor, 1998:83) means that the learning in/about the practice is always an evolving process. The experience is constructed and co-constructed through interaction among the living humans participating in the process. The training workshop using applied theatre practice which is the centre of this study is highly interactive, spontaneous and improvisational. It can never be fixed but remains fluid. New understanding is created in the ongoing experience and is supported by the methodological frameworks I implemented in, through and after the practice.

4.1.5 Insider knowledge

Both action research and reflective practice position the practitioner at the heart of the research. Practitioners are able to conduct their own research and be valued as knowledge producers. Carr and Kemmis (1983) define the crucial point for action research as:

…only the practitioner can have access to the perspectives and commitments that inform a particular action as praxis; thus praxis can only be researched by the actor him/herself. The dialectic of action and understanding is a uniquely personal process of rational reconstruction and construction. (166)

In such research, both action researchers and reflective practitioners use themselves as the research instrument ‘to raise the questions of inquiry, to process how those questions will be investigated, and to consider how their emergent findings will impact upon their
lifelong work’ (Taylor, 1996:40).

Combining these approaches within my methodology allows me to learn about my practice through the practice. I document the insider’s knowledge to develop my epistemology of practice, which rarely happens in other research paradigms. Most importantly, the methodology acknowledges my presence and impact in the study. It takes into account the implicit understandings gained from the practice, which are rarely subject to review but are valid to share with fellow members in the field. In addition, as Gallagher (2003) states, ‘[w]hat is clear is that there is no correct pedagogical model on offer for drama education’ (12). Like all kinds of drama teaching, the pedagogical model of teaching applied theatre varies according to its particular pedagogues and facilitators. The applied theatre training workshop that is the site of this study was conducted with adult learners in a community context which had no required curriculum. The teaching contents were decided by my professional judgement. In order to learn about how my practice impacts on Chinese NGO workers’ capacity building, my understandings of applied theatre and the rationales for my actions have to be made as explicit as possible for a systematic analysis.

4.1.6 Relationship between reflection and action

Reflection is the central element of both action research and reflective practice. Through active reflection by the practitioner-researcher, the practice is reviewed or/and adjusted in the midst of or/and after the action to generate new ‘theories-in-use’ (Schön, 1983). Dewey (1933) was among the first to put the emphasis on reflection as an important aim of education. Reflective thinking, he said, ‘converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action’ (Dewey cited in van Manen, 1995:33; Kinsella, 2010:7). His idea of linking intentional reflection to intelligent action provided a basis for reflective practice.

John Elliot (1991) promotes the nature of action research as fundamentally reflective. Improving practice through ‘a continuing process of reflection’ (50). For him, the reflection is ethical – where ‘the reflection is about choosing a course of action in a
particular set of circumstances, to realize one’s values’ (51); and philosophical – which ‘modifies conceptions of ends in ways which change one’s understanding of what constitutes good data about practice’ (ibid.).

Although reflection is a critical component in my practice, and an important means of my learning as an applied theatre practitioner working in the community, missing is some of the essence of applied theatre practice: its evolving nature. In this study, the principles of action research and reflective practice provide me with a holistic view of reflection to inform both the research and practice. I see reflective practice as an integral part of action research; and action research as a means to develop reflective practice within an evolving/shifting context. They are mutually dependent and in different ways enhance my research and practical capacity. In applying action research, I used the recursive cyclical process and the systematic documentation. The role of reflective practice deepened the reflective processes used within the research design (and not least, in the training curriculum itself, as will appear in the analysis); in conducting the fieldwork (including in my formal interactions with the participants, both in the workshop classes and in the interviews); in the data collection and analysis; and in writing the report. In the next section, I will elaborate how I use these two approaches to design this study.

4.1.7 Action research

Action research originated with Kurt Lewin and John Collier (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001:300) and has been developing since the 1940s. This kind of research is fundamentally embedded in ongoing practice and is shaped by practitioners in different contexts. Therefore, there are a variety of models co-existing in practice. In the continuum of positionality in action research, this study is categorised as an insider research project. There are two dimensions that informed the research design: systematic inquiry and participatory worldview.

Systematic inquiry

As I indicated, my regular practice has been shadowing the principles of action research. To a degree, I go through the cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect all the time. However, it
is not really traditionally pure action research according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988):

…to do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life; and to use the relationships between these moments in the process as a source of both improvement and knowledge.

(10, my italics)

The spiral of cycles is self-reflexive. Instead of using the classic action research cyclical process, this study contained three pre-planned cycles using three distinct but complementary and to a degree overlapping strategies of applied theatre, as an organised process of learning. It needed to be careful, systematic and rigorous so as to trace the growth of the researcher’s own knowledge. The recursive cyclical process in this study was not a fixed and linear mechanical approach which looks to research ‘as a source of technical means-ends rules for controlling and shaping the practices’ (Elliot, 1991:52). It served as a series of guiding poles to document a track through the whole process. It was an ‘organistic-oriented action research’ (Coghlan, 2003) which was ‘guided by a primary aspiration to study the inquiry process and help it transform through increasingly intensive learning in action’ (ibid:455).

The research design to begin with followed the classic action research process of identifying a problem to be solved or vision to be achieved – in this case both were embedded in my research question. The problem I perceived was some identifiable lack of capacity in NGO workers, and the vision was an improvement in my own applied theatre training practice that would build that capacity. That led to the development of my strategic plan. This strategic plan departed a little, but not entirely, from classic action research in two particulars.

First, the three cycles were effectively planned in advance, and in sequence, rather than the replanning being entirely the product of the observation and reflection in the previous cycle; however, both the pedagogical fine-tuning and much of the teaching interaction of
each successive cycle were based on that observation and reflection of the participants’
behaviour and learning in the previous cycle.

Second, I had no simple means of ‘testing’ the effectiveness of my three strategies. That
depended on the documentation and data analysis – the observation and reflection on an
ongoing basis, where I continually had to make judgments about the differences from my
previous practice (e.g. the new training actions and emphases involved in each cycle, and
in each workshop encounter) and reflect upon how those were impacting on the
participants’ learning. That demanded not only reflection on action, but continuous
reflection in action, where I constantly had somehow to achieve the distance to reflect
accurately on the levels of causality and the limitations and constraints between the
students learning and my pedagogical practice. This had to be achieved and made explicit
through a range of documenting and data gathering practices such as regular participant
interviews—synchronous and retrospective—and student assessment items (see below).

**Participatory worldview**

A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their
world…embodied in their world, co-creating their world. A participatory perspective
asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from
which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the
democratic, practical ethos of action research.

(Reason & Bradbury, 2006:7)

This notion promoted in action research of a ‘participatory worldview’ influenced the
thinking in my study. Although there was no intention to invite participants to be formally
co-researchers in this particular study, I embedded this participatory and democratic
worldview to provide guiding and practical principles in its process. The training
workshop was designed primarily to improve the circumstances of those for whom I as
the practitioner hold responsibility. The research process was not only for me to build my
understanding and knowledge, but it was also structured for the participants to build their
own knowledge about how the training informed their practice throughout the process. I
saw the participants as partners in the study, we together documented our own experience in the training workshop and reflected and shared with each other.

Power is an integral part of the interactions in any group as well as in conducting an action research study. In this study, I was more aware that power should not be executed on the participants but with them to deepen our understanding.

…our collaboration should not aim to ‘empower’ the [participants] by inducting into new understandings of [my] world, but that each side of the partnership should learn to respect the others’ values and assumptions in a participatory process that involved moving between and inhabiting each other’s worlds.

(Somehk, 2006:23)

This study followed the central principles of action research-based collective self-reflective enquiry, so the research design emphasised this implied reflexivity, recording the reflections of both the participants and the researcher. Many opportunities for all participants to share and reflect were provided throughout the process (See below, Section 4.3.1). This is an essential way within the participatory worldview of action research to become what Wenger (cited in Somehk, 2006) describes as a ‘productive community’ involving:

a ‘joint enterprise’, which is negotiated and for which all partners are mutually accountably; ‘mutual engagement’, which involves diversity between the participants but a commitment to doing things together; and a ‘shared repertoire’ of stories, artifacts, discourses and concepts, which are built up over time and engender a sense of community… (24)

4.1.8 Reflective practitioner research

It may be seen from the above that reflective practice was an integral part of my action research throughout the three action research cycles. It became increasingly clear throughout the study that not only was I a participant insider, but that my own practice, shifts within it, and continuous reflection on it were a key component of answering the second part of my research question, so that de facto I was engaging in reflective
practitioner study.

Drama educator and scholar Jonothan Neelands claims that reflective practice is ‘a way of life’. He quotes another drama scholar and well-known reflective practitioner advocate Philip Taylor, who proclaims that it is ‘life-long dispositions and the on-going and continuous self-inquiry’ that develop professional practice. (Neelands, 2006:17). This goes back to Schön’s seminal work (1983, 1987) on reflective practice and the links between that and professional artistry. In order to broaden and deepen our understanding of the importance of reflection, he reminds us that the essence of practice involves reflection in action, calling to mind a conscious awareness of the professional’s tacit knowledge in action. van Manen (1991, 1995) extends this theorising to encompass the notion of ‘pedagogical tact’ which can only accumulate in practice, through mindfulness of the practice, where sophisticated levels of reflection become reflection as action, to improve the quality of the work.

Finlay (2002) puts forward the discussion of reflexivity to propose a series of variants to distinguish the types of reflection the practitioner applies in reflective practice. I find her idea of reflexivity as introspection and intersubjective reflection enriches the breadth of reflective practice. In this reflective practitioner study, I was not only concerned with my self-dialogue on the subjective response but also focused on the ‘situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter’ (ibid:215). I was conscious of the intersubjective dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship. The reflective awareness supported how I conducted the fieldwork and data collection process.

**4.1.9 Blending the methodologies**

For me, weaving together the discrete but overlapping constructs and practices of action research and reflective practice through recognising their inherent qualities is central to becoming a practitioner-researcher. Examining their literatures in these integrative terms threw up further useful insights, in particular the aesthetic dimension of my research. Naturally, as applied theatre, my practice is concerned with art and artistry. However, I discovered support for a broader concept of an aesthetic dimension imbuing the research
process itself, not just the theatre component. From the world of action research Reason & Bradbury (2006:2) borrow Lyotard’s term to describe action research as ‘a work of art’ in the process of becoming. They propose:

Action research is emancipatory, it leads not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge. In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. (my italics)

From the world of reflective practitioner case study, I discovered that developing my own capacity to document my practice and depth of reflection, as Joanne O’Mara describes it, gives me more presence. As she explains:

The roles provide multiple perspectives on my own situation, with these roles sometimes colliding, vying for domination, creating confusion… Researching one’s own practice is fraught with tensions and split attention. However, the process of researching my own practice has made me more “fully present” to the artistry of my own teaching, forever alert to moments of significance, watching and analysing my students’ work…

(O’Mara, 1999:113)

I found the new role as researcher gave me a ‘third eye’ in the process of practice. It required me to be more alert, more reflexive during and after the training workshops as well the data collection process.

### 4.2 Research design

Jonothan Neelands continues his analysis of what it is for a drama educator to be a reflective practitioner (2006: 17) as follows:

In order to be effective the reflective practitioner strives to be self-knowing as well as other-knowing. To dig deep into self in order to bring into consciousness, the otherwise
unconscious instincts, habits, values and learnt behaviours that shape their practice, as well as to self-distance their interpretations of the effects of self-as-teacher on the lives, achievements, experiences and aspirations of those they work with…

(Neelands, 2006:17)

I conceptualised my research design as a way for ‘self-knowing’ and ‘other-knowing’. In order to make sense of what planned to do and why, and particularly my own personal pedagogy, I needed to ‘dig deep into self’ and allow the ‘unconscious instincts, habits, values and learnt behaviours’ to become explicit for examination. In order to know about the participants, the various data collection methods provide me with sufficient distance to hear their voices and their comments about their learning from their perspectives.

4.2.1 The training workshop

This study is centred on studying an applied theatre training workshop in order to investigate its impact on participants’ capacity building. Since there is nowhere any established formal or ‘objective’ curriculum for applied theatre training in a community context, each facilitator has a high degree of autonomy in deciding what to teach and how. There is no ‘one right way’ to do applied theatre. The teaching content (what to teach) and the way of teaching (how to teach) are subjective, based on the facilitator’s understanding of applied theatre and how it is learnt. This needs to be open for examination. Both the design of the training workshop and the rationales of teaching have to be explained. It is the facilitator’s own constructs that are likely to shape the educational experience for the participants.

As Nicholson (2011) says, ‘good practitioners complement their knowledge of theatre-making methodologies with an awareness of what it means to work in particular contexts’ (244). By the nature of my practice, every training workshop is unique and tailor-made to ‘work in particular contexts’. Every new plan of the training workshop is ‘prospective to action’ (Carr & Kemmis, 1983:164) and implies change, and it is also based on previous accumulated knowledge. The reference for planning was bound by the learning from the reflection from prior cycles of practice, as explained above.
The training workshop in this study was designed to teach the general principles and practices of applied theatre instead of as it often is to address a particular issue in education for development. For example, the training involved in the three other case studies described in the chapter *Capacity building theatre (and vice versa)* in which a preliminary description of this study’s workshop also appears: those three case studies are all focussed on capacity building among trainers specifically to address HIV/AIDS education in economically developing countries (O’Toole et.al, 2015). My study was a practitioner-training workshop open to the participants to decide how and in what context they applied the methods in their practice.

There are diverse genres in applied theatre practice and each has its specific philosophy and tradition of application. My selection of three genres (*Theatre of the Oppressed*, *Process Drama* and *Participatory Theatre*) to introduce in this training workshop was based on my own understanding of the potential applications in Chinese NGOs according to my previous field experience. I also intended to give the participants a variety of choices of applied theatre strategies for their own uses.

The applied theatre training workshop was the longest so far in China and it took place over ten weeks (from mid-March to mid-May, 2011), which divided into three phases. Each phase introduced one selected genre. The first and the second phase had eight sessions and the third phase had ten. There were three 3.5 hour sessions in every week.

In the following sections, I will first elaborate the overall structure and content of the training workshop content in each phase (what I taught) and then explain the rationales of its design (why I structured in this way). Finally, I will make explicit the model derived from retrospective reflection on my personal learning journey on applied theatre which drives the design and the analysis.

### 4.2.2 Content and structure of the training workshop

The three selected genres were Theatre of the Oppressed (Phase One), Process Drama (Phase Two) and Participatory Theatre (Phase Three). Their traditions have been reviewed
in Chapter Three. The following was the framework before the workshop started which was critically informed by prior cycles of practice. The following descriptions identify my intentions beforehand, as the actual plan in action was allowed to be fluid and dynamic based on real-time social encounters. The detailed lesson plans were decided from week to week in consideration of the participants’ responses and my increasing level of familiarity with their ability.

**Phase One: Theatre of the Oppressed**

Phase One would include theatre games and exercises, Image theatre, Forum theatre and ‘Rainbow of desire’ and ‘Cops-in-the-head’ techniques in the training workshop. There were three dimensions to working with the group in this phase: individual, group and social. Firstly, the exercises would help to ‘dynamise’ the individual participants’ bodies. In Boal’s words, in order to be capable of making the body more expressive, first of all, control and knowledge of the body is required (1979:125). In addition, I hoped the enhancement of self-understanding would help the participants begin to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, applied theatre is a place for collective learning. In this initial stage, the work would also serve to build the group trust and create a safe and open space for further work in solidarity. Thirdly, the central aim of Theatre of the Oppressed is to develop people’s capacity to understand their internal and external oppression, as well as the nature of oppression in system, culture and society. NGO workers mainly work with marginalized communities and oppressed groups. The training workshop in this phase would provide opportunities for them to reflect on the social situation of their clients through the activities.

**Phase Two: Process Drama**

In Phase Two, the participants would go through both the experiential and the practical stages of process drama (see Chapter 3.4.2). They would first learn from participating in several process dramas and then be given the challenge to plan a process drama in a group. I would select the process dramas with diverse themes to demonstrate the possibilities of the application of this genre. Apart from learning through participation, I would reflect with the participants after the experience to explore the elements of what makes a good
lesson plan. I hoped the participants could gain understanding through this exploration and obtain ideas for planning their own group process drama. Then, the participant groups would try out teaching their lesson plan with the fellow participants and receive feedback afterward.

**Phase Three: Participatory Theatre**

In Phase Three, participants would experience a collective play-making process based on the issues with which they were concerned. They would learn by doing to design activities to complement a performance involving audience participation. The notions and examples of ‘theatre for development’ and ‘community theatre’ would be shared at the beginning of this phase as an introduction. The expected role of the participants in this phase was different from the previous two phases. They would engage as teaching artists, taking various roles in the process including playwright, actor, director, designer, facilitator, etc. They were expected to apply the strategies learnt in previous phases in their own participatory theatre programme and to present that to a public audience. I did not aim at training the participants to become skilled artists; instead, through the experience of making a participatory theatre, I hoped to give them a sense of how applied theatre works in different ways.

**4.2.3 Rationale of the workshop design**

As I mentioned, there is no fixed curriculum for applied theatre training especially in the community context. The content of the training workshop was constructed to build on the skills and the complexities of the roles played in the learning process. With the understanding of the distinct features of each genre, I designed the training workshop in these three phases, which aimed to help participants to scaffold their learning experience step-by-step. Below, I will explain two aspects of the rationale of the workshop design:

a. The sequence of teaching – the levels of complexity of different genres
b. The progressive method of learning in different roles – being engaged in different mindsets at different phases.
The sequence of teaching

The rationale for introducing Theatre of the Oppressed in the first phase, and then Process Drama, then Participatory Theatre, was based on the complexities of the structure of the individual genre and application of how the participants could manage it. The skills introduced in different phases were scaffolded rather than separately serving one particular genre. The participants started in Phase One to learn various games, exercises and activities which were relatively easy to manage and adapt. In Phase Two, an effective process drama relies on a good framework to create a meaningful learning experience. Participants need more understanding in both applying different drama conventions and structuring the lesson plan. Content and form cannot be separated; they are mutually dependent. Learning through drama is tied to learning about the dramatic form. To learn how to select and handle the dramatic materials and the expressive skills would, I hoped, benefit participants in the next phase of training.

For instance, learning the structure of Forum theatre in Phase One could be applied to Participatory theatre in Phase Three; learning different forms of making still images in Phase One, might be a convention used to structure the Phase Two Process drama experience.

The progressive method of learning in different roles

In the workshop design, I planned to engage the participants in different roles from phase to phase to progress their learning. This reflected my perceptions about the progress of learning in applied theatre. In Phase One, the whole group only played the role of participants in all exercises and activities, whereas in Phase Two, they were the participants in the experiential stage and then changed to put on a facilitator’s hat in the practical stage to design their own lesson plans and try it out in micro-teaching. In the final phase, the participants were engaged as facilitators and teaching artists working throughout the whole process with an outside audience.
4.2.4 Teaching principles

The structure described above was like a road map of how I imagined that the applied theatre knowledge would build. This was based partly on an analysis of my own learning journey, from which I extrapolated a model of scaffolded learning. As Somekh (2006:14) notes, the self can be said to be a ‘research instrument’ and action researchers need to be able to take into account their own subjectivity as an important component of meaning making.

In retrospective analysis, I have found there were roughly five stages in my learning journey to becoming an applied theatre practitioner and trainer, which inspired me to think about what are the critical qualities an applied theatre trainee should possess.

- **Stage 1: developing the interest.** Watching my first stage performance, I was attracted by theatre. Since then, I developed an interest in going to theatre, in attending workshops and even in producing my own dramas at school. The positive feelings from all these activities sustained me as a theatre lover.
- **Stage 2: practising without knowing.** In assisting teaching artists to facilitate workshops, I could only recall memories from my own workshop experiences and offer help by imitation. I felt satisfied in doing this, but I did not really know why the activities were being effective. Experiencing the short-term workshop practices never addressed my need to go deeper and further in learning applied theatre.
- **Stage 3: systematic learning.** My Master’s study in the UK gave me more references to professional practices and theories about applied theatre. I learned from many mentors and colleagues in the field and their works broadened my horizon as to how theatre could be applied.
- **Stage 4: practising with more knowing.** Going back to Asia after the course, I was more confident in my own practice with the support of knowledge gained from the systematic study. I could make more sense of my work. I started to construct my personal theory of practice. However, the more I practised applied theatre, the more questions it raised.
- **Stage 5: on-going learning and practice.** By bearing the questions raised from practice
constantly in mind, I found practice and learning go in parallel. I persisted in seeking every opportunity to exchange ideas with local and overseas colleagues, to discuss and share my views in collaboration with others, to attend workshops, seminars, conferences, and of course, to read. The most obvious difference in this stage is the level of reflection. My thinking on the practice becomes more mindful and sophisticated. I am able to see things through multiple angles due to my accumulation of experiences and references throughout all the past years. And I know this stage will continue for the rest of my professional life. This study is part of it.

Using this template of scaffolded learning, I realised that it would be impossible for participants to learn applied theatre in a single training workshop. I also realised that every practitioner would have to some degree a different learning journey. Moreover, it is hard for a person in working within the community to get systematic training in China. There are very few people who get the chance to study abroad or receive long-term formal training in applied theatre. At the moment the only way for people in China to learn applied theatre is to seek the opportunity of attending short-term workshops. Therefore, the learning in this context is piecemeal, fragmented and dependent on the participants’ capacity for self-organisation.

Considering, then, the challenge that this context provides to sustainable learning in applied theatre, I referred to the core attributes of learning applied theatre that I had found in my own journey. These led me to believe that being **self-constructive and independent** were essential qualities to support the growth of an applied theatre practitioner. They became the fundamental elements in the training workshop which were made explicit as the following teaching principles:

- Encourage the spirit of mindful awareness and self-reflection, and recognise knowledge is constructed with the involvement of the knower
- Emphasise the importance of keeping one’s own pace of learning, trust one’s own experience and learning styles, and value one’s own individual thinking
Provide opportunities for participants to take initiatives in the learning process, and responsibility for their choices.

In order to fertilise the ground, I was intent on growing a living culture of respect, open-mindedness, caring and self-awareness to underpin the group. Applied theatre training workshops are based on collaborative learning. Therefore, a positive living culture for a group of people learning together over a few months was a fundamental constituent to support those individuals to develop the above-mentioned qualities. Such a living culture encourages the participants to respect the differences, to be flexible, to be willing to listen and to express as well as to take risks. This culture can create a driving force for fostering communication, connecting with self and others, developing empathy skill and building sensitivity. These principles guided my teaching to make the participants feel free and safe to learn to be self-constructive and independent learner.

4.2.5 The site

In order to conduct the research, the first priority was to make sure the workshop could be successfully organized. My choice of a site for the project was based on political and geographical reasons as well as local readiness.

The study took place at Guangzhou, one of the main cities in southern China. Politically, it is the capital of Guangdong Province, which has a relatively open local policy for NGO development compared to the rest of the country. There are many NGOs established and located in Guangzhou and the cities around. Geographically, since Guangzhou is close to Hong Kong where I live, it was convenient for me to commute between two places for the purpose of collecting teaching and research materials. This was of further importance for me because under the internet censorship in mainland China it is impossible to access all websites.

Local readiness was also a main reason for choosing an effective site for the research. If I chose a place where nobody knew anything about applied theatre, it would be very hard to get people to participate. Since the first amateur applied theatre was set up in 2005 and
brought in different workshops, Guangzhou has become an established foundation of applied theatre among NGOs in China. Applied theatre was not completely new to the local NGOs. Several organizations were willing to assist the promotion of the course through their networks.

4.2.6 The recruitment process

**Initiation of the project**

In China, it is difficult for an individual practitioner to organize a course without back-up by a local organization. When I suggested the project, my former partner, the Institute for Civil Society of Sun Yat-sen University at Guangzhou kindly offered to be the course’s supporting organization. Since they are one of the organizations well-known for providing NGO support in China, the course information would be accessed widely, especially to reach those organizations or NGO workers unfamiliar with my name.

**Recruitment**

Participants were openly recruited. The recruitment period was from October to early December 2010. Course information targeting NGO workers was sent out just via email. Every applicant was required to complete a form to state the reason(s) for joining the training workshop as well as previous drama experience. There were 44 applications received including full time NGO workers, committed long-term NGO volunteers, members of casual volunteer groups, tertiary students and non-NGO people. Since the research was targeted at NGO workers, I first ruled out six applications from tertiary students and non-NGO people. Recognizing the range of people working in NGOs in China, I made a preliminary short list of the rest of the applications. However, a practical training workshop could not accommodate such a large number of people. In order to make a manageable but balanced number of people from each organization, maintaining the variety of NGOs in the training group, 30 applicants were finally invited to the briefing session, based on their expression of interest and the commitment showed in the personal statement in the application form.
**Briefing session**

Prior to the briefing session, I sent a letter to every qualified applicant to clarify the foci of the training workshop. Using the letter as a form of communication, I wanted to express my intentions clearly and invite the applicants to rethink their own. The level of commitment was a very important element to sustain the group stability of a long-term training workshop. I tried to create room for the applicants to consider their needs and establish matching expectations.

The briefing session, which had two objectives, was held in mid-January in 2011. First, I wanted to take the opportunity to introduce the overall structure of the training workshop in more detail, especially the purposes of the research, the participants’ responsibilities and the ethical protection for their participation. The plain language statement and the consent form were given to the applicants at the end of the session. The applicants, who were all adult professionals, made their final decision to join this 3-month commitment and returned the consent form before they left. Second, the meeting gave the potential group members a chance to meet each other, to share their working backgrounds and express their needs and expectations for the training workshop. It also served the purpose of warming up the participants’ entry into the event. Their readiness and willingness would pave the way for the training workshop. It was not my intention to create a workshop merely for the research and my teaching objectives; more importantly, I was inviting them to create a space where all of us, participants and researcher, gained benefit from the learning process.

**4.2.7 The participants**

After the briefing session, 24 out of 30 applicants were accepted based on their level of commitment, e.g. including the availability to attend all sessions, and the degree of support by their organization, since some sessions were held on weekdays. 16 participants were full time NGO workers working in various organizations including 3 pairs and 1 trio of co-workers from four organizations. 3 participants were long-term committed NGO volunteers and 5 members of casual volunteer groups. The following table illustrates the make-up of the group and their types of work:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full time NGO workers</th>
<th>Long-term volunteers / casual volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># 3 org. for promoting civic society</td>
<td># 4 org. for promoting rural education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2 org. for international poverty relief</td>
<td># 2 amateur theatre groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2 org. for injured workers</td>
<td># 1 group for promoting environmental cycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2 org. for people with intellectual disability</td>
<td># 1 org. for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 1 org. for youth and community work</td>
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<td># 1 org for children’s special education</td>
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<td># 1 org. for mental health and counselling</td>
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</table>

Two participants dropped out after the end of Phase two due to their unexpected organisational workloads. The remaining 22 participants stayed till the end of the training workshop.

### 4.2.8 The workshop assistants

I invited three of my Chinese students to be the teaching and research assistants in this training workshop. They helped in the tasks of video- and observation note-taking as well as assisting teaching demonstration and leading groups if necessary.
4.3 Research methods

4.3.1 Data collection

In order to deepen the understanding of the process, and investigate what happened in the training workshop a number of methods of qualitative data collection were employed at different periods of time (see Figure 4.1). Since I was the researcher and also the practitioner in this study, I carried both my research agenda and teaching responsibility. The data collected in this project combined data generated primarily for research with data generated primarily for my teaching purpose (which as will be seen also fed very valuably into the total data used in the study); in addition, data emerged from the process which had not been planned before the study started, but which was able to be incorporated within the ethical guidelines set. This was an important source of data, an aspect of the non-prescriptive blended methodology I had adopted.

Data generated for teaching and learning purposes

My training methods involved setting up for my teaching and the participants’ learning purposes a number of forms of documentation: individual reflective journal, anonymous weekly feedback form, reflection form at the end of each phase, and final essay at the end of the course. These instruments aimed to assist participants’ reflection, and documented what they had learnt, and also assisted me to review the teaching during the process.

Other ancillary data was collected during the fieldwork: my ongoing and constantly changing workshop lesson plans; visual data such as photographic documentation, drawings, objects and images created in the workshops; artefacts produced by participants such as scripts and their own lesson plans.

Data generated for research

Some data gathering instruments I set up primarily for my research purpose, and not necessarily part of the training tasks. In this project, these instruments particular to the research comprised my practitioner’s journal; interviews (see below); informal
observation notes; and video and audio recordings both of the training workshop sessions and the fieldwork placements in Phase Three. It may be noted, however, and will be seen in the analysis, that these instruments, such as the interviews and recordings, did in fact have an impact on the participants’ learning and reflection.

Further background information pertaining to the research included: the recruitment form and the record of the group sharing and discussion during the pre-project briefing session in January 2011; and a retrospective questionnaire (see below).

**Interviews**
I conducted three semi-structured (face-to-face) interviews with each participant in order to document their chain of thoughts and their responses to the training workshop at different times.

- **First interview**: before the training workshop (February 2 – March 14, 2011)
  It aimed at understanding the participants’ working background and their expectations and experience both in capacity building and applied theatre.

- **Second interview**: after the training workshop (May 30 – June 11, 2011)
  It aimed at understanding the participants’ responses to the training and their plans for applying what they had learned.

- **Third interview**: four months after the training workshop (October 11 – 22, 2011)
  This retrospective interview was a follow-up aimed at understanding whether there was a lasting impact on the participants’ learning and their use of applied theatre after the training workshop.

**Questionnaire**
This was an unexpected bonus in the form of longitudinal data, not planned initially as part of the data collection, but accepted by the ethics committee on condition that it would be an entirely voluntary contribution by the participants. One year after the workshop
finished, I sent a questionnaire to all participants via email. Through the questionnaire, I wanted to investigate their understanding of applied theatre, the levels of their use of it in their own contexts, and their memories of the workshop after a year. All 22 participants returned the questionnaires.

**Practitioner’s journal**

The practitioner’s written journal served as my reflective record of the training workshop. I used it to document my reflections on the teaching after each session, to record the participants’ responses and the incidents that happened in the session. I filled in my journal on two occasions. First, I wrote at the same journal writing time that was offered for the participants, mainly at the end of a session. Second, I documented the reflection, thoughts and feelings at the end of teaching in each week at home. For some complex ideas of thought, I also audio-recorded the voice journals from time to time during and after the training workshop.

**Other data emerging from the process**

In addition, I collected and was able to use articles posted in participants’ blogs, as well as the emails and text messages sent by the participants during and after the training workshop; these were found to be extremely relevant to the study.

After the workshop, three participants consulted me about their planning and execution of applied theatre in practice. I went through the whole process from giving advice on their lesson plans, to mentoring their reflection before and after the practice. With permission, I audio-recorded the discussions between us and kept notes during the process of observing their practice. The data gave me an insight into understanding what the participants had learned in the training workshop by seeing how they were applying it.
4.3.2 Data Analysis

I decided upon coding and analysing these data sets through mixed methods and coding, entailing some aspects of a grounded theory approach, as well as strategies like content and narrative analysis. This range of strategies would be used in order to track and make sense of the multiple levels of meaning from participants’ verbal and nonverbal data that had been generated in the study.

Due to the large quantity of data generated and for the purpose of this study, I decided to focus on analysing the data from the 17 full-time NGO workers and long-term committed volunteers in order to investigate the relationship between the impact of the training workshop and practice in their workplaces. However, I recognised that those others – the casuals, the non-NGO participants and the early leavers had also contributed to the project in terms of their influence on the learning of others in the collaborative workshop ethos – therefore, data including them would be incorporated where appropriate.
4.3.3 Emergence of themes and categories

What participants mentioned in group-time discussions and wrote about their learning experience in transcribed interviews, journals, final essays and questionnaires were given more weight in the analysis. I put all relevant data of each participant into 17 individual folders. Each participant had a unique learning journey. The analysis process commenced by close reading of every participant’s folder and open codes. This first stage mainly concentrated on how the participants thought about their learning in the training workshop. Everyone described their own picture. The coding process was repeated in every set of participants’ data. This process was like identifying the colours in every participant’s picture of learning. After this procedure, all codes put together were constantly compared to each other to find out the following emerging themes (common colours used) covered in all participants’ data sets (pictures):

- Applied theatre learning
  - Techniques
  - Skills
  - Principles and pedagogy

- Generic learning
  - Personal learning
  - Reflective learning
  - Pedagogical learning

In the content and narrative analysis process, I was inspired by the beginning learners comparing their learning effectiveness with the participants who had had prior applied theatre experience. Accordingly, I decided to divide the participants into groups dependent on their prior level of applied theatre experience and review the data sets again to see if any pattern emerged. Three categories were finally identified based on their background in applied theatre. They are:

- Category One Participants with limited or no watching and participating experience
Category Two Participants with a little bit of participating and practising experience

Category Three Participants with participating and some practising experience

These categories provide additional dimension for analysing the themes in depth and also the correlations among the different aspects of learning mentioned by the participants.

As the facilitator, I was also one of the participants in the training workshop. My act of teaching naturally impacted on the participants’ learning. In order to deepen the understanding of the educative influence by facilitator in the process, I examined the data about my thoughts on the methods of teaching. This became another theme, analysing the participants’ learning from my perspective as facilitator and analysing the facilitator’s role.

4.3.4 Validating the research

By the nature of action research and reflective practitioner case study, the practitioner-researcher is the principal research instrument in the study. My subjectivity is intimately involved in the research process. I collect, select and interpret the data with my own unique background and experiences, and this I have to acknowledge rather than ignore. Being aware of the need to avoid self-indulgence, I adopted ‘critical subjectivity’ as described by Reason (1994) to protect the quality of the inquiry work.

Critical subjectivity means that we do not suppress our primary subjective experience, that we accept our knowing is from a perspective; it also means that we are aware of that perspective, and of its bias, and we articulate it in our communications.

(327; original italics)

When I come to validate the research, I don’t see there is an objective truth that exists out there for my discovery. Instead, perspectives in qualitative research are ‘multiple, shifting and constantly transforming’ (Taylor, 1998:137). I agree with Taylor that a rigorous drama research is a process that:
Based on these principles, this study relies on the quality of data from a variety of sources to thoroughly document both the facilitator’s and the participants’ voices through different means (journal, essay, questionnaire, video, interviews, blogs, lesson plans, emails, text messages) and in different forms (written, verbal, physical drama, visual data) from time to time (before, during and after the training workshop). The use of a range of formats of data assists balanced in the capture of the expressions of the participants who use different learning styles. The different data sets validated each other. The longitudinal data recorded the sustainment of impact at different times to rule out short-term effects or fortuitous outcomes. It helped to check the consistency of each participant’s responses; more importantly, to align what they said to what they had done. Therefore the impact of the training workshop and the changes observed were not only an impression/perception, but also reliable. Reviewing the data gave me the opportunity to gain distance from the actions.

Distance makes the familiar strange, it decentres the principal investigator from the lived event and provides a valuable opportunity to hear other voices, see new faces, while building a comprehensive understanding of the one event.

(Taylor, 1996:44)

From the distance, insights are generated by reading different participants telling and describing their experience about the same events in different manners. Because the participants’ learning experience was not in a fixed linear dimension, the traditional method of triangulation in research could not reflect the complex and intersubjective context in this study. Therefore, the validity of this research is drawn from Richardson’s notion of crystallization (1994). Using her words, the central image for validity is the crystal, which
combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. (522)

Every participant interpreted their own learning story based on their interest and worldview. Since every participant’s data set is uniquely crystallized, there is no ‘negative data’ as it is called, in this study. This is not a study about testing the effectiveness of the training workshop. Instead I want to gain understanding in participants’ learning no matter how much they mentioned they have learnt. More importantly, the participants’ experiences and responses offer me multiple angles to deeply reflect on the practice beyond my limited individual perspective. I first studied every crystal one by one and recorded the features of each. Then I put all crystals together to form a ‘crystal mosaic’ in order to construct a picture of the learnings in the training workshop. I identified the key colours and patterns as a whole in order to make sense of the data for answering the research question. I recognise there are multiple truths in the process of creating knowledge. What I claim in this study is only ‘partial understanding of the topic’ (Richardson, ibid.). The knowledge is situated and contingent but is vital to improve my practice. Practitioner research is an on-going research, which doesn’t have a full-stop.

Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

(Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005:963)

4.3.5 Transcriptions and translation

The first drafts of all interviews were transcribed by the participants and the helpers. I first invited the participants to transcribe their own interviews which provided two additional benefits. First, there was learning potential for them to revisit the contents of their interviews. In fact, there were three participants who shared with me their new understanding that had evolved from the transcription process. Second, they could adjust their answers if they wanted to. Not all participants were able to offer this help, so the remaining recordings were transcribed by helpers. All helpers were recruited only for transcription and they signed a confidentiality agreement for ethics purpose before I sent
out the digital files. Names were anonymised during the transcription and pseudonyms assigned. Then, I listened to the recordings of all the interviews and double-checked all first drafts to make sure of their accuracy in order to finalise the second drafts of each interview. For the in-class group time conversations, I transcribed sixteen sessions from video recordings.

All data was in Chinese. I translated the quotes in this thesis attempting to maintain the integrity of their original meaning. I chose not to do a literal translation because it would not make sense to translate word for word from Chinese to English.

All names in this thesis are anonymous.
Chapter Five  The Training Workshop

5.1 Phase One: Theatre of the Oppressed

This phase lasted for three weeks and comprised nine sessions. As mentioned, apart from introducing the Theatre of the Oppressed, this beginning phase also had the purpose of building group rapport. The narration of this phase will be in a linear format of week by week since the activities were sequenced to build on each other, beginning with the overview of the intended objectives in each week, then activity by activity. It is necessary to give quite a detailed account of the activities, in order to provide a textured understanding of how my pedagogy and their learning and growth were scaffolded. Further detail of some individual exercises and activities may be found in Appendix.

Week 1
Overview
There were three teaching objectives in this week. First, building connection among group members; second, helping participants to get used to drama work; third, introducing different games, exercises and simple image theatre techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed.

Session One
Participants took off their shoes, entered into the workshop venue which was an open space with a wooden floor. They sat on chairs in a big circle. This was more formal than my normal starting, because I wanted to separate the workshop’s real start from a ‘pre-activity briefing’ in order to make clear my expectations and their need before the activities began. I told them to be aware of each other sitting in the circle and feeling the group.

After a silence, I asked them to put down their notebooks, encouraging them to be fully present in every moment, suggesting they could jot notes during the break time, and
announcing that the lesson plans would be sent to them at the end of last session in a week. Then I briefly introduced the helpers and their roles in the training workshop. I was very conscious the group was comprised of participants with and without previous drama experience. As fine tuning I emphasized the importance of participation and how from participation they would develop their own theory of practice. I addressed some participants’ concern about lacking experience, to give them confidence assuring them the learning would grow with experience. I also stressed the need for open-mindedness and risk-taking. For those who were experienced, I suggested they focus on the essence of the activities in order to deepen their understanding.

Finally in the ‘pre-activity briefing’, I invited the participants to express their needs and expectations individually for the group. It took quite a bit of time since some participants appeared hesitant. Not everyone spoke and one member even queried the session as a waste of time.

The first activity was a two-round ‘shaking hands’ exercise to let the participants to start connect physically with each other. I encouraged them to focus on the feeling at the moment of holding hands with different people and asked them to share the experience after the exercises. Then, it was a series of silent exercises on exploring space and self, feeling the others and creating ensemble. No judgment, no special choice, just let it happen. Accepting and being accepted. This fifteen minutes exercise challenged some people especially the participants with little or no drama experience, who were very conscious of their bodies and found it difficult to concentrate on the process. They looked a bit lost and embarrassed and in the middle of the exercise, some either stood or sat at the side. I encouraged them to carry on. Although not fully engaged, they still followed other group members till the end.

All participants found the second activity, naming and introducing themselves and one other person easier and more straightforward. The whole process was full of joy and appreciation.
Still in the process of building the group and getting to know each other, I led a ‘motivation and timeline’ activity using drawings, where participants shared the stories of what had brought them to attend this course. In groups, they created images and movement to share the common factors.

The last activity of session one entered into the basic work of the Theatre of the Oppressed – an introduction of image making. Each participant worked with different partners to make free form images and then spontaneously creating images responding to music. Those participants with previous drama experience engaged in the exercises very quickly and also motivated their partners with less experience. The pairs where both had little experience tended to quickly run out of ideas and could not sustain the exercise as long as required and stood at the side waiting for the next round.

Before the dinner break, I checked the feeling of the participants in order to evaluate their condition at the end of session one. Most of them were excitedly anticipating the next session and felt they had slightly opened-up physically. Some started to reflect on what we had so far done and why.

**Session Two**

Session Two followed the dinner break, the same evening. This session was filled with different image games and exercises like various forms of mirroring exercises, sculpting images, and improvised movement. The participants were given opportunities to get used to the body work as well as working with different members with physical contact in pairs and in small groups. These activities were designed to further open up the body and the sensations, and develop flexibility and spontaneity of the body.

The next exercise was modelling. I began with demonstrating how to model a statue with the help of a volunteer. In pairs, they took turns to be the sculptors and used hands to model a statue, then share it with the group, using a number of iterations of different moods and memories. The discussion after this exercise was rich and members expressed appreciation of how they had visualized their own issues and embodied others’ emotions.
After this series of modelling exercises, the participants worked with a new partner in a moving around game ‘Balancing the space’. They imagined themselves standing in a big wok, and to keep the balance, they had to respond quickly to every change of the partner’s movement without speaking. Within fifteen minutes, the participants were full of fun and played around with their partner inside the shared space. At the end of the game, different pairs mingled together and danced to the music.

The session closed with me introducing the journal, some buddy talk and a closing circle ritual. I talked to the members about the purposes of the journal. And they spent time on writing up today’s experience before they shared it with a buddy. Before they left, everyone stood in a closing circle. Anyone could express the last words for today to the group and I made some housekeeping announcements after that. As a finale, we hummed together to find a harmonious tone.

**Session Three**

The next day, we started with spending an hour on whole group discussion. Participants shared their experience in yesterday’s sessions and also raised a number of questions on the method of learning. I insisted on playing the role of facilitator and listener, not keen on answering the questions as a teacher or an authority figure. I did not want my ‘answer’ to limit their imagination and motivation for self-exploration. My reluctance left some participants struggling.

We warmed up by playing a tag game after sitting so long in discussion. The first activity of the day was a transitional exercise for further image work. It also served the purpose of connecting the members with each other by telling and listening to personal stories. In randomly formed small groups of six, each member took turns telling a 2-minute story about what had happened before they came today and other members just listened. After the telling, members responded to the story by creating an individual image one by one without speaking. The individual responses finally formed a collective image to report the teller’s story from the listeners’ perspectives. All participants were engaged actively in the process. Some groups that had finished early had further discussion about their
feelings as tellers on viewing, how as listeners they interpreted the story and transformed the content into an image. We had a short plenary session after all groups had completed the task.

Spreading the chairs in the room, participants walked around and spontaneously with a partner created an image including a chair when they heard a signal. Gradually, I asked them to create images of relationships and later for volunteers to show these to the whole group. There was a heated discussion on different possible readings of images. We selected three images about family relationship for further exploration. I asked every participant in each image to feel the role they were playing and think of three statements starting with: ‘I think…’, ‘I hope…’ and ‘I need…’ in order to express the role’s inner thoughts to the group. The audience was very quiet and concentrated. They appeared impressed by the complex layers of inner feeling, need and desire a person could have in a particular situation.

To continue building the understanding of each other and encouraging self-reflection by using images, the last exercise was for the participants to create an image of a personal struggling relationship. In small groups, each member had a go at sculpting their own image by using other members’ bodies. Without talking, members in groups embodied others’ stories and felt the struggles of others. After the silent sharing, each group shared the sequence of images publicly.

In private, individuals wrote up their journal and then shared this with their buddy. Before the closing circle, everybody had to fill in an anonymous feedback form to evaluate the learning in this week.

**Week 2**

**Overview**

The second week focused on introducing three core techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed: ‘Image theatre’, ‘Rainbow of desire’ and ‘Cops-in-the-head’. I demonstrated in each session respectively how to discuss issues through Image theatre, how to use
Rainbow of desire to illustrate inner feelings, and how to apply Cops-in-the-head to explore internal conflicts. At the end of the third session, we spent time on discussing the preparation for Forum theatre in the week after.

**Session Four**

This session started with a whole group sharing and discussion about the previous week’s experience. I first invited each member to present an image to show their feelings during the week just past. After checking in with everyone’s status, some participants mentioned the difficulty they found in transforming the idea in their mind into an image. I took two participants’ ideas as examples to demonstrate how to create images showing the struggles.

‘Labour dance’ was the warm up exercise. During the process, participants needed to be aware of the use of space as well as spontaneously responding to the immediate cues of their partners. This exercise aimed at helping participants to develop sensitivity for the following activities.

The next three activities were a series of demonstrations to show how to apply image exercises and image theatre process for sharing ideas, collecting information and provoking deep discussion.

In the first activity, Power Shuffle (Appendix), participants had to respond on how they identified with different social categories (e.g. class, age, religions, gender, family status). This silent exercise created a tensed atmosphere to the whole group as they had to expose their personal interests/choices individually. They all showed their struggles and discomfort by using image to create visual dialogue in the second part of the exercise.

After a break, I demonstrated how to use image as a means to collect information by using an activity called ‘call on an issue’ (Appendix). Participants voluntarily took turns to call out an issue of his or her concerns (e.g. same-sex marriage, rural and city, family violence). The rest of the group immediately responded to the issue by making an individual image.
All members actively engaged, using their bodies more flexibly for the spontaneous responses.

The final activity in this session was Image of Transition (Appendix). The group first worked in pairs and then in a whole group to collectively explore the themes of social difference. Through the discussion in action, by building and adjusting the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal’ images, this activity demonstrated how the participants could use image theatre as a medium to facilitate discussion and negotiated meaning in the group.

During these activities, participants were also given the opportunity to share their views and debate social issues through action.

Session Five
After the dinner break, I invited participants to briefly discuss their experience in the activity of transitional image. They were still very keen on discussing how the ‘real image’ could be changed to the ‘ideal image’. I shared with them some of the choices I had made as a facilitator in the process. We followed by playing a classic Theatre of the Oppressed game called ‘Two by Three by Bradford’ (Appendix) to warm up for next activity.

We spent the rest of the session on Rainbow of desire, which is a series of techniques helping us to explore the internal thoughts and feelings that complicate our relationships with other people. We first went through a process to find the most strongly resonating story in the group. Every participant thought of a relationship in their life that was a struggle, and they made a gesture and a sound to show it publicly. I chose six varied sounds and put them in different spots in the room. Members, based on their personal connection, stood next to a particular sound and formed groups with the people having the same choice. In these groups, participants shared their personal stories and chose one that echoed the majority’s. The five stories selected by these small groups were briefly shared with the whole group.

After the vote, the group chose to work on the story offered by Shuxi. His story was about
a conflicted relationship with a male participant he met at a workshop. People including me were surprised at his courage to disclose his sexual orientation. I invited the members with more drama experience to improvise the scenes of Shuxi’s story. Together with the audience, we identified, analysed and created images for each of the internal struggles and desires of Shuxi in the situation. We replayed the scenes a few times, animating the images of desire in order to understand the blocks and unlock the potential for learning. At the end of the activity, every member in the group including me shared our feelings with Shuxi and expressed how his story linked to our lives.

We finished the session by writing up the journal and gathering in a closing circle.

Session Six

The next day, we began with whole group discussion. Participants raised a number of questions about the procedure of facilitating Rainbow of desire techniques. I made clarifications and shared my understanding of the practice with the group. We also checked how Shuxi was feeling.

After two energetic warm up games, we started working on Cops-in-the-head techniques, which deal with internalised oppression. I invited a volunteer to be the protagonist. Two quickly expressed their interest. While still in the process of negotiation, Anwen, one of the inexperienced members in the group, suddenly said she would be the volunteer. Everyone in the group cheered and welcomed her taking the opportunity.

Anwen presented her images again. The audience who could recognize and empathize with any one of ‘the cops’ could take up the role, playing the image and adapting her tone in saying the line. Anwen interacted with ‘the cops’ to get more understanding about the power relations and how they impacted on her. She explored the strategies to deal with ‘the cops’ collectively with the suggestions and demonstrations by the audience. ‘The cops’ also expressed their feeling in order to give other perspectives. At the end of the activity, everyone shared their learning and feelings with Anwen.
After a short break, I took the remaining time to introduce Forum Theatre by using theatre games and set up the initial group preparation for the class in the next week. An effective Forum Theatre should match the common concern of the audience. I invited participants to suggest the burning social issues they had in mind. There were sixteen suggested topics (e.g. illegal household relocation, medical system problem, gender expectation, teacher and student relationship, housing problem, NGO and government relationship, corruption…) and we voted for four (family education, workplace relations, food safety and educational problem). Participants formed groups based on their common interest. I suggested members that research the topics and bring information and stories for devising Forum Theatre in the following week. (I sent out email guidelines for this preparation after class.)

This session ended with filling the weekly feedback form, writing up the journal and a closing circle.

**Week 3**

**Overview**

This was the final week in Phase One. The main objectives for last two sessions were to devise and experience Forum Theatre. Followed by a Phase-ending session, it would serve the purpose of consolidating the learning experience of the participants in this phase and introduce Theatre of the Oppressed projects as practised in many countries.

**Session Seven and Eight**

Participants came before the session started for small group meetings. I spent some time in check-in the status of everybody. Then I briefed the group about today’s working schedule, which was a step-by-step guide for participants devising a Forum Theatre. I shared the Forum Theatre project that I had presented in 2010 as an example, to give some ideas on constructing a Forum play. Before the small group work, I took two balancing exercises as metaphors to remind them that the principles of the play in Forum should be neither an easy-solution nor a story with no way out.
The groups took the whole of session seven to devise their plays. In groups, participants discussed the topics, negotiated meaning and selected materials with the other group members. I walked around to give advice and provide assistance. This was not an easy process for the participants. Each group encountered some level of difficulty in creating a rich situation that would stimulate the audience to explore the oppression in the particular issue.

After the dinner break, in session eight, each group had time for final rehearsal and then performed to each other. With the time limitation, we voted for one group whose issue resonated with the majority, rather than going through the entire procedure of Forum theatre with all groups. In this demonstration, I was the Joker to facilitate the Forum and the participants (excluding the performance group) tasted the experience as spect-actors.

The participants wrote up the journal before the session was closed.

**Phase-ending Session**

The Phase-ending session consisted of three parts. The first part was the reflection section. I started with a whole group activity to warm up the participants, connecting with their self and with others. Then everyone was given a private time for reviewing all journal entries written in Phase One. During this reviewing process, they had to think of the following questions:

a. What is/are your central concern(s) in the learning process?

b. Is there any new discovery?

c. Any question you want to ask?

d. What do you want to further explore in Phase Two?

After the personal contemplation time, participants shared the insights gained from reading the journal and exchanged questions with their buddy in order to learn from each other.

In the second part, I made a presentation about some Theatre of the Oppressed projects
practised in different countries with the purpose of widening the participants’ imagination on how they might apply it.

Lastly, we got back to the circle and members shared their learning in Phase One. Some participants expressed their needs and those aspects that had been unsatisfactory, as well as their struggle with the methods of learning, especially not being provided with standard answers.

We ended this session with filling a phase-ending feedback form, a closing circle and a game.

5.2 Phase Two: Process Drama

Although the basic structure of the workshop (an opening whole group sharing and discussion, journal writing, and the closing circle) was retained, the method of teaching in Phase Two was different from Phase One. Process drama is a whole-group drama process usually based on a lesson plan. By the nature of this genre, participants together with the facilitator engage in learning by stepping in and out of the fictional world, themselves, in role, with no external audience. The scenes may include working as actors in theatrical conventions, games and exercises and rehearsal techniques. However, it is usually centred on experiential, naturalistic roleplay, where the participants step into role as the characters in the dramatic context—the fictional world—and the teacher may join in this roleplay as teacher-in-role. This phase was divided into three periods: experiential, planning and practice. Each period served distinct purposes to help participants to build their understanding of process drama.

Before the teaching started, I did two transitional exercises to illustrate the critical differences between Theatre of the Oppressed and Process drama.
**Experiential period**

**Overview**

The experiential period had five sessions. In this period, I led five process drama lesson plans of various lengths and with themes suitable for different ages. The main objective was to provide diverse experiences to the participants in process drama. They learnt the structure and a range of drama conventions during the process, which gave them basic knowledge for planning their own drama in the next period. There were whole group discussions in between the dramas to help them to consolidate the learning.

In the following section, I will outline the lesson plans and briefly described the content of discussion in this period.

**Week One**

**Session One**

**Process Drama 1: Dog and Cats**

This was the shortest lesson plan, which lasted thirty minutes and it was originally designed for lower primary school students. It was based on a story written by me exploring what real friendship is. There were ten cats living in a house and one day the owner bought a dog home as a new member of the household. The dog tried his best to do whatever the cats asked him to do in order be their friend even at the sacrifice of his own interest. Starting with storytelling, I stopped in the middle of the story when the dog felt unhappy although he had won the trust of the cats. Participants in role as cat and dog practised how to express their true self to their friend. They were very keen to show a variety of the strategies they applied in the conversation, and analysed their effectiveness. The lesson plan ended by a discussion about real friendship.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:

- Storytelling, Pair-in-role conversation, Still image

**Process Drama 2: The boy who had a nightmare**

This drama was originally written for upper primary school students. It aims to engage
the participants in exploring what is the cause of fear, how to express it, and learning to empathize with others. Part one was a pre-text—a combination of stimulus and focus—to lead participants into the context. The teacher-in-role as a mother who was worried about her son’s mental health came to seek advice from the group. The group was very engaged, especially those members who themselves were parents who contributed a lot of suggestions to the mother. And then the participants divided into small groups, each group improvising a short scene about the boy’s nightmare. They were excited to perform and the audience enjoyed watching. After discussing the possible causes that might make a child afraid, in part two, each participant drew a mask to show a face of feeling scared. In the final part, everyone randomly picked one mask and took up the role. They stepped into the shoes of a person who was experiencing fear and expressed the feeling with others.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:
Experiential roleplay with teacher-in-role, Still image, Small group improvisation, Drawing and Using Mask

**Session Two**

**Process Drama 3: Green Children**

The scheme of work is published in the book *Beginning Drama 11-14* by Jonothan Neelands. The plan is based on the 12th century story *The Green Children of Woolpit*, a legend about a green boy and girl from another world, who unexpectedly came to a medieval Suffolk village. The villagers generally accepted them into their community although some were suspicious of them. At the end of the story, the boy longed for his homeland too much and died, whereas the girl settled and learned to speak the language of the villagers.

The teaching and learning objectives were about how to respond when we encounter people who are very different from us, learning how to understand and accept the differences, and encouraging empathy for and care of people who are unlike us.

In the beginning of the drama, participants spent time on studying the story. They then
acted out the story in small groups and retold it as if in different roles. This was followed by pair work, gossip circle, circular drama and whole group drama, as in a town meeting. The participants were very responsive and played various roles (green boy, green girl, villagers in general, villagers with bias, villagers who were carers of the green boy and girl, mayor) each of whom held a different perspective. The drama brought out not only the feelings, but also the dilemmas of the story, to stimulate thinking and reflection on individual responses in various situations. They were also able to explore the impact of the attitudes they set for themselves in some parts of the drama. After all explorations through the dramatic action, at the end of the drama the participants thoughtfully chose their own stance in relation to the green boy and girl.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:
Storytelling, Student-in-role, Teacher in role, Improvisation, Still image, Thought-tracking, Small group drama, Ritual, Mime and Movement, Whole-group drama, Gossip circle, Circular drama

Session Three
Whole Group Discussion
After three process dramas, in session three I began with a whole group discussion and sharing before a new drama started. The participants participated actively and the discussion turned out to be a long session lasting for one hour and forty minutes. I first took ten minutes to clarify the writing of the journal since there was some feedback indicating that not everyone understood how to document the experience. Then I invited members to share their experience of the process dramas of the previous day. The discussion was very diverse. Some participants shared their observation of the features of process drama; some made comparison with their experience in Phase One; some discussed the rationale of a particular drama; some shared how they gained self-understanding from being in roles as different characters; some talked about the choices of action in the drama. I gradually led them to think of the teaching and learning objectives in every drama. From there, I asked everyone to share which was the role they played in the dramas that had made the most impression on them, and why. Finally, I asked for comments on having this long discussion session itself, in order to assess the effectiveness
of my pedagogical choice and see if anything needed to be adjusted in the coming sessions.

**Process Drama 4.1: Arrival**

This scheme of work is adapted from two lesson plans designed by Patrice Baldwin and Julie Dunn respectively which were based on the picture book *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. The book is about a migrant story told as a series of images where a man leaves his wife and child in an impoverished town to seek a job in an unknown city far away from his homeland, full of beings entirely alien to him. The key themes explored in this drama include separation, living in a strange place and integration into a community.

The drama took place across two sessions. Several images from the book were taken as a pre-text and starting point as well as a link to develop a sustained drama during the process. The first half of the lesson plan focused on exploring the moments before the man left his homeland. After showing an image, in role as the man I was interviewed by the participants. Then the members divided into groups to improvise scenes showing the issues that drove the man to leave his homeland. The scenes were shown in mime as ensemble and all members were very attentive throughout. In pairs, one, in role as the man’s wife, expressed her worries to her husband who had to make a response. Next, together in role they collectively wrote a letter to his wife. As the last episode in this session, everyone took up the role of the man packing his suitcase, and acted out the moment of leaving home. The participants were full of emotion at the point when the drama stopped.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:
Teacher-in-role, Small group drama, Student-in-role conversation, Whole-group drama, Collective writing-in-role

**Week Two**

**Session Four**

**Whole Group Discussion**

This was a fifteen-minute group gathering for checking-in with the participants before the
drama started. Coming back after one week, I encouraged members to take this opportunity to express themselves and share their recent thoughts and feelings. It was a brief but important process to connect with each other in the group.

**Process Drama 4.2: Arrival**

The second half of the lesson plan explored the life of the man in the new place called City Y. The drama began with a short re-cap of last week’s drama and then we acted out the scene of arrival. Using the images in the book, the participants enacted the hopes and fears of the people on the ship going to City Y. They were also asked to imagine their life as a stranger in City Y after arrival: what kinds of difficulties the man would come across and how he coped with them. Out of the role, members actively shared their own experience of being in a strange place. In small groups, participants created four images representing the man’s life at different periods living in City Y. Playing the roles of local people, participants acted out their responses to the new-comers. The drama ended with everyone writing in role as the man to his wife. The participants shared any feelings and experiences that had emerged from the drama.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:

Still image, Thought-tracking, Small group drama, Improvisation, Whole-group drama, Writing-in-role

**Session Five**

**Process Drama 5: Whose Toys?**

I designed this scheme of work with my colleague. The key theme in this drama was about environmental protection especially exploring how our action affects people in other part of the world without knowing. Participants were engaged in the whole drama, role-playing the staff of an international wooden toys company, starting with naming the company, drawing the pictures of the products and setting up the offices. They were very excited to choose for themselves their character’s position in the company. The staff were proud of their work in bringing happiness to children by producing toys until they encountered a dilemma. They received a report from their wood supplier that a local boy
had climbed up a tree in protest and stopped the workers cutting down trees. The teacher in role as the boy met the company staff and complained that the cutting down of the trees destroyed his only playground. The participants as the staff tried to persuade the boy to come down. This encounter came as a shock to the staff. They never thought their work bringing happiness to some children might at the same time destroy other children’s happiness. The participants were invited to discuss through in-role and out of the role reflection how to balance the benefits among different parties, although there was no easy solution.

Drama Strategies and Conventions used include:
Defining space, Improvisation, Whole-group drama, Teacher-in-role, Hot-seating, Writing-in-role

**Suggesting target groups for process drama**
After journal-writing, I invited members to suggest, based on their interest, the target groups for the process drama which they would design. Seven groups were suggested and six were chosen (middle school students living in rural areas, migrant workers, students in a school for migrant workers’ children, university students, secondary school students and children with Down syndrome). I set no limit on the number of people in each planning group since it was more important to allow every member to work in the group they really wanted to and benefit from their work. The sizes of the final groups varied from two to five. I distributed some notes on how to plan a process drama and the guidelines for selecting the pre-text.

**Planning period**
**Overview**
The planning period consisted of one formal session and non-formal meeting time arranged by individual groups. The formal session had two parts: whole group discussion and small group planning.
**Week Two**

**Session Six**

In the first part of this session, I facilitated the participants’ analysis of the structure of the lesson plans of the five process dramas in the experiential period. Working in their planning groups, they discussed the features of each plan and the drama conventions that had been applied, and chose one to focus on to explain their findings. After each of the discussions, I stressed the main elements in the plans and clarified any misunderstandings. Before handing over the time to the groups, I gave a short lecture on the principles of designing a process drama.

The participants worked in groups in the second part of the session. I walked around the room to give support to each group. After the session, individual groups organised their own meetings for planning the drama during the week.

**Practical period**

**Overview**

This period lasted for two sessions. Each group was given a time to try-out their lesson plan and received feedback.

**Week Three**

**Session Seven and Eight**

These two sessions were allocated to the small groups’ micro-teaching. Each of the six groups had forty-five minutes to try out some chosen parts of their plan. Before the micro lesson started, the members in the teaching group introduced the overview of the plan including teaching and learning objectives, the background of their target participants, the number of sessions, and the time for each session – so that we could give relevant feedback based on the information after the drama. After the experience, the members in the teaching group and the participants were given a private time to fill in an evaluation form and feedback form respectively. Back in whole group discussion, the participants described their own experience in the process while the members of teaching group played as active listeners, permitted to make clarifications after hearing all comments.
The feedback forms were given to the teaching group to further assist their reflection. Every group went through the same procedure: briefing → teaching → individual feedback/evaluation → whole group sharing.

Playing as the ‘target participants’, members felt interested in participating in different micro lessons. They were very enthusiastic to express their views and feelings after the drama. Many of them were able to share their opinions from both teaching and learning perspectives. They analysed the logic and flow of the drama, evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and gave suggestions to improve it. Thinking as the target participants, they shared the feeling of adequacy that the experience brought to them. This part was the beginning of building a platform for a learning community.

At the end of all micro-teachings, the day was finished by writing journals and the closing circle.

**Phase-ending session**

This session comprised three functions: reflection on practice, practising on the spot and reviewing the course. To begin with the individual reflection time, I asked the participants to re-read their journal and find out their personal central concern in this phase, to summarise the features of process drama through their own experience, and to reflect on their experience being in role. Following this with small group reflection time, the members what they had learned from the micro teaching and chose one insight gained from the process to share in the whole group discussion. I took the opportunity in the whole group gathering to clear up any misunderstandings of the method and reinforced the key elements of structuring process drama.

Responding to their expression of their difficulty in understanding the notions of key questions and pre-text, in the second part of the session I set up two exercises for the participants to practise on the spot. First, I asked the participants to revise the teaching and learning objectives of each plan in micro teaching into questions. Second, everyone chose an object and presented it as a pre-text to the group and together we discussed what
makes a pre-text that effectively engages participants.

In the final part of the session, we spent time on reviewing the course so far. I invited every member to find a spot in the room and created an image to mark the moment which made the most impression in this phase. I then thought-tracked all images. Afterwards, they formed a group of three. Taking turns as the facilitator, everyone got a chance to help a member to sculpt their ‘old’ and ‘new’ understanding of applied theatre after the learning in the first two phases. Lastly, I opened the floor to everyone to share their views on the learning methods of this training workshop. Participants filled in a phase-ending evaluation form to set their personal learning objectives in the next phase before they left.

5.3 Phase Three: Participatory Theatre

Overview
This was the longest phase in the whole training workshop, and lasted for four weeks. I did the least demonstration in this phase. My role shifted to be an adviser and mentor. The participants worked in groups throughout the phase. They were expected to apply their previous learning in designing a participatory theatre programs for a real community audience.

Session One and Two
These were the briefing and teaching sessions. I started with a presentation introducing the concepts and various kinds of participatory theatre in different places. I also showed videos on participatory theatre programs in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China to give the participants visual references.

In session two, I shared with the group a model for play building. After introducing the whole model, I suggested the group learnt it by doing it. I invited members to propose themes for the play. We together selected two (youth sex education and the marginalization of dialects in China) out of twelve suggestions. The participants, based
on their own interests, formed two groups to create a play by using the model. I worked with one group and assigned another group to a workshop assistant who had directing experience. We shared our plays at the end of this session and gathered in a closing circle before we left.

**Session Three to Ten**

In the beginning of session three, after a warm up exercise, participants were given time to record in their journal yesterday’s experience of devising a play. This was followed by a whole group discussion, where we shared our experience and raised doubts about the process. I took the plays as examples to further elaborate how to stimulate discussion through drama and the activities that might be designed for engaging learning. I also clarified the key principles of creating a participatory theatre program.

Before this phase commenced, three participants agreed to offer their work places as placements for participatory theatre. They worked in very different types of organizations, which could provide a range of choices to meet the participants’ areas of interest. The target participants were high school students (Group 1), injured factory workers (Group 2) and adults with intellectual disability (Group 3). I invited each placement provider briefly to introduce the proposal with the suggested theme for the program. Other members decided which group they would like to work with for the rest of the phase. I assigned each group a workshop assistant as a colleague to work alongside them and my role shifted to be a mentor working around with each group from time to time. Group meetings included formal workshop time and after class time depending on individual group demand.

**The preparation**

**a. Deciding the focus of the program and researching the topic**

The first job for each group was to decide the focus of the program. The members in each group negotiated with the placement provider to fix a topic for the program.

- Group 1 (high school students): dealing with parents’ expectations
- Group 2 (injured factory workers): promoting awareness of mental health after injury
- Group 3 (adults with intellectual disability): learning to prevent sexual harassment

In order to make real connection with the audience and design a program that resonated with their life situation, the participants as teaching artists found difficulty in creating the contents of the program from their limited understanding. I encouraged each group to find their own way to collect information from their prospective audience.

- Group 1 conducted a series of individual interviews with students at the school, through face-to-face meetings, listening to what the students thought about their relationship with their parents as well as their needs.
- Group 2 arranged a visit and held an informal chat with some injured factory workers at the organisation’s office. This casual atmosphere made the workers feel relaxed and safe to express their views freely.
- Group 3 designed a 1.5 hour workshop for the prospective participants. Through the interaction by using games and exercises, the group members could gain more understanding of the ability of the target audience and get to know each other.

b. Designing the program

Furnished with this new knowledge, they had further discussion to narrow down the focus and then started to devise their participatory theatre. This was a difficult process for all groups since to create a participatory theatre program challenged their understanding of the topics, their skill for play-building, their ability to integrate interactive activities with the drama and their facilitation skills. Although there were three workshop assistants with relatively more drama experience offering help to each group, they needed considerable input from me especially at the stage when they were thinking about interactive strategies. I felt I had responsibility not only for
the participants in the training workshop, but also needed to make sure the audiences could benefit from their participation.

c. **Final rehearsal**

The day before bringing the programs to the audiences, I organised a final rehearsal for each group to try running their full program. In the rehearsal, everybody got the chance to practise their various roles in a realistic presentation. The other groups as audience gave immediate feedback after the presentation.

**Session Eleven**

**The presentation**

The presentations of Group 1 and Group 2 took place in a high school’s sports hall where the Group 1’s audience was located. We brought the audience of Group 2 by coach and some of them directly came from hospital. Group 3’s presentation was for the members of a rehabilitation organisation. It was held in their art training room. Each presentation was approximately two hours.

**Group 1**

This participatory theatre aimed at discussing parent-child relationship with a group of high school students. The performance started as the students entered the hall and were invited to freely look around the objects representing four different stories on the tables at four corners. The audience sat in the centre of the hall, with the presenting group showing the stories from corner to corner. The stories included high academic expectations from parents, verbal violence in the family, no room for self-expression and the pressure from parents’ excessive concern. After the first showing, the host invited the audience to participate in the interactive activities in the second showing. From the protagonist’s angle in each story, collectively we explored how to deal with the parents in the situations. At the end of the presentation, the audience was divided into groups led by the teaching artists to share their own stories of their parents.
Group 2
In a context of neglect for the mental health of the injured worker, this participatory theatre focused on raising awareness of the emotional challenge after injury and learning how to support others. The story was about an injured worker, Liu Bin, who lost his hand in a factory accident and has been waiting a long time to claim his lawful compensation. He was very frustrated for himself and short-tempered with his wife, who finally left the family.

The host started by playing a game to warm up the audience before the performance. The drama was stopped at the point of Liu Bin being alone at home after his wife left. Then the host invited the audience to name the emotions at different stages of Liu’s situation. Next, each teaching artist took on role as one kind of negative emotion, standing separately on the space with one line for this role. The audience walked around the space and interacted with the actor in role, exploring how to cope with the specific kind of emotion in action. Afterwards, the audience got a chance to come out and give advice to Liu Bin. They were given a booklet with information about mental health and the contacts of relevant organisations.

Group 3
This participatory theatre aimed at helping members of an organisation for adults with intellectual disability to learn skills for preventing sexual harassment. The presenting group began by showing three situations involving sexual harassment respectively on public transport, at a sheltered workshop and at the rehabilitation centre. After the first performance, the host facilitated a public discussion with the group and invited the audience to share their feelings as if they were the protagonists. Then, using the forum theatre format, the audience either gave advice to the characters or came on stage to make direct interventions during the re-play of each scene.

Post-presentation sharing and Phase-ending session
After the first day of presentations (Group 1 and 2), I held a short discussion session with the whole group at the venue. This sharing mainly gave a chance for the group to express
their immediate feelings after the shows without any analytical discussion or reflection.

On the next day, we had the Phase-ending session followed by the last presentation. This session was divided into two parts: small group reflection and individual reflection. Each participant worked in a group intensively throughout this phase. In the first part of the session, group members spent time together to reflect on the whole learning process and wrote a list of ‘DOs’ and ‘DON’Ts’ for doing participatory theatre. They confided in an intimate circle and honoured the successes. At the end of the group reflection, they created images to share their learning in this phase and showed them to other groups.

In the second part of the session, participants worked on their personal reflection, which was guided by the questions stated in the phase-ending evaluation form.

**Course-ending session**

After the Phase-ending session, the whole group had dinner together before going back to the normal workshop venue. After a relaxation activity, each participant chose three memorable moments from this course and recorded it as a picture/symbol or in words, which they shared in randomly formed groups of five. In those groups, members organised all the chosen moments into categories and showed them to another group. Gradually, the whole group joined together and I shared with them my own learning experience in applied theatre.

I followed by reviewing the whole learning journey with the group. They wrote down their own definition of applied theatre on a piece of paper, passed the paper around the group and wrote down their comment/sharing/thought on the back of each piece of paper after reading it.

To link back to the beginning, I gave back the pictures they drew about the stories of what had impelled them to attend this training workshop. In connection with their initial motivation, they were asked to write down what they wanted to take away from this workshop and what things they wanted to leave here. Everyone played witness for each
other in ‘the ritual of departure’. Each member, one by one, stood at one side of the room, shared publicly what they would take away and leave, then walked across to the other side of the room at their own pace and in their own way.

In the last closing circle, I gave a hand-made key ring and a letter of encouragement to each member as a souvenir before they left. It was the longest session and we finished at midnight.
Chapter Six Participants’ Responses to the Applied Theatre Training Workshop

The main objective for the participants in the training workshop was to learn how to master the skills of applied theatre and use it in their workplace. Each of the participants came with different kinds and levels of previous applied theatre experience. Their experiences included watching, participating and practising.

Watching experience
For a number of participants their only experience was watching an applied theatre performance/workshop as audience/observer or even just viewing a video about the drama workshop. They felt excited after the watching experience and imagined that drama would be an effective strategy in their work. They came to the workshop to learn the applied theatre skills.

Participating experience
Some participants had experience attending one or more applied theatre workshops, for instance, process drama, forum theatre, theatre-in-education, playback theatre. They knew what a drama workshop was about. They were prepared to learn in an open space, involving physical participation and working in a group. They came to learn additional applied theatre skills.

Practising experience
Some participants had learned applied theatre from time to time for up to a couple of years. They had experienced different kinds of applied theatre workshops and started their own practices. Some were applying theatre methods at work, for example integrating strategies into their own training programs; some came from a local amateur theatre group which organized occasional workshops/performances for the local people and sometimes invited overseas practitioners to deliver training. Although they had certain practical experiences in applied theatre, they had only learned the methods in bits and pieces. Such hobby-like practices could not provide them with a solid ground to learn from the
experience. So, they came to learn applied theatre in a more systematic way.

Some people started their interest in applied theatre after watching a performance, whereas other people knew about it through attending a workshop. Therefore, the watching and participating experiences were not necessarily acquired in that order. However, for the people with practical experience, their continued commitment to applied theatre was usually driven by previous positive experience in both watching and participating.

These three kinds of previous experience all fired up the participants coming to the training workshop, but all brought with them different expectations and preparedness in starting their learning journey. In the data, three categories of participants have been identified with different levels of learning effectiveness during and after the training workshop. These are directly related to their previous applied theatre experience. They are:

- Category One: Participants with limited or no watching and participating experience
- Category Two: Participants with a little bit of participating and practising experience
- Category Three: Participants with participating and some practising experience

In the following sections, I will show the participants’ learning responses to applied theatre according to these three categories. Because of the different kinds of teaching and learning experiences generated by the three distinct applied theatre approaches, in each category I will describe the learning differences of the participants from phase to phase.

6.1 Category One: Participants with limited or no watching and participating experience

There were nine participants in this category and all were beginners in applied theatre. Eight persons were full-time NGO workers including three pairs of colleagues. Another one was a department head of a volunteer-based NGO.
Full time NGO workers

| # 2 | org. for international poverty relief |
| # 2 | org. for injured workers |
| # 2 | org. for people with intellectual disability |
| # 1 | org. for rehab for mental illness |
| # 1 | hospital for injured workers |
Volunteering group member

| # 1 | org. for promoting rural education |

**Phase One**

In session one, the Category One participants mostly felt very excited to begin the training workshop,

This is the first time I attend this kind of workshop. On the way to the venue, I thought the workshop would be like a lecture, teacher holding a book and reading to us and we would need to keep jotting notes during the class. Oh, beyond my expectation, it was an interactive and open way of teaching. It engaged me so fast and I could feel a different meaning to games. Although I did not fully open up, I felt so happy.

(Liliang, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

I am excited I can really have a chance to learn Applied Theatre. I can touch her, really get in touch with her.

(Meili, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

At the same time, some of them struggled to adapt to the workshop mode of learning.

Struggling, adapting, uncomfortable; although I participate, I still cannot open up and feel restrained. I feel a bit uneasy and uncomfortable.

I am afraid. I am not brave enough to express myself.

(Anwen, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

In the beginning, I felt embarrassed and did not know what to do. I had many questions in mind and didn’t understand why we had to do physical work? What was the purpose?

(Qiling, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)
Jieyan [another participant] said I am very active. Actually, I feel very passive at heart. And also I am very alert like a hedgehog. I need to make sure I am safe before I get started.

(Jingjing, March 18, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Some judged their own performance and compared it to the others.

In the sculpting exercise, when I looked around other participant works, they were very real. I found it so hard to sculpt what I thought in mind. We have to feel when we sculpt, but how? How can I feel and interact with someone who plays at sculpture? …of course, some people are more creative and expressive than others.

(Chenyu, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

I have no imagination. I am not doing good. I feel uncomfortable doing mirror and sculpting exercises. I feel uncomfortable. I may say I am even more afraid I don’t have imagination, I am not creative enough. I don’t want to let my partner down. My mind cannot open up.

(Anwen, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

The activities of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Phase One involved sharing personal stories and exploring the issues of internal and external oppression. This intimate experience brought personal impact to some of the beginners and affected their focus on learning about the method. Qiling mentioned in the second and third interview that she was very repressed in this phase. She received different kinds of negative emotion from others’ dramas about oppression. She felt that entering into others’ emotional status trapped her for quite a while.

Today’s session made me feel very heavy. I am a bit unhappy, from the beginning till the end.

(Qiling, March 18, 2011 <Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Even at this stage, however, there is evidence of a slight progression in understanding.

I suddenly understand the reason why I feel so heavy and unhappy. It is because the exercises of the Theatre of the Oppressed. I saw different oppressed situations in the
scenes. I know it does happen in real life, but I still find it is hard to believe. This is not the ideal society in my mind and it makes me having emotional fluctuation.

(Qiling, March 19, 2011 <Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

By the nature of Phase One learning, there were activities relating to self-expression and self-exploration that helped participants to gain more self-understanding, which eased their mind for the remainder of the course. Qiling shared her progress in an open group phase-ending discussion:

I remember in the first and second week. Although I felt I learnt something, I also felt very repressed, uncomfortable and unhappy…I think it is still a very precious learning opportunity for me though I have been struggling and feeling bad for a while. The great learning in theatre is to my self-understanding. I learned how to feel myself, to see my needs. I did not really concern myself about my inner feeling and needs before. But now I learn to take care of my internal self.

(March 26, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>)

The drama activities built the learning confidence of participants through building personal confidence. Participants felt positive to themselves, then they could have more ease and open mind to their learning and face difficulty. We mentioned Anwen above, who felt it was hard to engage and always criticized her performance in the first week. Gradually, she found her difficulties were also shared by other participants in the activities and that improved her performance. In week two, she wrote in the journal (March 18, 2011
<Week 2/Phase 1>):

I still feel a bit uncomfortable. My imagination cannot open up and get used to showing facial and physical expression. However, I get a sense that some new discovery about myself is emerging. I hope I can fully open up.

The next day, she volunteered to be the protagonist of the Cops-in-the-head exercise. She was in everyone’s focus. After the session, she wrote in her journal:

It seems not very difficult to express myself.
I should find my own confidence, not rely on others’ recognition.

(March 19, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>)
After that week, she again voluntarily took the main role in a Forum drama. The positive experience in the previous session supported her self-confidence as well as her learning confidence.

I have to be conscientious about my feeling. Even just a little bit, it is still OK. As long as my true feelings, I will be fine.

(March 25, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>)

Maybe I have been very engaged to the training workshop these days, I can even dream drama at night.

(March 26, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>)

The activities gave them fun and excitement. The inexperienced participants related the training to their contexts and showed the beginnings of thinking about how to take them back to their work.

When I was in the struggling image, I suddenly thought about my work. I can invite volunteers and clients to show the images of their conflicts with factory owners and government. They could show their relationships by using image theatre too.

(Liliang, March 18, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

However, some Category One participants also found it difficult to understand the experience, and raised questions in their journal.

I felt not quite right when I observed others’ group sculptures. What do I need to observe and how? When I make an image, can I do whatever I want or must I find a theme for the image?

(Qiling, Mar 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

I recall the memory of the forum theatre exercise yesterday. I don’t really understand. I cannot imagine how I can show oppression in drama. What should I do?

(Jingjing, Mar 26, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

The learning in Phase One seemed to confuse the first time learners in applied theatre.
They participated and observed the methods on the surface. They could recognise the procedures of the activities but not understand the rationales behind. After Phase One, Meili and Anwen were invited by their manager to share their learning in the training workshop at the annual regional retreat meeting. They decided to use Image theatre strategies to show some of the social problems. They fixed in advance all the images of social problems, as well as the transition techniques possible for each image. They missed the essence of participation with their audience, of allowing them to feel ownership and explore, that I had demonstrated in the process of the training workshop.

**Phase Two**

The structure in this phase comprised experiential, planning and practical periods. The members had no problem in participating in the experiential period. In this period, the Category One participants actively shared their experience being in role and were able to identify with aspects of their own professional lives, such as Qiling’s strong reaction in the Green Children drama to the children’s rejection by the majority. This was prompted by her understanding of the struggles against exclusion of her own mentally ill clients. Some participants mentioned they gained more understanding from the group discussion by listening to other more experienced participants’ sharing. The complexity of planning and practising process drama also made some participants felt frustrated. Although they all felt a lack of accomplishment in doing process drama, there were three different types of learning response among Category One participants in this phase.

**Progression**

Some participants carried forward the confidence gained from Phase One and continued improving in this phase. They actively learnt from others in the discussions. Meili mentioned the group discussion helped her to understand more clearly and deeply. Anwen did not listen passively, and also participated in the sharing. She found herself changed:

I find my thinking and way of speaking is different.
I learned how to listen, to open up myself. I can reflect on my work.

(Anwen, April 15, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)
They also had positive views on their learning and showed their keenness to try it out.

I took away six models of process drama from today’s session that I can use later.
I hope I can facilitate a workshop on my own in the next month.
(Chenyu, April 15, 2011<Week3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Coping
The second type of response was coping. Participants felt unconfident in their learning and left with questions unanswered. They did not speak much during group discussion. However, they still wanted to keep track of the learning and try finding bits and pieces from the process.

In the later stage of this phase, I focused on lesson design. I would like to know how different parts link to each other; how to match the conventions with teaching objectives; how I can choose a suitable pre-text for a theme. But, I cannot find the answer. My mind is still full of question marks.
(Qiling, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Xinhong felt she lacked confidence in learning process drama.

I don’t understand. I don’t know what is the difference between Forum theatre and Process drama? The more I listen, the more I am confused.
(April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Group discussion)

But, in the same discussion, she appreciated storytelling and telling a story in different roles.

In the second phase, I found the simple storytelling can bring out a lot of issues for exploration…we can have different feelings and learning when you experience the same story told through playing different roles.

For Jingjing, she felt frustrated and criticized herself from Phase One where she could not adapt to the learning approach. In Phase Two, she kept thinking the learning was difficult for her.
My learning in process drama is a mess. I cannot engage. Maybe it is the problem of my past learning habits. I cannot think deeply for the drama and I feel so far away from it.

(April 8, 2011<Week 2/Phase 2>, Journal)

However, she did not give up and kept finding a way to learn. In the planning period, she was happy to find the guidance notes she was provided with helped her in her designing a lesson plan.

The guiding questions in the notes led my planning and it was very helpful to keep my thinking on track and not jump around.

(Jingjing, Final essay)

Although she could cope with the planning task, she still felt inadequate in using process drama.

Regression
Liliang felt confused and left behind in this phase. He showed lack of enthusiasm compared to Phase One and lost his confidence because of the difficulty of learning.

…in the group discussion of Phase Two, I always spoke last because I did not know what to say.

(April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

I felt it difficult. More and more difficult. I don’t know whether the pace was too fast or I am lacking in comprehension ability. I cannot fully understand process drama and what is the purpose.

(2nd interview)

Phase Three
In this phase, every member joined a smaller group to spend the whole phase in designing and delivering a participatory theatre program to a real audience. The Category One participants did not choose to take a leading role in their production group mainly because
of lack of skills and experience (devising drama, designing interactive exercises, facilitating the program). But because each member in the group was allowed to work in different roles, everyone was able to find their place to contribute what they could in the program. All Category One participants played a role in the drama and assisted the audience in discussion if any. Some participants in this category felt good learning from the process and from each other, whereas some felt this phase difficult and their learning regressed.

**Progression**

Most Category One participants were happy to learn new things in this phase, like production and acting skills:

> During the rehearsal, I had great learning about how to arrange actors’ entrances and exits as well as how to do the scene changes.

*(Chenyu, April 23, 2011<Week 1/Phase 3>, Journal)*

As well as the process of creating a participatory theatre program:

> The collaboration process in Phase Three widened my horizon. We talked about diversification of skills and applications in applied theatre… I found for myself that I could be more open and engaged. I got involved wholeheartedly in the process. We had lot of discussions, enactments, writings and rehearsals. I found it very practical.

*(Qiling, 2nd Interview)*

> In Phase Three, we learnt how to collect data from the prospective audience. Then we devised the drama and checked whether it matched our objectives. We did not just perform a show for the audience. We learnt how to design the questions from the beginning till the end, in order to keep the audience engaged.

*(Xinhong, 2nd Interview)*

**Regression**

There were two participants who struggled during the process. Anwen had originally increased in confidence in the first two phases, but found herself quite incapable in this phase.
At the end of Phase Three, I seemed to be going back to the beginning Phase One’s status. I did not how to do; what to think. My brain was frozen. I felt uncomfortable. I felt bad and depressed…I did not know why I behaved like that.

(Anwen, Final essay)

Jingjing had been finding it difficult to understand the learning in the first two phases. She placed herself in a detached position although the targeted audience of the group she joined was similar to her clients.

In the last stage of placement, I did not feel much. I could not feel engaged. I knew the reason. From the very beginning, I rejected the objectives of the program and I gave myself a conclusion that was impossible. I thought their [her group’s] idea was scary. It made me not willing to get involved. I didn’t want to see something close to my clients. I wanted to see something different…I thought the ending of the drama was so scary. I felt applied theatre can be dangerous sometimes.

(Jingjing, Final essay)

However, in general, most Category One participants felt excited and satisfied at the end of the phase no matter how much they considered their level of learning. The success of the program built their confidence in the power of applied theatre. Zhuhui saw the possibilities of applied theatre from the practices in Phase Three (2nd interview). Liliang got more volunteers registered for helping to develop a drama group in his organization after his clients/volunteers attended the program. Minxia received appreciation from the parents of the audience who were the members of her organization with intellectual disability. Xinhong, a quiet and passive member of the group, got a big surprise after watching and participating in all three programs. She was able to articulate her learning in explicit detail.

I was so surprised to watch the scenes. They were completely different in my mind. In the beginning of this training workshop, I could not imagine we could create such an educational performance. My previous understanding of performance was of actors acting on stage and the audience discussing on their own after the show. In these programs, actors could be interrupted by the audience; they could be hot-seated and
say something not written in the script; and the audience could actively participate and change the protagonist’s behaviour. It was unbelievable.  

(Xinhong, Final essay)

This positive experience has given them the will to continue learning in applied theatre or at least to trust that the methods can contribute to other people’s life and learning.

6.2 Category Two: Participants with a little bit of participating and practising experience

There were six participants in this category and all were beginners in applied theatre. Five persons are full-time NGO workers including three from the same organization. The other one is a founder of a volunteer-based NGO.

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<th>Full time NGO workers</th>
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<tr>
<td># 3   org. for promoting civic society</td>
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<td># 1   org. for promoting volunteering</td>
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<tr>
<td># 1   org. for promoting rural education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteering group member</td>
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<td># 1   group for promoting environmental cycling</td>
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**Phase One**

As a natural part of the activities in the Theatre of the Oppressed, like the Category One participants the members in Category Two also observed their feelings and performance in the activities, and made comments on themselves after the experience.

I could not be free from inhibition in engaging in the activities… I was very reserved most of the time. It seemed there were eyes looking at me and I could not be open... This reminded me I have been longing to become a free person. Actually, I am still far from this goal. I still care about the public eye.  

(Shuxi, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)
Although I know everyone has one's own pace in the learning process, I really could not accept and adjust my condition. I think it can be a good learning opportunity to deal with this uncomfortable feeling.

(Zhaofeng, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Zhaofeng also linked her self-observation from the activities to her life experience in the following week.

Today, I did not take the risk to intervene in the situation of the oppressed in the activity, because I thought it was impossible to make change – this was based on my previous experience in observing the responses from the oppressors. Of course it is worthwhile to try even though it may be impossible, I am still afraid of failure and have lost the confidence to make change.

(Zhaofeng, March 19, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

They were unlike the Category One participants who felt the drama activities as very strange, and where they were struggling to adapt to them. The inner struggles of Category Two members came from self-evaluation. Through their observation while participating in activities, they evaluated their own engagement and learning progress during the process. Jieyan felt good that she could be more open in the training workshop.

I am a slow person. I used to take 2-3 hours to open up my body. Today, I was surprised, or it was very different from before. My body was able to open up. I tried to let go [of my own desire]. In the mirror exercise, and the one-to-one activity in this afternoon, I could fully give and take… I think this workshop can help me face this issue.

(Jieyan, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

But after the end of the same session, she set herself a goal for improvement in the coming session.

There was not much deep feeling and thinking [in this session]. I hope I can be in better condition tomorrow coming to the workshop. I can challenge my discomfort zone; I can have ‘the third eye’ to observe things and think more deeply.
Based on their personal experience in the activities, the Category Two participants found benefits from the learning that drove them to apply or at least be willing to try out the activities at their workplace.

Today, I gained a lot from an image exercise with adding inner voices like “I think…’, ‘I need…’ and ‘I wish…’. After the workshop, I tried to integrate these elements into the music section of my training camp. Putting these elements in changed my original workshop framework and the core message to the participants. Trying out this process, made me think more deeply about the relationships to each other of ‘art’, ‘education’ and ‘music’.

(Jieyan, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

My learning: rainbow of desire, the process to analyse oneself.
Idea for application: To assist clients to have more self-understanding, to see more possibilities, to obtain energy from listening to others’ responses.

(Luping, March 18, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Apart from the self-observation, they spent considerable time writing in the journals to record the operational procedures of the activities although I sent them lesson plans every week. Since the participants in Category Two came with some understanding of applied theatre, they also paid attention to my methods of facilitation.

How to guide through questioning? The facilitator threw the questions back to the participants. Actually, it was fully open. Let the participants think, interpret on their own. Remind them that the process of change has its own pace; we should think by stepping into other’s shoes. How to do it?

(Yunlei, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

The facilitator has to pay attention to the meaning beyond the surface. We should create sharing time after each activity so that we can explore different points of view, learn from each other’s experience, and reflect on our own views and experience.

(Yunlei, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Shuxi commented on session one and gave his own suggestions after the experience. The following journal entry showed his independent thinking.
About facilitation:

- some members felt uncomfortable since there was no activity before [inviting] the expression of needs in the group discussion. I think starting with a game would be better.
- there was no preparation for physical contact before the sculpture exercise; but it seemed most of the people did not care.
- it was nice to add music in the mirror exercise…

(Shuxi, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

They tried to make sense of the objectives of the individual activities by asking questions and raising queries about their uncertainties.

Oh, I had have never known there are so many layers of feeling in an event. Is the objective for using rainbow of desire and cops-in-the-head to heighten emotion? Do they want to help participants to discover and understand their own feelings? So, what is the meaning for the participants, to let them dialogue with different kinds of feeling?

(Jieyan, March 18, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Their previous experience allowed them to see the activities at a deeper level:

I found that I am quite familiar with the activities and have used them before. Therefore, I pay more attention to the rationales and values embedded in the activities.

(Luping, March 26, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

Either in their journal or in open group discussion, the Category Two participants would ask quite a lot of technical questions about the skills and principles of the activities in application.

I have a few questions about the rainbow of desire…does it have a therapeutic function? Or it is just for the protagonist to see more possibilities? What is the main objective for the rainbow? Second question: I played one of the feelings of the protagonist in the event, I needed to maintain my gesture which put me in a bit of a funny pose. I couldn’t help laughing at the pose. I am thinking – will the pose block [the auxiliary’s] emotional engagement? Third question: I felt Shuxi [the protagonist] was very brave
to share yesterday. I am curious: will our clients have the same level of courage to face themselves? Or although they are willing to face themselves, can they truly articulate their feeling [in the process]? If they can’t, shall I stop the story and change to another one?

  (Luping, March 19, 2011, Whole group discussion)

Other participants such as Shuxi and Jieyan provided the same level of searching questions.

Just after Phase One, some Category Two participants accompanied by a Category Three member initiated a study group on exploring the Theatre of the Oppressed. They called a meeting to collect opinions on the form, and the possibilities of sharing practices among the members. It showed the participants did not just ask questions raised in the training workshop but they were beginning to take independent initiatives to search for their answers.

**Phase Two**

In the experiential period of the Process Drama phase, like the Category One participants, the members in Category Two focused on the experience of playing different roles. Some evaluated their acting skills.

I found my acting skill was bad. I was very limited. I was not good at physical expression. The facial expression was very inadequate.

  (Xunxi, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

And they also shared how the roles in process drama linked to their life.

I could not leave my parents. In the activity to write a letter to home in role, I wrote about how much I wanted to care for the parents. I think it was because I always worry about my own parents.

  (Jieyan, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

In the planning and practical period, the responses of Category Two participants were
various, particularly depending on their previous experience of process drama. Although they had all attended applied theatre workshops previously, not everyone in this category had learnt process drama before.

Some participants new to process drama found it hard to design a lesson plan. As with the Category One beginners, they mostly paid attention to experiencing rather than seeing the structure of the drama. However, unlike the Category One participants, they managed to get over their feelings that they were regressing and losing self-confidence. They were quite positive and found their way to learning in the process.

I had not learnt process drama before. I felt very excited, playful and renewed.

In planning a process drama… it felt so ‘painful’. I did not know what to do, I was very stupid. There were many unfamiliar terminologies. I had to explain these to my partners [who were beginners in drama], which made it even harder for me. However, I know how different conventions work since we did [the micro-teaching].

(Yunlei, 2nd interview)

~very complicated, very entangled, very fun – process drama and the design process
~this is my first time to learn process drama, I focus on observing how Yi-man leads the process

(Zhaofeng, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

For some who had learnt process drama before it was easy to comprehend the process and it deepened their understanding of some principles, like how to set up a good key question.

About learning process drama: I learnt about the techniques in the previous workshop. In this training, I learnt how to set objectives starting from key questions which should not pre-empt the answer. I can learn more deeply this time.

(Luping, 2nd interview)

Jieyan was able to articulate her new understanding in the process.

It was very fundamental. It contained a lot of basic principles like setting learning
objectives. That was a very stunning idea to me – starting from a question, rather than what I want the participants to do. It changes my paradigm, it is not about the message I want to give to the participants; it is a co-inquiry process, working together with them. I am conscious of needing to keep this as my teaching rationale: to value everyone’s own experience, and there is no standard answer.

(Jieyan, 2nd interview)

At the same time, the learning created new questions for her to think deeply about:

It stimulated my thinking during the planning period. I found it is not easy to design a process drama. A bit difficult. The difficulties are: I do not know how to set up a role, how to [create a plan to] suit the workshop participants, and how to structure an appropriate framework for process drama.

(Jieyan, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Shuxi reflected on his observation of process drama and asked himself thoughtful questions.

If there is no answer or viewpoint generated from process drama after discussion, what is the purpose of the discussion? Does it focus on the process as a more important objective for education? What is education?

(Shuxi, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

**Phase Three**

All Category Two participants were new to participatory theatre. However, they found it easier to be involved and contribute than the Category One members since they had relatively more skills and understanding in drama. They were the active members in the groups. One of the members in this category took up the role of host in one of the three programs. Others played major roles in the devising and rehearsal process. The practical way of learning provided by the workshop brought confidence to Category Two participants.

The learning in this phase was very slow. I had to create a participatory piece although I had not seen one before. I am thankful I did it; otherwise I would not have such a
strong feeling and deep understanding about it. Phase Three was like a trying out process, working with the unknown. I committed myself to try, although we did not know much. But, I gained many new understandings.

(Luping, 2nd interview)

Like Category One participants, members of this category felt very excited after the performance which brought them new understanding of applied theatre.

I was impressed that we created a theatre in education program for injured workers. We used games, hot-seating, and activities for sharing suggestions, to assist them in dealing with their [negative] emotion and state of mind… I was so moved when they hugged me—in role as the hopeless injured worker—with their injured hands. I found myself able to be deeply in role. I felt, as a person in despair being myself abandoned and denied, regaining the support from a group of people with similar experience…I could see the power of applied theatre.

(Xunxi, Final essay)

In general, the Category Two participants were actively involved in discussion and reflection. Three of them always played a leading role in whole group discussions. They raised insightful questions to the group like:

Who am I in the process of playing a role? Am I the character or myself? What is the relationship between two? I tried to understand the values of the character, but whose value judgment did I really apply in the drama?

(Zhaofeng, April 2, 2011, Group discussion)

Although they did not feel accomplished at every method, they expressed increasing understanding and confidence in using applied theatre at the after-training interviews. All of them mentioned they saw applied theatre as more than a tool: it is a set of beliefs.
6.3 Category Three: Participants with participating and some practising experience

There were two participants in this group. They had experience of attending different kinds of applied theatre workshops and facilitating workshops. One person was a full-time NGO worker in a social organization and the other one was an active member in an amateur theatre group and herself was a staff member in a commercial company.

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<td>Volunteering group member</td>
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**Phase One**

Baiyi had attended workshops about Theatre of the Oppressed before. He was familiar with quite a number of techniques of this approach. He placed his main attention on the methods of facilitation and the structure of the lessons in this phase of learning.

How can we run an effective workshop with participants from various backgrounds? When we play games in the workshop, how can we experience and accept cultural respect and understanding?

(Baiyi, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Will we create memories of the process of having physical connection with others that influences our thought?

(Baiyi, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

What is the right time to give suggestion to the participants? How can we catch the main points for the exploration of issues from the participants’ conversations?

(Baiyi, March 25, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

He raised a question about the setup of a sculpturing exercise during the whole group
sharing, which aroused responses.

Did we do the happy sculpture before the unhappy sculpture? Did it have a special function? I think it would be better to do the unhappy one first, and then we could have a ‘happy ending’.

Apart from that, he also mentioned his self-observation during the process of learning and linked it to his professional development.

To be true to self and take the risk of expressing oneself. Expression is a process to promote relationships. It can help to strengthen the theatre skills and create a sense of security for the participants.

(Baiyi, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Tianxin did not have as much experience in the Theatre of the Oppressed as Baiyi did. She knew some games and image exercises from previous courses and had once done a Forum Theatre presentation within a workshop. She described them as glimpses of the approach. Therefore, this phase of learning for her comprised previously known exercises and completely new activities. She showed two explicit responses. The first was about her personal learning after the activities – as with all other participants. For instance, she wrote after the Cops-in-the-head exercise:

Often, the physical and mental energy of the will to do something will be identical. But, there are different reasons for the opposing force. If we don’t understand these reasons, the opposing force won’t leave and influence the moving force. It is not helpful to me facing the reality.

(Tianxin, March 19, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Another response was to reflect on the meaning of activities. She was focused on making sense of every activity and she tried to articulate their objectives afterwards.

The warm-up game ‘I like myself…’: it allowed participants to know each other’s strengths and concern; let participants choose the next one to introduce, which could build connection in the group.
‘Improvisational image’: it helped us to understand the power of story embedded in the images, and also it was the entry exercise to warm up us to the rest of activities.

(Tianxin, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

However, she puzzled over those activities with complex structures. She was unsure how to make the rainbow of desire exercise work after watching it only once. During the small group work, she felt it was hard to devise an effective scene to provoke discussion and intervention for Forum Theatre.

Like Baiyi, she also raised the question of how to facilitate:

If we work with beginners, should we first help them to open up their body, to stimulate them by using games? Then we can ask them to create still images and sculptures, to imitate, share and express by using their bodies? And what about other drama work afterwards? How can I guide this process? What is the most effective way to facilitate participants?

(Tianxin, March 12, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

She joined some of the Category Two members in organizing a self-study group of the Theatre of the Oppressed after this phase. And she was invited to share practices and led a session on using image exercises for the group members. She took the initiative for her own and others’ learning.

**Phase Two**

Process drama was new to Baiyi. Like other participants, he commented on his ability to act and he shared their mixed feelings about the roles in the experiential period.

I found myself very accepting of the Green children. I said to them in role in the drama, ‘please live well, I will love you with my deepest love’. This really spoke from my heart.

It was hard to jump into a role in a short time. I think it may be lack of experience in life.

(Baiyi, April 1, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)
He was not very active in this phase, as he said in the second interview:

I was absent for some sessions in this phase. I felt behind. I could not fully understand all things.

(Baiyi, 2nd Interview)

This could explain why he did play an inactive role in the planning and practical period.

He learnt from participation, observation and listening to others in discussion in order to construct an understanding of process drama. Although he felt inexpert in process drama, he got a very clear concept of it. He wrote his definition of process drama in the last week of this phase.

Process drama is: the facilitator starts with using one or more pre-texts, allowing the participants to experience different roles in the process (create empathy), seeing a problem from different angles…Participants can gain more understanding and stimulate new thoughts in the process.

(Baiyi, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

In contrast, Tianxin was excited by Phase Two. She was not new to process drama, as with Baiyi in Phase One, and she built on her previous learning in this phase. She put her focus on the structure of lesson plans and facilitation right from the beginning.

I paid great attention to observe how the facilitator structured the drama and linked up different parts.

Using the materials from real life in drama was very effective. It provides a thinking space for participants. It will touch and affect people.

(Tianxin, April 1, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

She found the planning and practical period was very helpful.

I made painstaking efforts to finish the design of the lesson plan for micro-teaching. It was a struggle to choose among different conventions and make sense of them. I think
it was an important process for learning. No matter whether you decide to use a
convention or not, it is all the matter of linking with the teaching objective.

(Tianxin, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

She gained more confidence in using process drama after this phase.

I feel happy. The opportunities to experience many different lesson plans broadened
my mind. I feel more solid... I have more confidence to design my own plan.

I like the process of learning (experience, planning, and practice). I want to use the
lesson plan designed by my group later [with real participants].

(Tianxin, 2nd Interview)

**Phase Three**

Both members in Category Three had previous experience in playmaking and
participating in interactive theatre performance. They naturally took active leading roles
in their groups especially in helping to direct the drama.

Baiyi worked in the group creating a participatory theatre targeted to adults with
intellectual disability. He thought he understood the participants very well since he had
worked with similar kind of clients before. However, it was not the case in practice. He
realized that he used to work with the ‘talented’ clients who were highly selected.

In Phase Three, my knowledge about the clients was very superficial. Actually I may
only have known 5% of them, which I used to think was already very representative.

(Baiyi, 2nd Interview)

In the evaluation form of this phase, he wrote about new understanding about working
with clients that he had gained from the practice:

I need to learn to be more attentive, more focused; to see things from stepping into
others’ shoes, from the perspective of my clients.

He also mentioned self-observation in the process as well as working in a team.
I discovered some of my characteristics in the process. I sometimes lost my temper, sometimes I was too casual and reserved. In the beginning I thought it would not be too hard since I had previous experience. Actually, it is always different when you work with a new team. Anyway, I felt very satisfied with the performance. We all performed very well according to what we had to offer. I did a lot of reflection and I improved.

(Baiyi, Final essay)

In the beginning, Tianxin shared responsibility with her group members. However, the members (most of them were Category One participants) were confused by the key objectives of the program. They did not clearly understand the issue being presented to the audience. Tianxin took up the leading role when the group got stuck. She asked me for a meeting to consult how she could do this, mid-way through. She organized her ideas and suggested a work plan to send to all members. She came back the next week and improved the working efficiency of the group.

Overall, it was good in Phase Three although the process was not so smooth. We made many mistakes. One statement by Yi-man has had a great influence on me, ‘Have you placed your clients into your heart’. Do we see them as a concept or a group of people we serve? I found our mistakes also related to this issue. We did not put them at the centre of our program design. It will affect my way of doing participatory theatre in future.

(Tianxin, 2nd Interview)

In general, the learning of the two members in this category built on their previous experience. Besides personal learning from the experience, they obviously reflected and commented on the activities from a facilitator’s point of view. They spent time observing my methods of facilitation and were conscious not to over-talk during group discussion. They were relatively more able to make sense of the learning on their own. As Tianxin wrote on the first day of the training workshop:

We need to experience, reflect, summarize, and consolidate the learning in order to construct our learning through the integration of experience and theory. Carrying our own theory, we can understand how to apply different approaches and games into our
They asked themselves questions about the skills and techniques of application although they may not have found answers. Although they were not fully expert in every strategy, especially those methods they were encountering for the first time, their responses were different from the other two categories. They did not feel frustrated nor lose their learning confidence like the Category One participants. They did not actively ask technical questions to clarify the procedures and details of the approaches like the Category Two participants. The members in Category Three tended to contemplate in internal reflection or simply make their own choice about what they wanted to further develop. This may explain why they mentioned learning as a facilitator and about applied theatre as an ongoing business.

I want to discover and nurture myself to be more careful about details, to be attentive; to carry a sense of equality and harmony without losing humour. The key to achieve it can only be based on the facilitator’s personality. It is the process of gradual development. This is a lifetime assignment. Never-ending.

(Baiyi, April 23, 2011<Week 1/Phase 3>, Journal)

The more I learn about applied theatre, the less I know. I feel myself rather like a beginner, and I never finish learning.

(Tianxin, 3rd Interview)
Chapter Seven  Applied Theatre Learning

There were two overarching learning foci for this training workshop: Applied Theatre Learning and Generic Learning. This chapter deals with the former and the next chapter the latter. Analysis of the data reveals how the different levels of previous drama experience affected the members’ mode of learning in the training workshop which directly relates to the depth of the applied theatre learning. Two modes of learning were evident among the three categories: participant and facilitator. First, the *participant* mode of learning meant that the learners mainly experienced the activities as participants and were more conscious of personal learning than thinking about applying the activities. Second, the *facilitator* mode of learning meant that the learners experienced, observed and analysed the activities in the process and summarized the learning in order to apply it. These two modes of learning were not mutually exclusive and both were generated by the applied theatre learning. Using participant mode will limit the learning to more on the surface, whereas using facilitator mode will provide space for deeper learning of applying theatre. All participants were more or less using both modes. However, participants in each category acted differently in their dominant mode(s) of learning:

Category One: mainly participant mode
Category Two: mixed participant and facilitator modes
Category Three: mainly facilitator mode

In the next section, I will describe and identify the learning about applied theatre of the participants in each category and indicate how different modes affected the depth of learning based on their reports.

7.1 Category One: mainly participant mode

Although the Category One participants had a will to learn how to use applied theatre,
they had struggles and difficulties during the learning process. Since they were new to applied theatre, most of the activities were first-time experiences for them, and their time was occupied in clarifying the instructions. They spent most of their time experiencing the activities merely as participants. Therefore, the immediate learning for them was personal learning. A typical participant mode of learning was how Chenyu described himself:

> When the learning process moves on, it touches my inner feeling deeper and deeper. I have been submerged in the experience and have no time to record and reflect about it.

(Chenyu, March 26, 2011 <Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

The participants felt fun, happy and being empowered in the process, and also, they felt challenged in learning the new method. At the same time, they bore in mind they came to learn how to use applied theatre. Anwen was conflicted between being a participant and learning to be a facilitator.

> Sometimes I feel struggle and not sure whether I learn drama or learn a new working method. If I learn drama, I feel I have not much knowledge about it. I have no talent to do this since I have found myself with limited facial expression and imagination; my body is very rigid. If I learn a new working method, I don’t think I am able to manage it.

(Anwen, March 18, 2011 <Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Though obviously the Category One members revealed the participant mode most of the time, there were a few of them placing themselves as observers during the learning process in order to make sense of the methods from the facilitator’s angle. There were also opportunities given in Phase Two (planning and micro-teaching in process drama) and Phase Three (devising participatory theatre) to purposefully shift the members’ perspectives from participants to facilitators. However, lack of previous knowledge limited their growth as facilitators, whether they intentionally observed the process or reflected after the participation. They found their understanding of the methods inadequate, and raised a lot of questions and doubts.
I still carry many questions at the end of the session. When I watched other groups’ sculptures, I did not know how to observe. Do I need some specific observation skills? When I was asked to make a still image, can I make whatever I want? Or I should think of a theme and make an image accordingly?

(Qiling, March 12, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

How can I choose a story for Process drama to suit my participants? How can I guide them? How can I design the activities? How can I allocate the time?

(Anwen, April 1, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

If there is no absolute direction indicated in a lesson plan, how can I make sure where the participants go in the process? If the participants diverge from the plan, should I stop the process or adjust my lesson plan on the spot?

(Meili, April 9, 2011 <Week 2/Phase 2>, Journal)

I don’t know the functions for every convention. Although I can gain a bit of understanding through experience, I still don’t know how to apply it in my work. How can I make my audience understand? It is very hard for me.

(Liliang, April 16, 2011 <Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

The feeling of inadequacy affected some of the participants’ learning confidence. Liliang and Xinhong regressed in Phase Two; and Anwen felt quite incapable in Phase Three. Jingjing found herself hardly able to make sense of the methods right from the beginning. She said she could not learn without having all the theory before the experience. In the practical exercises and placements in Phase Two and Three, the Category One members were mainly led by the experienced members in their groups.

Overall, the Category One members were mainly in participant mode, although there were moments for them to shift their learning toward the perspective of the facilitator. Though there were limitations, the participants recognised the training workshop did provide them with an entry to learning about applied theatre. This entry brought about a change in their understanding of applied theatre, of the basic experience and of learning various techniques. It also gave them the chance to observe my modelling as facilitator, and some experience of the principles and pedagogy, which gave them confidence in applied theatre and motivated their continued practice. In the following section I will talk
about these aspects of learning (concepts, techniques, skills, principles and pedagogy) as shown in the data.

### 7.1.1 Concepts

For Category One participants, their perception of ‘drama’ was based on the traditional view of drama as performance. As is the nature of this art form, they saw drama as a dynamic, visual, fun, expressive, attractive, creative medium. But they had no idea of the concept of applied theatre. During the learning process, the participants were able to gain some basic conceptual understandings about applied theatre especially from the activities to which they felt more closely drawn.

After the first day of training, Meili had already found new applications for drama.

> I find the applicability of drama is more than I expected to be able to use for public education. It can also help people develop empathy and has a kind of therapeutic function. I think I can use it in our new worksite and benefit the children in that area.  
>  
> (Meili, March 11, 2011<Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Similar to her, Liliang acquired new concepts for using games.

> I used to think games were only for ice-breaking. I had never thought of using games as strategies to help participants enter their roles.  
>  
> (Liliang, 2nd Interview)

In the last session of Phase Two, I invited the participants to share their past and present perceptions of using drama after the two phases of training. Zhuhui and Chenyu shared their new understanding of applied theatre being about participation and action for change.

> In the past, I thought drama meant performance and only the professionals could do it. Now, I have found that drama can make things very concrete and clear, and every ordinary person can participate.  
>  
> (Zhuhui, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)
In the past I thought applied theatre was a method that allowed participation. Now, I think it is more than that. Applied theatre can allow the facilitator and participants to practise for change.

(Chenyu, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Apart from the general concepts, Category One participants also revealed their learning about the concepts of three approaches introduced in this training workshop. The examples below show the conceptual learning of Category One members in each phase.

In Phase One, the participants tended to build their concepts according to individual exercises and activities. For example, Qiling summarized her observation on the Rainbow of desire exercise:

The Rainbow of desire is an exercise that allows the audience to try out different solutions. The protagonist can find the most suitable way for him/her to try out through watching various suggestions. We should not criticize but respect the protagonist’s feeling and emotion during the process.

(Qiling, March 19, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

In Phase Two, Jingjing wrote a good consolidation on her learning in process drama although she thought she had learnt very little about applied theatre in the training workshop.

1. It is important to structure a story that can engage and be understood by the participants to discuss the theme in drama.
2. The theme should be open and leave space for participants to explore different possibilities.
3. Facilitators/leaders should hold back on expressing their own personal judgement and avoid restricting the participants’ discussion. They should create an open atmosphere for the participants to explore the topics according to their interests.
4. It is important to structure a storyline that engages participants. Conventions like defining space and teacher-in-role are strategies to assist participants to stay in role.
5. Process drama should concern the group’s common interest.

(Jingjing, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)
In Phase Three, Xinhong was ‘very surprised’ and had a ‘wonderful experience’ in applied theatre after participating and watching all three participatory theatre programs. She said the new understanding of using theatre to her was like ‘turning the world upside down’ (2nd Interview).

In the beginning of this training workshop, I could not imagine we could create such an educational performance. My previous understanding of performance was of actors acting on stage and the audience could discuss on their own after the show. In these programs, actors could be interrupted by the audience; they could be hot-seated and say something not written on the script; and the audience could actively participate and change the protagonist’s behaviour. It was unbelievable.

(Xinhong, Final essay)

7.1.2 Techniques

It was hard for them to capture and remember all the complex procedures and patterns in their first time encounters. Some of them could not identify the names of some strategies after the training although they had lesson plans in their hands. They were just at the stage of tasting applied theatre and at the same time learning to use it. Their lack of knowledge and experience in applied theatre made Category One participants tend to absorb the learning at surface level, i.e. the procedures and observable features of the activities. What they mentioned they had learnt were mainly the easy-to-manage single exercises, activities and conventions.

Some of the exercises and activities in Phase One were very basic and the Category One members found them easier to understand and directly usable in their contexts. One of the popular techniques was image exercises. Liliang generated an idea to use it with his clients after he experienced it.

When I was in the ‘struggling’ image, I suddenly thought about my work. I could invite volunteers and clients to show the images of their conflicts with factory owners and government. They could show their relationships by using image too.

(Liliang, March 18, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)
Unlike the relatively complex procedures in the Rainbow of desire and Cops-in-the-head exercises, the format of Forum Theatre is pretty straightforward. Zhuhui imagined the form could be used to help his clients’ growth.

I can create a drama about the life of factory workers and bring it to workers in industrial areas. Through their interaction with the protagonists, the audience will be able to share their thoughts and solutions to the problem. It can benefit their growth.

(Zhuhui, March 25, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

Similarly in Phases Two and Three, the members in Category One picked up bits and pieces of the techniques they could understand and manage during the process. Although Xinhong had insufficient confidence to design a process drama, she learnt to use a simple participative storytelling technique to co-construct a story with her clients, which was a new experience for her (2nd Interview). Actually, the learning through practice in these two phases mainly provided the initial experience and basic knowledge for their references. Anwen explained that the learning in Phase Two introduced her to the ideas that process drama should include a key question, scenes, roles, a framework, symbols and drama conventions. And Chenyu learnt the structures and models of process drama from his observation of the micro-teaching.

I learned the importance of the step building in process drama. The roles we set up for participants framed different kinds of possibility for exploration.

(Chenyu, April 15, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Xinhong learnt the basic techniques of devising participatory theatre from literally recalling the steps she ran through in her first experience.

In the last phase, we needed to collect information. Then we came back and devised our script. We reviewed the script in order to design activities to allow the audience to participate so they not only sat and watched. Therefore, we learnt how to set questions to engage and attract the audience in the process.

(Xinhong, 2nd Interview)
7.1.3 Skills

The data showed there were three kinds of skills the Category One participants learnt in the process.

a. Facilitation skill

Most of the participants in this category did not specially pay attention to my facilitation but they took notes on the methods of facilitation which stimulated their thinking after the experience. In one of the image exercises, I encouraged Qiling to take risks and challenge herself to make new and unfamiliar gestures. She found this immediate encouragement to ask her to think out of the box was useful. She thought she could use this way of working with her clients to open up their minds and enhance their ability to express themselves. Minxia wanted to use the way I invited people to share ideas during group discussion.

I should invite every group member to take turns in sharing their feelings in my future workshops. They can use verbal or physical language. I believe it will improve their communication skill.

(Minxia, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

After working with me to devise a short play, Zhuhui noted his learning about facilitation.

The process affected me to think deeper and farther. I have to consider how to help participants understand and give guidance in the devising process. I cannot impose my ideas on them. It will reduce the room for the participants to think and reflect. It will create a distance between the participants and me. If I can treat their ideas as equal to mine, they will feel accepted.

(Zhuhui, April 22, 2011<Week 1/Phase 3>, Journal)

Zhuhui also learnt from his experience as facilitator after micro-teaching in Phase Two. He reminded himself a good facilitator should have flexibility to adjust his plan and guidance without losing consistency (April 15, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal).
b. Planning skill

In general, the Category One participants rarely mentioned learning planning skills. However, a few stated they gained more understanding in planning a process drama after the co-planning exercise but they were not really able to articulate what they had learnt. Jingjing was the only one to describe her learning about planning clearly.

I found it was very useful to have a chance to design our own lesson plan. I learn a lot in the process. The guiding questions in a note led my planning and it was very helpful to keep my thinking on track and not jumping around. It helped me to think more logically.

(Jingjing, Final essay)

c. Drama skill

Learning about drama skills was common for Category One participants, compared to participants in the other two categories.

The most important learning for today was drama skills like lighting, music, rhythm and mime. It gave me a big surprise when I watched the mime presentation using the background music to create the mood. I want to use it in my future work. I want to use music to express meaning.

(Chenyu, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

During the making process of participatory theatre, the participants mentioned they acquired some basic drama skills in devising, the uses of music, lighting and props, and stage management (e.g. scene changes and actors’ entrance and exit arrangements).

7.1.4 Principles and pedagogy

In terms of learning the principles and pedagogy of applied theatre, the Category One participants were still in the process of making sense of it. Not many members clearly talked about it. Some could only generalize this area from the participant perspective. For instance, Minxia learnt about the principles from observing her own change to be more inclusive, willing to listen, respect others, reflective; and also seeing the others’ change in the process:
I learned about the principles of applied theatre from observation. I saw the change in other group members. I could also see how I practised the principles at the time I worked with others.

(Minxia, 2nd Interview)

Zhuhui made sense of applied theatre’s rationale by linking it to his organisation’s work principles after finishing the whole training workshop:

The rationale of applied theatre connects with my organisation’s work principles: to care, respect and help everyone; to develop ability and potential; and to be able to solve our own problem.

(Zhuhui, 2nd Interview)

Meili, who chose to pay more attention to observing teaching methods, was the only one in this category who could articulate this aspect of learning. In the final essay, she had a section specially shared about her learning about the principles and pedagogy of applied theatre. She summarized applied theatre as participative and participant-centred. It was based on participants’ active, experiential and reflective learning. The teaching and learning relationship was equal, and all learnt together as a community through collaboration.

Although the Category One participants rarely mentioned principles and pedagogy, most of them mentioned their changes in their working with clients, which I suppose was the implicit learning in the process. I will discuss this in the following chapter.

7.1.5 Applications

Although there was limited applied theatre learning for the Category One participants, all of them had positive comments about and trust in applied theatre after the training workshop. Some like Zhuhui felt excited by the varieties of applied theatre strategies. He described applied theatre method as a ‘magic wand’ which could make wonderful things.

I have confidence in applied theatre. I used to think the method was very rigid. I have
found the method is very rich and sophisticated but only since joining this training workshop. Previously I thought it was very simple but actually it has many layers and perspectives. This method is very deep and there is no end to the learning.

(Zhuhui, 2nd Interview)

Some found applied theatre very effective for their clients after the participatory theatre presentation in Phase Three and they generated ideas about areas where they could apply it. Minxia received positive feedback from her clients’ parents after they saw their children with intellectual disability actively responding to the drama in Phase Three. She then came up with ideas that she might use drama to enhance her clients’ self-care ability and social skills (Final essay). Liliang gained confidence in the method especially as there were three clients wanting to join his drama group after watching the program, which was unusual. He affirmed the possibilities of applied theatre.

Applied theatre is not only used in promoting labour law. It has a therapeutic function. It depends on how you use it. We must fully understand our clients before we design a drama lesson plan.

(Liliang, Final essay)

Qiling even thought applied theatre should be a skill for social workers.

I really think applied theatre is an effective method for my clients…drama can visualise an issue and be easy for people to receive…I believe it should be a skill for social workers. No matter whether they work with young people or like me with mental illness rehabilirants, it is a very good method. I think it will create a new page in my field if more colleagues can use it.

(Qiling, 3rd Interview)

Their confidence in applied theatre as an effective working method motivated their interest to practise it after the training workshop. So, what are the factors affecting their ability to apply it? The data shows there were four, which I am going to discuss in this section.
**Job relevancy**

This is the first and direct criterion affecting their application. Qiling, Anwen and Minxia were required to organise workshops in their work. Although they were not accomplished practitioners, they had a need to use it. They tried to use it with their limited understanding. They used simple exercises like still image or imitating the lesson plans in the training workshop, even though they did not fully understand the principles behind them.

I did try to use applied theatre techniques to discuss issues with my clients. When I asked them to make a still image, they felt very uncomfortable. They told me making a still image reminded them of unhappy moments staying in hospital. I did try it a second time and they felt the same. Because of their responses, I asked myself: ‘is it suitable to use applied theatre with my clients who are mental illness rehabilitants?’ or ‘is only just using the still image exercise enough?’ or ‘is it only because I cannot manage the techniques?’

(Qiling, Final essay)

Xinhong, Liliang, Meili, Chenyu, Zhuhui and Jingjing had no immediate need in their regular work to use applied theatre. They might think they would like to use it, but it is not necessary unless they have extra time for trying it out.

Apart from them, Xinhong thought applied theatre was not suitable for her clients with severe mental disability. They were not capable of articulating, expressing themselves or manage to move their body very well. I guess her response may come from her lack of understanding of the methods, and there was no special demonstration in the training workshop on how to adjust the strategies to suit people with different abilities.

**Platform**

Even where there was no direct and immediate need in their regular work, some participants in this category did strive to try it out whenever there was a platform. Meili was an administrator in a youth and children’s centre. She asked her colleagues to offer her a timeslot to organise a drama workshop for children during their summer holiday. Although organising social gatherings for clients was not the main job for Zhuhui, he still
took the opportunity of trying out a few applied theatre exercises on one occasion. Liliang said applied theatre was not necessary to his work; however, he kept joining forum theatre performances organised by the Category Two participants. Jingjing suggested to her supervisor the inclusion of applied theatre activities in one part of the prevention training program for factory workers and managers. Chenyu thought applied theatre was irrelevant to his immediate work in an organisation and hard to use in his position; however, in his follow-up questionnaire after a year, he mentioned he was planning to include applied theatre in the new curriculum because he had thought of a place to put it in.

- **Availability of working partner / co-learner / mentor**

Job relevancy was the primary driver for the participants to use applied theatre. Some participants did need a companion to motivate their application. As mentioned above, Meili is not in a position to organise workshops although she works in a youth and children’s centre. For her colleague Anwen, who was working in the same organisation but placed in another centre, her duties enabled her to work directly with children. Anwen occasionally invited Meili to come and work with her in the centre. They discussed their plans and evaluated their try-outs together. In addition, they sent me emails very often to consult about their applied theatre work, as they thought my role as a mentor was important to support their on-going practice. Otherwise, they really didn’t know how to improve their work since there was a lack of resources around their circle. Another case was Liliang, who believed in applied theatre but he didn’t think he could do it on his own. He actively joined applied theatre activities organised by others and invited other participants from the training workshop to run workshops for his clients. These kept him in touch with applied theatre practices.

The unavailability of a working partner could hinder the application. Even though Xinhong and Minxia worked in the same organisation, they were in different centres and the nature of their jobs was different, which did not easily offer them the opportunity to collaborate in trying out applied theatre. Furthermore, since Xinhong worked mainly with adults with severe intellectual disability, it was hard for her to imagine how applied theatre might work for them without any help. Similarly to Jingjing, she found it was difficult
with her limited understanding to explain the methods to her colleagues. Not being able to find a way to communicate with her working partner prevented her from practising.

**Confidence**

Generally, participants in this category had not much confidence in using the methods because of their lack of understanding and practice as a facilitator. The above-mentioned factors give us hints about how they were coping with this lack of confidence. For some participants like Qiling, Jingjing, Zhuhui and Chenyu, they tried to keep practising or creating a platform for practice in order to gain more experience. The others, Meili, Anwen, Liliang and Minxia, preferred to work with each other to share their learning or invite collaboration, to assist their practice. Some of them asked for my suggestions on readings to help their own study of applied theatre.

As far as applying the methods, most of them had an awareness that applied theatre as a method is one where you use it or lose it: on-going practice as a continued learning process was the key to enhancing their understanding. They were only able to improve in their own contexts since they found it hard to transfer exactly their learning from the training workshop into their workplaces.

> I have to try more, to practise at work. Not only sit and imagine or make mental assumptions. The learning should take time to practise and digest.
> 
> (Zhuhui, April 22, 2011<Week 1/Phase 3>, Journal)

> The method is difficult to understand. It is useless if I only think about it. I should learn by doing it, discover my ability through the practice. It is the only way to learn.
> 
> (Liliang, 2nd Interview)

### 7.1.6 Summary

On the whole, the training workshop gave the Category One participants great confidence in the power of applied theatre. They recognised that the training workshop opened a new door of possibilities and gave them more resources for their work. At the same time, they felt it was very difficult for them to catch up with the learning.
Too quick. I wish the workshop could be longer. For people with more experience it will be easier…it was like a running train: once the training started, it kept running...

(Zhuhui, 2nd Interview)

Jingjing described the learning in applied theatre as like a ‘bottomless hole’.

Sometimes I feel close and sometimes I feel far away from applied theatre. I have not digested the learning yet. I am full. I cannot eat any more, but it is really very attractive.

(Jingjing, Final essay)

They appreciated the learning and at the same time felt themselves inadequate.

I just know of the three approaches ‘at skin level’. I feel entangled and need further learning and practice to make progress.

(Minxia, Final essay)

But, most of them held the belief that applied theatre learning had had an influence on them.

I am in the process of condensation. I mean, apart from something which is hiding in my mind, I am sure there will be a time for the learning to be used. I feel it will be a great influence on me.

(Chenyu, 3rd Interview)

The training workshop has given me an imperceptible influence. I gained more and more understanding about the learning as I was approaching the end of the course. This imperceptible influence will stay deep in my heart.

(Meili, Final essay)

7.2 **Category Two: mixed participant and facilitator mode**

This category of participant all had previous applied theatre experience. None of the five members had learnt all three approaches before. Two had some experience in Theatre of the Oppressed; three of them had learnt Process Drama before; three had experience in
Playback Theatre and come across some drama games and exercises. Not everyone came with the same amount of experience. Although the members in this category were more or less conscious of the facilitator mode, the members who had lesser experience tended to stay longer in the participant mode. In the participant mode, they concentrated on their personal responses to the experience and thinking about personal issues (e.g. reserved personality, self-judgment), which I have discussed in previous chapter.

Since this training workshop was not their first experience of applied theatre, the Category Two members had already got some basic concepts from their previous workshops. They were familiar with the workshop method of learning and had a certain level of expectation of the functions of applied theatre. As Luping said in the first interview, ‘applied theatre is: a holistic way of learning by using whole body, a platform for expression and giving individual voice, a place to feel free to suggest opinion and being relaxed and a collective decision-making process’. Other members also mentioned that applied theatre can give people power, allow everyone to take up the stage and find one’s voice, and gain understanding through participation and making change. Their prior understanding gave them a ‘trained mind’ to attend the training workshop which made a difference from the Category One members.

Drawing from the data, their learning in techniques, skills, principles and pedagogy and applications of applied theatre are as below:

7.2.1 Techniques

For the participants with previous experience in applied theatre, there were familiar activities as well as new activities in the training workshop. When they revisited the known activities, they did not need to remember the procedures, which spared them more time to observe and feel the activities more deeply. Yunlei said she only had superficial knowledge of Theatre of the Oppressed from her previous learning. This training workshop demonstrated to her how to dig deep on different issues by using the techniques. Now she knew how tension works in this approach and how to focus the discussion between the oppressed and the oppressor. Shuxi had participated in Forum Theatre before
and did not understand the elements required to devise a Forum drama. This time the training made him consider in more detail:

What is conflict [in Forum drama]? The conflict should not only relate to personal issues; to a certain extent, it should be universal. Showing of the conflict should include tension. The story in Forum Theatre should connect with the audience’s life so that it can engage and motivate them to take action for change. The topic should create space for discussion, not a closed statement.

(Shuxi, March 25, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

This was Luping’s second time learning about process drama. She said that the first time she had only been able to learn what the drama conventions are and how they operate in process drama. This time, the training workshop allowed her to think in more depth about this approach.

In this second time of learning, I learnt the importance of structuring an effective lesson plan and how we choose the focus of enquiry. A good lesson plan can engage participants to focus on a situation or a particular role’s perspective; to explore the issue from different angles and different levels. The process can bring participants to a new understanding.

(Luping, Second Phase-Ended Evaluation Form)

When they learnt the new techniques, first of all they found these could add to their mental store of reference regardless of how thoroughly they were really able to manage it. They experienced new games, exercises and uses of drama in the training workshop. They could see the new possibilities of using applied theatre.

As well as learning to apply the complete approach, the participants’ immediate learning included single activities and new versions of known exercises. They recorded and talked about the activities they would like to take away, in their journals and in discussion. For example, Jieyan recorded in her journal what she could use after each session.

I think I can use the following activities:
1. improvisational dance; 2. some games like zip-zap-zop, 1-2-3; 3. activities helping to discuss feeling and thought; 4. exercises to explore oppressed issues…

(Jieyan, March 19, 2011< Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)

She had used music very casually in her work before. This time she was impressed to see how music elements could create deeper meaning and enhance the educational value of her work. She expressed great interest in applying the learning in her next workshop.

Like Jieyan, Shuxi found the single activities like building sculptures, still images, role on the wall and thought-tracking were very manageable. He also mentioned his new learning about image theatre. The following was his record after the experience:

> Two to three people create an image to show their relationship; and allow many ways to interpret the same image. Adding spoken thoughts to an image will make it more powerful.

(Shuxi, March 12, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

In learning about specific approaches, the learning effectiveness depended on how much opportunity they had to practise them in the training workshop. Most of the Category Two participants hesitated to use some methods in Phase One like Rainbow of desire and Cops-in-the-head because of their lack of practice as facilitator during the learning process. Luping and Jieyan said one demonstration was not enough to help them fully understand the techniques and give them confidence to try them out. However, their previous knowledge in applied theatre supported them in asking sensible questions to assist their learning. Although Shuxi expressed his inadequacy in the use of the Rainbow of desire exercise, after the experience he showed his thoughtfulness about the exercise.

> What does the Rainbow of desire exercise seek to achieve? People feel sympathy after watching the images of different desires. What is the function of this method? How do we represent strong and weak desires? How do we transform or make a balance among them?

(Shuxi, March 18, 2011 <Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)
He had no answer for his questions yet but obviously they were part of his learning process. The experience of new applied theatre methods in the training workshop kicked off his thinking about it and prepared him for further learning in the next experience.

Contrastingly, the members in this category acknowledged that the opportunities of practice provided in Phase Two and Three were helpful in equipping them to use the techniques. Although they were confused in the beginning sessions, they gained more solid understanding after the practice.

In Phase Two, Zhaofeng felt great difficulty and confusion in planning a process drama. However, she found this process helped her to identify the key elements (multiperspective, distance, openness and functions of role) which she needed to consider for an effective lesson plan in future. Yunlei had a similar experience. She reflected on the planning process in the second interview and described it was a ‘painful experience’. After testing the plan in micro-teaching, she learnt from her mistakes about the functions of the conventions she had used.

In Phase Three, all participants learnt about participatory theatre by doing it. Four members in this category worked in one group and the other two worked in another group. They were all active members in their groups. They went through the whole process of creating a program (they researched the topic, interviewed/visited the target audience, devised a play, designed interactive activities and presented the program). They felt lost at the beginning but found the process of learning by doing was very helpful.

The process of creating a participatory theatre program was like ‘pulling a bull up to the tree’. I had to do something I had never seen. Working in the unknown. Looking back, it was lucky that I did it; otherwise I would not have such a deep understanding about this approach.

(Luping, 2nd Interview)

Starting with confusion, Luping learnt how to shape the focus of the exploration. She was chosen to be the host. At her first attempt, she did a very good job with an organised, calm
and clear mind.

### 7.2.2 Skills

There were two special skills they reported they learnt in the training workshop: facilitation and planning skill. These two skills directly showed their facilitator’s mode of learning.

#### a. Facilitation skill

It was common to all members of Category Two that they paid attention to my facilitation. Participants like Luping who had previous experience of some of the activities wanted to spend time on the methods of facilitation in order to enhance their skill. They asked questions along the way based on their experience:

> In the making process, it is a very important skill for the facilitator to lead the group. Dealing with different kinds of topics suggested by the participants, what were the main principles and methods of facilitating the group?  
> (Luping, March 25, 2011<Week 3/Phase 1>, Journal)

They were interested in how the facilitator worked in the process. They observed my actions and ways of responding and interacting with the group. Xunxi reflected on my facilitation and took away good examples, and improved my flawed modelling for his own use. In Phase Two, Yunlei started a new section of her journal to record my facilitation for her reference. The following was her observation in Week 1/Phase 2:

> From caring about the inner feeling of participants to training us how to actively listen to each other, asking us to identify the emotion and feeling behind one’s speech.

> Although Yi-man knew the answers, she wouldn’t speak out. She motivated the participants to think, to experience and to summarize. She intervened at appropriate times. No good or bad; no right or wrong.

Zhaofeng expressed fully the reason why she was so concerned about the facilitation.
I chose to pay attention to what Yi-man said, the way she said it and what she did. I chose this focus because it will increase my confidence as a facilitator. I can learn these skills... I want to be an applied theatre practitioner after the training workshop. I did not want just to play the role of a participant as I had in previous workshops, which did not help me to gain confidence. I wanted to observe attentively and think deeply what the facilitators did in the process. What they did looked like magic to me.  

(Zhaofeng, Final essay)

b. Planning skill

The Category Two participants learnt how to create a plan for the individual approaches and also showed ability to learn from the overall structure of the training workshop. Luping and Jieyan specially mentioned that they had learnt the key elements in designing a process drama. The training workshop gave them many exemplars. They also learnt how to plan a drama step-by-step. Jieyan appreciated the planning and practical experience:

I enjoyed the process of planning and teaching. In Phase Two, I learnt: how to design a lesson plan, how to set objectives, how to reflect on our preconceived ideas and to focus the main theme. Although it was hard, I am keen to further explore this approach.

(Jieyan, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

Learning from this experience, she summarized the learning principles and applied them to her overall workshop planning.

It was very fundamental. It contained a lot of basic principles like setting learning objectives. That was a very stunning idea to me - starting from a question, rather than what I want the participants to do. It changes my paradigm, it is not about the message I want to give to participants; it is a co-inquiry process working together with them.

Before this training, I planned my workshops by playing one game after another. I had never thought of their connection. But now, I can think more deeply about how to plan a workshop within a theme and design activities around it.

(Jieyan, 2nd interview)

Yunlei felt herself become more professional after the training workshop.
I was very messy at planning a workshop before. I had no confidence because I did not know whether I was right or wrong. Now, I know there can be many directions; the decision made depends on the context. I know more strategies and steps to assist my planning process. I feel more professional.

(Yunlei, 2nd interview)

7.2.3 Principles and pedagogy

This category’s participants were very attracted by the principles and pedagogy of applied theatre. All of them mentioned their appreciation and excitement in learning about it. They emphasised after the training workshop that applied theatre is more than just a tool, it is about a set of beliefs and values to support the practice.

The learning came from their first-person experience and change. Xunxi explained how the principles and pedagogy affected him personally.

The training workshop makes me more open to accept others, to self-reflect, to respect others’ feeling. I can be more empathic about others’ feelings, and respect the space of others. I gain benefit from this personal understanding and change.

(Xunxi, 3rd Interview)

From the participation, Yunlei reconstructed her experience to fit into the pedagogy of applied theatre.

The greatest learning in the training workshop was gaining understanding on applied theatre pedagogy:
- no pre-set result; we need to create more possibilities in the process; open up thinking space for the participants and their own voice;
- active listening is the main skill in applied theatre; in order to effectively respond to the participants, we should have the ability to understand the feelings and thoughts behind one’s speech through careful listening;
- observation and opening up with sensitivity are another important skill;
- the facilitator should not give answers and allow rigid pattern of thought to block the learning process; more importantly, to lead the participants’ reflection and
ability to summarise their own learning.

(Yunlei, Final essay)

The following principles of applied theatre described by Zhaofeng, that it is about honouring individuality, is typical of the learning of this category’s members.

Applied theatre allows participants to see different people, learn to understand different people based on their own personal experience and knowledge. They take in the experience and reflect on it…They are allowed to keep their own thinking space…They are given the opportunity to deeply explore an issue starting with its connection to human life.

(Zhaofeng, 2nd Interview)

The principles and pedagogy embedded in applied theatre brought them more confidence and support in their own role as facilitator. Luping summed up:

Overall, I did not know enough from my previous learning in applied theatre. In this training workshop, I gained more understanding of the rationale (dialogue, including everyone’s voice, openness as a facilitator, the importance of creating a safe space for participants to explore, and respect for people). It gives me lots of new possibilities. I am intrigued by applied theatre.

(Luping, 2nd Interview)

More importantly, the confidence gained from their positive experience in the training workshop made them feel more professional in using drama. Luping was able to further articulate her understanding of the principles in the third interview and how it can contribute to facilitate workshops.

Applied theatre allows me to see people from different perspectives. I can understand a person from his/her feelings, needs and desires. This rationale is very important in the design and facilitation of workshops. Concerns with equality, expression, personal development, reflection and how to reflect have become my work guidelines.

(Luping, 3rd Interview)

Their learning about the principles and pedagogy led to pedagogical changes in their work,
which I will discuss it in other chapter.

### 7.2.4 Applications

The Category Two participants were keen and eager to try things out after the training workshop. Five out of six members in this category shared their lists of practices with me, in interviews, questionnaire and emails. The only member working in a volunteer-based group in this category had been busy with his position as leader and had no time to practice. He said he would keep applied theatre in mind and look for the chance to use it. (Note: I received an email on May 1, 2013 that he promoted an applied theatre workshop exploring a current matter of concern to his work, hosted by him).

In Category One, I identified four criteria as contributing factors to the beginners’ use of applied theatre. Although these criteria were not necessarily all factors applicable to the Category Two participants’ ability to use applied theatre, they are still useful and relevant to analyse their cases.

- **Job relevancy**

The participants in this category were independent and they used applied theatre regardless of the nature of their job. Four members were able directly to apply the learning in their existing workplaces. They started by using the more sophisticated single games and exercises in their training work. Luping and Shuxi used physical exercises to open up the participants’ bodies and minds and assisted them with self-observation. Furthermore, they used applied theatre activities whenever it suited their purpose. Shuxi and Zhaofeng found it was helpful to explore social issues with young people. Jieyan used drama conventions with her participants to explore how to care for family members.

Yunlei was an administrator. Although the nature of her immediate job gave her limited opportunity for practising applied theatre, she still found her own way to use it. She volunteered to lead drama activities in an organisation retreat. She actively joined colleagues from another department to use applied theatre in her spare time.
Platform
The participants in this category created their own platforms for practice. Jieyan was invited to organise for a Volunteer’s Day a re-run of one of the participatory theatre programs created in the training workshop. Three members in this category joined the re-run. Shuxi, Zhaofeng and Yunlei, as colleagues, worked together in a Forum Theatre presented to a group of university students. They also jointly initiated a series of applied theatre workshops in a community college run by their organisation.

Availability of working partner/co-learner/mentor
Unlike the Category One participants who required companions to motivate and assist their application, the members in Category Two sought working partners mainly because of the requirement for team-work in approaches like Forum Theatre and Participatory Theatre. They mainly worked independently.

The availability of a mentor was not an important factor in their ability to use applied theatre. Some members sent me lesson plans to seek comment and suggestions. My presence or not was not a necessary factor in their decision to use applied theatre. They felt they had professional knowledge to support their practice and trusted that they would improve through on-going practice. I will elaborate on this in the next criterion.

Confidence
Just as for the participants in Category One, confidence was a critical factor in driving the Category Two members’ application of the workshop. They expressed that they had more confidence in using applied theatre after the training workshop although they did not fully understand every method.

The training workshop brought me great motivation to practise. I want to use the strategies I learnt in the workshop. I am more ambitious and have more confidence to try out applied theatre. Though I can only use the forms and sometimes I am not sure of the functions of the activities, I am still keen to use applied theatre when I want to stimulate participants’ thinking and make change.

(Shuxi, Final essay)
Jieyan did not have confidence in all the activities taught in the training workshop. She was hesitant to use Rainbow of desire, Cops-in-the-head and Forum Theatre. She started trying out the methods in which she had more confidence, like image theatre and process drama. She expected she would gain more courage to try out other methods after accumulating more experience, and believed that practice was the golden key to internalising applied theatre. Although she mentioned failure in her practice, she did not give up using it. Similarly to her, Luping had an unsuccessful experience in practice but the professional knowledge gained in the training workshop gave her confidence to improve in the next time.

I used drama activities to teach the volunteers to express themselves to release their emotion. I did not do it very well. I know I missed many key steps. This showed a change, since before I attended the training workshop I would not have known what was wrong. Now I am more conscious and believe I can improve next time.

(Luping, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Interview)

Successful practice, certainly, is a good way to bring confidence. Yunlei used image exercises in her organisation retreat. She obviously felt she was now different and more ready to lead the exercises.

I felt so good. I did not feel shy or nervous. It was so smooth. I know how to give instructions, compared to the past, where we would ask someone who was more experienced to lead the activities. But now, I am confident to do it by myself.

(Yunlei, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Interview)

What they described they used in their works actually was quite basic in the beginning. No matter whether their practices failed or succeeded, it seemed that the confidence gained from the training workshop made them trust applied theatre, which created a force to move them forward to be willing to take risks and try out new strategies. Zhaofeng, for example, was so excited about applied theatre that she felt she could use everything learnt in the training workshop.

Applied theatre really works. My belief is based on my personal understanding,
connection and change in the process. And also it comes from seeing other people’s change in the workshop. I like the method very much. It is a very good method…I don’t know why I am so confident and think I can design and facilitate applied theatre workshops. I am confident and keen to use it.

(Zhaofeng, 2nd Interview)

Her high personal confidence had been accompanying her practice and her progress. She used image exercises just after the training workshop and was not very successful. Then she used drama in a sharing event with partners from other organisations and received much positive feedback. With increasing confidence, she used image exercises again and this time she found her skill more mature. From applying single exercises, she tried to conduct and design her own process drama workshop. The on-going practice played an important role in her professional development.

7.2.5 Summary

The techniques, skills, rationale and pedagogy that the Category Two participants learnt from the training workshop, on top of their previous learning, brought them to another level of understanding applied theatre. They told me they had used the methods superficially in the past. They blindly imitated what they had seen and experienced in previous workshops without knowing the rationale and pedagogy behind the strategies; someone even thought applied theatre activities were just for fun. After the training workshop, they found they had more ideas and a clearer rationale to support their practice.

In my past learning in applied theatre, I could only imitate. Now I want to explore more. I really want to use this method. I will ask myself, ‘why do I want to use some specific strategy?’ I wouldn’t ask this question before, but I am now more accomplished. After learning from experience, I know how to react in an emerging situation and give a prompt response.

(Shuxi, 2nd Interview)

They had more examples and more resources to refer to; and they were clearer and more practised in using applied theatre, especially those activities they had known previously. Most importantly, they could feel a sense of professional growth.
In these ten weeks of training, I became in touch with applied theatre and got to know its theory. I had opportunities to practise and it increased my understanding of how to apply it. I have more confidence. The confidence was built from the course, the methods, the understanding of theory and the practical experience. I now know what a workshop can be; I know the direction. Although my skill is still immature and raw, I know which the right direction is.

(Yunlei, 2nd Interview)

The growth also came from questions, confusions and unknowns. Jieyan mentioned that the more she explored applied theatre in depth, the more questions were raised in her mind. She affirmed that this process had the capacity to broaden her vision.

I cannot use all the techniques at the moment. However, the learning process kept stimulating my thinking. It gave me different ways to observe applied theatre. This thinking process is very crucial. Now I know we have to make professional decisions to choose what to use. I gained more understanding after our exploration. It has opened my vision.

(Jieyan, 2nd Interview)

Zhaofeng asked the question of how to integrate the principles into the activities, which was very fundamental to her further professional development.

I now know the principles, but I think I still need time to further explore the application of them. I am not sure the relationship between the principles and the activities. How I can bring out the important values from the activities in order to stimulate the participants’ thinking. How to make it happen?

(Zhaofeng, 3rd Interview)

According to the data, though participants were not able to become accomplished in all methods, they tended to make more informed choices in using the strategies. They selected those activities more in line with their own ability, understanding, needs and contexts. Their professional confidence increased. They used the methods with more understanding, and the assurance of on-going practice as a way of learning applied theatre.
7.3 Category Three: mainly facilitator mode

There were two members in Category Three, Baiyi and Tianxin. They mentioned in the first interview that they would like to have more systematic learning in applied theatre. They had been learning about applied theatre through attending and facilitating workshops as well as participating in interactive theatre for a number of years. They felt unsatisfied and dried-out in practice, which drove them to come to the training workshop for further development in applied theatre.

From the beginning of the workshop they were in facilitator mode. Apart from their eagerness to learn more new activities, they also set their own learning focuses in the process. Baiyi concentrated on understanding the principles of applied theatre and the facilitation skills. Tianxin’s emphasis was on building her own theory of applied theatre. Therefore, what they learnt from the training workshop, which blended the concepts, techniques, skills, principles and pedagogy, did address their focus, in the main.

7.3.1 Baiyi

Baiyi chose to ‘hold two minds’ (3rd Interview) in the learning process. One mind was for observing himself in action; the other mind was for observing others (participants and facilitator). He emphasised his improvement in active listening skills.

In this 10-week workshop, I gradually gained the ability to understand the meaning beyond one’s speech. I can tell better why someone says what they say, and understand that in terms of his/her belief and background.

(3rd Interview)

He also applied this skill in the workshop to actively listen to what I said, and generated the following comment about being a facilitator.

Being a facilitator, we need to observe ourselves. We should know why we choose to say something or not; why we speak this instead of that; what is the reason behind it; how we choose to respond or not respond to the participants.
In the questionnaire after one year of training, he noted that he treasured this active listening skill. He also said, ‘Actively listening to what other people say has become my habit’ (Final essay).

The workshop provided Baiyi with a space for observation. Like a witness, he could see the organization of the workshop as well as the learning of other members. He was able to assess the participants’ learning from observing their bodies’ flexibility. He mentioned ‘I learned how to set up activities and these details of facilitation can help me to understand how to open up the participants’ ability’ (March 11, 2011, Journal).

Apart from the facilitation skill, his experience of practising participatory theatre gave Baiyi a different angle to see how to work with clients. He found he only knew his clients superficially before that practice. He learned the importance of client-centred planning which focuses on the needs of participants. This idea replaced his original facilitator-centred planning, and deepened his future practice.

Regarding the learning of applied theatre strategies, he recorded bits and pieces of new games and exercises in his journal for future reference. He mentioned that the training workshop refined and deepened his existing knowledge, especially of how to devise an open and effective Forum Theatre. Process drama was new to him. He did not feel confident enough to develop a lesson plan. However, unlike the beginners, he showed the ability to build on his understanding of it through his experience. The following quotes demonstrate how he developed quite a profound understanding of process drama across three weeks of learning.

Process drama places the participants at the centre. It allows participants to feel the characters in role. It is easy to engage me in the drama…

(Baiyi, April 2, 2011<Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

Through the detailed set up and teacher in role in process drama, participants can
deeply explore their inner feelings, which stimulates further discussion and generates new possibilities.

(Baiyi, April 8, 2011<Week 2/Phase 2>, Journal)

Process drama is: the facilitator starts with using one or more pre-texts, allowing the participants to experience different roles in the process (create empathy), letting them see a problem from different angles… Participants can gain new understanding and be stimulated into new thoughts in the process.

(Baiyi, April 16, 2011<Week 3/Phase 2>, Journal)

He was an experienced practitioner and received frequent invitations to conduct workshops. So, he got many opportunities after the training workshop to use applied theatre as part of his job. In his report, he did not indicate that he had used any specific approach from the training workshop. He took the activities learnt from the workshop as his reference points and used whichever of them were suitable to his workshop’s objectives and contexts. However, the facilitator qualities he developed through his observation and reflection continued to contribute to his work. He said in the questionnaire after a year:

The training workshop gave me confidence. I can be more attentive to understand how the participants think and feel. I have self-confidence that my workshop can bring benefit to others.

The confidence he gained from the training workshop was one of the catalysts that drove him to become a full-time freelancer one year after the training. He also actively sought opportunities to do further study in applied arts overseas.

7.3.2 Tianxin

Tianxin gave her attention to the activities and the principles behind them. She was keen to build her own sense of the different approaches. As she said, ‘I only learnt about the forms and methods without understanding their principles before. In this training workshop, I was able to learn about the framework of applied theatre as well as its rationale which enhanced my professional ability’ (2nd Interview).
She acquired deeper understanding of the techniques she had already known like still image and process drama. She had previously utilised still image as an activity to kill time in the workshop. Whenever she did not know what to do, she would ask participants to create an image. But now, after she had experienced the variety of uses of still image exercises within the training workshop she thought it was an effective strategy to connect and communicate with people. Furthermore, she had a breakthrough in learning process drama. Her previous workshops had left her with only blurred understanding of process drama. In this training workshop, the experience and micro-teaching opportunity built on her existing knowledge.

I think the second phase brought me fun and broad experience of process drama. I participated in many lesson plans; and then I tried out planning and teaching which gave me confidence.

I have learnt how to select pre-text and practice. I like this form very much. I want to use the plan we designed with ‘real’ participants.

(2nd Interview)

She also actively built up her understanding of new strategies. She was very engaged in the learning process. Besides taking notes of the new games and exercises, she recorded questions and reminders for future practice in the journal after every experience. For example, after the Forum Theatre exercise, she wrote:

1. It will be better if we can have further and deeper analysis of the oppressed and oppressor.
2. It will be better if we can apply ‘Rainbow of desire’ and ‘Cops-in-the-head’ to facilitate the devising process.
3. The role should not be too abstract - it is better for it to be a human character. That will be more engaging for the audience.
4. It is important to choose the content most connected with the audience.
5. Should be close to the real context.
6. The ending should be opened up for intervention.

(Tianxin, March 25, 2011<Week 2/Phase 1>, Journal)
She summarized her learning as a record of this stage of the process so that it could provide a basis for the next time.

She did not just learn how to operate activities, but at the same time she constructed for herself a concept of applied theatre.

Applied theatre always urges us to think; to reflect on why we say what we said. How do we feel about another’s speech?

(3rd Interview)

Applied theatre is not like the traditional teaching method. It sets up scenes for discussion and sharing. Participants think and learn from experience. Applied theatre provides a safe space to help them to face and solve problems.

(Final essay)

Like Baiyi, she was also attracted by the client-centred planning approach, especially after the Phase Three practice. She mentioned in the second interview, ‘Yi-man asked me, ‘do you put the clients into your heart?’ This statement had a great impact on me. Do I treat the clients as an object or a subject? This does matter. I find myself making mistakes every time because I do not put my clients at the centre of planning’. These concepts and planning principles were to lead to changes in her practice.

Tianxin gained great satisfaction in this training workshop. Her enhanced knowledge about applied theatre and the changes which she had noticed in other members in the process gave her confidence in her own ability to apply it. She used to think applied theatre was just an entertainment; but now she was confident to say ‘applied theatre is a very valuable method’.

This confidence drove her after the training workshop to resign her job in a commercial firm and become a full-time applied theatre practitioner. Working as a full-time applied theatre practitioner, she had many opportunities to put her new knowledge into practice. She actively applied her learning from the training workshop, especially process drama. She was practising this form by using others’ lesson plans and also creating her own plans.
Through the practice she felt more able to manage the form. She also participated as one of the leading organisers in re-running a participatory theatre program originally created in the training workshop. In the rehearsal process of the re-run, she told me she suddenly realized ‘all three phases of learning in the training workshop actually linked with each other’. She utilised the games and exercises more flexibly and better integrated for her purposes, except ‘Rainbow of desire’ and ‘Cops-in-the-head’ which she thought she needed still more time to make sense of.

7.3.3 Summary

Baiyi and Tianxin showed their learning process was more self-directed based on their background, interest and experience. They concentrated on learning about the methods from the facilitator’s perspective and were not so much influenced by personal learning as the members in the other two categories. They were relatively independent and sought out what they thought would be useful for them, and did not feel they had to learn all the activities fully. The training workshop provided a platform for them to build on their existing knowledge and capacities.

They both emphasized that the more they learned, the more inadequate they felt their own professional skills were.

Applied theatre is very beautiful. It works! Applied theatre is so big and it attracts me to move forward. I am so small and need more learning. Applied theatre gives me confidence for further development.

(Tianxin, 3rd Interview)

They agreed that practice is the key to learn about applied theatre. As Baiyi claimed, learning about applied theatre is ‘a lifetime assignment’.

This ability can only be gained from participating in and facilitating workshops. You can never learn from your imagination; it won’t help you improve.

(Baiyi, 3rd Interview)
Chapter Eight  Generic Aspects of Learning

Just as the professional learning in applied theatre discussed in the previous chapter distinctly showed up the differences in the three categories of participant, the data also revealed there were three distinct kinds of generic learning occurring across the categories regardless of the previous level of applied theatre experience. They are:

- Personal learning,
- Pedagogical learning, and
- Reflective learning.

The participants described that they had not expected to encounter these kinds of learning before they came to the training workshop. Although the participants clearly identified these three generic learning types in the interviews as well as in the final essay after the training workshop, they could not articulate all the specific moments or activities when this learning was taken place. It profoundly reflects the tacit nature of the generic learning embedded in the training workshop. The data indicates that some participants were specifically influenced by one category of generic learning and made little or no mention of the other kinds. Nevertheless, it is still important to start the analysis from the participants’ perspectives: how they accounted for their generic learning and described how the learning changed their understanding, attitude and behaviour at work and in life are critical clues to deepen our understanding of the learning process.

8.1  Personal learning

All participants mentioned that they gained a certain level of personal learning in the training workshop. A representative comment made by Minxia describing the impact of personal learning:
I don’t think we were in a training group. Instead, we were a personal development group. Because every time I came, I found people changed.

(Minxia, 2nd Interview)

As I said before, the participants could not fully articulate when, how and at which moment their learning occurred. Only a few of them were able to remark what influenced their personal learning in the training process. So their responses are mixed in with describing what they learnt and how they felt in the training workshop as well as their changes at work afterwards. There were three main types of personal learning mentioned by the participants:

8.1.1 Self-awareness

The whole training workshop made me form a habit of seeing and observing myself.

(Shuxi, 2nd Interview)

This comment from Shuxi was common to most of the participants in the training workshop. They felt impressed by the opportunities to enhance their self-awareness, and that allowed them to observe and understand their inner feelings, and know more about their self-limitations and habitual behaviour.

a. Observing and understanding inner feeling

The participants felt touched by the experience enough to dig deep into their own inner feelings. As Anwen said, she started to become aware of her feelings and to think about them during and after the workshop. She gained self-understanding from this awareness.

I was able to discover some things that have existed in my heart for a long time. I did not know they have been living with me for so long. Didn’t have a chance before to see how I was blocked – to find out the reason why I have grown like this.

(Anwen, 2nd Interview)

Qiling told me she had always neglected her feelings before. She seldom dared to express
them and used to suppress them. She learnt from the discussion sessions and the drama activities that she should value her own needs and feeling. She started trying to admit and deal with her feelings, positive and negative. She found benefits from this change:

If I can be more concerned about my personal feeling, I can find the clue to what makes me feel uncomfortable and then I can take care of myself. If I can observe my emotion, I can discover more about myself and promptly find a way to deal with it.

(Qiling, 3rd Interview)

Importantly, she found this capacity contributed to her work. She found she was able to be more sensitive and empathise with her clients when they shared their puzzlement and what made them unhappy. Zhaofeng extended this idea to link the importance of self-awareness to the basic qualities for NGO/social workers.

I found it was a fundamental experience in the training workshop to discover oneself...I think this is so important to everybody who works as NGO/social workers and it is always missing in our field. From caring and understanding ourselves, we can understand others.

(Zhaofeng, 3rd Interview)

b. **Knowing self-limitations/habitual behaviour**

Apart from feelings, the participants discovered their limitations and their behavioural patterns when they interacted with others. Through self-observation, they had opportunities to re-learn about themselves. It was an important element to enable change.

Chenyu found that habitually his mind kept tight control over his body during the exercises. Although he could not liberate his body in this short time, he recognised that applied theatre would help him to achieve this goal.

I think I will be able to liberate my body eventually. The training workshop helped me to understand myself. To understand what has been controlling me was the starting point to think how to release these locks. And I know applied theatre can be a safe place for me to learn how to liberate myself. I may not do it in real life, but I am sure
I can do it on stage.

(Chenyu, 2nd Interview)

A great impact on Baiyi was his new understanding of his expressive ability. He originally thought he was good at expressing himself. During his own observation in the training workshop, he was surprised he was not as capable as he had thought. This new understanding created a drive to improve.

Because I know my real level of ability, I can use it seriously to improve. Had I kept thinking I was good enough, I wouldn’t make any improvement.

(Baiyi, 2nd Interview)

Similarly to Baiyi, Jieyan found she had a habitual mode of thinking that only focused on seeing negative things, which made her always feel frustrated. With this observation in mind, she reminded herself not to neglect the positive side, and keeping balanced perspectives.

Zhuhui recognised he tended to hold negative emotions and ignore the clients’ feelings during their discussions. The training workshop enhanced his sensitivity to observe his own emotional cycle so that he could manage his negative emotions and change his relationship with his clients. He described it was a process of ‘cleaning’.

It touched my heart. I felt refreshed. As if old dust has been cleared. I feel as if I have been promoted after cleaning out that old and accumulated rubbish.

(Zhuhui, 2nd Interview)

Knowing their habitual behaviour also impelled the participants to try out new responses in the training workshop. Shuxi observed he always feared to be seen and exposed doing exercises in public. He found there were lots of inner mind controls blocking him and keeping him distanced from others. He resisted others’ ideas. Although he did not expect to be able to make a sudden change, the intensive opportunities in the workshop to observe himself were very meaningful for him. ‘The realisation was a critical pre-
requisite to make a decision for change’ (2nd Interview). He did attempt to open up himself in the training workshop.

I found a change. I used to resist different opinions. I always held on to my idea tightly… In Phase Three, I was very resistant in the discussion where we chose the topic for our participatory theatre program. I recognised my resistance. In the past, I would persuade others to accept my idea. This time, I gave way to others’ ideas and opened myself up to try them.

(Shuxi, 2nd Interview)

8.1.2 Self-confidence

The participants described their increasing self-confidence during the training workshop. They found they were more willing to express themselves publicly, be more assertive and feel able to change. From the participants’ revealing responses, there were three kinds of forces contributing to improving their self-confidence.

First, participants mentioned that it was important to see others being brave in the learning process and in their practice. They appreciated other members, including me as facilitator, being willing to take risks, and they took it as a cue to act differently. Before the first activity started in session one, Xinhong challenged me about wasting so much time in checking the expectations of the group. Some participants wrote in their journal praising her braveness in challenging the teacher, which was unusual in Chinese culture. After the Rainbow of desire exercise in Phase One, many participants admired Shuxi as the protagonist who disclosed his sexual orientation. On another day Shuxi also shared his innovative social projects with the others. Jingjing was impressed by his courage, and that affected her own change:

When I get back to my workplace, I can be more assertive. I am braver in expressing my opinion. I think this courage comes from Shuxi’s works, especially how he responded to social issues in action. I was moved by him. So, when I get back to work…when I see something unfair, I will stand up and fight to counter it now.

(Jingjing, 2nd Interview)
During the encounters with others, Chenyu deeply felt he had ability to make change in himself.

I thought I quite understood myself. I was honest in facing my problems. However, I was missing the ability and the way to make changes. After this training workshop, I feel I am able to make changes. It was because I saw the courage of others, and through them I saw myself. I learnt about myself through other people’s stories. The experience gave me more strength.

(Chenyu, Final essay)

Second, the culture within the training workshop of encouraging expression also played a role in enhancing participants’ self-confidence. Meili, Anwen and Qiling mentioned that they had obviously changed to be more willing to express their viewpoints publicly. Qiling compared this with her responses in the past:

I would not expose myself in the past, because I was afraid I might be wrong. I was not certain about my ideas. Now, I find I feel more comfortable to speak out and actually my opinion is workable.

(Qiling, 2nd Interview)

Third, the opportunities in the training workshop to practise helped the participants to create self-confidence. Yunlei found the acting and presenting opportunities made her more active and confident. She explained in detail how the gain in confidence changed her way of work.

Acting and presenting boosted my confidence. I was a passive person and did not dare to stand out to show my ability. Although I am a person-in-charge of an administrative department, I always retreated. I preferred to invite people from outside to take up my training jobs. When I decided on a course, I usually preferred to be a coordinator not the facilitator. After this training workshop, I think I can try to stand in the front.

(Yunlei, 2nd interview)

She reconfirmed her change six months after the training workshop, in the third interview.
I became more mature after the training workshop. Learning from lots of dialogues and open sharing, I found my work style gradually changed… I have gained more confidence. I can have more sense of control at work and feel work is more smooth and effective.

(Yunlei, 3rd interview)

8.1.3 Social ability

The training workshop incorporated many different kinds of interactive activity, which the participants accounted for enhancing their social ability to express themselves, to listen and, to care for and empathise with others. The participants also talked about this type of personal learning based on sharing their attitudinal and behavioural changes at work.

a. To express

Participants valued applied theatre training as it was able to enrich their ways of expression that were not limited to verbal language. Luping brought up this point clearly: ‘I only relied on verbal language before. This training workshop made me see how important it is to use physical language. It can provide me with an additional way of expression’ (2nd Interview). Chenyu, a participant who much appreciated the artistic way of expression, described how learning a new way to express himself would contribute to his life.

Influenced by the past education, I found using verbal or written language were not enough to express myself, especially my feelings. So, I had strong expectations that I was going to learn an art form that would help me to express myself. Through rich expression, I can be relaxed, re-experience, promote and liberate myself… the different kinds of physical exercises in the training workshop made me feel very nervous because I had forgotten how to use my body, how to control my body to complete the tasks. Therefore, I am very sure this is what I needed to learn.

(Chenyu, Final essay)

b. To listen

In the training workshop, by the nature of applied theatre pedagogy and the way I
structured their work, the participants had to work collaboratively with each other in different formats such as pair work, small group planning, whole group sharing and discussion. During this process, they were given opportunities to learn how to listen to others and respect others’ opinion. As Meili said, ‘The collaborative opportunities in the training workshop made me slow down and listen to others attentively. I found everyone was very smart. Creating things with others always achieved better work than merely working on my own. I am more willing to listen and accept others’ ideas’ (2nd Interview).

Anwen described how she changed her attitude to work with others.

When I discussed with people in the past, I found it easy to be impatient. I only wanted others to listen to me and accept my ideas. Now, I am not like this. No matter whether I am in the training workshop or back in my workplace, I can be calm to share my views…let other people finish their point and I can try to think about their stance…

(Anwen, 2nd Interview)

With similar changes at her workplace, Minxia described how her colleagues commented on her:

My colleagues felt my change, change to be more gentle. They said I used to be a dominant person and impose my ideas on other people. Now, they have found I will share my views and experience, and at the same time allow others to express their views.

(Minxia, 2nd Interview)

c. To care for and empathize with others

Most of participants found they could be more caring and empathic towards other people after the training workshop. They could think from another’s perspective - not just hold tight to their own views – respect others’ needs and give others space (Anwen & Xinhong, 2nd Interview; Xunxi, 3rd Interview). These changes generated a positive impact for their personal relationship. Meili explained that she could re-gain the feeling of a heartfelt encounter from an interaction in role. It inspired her to work with clients differently in future.
Chenyu further explained that the practice in the training workshop helped him to understand the core value of working with people.

I have gained more understanding about people. I remember the word ‘magic’. It reminds me it is impossible to expect people to do what we want. We should understand others’ pain. To empathize is the core value of our work…this training workshop gave me concrete and deep experience to learn about it…I learnt how to care for others in my organisation…

(Chenyu, 2nd Interview)

Zhuhui even mentioned his behavioural change at work.

If my clients distrusted and resisted our help in the past, I would simply think this was their problem. I would criticize them. But now, I will consider that they are rejecting me because they have been hurt many times before. Like the stories in our dramas, they may have something that happened before which causes their distress. They need my help.

(Zhuhui, 2nd Interview)

He was also surprised by his change to naturally sit closer to his clients whereas before he only stood at the door of the ward talking to his clients in hospital.

Now I want to sit closer with them. I did not have this feeling before. I think if we can shorten the distance between me and them, I can feel their needs, ‘read’ their feelings and get more understanding about them.

(Zhuhui, 3rd Interview)

8.2 Pedagogical learning

This generic learning has been mentioned in the previous chapter. Reviewing the participants’ responses, learning the principles and pedagogy of applied theatre was shown to be common to all participants, in three categories. Although the contents of the pedagogical learning mentioned by the participants like democratic, dialogic, reflective,
experiential and people-centred learning are similar, the application discussed in this section is slightly different. Here, it means the wider scope of application through which the participants learned to use the pedagogy in general and not necessarily just as it relates to applied theatre practice. Obviously, the Category Two and Three participants made more explicit mention of this kind of generic learning. They could also refer to the positive learning they had gained from previous applied theatre experience. They had some sense of the pedagogical beliefs of applied theatre, which they appreciated, and they put the focus on it in this training workshop.

To a certain extent, the Category One participants were attracted by applied theatre pedagogy before they came to this training workshop. Although not every member in this category could articulate their pedagogical learning, the data indicates they all had different levels of effect. Three out of nine participants emphasized the pedagogical learning and described how it impacted on their practice. Another four participants did not specially mention this generic learning, but it was implicitly shown from the examples they gave about new ways of practice, such as involving collaboration and participation and client-centred planning. Two participants who found difficulties in learning applied theatre did not count any pedagogical learning. However, from how they described their own learning experience, I can see they did gain some benefits from applied theatre pedagogy, like teaching more effectively through visualization and learning from others. They lacked the ability to integrate their personal positive experience into their knowledge of its application.

Overall, the participants claimed their own pedagogical learning came through personal experience and observation of other participants’ changes during the training workshop; and also the change after the training workshop in their own way of thinking and practice at work. I summarize next the six aspects of pedagogical learning identified from the data and how the participants accounted for the influence of these on their practice.
8.2.1 Change in understanding of pedagogical concepts

a. Participation and empowerment

Participants described that the embodied experience of participation and empowerment in the training workshop changed their way of working whereas they only had intellectual understanding of these concepts before.

In order to empower the clients, we should let go of our egos as facilitators. I had learnt this concept intellectually in the past. After the experience in action, I found it is not as easy as I thought if we really give the power back to the clients. Before this understanding, I was the one in a group who gave many suggestions; now, I will give more space for the clients’ suggestions and together we can try them out.

(Meili, 2nd Interview)

Like Meili, Qiling changed her way of leading the drama group at her centre. She used to set a fixed script for the group members to follow but from now on she would co-devise the play with them. She found this increasing degree of participation made the members more engaged in the process. It satisfied her to watch them shift from being uninterested to active participation. Zhuhui further articulated the importance of involving participants in the teaching process, based on his learning in the training workshop.

The workshop made me think more deeply about working with clients. I think of how I can help them to understand things or to guide them in a new direction. I should not ignore their ideas and their process of reflections by imposing my ideas or giving them answers. To do this will create a distance between me and them. If we can have a more equal relationship, the clients will accept each other with a good grace.

(Zhuhui, April 22, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 3>, Journal)

Engaging the participants can also happen in the process of teaching. Jieyan was attracted by setting questions instead of statements as her teaching objectives. This was a completely new idea for her that she had never thought about.

Starting from questions means the learning does not have to be based on what I want to do with the participants. To change my way of thinking: learning is not about
sending my message to the participants, it is an exploration, working together with them…this leads me to think of the position of the participants and of me as facilitator in the process.

(2nd Interview)

b. People-centred/client-based pedagogy

Participants mentioned that applied theatre gave them a platform to focus, explore and empathise with people’s feelings, needs and desires. It was not an idea or an attitude that emerged through talk or seminar; this learning was manifested in action. It triggered them to think from their clients’ perspectives.

Applied theatre gave me many ideas especially how to understand people. I find it’s very useful; it is valuable to understand people’s feelings, needs and desires. Because I am a social service worker, this learning can help me design my workshop better.

(Luping, 3rd Interview)

To see people’s need is an important starting point, especially for my work. Before, I had only learnt from theory but now I can learn from my own experience. It is very fundamental to how to understand people.

(Zhaofeng, 2nd Interview)

To understand others’ feelings helped the participants become more considerate to their clients. They learnt to respect their individual differences, personalities and personal habits. Instead of setting all teaching objectives based on the facilitator’s agenda, they now started thinking from the participants’ point of view. Meili shared her pedagogical change:

I now design activities based on my participants’ desires and needs. I previously thought they came to my workshop only for the gifts. Now I think about it from their situations. I wonder what they would want after a long tiring day’s work. How can I engage them? I am more active in trying out different ways to communicate with them. I have changed from merely being concerned about their materialistic needs, to their spiritual needs.

(Meili, 2nd Interview)
8.2.2 Culture of learning

Some participants appreciated and enjoyed the culture of learning. They described how the training workshop made them learn the essence of applied theatre, which is dialogic, respectful, equal and open. They learnt by living through the process. As Zhaofeng said,

I experienced what equality was about in the process. Equality doesn’t mean that everyone gets the same thing. It means we can pay respect to every member’s experience and also their past. We can all choose what we want to see, feel and learn.

(Zhaofeng, Final essay)

Luping mentioned that the philosophy she learnt from the training workshop affected her way of thinking at work. She said, ‘I apply the essential principles more consciously, like emphasising reflection, equality and dialogue, giving everyone a space to develop, listening actively when I am planning or conducting a meeting’ (3rd Interview).

8.2.3 Value of collaborative learning

Participants felt impressed by the many opportunities for collaboration throughout the training workshop. They frequently worked with people in different forms of collaboration like pairs, small groups and the whole group. They found the collaborative setting helped them to learn how to express themselves and listen, as well as to learn from others’ ideas. They discovered they were learning not only from me as the facilitator, but from everybody in the group.

I found every member in this training workshop was very distinctive. Unlike the previous workshop I attended, I found this time we built the knowledge together. Everybody was a treasury and shared their ‘precious stones’ with each other. Very rich! I learnt not only from the facilitator. I saw everybody had some contribution to make, to produce the knowledge. It greatly inspired me – the facilitator of a workshop does not own it; more importantly, s/he has to stimulate the participants to work together. The result will be much richer.

(Luping, 2nd Interview)
8.2.4 Value of self-constructive learning

Some participants described that the self-constructive method of learning in the training workshop respected every learner’s pace, which created more learning possibilities for them. Meili reflected,

The learning content in this training workshop was not like the text-book which is restricted by its fixed script. The learning process through individually documenting the feelings and thoughts in the reflective journal; then sharing, summarizing and consolidating the learning through group discussion, which was able to help to ease my doubts and remove blind spots in my own private thinking. No standard answer was provided; the learning was full of possibilities.

(Meili, Final essay)

For Zhaofeng, this learning process was revolutionary. She felt released from the traditional view of only honouring one standard answer. She wrote, ‘it’s the first time I believe in this process cause I really see in this course that REAL knowledge is based on existed understanding, experience and feeling. It’s so valuable’ (original in English, Final essay).

8.2.5 Value of learning through discussion

Participants mentioned the benefits of learning through group discussion, from both personal and teaching points of view. Some members appreciated that the process of listening to others could help them to see things from different angles, to enhance their learning from others’ reflection and discussion, to learn how to present similar ideas, to analyse different viewpoints and to gain recognition for their thoughts. Yunlei further elaborated that the opportunity for group discussion was a vital element for experiential learning.

I think discussion is very vital. You led us to do the activities…let everybody try first, and then asked us to discuss the experience afterwards. It was very effective. I found it was worthwhile to spend time on thorough discussion. I will take it back to my work. Next time when I conduct a workshop, I will teach in this way… Lack of discussion limits the participants’ learning. Through discussion, they can understand why we did
this and that… This will become one of the important elements in my workshop design in future.

(Yunlei, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Interview)

8.2.6 The qualities of the facilitator

Although this is not a teaching method, it is an important extended pedagogical learning; as the facilitator, I was myself reminded of the qualities required during teaching. Some participants documented their observation and learning during the training workshop. Like Qiling,

After experiencing the session today, I think I need to spend more time to listen to the participants in my workshop. Be patient and give enough space for them (especially in the discussion section). Furthermore, the facilitator should be the first to show a high level of engagement. This is the critical factor to lead the participants and make them feel engaged.

(Qiling, March 11, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 1>, Journal)

Zhuhui noted that he had learned that a good facilitator should be a good communicator who was expressive, attentive and sincere. At the same time, he reflected on his current working style and wanted to make a change.

When I communicate with clients, I should be an attentive and active listener. As I learnt from today’s workshop, the delivery of ideas should be clear to make communication effectively. I used to work casually with clients; I must improve my emotional control and create good conditions.

(Zhuhui, April 1, 2011 <Week 1/Phase 2>, Journal)

8.2.7 Case 1: Minxia’s change in practice

Minxia was one participant who frequently mentioned pedagogical learning. She gained her belief in the pedagogy from her personal feelings and the observation of the participants’ changes in the process. She was excited and actively put the learning into practice after the training workshop. She shared the following snapshots in the second and the third interview, to show how she was applying the new pedagogy. The positive
responses she received from the clients reinforced her belief. Most importantly, she found herself being more professional after applying the new pedagogy. I have chosen three snapshots to demonstrate how she applied the learning in new practice.

**Snapshot 1: client-centred pedagogy**

In a workshop for a group of workers at a social welfare centre, she was alerted by her colleagues that it was a tough group, with low motivation. She used to begin with simple physical exercises for ice-breaking; whereas this time, she broke the ice by touching the participants’ inner feelings. She imagined and felt their working situation from their position: they were a group of hard-working social workers, whose contribution was always being neglected by the general public. She started the workshop by sharing her personal story; then gradually she invited them, via sharing their own backgrounds and hobbies, to share their feelings about their work.

Please step forward if you:
- like eating fruits;
- are a parent;
- feel pressure at work;
- feel happy at work;
- feel lost at work sometimes…

The questions Minxia chose to ask made the participants feel they were being recognised and of concern to someone. She commented on her new approach to beginning a workshop:

Through the process of asking questions, I came to feel that they really gave a lot of effort to their organisation. I said thanks to them, thanked them for their contribution to serving unprivileged people. Their silence showed this was well-received. Some participants told me there was nobody who had said thanks to them before. They had resisted and ignored previous workshops because they thought the facilitators did not understand them. So, I feel it is very important to respect people.

The participants were very engaged in the rest of this workshop. Minxia put herself into
the participants’ shoes, felt their emotions and paid tribute to their efforts. The client-based paradigm was rewarded by the participants with appreciation.

**Snapshot 2: participation and self-constructive learning**

In the same workshop mentioned above, the core activity was teaching the social workers how to assess a student with special needs. In the past, Minxia had used one-way didactic pedagogy to tell the participants what they should do. This time, she invited one participant to describe a student problem as a case, then discussed that openly with all the social workers. Through her interaction with the student, she asked the participants, ‘what do you think we should do with this student?’

This is very unusual for me. I learnt it from you in the training workshop. I never asked this question in my previous teaching. Before, I would directly tell them what they should do without inviting their suggestions. Now I found they actually knew their students very well. I only needed to help them think about the things they could do. They knew best about their students’ needs. My imposed suggestions could not always work for them.

Minxia changed her one-way didactic pedagogy to invite participation. She engaged them as active participants instead of passive recipients. She trusted the participants’ ability and honoured the knowledge they had accumulated from daily working experience. She was feeling good and satisfied with her change in practice, especially seeing that ‘a tough group with low motivation’ turned into ‘an active engaged group’.

**Snapshot 3: empowerment and collaborative learning**

At the end of another workshop conducted by Minxia, she changed the expert-centred method of holding a Q & A session. Instead of the facilitator as an expert giving answers, she invited participants to come out and ask their questions and opened the space for whole group collaborative exploration. She encouraged the participants to stand up and find their own voice. Then she invited everyone to write down their ideas and suggestions on a paper. The questioner collected these, read them out and discussed them with the group. They were also able to keep the papers for their further reference.
I found it was a very good method. I learnt a lot from the participants. If I used the old way to conduct this section, I became the ‘big figure’ and never got a chance to learn from others…it was good also because everybody could suggest different ways to deal with the problem, which created more possibilities.

She was impressed by the shared learning space where the active participation evolved. She found changing the role from being the expert to a co-learner increased the level of acceptance by the participants as well as their learning opportunities. She commented herself:

I felt very good. More importantly, I now feel I am more professional.

8.3 Reflective learning

There was limited explicit description from the participants about reflective learning. Most of the participants claimed they were ‘more reflective’ after the workshop but found it hard to articulate in words what exactly that meant, and what was the content of this type of learning. Reflective capacity is an inner quality. The setting, structure, activities and tasks all had the potential to provide the ‘reflective space’ for the participants. Apart from the participants naming this kind of learning, reflection as action was embedded in the activities and tasks in the training workshop. Although the participants did not particularly speak about the reflective learning, they did show their reflective responses in the learning process. For instance, the Category Two and Three participants made relatively less mention of reflective learning in the interview and/or final essay; however, they did ask sophisticated reflective questions (the reader may refer back to some of those in this chapter and the last) during the group discussion and in the journal. They did not talk about reflection; they showed the act of reflection in the process.

As I said, reflective capacity is an internal quality. Every participant had a different starting point. A few Category One participants with low learning confidence and a very different prior learning style said it was very difficult for them to reflect. Jingjing was a
typical case. She mentioned many times that she always started from learning theory before experience. This training workshop was set up on experiential learning, which hindered her learning.

You asked me to reflect after the experience, I didn’t know how to do reflection…I participated in all the activities. Sometimes, I could not think of anything…I participated, I experienced, but I could not reflect deeply and only stayed at a very superficial level.

(2nd Interview)

Jingjing was in fact able to articulate some of her learning experience and learning preference, which in one sense shows a general kind of reflection. In a broad sense, all the types of learning analysed above involved reflective capacity. What the participants shared in applied theatre learning and generic learnings are a kind of ‘reflective learning’. Through reflection, they consolidated, synthesised, summarised their learning in the training workshop as well as their unsuccessful learning experiences.

Reviewing those participants’ comments relating specifically to reflective learning, I extrapolated the following three areas as what they thought of significant value to themselves:

- aspects of the training workshop that helped to build reflective capacity;
- a sense of change after the training workshop; and
- the value of being reflective.

8.3.1 Aspects of the training workshop that helped to build reflective capacity

From the data, there were three aspects that the participants thought were particularly helpful to their reflective learning: the reflective journal, the teaching methods and the interview.
Reflective Journal

Most of the participants had not written a reflective journal before. They generally gave positive comments on this task and said they would recommend it to their colleagues. Most of them found it useful to note down their important feelings, thoughts and moments after the experience.

The reflective journal is very special to me. It was able to help me to document what I was thinking, what I was doing and to reflect on why I had these responses…If one did not do that, one would regret it. One cannot ever recall the same feeling again.

(Baiyi, 2nd Interview)

The reflective journal was able to provide reference material for them to reflect on the process in future. Jieyan believed that she would gain more understanding from reviewing the journal from time to time (2nd and 3rd Interview). Qiling pointed out the act of writing itself was a process of thinking.

I found the reflective journal was helpful. It was able to help me to consolidate the experience and my thoughts in each session. This was a process of reflection. It made a difference if you got a chance to write down something. It helped my mind become clearer and more systematic.

(Qiling, 2nd Interview)

Although the participants thought they were not sure if they could form a writing habit after the training workshop, some tried to find a way to keep this spirit. Baiyi mentioned he would now make notes and write reminders for his next practice after each workshop he conducted (3rd Interview).

Not every participant really understood the function of writing the reflective journal though I put instructions and a set of guiding questions on the first page of their journal. Some wrote very brief and short notes; some just used the journal to take notes on the procedures of different activities. Some found it difficult to document their learning through writing in the reflective journal. Like Liliang,
I had lot of feelings during the activities. However, I found it very hard and did not know how to write through words in the reflective journal. I could not write.

(2nd Interview)

Reading his reflective journal, though his writing in Phase Two and Three was short and shallow, I found that what he had said was not the whole truth. He did reflect on personal awareness quite deeply in Phase One, in which he still felt confident and excited about learning. The same for Jingjing: as I mentioned before, low learning confidence hindered his learning.

A dialogic method of teaching

Many participants mentioned that my choice of stepping back and not giving standard answers for all their questions effectively helped them to build reflective capacity. It gave them a space and motivated them to think independently. Jieyan expressed how this teaching method benefited her learning:

The teaching method was very helpful to enhance my thinking ability. If you had given me more direction and provided answers, I would have thought less. I was not being reflective in the previous workshops I attended. Here, you provided me space to think and reflect. It was important. If you gave me all the concepts instead of allowing me to build them by myself, I would not remember them. The knowledge created through my own thinking process can be a resource for future practice.

(Jieyan, 2nd Interview)

The teaching method influenced not only the participants’ reflective capacity. It could also be an experience to be reflected on. Meili recognised the benefit of not being limited by given an absolute answer, and linked this idea to think of her work:

Now I will think: will I block the children’s imaginative ability if I only give them one absolute answer?

(Meili, 2nd Interview)

And she did not blindly accept what she experienced. She demonstrated her reflective
capacity by asking more reflective questions:

It is clear that the participatory way of teaching has many benefits. The current examination-oriented education does limit the students’ creativity. However, is the participatory way the best way of teaching? Is it more suitable to apply where there is an open learning objective? Is it appropriate to decide whether we use a participatory, semi-participatory or traditional way of teaching, depending on the students’ stage of development?

(Meili, Final essay)

**Interview as an act of reflection**

Surprisingly, the interview was one of the research methods which turned out to play a pedagogical role in contributing to the participants’ reflective learning. The participants took those opportunities to think about and talk about learning. The interview was an act of reflection. Some participants mentioned it could give them a reflective space to consolidate the learning from the training workshop.

I have a strong memory of the time talking with you at interviews. This was a space for contemplation and for consolidating learning.

(Xunxi, 3rd Interview)

The Interview also provided a platform for participants to reflect on their practice. Baiyi valued this:

Interview is a good platform for me to consolidate my experience. I can reflect on my practice while sharing it with you. It enhances my thinking ability and affects my way of thinking.

(Baiyi, 3rd Interview)

**8.3.2 Sense of change after the training workshop**

A number of participants mentioned they got a feeling of change in thinking habits and at work after the training workshop. Jieyan described the reflective capacity she gained like ‘the third eye’. She was able to ‘jump out’ to observe herself while she was doing an
activity. She compared the learning this time with her previous workshop experience.

I am a lazy person. Although the workshops I attended always emphasized self-awareness and self-reflection, I was still passive for change. However, in this training workshop, I have gradually created a habit to become aware of myself. I unconsciously make myself alert to what I am doing and what I feel in every moment. Asking why. For a lazy person like me, this habit is a very important reward.

(Jiyan, Final essay)

Carrying this similar sense of gaining reflective capacity, participants like Anwen and Meili found an obvious change in their thinking pattern at work. They found themselves asking ‘why’ at work with increasing frequency, which was new to their life. Yumei said,

I have increased times for self-reflection and self-evaluation both at work and in life. When I meet people, I will automatically think and reflect on what they said they meant.

(Yumei, 3rd Interview)

Meili thought this change could make her more understanding of her clients. Both of them mentioned that their colleagues expressed positive comments on their change.

8.3.3 Value of being reflective

There were a few participants who mentioned that their reflective capacity could help them to make better professional judgements.

It is very important to have reflective ability. I always tell people: if we don’t learn from mistakes, we will keep repeating the same fault; if we don’t know there is a mistake, we can never improve.

(Tianxin, 3rd Interview)

Yunlei suggested that reflective capacity is critical to NGO workers. It could help them to learn from experience. Although she did not think she was reflective enough, the experience obtained from the training workshop gave her a guide to practice. She valued the importance of being reflective especially in the Chinese context:
I think this ability is very important. It is very dangerous if we can only see things in black or white. It is dangerous especially living under the thinking mode of our country party. Being reflective is very useful.

(Yunlei, 3rd Interview)

8.3.4 Case 2: Zhuhui’s reflective learning

Zhuhui described a strong sense of reflective learning after the training workshop. I found his account indicated that all three above-mentioned areas of generic learning were involved. His case shows how the accumulated and holistic influence from all the areas generated deep learning that benefited his personal capacity and professional growth. In what follows I put his voice in the interviews under the title of each area since they are already self-explanatory.

Aspects of the training workshop that helped building reflective capacity

Journal

When I reviewed my journal, I felt what I had written was unbelievable. The writing was unusual. The words I used were sophisticated and deep. I was able only to describe the concrete and superficial things before, but this time I could explain the abstract ideas.

Teaching method

I think the way you taught was good. If you had behaved like a traditional teacher, I would have relied on you, which would have hindered my learning. Since the beginning of this training workshop, I have been learning to think independently. When I go back to my working environment, I can still think on my own without relying on you.

Interview

I find the interview has a function of helping me to consolidate my learning and give me room for reflection.

When I listened to the recording of the second interview, I felt it was quite ‘painful’ since you pushed me to think and reflect. You helped me to analyse and understand what I had done, to dig deep into my thoughts.


**Sense of change after the training workshop**

In the past, my thinking was very simple and superficial whereas now it is at a deeper level. I will think about why something has happened. My reflective capacity has gradually developed.

I think it is good to see things thoroughly. I know how to summarize different ideas. The bad thing is sometimes I feel confused. When I sort out one problem, another problem comes up. The more I reflect, the more questions. It is still good to generate a motivation force to improve.

**Value of being reflective**

I felt my growth was very flat. But gradually now, I feel my capacity has been developing like stepping up stairs... having reflective capacity helps me to improve quickly.

In the past, I could only deal with problems one by one and mostly superficially. I did not know how to put the relevant issues together and find out the original cause of a problem. Now, I can do it better.

In the past, I would take for granted all the things that happened in the activity and had no reflection after the experience. Now I will reflect on the experience and check if it matched with the objectives, the clients’ needs and the rationale.

In the past, I only wrote my report on what I saw, very simply. Now I will add in my reflection and provide alternative ideas. In the organisation’s general meetings, I can now give more sophisticated suggestions. I have found my colleagues looking at me differently.
In the last two chapters, I have described what the participants claimed they had learnt from the training workshop, based on their points of view. However, as the facilitator who setup and structured the training workshop, what were the underpinning assumptions of my own theory of practice? How do I understand what I did? How has this influenced the participants’ learning? Has the participants’ experience of learning improved through my efforts to live up to my own educational values, accumulated from my previous learning? How have they responded to my teaching methods and what was my reaction to their responses? What have I learned from it? In this chapter, I would like to explore these questions, focusing on the pedagogy of the training from my perspective as facilitator. My own theory of practice was continuously evolving in the process. I was not fully clear about my teaching choices even as I was making them. Gradually, through my own sustained reflective processes, I found there to be an alignment between action and my educational theory; and this chapter will make these implicit ideas explicit.

9.1 Personal theory of practice

In the methodology chapter, I stated the teaching principles guiding my practice throughout the training workshop. I emphasised that my teaching method was based on my previous learning and experience. Through this study I have found it necessary to deeply reflect on my own role in the training and what I brought to it. How did I become an applied theatre practitioner? What factors combined to make how I work today? Helping other people learn in/about applied theatre definitely informs my own practice. After the years of practice, I recognise applied theatre is a highly practice-driven discipline. I cannot learn only from reading. I can never learn from a single occasion, not even a systematic formal course. My personal learning journey has taught me the importance of complementing practice and theory. Reviewing my past steps, my understanding of applied theatre was at first mostly grounded in practice. Then it directed
me to particular readings for integrating the practice with theory. In this sense, I think learners in this field should be independent and self-constructive in order to consolidate their learning after each practice encounter, and construct their own theory as a guide to improve their next practice. Therefore, when I first thought of the plan for this training workshop, the main teaching objective which came to my mind was to nurture a group of independent and self-constructive learners. Considering the fragmented and piece-meal learning opportunities in the current mainland Chinese context, I thought this would be a way to benefit their sustainable learning and practice.

Mindful awareness and reflection were two core attributes that I thought were critical to support the independent and self-constructive learner. According to UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, 'mindful awareness can be defined as paying attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is. It invites us to stop, breathe, observe, and connect with one's inner experience’ (http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=16). In experience-based learning like applied theatre, experience is a primary source for learning. If we can be mindfully aware of 'present moment experiences’, they can supply rich materials for reflection. Experience alone is not necessarily educative; reflection is a process that creates space for making sense of it (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985). These two individual abilities assist learners to construct their own knowledge independently. Following this line of thought, it was essential for me to aim to nurture independent and self-constructive learners by promoting mindful awareness and reflection. In the next section, I would like to review what I proposed in order to practise my teaching and learning theory for the benefit of the whole group.

9.2 Personal teaching and learning theory in practice

This was the first time in my practice that I insisted on emphasizing teaching principles as a guide to structuring the training workshop and my teaching decisions in the process. When I examine the data about my thoughts, speech and action, this insistence is apparent
throughout the training workshop. I enacted and from time to time talked about my theory of learning in applied theatre. The following analysis identifies what I said and did to promote independent and self-constructive learning through encouraging mindful awareness and reflection during the different periods of the workshop.

9.2.1 Pre-training workshop stage
a. Letter before briefing session
I made it clear to the potential participants my emphases on this way of learning and my positioning from the first – before they came to the briefing session, so that they could make an informed decision

This training workshop puts strong emphasis on the participants’ reflection and documentation of their experience. For consolidating and internalising the learning, every participant has to write a journal, do some reflection and join in discussion during the course.

This training workshop is not an expert teaching course. I position this course as a platform to co-explore the application of applied theatre between facilitator and participants. I will share my knowledge and so will you, sharing your working experience and needs. With support from the group, I hope you can become a reflective practitioner.

(Yi-man, extract from the Letter to participants before briefing session)

b. First interview
In the interview before the training workshop started, I expressed what I expected of their attitude to learning in the process. The following main points, raised during these preliminary interviews, together illustrate my personal theory of learning.

● Respect different paces of learning (especially for beginners)

(To Anwen) Learning is a personal activity. It starts at your own pace. It doesn’t matter if you walk on a different path. No need to make comparisons. It is not about who is better than whom. Doesn’t matter! Because everyone is independent and unique. For
me, I am also new to the group. I have never worked with you guys before. Everyone is different. Every time is our first time.

- Independent learning

  (To Tianxin) We have to build our way of learning internally. If you can build your own system for learning in these few months, you can go further after this training workshop. Learning is a lifelong matter.

- Learning from others

  (To Baiyi) I hope everybody in this training workshop can share their experience and ideas on applied theatre with each other. We will explore the activities together. We can discuss the possibilities for applying the activities, to dig deep into their meaning. I hope we are a learning community.

  (To Qiling) We are a community. Everyone has different experiences and can inspire each other. I am not the only one you can talk to. You may discuss and explore with any one of our group members... Everyone may have a different interpretation of an activity. So, it will be a chance for you to synthesis different ideas.

- Encourage reflection

  (To Zhuhui) It is critical if you can train your mind to be more reflective. You told me you want to be more professional. I think the critical quality in being a professional is reflective ability.

- Encourage to dig deep for understanding (to the participants with applied theatre experience)

  (To Tianxin) I would like to encourage you to achieve a higher level of learning. Since you have learnt some activities before, this time you have the opportunity to observe how a beginner starts to learn the activities. At your level, I will challenge you to dig deep into the understanding you already have of the form, and to carefully observe the development process of the learners.
9.2.2 In the training workshop

Learning in/about applied theatre itself is a kind of experiential learning. The form by its nature encourages multiple perspectives, open and diverse interpretation, and finding possibilities. In order to encourage participants to construct knowledge from experience independently, as previously mentioned, reflection is the key to generate learning in drama, as drama educator Dorothy Heathcote (Johnson & O’Neill, 1984) reminds us:

> Without the development of the power of reflection we have very little. It is reflection that permits the storing of knowledge, recalling the power of the feeling and the memory of past feelings. (97)

Quality of reflection requires mindful awareness. Awareness makes the learners conscious of their feelings, thoughts and emotions in the experience. Then, through active reflection, they can interrogate the activities to create meaning. In return, reflection will increase the quality of self-awareness. I believe it is more important for practitioners to learn about themselves than any number of skills. The more the learners know about themselves, the more they control and sustain their learning. In the training workshop, I intended to stress the importance of mindful awareness in order to foster embodied, individual and collective reflection during, between and after the activities. They were not separate but mutually supported each other.

a. Embodied reflection

Good quality of experience in applied theatre can arouse ‘contemplative possibilities’ (Taylor, 1998:140). As Taylor stresses,

> The art form unsettles and disturbs. It raises and confronts consciousness. It doesn’t freeze our response, it activates it, animating recurring and evocative images.

The ‘animating recurring and evocative images’ created by embodied involvement evoke participants’ reflective responses in the ‘here and now’ moment during the activities. There are many choices for action that the participants have to make consciously and unconsciously during the process. For example: making an image by sculpting another’s
body; thinking of a daily movement to create an improvised dance; choosing an attitude
to play a role in process drama; giving advice to a teacher-in-role; designing a critical
event for a protagonist in participatory theatre; etc. Every decision subtly or tacitly
connects with their interests, will, values and life concerns – and those also reflect the
participants’ life situations, individual experiences and personal worldviews.

Furthermore, the reflection in action does not stop at the individual level. In applied
theatre, the participants are usually given a space to turn reflection into action. They show
their ideas through action and learn from each other, which diversifies their understanding
of an issue or a situation. In the ‘image of transition’ exercise in the Theatre of the
Oppressed, the participants are asked to imagine a ‘real image’ of a theme and share it
with a partner or in a group. Through negotiation, they exchange understanding by
making a representative image of the theme they explore. The images are allowed
multiple readings, which portray the participants’ opinions on the issue. It extends their
independent thinking through dialogue in action.

Embodied reflection during and between the activities can provide a space for participants
to think of, be aware of and articulate their teaching and learning I find that the facilitator
also plays a critical role in influencing the focus of reflection (what to reflect on) by
structuring and selecting the activities as well as asking the reflective questions.

**Structuring the training workshop**

I chose to start the training workshop by teaching Theatre of the Oppressed because the
games, exercises and activities provide direct opportunities for self-exploration. I would
be able to use participants’ personal material, connecting with their inner feelings, being
aware of their personal choices and thoughts on different issues and of their relationship
to others. Then, process drama in Phase Two altered the experience to explore the self and
others through sustained fictional roles. Gradually by Phase Three, the participants were
given increasing power to make decisions about the topics/issues they would like to
explore by using applied theatre (forum theatre, process drama, participatory theatre).
They had to reflect on their main concern at that moment of life and put it into action.
Selecting topics

In Phase One, through demonstrating the Theatre of the Oppressed exercises and activities, I purposefully put one of my teaching emphases on helping the participants reflect on their current condition. I also encouraged them to actively think about what they wanted to explore and which issues most concerned them at this moment, and to share their views on different issues in action. Although Theatre of the Oppressed by its nature embeds the potential for self-exploration, this genre is still open for the facilitator to direct the participants’ focus of learning. For example, when I introduced image theatre, I chose to ask the participants to create images about their happy and unhappy moments, about what happened in their recent lives, about stories of personal struggles etc. Though I chose some foci for their learning, I was aware not to limit the discussion and reflection, which was also a space for them to practise mindful awareness. The following extract shows the participants’ sharing in reflection and their new awareness of different concerns after the exercise on making happy and unhappy images:

YM: What do you feel about the exercise?
P1: From feeling relaxed to feeling tense.
P2: I find happiness is much easier to empathise with than unhappiness.
P3: I have a thought. If we first make an unhappy image before the happy image, there might be a therapeutic effect.
P4: I find the physical condition can affect emotion.
YM: Did it affect you in the process?
P4: When I made the happy image, I felt more positive; whereas the unhappy image made me feel unhappy.
P5: At the moment when everybody was dismissed, I felt happiness could be shared but unhappiness only belonged to the self.
YM: So according to your observation, was it like your real life situation?
P5: Oh...I think it is.
P6: I find I don’t really know my body. I spent quite a long time thinking of making the images. I didn’t really pay attention to my physical status.

In Phase Two, my selection of lesson plans was based on showing a variety of process

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1 The number applied in all extracts represents the order of speaking. It is not necessary the same participant by using the same number in different extract.
dramas. I chose dramas with various lengths and structures, using diverse sets of conventions and pre-texts, and different age targets. I hoped the selections supplied a wide range of inputs for reflection after action. The participants accumulated their experience in five process dramas as a source for them to think about both the general principles and the specifics of process drama. The experiential period gave them a foundation to construct learning in the reflective processes.

**Asking specific reflective questions**

Apart from choosing topics to raises awareness, I always asked follow-up questions to help the participants think deeply. I used the ‘shaking hands activity’ in Phase One as an example. It is a common warm-up activity in applied theatre workshops. Some facilitators use it as a mild and non-threatening physical contact game to start a workshop. I shared this objective and also added my own agenda. I did this activity twice in different versions. In the sharing after version one, participants listened to the diversity of responses. Each expression showed a different individual personality. Members started to build connections with each other. I saw my role as a reminder to the participants to go back to their own inner feelings and to encourage them to be mindfully aware of what they felt in the process.

YM: What did you feel during the activity?
P1: I didn’t really know who I shook hands with.
YM: So, this was your feeling in the process? Anyone has a different feeling?
P2: I shook hands with some people twice; but some not at all.
P3: I feel very artificial.
YM: What made you feel artificial?
P3: Too quick.
P4: I felt the process was very messy. Shaking hands was like completing a task.
YM: What was this feeling of completing a task like?
P4: I could not feel anything. I did not even know whose hands I shook with.
P5: There were some hands holding me with a friendly force. I had a sense of connection.
P2: Someone held me with both hands.
YM: So, was there any difference for people holding you with one hand or both hands?
P2: Holding with both hands made me feel very warm and seemed to say ‘I miss you
so much.
P6: I felt people just wanted to finish a task.
YM: So did you treat the exercise as finishing a task?
P6: No, I didn’t. If I had done that, it would have made the exercise meaningless.
P7: I was different from you. I did shake hands with my heart and said ‘Hello’ to everyone I met during the process.
YM: Does anyone remember if you shook hands with P7? Did you feel her sincerity?
(some nod)
P8: I found someone who was very creative and found an efficient way to shake everybody’s hands within a short time.
(shows this way of handshaking)
P9: I originally used my right hand. When I saw someone using an efficient way, I hesitated about whether I needed to change my way.
P10: I specially approached the people I did not know before.
P11: I felt very happy to meet many old faces and new friends.
YM: Anyone who shook hand with P11?
(many people put hands up)
YM: Did you feel her happiness?
(many people nod)

The second time, I invited the participants to associate the experience with their real life situation. I asked questions to heighten their self-observation. Though their answers were short, in this first activity of the training workshop, I wanted to subtly link reflection to their real life situation. The following are the extracts of two participants’ responses:

P12: I got lost! In the beginning, I was holding hands with two persons. When everybody had finished shaking hands with everybody else, there was a moment with no hand holding mine. I did not know what to do.
YM: Do you always feel like this in life? Feeling lost when something suddenly disappears.
P12: Yes, yes…
YM: Do you always have this experience?
P12: It usually happens at work. I sometimes get lost…having this feeling.

P13: I found myself always standing at the edge of the circle.
YM: Did you shake any hands?
P13: Yes. When I was nearly finished, I chose to stand at the edge. After a while, I hesitated. Then I thought I should stand inside the circle.
YM: What did you feel when you stood at the edge?
P13: I felt many people were very active and passionate. I also saw some people who treated the activity as merely a task.
YM: So in your life, do you always choose to stand at the edge?
P13: Yes, always...
YM: Do you think it is the most comfortable position for you?
P13: True. Yes!

Participants were encouraged to be aware of their feelings and turn them into words. Several of the activities in phase one, such as mirroring and sculpting exercises, rainbow of desire, cops-in-the-head had a similar focus: to raise mindful awareness, and connect inner feelings to reflection in action.

In Phase Two, selecting roles for participants in different process dramas was not my first priority in the lesson planning. I invited participants to share their feelings in-between the episodes in each drama. I also asked questions to link their feelings back to their own lives after the dramas. To a certain extent, I wanted to keep the custom of encouraging awareness of the relationship between drama and life. Through the in-role and out-of-role reflection, I hoped to help participants to enhance their self-awareness by articulating their feelings and thoughts.

This extract is an example of in-role shared reflection in the process drama ‘Green children’ – after they had role-played one of the green children with a non-green friend, in pairs:

YM: What did you feel in this episode?
P1: I did not understand what he meant. I felt very nervous and worried by his emotion.
P2: I could feel his friendliness.
YM: So, did you increase the level of acceptance during the process?
P2: (nod) Yes.
P3: When he first came in, he touched me gently. I felt he was nice and friendly.
P4: He showed me many different kinds of green things. This...and that...although I did not understand his language, I could feel he was kind to me.
P5: He kept forcing me to eat things.
YM: What did you feel when he forced you to eat?
P5: In the beginning, I felt he was nice. But gradually, I felt helpless because he kept giving me things I didn’t want.

The following activity is an example of out-of-role reflection in the process drama ‘Whose toys?’ – as the last activity in this lesson plan:

YM: Now, I invite you to leave your role as company staff and be yourself again. I am going to pass you a box of coloured chalks. I want you to reflect on your learning in the drama. Then you can choose one colour to represent your response to the story from your personal point of view, and share your thinking with the group.

b. Personal reflection on action: Reflective journal

A journal is a vehicle for reflection. It is a private space for the participants to organise learning from their own point of view after the experience. Jennifer Moon (1999) identifies the purposes of writing journals. These include:

- To deepen the quality of learning, in the form of critical thinking or developing a questioning attitude
- To enable learners to understand their own learning process
- To increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning
- To enhance professional practice or the professional self in practice
- To enhance the personal valuing of the self towards self-empowerment
- To enhance creativity by making better use of intuitive understanding
- To free-up writing and the representation of learning
- To provide an alternative ‘voice’ for those not good at expressing themselves
- To foster reflective and creative interaction in a group

(188-194)

The above list defines my objective for promoting independent and self-constructive learning in this training workshop. The participants documented the things they felt most interested in and their main concerns during the learning process. The entries could also be a record of growth and honouring an individual experience. Most importantly, the participants were encouraged to be active learners and had an opportunity to find their
own voice in the process.

The following note I put on the first page of the participant journal to share my own thoughts about the functions of the journal as a reminder for writing it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We believe our wisdom grows from wholeheartedly living in the experience, attentive observation and full reflection. Learning can be gained if you have enough courage to face yourself as you really are. We start from where we are not following others. We keep our own pace and walk towards the inner depth of mind.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We hope this journal as a private document can create a space for personal development, for contemplation after action. It can help us to organize, extend and consolidate the learning after the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We hope this learning record can accompany you and bring you a new perspective to dialogue with yourself, others and the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every small step is like a drop of water everyday accumulating to build your understanding. Only you can open the door of learning provided that you are taking it seriously enough. No one can replace you for learning, only YOU can do it for yourself!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A warm reminder during the writing (adapted from Moon, 1999:102):
  
  Let words flow—write about whatever is at the top of your mind; uncensored, no polish is needed; ideas will come before you know it and surprise you.
  
  Use your own words—put your name on things, not what others say; be honest, say what you feel and think.
  
  Dig deeper—urge yourself to keep digging deeper and deeper so that you can understand and use your understanding. Link to your authentic feeling and thinking. Ask yourself questions about the experience and thoughts generated, to search your ‘truth’ through linking with your inner self. |

(Original version in Chinese)

There was no fixed format to record the experience. In order to stimulate their thinking, I provided some guiding questions as a reference to the participants.

- How did you feel about today’s workshop?
Was there any impressive moment for you today?
Did you find any new discovery about yourself today?
Did you find any aspect difficult for you today?
Will you give yourself any challenge in the next session?
Is there anything you learnt which you want to practise in your work?
Any other thoughts?

The participants wrote their journal at the end of each session. At the final session in Phase One and Two, they were given time to review the earlier entries and summarise the central concern and issue they felt important from reading the pages.

*Take out your journal. Please don’t write. Just read from the first to the last page. While you are reading, I hope you start to think of your personal central concern in this learning process. You can ask yourself questions on the thing you wrote. You may find there are some things that continuously stay in focus for you. Maybe a drama activity, maybe your response, may be a relationship…jot it down in a new page and ask new questions. You may find surprises in this reviewing process…this is very important.*

(Yi-man, Instruction in Final session/Phase 1)

c. **Collective reflection on action: Group time**
The group gathered together at the beginning of every session. The main purpose of these sessions was to encourage the sharing of feelings, thoughts and questions raised in the previous session. In order to create a space for the participants to express and connect with each other, I usually started with checking-in every participant by asking them to reflect on their week.

*I would like you to take this moment as a space, a stage for your own to share and express the feelings of your week by creating an image. Let’s begin with sharing your feelings at this moment. To express is an action. I invite you to come out and sit on this stool during your sharing.*

I wanted to encourage every participant from the start to be aware and practise connecting
their own personal feelings with others. In a session, I started with inviting the participants to be aware of the place they chose to sit, and think about the relationship between self and space, about space and people. From the physical distance to mental distance, I wanted the participants to reflect on their relationships with others. I intended to create a platform for social communication. Through encouraging the participants to express themselves to others, I hoped for them to gain self-confidence and at the same time to strengthen the connections in the group. The participants were able to learn from seeing others’ ways of interaction and expression. I thought creating a culture of connection, sharing and acceptance would be helpful to enhance reflection for learning in the group.

The focus of the discussion would follow the flow of the participants’ concerns as well as the reflective questions I posed. In Phase One, the discussion usually started with me inviting the participants to talk about their experience.

*Any sharing about the previous session?*

*What is your observation on the activities we did yesterday?*

Participants shared their thoughts on what had given them strong feelings. To begin with the participants’ concerns is critical. I believed that they could not learn everything in a training workshop, and so it was more important to allow a space for their own learning. In line with the concept of promoting independent and self-constructive learning, they were encouraged to construct their learning from ‘where they were’ and from their own needs and interests. Furthermore, they raised their concern publicly. The personal sharing was not merely personal any more. It provided an opportunity for collective reflection and learning.

In Phase Two, I asked structured questions as part of my teaching.

*So far, for you, what is applied theatre?*

*What do you think about the features of process drama?*

*What do you think are the learning objectives in each lesson plan?*

*What is/are your personal learning point(s) from the micro-teaching?*
I posed the questions to help the participants to reflect and make sense of the experience. The participants would be invited to share their personal thoughts either in whole group discussion or in small groups before sharing publicly. As if they were drawing a picture collectively, everyone contributed a part of it and built on their understanding. They practised articulating their experience into words; at the same time, they listened to others’ thoughts and feelings. Generally, I did not limit the group time. I gave as much time as possible for the discussion process, because I thought it was important to provide space for thinking, expressing thoughts, asking questions and talking to each other.

I played several roles during the group time: facilitator, questioner, observer, researcher, participant and teacher. I put the emphasis on encouraging the participants to focus on self-awareness, asking them: what they felt about the experience, what they thought, why they thought what they thought. I would sometimes share examples, experiences and stories from my work. When they asked me questions, most of the time, I held back my opinion and was reluctant to give a ‘standard answer’. I would rather say,

*Good…jot down your findings. Keep exploring them.*
*I have no answers. I encourage you to continue to find out more, searching from your practice.*

Or I would ask follow-up questions to help them think below the surface:

*Can you imagine why you have these kinds of feeling?*
*What did you do at that moment of difficulty? How did you cope with it?*
*Do you know why you are afraid of showing your body in the mirror exercise?*

Or I would seek opinion from other group members:

*Is there anybody who can offer a suggestion for solving this problem?*
*Does anyone share his/her feeling?*

From time to time, instead of giving ‘the answer’, I encouraged the importance of mindful
To me, learning is a process. We learn at every moment. Everyone has their own pace. Someone will learn things faster, whereas someone else needs more space to learn. The most important thing is for you to know your own pace. Are you a fast learner? Or do you prefer learning things slowly? You should keep to your own pace. Sometimes, we may be afraid if we learn things more slowly than others. This may be a pressure you put on yourself. There may be an inner voice that says, ‘I am a slow-learner. Other members have more experience. I am good at nothing’… Therefore, please give yourself space to learn about yourself. To understand who you are. You may find you are a person who fears standing in front of people. You may find you like to be the best and perfect. It is important to reflect and ask yourself, ‘Where have these ideas come from?’ Have they come from yourself? Or have they come from the facilitator’s pressure? … I think the awareness is very critical. This is a good starting point. You don’t need to put your focus on how far other people go. It is better to concentrate on the challenge you give yourself, how far you can go today compared with yesterday.

(Yi-man, Opening remarks, Week 1/Phase 1)

I would share my personal theory of learning about applied theatre in the group time to explain my teaching methods.

I hope to provide you with a method of sustainable learning. Actually, I also learn this way. You need to practise applied theatre in your own context independently. No one will be available to help you all the time. So, you should have the ability to sustain your own learning. This is an ability to help you on your journey.

(Week 3/Phase 2)

9.3 Participants’ responses

In the data expressing what the participants valued in the training, the teaching method was a theme mentioned by with high frequency. They mentioned aspects that aligned with what I intended to do according to my personal learning theory. Although I did not take my educative influence for granted, what they described and how they responded to their learning experience can provide a cross-reference for examining my practice. In this
section, after carefully delineating the themes and sub-themes, I am mostly allowing these in the main highly articulate students to speak with their own words, rather than paraphrasing and editorialising, as their words resonate together to create a natural synthesis. I shall be analysing and extrapolating from their testimony in the following chapters.

9.3.1 How they described their way of learning?

Most of the participants described their learning method in the training workshop by comparing it to traditional education. They found the learning method in the training workshop was very different from their previous learning experience. They made sense of the learning method by finding what was new to them.

9.3.1.1 Self-constructive learning and teacher-student relationship

In my past learning, everything would be given a definition. I would be told what should be learnt, very clearly. Then, teacher would give you some examples to help you understand the application. However, this time, we have to learn by ourselves… we need to experience and feel. Then we have to examine the contents to construct our own meaning.

(Luping, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

This is typical of those participant descriptions of their learning method. They further explained the unexpected teacher-student relationship in this training workshop.

I am used to thinking the teacher should answer all questions. However, the way you teach: pushing us to think, to find out the answers, is very different from my knowledge of the role of teacher.

(Yunlei, 2nd Interview)

They found they could not depend on me.

I totally relied on my teacher in my past learning experiences. If I had a question, the teacher would tell me the answer or give me a very concrete guideline to find the
answer. However, I cannot think you will do the same in this workshop. I have to play an active role to internalize the learning in the process.

(Jingjing, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

They even used the mother-child relationship to describe their past learning.

This time is very different. We are used to putting the focus on the teacher: as a child waits for his/her mother for feeding. But ‘the mother’ here is not prepared to feed us at all.

(Xunxi, 2nd Interview)

9.3.1.2 Required documentation and reflection

I take many notes. And I have to think about them. I found this time that I take writing my journal very seriously. Looking at my journal, I have never written that much. This will affect my learning. In the performing art workshops I [have previously] attended, I would not document my feelings about the dance and singing I participated in. However, this time, I have a desire to document and write about it.

(Baiyi, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

This training workshop put an emphasis on requiring us to reflect, to be aware of our inner self, or to observe our way of thinking, our frame of thoughts and also habits.

(Luping, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

9.3.1.3 Learning from experience

I find it is a very attractive and interesting way of learning. People said we study knowledge to apply it. This time, we play to learn. We absorb the knowledge from playing games.

(Liliang, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

We have to move our bodies and participate in this training workshop. It is very different to the traditional Chinese education. There were only two PPT presentations within three phases. And also, there were very few teacher lectures; we mainly participated in drama, discussion and sharing.

(Qiling, 2nd Interview)
9.3.1.4 Learning from others

This time every participant shares their experience and knowledge. I have a very strong feeling that we have been constructing our learning all together this time. I find this training workshop is very different which makes everybody visible. In my past learning, the participants were invisible and they spoke not even a sentence, just like a ‘passer-by’. But here, everybody stands out.

(Luping, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

9.3.1.5 Freedom in the learning process

The learning atmosphere is very different from the workshop I attended before. I feel everybody can be close and friendly to each other. In the previous workshops and classes, the teacher always sat in the front and we all sat in rows and faced the blackboard. Whereas here we can be free to express ourselves.

(Xinhong, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

I can lie on the floor in this training workshop. I feel very comfortable.

(Anwen, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

9.3.2 How did they respond to the teaching method?

There were two stages in the responses of the participants to the learning method of this training workshop.

9.3.2.1 Struggling stage

Many participants expressed that they found the beginning phase was ‘painful’ and ‘tiring’ since they had to do a lot of reflection and rely on self-constructive learning, which was unfamiliar for them.

This is a workshop where the teacher pushes you to think, to ask why. We have to think for ourselves and the teacher will only facilitate the process.

(Yunlei, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)
They were confused and did not know how to learn and what to learn in the process. They expected me as an expert teacher to provide definitions and explanations after the activities. They had the particular function of teacher in mind and thought this was my job to provide teaching for their understanding. I was the one to set up the learning agenda and summarize the points for learning at the end of the session. Their struggles created tensions during the group time. Some participants requested me to reduce the discussion time and adjust my teaching method.

If this is a general workshop, the discussion can be that long. However, this is a trainer-training workshop. I think Yi-man should summarize the main points for our learning after a short sharing among the participants. This is very important to let me understand every learning objective for each activity…I think it is more important to be directly told by the teacher.

(Zhangnan, Group discussion, March 12, 2011)

Although some participants complained about the long discussion wasting time, I also received alternative voices from other participants in this stage.

I agree to keep the long discussion time. Since this is the beginning phase of the training workshop, we have just started to come together as learners. Everybody has a different learning experience and level of acceptance. If there is only limited discussion time, people with more experience are likely to dominate the time. Some people may have no opportunity to express themselves. Then we have no way to feel other people, to understand the questions people have. I think it is good to put a slow pace on discussion.

(Tianxin, Group discussion, March 12, 2011)

The discussion makes me learn to be patient. I find learning nowadays is like a fast food culture. Everything should be quick and efficient. No one cares whether you can learn it or not… I think a real education should accept people’s differences. Be patient. It is very basic. If you cannot do this, it is not going to be useful although you have learnt a number of skills.

(Baiyi, Group discussion, March 12, 2011)
9.3.2.2 Adaptation stage

Though the unfamiliar learning experience made the participants struggle and feel uncomfortable, I chose to insist on this teaching method because I thought this pain was necessary for everybody to adapt to a new way of learning. I did not ignore their feelings. I encouraged them to connect to their inner feelings and stick to their own pace of learning. I also responded to their need for ‘information feeding’ by setting up a blog on the internet. I kept my style of teaching but agreed to put learning materials online for their reference. For Zhaofeng the consistency of this way of teaching was important to her.

It is very important for you not giving the answer. One day, if you change your style and give me the answer, it may break down my constructive learning process.

(2nd Interview)

According to my observation, the participants gradually adapted to the learning method by the end of Phase One, with less tension and more focus on participating in the group discussions. They still had their doubts and confusions but they were willing to adapt. Since they realized they could not totally rely on me, they started to seek their own learning methods. Jieyan recognized the benefit from my style of teaching:

If you stepped out more in the front or led more in the process, I would have less opportunity to think and learn less. The space you created for my reflection and thinking was very important. If you gave me the concepts, I would not have any ownership…Now when I think of using applied theatre activities, the reflection I came across during the training workshop has left a guide to remind me.

(2nd Interview)

Anwen mentioned that the emphasis on reflection and mindful awareness in the process provoked her thinking.

From learning in primary school to university, I had never actively thought ‘why things happened like this and that’. Never. Because I thought things had their fixed form. I had never been aware of my inner feelings and my needs at a deeper level. I had never asked what I was thinking. This time, I will feel what I feel, ask why I have this feeling,
why I behave like this…

(Anwen, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

The way of promoting independent and self-constructive learning helped the participants to become active learners:

Although I had the urge for an answer, sometimes the questions hanging in the air made me think more deeply. The questions in my mind motivated me to seek the answer. If I had been given an answer, I would not have had the drive to seek the answer in the learning process.

(Qiling, 2nd Interview)

9.3.2.3 Learning benefit

Most of the participants found learning benefits from this learning method. Zhaofeng described having a chance to construct her own knowledge was like a ‘liberation’ and ‘revolution’ to her (Final essay). Change from the struggling stage to the adaptation stage evolved in and after the training workshops. Tianxin changed her attitude about the absence of standard answers shared with other participants. In Phase One, she mentioned it was necessary to have standard answers for learning. At the end of Phase Two, she said in group time,

Although I do not really look for an answer, I do hope to learn more from the teacher’s own experience…So, I feel uncomfortable every time when I ask a question. I want to listen to your (the teacher’s) past experience as my reference… I can have no standard answer, but I need a point of reference.

(Tianxin, Group discussion, April 16, 2011)

After the training workshop, she had a more sophisticated reflection on getting a standard answer.

After the training workshop, I find there is no standard answer for many things. We can therefore have more space… I have received 20 years of black-and-white education. In these three months, I have learnt about exploration, possibilities…I used to think you would tell me ‘what applied theatre is’. I expected you would tell me the
function of every activity, and who we can apply it to. I thought you would give me clear guidance. But you didn’t. For a period of time, I thought I could not find useful answers because there was no guidance…Gradually, I started to question the standard answer: is there only one answer? Only one standard function? Now I think it is actually different if you use applied theatre with different groups of participants. One way of application may not be suitable to all groups. I think this learning is more important than learning about standard answers.

(Tianxin, 2nd Interview)

The teaching method in the training workshop drove some participants to reflect on their perception of learning. For example, Yunlei compared the new experience with the traditional education she had received.

The education I received emphasized ‘Gao, Da, Quan’—we had to model our heroes who are the strongest, greatest, flawless and perfect. Working in a community, no matter whether in a training course, workshop, discussion seminar or internal meeting, we have had only black or white, right or wrong. Now, you always tell us there is no ‘full-stop’ in learning. You mentioned the space for possibilities, creating possibilities. This gives me a lot to reflect on. When I lead a group next time, I will pay more attention to the teaching I deliver, the words I say and the things I do. I will think from different angles.

(Yunlei, 2nd Interview)

Some changed their preferential way of learning after the training workshop.

I currently attend a mime workshop. I compare this teaching method with our training workshop. I find that I like your way of teaching. Although it was a painful process because you did not give us answers and we had to find our own, it was actually a very good way to learn. I like this complex process.

(Qiling, Questionnaire)

I will now compare the teaching method in the training workshop with any course I attend. On one occasion when I met a didactic teacher I felt very uncomfortable.

(Luping, 3rd Interview)
9.3.2.4 Learning difficulty

Although almost all the participants mentioned that they appreciated my teaching method in the training workshop, there were four participants who admitted that they had learning difficulties throughout the process. Two main difficulties they shared:

a. Beginners need more guidance on new ways of learning. They need external support to give them ideas on what to think, how to reflect.

   I am a beginner and I need more guidance. I am not like the smart students. I don’t fully understand what you are talking about. I tried my best to think by myself and consulted other participants to help my understanding.

   (Xinhong, 2nd Interview)

b. They relied strongly on their existing learning habits and found it hard to adapt to new ways of learning.

   Not giving answers did limit my learning. You know the final destination but you keep telling me to run to the end. Never-ending discussion...But I don’t really have the ability to organise different ideas, so I needed your suggestions. You summarised with many different possibilities. It was at least better than giving no answer.

   (Xunxi, 2nd Interview)

   This teaching method blocked my learning. I know I need to learn theory before practice. I need to make everything clear before I can move. It is easier for me to learn if I have been given a clear direction... Yes, not everything has an answer. But I still hope someone can give me an answer.

   (Jingjing, 2nd Interview)

Xunxi and Jingjing were two of those who recognised their learning difficulties in the process. It hasn’t diminished their interest to try out applied theatre strategies in their work. In the interview after the workshop, they mentioned their confidence in the effectiveness of the methods and were thinking about potential opportunities to integrate it at work.

In this chapter, I have made explicit my personal theory of practice, which led to my
choices of the structure, selection of themes and the teaching methods of the training workshop. I deliberately emphasised the importance of mindful awareness and reflection and of actively setting the activities and tasks in the participants’ learning process. The participants’ responses have been described including the participants’ perception of their learning methods and their reactions to the teaching methods. Both learning benefits and learning difficulties have been discussed to explore the impact of my personal theory of practice in action on the participants’ learning.

To sum up, from Chapter Six to Chapter Nine, I have firstly identified three categories of participants with different levels of prior applied theatre experience and described their learning responses in each phase of the training workshop from category to category. This was followed by the exploration of how the participants’ applied theatre learning in detail was dependent on different dominant modes of learning in each category. Three generic aspects of learning, that were generated across the three categories of learner have been explicated and demonstrated by examples and discussion of particular cases. Lastly, a reflection on all of these from the facilitator’s perspective has been provided to complement the participants’ account of learning and the teaching methods. In the following two chapters, findings from the data analysis will be further discussed, in the particular terms of the research questions.
Chapter Ten  
Understanding the Learning Experience in Applied Theatre Training Workshop

In Chapters Six to Eight, I analyse the participants’ learning responses and identify various kinds of learning generated in the training workshop. In this chapter, I would like to further discuss how the participants learnt what they learnt by elaborating the ways in which knowledge is located within the applied theatre experience; and how the experience informs my understanding of the stages of growth for applied theatre learners, as well as the relationships among different kinds of learning to assist building capacity.

10.1 The locating of knowledge in applied theatre training workshops

Going back to the literature on adult experiential learning, the three paradigms mentioned in Chapter Two identify different ‘places of knowledge’ in the learning process. The constructivist perspective sees learning taken place in the series of conscious mental reflective activities during and/or after attending an experience. Through conceptualising ideas and theories from the experience, cognitive knowledge is formed to support the learner’s novel actions leading to a new round of experiences. The situated theorists believe the place of knowledge is centred on the learner participating in the community of practice. In the process of practice and being in the culture of practice, learners develop understanding and knowledgeable skills through the learning curriculum evolving out of participation. These theorists tend to emphasise the practical ‘know-how’ knowledge. The embodied perspective reminds the importance of the learner’s body as a primary site of learning. Feeling, doing and thinking are unseparated and operate at the same time. The sensory, emotional and affective dimensions in human experience embed the powerful tacit nature of the embodied knowledge.

The three adult experiential learning perspectives each put a different focus on locating
the place of learning. However, it seems they cannot ignore the existence of each other. As regards learning through reflection: although Kolb (1984) does not pay much attention to discussing the learning context, Boud and Walker (1990) are conscious to remind us of the importance of how the learning milieu impacts on the learner’s learning process. For them, learning is a function of the relationship between the learner and the milieu. Knowledge being formed is subtly situated: learning from within the situation. Although learning experience is highly situated, reflection is a necessary tool to articulate what knowledge has been learnt. Beckett (2004) proposes that bearing reflective questions in mind is a way of effective organic learning. The inferential understanding of ‘knowing-why’ the reason for action can develop a more profound knowledge for practice. He (2001) also acknowledges the learner’s embodiment in the situated context. A holistic learner does not only have regard for the cognitive learning but also for social, affective and physical understanding. Similarly, the embodied learning theorists also do not reject the role of reflection in the learning process but rather bring us back to the central point about human nature: that learning is not a mind-body split.

In this study, two main dimensions of knowledge (applied theatre and generic) gained by the NGO participants have been identified. Applied theatre knowledge includes concepts, techniques, skills, rationale and pedagogy as they are articulated by the learners. They were able to generalise what they learnt from the training workshop through reflecting on the embodied experience they went through and observed, just as the constructivists’ paradigm proposes. They could state the applied theatre knowledge concretely – although learners in different categories conceptualised different levels of depth of knowledge. In contrast, the participants generally could not articulate their generic learning so well. The way they recognised this aspect of learning was more based on what they noticed about their thought, attitudinal and behavioural change during and/or after the training workshop. The learning evolved through the learners being in the situation as well as participating in the community of practice. These two aspects of learning seem to have been acquired in different places during the learning process and identified as different kinds of knowledge.
Therefore, there is no one existing adult experiential learning model that can be applied to make sense of the learning in an applied theatre training workshop. A single paradigm of adult experiential learning is only valid to inform part of the applied theatre learning experience. The place of knowledge in applied theatre training workshop is the integration of the cognitive, the social and the embodied learning. The cognitive knowledge about applied theatre has to be built in the social and embodied learning process, in which generic knowledge is generated accordingly. No matter whether the knowledge is generated through the reflective process or emerges in participation and practice, these certainly do not exist in isolation but are rooted in the applied theatre as a kind of aesthetic learning. In order to further understand the place and kinds of knowledge in the applied theatre training workshop, I now turn to a closer look at the learning experience itself.

10.2 Learning experience in the applied theatre training workshop

Applied theatre is a kind of aesthetic learning. Greenwood (2011) mentions three interrelated aspects of the aesthetic and learning:

- learning about the aesthetic,
- learning through aesthetic experience, and
- a kind of learning that is not predominantly intellectual but that is located in the body: that is visceral, emotional and intuitive.

Applied theatre learning experience does link three things together. To apply the idea, we can say the training workshop is a place: learning about applied theatre through applied theatre experience that is a kind of learning not predominantly intellectual but located in the body. The NGO participants came to this place to learn about how to use applied theatre, based on the vivid experience which embeds both intellectual and embodied knowing.

Experience generated throughout the training workshop involves multiple ways of
knowing/learning which are similar to Heron’s extended epistemology. According to Heron’s theory of personhood, four modes of the psyche (affective, imaginal, conceptual and practical) are integrated in different combinations creating four distinct world-views. Each world-view generates one particular form of knowledge (i.e. experiential, presentational, propositional and practical). A whole-person holistic learning approach should include these four interrelated ways of knowing (see page 37-38). Like other experiential learning models that we have discussed, Heron’s theory also has a limited focus on the individual learner’s experience although he does not ignore the learner’s interaction with other beings. I still find that the identification of four ways of knowing as an epistemic frame is useful to make sense of the learning experience in the applied theatre training workshop. Prompted by Heron’s theory, I acknowledge that no one kind of knowing is sufficient in and of itself to lead to complete understanding about the applied theatre learning experience. Different ways of knowing (also learning) build on each other to help participants in learning applied theatre. Knowing is not merely validated through thought or/and reflection; nor is it only generated through practice in a community. Heron emphasises the equal importance of the knowing through full-bodied engagement located in feeling and emotion, intuition and imagery. In the following section, I will apply the idea of Heron’s four ways of knowing/learning to discuss the applied theatre learning experience in the training workshop, in association with the key concepts from the applied theatre literature, and at the same time I will locate the knowledge that has been addressed in this study.

10.2.1 Experiential knowing / learning

As Heron stressed, experiential knowing is the bedrock of the other three kinds of knowing. Feeling in experience is not just a resource for learning but a valid kind of knowing by itself. It is grounded in the experiential presence of a person in the world and operated by the affective mode of the psyche. It is the state of being in felt-encounter. This is the very foundation of human perceptual sensibility which Heron & Reason (2008:3) call ‘the capacity for feeling’.

…the capacity for feeling… [may be defined] as a participatory relation with being
and beings, integrating the distinctness of knower and known in a relational whole. Experiential knowing is feeling engaged with what there is, participating, through the perceptual process, in the shared presence of mutual encounter.

In this view, Heron emphasizes the experience as not merely individual functioning but also participatory. Knowing is taking place through being present with others in the environment.

To experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mould and to encounter, hence experiential reality is always subjective-objective, relative both to the knower and to what is known.

(Heron & Reason, 2008:2-3)

This sense of connectedness helps us to distinguish self from other and also simultaneously in the experience be noticed ourselves. This kind of knowing is pre-verbal but very real to everybody. It is the entrance to learning in experience at the sensory level. Although the knowing is implicit and it is thus difficult to articulate and collect direct evidence, its value should not be underrated. Heron (1992) gives us an insight into the significance of emotionality in learning. In order to extend and deepen the participants’ experiential knowing, the facilitator has to fertilise the ground for the participants by being open, responsive and present.

In this study, participants entered into the applied theatre training workshop, with feelings generated immediately on encountering the space, the people and the tasks. Their experiential learning was not, in Heron’s term, a subject-object split. It started from ‘acquiring knowledge of being and beings through empathic resonance, felt participation’ (ibid.:224) through the pedagogical experience. They embodied this through subtle sensory experience right from the very beginning. When a participant walked into the room, what was the immediate experience of each of them? Taking off their shoes, walking barefoot on the wooden floor; seeing a big circle in an open space surrounded by chairs; choosing one of the seats; and sitting down next to somebody. Someone in the circle felt nervous; someone else felt enthusiastic. Novice learners felt tense whereas more
experienced learners felt at home in the familiar setting.

Embodied pedagogy gives the power to learning about applied theatre, which emphasises participation and dialogue in the social learning process. Body as the primary site of knowing in applied theatre is not based on a grasp of intellectual concepts but is rooted in experiential knowing. Through the workshop the participants’ experience was first and foremost through sensing (consciously or unconsciously) their own physicality and their relationship with others. They immersed themselves in the embodied learning experience, whether sitting in a big circle, working independently or in the many smaller group activities in each session. They listened and were listened to; they interacted with different people, touched and were touched by others; they acted in the open space, seeing and being seen. Everybody shared the presence of mutual encounter in the room from moment to moment, tacitly and automatically. Gradually, ‘a sense of pre-conceptual communion’ (Heron & Reason, 2008:369) developed in their shared world in the training workshop. This kind of knowing is the deepened state of awareness that is ingrained in the body.

Feeling and sensitivity to the physical messages and resonances are central to the applied theatre experience. As mentioned, the body is the agent to acquire knowledge via the senses, through developing learners’ sensitivity in order to open up and expand their experience during the drama process. Boal’s system of Theatre of the Oppressed puts it as the priority. For him, it is critical to activate the senses in order to liberate the oppressed body. He (2002) proposes a system of exercises and games to develop people’s embodied consciousness ‘to feel’, ‘to listen’ and ‘to see’. His theory was also the foundation of the Phase One training workshop. The participants went through a series of activities (e.g. mirror, image and sculpture exercises) in order to extend their awareness of their experiential knowing. They entered into the physical experience and then at the same time they were reminded to focus on sensing their inner feelings and themselves in the space while interacting with others.

Heron (1992:229) reminds us that to lay the groundwork for enhancing experiential knowing, those emotional elements of confidence, attunement, felt resonance and positive
arousal are also critical to support effective learning. The facilitator should work towards ‘eliciting a positive emotional attitude within the learner’ and help ‘learners generate and sustain emotional arousal among themselves’.

People learn more effectively when they are enjoying themselves and what they are doing; when they are satisfying some felt need or interest and are emotionally involved in what has personal relevance to them; when they feel good about the whole idea of learning and the exercise of their learning competence; when they feel confident, secure and in a low threat, cooperative, non-competitive situation.

(ibid.)

In line with this idea, Cahill (2002) stresses ‘a key responsibility for the [drama] educator is to consider themself an architect of the social space that contains and supports the aesthetic space’ (17). The healthy social space, she recognises—building a positive relationship with trust and a sense of supportive community—is the key to a successful entry into drama for the participants. It is the basis of any kind of applied theatre learning in the aesthetic space. Therefore, where participants are isolated, and the emotional relationship among them falls apart, this poor social connectedness will make it impossible for learning to happen.

In this study, all participants brought a high interest level to learning applied theatre. In the first interview before the training workshop started, they expressed their positive past experiences and their expectations. When they came to the training workshop, both beginners and experienced learners felt so excited to be in touch with applied theatre. The participants’ positive emotional attitude to applied theatre right from the beginning was supported by the growing pedagogical experience which successfully sustained their emotional arousal and willingness to try throughout the process. Some Category One participants felt confused and lost in the process at some points, but it had not diminished their interest being in the training workshop and their confidence in applied theatre. As facilitator, on the basis of my personal theory and practice, as mentioned in Chapter Nine, my intention was to make all efforts to build an inclusive, caring, encouraging atmosphere to allow participants to feel safe and comfortable both in connecting with others and
looking into their inner selves. The pedagogical experience I initiated through the design of the training workshop acted like an undercurrent to irrigate the soil for experiential knowing. The learning for the participants emerged at the experiential level firstly through their immediate sensory memory which as has been demonstrated earlier significantly contributed to their later understanding of applied theatre.

In applied theatre learning experience, experiential knowing is not only generated in the real-life social context but also in the drama/applied theatre exercises and fictional dramatic context. Heathcote (Johnson & O’Neill, 1984) stresses, ‘emotion is at the heart of drama experience’ (97). More than just seeking or building a positive atmosphere or culture for learners to feeling safe and relax, the facilitator will use emotions (not necessarily positive but authentic) for deepening the learning in applied theatre. The relationship of the emotions/feelings to drama have been an important theme of research in the field (Bolton in Davis & Lawrence, 1986; Winston, 1996; Wright, 2005; Thomson, 2009; Dunn & Stinson, 2012; Franks, 2014). Wright makes explicit the relationship between drama and feeling.

Drama education, in contrast to other forms of education not in or of the arts, is a field of feeling — and needs to be taught as a field of feeling — as much as it is a field of knowing. Without feeling, drama is of little consequence. In this respect, it can be described as a sensitive and sensitised encounter with personal and social vulnerabilities, undertaken within the domain, and through the discourse, of learning. The sensitive nature of the excursion into feeling is a necessary part of the learning in drama.

(Wright, 2005: page unnumbered)

No matter whether doing exercises and activities in the theatre of the oppressed, working in role in process drama, or performing in participatory theatre, applied theatre practice is conscious of the power of using the affective domain to heighten the learning experience. Playing in role in drama purposefully engages the participants’ emotion and feeling under the ‘no penalty zone’ to facilitate deep learning. In the imagined world, under the protection of role the learner steps into the world of otherness and feels as those
others, in either a positive or a negative sense. Something as simple as embodying images for a character or personal situation in an exercise, or just watching others’ performances, will also strike us with these emotions. Learning can be taking place through the interaction between feelings in personal real world experience and feelings evoked by the dramatic world experience. Bolton (Davis & Lawrence, 1986) calls feeling and emotion created in drama the ‘second order experience’ within Vygotsky’s dual affect. This experience creates distance for the learner to review and examine the meaning of life. He explains,

In drama we require a heightened awareness of the interaction of two worlds, not an avoidance of the fictitious so that nothing is felt, nor an escape into the fictitious so that everything is felt but nothing is understood. The emotion that is experienced then is really a compound of emotions that is prompted by both the contexts. (106)

The affective experience in applied theatre that encourages participants to enter into another’s viewpoints is the essence of empathetic understanding promoted in experiential learning. Applied theatre exteriorises not only internal domains of feeling about other participants and self in the empathetic face-to-face relationships. It provides the opportunity for the participants to build empathy by exploring the wider human social relations through emotional learning. This resonates with the commentaries of the participants in this study who identified with the impact of the feeling the characters felt when they embodied themselves in the images of the oppressed, the stories of process dramas and playing the protagonists in the participatory theatre performance.

To summarise, in the applied theatre training workshop, the experiential knowing/learning is cultivated in both real and fictional contexts. In the real social context, the whole-person knowing of self and others is enriched through developing the participants’ sensitivity and mindful awareness to notice various felt encounters constantly in process. As well as creating a culture that honours feeling as a way of knowing and positive emotional arousal among the members in the training workshop, in the fictional context applied theatre deliberately uses feeling/emotion to stimulate learning especially empathic understanding in the learning process. The capacity to feel
is nurtured in this foundational level of applied theatre learning experience through rich experiential knowing.

### 10.2.2 Presentational knowing/learning

This kind of knowing is processed through intuitive grasp of the imaginal patterns expressed in various forms. The learning experience through this way of knowing directly informs experiential knowing/learning and is also informed by it. The expressive activities bring the unconscious and unarticulated experiential knowing into a communicative form open to reflection. This kind of knowing can be recognised itself as a kind of knowledge and it provides a platform for individuals to connect in the learning space (human connection) and also fundamentally serves to provide those individuals with epistemological coherence, as a bridge between experiential knowing and propositional knowing.

As a mode of knowledge that is recognised by Heron, art manifests the tacit knowledge and emotional experience inherent in images by using shape, sound, movement, metaphor and symbol in order to reveal the underlying pattern of things. He validates that by borrowing ideas from theories of expression and the work of Susanne Langer to support his view. He is enchanted by Langer’s idea of ‘vital import’.

> A work has vital import if it symbolizes, by virtue of its dynamic structure, the forms of vital experience, the pattern of sentience, the process of life itself as it is felt and directly known.

*(Heron, 1992:167)*

Langer (1953) stresses there is human knowledge especially feeling and emotion that cannot be communicated by using words. And the inner experience in our body cannot know what we know. Art as symbol of feeling makes the affective dimension of knowledge explicit.

Nicholson (2005) describes applied theatre as
In an entirely practical level, drama is composed of material elements, of bodies and voices in space, and the physical embodiment of knowledge and understanding is integral to the art form itself. (57)

In applied theatre’s use of aesthetic patterns like symbols and signs, spaces, images, metaphors, stories, movements, they are definitely main components of a presentational way of knowing or, in Yorks & Kasl’s term (2006), expressive knowing. There are four relevant elements in this learning process that are identified by Seeley (Seeley & Reason, 2008:30-31) in her thesis of an extended epistemology of presentational knowing – which is also aligned with the applied theatre learning process. They are:

i. **Sensuous encountering**: using all our ways of sensing to experience the world directly with a whole-body sense of curiosity and appreciation for the glorious mundane;

ii. **Suspending**: hanging fire with fresh rounds of clever intellectual retorts in order to become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of our more-than-brainy bodies to the more-than-human world;

iii. **Bodying-forth**: inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the media of our bodies without our intellects throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique;

iv. **Being in-formed**: becoming beings whose living and actions form and are informed by the rich experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing, both as perceivers and as creators.

These four elements do not have a separate existence and each state offers something to the others. They co-arise and in time they blur into one another. As discussed in the section above on experiential knowing/learning, feeling via the senses is the ground for all ways of knowing. Particularly in applied theatre, it is important for participants to open up as well as sharpen their capacity to feel in order to learn effectively in the process. Sensuous encountering is also the starting base for presentational knowing in most genres of applied theatre. Whether they were in the Theatre of the Oppressed exercises and activities in Phase One or the using of pretexts to create stories in process drama in Phase Two or devising performance in Phase Three, participants began by using their senses to feel, to
listen and to see what was happening in order to act in the here-and-now situation. They entered into the situations/dramas by touching others, by feeling the space while walking, by sculpting the others’ bodies, by listening to others’ stories/music, by looking at the images/pictures/artefacts…etc.

Learning through the presentational way of knowing, participants in applied theatre are asked to temporarily turn off their intellect (a paradox that will be explained below). They suspend their disbelief to step into the aesthetic space in order to explore new meaning from the unknown that lies beyond reality’s usual images and knowledge. Echoing Langer (1950), the experience in the art intends to create ‘strangeness, separateness, other-ness’ for insightful learning. To do this, participants have to delay their judgement and the analysis of meaning and allow their expressive knowing to bring them a new way of seeing. Let us take an example from Phase One. In the sculpting exercise, participants in pairs were asked to create a series of free-form images by using their partner’s body. Instead of planning ahead, they were encouraged to just follow their immediate feeling and make different human statues so that they could see what they had created, and be surprised by it. Participants had to apply the same spirit to working within the dramatic context to submerge themselves into the life of the story and the characters’ journey. Suspending the intellect does not mean not thinking but highlighting the process of ‘not-knowing’. In the applied theatre learning experience, the element of suspension is of considerable importance within the presentational way of knowing. The habitual and dominant cognitive mind is placed into the background for a while in order to give space where the affective mind can become both engaged and then visible.

While coming to know through sensuous encountering and suspending, bodying-forth becomes the yield of both. Seeley (2008) borrows the phrase ‘bodying-forth’ from MC Richards and David Abram, to emphasis the role of embodiment in generating presentational knowledge. She explains,

…communicative meaning is first incarnate in the gestures by which the body spontaneously expresses feeling and responds to change in its affective environment.
The gesture is spontaneous and immediate. It is not an arbitrary sign that we mentally attach to a particular emotion or feeling; rather, the gesture is the bodying-forth of that emotion into the world, it is that feeling of delight or of anguish in its tangible, visible aspect.


Undoubtedly, body is the main means of mediation in applied theatre practice. Learners allow the presentational knowing through the body to be mediated by different kinds of materials used for expression. In Phase One of the training workshop, participants worked with the body within different frames of the exercises and activities. Participants made spontaneous physical expressions that represented their existing understanding and interpretation by using their body, and they also responded to others’ bodies. They were encouraged to try out different ways to use their body and collective bodies through free kinaesthetic imagination, creatively and actively. The genre provided a new physical experience for the participants that elicited their new/unconscious understanding of the self, others and the environment. This direct experience intentionally built a platform for the participants to observe and reflect through the embodied awareness during the practice. Their heightened awareness of the emotion and action in this process raised thoughts and ideas for participants’ further thinking. Usage of embodied experience in applied theatre widens learners’ imaginations, which are not limited to the real context, but also are working in the fictional context.

In Phase Two, the presentational way of knowing is mainly rooted in the playing of roles in drama. Role-playing in applied theatre expands the bodylines of social relations. For participants, by engaging in a physical gesture, at the same time they are representing the life of the characters they play. Our body is the metaphor. Through a series of non-scripted collaborative and improvised enactments, participants employed the characters’ language and stepped into those others’ emotional status in order to learn about their lives and situations. As has been mentioned, by suspending disbelief, participants embodied themselves into other world, a world of fictions and possibilities.

In Phase Three, participants deliberately devised their own piece of performance to tell
the stories of their targeted group of protagonists. They examined the lives of the others in action, neither merely in mental activity nor just sharing verbally. In order to communicate, they actively searched for the appropriate expressive forms to create the performance. Bodying-forth is irreplaceable in the process of learning in an applied theatre learning experience. Participants can never plan exactly or expect a particular outcome of their explorations. Applied theatre as the way of knowing/learning is always provisional and in the process of becoming. Applied theatre is highly experimental in nature.

‘Being in-formed’ will emerge from going through the above three elements (i.e. sensuous encountering, suspending and bodying-forth). The new way of seeing is generated through the use of imagination and intuition in the expressive knowing process. It is a foundation for new thoughts, ideas and behaviour. As Wang & Yorks (2012) describe it:

Presentational knowing is a pathway to self-awareness and allows one to stay open to multiple interpretations of his or her experience and protects one from premature conceptualization that constrains and restricts meaning.

(162)

They define self-awareness which is closely related to ‘in-formed’ change.

By self-awareness, we mean clearer perception of one’s strengths, limitations, thoughts, beliefs, motivations, and emotions along with how one’s taken-for-granted experiences have embedded these perceptions into one’s way of being. This enhanced self-awareness provides a foundation for new behaviour.

( ibid.:158)

In applied theatre, mindful awareness is aroused for informing learning through sensuous encountering, suspending judgement and disbelief and allowing the body to work in spontaneous flow. Participants perceive through experiential knowing and create through presentational knowing. The human ability to hold dual reality in mind or in the state of ‘metaxis’ is emphasised as one of the primary explanations of learning in drama process (Bolton, 1985; Boal, 1995). Participants see themselves act while acting; and observe
themselves in action and reflect on it. Their existing worldviews and understandings can be noticed and visualised, which makes them accessible to use in dialogue with others. During this process, new meaning is created and codified to bring insight to learners.

Kasl and Yorks’s (2012) account of presentational way of knowing forges two important pathways for holistic learning. These are useful to help us define its position in the applied theatre learning experience. The first pathway is for human connections ‘enhancing the capacity to communicate the quality of one person’s lived experience to another’ (ibid.:515). It is mentioned in the experiential way of knowing that the more felt-resonance there is among group members, the more effective will be the learning. The presentational way of knowing is a means to build this empathetic field to allow individual learning within whole-person relationships. Expressive activities can be channels for participants to share their own experiential knowing and at the same time to provide a way for others to afford glimpses into their world of felt experience. Throughout the training workshop there were many activities intentionally building participants’ empathetic connection; for instance, in Phase One, we:

- created sound and movement to introduce our personal strengths to each other;
- during the opening of the session shared images about the key moment of their week;
- embodied their partner’s current emotional status;
- tried out others’ ideas in action;
- shared through image theatre stories of struggles in life;
- etc.

These exercises and activities built the group’s connection to the real context and prepared them well with empathetic understanding to work together in other phases of the training workshop. In Phase Two, the practice of process drama expanded the participants’ empathetic resonances, through the broader world of roles in drama. Working in fictional contexts as platforms for participants stepping into others’ shoes, they more or less decentralised their ego to experience others’ life situations, to live in and feel others’ struggles or dilemmas. Empathetic connection could then be extended to a larger community,
learning from role-playing in each other’s stories.

The second bridging pathway provided by presentational knowing is for epistemological coherence. This is an important means to link experiential and propositional knowing. It transforms the experiential felt-senses into a communicable form for later reflection and conceptualisation in propositional learning. ‘Presentational knowing can help the learner connect with his or her own experiential knowing by bring felt experience into conscious awareness’ (Yorks & Kasl, 2002:187). When learners express themselves in the learning encounter, their emotions will become more explicit in the process.

Kasl and Yorks (2012) describe this pathway according to intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. At the individual (intrapersonal) level, expressive forms can effectively evoke experience of deep feelings and intuitive knowing that have emerged in the process, which can bring more insightful perspectives for further exploration. This learning experience can bring feeling and emotion and tacit knowing into consciousness and make them accessible to critical reflection in propositional learning. At a social (interpersonal) level, bringing learners into an empathetic connection to give them access to the experiential knowing of the other prepares them to openly and respectfully learn from each other. The group with empathetic connection can have more capacity to engage into critical discourse with each other in the learning process. Kasl and Yorks (ibid.) remark vividly about this relationship among different ways of knowing.

Experiential knowing comes from being in the world; propositional knowing involves reflecting on the world. Presentational knowing is a pathway between these two epistemological stances; by bringing experiential knowing into conscious awareness, presentational knowing enables the system to reflect with greater clarity and forge coherence among feelings, thoughts, and actions.

(516; original italics)

In the presentational way of knowing/learning process, participants are encouraged to use various expressive forms to communicate the experience of experiential knowing or to generate expressive knowledge by itself from the exercises and activities. While they
work in the forms, they also acquire skills to use the forms and practise them through embodiment. This is in congruence with what Boal says about the human body,

…to control the means of theatrical production man must first of all control his own body, know his own body, in order to be capable of making it more expressive.

(Boal, 1979:124–125)

To learn to be more expressive, they are also required to develop the sensitivity to raise conscious awareness in the process. By embodying in applied theatre, participants also are invited to constantly connect their outside worlds into the mental and emotional place that leads them to be open to learning as whole-person learners. Participants working in various forms of applied theatre prepare themselves to be familiar with using and controlling their body in order to learn how to create, respond and communicate. As the confidence of mastering the forms increases, their capacity to express will be also flourish vividly through this way of knowing/learning.

10.2.3 Propositional knowing/learning

This way of knowing is the traditional kind of knowledge based on intellectual terms of ideas and concepts. It is the ‘knowledge-about’ that is expressed in propositions – ‘statements which use language to assert facts about the world, laws that make generalizations about facts and theories that organize the laws’ (Heron & Reason, 2008:373-374). Heron emphasises (1992) that propositional knowing should be coherent and consistent with presentational and experiential knowing. It is not a type of knowing that is split off as a conceptualised entity. It is the knowing which Heron calls ‘subject-object transaction’ that ‘you need to go deeper into the subject in order to go deeper into the object, that is, if you want to get into the object’ (170). In order to go deeper into the object through the subject, we go through the process of being present and opening ourselves to participation in and with it, along with the flow of exercising imagination within perception. This way of knowing is then in a position to reveal what had been disclosed by expressing the conceptualising object and naming it as a proposition.
In learning applied theatre (and applied theatre training), the knowledge-about is usually constructed by learners’ own reflection. The role of reflection is the catalyst for the propositional knowledge. Their reflection is triggered by feeling and emotion as well as the consciousness that emerges in the learning process. David Wright, who researches embodied learning in drama education, affirms how the relationship among feeling, consciousness and reflection is supported by neurologist Antonio Damasio. He says,

Damasio's work is at its most important in its identification of feeling as the stimulus for reflective consciousness. Without feeling, there is no need for reflection — thus without feeling, there is no consciousness.

(2005: page unnumbered)

Therefore, using Heron’s notion, through experiential knowing in the encounter, presence generates feeling; presentational knowing brings feeling into consciousness which in the conceptual mode for theorising the learning, becomes food for reflection.

The propositional knowing through reflection within the training workshop was set up through various kinds of tasks, in verbal and written formats, individually and collectively. The propositional knowledge in this training workshop was not learning about a particular topic, issue or theme in drama like poverty, gender issue, environmental education; participants came to learn more generically about ‘what is applied theatre’ and ‘how it works’. Propositional knowledge emerged more fully after each workshop concluded, when reflection had taken place and served the learning. There were general common reflective spaces in the overall training workshop structure and also some specific space in each phase of learning. There were three general common reflective spaces: first, in whole-group discussions at the end and the opening of each session; second, in each course-ending reflective session; third, in writing an individual reflective journal. The specific reflective space was constructed as follows:

- in Phase One, mainly after each set of exercises and activities (e.g. mirror and image exercises);
- in Phase Two, after participants had experienced all the process dramas and the
micro-teaching;
• in Phase Three, after they had finished all the participatory performances.

Although the places for reflection were different, they served similar functions. In these propositional learning spaces, participants were encouraged to use this reflective conscious awareness to make sense of the embodied experience. They turned on cognitive analysis to conceptualise ‘what is applied theatre’ and ‘how it works’ through critical discourse and critical reflection channelled through presentational knowing, publicly and privately. The public and open collective discourse was a significant means for the participants to tap into their own observations and discoveries in the process and begin to share with others the meanings that had been implicitly understood in the experience. Personal critical reflection was shared publicly to articulate the ideas and thoughts in mind and also it served as an alternative or generated wisdom to pass on to help others’—and their own—further reflection.

Knowledge about applied theatre is a kind of self-constructive propositional knowing. It is crucial for the learners to have their own private reflective space for contemplation. Writing a reflective journal was the platform for this space. Going through the personal experience and the active dialogues with others, participants organised and documented their own meaning and constructed their own theory of applied theatre as far as they were able at each stage.

Reflective ability is vital to the propositional way of knowing but it is not taken for granted. In the process of the training workshop, learners participated in every exercise; the individual activities as well as the full dramas were means to build their capacity to reflect. Applied theatre as a generative space for reflection creates opportunities for participants to practise using cognitive thinking to actively observe and analyse what is happening now-and-then. For instance, in the demonstration how to do ‘real-ideal image’ activity, participants were invited to collectively discuss each image of reality, question the context of each image, consider the stances from different perspectives and reflect on their own relationship to each particular situation. They shared their own subjective
knowledge to join in the objective public discourse. Although the content analysis was not directly related to conceptualising applied theatre, in this process participants deliberately practised and learned how to use reflective thinking through active participation. It was possible to train the participants’ ability to reflect more deeply. Most likely it turns out to enhance the quality of reflection in the propositional knowing that is learning about applied theatre as a whole.

10.2.4 Practical knowing/learning

Practical knowing is ‘knowing how-to-do, how to engage in, some class of action or practice’ (Heron & Reason, 2008:375). It emerges from the experiential to the presentational to the propositional. Although it is immediately grounded in propositional knowing, it cannot be reduced by it. It has to go beyond the descriptive concepts into the autonomous competence whereby learners can show they are able to use their skills. Jarvis (1994) stresses that ‘knowing how’ and ‘being able’ are not synonymous. He makes explicit that practical knowledge is shown to include two inter-related dimensions other than the ability to perform an action: knowledge-how and tacit knowledge. They are both embodied in the individual who performs the practice. He analyses that there are six factors in the acquisition of practical knowledge: learning knowledge-how; learning how in practice; acquisition of tacit knowledge by forgetting; acquisition of tacit knowledge by learning pre-consciously; acquisition of knowledge-how by reflective learning; continuing learning and education relating theory to practice (ibid.: 39-42). In learning how to practise applied theatre, it is also important for practitioners to have knowledge-how, tacit knowledge and the ability to perform in order to use it effectively. Therefore, in addition to Heron’s theory, it is helpful to take Jarvis’s ideas to elaborate and locate the practical way of knowing/learning in the applied theatre training workshop. This will be then followed by a discussion on how the capacity is acquired during the learning process.

For learning knowledge-how, Jarvis (ibid.) suggests that we can acquire it by four different processes, learning through:

- taught instructions (e.g. lectures and demonstrations),
practice (going through stages of observing, trying-out and independent practice),
reflective learning (turning the discovery from action into a new body of practical knowledge),
continuous learning and education.

For the purpose of discussing the practical way of knowing/learning within the applied theatre training workshop, I will focus on the first three processes, although continuity of learning is also important to the development of the applied theatre practitioner. In the training workshop, learning knowledge-how through instructions and in practice always came together. Throughout the three phases, participants learnt knowledge-how to practise each genre. This basically began with my introduction, instruction or demonstration. I normally started with briefly describing how the practice functioned and its preliminary procedures, if necessary giving a demonstration. Then, the participants spent most of their time learning from their own embodiment of the work individually and/or collectively. In the earlier phases, the practice engaged the learners mainly as participants in applied theatre; in later phases of learning, it gradually shifted to engage them as facilitators. Learning knowledge-how as participants came about for them mainly through embodying the steps and sequences of the exercises, activities and dramas, like learning image theatre, forum theatre, cops-in-the-head, rainbow of desire and process dramas. Learning knowledge-how as facilitators came through leading the work independently in activities like the micro-teaching in Phase Two and participatory theatre placement in Phase Three. In those learning processes, they had to exercise their planning and facilitation skills, etc.

There is another process of learning knowledge-how through reflective learning, which is directly informed by and intertwined with propositional knowing. In this, existing knowledge-how that has been learnt from propositional knowing is performed in practice, then new observations and discoveries will feed into the source of reflection and finally enrich the new knowledge-how as well as new skills in later practices.

As far as tacit knowledge is concerned, Jarvis (ibid.) mentions that it can be acquired by forgetting and pre-conscious learning. As the participants gain in expertise during the
practice, they tend to forget the existence of the original rules which remain in play at a low consciousness level. The knowledge is gradually internalised and accumulated without conscious awareness. Jarvis finds in his studies that as in the natural process of working in direct experience, humans will learn pre-consciously from their embodied practice and skill performance. The tacit dimension of practical knowledge which is impossible to articulate develops within the practitioner. In the training workshops, the participants learnt the tacit practical skills by doing them with the interactions of a whole community. Through participation and facilitation, the learners’ minds and bodies commit the skills to memory. In Jarvis’s words, the pre-conscious learning occurs ‘at the periphery of the vision, at the edge of consciousness’ (ibid.:37).

The *capacity to practise* is basically embedded in all capacities generated in the process of the other three ways of knowing/learning. It is directed by propositional learning, inspired by presentational forms and rooted in and continually refreshed by experiential encounters. So we can say the capacity to practise includes the capacity to feel, to express and to reflect. In this study all operated simultaneously to a certain extent. From phase to phase, participants moved from learning basic skills (in the earlier stages like making an image by using the body). That was a practical way of knowing to build their capacity to practise more complex and integrated genres at later stages. For instance, participants started to learn basic still image in Phase One. This skill then became one of main conventions in process drama (Phase Two). Learning the skills of using different drama conventions in Phase Two then became the necessary input in Phase Three for them to know how to incorporate the strategies they applied in the participatory theatre programme. In other words, the practice of devising scenes through using images and forum theatre in Phase One then playing roles intensively in process dramas in Phase Two all contributed to the skills needed to devise an interactive performance in the final phase. The planning and facilitation skills also operated in the same way, as participants gradually engaged in learning about how to facilitate a process drama in their micro teaching, then that experience contributed to hosting their program in Phase Three. With these various opportunities for practice, the participants gained the ability to cooperate with others which was also one of the main ingredients of the capacity to practise. Not
least, the concepts and pedagogy gained as part of implicit knowledge while going through different phases also became part of the critical source of building this kind of capacity through the practical way of knowing.

Learning experiences in the applied theatre training workshop included multiple ways of knowing as described above. Each way of knowing specifically nurtured a particular kind of capacity to facilitate the learners’ learning in the process. I should emphasise again, all ways of knowing and their generated capacities cross fertilise with each other and sometimes this occurs simultaneously. It is a dynamic interplay among the activities, mediated by an intuitive grasp of imaginal patterns in the practice and by then conceptually naming the quality that has been identified as creating the learning.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss how this learning experience informs my understanding of the four aspects of learning that have been identified in this study (i.e. applied theatre learning, personal learning, pedagogical learning and reflective learning). I will begin with discussing applied theatre learning, which was an immediate output from the propositional and practical ways of knowing. By comparing the learning responses of the participants in three categories, this aspect of learning can be directly used to assess in a person the depth of their professional knowledge of how to use applied theatre. Based on this comparison, I will state the features of the applied theatre learners in each stage of their growth. Then, I will talk about the functions of generic aspects of learning, which are informed by the capacities to learn generated in the learning experience, to support the growth of applied theatre learners.
Chapter Eleven Understanding Applied Theatre Learning and Generic Learning

11.1 Understanding applied theatre learning—learning the traces of growth of the applied theatre learner

In this study, all participants showed their readiness to attend the applied theatre training workshop to a certain extent. Their readiness had been set up through different kinds of previous experience (watching, participating and practising) in applied theatre. They brought similar expectation to the workshop, wanting to learn to use applied theatre. However, there were diverse learning responses among the participants that affected their learning effectiveness.

The data shows there are three categories of learner that correlate to fundamentally different levels of prior applied theatre experience. Dewey’s theory of experience states the principles of continuity in experience. This principle does not only apply to life experience, which was Dewey’s concern, but it is very crucial in learning about applied theatre, as shown in the data. Dewey stresses that current experiences are linked to past ones that support learning quality, application and adaptation. This resonates to what Boud and Walker describe as ‘the personal foundation of experience’ of the learner, which, they stress, can

affect what is done, and how it is done; it can affect the confidence of learners, their ability to act in the presence of others, and how far they can be committed to involvement within their learning milieu.

(1990:63)

Moon (2004), another scholar supporting the constructivist paradigm of adult experiential learning, has a rather lengthy exploration of the function of the internal experience in the experiential learning process. She states,
Internal experience is the relevant prior knowledge and experience. This guides the means of assimilation by guiding our frames of reference in relation to external experience, enabling us to focus on the relevant variations in the current external experience and taking account of the variations between current internal and external experience.

(ibid.: 30)

I have described separately, in Chapter Six, the individual responses in applied theatre learning in each category. Here, I want to compare their differences under the following three further sets of observations in order to gain more understanding of the impact of prior experience in their learning process.

11.1.1 Emotional response about learning

The first observation relates to the contrasting emotional reactions the participants displayed when they encountered the applied theatre learning. The Category One participants were obviously lacking experience and displayed the most visible emotional responses to the learning. They had no background knowledge and experience to support them in the new learning environment nor in how to bodily participate in the applied theatre training workshop. Lack of prior experience made them feel anxious and they struggled to enter the new way of learning. Although they were excited and ready to come for learning, at the same time they doubted their performance as participants in the workshop. They did not know what they ‘should’ do and they could not make sense of the meaning of the activities. They judged themselves ‘uncreative’ and ‘incapable’ especially in the earlier phase of learning and continued thinking in this way when they encountered difficulties in the later phases.

The Category Two participants also felt frustrated and confused sometimes during the learning process. However, they did not count their confusion and frustration as resulting from their incapability to learn applied theatre. They quickly turned the emotional responses into an insight for personal learning. They perceived it as a process of learning which motivated their evaluation for improvement.
The Category Three participants were rather more detached and able to observe their own and others’ emotional responses. Learning from their prior experience, they were not easily disturbed by the emotional fluctuations generated in the learning process. They could manage their emotion and saw it as irrelevant to their learning ability.

### 11.1.2 Reaction to new learning

The second observation is the participants’ responses, in their categories, towards encountering new learning. The Category One participants had no previous applied theatre experience, in Moon’s term (2004) ‘frames of references’, to support and guide their new learning.

The constructed frame of reference could be said not only to direct the attention outwards towards aspects of the material of learning, but also to influence the manner in which the internal experience is ‘assembled’... The frame of reference could be said to be guide and to act as a driver of the system of internal and external experiences in learning so that we learn what it is that we want to learn in an appropriate manner. (26)

The Category One learners did not understand how the activities were going to work and thought there was a set of rules by which they should behave in the applied theatre training workshop. They posed a range of questions but had very limited ability to proceed towards answers at this stage. Learners in this category stayed in the emotional response when they felt difficulty in learning new things. In most cases, it cost them much effort to manage the broad disparity between internal experience and external new experience.

The Category Two participants responded differently when they encountered a brand new experience in applied theatre. They actively discussed, analysed and made sense of the new activities, supported by their previous knowledge and experience; and they also actively found new and deeper learning in the activities they had come across before. They also posed questions when they did not understand what had happened. The questions were at a deeper and more sophisticated level compared to the mainly procedural questions asked by Category One participants. They took unfamiliar experience as a new resource to build on their existing understanding in applied theatre.
In contrast, most of the Category One learners did not see building unfamiliar knowledge as a necessary process of learning initially; instead they attributed the unfamiliarity to their personal inadequacy. At the end of Phase One, jointly with the Category Three participants, the Category Two learners formed a study group to share learning and practice, which showed their growing autonomy in the learning process.

Additionally, the Category Three learners performed more independently. They were able to contemplate and create meaning out of the new activities and had further insights into the activities they had learnt before. They were conscious of making choices about what they wanted to further develop according to their personal learning intent. They were inspired to assimilate new things into their current knowledge to create new understanding in applied theatre practice.

11.1.3 Idea of application

The third observation is about the kinds of application the participants in each category mentioned. The Category One participants tended to raise ideas for applying the activities by copying and imitation of the surface features and steps; whereas the Category Two participants analysed the activities and integrated them into their existing work. They could give reasons for the way they would use the activities. For the Category Three participants, they were more able to make sense of the learning for their own use. They would think about how to do it, and do it differently to modify the activities for their own needs.

The different approaches to the idea of application reflect the participants’ conception of learning as rooted in their frames of reference. The learners in experiential learning will bring their own thinking about the learning process to accommodate new experience. The advanced learners who have a broader frame of reference have more choices of possible ways to view the learning experience. Moon (2004) draws on this discussion, which is supported by a wide range of literature, and proposes,

as a learner becomes more sophisticated in the manner in which she conceives of
knowledge, we can say that she becomes more flexible in the manner in which she works with knowledge—and more flexible in the way in which she sees knowledge is used by others. (42)

This notion is applicable to the applied theatre learners. The beginners tended to see the applied theatre knowledge as a kind of received knowledge that they had to memorize and reproduce in order to learn; the more experienced learners rather recognised that the learning is constructed through the internalising process of building the knowledge for themselves.

These three further observations from the participants’ responses indicate the following features (Figure 11.1) of the applied theatre learners in the categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category One</th>
<th>Category Two</th>
<th>Category Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>comparatively more emotional blocks; sense of uncertainty in the learning process;</td>
<td>fewer emotional blocks, and treats obstacles not as them being incapable to learning but as an insight to personal learning;</td>
<td>rather detached from emotional blocks; emotion is itself a source for learning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparatively low learning confidence, self-doubt, low self-efficacy;</td>
<td>more learning confidence;</td>
<td>confident, self-directed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of frame of reference to support the new learning and still in the process of making sense of knowing-that, tend to ask surface and procedural questions;</td>
<td>enough frames of reference to support deeper observation and analysis for understanding the learning; asking more deep questions; understanding that knowing-that and knowing-how leads to more knowing-why knowledge;</td>
<td>broad frames of reference (more choices) to create their own usage of the training and integrate it into their own practice; asking deep questions and critically reflecting on existing self-understanding; increasing focus on knowing-why knowledge;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge is passively received as beginning learner; copying and imitation of the surface features and steps as an entry point to learn for practice</td>
<td>Knowledge is constructed; analysis of the activities and integration of the knowledge into their existing work; ability to take unfamiliar experience as a new resource to build on their existing understanding</td>
<td>Knowledge is constructed and provisional; not only study of the new knowledge, but creation/modification of new meaning for their own use; building on the new learning with further insight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11.1 Learning responses according to prior experience categories**

The above table is a result of comparing the overall learning responses of the participants among three categories. It is helpful to identify the various learning conditions in each stage of learning. The learning conditions are not fixed but fluid alongside the increasing of experience. Even though for the Category One learners those limitations already mentioned were apparent at the start, they all made more or less progress by the end of the training workshop. Some of them did make significant journeys towards enablement in their learning process.

In general, the participants with more experience were able to be more confident, flexible, reflective, independent, self-directed, and find less emotional disruption in the learning process. The stages of growth of applied theatre learners rely on the prior applied theatre learning experience. This equips the participants with learning frames of reference to enhance their ongoing learning. The frames of reference provide guidance for the learners to select focuses of concern, to perceive the process of learning and the nature of knowledge, as well as to give them the capabilities to participate and learn through the applied theatre activities.

The different stages of learning in the three categories show that applied theatre learning is a kind of constructive knowledge, which is hard to gain in a single training workshop. The participants build on their own knowledge in every applied theatre experience. Learners grasp new experiences and think about them to construct their understanding of the method. When the learners get a chance to revisit it through participation and/or
practice, they form new insights in comparing with the existing understanding, and they adjust it if necessary. Just as the reflective paradigm of experiential learning proposes, participants bring to the surface of their understanding what they have learnt about applied theatre based on reflecting and integrating their observations from the experience to create concepts for making sense of the practice. Going through this mental activity, learners can articulate the knowledge concretely to facilitate their future learning.

Although there is not much mention in Kolb’s classic experiential learning cycles about the influence of the learner’s foundation of experience, other scholars like Boud & Walker and Moon do express their concern for the learner’s conception of learning, as I have discussed in the previous section. No-one can grasp everything at one time. Learners select things to learn according to their frames of reference. As stated in Chapter Seven, there were two central learning modes (participant and facilitator) in which learners operated, creating very different focal awareness towards perceiving their learning in the experience. By operating in the participant mode, the learners will tend first to place their personal responses at the centre of the learning process. By operating in the facilitator mode, the learners will put their focus on facilitation, thinking about the methods and rationales of teaching and observing others’ learning responses. They will use more objective eyes to see what is happening in the learning process. In this study, the novices tended to use a participant mode of learning in the process; whereas the more experienced participants mainly operated in the facilitator mode. Those participants who were able to shift toward using more of this mode of learning were able to become learners at a more advanced level. The learners with more prior experience in applied theatre seemed to be more independent, self-directed, reflexive and with a critical mind.

The operation of the learning mode in applied theatre depends on the participants’ different stages of development. All learners in this training workshop accumulated their internal experience (later becoming their frames of reference) through being participants from phase to phase. Their body was the primary site for learning about applied theatre. Being a participant is a necessary path for the learner to understand how to use applied theatre efficiently. As discussed, experience itself is the critical factor that affects the
learning effectiveness in applied theatre. The participant mode of learning, I shall claim, is the earlier developmental stage of learning applied theatre. Therefore, the Category One learners were necessarily dominantly exhibiting this mode of learning (although they were at the same time struggling to learn how to be a facilitator). The Category One learners reflected on their own experience to stimulate thinking about the possible use of applied theatre with limited participating experience. They were busy participating in all activities and were only able to squeeze a little time to detach themselves to observe how things work, unlike the learners in the other two categories. The experience gained from being a participant, is a critical resource to construct their frames of reference in applied theatre, which is in itself a necessary path towards becoming a facilitator. By contrast the Category Two and three learners automatically took their own experience of being participants and observing other participants as material to enrich their reflection. Therefore, the data shows the Category One learners started with a participant mode of learning and collected concepts, techniques, skills and rationale and the pedagogy of applied theatre on the way towards participation in different phases of learning. The other two categories operated more and more in facilitator mode – thinking beyond the activities, supported by their prior experience as learning resources. They could see the link between related ideas because they had more knowledge of applied theatre.

So, how do all these above factors inform the stages of growth of applied theatre learner? To a certain extent, participants in each category reported that they increased their learning frames of reference across the three phases of learning. The participants’ development resonates with what O’Toole (O’Toole et al., 2015) categorises as five practitioners’ levels of capacity in applied theatre: Readiness, Experience, Adoption, Ownership and Mastery. Category One learners moved from readiness (level one) to gain experience (level two) – or vice versa. They started with no knowledge in applied theatre, or very limited, experiencing various activities themselves which changed their perception of applied theatre and built their basic techniques and skills. This learning reference formed a base for their learning that followed. Category Two learners moved from experience (level two) to adoption (level three). They came with basic concepts and expectations of applied theatre as well as some knowledge of applied theatre activities.
Their facilitator’s mode of learning assisted them with deeper understanding of the known concepts, exercises and activities. The learning references obtained before and during the training workshop helped the learners to manage the new learning associated with existing knowledge. The Category Three learners moved from adoption (level three) to the beginning of ownership (level four). They deliberately positioned their learning by observing the facilitator’s practices and engaged in a productive speculation about what she might be thinking. They had a store of base knowledge in applied theatre gained from previous learning experience and practice. The training workshop provided them with further insight in known concepts, techniques and skills and rationale, and pedagogy. The new learning references added to their store of knowledge. They managed to integrate the experiences into their existing practice and created new forms for their own uses.

The applied theatre learning developed through artificially constructed experience (i.e. frames of reference); nevertheless, that is inadequate to make a learner grow from stage to stage. As discussed in the previous section, the learning experience involves multiple ways of knowing that together build various capacities to assist learners to learn. The primary purpose of the applied theatre training workshop was to develop applied theatre practitioners; their capacities to learn helped me to recognise the factors affecting the learner’s growth in applied theatre learning and differentiate their characteristics, moving from one category to another.

Now I turn to the discussion of how the generic aspects of learning, nurtured by the capacities to learn in the process, contribute to the growth of applied theatre learners.

### 11.2 Understanding generic learning—nurturing personal and professional agency to sustain applied theatre learning

Chapter Eight identified three generic aspects of learning: personal, pedagogical and reflective learning. Although the level of each aspect of generic learning is distinct and
some appeared to a greater or lesser extent in different participants’ experiences, they are generally mentioned by all participants regardless of their level of prior applied theatre experience. The generic learning is tacit in nature so that most of the participants could not articulate when and how they acquired the learning. As I have stated in an earlier discussion about the learning experience in applied theatre, we know about applied theatre holistically in multiple ways. While participants are acquiring applied theatre knowledge through experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing, various new capacities develop out of the interaction between the felt-encounter experience, embodied expression, reflection and doing among the whole group and their encounter with forms and concepts available in the applied theatre training workshop. The capacities generated throughout the learning process directly contribute to the participants’ generic learning. The study has found that this learning powerfully built the participants’ personal and professional agency. This itself supported their further learning within the training workshop and their practice at work, as well as sustaining their further learning in applied theatre more generally. In this section, I would like to explore those issues starting with the relationship between capacities to learn and generic learning. This will be followed with discussion of the inter-connections among the three generic aspects of learning; then I will talk about how the generic learnings nurture the participants’ personal and professional agency and finally how this finding informs the applied theatre learning.

11.2.1 Relationship between capacities to learn generated by the learning experience and generic learning

There are four main capacities to learn that are developed to support learners along their way of participating in an applied theatre training workshop. They are: the capacity to feel, the capacity to express, the capacity to reflect and the capacity to practise.

- The capacity to feel grows out of the experiential way of knowing. In the applied theatre training workshop, the participants were encouraged to honour their feelings both in the real and fictional contexts. At this base level of knowing, the participants
were provided with opportunities to develop sensitivity to becoming mindfully aware of their own and others’ beings through bodily presence. Empathic understanding and connection had been enriched during the knowing process.

- The capacity to express is a corollary of the presentational way of knowing. In applied theatre, this way of knowing is also the kind of embodied knowledge that heightens conscious awareness of the body and senses. Through embodied knowing, it makes concrete the ideas that were originally unconscious. Through learning to express in different applied theatre genres, participants concurrently practise control and holistic communication.

- The capacity to reflect is developed through the propositional way of knowing. Applied theatre as a generative space encourages participants to practise reflective thinking through active participation in and out of role before, during and after the activities and drama.

- The capacity to practise is enhanced through the practical way of knowing. This capacity is fostered by the other three ways of knowing to support the learning of knowledge-how, tacit knowledge and skills, through various individual and group practices during a training workshop.

Each capacity to learn has a different level of impact on each aspect of generic learning. Obviously, some have more influence than others. However, we must bear in mind that the learning experience is an unseparated whole; there is ‘the mutually enhancing effect between the four ways of knowing’ (Heron & Reason, 2008:374).

**Personal learning**

In this study, self-awareness, self-confidence and social ability are three main types of personal learning that were mentioned by the participants. These types of personal learning are firstly the main corollaries of the blended experiential and presentational knowing, assisted by the propositional and practical ways of knowing. The capacity to feel is the critical foundational ability in personal learning. It enhances participants’ level of awareness of their own inner feelings, self-limitations and habitual behaviours as well as allowing them to notice and empathise with others’ feelings; this was at least true
within the culture that I cultivated in the training workshop. The capacity to express brings consciousness to the participants’ thinking and feeling through active observation in action; this is followed by the capacity to reflect, helping them to ask why they acted in the way they did. Being mindfully aware of their own immediate feelings and emotions is an important source for reflection and to inform change for personal development.

Let’s take as an example the Category One learner Qiling in this study. She was disturbed by the uncomfortable feelings elicited in Phase One while doing theatre of the oppressed (refer to page 140-141). The capacity to feel was building along with the capacity to express; this brought her inner emotions to the surface and made them explicit, which stimulated her thinking on what made this uncomfortable feeling. The capacity to reflect helped her to think of the experience and name ‘what’ the feeling was about, locate ‘where’ it came from and reflect on ‘why’ it arose. She kept a closer observation on her internal self during the process. This quest went alongside her participation in other exercises to bring her understanding to the surface through the interactions. She started consciously to learn from her feelings to gain more self-understanding. Her anxiety about her incomprehension was gradually clarified and finally she felt more confident to accept her feelings of discomfort. This process of growing self-acceptance and understanding made her pleased and satisfied. The personal learning experience sharpened her capacity to feel, to express and to reflect; it contributed to her capacity to practise, where she mentioned that she could be more sensitive to her clients’ feelings and emotions at work.

This exemplifies that the capacities that enhance the participants’ self-awareness and social abilities do not stop at the level of feeling and understanding but also help them to gain confidence to act according to their understanding and to try out something new, to explore the possibilities for change. Participants increase the degree of willingness and skills to practise through the nature of a.) the experiential way of knowing that actively builds a culture of learning to make participants feeling safe and comfortable to express and b.) the presentational way of knowing that encourages expression via diverse aesthetic forms. Building the capacity to practise has a direct impact on personal agency that will be discussed in detail later.
**Pedagogical learning**

The capacities developed from multiple ways of learning critically support the effectiveness of pedagogical learning in the training workshop. Participants mentioned they used to ‘know about’ the people-centred, inclusive, participative and dialogic pedagogy only by propositional knowing. However, they did not think they could really understand until they were ‘being’ in the pedagogy through experiential, presentational and practical knowing. Attending the applied theatre training workshop and working/learning in the open-space throughout four months were like a ‘ritual action’ (Courtney, 1995) for the participants. Pedagogical learning generated was a kind of ritual knowledge that is described by Jennings (1982:115) ‘is gained by and through the body’.

Pedagogical learning starts with participants’ capacity to feel the personal benefits from the first person ‘living through’ within the community of practice. Participants cannot learn about applied theatre pedagogy without experiencing it personally. The capacity to feel helps them to be actively aware of what they feel and others’ feelings during the learning process. They will observe how much they positively feel relaxed, equal, compassionate, respected and empowered from their own experience. And also they will be able to feel the other members’ attitudinal and behavioural change through the empathic connection.

The capacity to express generated by the presentational way of knowing builds their skills to participate and to act expressively. It is also a means for participants to acquire through embodied learning the pedagogical strategies. The capacity to reflect operates to help them consolidate their pedagogical experience and generalise the principles underpinning this teaching method. The snapshots of Minxia’s change in practice described in Chapter Eight are a vivid demonstration of the contribution to her professional development from the capacity building process.

**Reflective learning**

Reflective learning supported by all the other capacities is quite straightforward. The capacity to reflect is obviously a direct output of reflective learning. Actually, as discussed
in the section on propositional knowing, all other ways of knowing contribute to the development of the reflective capacity. Participants in an applied theatre training go through the practice of applied theatre as an aesthetic experience-based learning grounded in feeling, expression, and practice. Through this, participants learn how to reflect.

Reflective learning is a capacity which can be learned or nurtured and is also related to feeling. This is an inner quality that is tacit in nature. The participants of my workshop could not just talk about reflectivity without being reflective at the same time. Therefore participants could only recognise this kind of generic learning by explaining they gained ‘a sense of being reflective’. They felt they were reflective and automatically thought behind the surface encounter. Reflective ability becomes a habitual skill to be operated in life and at work. The capacity to express equips participants with diverse ways of reflection other than total reliance on traditional conceptual thinking. Using imaginal patterns as a reflective source from enriches the content for reflective learning and allows the learners reflect in action. The capacity to practise gives the opportunity for the learners to exercise their reflective skill, and for their reflective learning to be seen in their practice. Zhuhui’s demonstrated journey of reflective learning (refer to page 220-221) was a typical example of how different capacities work together to make a participant feel the growth, reflect on it and practise it at work.

11.2.2 Generic learning and the development of personal and professional agency

Theories of agency have long been implicit in drama education and applied theatre where the focus is on the performative, action, and engagement. What the notion of agency foregrounds is the individual, choice, freedom, and intentionality; it speaks to being purposeful and having and taking control in one’s life.

(Wright, 2011:111)

The notion of agency emphasises that people can have and take control in life; it can also be understood to imply that people have the capacity themselves to promote change.
Generic learning, generated in the applied theatre learning experience, in various degrees contributes to the development of learners’ sense of agency to enable change, personally and professionally.

**Personal learning** in an applied theatre training workshop—can be a manifestation of agency. Theorized by Bandura (1994), perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their agentive capabilities to produce effects. The level of belief in their self-efficacy determines how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Applied theatre deeply engages participants with their holistic selves as an important part of the learning process. As discussed, it builds the participants’ self-awareness, confidence and social abilities. The learning helps them gain strongly in self-understanding (inner feelings, knowing their limitations and their habitual behaviours) by active participation and observation in action. Participants enhance their social ability to express themselves, interact and relate to people leading them to become active and agentic inside and outside the training workshop. During the intensive interactions with others in a safe and trusted community, they learn from others and practise their own skills that increase their self-belief to act differently and try out new ideas in life. As Shuxi affirmed in the second interview, ‘the realisation was a critical pre-requisite to make a decision for change’. These all form the foundation of personal agency for participants to feel they are able to control and exert influence.

Learners will come to believe they can control and influence their progress in learning. They will know what they need to change and make their own decisions based on self-understanding rather than blindly reacting. For example, as Baiyi found during the learning process, he was not so good at expression as he had thought; then he decided to improve it by paying attention to improving this area of skill building. By increasing self-knowledge in a non-competitive but empathic space, the participants gradually form higher levels of self-acceptance. They will learn to accept not doing as well as they desire with less self-judgement and increased efficacy belief. At the beginning of the training workshop Anwen was afraid to act and criticised her performance, but gradually she felt more at ease in facing the difficulties, and believed that she was able to learn and that her
progress was fine. As for her, this will lead participants to take ownership and responsibility for their own pace of learning – not seek to compare their performance with others.

Participants will learn to put their focus on their own performance. They put thought into action since there are opportunities provided for them to practise. Participants’ self-belief in their efficacy will influence how they feel, think, and act in the learning process, as they re-construct their own personal identity. Once they open up, they encounter brand new experiences which widen their original boundary of understanding. Personal learning in applied theatre develops the sense of agency for increasing a learner’s autonomy in learning, self-fulfilment and ability to change.

**Pedagogical learning** is a way to develop learners’ professional agency through constructing by applied theatre methods, pedagogical knowledge and efficacy belief to build professional identity. Eteläpelto et al. (2013) conceptualise professional agency that ‘is practised (and manifested) when professional subjects…exert influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities’ (62).

All the participants in my workshop mentioned this learning directly related to the generation of new ideas and directions for their workplaces, leading to changes in their work habits and pedagogical change. In their accounts, they described the pedagogy in the training workshop as honouring participation, empowerment, a people-centred approach, along with collaborative, dialogic and self-constructive learning.

Participants learn about pedagogy by being embodied in the learning process. This pedagogical experience lays the grounds for them to be validated as active knowers; it situates the learning in their own experience and construction of meaning. In the process of exercising their own personal agency for learning, to a certain extent they will become able to earn the currency of being more in control in their general practice, with their increasing understanding of the pedagogical principles embedded in the applied theatre. They will find themselves, as the facilitator does, not only knowing-that the applied theatre strategies worked, but also knowing-how. Some of them will start to know-why.
Learning and thinking about the rationale and pedagogy behind the methods will make them feel more competent and be a positive influence at work. They will feel themselves more professional after the training workshop.

This study found that the belief in the efficacy of applied theatre both that already existed before the training workshop and developed further during the training workshop is an important element in sustaining the development of professional agency. All participants need to come with a positive impression of applied theatre. If they admire the method and believe it can contribute to their work, they will have a desire to learn how to use it. Throughout the training workshop, my participants affirmed this impression and gained more concrete and personal understanding from the embodied pedagogical experience. With a constantly increasing level of belief in the efficacy of applied theatre, the participants will have higher motivation towards continuous learning of the method, regardless of whether this belief in its efficacy is raised by experiences of mastery or solely by vicarious impact. The ongoing commitment to develop applied theatre learning will be the prime driver for the learners at all levels to improve their agentic capabilities in practice.

*Reflective learning* is the catalyst to develop both personal and professional agency in an applied theatre training workshop. Factors that engage participants as self-directed learners and help to build their reflective ability include writing a reflective journal; using a teaching method that encourages independent learning; and interviews too can be reflective spaces—as my participants pointed out—providing the opportunities to practise reflection and internalise the ability to change one’s thinking habits, which become reflective and deeper. As they also claimed, the growth of resilience helps make better judgements in problem-solving. Reflection is a key personal agency for learning to be a professional. With a reflective mind, learners can be more aware during the practice and also they can see what they do in a wider perspective.

### 11.2.3 Generic learning, agency and applied theatre learning

It is clear from the participants’ own accounts of the generic aspects of learning, that they
could recognise and describe the changes in their practice leading them to be more professional. As mentioned elsewhere, applied theatre knowledge is a kind of constructive knowledge. Therefore, the level and progress of generic capacity building for each individual depends on their prior learning experience.

Learners with mainly a participant mode of learning tend to focus on personal learning at first. It is important for them to build personal agency to support their ongoing learning in applied theatre if they have a lack of prior learning experience as reference. Personal learning strengthens inexperienced learners’ sense of efficacy so that they become able to recover quickly when feeling frustrated and confused in the learning process because of their deficits in knowledge and skills. Once participants increase their sense of personal agency, they will have greater capacity to transform it into professional agency. Throughout the study, the participants showed how they gained from personal learning to work with their clients more professionally and with improved practice.

Contrastingly, learners with mainly a facilitator’s mode of learning tend to be more conscious of the pedagogical learning. This is the main source of professional agency in applied theatre which is differentiated by the learners’ category level. The pedagogical learning level of applied theatre learners in any training workshop in order to facilitate agency building will be different according to their different developmental, levels. Beginners may not really see the link to applied theatre practice; they will tend to pick up the individual concepts of the pedagogy in order to improve their general ways of working. More experienced learners will be able to perceive that this learning can be applied in both general and applied theatre practice. They will recognise the connection of practising applied theatre to developing more sophisticated learning in general. Therefore, if they know the pedagogical principles which underpin applied theatre, they will not be merely following the steps and procedures slavishly. The knowledge for them is not fixed and rigid but they can be more creative to determine their choices and actions in ways more profoundly suited to their own practice. They have greater sense of professional agency.

Reflective learning functions by its application to both modes of learning but its level of
depth differs according to experience. The development of this ability will assist the learner to shift from being a participant to a facilitator and to grow into an independently directed learner. The areas of reflection and the reflective questions the learners ask vary according to their stage of development. When inexperienced learners stay in the participant’s mode of learning, their reflection will be mainly about personal issues (e.g. evaluating their own creativity) in the process of building personal agency. When they try to reflect on the experience as facilitators, the reflective questions they ask are likely to be around ‘what’ and ‘how’. They will be keen to know what is this and that activity, what might they do and how could they do it. This will give them opportunity to build their professional agency by making sense of the activities encountered.

More experienced learners sometimes also reflect on their personal learning. Most of the time, however, they are likely to reflect with a facilitator’s mind – to ask ‘what is it?’ when they come across new activities, and to ask the ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions at a deeper level. They will raise questions that go beyond the procedural level, and be more concerned with bringing about effective facilitation, e.g. ‘What are the main principles and ways to facilitate a group?’ ‘How do we transform or find a balance among the activities?’ They can also demonstrate the ability to analyse and articulate their observation in the experience during the reflection.

Participants already with considerable experience are able to maintain a facilitator’s mind from the start. They set their own learning focuses based on their goals and interests. They actively observe and reflect on what is happening from moment to moment and dialogue internally with their existing knowledge. They set themselves questions to guide their observations and what subjects to reflect on. The depth of reflection indicates the level of their professional agency, showing the ability to frame and reframe the applied theatre learning and to recognise the relevance in the process.

Learning experience in applied theatre develops participants’ capacities to learn. The higher the level of capacities, the more advanced the learner. The depth of learning relies on depth of learning experience. I am not saying that all applied theatre experiences will
have the same quality to nurture applied theatre learners’ capacities; but I assume the accumulated amount of experience that was shown in this study gave it its positive learning impact. The capacity to learn directly contributes to the generation of generic factors of learning. These are crucial to nurture the growth of the applied theatre learner because they facilitate the participants in sustaining their personal and professional agency for sustainable learning in applied theatre.
Chapter Twelve  Conclusion

This concluding chapter starts with my reflection on the relationship between the participants’ learning and my personal theory of practice in order to point out the impact of the facilitator factor as an additional dimension in the applied theatre training process. Then, I will review the findings from this study of increased understanding of applied theatre training practice and bring it to address my research questions. Finally, I will address the implications and suggest some potential areas of further research based on this study.

12.1 Reflection on my personal theory of practice and its influence on the participants’ learning

In the previous two chapters, I placed my focus on examining the participants’ learning in the experience and proposed that there was a blend of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing/learning in applied theatre learning experience. I proposed that each kind of knowing/learning builds a specific kind of capacity to learn which strongly supports the learner’s generation of three different kinds of generic learning. Since I argue that the accumulation of learning experience for developing frames of reference (the applied theatre learning) is significant to the growth of an applied theatre practitioner, the generic learning plays the most critical role in enhancing the learner’s agency, both personal and professional, in order to sustain their practice and learning in applied theatre.

There is another factor, so far undiscussed. Understanding the applied theatre learning also involves considering the personal impact of the facilitator in the training workshop. Schön (1987:33) notes that the practitioners of a profession share a common body of explicit professional knowledge, but they are also different from one another as they bring in their own particular experiences and perspectives to their work, and their styles of
operation. This applies to the facilitators of applied theatre training workshops: each one has their own, using Schön’s word, ‘stance’ (ibid.:119) which involves ways of perceiving and understanding applied theatre and how it could be learnt. Therefore, you may see the applied theatre learning experience created in this study had to blend in with objective norms of applied theatre practice and the subjective stance of the particular facilitator (myself). The objective norms are the applied theatre traditions and specialised knowledge in each of the genres. The subjectivity factors of the facilitator include:

- my understanding and selecting of the genres; and
- my embodiment of the practice and the pedagogy; and
- my personal theory of practice in teaching and learning applied theatre.

These are of course interwoven. My understanding of the theory and practice guides my selection of the genres in the training workshop and also how they are manifested and managed in the workshops. My style of teaching and how I embody the practice and the pedagogy were also mentioned by the participants as factors that influenced their learning. The facilitator is the key agent to bridge the gap between the participants and the practice. Therefore, the examination of the participants’ learning in applied theatre must account for the impact of the actions and choices of the facilitator. Even within the limited scope of this study, I would like to pay special attention to examining my personal theory of practice in teaching and learning applied theatre, which I have already outlined in Chapter Nine as a significant concern.

As an applied theatre trainer, I could have chosen to restrict myself to the content of applied theatre: emphasise how every single strategy works, train the techniques and skills, and analyse the structure of the methods. Alternatively, as in this training, alongside teaching applied theatre skills, techniques and knowledge the trainer can stress their focus on nurturing the participants’ personal and social attributes that will sustain their learning and practice. In Chapter Four (the methodology chapter), I explored the rationale of my theory of practice as a facilitator as it had been based on two factors: my personal learning journey in applied theatre, and my observations of the fragmented nature of much learning
in applied theatre. I believe applied theatre learners, especially working in a community context, have to equip themselves to be independent and self-constructive learners, in order to be able to scaffold their learning in what are invariably piecemeal learning situations.

According to this idea, I propose that it is necessary to use the living culture of the participants as the soil in the training workshop that will allow the participants to grow into independence and self-construction (see page 98, 222-223); and we need to recognise two attributes, mindful awareness and reflection, as the key capacities that will support and sustain their learning both during and after the training workshops. A little at a time throughout the training process, as the facilitator I consciously brought in the idea of promoting mindful awareness and reflection. As the curriculum writer, I consciously structured the training workshop with that intent, by setting up the teaching order of the genres, the assigned tasks and activities, and selected topics. Through this ordered process, the facilitator can structure the context so as to allow the participants to exercise and practise the ideas (see detail in page 224-237).

In short, this study proposes that mindful awareness and reflection are the guiding principles for the teaching decisions made in training workshops, in planning, instruction, facilitation – as they were for me. These two attributes, canvassed in some of the literature on drama education and applied theatre learning (Bundy, 2003a; Edmiston, 1992; Heathcote in Johnson & O’Neill, 1984; Wagner, 1999, Wright, 2011 etc.) have emerged within this study as the critical qualities for a sustainable learner in applied theatre. They are especially closely in alignment with the generic learning findings in this study. The participants’ descriptions of what they had learnt generically were close to what I emphasised and embodied constantly right from the beginning of the workshop. These participants were able to describe aspects of the learning culture such as learning from each other, people-centredness, a sense of freedom, reflective and dialogic learning, as elements that I had deliberately built into the training workshop and which they were able to articulate as having provided benefits for them.
The emphasis on mindful awareness impacts directly on participants’ *personal learning* which also contributes to promote the participants’ *reflective learning*. Mindful awareness is similar to the capacity to feel through consciously being and doing in the training workshop process. This capacity is, as I discussed in an earlier chapter, the food for reflection. The deeper the feeling of self and others, the deeper the reflection. As David Wright (2005) reminds us, ‘[w]ithout feeling, there is no need for reflection – thus without feeling, there is no consciousness’ (page unnumbered). The facilitator’s emphasis on building the capacity to feel mindfully contributes to the learner’s capacity to reflect throughout the learning process. They are complementary to one another. Therefore, those capacities cannot be taken for granted, but learning through applied theatre provides rich potential for them, as I discussed in Chapter Ten (deconstructing the applied theatre learning experience). The layer of the facilitator’s theory of practice also plays a critical role in directing the focus of learning. So it is also a part of the curriculum that must be explicitly acknowledged, one that is worthy of further investigation and examination.

In Chapter Ten, when I addressed the different kinds of learning/knowing generated by the applied theatre learning experience in general, the reader may discern the fingerprints of the facilitator left in the individual choices that I gradually introduced. I consciously built a structure of learning and living culture to enrich the participants’ mindful awareness across the applied theatre learning experience – as I have mentioned. In every kind of knowing/learning, I have found it is necessary to help the participants to be fully present: to be aware of what is happening in their mind and body as well as the responses of those around. As I perceived, it is necessary to work internally with the participants, as well as externally, in order to sharpen their sensitivity for further reflection. A good applied theatre practice will bring awareness to the participants, but it also requires the facilitator to place the focus on manifesting it during the learning process.

In nurturing the participants into being independent and self-constructive learners, mindful awareness is the first step. This in turn goes along with promoting reflection. However, in this study, this principle ended up providing a significant challenge to the participants, due to a cultural struggle.
In this study, the cultural parameters of the Chinese participants meant that they came with different perceptions of and expectations for teaching and learning from the applied theatre pedagogy. As I have repeatedly mentioned, the building of capacities to learn (mindful awareness, reflection) has to be backed up by the learning culture. As the facilitator, I was the person who initiated and modelled the way of teaching and learning (of course, according to my own understanding). These beliefs about learning and teaching include that they are embodied, constructive and experiential; I also play a role as a member in the group, rather than the sole and separate transmitter of information and instructor. I leave the greater space for participants to learn from their own experience, awareness, reflection and from each other. However, unexpectedly, in the workshop of this study some participants expressed discomfort and confusion when asked to learn through this experimental, reflective, collaborative approach in Phase One. Some responded reluctantly. They discussed their struggles and asked me for more teacher’s talk and standard answers. I was at first surprised they had these responses as I thought the notion of promoting mindful awareness and reflection was a suitable approach. But I came to understand this perception came from traditional Chinese education which is didactic in nature; some of them confirmed this in the interviews (see also Chapter Nine).

At the time, facing those participants’ challenge, I reflected by asking myself why I taught in this way. I reassured myself with this thought: I don’t believe there is a ‘standard answer’; everyone works in a different context and in a unique situation, there is no one way of doing things. I worried that even giving a ‘temporary answer’ would discourage their thinking and let them rely on my expertise. More importantly, they would return to their habitual way of learning and ‘the teacher is the only expert’ relationship. My response to their resistance was to insist on my teaching method. I encouraged the participants to keep observing their learning progress and comparing our way of learning with their learning habits. An adjustment I made was to offer extra mentoring sessions for some participants who were feeling left far behind. In the end I could not be sure whether these sessions were of benefit to the learners or whether it was just my rigid and stubborn insistence. However, I agree with Schön’s words on educating the reflective practitioner, that the learner receiving a new way of learning should cultivate ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’ and be ‘expected to experience confusion and puzzlement’ (1987:120). In
what he calls ‘the paradox of learning’,

   a really new competence is this: that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn, can learn it only by educating himself, and can educate himself only by beginning to do what he does not yet understand.

   (ibid.:93)

This experience helps them to learn and discover the essential meaning for themselves. The process of reflecting on their own response to the new way of teaching and learning is also a promotion of reflection. This way of teaching and learning is like a new narrative of education for the participants, learning in the fictional context and also in the context of the setting. This reminds me of Nicholson’s metaphor of personal change (2005): applied theatre as transportation, where change will take place gradually after the accumulation of a series of transportations. This process showed in this study. I must say the long training period did give support to the learners’ transformation. So far as could be ascertained most, possibly all, of the participants showed more reflectiveness by the end and even later, after the training workshops – though of course, not everyone at the same pace of learning. A few participants will, as mine did, still find it hard to reflect critically at the end of the course. But they will observe and appreciate that this way of teaching and learning does bring benefit to the other participants though they may not be able to identify it so obviously for themselves. I interpret this to be in itself already a positive impact on their reflective ability.

By the end of the training workshop, the students confirmed my insistence and appreciated this way of teaching and learning. My pedagogical choices do not come from a vacuum but from my trust in and understanding of applied theatre practice and my own learning experience and reflection. I understand that any choice is risk-taking and cannot guarantee a positive result. I cannot tell in the moment of making a choice whether it works or not but that choice is guided by my theory of practice and what I believe – just what I am trying to impart in the training of applied theatre practitioners; mindful awareness and being reflective to my own practice; trying to ensure I am not working blindly and ignoring the participants’ needs.
Facilitators need to make explicit their personal theory of practice, how they perceive the teaching and learning in and on applied theatre. They need to critically examine its impact to the learners from time to time. In applied theatre learning, more or less, like an apprenticeship model of training, learners learn from the facilitator’s demonstration, advice, questions and critique, as well as his/her embodied values.

12.2 Understanding of applied theatre training practice from this study

This section reviews the main findings in this study that help us to further understand the learning experience and the factors that impact on it in an applied theatre training workshop.

12.2.1 Applied theatre learning and the growth of the applied theatre learner

![Graph showing the relationship between applied theatre learning and the growth of the applied theatre learner]

Figure 12.1 The relationship between applied theatre learning and the growth of the applied theatre learner

The study shows that the level of applied theatre learning (the principles, concepts, skills, techniques and pedagogy) varies according to the level of prior experience of the learner from which they bring in different levels of understanding and frames of reference. The
stages of growth of an applied theatre learner depend on the accumulation of all four different kinds of knowledge (experiential, presentational, propositional and practical) within the workshop. The more the applied theatre learning, the more the learner tends to respond confidently, flexibly and independently in the training process. The accumulation of applied theatre learning in the training workshop in return equips the learner in each stage to become a more advanced learner. Therefore, applied theatre learning is both the cause and the effect of each stage of their growth. They are mutually interwoven.

However, one may be also aware from Figure 12.1 that there is a ‘flat bit’ in each stage of learning, an obstacle to the learning which forms a hurdle that the learner needs to get over before they can move into a more advanced stage. For the beginners, they need to build sufficient confidence in the applied theatre learning method, by the accumulation of embodied experience and knowledge in the learning process, to surmount the hurdle. For the participants with some experience, they need more practice to accumulate sufficient frames of references in order to build their own personal theory of practice that will take them over their hurdle. Overcoming these ‘flat bits’ will also be helped by the generic learning, as is illustrated in the following diagram.
12.2.2 The relationship of applied theatre learning to generic learning

I have discussed the four different kinds of knowing/learning embedded in the applied theatre learning experience, applying Heron’s notion of experiential learning. However, I have to stress these four kinds of knowing are interwoven, connected with and grounded on each other, instead of a clear-cut experience on its own. In Figure 12.2, it illustrates the relationship of applied theatre learning to generic learning which, the study shows, provides possibilities for each kind of knowing/learning to generate a specific kind of capacity to learn which immediately contributes to the generic learning. The capacities to learn strengthen the learner’s generic learning to support them moving onto the next stage of growth in applied theatre learning. Those three kinds of generic learning also build the learner’s personal and professional agency for supporting their practice and further learning.

12.2.3 The facilitator factor

The levels of different capacities to learn are dependent on the experience of the facilitator both subjective and objective, including his/her understanding of the practice, personal theory of practice in teaching and learning applied theatre and embodiment of the practice,
and apprehension of the learner’s needs. These dimensions of subjectivity of the facilitator directly and powerfully influence the priority of learning focus in the learning process. Some facilitators may put more stress on the development of the participant’s presentational knowing to move and use their body; some may stress the importance of consolidating the theory of applied theatre and how and why it works; some may spend more time on mentoring the participant’s practice. Every facilitator will put a different proportion of emphasis on the teaching and learning process according to their stance, style and understanding of the practice.

12.3 Back to my research questions

I started this study based on my curiosity about the Chinese NGO workers’ learning as participants in an applied theatre training workshop. In the beginning of the study, I set the questions for my research: Does applied theatre training contribute to capacity building of NGO workers in China? If so, how and what factors might support or inhibit the application? I designed a 3-month training workshop for a group of NGO workers, then carefully documented their learning and responses as well as my impact as facilitator of their learning. This study offers a set of developmental ideas and epistemological understanding about applied theatre training workshops. It makes more specific sense of what might be involved in a claim to the effect that the capacities generated in an applied theatre training workshop have a contribution to make well beyond the applied theatre itself.

This study clearly demonstrates that the NGO participants learnt about the different levels of applied theatre knowledge which will enhance their ways of working in NGO contexts. Other than learning the specific professional knowledge, the capacities to feel, to express, to reflect and to practise that are built in applied theatre learning also directly contribute to the generic aspects of learning. The generic aspects of learning powerfully enhance the personal and professional agency of the applied theatre learners that in return supports their development in applied theatre learning. At the individual level, participants’
personal learning supports them in building more mindful awareness, self-confidence and social ability. At the professional level, the pedagogical learning generically contributes to participants’ change in practice. Reflective learning serves at both levels to become a capacity for the participants’ on-going learning at work and in applied theatre.

These generic capacities are the intangible and ‘soft’ abilities which the NGO literature calls for (refer to Chapter One). Their relevance was evident at various points in this study. Sense of agency is important to Chinese NGO workers, as most of them have to work independently without constant help and support. They have to work alone and require the capacity to act in response to their daily uncertainties that arise at work. They have to make their own decisions, to solve their problems on their own, to try different ways, to seek their own resources, etc. They need to build capacity to help themselves work in uncertainty. Being reflective, self-directed, independent, self-aware: all those attributes may help them working in the field. Therefore, they are really the important elements of personal, reflective and pedagogical learning that will help Chinese NGO workers to overcome the difficulties and deficits that are a result of both their work contexts and of the traditions in which they were taught, and therefore, at all of their different levels, to change their practice (see the cases shown in page 211-214 and 220-221).

**Factors to support or inhibit the application**

The following factors that either support or inhibit their management of applied theatre must be taken into account:

a. **Individual experience that participants bring to the training workshop**

The study shows that participants’ learning responses are powerfully influenced by their level of prior experience in applied theatre. Their prior knowledge, skills and techniques equip the participants with different frames of reference assisting or at times inhibiting their learning in the process. Therefore, participants with different levels of experience will require different kinds of help to enrich their capacity building process. The study shows that beginners in applied theatre need a quite different kind of scaffolding from participants with more prior experience. They need to build confidence in the learning
methods of applied theatre by accumulating embodied experience and knowledge in the learning process. Participants with a little or some prior applied theatre experience need to take time and practice to strengthen both their capacities to learn and their frames of reference in applied theatre. By increasing the applied theatre learning experience, the capacities to learn generated in the process may enrich the participants’ efficacy in learning. Therefore, any facilitator has to take into account and scaffold the participants’ learning based on their particular stage of growth.

b. Cultural tradition
The study shows the importance of recognizing existing deficits in the capacity to learn through inquiry-based, dialogic, reflective approach, and also that this poses a challenge to participants. The habitual way of learning in a culture shapes the perception and expectation of learning. If participants hold a traditional and passive view of learning, then they may be uncomfortable to take responsibility for the learning and this has to be got over during the workshop. It can inhibit their learning from the beginning, and therefore one must take this into account.

c. Facilitator’s emphasis and focus on teaching how to learn
The study also shows how important it is to continuously emphasise participants’ capacity to learn, and direct it by this kind of scaffolding that supports their learning. A facilitator who pays close attention to enriching the participants’ ability to learn (or generic learning) by structuring the learning contents and integrating the processes that build learning capacities helps participants develop learning confidence. Participants with higher capacity to learn will tend to be more independent and self-constructive learners in applied theatre.

d. Time factor
The relevance of this factor was not immediately obvious, and has not been systematically analysed in this study, but I believe the data shows that it is important to give the learners immersed with the new learning enough time for change. Although I would not be able to identify whether the same result might have been achieved in a shorter study, the
extended length of the training workshop did have a positive impact that was recognised by the participants as a significant factor. This was particularly true for the beginners who mentioned having different kinds of struggles with the unfamiliar way of learning in the first phase. This indicates how important it is to give adequate time for the reflective process to happen (Bolton, 1979, 1984; Heathcote in Johnson & O’Neill, 1984). Since most NGO training does not have the luxury of the extended time that I had, a crucial task will be to try to find short-cuts to maximize the benefit of the period of reflection, to compensate for the shorter training time or to prioritise longer training time for maximum effect.

12.4 Implications of the study

Drawing from the findings, I can confidently infer that this study fundamentally enhanced my own learning as an applied theatre trainer and my understanding of how to implement applied theatre training in the NGO training context. Therefore, the implications of the study literally go to address the applied theatre trainer and NGO training. As it is more straightforward to give advice to the applied theatre trainer, as a means of comparison, I will spell out in more detail the implications for NGO training.

a. Implications for the applied theatre trainer:

- The facilitator must as part of the planning process identify:
  - how much prior applied theatre experience the participants bring into the workshop in order to identify which stage of their development in applied theatre they have reached. Then the facilitator will have a reference to help him/her design the training course: whether the participants need to have more embodied experience in order to enrich the frames of reference for sustainable learning; or whether they are at the stage where they need to have more chances for practice in order to deepen their understanding through doing it.
  - what are the cultural traditions and perceptions about teaching and learning that
the participants bring to the workshop. Then, the facilitator will be informed about whether the participants’ cultural background and baggage will support or inhibit their learning in applied theatre. In the case of the participants coming from a passive learning background, they may need the facilitator to encourage them to think critically in order to enhance their reflective ability towards becoming an independent learner.

- Other than modelling the practice and demonstrating the skills and techniques, the facilitator should consciously include the teaching of generic capacities as part of the curriculum and make it explicit in the teaching plan and objectives in order to facilitate participants’ effective learning in applied theatre.

- The facilitator must explicitly acknowledge his or her own philosophical stance and personal theory of practice of how to teach and learn applied theatre, in order to reflect on and examine the impact of those on participants’ learning. The notion that one can build a definitive theory of applied theatre training practice is hotly contested. However, this acknowledgement is the first step to show our reflection contributing to constantly and actively improving practice.

b. Implications for NGO training:
In Chapter One, I discussed the growing acknowledgment of a developmental view of NGO work that calls for a more people-centred, process-oriented and participative way of capacity building. Concepts such as cooperation, participation, ownership, empowerment, dialogue, power-sharing and democratic process have made a strong appearance in the NGO discourse. This is probably influenced by the agency paradigm which ‘involves the conception of humans as autonomous, self-conscious beings who associate freely and take responsibility for their own lives’ (Kenny & Clarke, 2010:7). As Morgan (2006) reminds us,

An understanding of capacity must also go beyond the instrumental, the technical and the functional and encompass the human, the emotional, the political, the cultural and
These are the five core capabilities which Morgan (ibid.:8-16) proposes:

- the capability to act and self-organise;
- the capability to generate development results;
- the capability to relate;
- the capability to adapt and self-renew;
- the capability to achieve coherence.

And these are the abilities that Kaplan (2000) suggests for NGO capacity building:

- the ability to find the right question and to hold a question;
- the ability to hold the tension generated by ambiguity and uncertainty;
- the ability to observe accurately and objectively, to listen deeply;
- the ability to use metaphor and imagination;
- the ability to help others to overcome cynicism and despair and to kindle enthusiasm;
- the ability to generate the trust;
- the ability to reflect honestly;
- the ability to ‘feel’ into the ‘essence’ of a situation;
- the ability to empathise;
- the ability to conceptualise.

All those suggested NGO capabilities/abilities and definitions are familiar to applied theatre and reinforce the implications of this study for NGO training. I am fully aware the NGO’s work is what Morgan notes ‘a risky, murky and messy business’ (cited in Lusthaus et al., 1999). That is problematic if one wants to find a ‘one-size-fits-all approach’ for NGO capacity building. However, I do find there is great potential for both the artistic and pedagogic traditions of applied theatre to contribute to general NGO training, especially at the individual level.

Applied theatre is a dramatic art form exploring the possible worlds of ‘as-if’ by using
actors’ mental, physical and emotional engagement. It invites participants to actively employ their imagination in the process and put their feelings and thoughts into a visual presence, a creative space. This space, according to Nicholson (2005), allows:

people [to] feel safe enough to take risks and to allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability. It is creative moments of transition that enable participants to move out of restricted spaces—literally or symbolically—and beyond identities that are fixed and codified by particular spatial practices into new forms of social identification.

(129)

‘Living through’ in the creative space cognitively, affectively, subjectively and objectively, participants experience their feelings, thoughts and ideas through embodiment to see things in a new light. The reality is not fixed and set. Applied theatre encourages participants to experiment ‘what is not and what could be’, to pose questions, to see things beyond the surface. As Greene (1987) affirms, doing arts ‘enable those who open themselves to what they create to see more, to hear more, to feel more, to attend to more facets of the experience world’ (14). Applied theatre encourages the embracing of vulnerability, taking risks in a safe and creative space, experimenting with ideas and thoughts in the here and now, exploring the reality beyond the surface. These are all qualities that powerfully help NGOs to deal with working situations involving rapid change, uncertainty, unpredictability and ambiguity. This study has shown how participants (particularly beginners) can change after going through a period of training from being anxious and wanting to get it ‘right’, to start feeling relaxed enough to overcome their resistance to ambiguity, and accept the realities of their position.

Applied theatre is also a democratic space where knowledge is considered provisional, waiting to be discovered and co-created by the participants working together. It emphasises that the facilitator should take off their crown and share the power with the participants as active co-learners in the process – which takes us back to the ‘agency paradigm’ mentioned in earlier paragraphs. Applied theatre encourages every participant to have a voice both through dialogue and in practice that increases their sense of
ownership in the creation process. Neelands (2009) observes that this kind of democratic learning in drama goes beyond drama. The participants experience and practise in a public and participatory process that will possibly shape their learning in the social domain. I am reminded of the pedagogical learning that the NGO participants in this study explicitly mentioned and highly prized: the embodied way through which the democratic values of the training workshop were made manifest. It gave them a deeper understanding of those values such as participation, empowerment, equality and dialogue through practice, rather than knowing about it intellectually.

Applied theatre has a pro-social pedagogic tradition that creates space for everyone to actively participate in the process rather than being an audience of passive receivers. In the interactive working process, participants as actors learn about themselves and others. They learn in practice to observe their own actions or see themselves through others’ response. From seeing, hearing, and feeling in action, the participants gain more self-understanding which leads to increased self-confidence ‘to act and self-organise’, as this study has shown. This very social process of having the chance to take on roles also enhances participants’ sensitivity as well as improves their empathic understanding and awareness of others. O’Toole et al. (2016, in press) describe the importance of empathic identification.

The single most basic act of drama is empathic identification: putting oneself in somebody else’s shoes, to find out not only what they are thinking and why, but also how they are feeling, and why.

The ability to feel the emotions of others makes NGO workers sometimes let go of their agenda so that their work can cater more closely for the clients’ socio-psychological needs. In order to set up the social space for experience and learning, facilitators must firstly build trust among the group members and make them feel safe to express and listen to others. Bundy (2003a) notes this from her research findings,

significant aesthetic experience will not occur until the workshop leader…works to build their trust. They need to trust the leader, themselves and each other.
The living culture of generating trust and respect in an applied theatre training workshop provides an embodied reference for NGO participants which impacts on their future practice, as was evident in this study. It reinforces that the applied theatre training workshop itself can be a way to equip NGO workers with the ability to generate trust with their clients.

Reflection is an indispensable element of learning in applied theatre. I repeat what Heathcote emphasises, ‘without [reflection] there is no learning from the experience’ (Johnson & O’Neill, 1984:209). Facilitators in applied theatre actively structure ways for reflection in and on action as I have mentioned in previous various chapters. Reflective ability is also what Kaplan (2000) calls for in the NGO field. As he says, development for practitioners ‘demands constant self-reflection, reflection on practice, if practice is to be improved’ (521). Being reflective makes the developmental work more valid and responsive to the complex interconnected nature of the social, economic and political spheres in the community. That is a prerequisite ability that development workers should have for building other abilities (e.g. the ability to achieve coherence, to find the right question, to conceptualise, and to generate results). And as this study has reinforced, reflective learning is the prime ability above all that supports other aspects of learning.

Applied theatre as a creative, democratic, social and reflective space answers the call for the development of the capacities in the NGO field.

12.5 Recommendations for further research

This study has sought to make a step forward towards building a deeper understanding of a participant’s learning experience in an applied theatre training workshop. The journey started with my personal interest in examining how an applied theatre training workshop works for NGO workers. Naturally, an individual facilitator’s narrow view will have lot
of limitations. For further studies to build on this research I would suggest:

- We need more long-term and transcultural research to study the participants’ learning needs in different stages of growth in learning applied theatre. This is needed in order to probe more analytically and deepen our understanding of the assumptions I have made about the stages of growth of applied theatre learners and their learning responses in each stage.

- For long-term research, it would be very useful to check the progress of participants over a period of years following their training workshop. Doing this would identify whether the participants are able to get through the barriers of each particular stage, and whether indeed the stages and barriers conform to my perception. This research should also examine how many of the barriers can be related to their original training, and lead to better understanding of what else they need in the learning process.

- This study was in a highly specific context of Chinese NGO workers working in charity organizations. This research clearly identified some of the cultural issues that were hindering them, which the students brought as baggage from previous learning experiences. On the other hand, we might further investigate whether there are any cultural benefits, too, factors brought by the participants that will advance and enhance their learning. Furthermore, it would be also very interesting to compare those results with other cultural settings, e.g. NGOs working in other settings/countries; or workers working in other contexts, for instance educational contexts - comparing the NGO context with the context of schooling or comparing the NGO context with the context of formal adult training, in order to see to what extent this kind of learning is applicable to tertiary training.

- In this study, I shared explicitly my personal theory of practice in teaching and learning in applied theatre and its impact on the participants’ learning. It is important to encourage any practitioners in the field to examine their own personal theory of practice, in order to deepen the discussion of the facilitator’s educational influence
in effective teaching and learning in applied theatre.

- I have been concerned in this study about how to support participants especially in community contexts to get systematic applied theatre training instead of short-term and piecemeal workshops. The study clearly indicates we need more systemic and longitudinal research to examine what kinds of structures of applied theatre training courses are appropriate for people who may not be able to apply for any institutional courses in the community, and also how we design them. For instance, other than my three-phase structure of the training course, what other models might be more effectively applied in community teaching and learning contexts? And also, based on the participants’ working contexts, how we can support them and identify what they need to be supported in order to sustain their individual learning after the training workshop.

- In this study, in the specific context of a 3-month long training workshop the generic capacities played a critical role in sustaining learners in both applied theatre and NGO practice. However, can this finding of the importance of generic capacities be applied only in such a long and intensive course? It is crucial for future research to examine how the building of generic capacities can be feasibly managed in the shorter applied theatre training courses that are the norm in the field.

12.6 Concluding Remarks

Writing is not just reporting the research findings. Writing is the very act of reflective inquiry and of discovery.

(van Manen, 2002:27)

Having experienced such a rich reflective journey, firstly through practice and then through writing about it, now it is the time to bring my own new understanding from the inquiry and discovery back to the field, and start up another journey.
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Appendix

Some Phase One activities in the training workshop

Week 2

Labour Dance
Starting by exploring a daily movement in life, members improvised a dance inspired by music. In group sharing, one started showing their dance and people who had devised their dance from the same kind of daily movement could join in.

Power Shuffle
This silent exercise was divided into two parts: experience and dialogue. First, all participants stood in a line at one side of the room. I called out fifteen social categories related to class, age, religions, gender, family status, occupation, educational background. Each member decided whether s/he wanted to identify herself/himself as a member of the category or not. If ‘yes’ to the category, participants had to step to the other side. There were times that the numbers on the two sides were even; there were times that only one member facing the main group.

In the second part, we used images to share thoughts and feelings about the experience. The first person came out to create an image by using other people’s bodies; anyone with whom that idea resonated could build on it or adjust the image until another new idea was initiated. The members were concentrated in the entire process of visual dialogue. Apart from the personal feelings, we also showed through the images our comments on the expectations imposed by society.

Call on an Issue
Participants took turns standing on a chair at the centre calling out an issue of his or her concerns, e.g. same-sex marriage, rural and city, Chinese education, family violence, human rights for disadvantaged groups, sex education, and unmarried pregnancy. The rest of the group immediately responded to the issue by making an individual image which represented their own perception. The images included feelings, comments and public
opinion on the issues called out. Through groupings and thought-tracking the images, the persons who called got to know as researchers more about the collective understanding of those issues in the group.

Image of Transition
In pairs, participants agreed on some concept about social difference, and transformed the idea into a representational image, showing it to the group. The audience was allowed to share their interpretation of the images before they were clarified. This process helped the group to start to think of different topics and warmed them up to vote for one which most resonated with them, for further exploration.

The majority selected to explore ‘the difference of classes in society’. We co-constructed an image showing a current phenomenon. During the process of making the image, we actively discussed different perceptions of the classes in Chinese society nowadays. The final image was called ‘real image’ which showed a real life situation recognised by all participants. Repeating the same negotiation process, we co-created an ‘ideal image’ of the situation. Placing two images separately at two ends of the room, together we tried out different possible ways to transform the ‘real image’ into the ‘ideal image’ in action.

Two-by-Three-by-Braford
Participants worked in pairs facing each other and to count from 1-3 repeatedly, then to substitute gestures and sounds for each number gradually one by one. Finally, the participants worked out a sequence of movement in each pair.

Cops-in-the-head
Everyone found a personal space and thought of a moment that there were discouraging voices (cops) stopping her/him from doing what s/he wanted to do or saying what s/he needed to say; then we created five images (self in the situation, three cops and self in an ideal condition) in addition with a line for each image. Each member took turns to show the images publicly.