

The Intuit: An investigation into the definitions, applications, and possibilities offered by intuitive applied theatre practice with vulnerable youth

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Abstract:

This article offers insights into what might constitute intuition in applied theatre practices with vulnerable youth in London. The study will explore the approaches of five theatre companies working with children and vulnerable youth. A lead practitioner from each company has been interviewed, and the interpretation of the data they have provided has offered new insights into the role of intuition as an approach to ensuring applied theatre is responsive to young people living precarious lives. The research identifies two aspects of intuitive practice, one that resides with the actions and thoughts of the practitioner, and the other with the acceptance of intuitive creative offers by participants. The study has also revealed the potential heightening of intuitive responses for practitioners who share history, culture, location or identities with their participants. Altogether the findings from the research offer useful potential considerations of key qualities for an intuitive practitioner, or the Intuit, working specifically with young people in contexts of uncertainty.

Introduction

In this article, I will discuss the potential role of intuition in applied theatre practice and propose that it is an essential ability for a practitioner to navigate practice with young people who live in contexts of uncertainty. I will propose that it is not just the practitioner who may display intuitive abilities but it is also essential that participants accept the intuitive 'offer' from practitioners. There is a reciprocity in an intuitive exchange. How intuitive decisions are informed and offered and how they are accepted will be the topic of discussion in this article. Five practitioners from leading theatre companies working with vulnerable young people have informed this research. Practitioners have offered their own stories of moments of intuition. I have analysed the commonalities that occurred between each interview to bring together key findings that form insights into intuitive practice for practitioners engaging with vulnerable youth.

Intuition is a complex term referred to in many fields, including philosophy, cultural studies, neuroscience, education, creative arts, management studies and sociology. Understanding themes and definitions that are relevant for an interrogation of 'intuition with vulnerable youth' is central to this research. The first section will identify 'traits' that have been named as possible identifiers of intuition. It is my intention to address concerns that readers may hold about the relevance, and the 'existence' of intuition as vital epistemology for working with vulnerable youth through applied theatre.

Several theorists including Sheila Preston (2016), Michael Balfour (2016), and Kay Hepplewhite (2013, 2016) have begun to explore the relationship between applied theatre facilitation and intuitive practice. Balfour denotes intuition as 'social' and 'aesthetic' instinct (2016: 153). Preston has suggested that intuitive practice is synonymous with being present and consists of 'being able to listen and read what is happening, sitting with discomfort... respond[ing] creatively in the moment' (2016:81). Hepplewhite relates intuition to tacit knowledge attained through experience and played out in response to participants. Applied Theatre has begun to embrace ideas of intuition although these are often related to flow theory or attunement; a more substantial study of what constitutes intuition in applied theatre practice, and how this may differ with different groups has yet to be offered.

My research will begin to address this knowledge gap by investigating what intuition might mean for Applied Theatre practice conducted with vulnerable young people in London. For this, I have interviewed the following practitioners about their definitions of intuition and experiences of intuitive responses within their practice working with children and young people: Sylvan Baker (Verbatim Formula), Ned Glasier (Company), Jo Carter (Immediate Theatre), Adam Annand (London Bubble) and Maggie Norris (The Big House Theatre). The interviews were conducted in October - November 2017. Companies were

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chosen because they represent a range of different approaches to working with children and young people.

What is the Intuit?

The influential work of Guy Claxton and Terry Atkinson (2004) provides useful discussions about the 'ways of knowing' associated with intuition. Discussing Tony Bastick's (1982) comprehensive survey of literature on intuition, Claxton (2004) proposes the anatomy of intuition drawing out seven key connected traits of intuitive practice from Bastick's research findings. Three are of particular significance for my purposes: affective tone and emotional involvement, the role of experience, and trust in one's decision-making capacity. Affective tone and emotional involvement denote an emotional reading of participants. Claxton has identified a connection between creativity and emotion noting that a type of intuitive response may occur 'when the cognitive system is in low-focus' (Claxton 2004:41). In other words, creative problem-solving embodies a state of non-habitual and non-entrenched perspective that offers alternative solutions to complex problems, which require an unconventional approach to seeking an answer, in this case one could suggest that intuition and intuitive reasoning are intrinsically linked. Elijah Chudnoff (2013) elaborates on the difficulties of determining the placement of intuition as a form of intellect that moves beyond sensory perception. He suggests that both rationalist and empiricist views of epistemology do not capture the ways of knowing that intuition offers. Chudnoff proposes the need to acknowledge the relationship between reason and intuition instead. He suggested that intuition is a motivator towards reaching reason, for example the provocation for making a decision. In place of a doxastic position, which may also be referred to as a logic formed through beliefs, he posits the importance of seeing intuition as peculiar in its qualities:

This [intuitive reasoning] is reasoning that is based on intuition. It can involve memory, testimony, deduction, induction, and abduction. What distinguishes intuitive reasoning is that whatever beliefs are epistemically based on it are epistemically based at least in part on intuition. Notice that a bit of reasoning can be both intuitive and empirical. That is, it might be based on both intuition and sensory perception. What the *a priorist* should say, then, is that our knowledge of abstract matters, or at least our knowledge of some abstract matters, is based on purely intuitive reasoning – i.e. reasoning that is both a priori, so not empirical, and intuitive (Chudnoff, 2013:16).

Intuition as a motivator towards reason is a useful frame for understanding decisions that are made in the moment. Chudnoff's assertion is also useful as an indicator of an agnostic positioning between rationalist and empiricist perceptions of knowledge or related to both perspectives inseparably. In this case, intuition exists as a form of 'knowing' in and of itself. It is this positioning that I aim to use in my interpretation of interview data later in this article.

Claxton's suggestion of another trait of intuition, the role of experience, is important to discuss. Claxton suggests that practitioners may have developed expertise and a broad tool box for a particular area of practice, and may well be able to delve into this data-base of knowledge in 'novel, flexible and integrative ways', although this knowledge also presents a problem for the Intuit:

[...] this latter condition [expertise in a particular area] seems to exclude those who are *too* knowledgeable about the subject, for while they have the requisite database, a particular way of looking at it may have emerged that is so entrenched and habitual that it precludes taking a fresh look (Claxton, 2004:41).

Here, Claxton suggests that practitioners who have a plethora of knowledge and experience may not remain open to new ideas and information. This may consequently affect their ability to be intuitive. The ability to trust one's intuitive judgements is not just constricted by experience and expertise as an adult, it is also limited by the ability to trust one's judgements. For example, Lucy Atkinson (2004) debates the significance of nurturing environments that either support or disallow children to trust their judgements. The impact of this initial encounter inevitably affects whether, as an adult, a practitioner can trust intuitive impulses to respond to uncertainty. This idea does not contest intuition *per se*, but it does offer insights about why some people are more intuitive than others. The Intuit in this case, would require the ability to trust their own judgements and additionally, despite having much experience in the field, remain open to new ideas and the evolution of their practice to resist stagnation in their receptive capacities to meet constantly changing participant needs.

The Intuit's Navigation of Uncertainty

Across the five companies who took part in this research, one of the common challenges for practitioners to navigate was uncertainty. By uncertainty, I am referring to the varying circumstances of precarity that face the children and young people accessing each company's projects. The ways that each company addressed uncertainty is important to consider because this reveals the types of intuitive approach that practitioners chose to take to respond to 'unknowns'.

London Bubble works with vulnerable youth to 'support their mental health and wellbeing building resilience, self-esteem and self-awareness' (London Bubble, 2017). One of the programmes the company run is 'Speech Bubbles'. Children who access Speech Bubbles experience communication needs in Key Stage 1 (5-7yrs.). Associate Director Adam Annand states that children in the Speech Bubbles programme:

[...] present either as children who have become very internalised around their communication needs, so they've gone quiet and they've disappeared, you don't hear them, they don't put their hand up. You might not even notice them in the classroom, and then right through the continuum right to those children who've, because of their communication need, they've externalised it, they've got frustrated, they've got angry (Annand, 2017).

Annand notes the importance of trying to shape structure in the context of insecurity: 'So much of life just happens at them, the next thing that happens is 'I don't know what's going on here at all' (Annand, 2017). For Annand, the safety of a familiar workshop framework and the openness this provides through the relief of having structure, is essential to address feelings of uncertainty. Negotiating creative moments of liberation within a structure is additionally important to enable participants to experience delight in moments of artistic engagement. Understanding how to balance structure and creativity is important, and requires an understanding of the nuances of interaction happening in each group. Annand points out that new practitioners will often try to hold too many details in their minds, which can lead to assumptions about the group. Whereas established practitioners are able to narrow their attention to concentrate on the nuances within each group and respond to their needs: 'Because you feel comfortable, I know what I'm doing, so now I've got a good idea about that, now I can start reading the nuance in the room, understanding that and tweaking, adapting and changing' (Annand, 2017). Bob Harbort (1997) identifies a similar point noting the importance of reducing uncertainty, which he attributes to contracting the level of focus. He suggests that when experience has been reinforced and one's focus has narrowed to concentrate on what is happening in an immediate moment by shutting out external stimuli, there is a reduction in uncertainty (Harbort, 1997:138-9).

A reduction of uncertainty can also be seen within the work of Company Three who respond to the needs of young people aged 11-19yrs in North London. The company offer 'a space where young people can talk to adults, and in which adults will really listen... Our plays are part of ongoing conversations about what it means to be a teenager' (Company Three, 2017). In this case, uncertainty may derive from any number of contextual factors including school pressures to achieve, through to resistance towards education, from precarity² of immigration status to uncertainty about the future. Company Three take a long-term intervention approach to identifying and responding to the needs and creative ideas of young people they work with. They believe in the value of young people not as trainee adults, but as teenagers who hold specific insights into society. Addressing uncertainty in this case is actioned through a practitioners' commitment to 'deep listening'³ to the needs and ideas of their participants. Artistic Director of Company Three Ned Glasier suggests that an attempt to understand the situation of the group by attuning to their feelings, thoughts and intentions is essential for practitioners to understand the perspective of young people. Wearing the 'hat'⁴ of a participant is an alignment of thought between the practitioner and young person. Annand has also identified this as a key trait for working intuitively, suggesting the need to be in several 'mind' states simultaneously to act as go-between as entertaining actor and an educational facilitator:

² I am referring to Precarity drawing upon Standing's (2014) definition of precarity

³ Deep listening is a term referred to by Flowers et al. (2004)

⁴ The term 'hat' in this case is the phrasing offered by respondents. It is meant to suggest stepping into the shoes of a participant, or seeing a situation from their perspective.

It's also about stepping out and looking back... rather than just experiencing it in the moment, it is about maintaining the moment of reflection at all times. You are both within and without of this thing and you're doing it, but you're also looking at what you're doing and reflecting on it (Annand, 2017).

Annand's reading of wearing multiple 'hats' or 'hatting', is a useful analogy to understand the sometimes-conflicting knowledge or 'expertise' one might carry and use to intuit what is happening within a group. The 'inbetweenness' that Annand identifies suggests that intuition occurs in the space between sets of competing knowledges that are trying to interpret participant engagement, reflect upon what has happened, project what might happen next, and take action. Jo Carter, Artistic Director of Immediate Theatre which has established a range of theatre projects with Estate Based communities in deprived areas of London, also identified the use of what she describes as multiple 'mes' in her work. Immediate Theatre work with challenging young people in Hackney, East London. Carter's experience working with the community for over 20 years has enabled her to intuit the 'me' she may need to play to find points of connection with those she works with: '[...] what I want to do is to almost be in-role as a member of the community. So, in fact I'm kind of using facilitator in role stuff... I'm always me, but I'm one of mes... Whichever bit of me is useful is the bit I'll give you' (Carter, 2017).

This ability is an enabling strategy that may help to secure connections with groups where there is uncertainty about what might link people from the local area. We might then relate Carter's intuitive approach to finding connections as an empathic ability to understand and respond to the complex, ever-changing context of communities in areas of increasing gentrification. Another type of uncertainty Carter's practice responds to is violence from young people towards one another and others in their communities. For the young people Carter has worked with, many are exhibiting increasing levels of violence and anger towards adults who may represent 'the establishment', which they perceive as a threat. However, Carter's approach to intuit connections seeks commonality with complex young people that is essential to find points of common ground to begin creative processes.

Seeking common ground is a means of intuitively connecting with young people. The type of connection and approach taken can take different forms. It may not take the form of discovering parallel situations, but perhaps choosing to share similar backgrounds that can build temporary trust between vulnerable youth and practitioners. Take for example the Verbatim Formula project created by Dr Sylvan Baker and Dr Maggie Inchley, who work with care-experienced young people using headphone verbatim strategies to enable participants to tell their stories in performances that intend to effect change in social worker practices and policy. Creating a workshop space that enables young people to leave their 'social armour' at the door is important, which is why a proportion of the creative team are open about sharing their backgrounds as care-experienced with the group. Baker attested that this approach enables participants to connect with project teams because there is an unspoken shared knowledge and deep understanding that may only resonate with those who have similar experience in the UK care system (Baker, 2017). This doesn't inhibit challenging behaviours from the group necessarily, but in the relatively short time span of workshops, it does offer points of connection that enable uncertainties that may relate to participants feeling misunderstood, to be overcome with the realisation that others in the group understand what they may have encountered. The Verbatim Formula offers a caring structure to address uncertainty:

[...] we can't guarantee security, but we can guarantee a level of safety, and an awful lot of time and something which is kind of ambiguous for them but, care... We want to invite them...and to understand that what they are saying, however much it may have diminished in significance because they've told their narrative over, and over again to a succession of adult professionals, is significant to us (Baker, 2017).

Care as a way of demonstrating 'deep listening' in response to participants' stories is an important means of establishing a space of comfort for participants to take creative and personal risks in telling their stories. The structure of care in this case is about creating an even platform of experience. The Big House theatre, set up by Maggie Norris also works with care experienced young people and provides a structure of combined care and discipline to create a sense of safety within rehearsals. The young people accessing The Big House are 'care leavers who are at high risk of social exclusion' and The Big House believes that '[t]heatre engages the individual in a collaborative context, developing positive feelings of self-esteem, mastery and control. We believe that art can be transformative' (Big House Theatre, 2014). Part of the negotiation of this level of impact is a holistic model of support.

Artistic Director Maggie Norris described this as a bespoke approach to meet the support needs of each cohort and engagement with external support organisations to offer further ongoing interventions. Norris' approach clearly draws upon the use of discipline through group contracts, which are decided by participants to maintain physical and emotional support within sessions. Allowing participants to decide upon group contracts demonstrates a pledge to enable young people to make decisions. It also indicates that practitioners listen and respond to participants from the start of a process.

Although these methods create a sense of comfort and order in the lives of young people, intuitively responding to the complex changing needs of each group requires practitioners to be accepting of, and able to thrive in, processes of uncertainty. This is not only located in the contexts of the participants, but also in the uncertainty that can occur in creative processes promoting participant agency, 'deep listening'⁵, and encouraging ownership of creative ideas. Glasier (2017) has a rule of accepting all participant ideas even before they are fully articulated:

[...] they [participants] know that there's a rule that I have, which is if they come up to me and they say 'Ned, can we...' or 'can I...', my brain will always say 'yes' before they finish the sentence. And I think them knowing that rule is a really important opener that takes away some of the boundarying to some of their work which might otherwise happen... They are the two most important things... onis listening, and one is saying yes. (Glasier, 2017).

Glasier's commitment to agreeing to participant suggestions is an important step towards 'deep listening'. In this sense intuition is not the rational response to participant suggestions, which might become blocked by logistical thinking, but rather allows an outright acceptance of thoughts. Then, intuition becomes a non-negotiable response of receipt, one which may cause excitement and stimulate creative thought without censorship. This approach arguably creates a nurturing, supportive environment where young people can learn to trust their judgements.

Intuitive navigation is important for the practitioner to make connections with participants, and also for practitioners to help participants take creative risks. The use of deep listening, structure and support are important elements in intuitive judgement for the practitioner, but it is also imperative to enable participants to want to take part and feel that their ideas heard. This may also have another benefit, which Lucy Atkinson terms 'intuitive response'. Atkinson (2004) states that the level of structure, direction and support a child receives in 'nurturing environments' are influential in determining whether a child is able to trust in their decision-making capacity. This is an essential element for intuitive response. Atkinson discusses the creation of a supportive space to enable participants to develop their own abilities to make creative choices and trust their social instincts:

There are many other situations which form chaotic nurturing environments, but all have in common the fact that it makes it hard for the child to develop a sense of order and pattern. Without this structural basis, it is very difficult to trust your own judgement, as the outcome feedback is constantly changing and adjusting the general direction of judgement with a frequency that is hard to cope with (Atkinson, 2004:57-8).

Assuming that a drama workshop is a 'nurturing environment', the creation of safe and supportive space enables a participant to develop their autonomy through creative decision-making. Atkinson suggests that a low level of direction i.e. instruction, and a high level of support is ideal for a child to develop their intuition. This type of environment creates a supportive space for creative risk taking. Jennifer Fisher (2006) elaborates on the importance of this strategy:

[...] intuition can facilitate group consciousness... Such a blurring of discrete identities troubles art world ideologies premised on the individual persona and unique authority of the artist. Intuition thus disrupts boundaries that are considered certain and necessary within Western culture (Fisher, 2006:13).

What is of note here is Fisher's reference to the shift from individualistic notions of the creative artist towards more collaborative 'radical' notions returning to community cultures in shared artistic endeavours. Group consciousness or ways of relating to one another are important to enable all ideas

⁵ Flowers et al. describe *deep listening* as 'being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense' (2010: 13).

to be heard and valued. This process of 'witnessing' is important for a vulnerable child. Camila Batmanghelidjh (2006) identifies the potential impact of witnessing the stories of traumatised youth stating that this is a way of verifying and acknowledging stories. This is not dissimilar to the creative process of sharing an idea, and having that idea verified by trying it out in rehearsals. Discussing her approach to drawing out character narratives, Norris talked about the one-to-one strategy taken to co-creating characters. This approach enabled participants to have ownership over the characters, who may hold similar views and experiences to their own, but provide an important fictional distance. The direction of character creation is held by participants and co-crafted by the creative team through discussion, experimentation and rehearsal. The challenge here is to navigate between support and direction to ensure a child who has a less developed intuitive capacity may still contribute to the creative process. Atkinson elaborates on this point:

[...] stripped of the 'security blanket' of high direction, the child who has formed the habit may find it very difficult to trust their own judgements without outside confirmation and permission and, at worst, be unwilling to make judgements at all, preferring to stick to courses of action prescribed by others. It is also generally much quicker and easier to do as one is told rather than to discover it for oneself, hence the highly directed child may well resent being expected to trust their own judgements in subsequent environments (Atkinson, 2004:59).

The process of seeking a balance between instruction and freedom is important and is clearly present within each of the five practitioners' approaches investigated albeit in different ways. It is then part of the Intuit's approach to attempt to search for this balance by attuning to the specific complex needs of participants. A useful term that is relatable to this process is arguably empathic attunement. Empathic engagement between the practitioner and the group may enable all to reach a point of intuitive mirroring i.e. enable participants from precarious backgrounds to become intuitive in their creative resolve.

Empathic Attunement

Empathic knowledge is a central theme for understanding intuitive thought. Angela Hague suggests that it is '... a merger of subject and object or Self and Other that is accomplished through an act of sympathetic identification... Intuition necessitates an empathic response on the part of the intuiter, a sympathetic merger of the intuiter and the intuited that is often catalyzed by emotion' (Hague, 2003:66). Empathic 'attunement' enables the Intuit to move beyond sympathy and towards engagement with the 'sense' they gain from entering a workshop. Baker relates a similar sensibility:

[...] as a facilitator there is an additional presence of you in the room whose only role is to be sitting, as it were, orbiting the space, just checking what's going on. Kind of like a facilitator drone that's just checking the temperature as it were: What are people doing? Are they engaged? What are they saying? How loud are they? Are they smiling? And it's just giving that data... an experiential intuition is how you then navigate your way through the session (Baker, 2017).

Baker's summation suggests that empathic attunement is a process of sensing the emotional state of the workshop space, interpreting 'data' from this input and extrapolating an appropriate response based on prior knowledge of the group. Although this may be an initial means of reading the group and responding this is not a singular process, it is a continuous loop of repeated sensing not only emotional attunement but ways to draw out creative ideas to develop performances. Glasier aptly states: 'I think the thing that makes a particularly special artist and the thing I increasingly look for in any artist that we work with is empathy and the ability to understand the impact of the word you're about to say to the mixed group of young people who are with you' (Glasier, 2017). In this case, the quality for an artist an ability to attune and pre-empt responses from those they are working with. This is not a simple process. It requires future presencing⁶, an open-ness to respond to uncertainty, and an ability to engage in a creative empathic approach to responding to non-verbal cues and 'sensed' emotions in a workshop. Carter, Norris and Annand all state similar points noting that seeking connections with young people, offering bespoke journeys through a creative rehearsal process, and understanding that 'reading the

⁶ Flowers et al. refer to presencing as 'pre-sensing' and bringing into presence – and into the present – your highest future potential. It's not just 'the future' in some abstract sense but my own highest future possibility as a human being' (2010:220).

group' and 'being read by the group' is a reciprocal process are all approaches the Intuit adopts to reach empathic attunement. Tony Bastick (1982) offers explanations about the Intuit's ability to traverse emotional states (emotional sets) through empathic projection:

The organization of information by emotional sets requires the use of empathy to evoke feelings subjectively appropriate to the information, often initially emotionally neutral information from the environment. Attributing the processed information to the appropriate situation, requires projection of these feelings to the objects associated through empathy with the feelings. Hence, empathic projection is a necessary ability of the intuitive type. From the intuitive type's ease of emotional drift and combination of emotional sets it follows that the intuitive type is more emotionally variable than the non-intuitive type (Bastick, 1982:356).

Bastick's description of the ability of the 'intuitive type' denotes a sense of ease moving between emotional states. This may easily be applied to movement between fictional worlds or engagement in a liminal space in devising processes, exploratory workshops and spontaneous improvisation or play. Empathic attunement, structure, and the ability to feel comfortable in moments of uncertainty are all important qualities of the Intuit. This perspective resonates with practitioners' responses when asked how they felt when they walked into a workshop and realised their planned session wouldn't work. Carter reported feeling elated stating 'it's a joy!... It's like hang-gliding, you haven't got your engine – like a glider, you find your thermal and you're riding your thermals' (Carter, 2017). Similarly to Carter's feeling of joy in a moment of uncertainty, Norris noted that upon realising her detailed session plan wouldn't work, she tore it up and stated 'I love it! Absolutely loved it' (Norris, 2017). Glasier reported that he felt confident to react in a moment of 'unknowingness' and because he had trust in the group, he felt relaxed enough to ask for their input to respond. Baker brought up a sense of interest in feeling more present in a workshop than in general life, because of the attention to detail that is required in interactions with vulnerable young people. A majority of respondents have identified feeling comfortable and joyous when faced with the feeling that a planned session needed to be cast aside in favour of responding creatively when planned activities wouldn't work. The application of these qualities to moments of creative engagement are useful to help expand our understanding of what aspects of interaction may be at play when responding intuitively. For the next section, I will illustrate the 'action' of intuition in creative moments of practice. I have chosen one example from a workshop and another from a performance to illustrate two different applications of intuition.

Intuition in Action: Applying qualities of the Intuit

Balfour emphasises the importance of social instinct where 'the facilitator incorporates different aspects of social engagement and awareness' and aesthetic instinct, which Balfour describes as 'related to the ability to identify and introduce appropriate creative and imaginative propositions into a group process' (Balfour, 2016:153). The qualities of the Intuit may be essential for both social engagement and aesthetic instinct. Annand related an unusual moment of practice in one of the Speech Bubbles workshops where a story was suggested by a young participant who contributed a narrative that began with the following opening line: 'Jamie went upstairs and got the scissors and cut off all his hair, then he went to school, and everybody laughed, even nearly the teacher' (Annand, 2017). At this point Annand moved off plan, and spontaneously employed a teacher-in-role technique and stepped into the circle as Jamie. Annand explains this decision:

[...] I hadn't planned this one, but I realised they were really, really engaged with that character, so I then said, okay, I'll tell you what – and this is intuition or it's just having confidence to do it – when I got into the middle of the square I said 'right, I'm going to be the boy cutting my hair, one at a time you can come in and see me, and you're my grown up.' But I suppose the intuition was going 'they are really loving this, we can really extend that communication here' because that's what I'm working on, I'm working on their communication skills (Annand, 2017).

There are multiple layers of intuitive qualities apparent in this example. Empathic attunement is recognisable through Annand's reading of the group's engagement; perhaps their excitement may also be located in his spontaneity to jump into role. The group were familiar with the conventions of teacher-in-role, which allowed Annand to transition between facilitator and performer with ease and without the interruption of explanations about how the technique works. It is clear that the group were able to read and respond to this creative offer, by imagining different characters who might interact with Jamie in this

moment of play, for example an angry mum, a hairdresser and a compassionate adult. There is a thought process that is conscious and provided permission for spontaneity located in Annand's reference back to the intentions of the workshop to develop participant communication skills. What is also clear in this moment is the navigation of creative spontaneity within the support of a structure that is always used in workshops, this is the moment of artistry 'Giving them that structure but maintaining the joy and unique moment in the middle is a real balance' (Annand, 2017). Clearly, this group were able to trust their judgement and play along with the offer made by Annand by mirroring intuition in their improvised responses to the scenario thereby enjoying the opportunities afforded by the moment of spontaneity.

Another moment of intuition in action can be located within a performance by the Verbatim Formula. The company intended to perform a selection of verbatim testimonies from care experienced young people. The triggers to begin a testimony were decided in advance:

- 1.) Testimony is triggered by the proximity of an audience member to a performer.
- 2.) An impromptu performance may be triggered by a performer deciding to begin a testimony, which would then trigger other performers to start too.
- 3.) A performer may spontaneously initiate a testimony starting, which doesn't have to be followed by any other responses.

It is important to note that there had been no further instructions or rehearsals for this particular performance. On the day, Baker relates how the ensemble exhibited impromptu actions that created a moment of significance both theatrically and personally for the person whose testimony was unexpectedly performed by all performers:

[...] at one stage when there were three or four members of the audience in the space... a performer started a testimony and then 4 or 5 seconds later another performer started the same testimony, and 4 or 5 seconds later another performer started the same testimony. So, we suddenly had this polyphony of the same testimony and we hadn't planned it... It was absolutely amazing because they would go in and out of phase and through being an audience member who got to hear the same piece of testimony reiterated, the significance of the testimony changed (Baker, 2017).

In this scenario, a shared moment of communal intuition with one person socially reading and responding to the next created a carousel of voices. It is possible to attribute this moment as an example of aesthetic instinct with the participants responding creatively to the space of the performance, the live audience actions/reactions, and the selection of testimonies they were given to perform. This playful approach indicates a collective act of creativity through intuitive response. There was arguably a clear sense of what Alfred Schutz (1967) terms 'wide-awakeness': '[...] the performing and especially the working self is fully interested in life and, hence, wide-awake. It lives within its acts and its attention is exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan. This attention is an active, not a passive one' (Schutz, 1967: 21). A crude description of Schutz's concept may be found in actions taken when one is fully attuned and present in a space with others, and can respond with immediacy to what is theatrically offered to form a unique, unplanned encounter. To synthesise and build a collective performing body is an extraordinary moment of intuitive engagement. From a neuropsychological position, Charles Laughlin (1997) describes the apparition of an idea from an unknown place: 'Intuition typically labels a type of experience in which the answer to a question, the solution to a problem, guidance in following some goal, a creative impulse resulting in the emergence of some image, idea, or pattern, springs into consciousness... seemingly out of nowhere' (Laughlin, 1997:20). What is striking in Baker's example is the collective response to a creative offering. The creative impulse that Laughlin discusses is clearly apparent in the emerging verbatim performance. It is perhaps of little surprise that intuitive practice might offer such opportunities through the careful empathic and nurturing environments that are offered by each practitioner I have interviewed. The mimesis of intuition, and the resilience gained through trusting personal judgements demonstrates the need for the Intuit in creative practices with young people facing various forms of uncertainty. I would even suggest that without this approach, it may not be possible to engage in creative play, exploration and devising processes. Even though each practitioner has a slightly different experience of intuition, all have been able to identify intuitive moments within their practice. Though intuition is important in creative practice there may be other influential factors that are important to discuss.

Practitioner Experience

Implicit knowing or 'tacit knowledge' is often cited as a key component of intuitive practice (see Reber, 1993, Eraut, 2004, Fisher, 2006, Nelissen et al, 2008, Hepplewhite, 2013). Tacit knowing is about holding understandings that aren't necessarily guided by reason, but are in fact held within a practitioner, which raises questions about whether or not intuition can be learnt if it is not innate. There are conflicting perspectives that offer a mix of support and scepticism towards implicit knowledge. Jennifer Fisher (2006) offers an 'extra-rational' approach to understanding:

[...] intuition presents a reflexive and innate form of knowing – an inner guidance that pertains to implicit insight. Engaging intuition also entails the simultaneity of inward and outward focus in order to grasp a situation as a whole. Moreover, in contrast to deductive thought, intuition holds the capacity to *become* that which it perceives (Fisher, 2006:11).

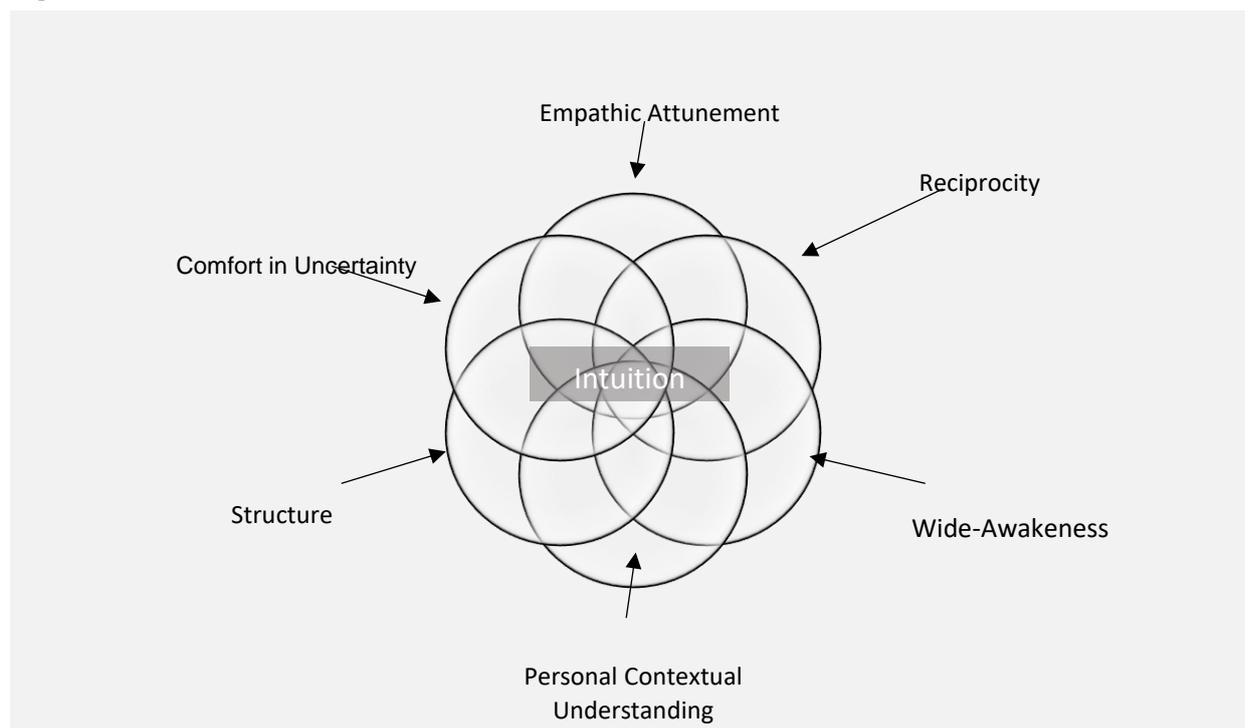
Fisher's reference to innate knowing as a means of seeking direction from perceptual insights can be located in practitioners whose knowledge of the context of their participants may reach beyond an understanding of research or statistics. It is apparent that several practitioners who took part in this research have experience of life circumstances that echo those of their participants. Each practitioner, has either had experience of theatre creating important impacts in their lives, the lives of those they work or have implicit knowledge of the key 'uncertainties' that their participants have experienced. Additionally, each practitioner holds a wealth of knowledge in the forms of their various practice approaches. Kay Hepplewhite (2013) extends this idea noting how explicit knowledge can become as Baker states 'knowing I have a practice' (ibid: 2017). This process is a transferral of explicit knowledge to implicit understanding:

Intuition can be seen as a hunch or insight which then leads to a decision or creative outcome. The intuitive actions of the competent senior applied theatre practitioner have grown through a series of knowing actions to achieve the now tacit understanding s/he uses implicitly within the work (Hepplewhite, 2013:66).

Hepplewhite's reading is a useful perspective on intuition although it is also arguably limited to a rationalised approach towards interpreting intuition and making it 'passable' as a form of knowing. There are clearly points where practitioners I have interviewed have been clear that 'intuition alone doesn't put on a show' (Carter, 2017). There is also a limit to intuition that is important to discuss: it is not always accurate. Annand, Carter and Glasier all noted this possibility. It is, for example, quite possible to misread the actions of a child who does not want to participate as defiant, though there may be many reasons for their response. Taking the 'wrong' reaction to this 'opt out' behaviour could be problematic. It is clear that practitioners require faith in their practice to assist them in moments of uncertainty. Inaction may result from practitioners who are too analytical and who do not trust their judgements because of cognitive dissonance, and it is possible for the Intuit to make misjudgements. However, if misjudgements are made, so long as the practitioner can admit to an error in their decision-making and call upon their group for support to move the devising process forwards, the Intuit can move the session forwards rather than facing creative blocks. Intuition then, is an act of faith. There is also a third point that warrants mention, for the Intuit to have faith in their practice we must not forget the role of the participants. They are vital as 'rejectors' or 'acceptors' of practitioners' suggestions. They help to shape responses, and develop bespoke practices through their feedback, which may be non-verbal, resistant, accepting or engaged in the offer made by the Intuit. Intuition cannot succeed without their acceptance.

Referring back to the Verbatim Formula, it is clear that participants responded differently to the project once they were aware that the creative team 'knew' what uncertainty the participants may be encountering, because they had lived it in their own experiences. Baker describes how he felt the group let down the armour that protects them in day to day life, to give themselves permission to join in and play as a result of this shared recognition. It is clear that the offer of innate knowledge, that may remain largely unexplained, was essential for the group to relax into intuitive moments of engagement. This is an act of reciprocity. It is a mirroring of intuitive knowing in action; an implicit form of understanding that requires no explanation, yet it is clearly important for participants to feel understood, and it is important that they accept the Intuit's response to them.

Figure 1. Elements of Intuitive Practice



Conclusion: Limits & Possibilities

Experience is part of the reason why intuitive decisions are successful in practice. However, there are two layers to this where empirical evidence is absent. Firstly, the ability to trust one's judgement and to empathically attune to a group is not necessarily something tangible, which means it must be an inherent quality that a practitioner possesses. Secondly, trying to understand non-tangible abilities in practitioners who are able to hold a deep understanding of participants, and interpret understanding into responsive actions is complex. Glasier offers a useful insight: 'It's like sitting in someone's brain in the present to understand what might happen in the next bit. I think it's very rare. It's hard to find in people we employ, and when we get it, we keep it' (Glasier, 2017). The rarity of this ability is important to note. It suggests that this ability is not inherent in all who work with vulnerable young people, though it is clearly important. The capacity of a practitioner to navigate uncertainty is another aspect of intuition. The careful balance between structures that offer support to participants and moments of intuitive agency are also significant; they allow participants to build confidence in their own judgments and safely enter liminal spaces of play.

There are clearly limitations to this research. Of the many practitioners working in London, there may be other challenges to navigate for the Intuit, which suggests that further research is warranted to grasp a more extensive perception of the role in action. The qualities for intuitive engagement may well differ from context to context, and from group to group. One might posit that working with elders or with carers or within prisons, requires a different set of intuitive abilities to respond to context-specific creative challenges. The role of reciprocity in intuitive mirroring and the acceptance of the Intuit's offer(s), warrant further examination to note their significance. The expansion of research to address intuition in applied theatre practice may open new avenues for practitioners and for training young practitioners to practice responsively with vulnerable groups. For now, I suggest that for applied theatre practitioners working with vulnerable youth, intuition can be perceived as a creative balance of empathic attunement, immediacy, wide-awakeness, implicit knowledge, reciprocity, and an ability to respond to uncertainty through creative and imaginative (re)actions.

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