

ACT IV

Introduction to this Section

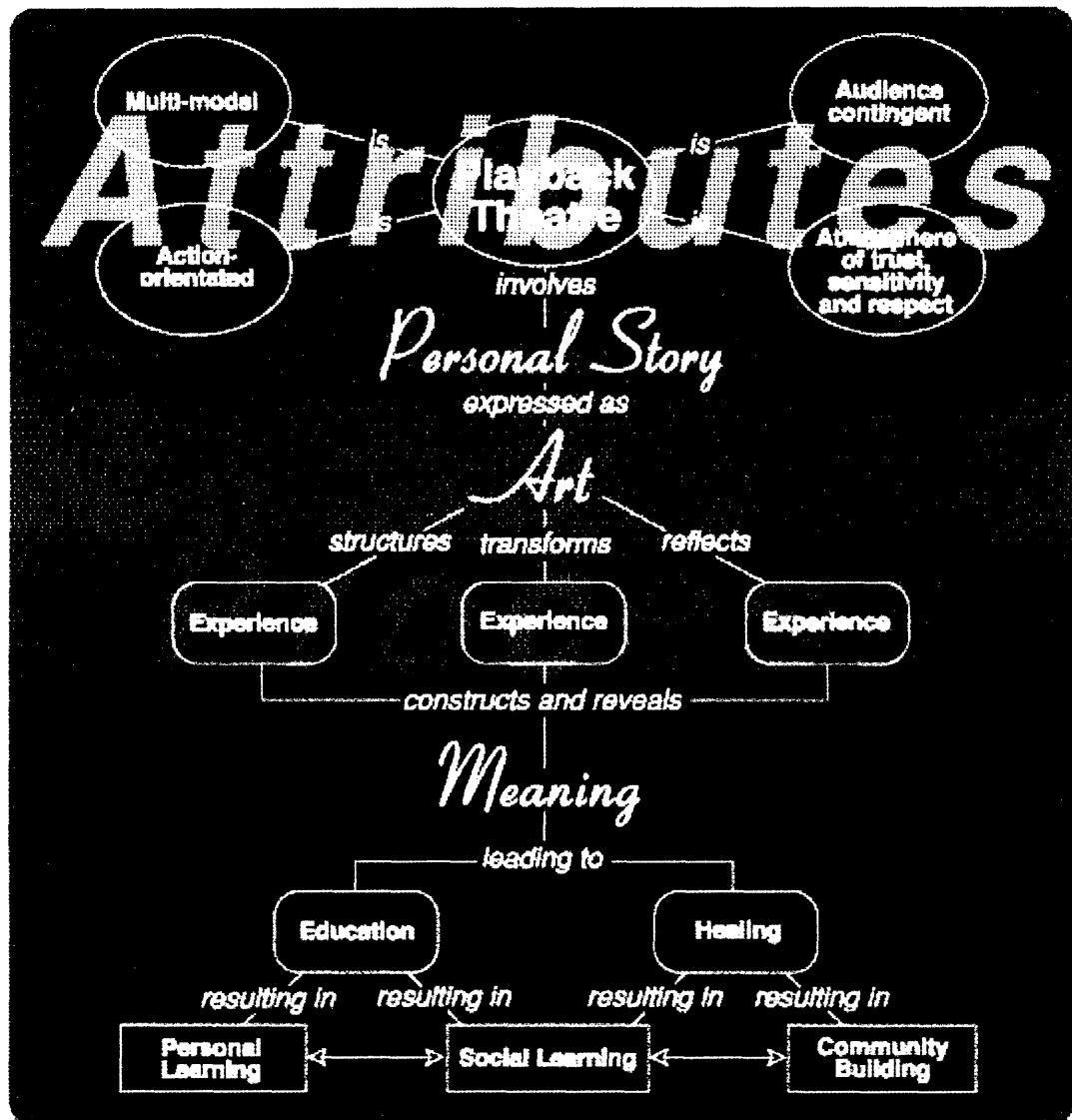
This fourth Act of the thesis comprises three scenes (Chapters 9, 10 & 11). These chapters present data linking the propositions of PBT with the horizon of experience of the co-investigators. Chapter Nine will consider the *attributes* of PBT, or “the thing itself”, and Chapter Ten will consider the *process* of PBT—that is, “how participants make meaning of this thing”. In the last chapter of this section, Chapter Eleven, I present data that reveals the *outcomes* of PBT, in short, “what meanings people make”. It is also important to remember that these three dimensions are reported through the descriptions and voices of the co-investigators themselves, that is, the *lived experience* of PBT.

Chapter Nine, which follows, considers propositions associated with the *attributes* of PBT as represented in the literature, whilst mindful that this literature to date does not include any substantive empirical investigations, but rather is grounded in the PBT practitioner movement. First, I present in graphic form an analytical model that I used as a heuristic tool to search for empirical evidence of these propositions. The representation is given in the form of an Entity Relationship Diagram (ERD) (Chen 1976)—that is, an abstraction of the real world that simplifies the problem to be solved while retaining its essential features (Ross 1987). The diagram identifies entities, shown in the rectangular boxes, and the relationships that link those entities, shown as lines. These descriptors specify the nature of the relationship. In one sense, the boxes represent nouns while the links or relationships are verbs. The propositions that constitute the model flow from and/or map directly on to these entities and the relationships that link them together. It is also important to understand this as an analytical heuristic based on the academic and professional literature concerning PBT that, as I have previously highlighted, is both descriptive and analytical, but rarely of an empirical nature.

What I report here is how these propositions, inherent in PBT, “map” on to this ERD. This mapping reveals evidence from the data that either supports these propositions or throws them into a new light.

Figure 6

An analytical model of Playback Theatre



This ERD is divided into three general sections. The first section pertains to PBT particularly, and its *attributes*—that is, those constituent elements that go to make up PBT, or “the thing itself”. Second, there is a section that relates to the PBT *process*—that is, **how** PBT goes about achieving its outcomes. And third, a section that reveals the *outcomes* that participants report as a result of the lived experience of PBT itself. What is important to

understand is that these three sections have *blurred* rather than fixed boundaries—this notion reflected graphically in the gradation of colour.

For example, while it is the case that personal story is an attribute of PBT, it is also part of the process. It should be noted, further, that each of these properties and dimensions can be further atomised as part of the analysis; however, to follow this process to its legitimate end is to fracture PBT apart into very small units that does not represent the organic interrelated nature of the form.

It is important to understand that this representation of an analytical model of PBT is not in any way meant to imply that the entities and their linking relationships are of a causal nature, as might be expected for instance in experimental work. That is, one entity is not in a “stimulus-response” relationship to another. For example, in relation to *healing* and *learning*, it is not the case that one is always an immediate precursor to, or a result of, the other; healing shapes learning in the same sense that learning fashions healing. Hence, they are in a dynamic relationship, and are connected by a dialectic that is part of a larger process. When they are pulled apart, something is lost. Therefore, this diagram represents one way of conceptualising this set of interrelationships and provides a set of propositions that have guided the analyses.

These propositions were then operationalised—a process that was facilitated by the “search operators” in the software package, and the coding and conceptual work already completed, and held in the NUD*IST tree. As a consequence, I took each proposition and searched for empirical evidence bearing upon it. In addition, following on from principles espoused by Miles and Huberman (1994:278-280), I also searched for evidence of negative, new or “surprising” cases.

For this set of propositions, listed in the order that I searched for them for analytical purposes see Appendix E. It is important to understand that these propositions do not necessarily fall neatly into any one of the three conceptualisations mentioned. However, this conceptualisation of *attributes*, *processes* and *outcomes* provides a way of systematically considering all of the propositions of PBT while not closing off opportunity for new categories, concepts or interactions to emerge.

CHAPTER NINE

Playback Theatre: Attributes

The actors are at hand, and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know.
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.i. 115-16)

Introduction

This chapter presents empirical evidence illuminating the *attributes* or characteristics of PBT as revealed through the co-investigators' experience and voices. In this chapter, I focus on thirteen key propositions with their properties and dimensions that have been conceptualised from the literature—a process described at the beginning of this Act. Each of these propositions is discussed in light of relevant co-investigators' comments and statements that are reported verbatim.

Playback Theatre Attributes

A1. Playback Theatre is based on story.

PBT uses story for its text, and the playback itself has a narrative structure. Simone with a background as a psychiatrist, described her experience of the storytelling in PBT this way:

I think it is a hunger for being acknowledged and being listened to, and to the credit of the actors, they really know how to listen and how to invite that response. That's an art and they have got it.

Simone has highlighted the potential of story to help define and express identity and humanity. Louise drew attention to how stories exist in all cultures:

You know, it's fluid and it's playful and stories are really wonderful things and I think, 'Well, you know, what do we have in life except for a whole lot of stories'.

That stories are wonderful and stories are wonderful in any culture, you know, all cultures have their storytelling conditions and, and I love stories⁴².

Louise saw stories as a narrative of life in all cultures, and by emphasising the pleasure that she got from story in PBT, she offered a potential explanation of why story is universal. Brad, in reinforcing these notions, also described the bonding role that story can play:

That's the value of story. And that's what stories in primitive cultures are all about too. Storytelling is a bonding exercise for that culture. Often they can tell the same story over and over again. They contain a higher verbal; their history is all tied up with verbal stories. That's where the real value is because you are much more likely to remember the Playback stories. I remember all the Playback plays. I seem to because of that community feeling. Because I shared it with other people. There might be a community memory, if you like.

For Brad, the community element was important, not only for the collective experience that it engendered, but also because of its power to assist memory. This idea highlights the socially educative potential of story.

Uma also picked up on the power of story, describing how story can be profound, with a potential for both good and bad:

So if you take Jungian stuff, if you take Jungian ideas of archetypes and stories and myth, universal mythologies across cultures, the idea of story is very dominant there. I guess it's sort of about not underestimating the power of the story. That it can be a very profound technique and it can be used to great good, and I think it can be used to harm.

Mitchell, comparatively new to PBT, drew attention to how it has provided a venue where his story can be told, and heard:

And what came into focus for me is that Playback seems to be a safe venue for me to access that sort of [personal] material, 'cos I've actually tried to do an awful lot of my history over the past few years in, in different venues, and, in Playback I've found the venue that is a public place to do it. And it seems to me to be a bit of cultural tradition that I've never had in my life where through storytelling, I got to get in touch with my stuff, people get to get in touch with their stuff and that's what it's about.

Mitchell, in speaking of PBT's opportunity through story to "get in touch with my/their stuff". Indicates how story can be both universal and pervasive. Simone eloquently described this notion, and she is worth quoting at length:

⁴² Each of the co-investigators' quotes has been edited for ease of reading. This has been a tension for me, as I sought to remain true to exactly what each person has said. However, having left all of these stutters and grammatical errors in, it became clear that these were distracting and I subsequently removed them. Where significant pauses or laughter were crucial to the meaning of what was said, these were left in.

We are shaped from our very early beginning through stories. Later little kids get told stories, bedside stories, and stories tell us how to live, how to behave, what is good and evil. You have got the ten commandments, the bible is a book of stories, the aboriginal myth[s], all the other myths you think and care about, are all about stories about human development, about human relations, about human code of conduct and what happens to you if you do such and such and what you can expect. So our whole life and our experiences are shaped around stories. So, part of my work is to listen to a story, every patient has a story to tell and I like case histories, and every drug that comes on the market has a story to tell. There is a story to everything. You know this cushion has a story. They all have stories to tell. So it's the concrete way to experience and understand the world around us. You know, we are stories.

Story, in short, can be seen as a powerful medium that taps cultural, social and personal needs, and PBT, at its heart, revolves around story.

A2. Playback Theatre transforms personal story into theatre.

In relation to this proposition, seven out of the 47 co-investigators commented on how, as indicated earlier in discussion of the narrative—performance axis (Chapter 4), PBT takes personal story and transforms it into theatre. Two of the seven co-investigators were tellers.

Tracey, a teller, described what happened with her own story:

Well the performers, from memory in lateral and creative way, not a literal way because Playback would be terribly boring if it was exactly literal, and it wouldn't build on what is offered. It is taking ... the performers listened very attentively to what I said and what I didn't say, and what I implied maybe, and filtered that through their own knowledge of the world with the intent of trying to capture what I had said, and what I had not said and present that back to me and to other people in the room. They managed to do that successfully. So they are doing it in action, which is a way of externalising. Playback is fascinating because it is not only the externalising of your own, like painting or writing is an externalising, giving form and making tangible your own experience, whereas Playback is doing that with someone else's experience which is quite a remarkable skill, a special combination of skills.

Tracey highlighted the fact that the actors take a story that is told, and give it aesthetic form, in short make art out of it—and in this case *theatre art*. Interestingly, her reference to the actors' use of the said, and the unsaid, hints at story's layered nature and the process of transformation.

Nancy, while not a teller on this occasion, also drew attention to how personal story is transformed into theatre, and what that meant for her:

I think it takes you beyond the experience. And maybe can, because of the artistic nature of it and the way they present it, or for me anyway, that can connect with me at different levels, than maybe if they just spoke. Maybe it expands the picture of the interaction, because the spoken word is actually very limited, so his story is sort of expanded by the artist. You know by the way they do it, now they might

also have some words but that's, that fits in with the movement or the creating of the picture.

For Nancy, the artistic rendering of the teller's story made it more than the particular story itself, and hence an observer not only connects with the story, but also with some of the broader themes or issues raised. PBT, then, can transform personal story into theatre, and, in like manner, the Playback can elicit the participant's personal story.

A3. Playback Theatre has elements of therapy, theatre, community building and storytelling.

This proposition highlights that PBT has a number of different elements to it. These elements include the theatrical, storytelling, the therapeutic/healing, and community building. A search across all co-investigators' responses showed a plethora of material where respondents had specifically talked about one or more of these elements. For example, 35 out of the 47 interviewed talked specifically about theatre, 29 talked about story and storytelling, 35 mentioned therapy/healing, and 33 talked about community building. In addition, there are a number of intersections where these ideas are talked about in relation to each other.

Interestingly, a search across the four nodes of Story, Art Form, Therapy and Community Building did not elicit any text that was coded at all four nodes. This means that the co-investigators did not consciously link all of these four ideas together; that is, they did not talk about any of these ideas in relation to each other. In addition, a search across Story, Art Form and Therapy also did not produce any evidence that participants intentionally talked about these entities in relation to each other. However, when Story, Art Form and Community Building were intersected, there was evidence that these entities are linked through the experience of PBT.

Brad, a regular attendee, described this connection in these words:

A thing I think is fairly obvious. The value for the stories in Playback is the way it's told. And [the conductor] hit on it that night at the end when she said 'we became a community that night' because we all shared each other's stories in front of other people. That's what the power of Playback is.

Brad also went on to make a distinction between "popular" theatre and PBT, hinting at the roots that it draws on:

That was where the power of original theatre came from. Many people went to the theatre [and] they became a community. Now when we go to see Phantom of the Opera or one of the latest musicals we all sit in these dark rooms and we don't even see the person sitting next to us. We see a wonderfully professional

entertaining show, but you couldn't even remember what the person next to you looked like.

Interestingly, Brad highlighted here how sharing these stories within a “community” endowed them with extra significance. And for him, it was also “the way that it was told”, that is, *how* it was made into Theatre Art, by a form of *interchange* rather than mere *presentation*.

There is also evidence in the interview data of links between the entities of Art Form, Therapy and Community Building. Ursula, for example, highlighted explicitly the connection in PBT between theatre and therapy:

I think they do resonate actually. Playback seems to be a funny halfway point between drama and therapy. I think it would be a very useful form of self-reflection. I think it's a very useful therapeutic tool, personally. I think it's obviously got a very valid role in hearing [and] allowing people to be heard and maybe allow themselves to heal.

What is important to understand about this proposition is that PBT is seen as composed of a number of different elements—theatre, storytelling and what I refer to in Chapter Three as “healing”—and these elements are talked about as both interconnected and interactive. However, these elements interact at different times and in different ways.

A4. Healing and Art are both integral aspects of Playback Theatre.

In addressing this proposition, I have further organised this higher order idea into sub-themes and various dimensions of those themes. First, I will report on the connection, through the co-investigators' words, between PBT and Art.

Kirsten, an enormously experienced playback actor and musician, explained the healing—art connection this way:

Good art always has that affect. If it is well done, if it is coming from a deep inspiration and there is a lot of skill and inspiration in how it manifested, then it always has that affect on people of this kind of very deep delight and relief almost or expansion which is healing. It is profoundly healing. It is very healing for people to go to a concert of beautiful music and be surrounded by that gloriously well put together network of sound and tambours. There is something that nurtures the spirit. When that element of art, all of that I have just been saying, in a deliberately therapeutic context it would have to just enormously deepen the therapeutic effect.

Art, and in this case theatre art, therefore, can be an integral part of PBT, organising and giving coherence to experience. Furthermore, this experience of art can be healing in the way that it provides meaning, delight and relief. This experience can also be ontologically affirming where participants feel “expanded”, with their spirits “nurtured”.

(a) Playback Theatre is linked explicitly with Art.

i. This illustrates that PBT is capable of conveying universality of meaning beyond the individual stories that are told. Tess, a first time attendee, described how individual stories could be seen on a number of different levels:

You could kind of see that one [story] on two levels. It was just a light story about doing something. But I guess it was also about— there was something also a bit special about the story too. There was something a bit deeper to the story. I liked that.

For Tess, PBT often revealed layers of meaning in a story. Inga, also a first time attendee, described her own experience where a particular story that was told resonated more broadly with her own experience:

I suppose it's the way that other people's stories have echoes for you. Funny enough that first story in some way had a lot of echoes for me. I thought maybe it was because it was about relationships between fathers and sons and all that kind of stuff. And it was interesting, I looked at that and thought of my father who had been sick.

Interestingly, in this later example, the story that Inga referred to was told by a male, about a male, but Inga was able to see broader echoes than merely the gender involved, with the evocation of her own father.

Elaine, an occasional attendee, also identified the universal nature of stories told in PBT:

The duck story—I mean it's incredible that such simple stories actually tap into these huge things. Because that duck story was such a simple story, but when Playback really works the actors relate that story to the universe and make it a bigger story and that's when it's really powerful ... this is a story about the whole way we are treating this planet. So it seems like they always come back to these huge stories, life, death, struggle and happiness versus unhappiness, and families. Relationships and families.

What Elaine identified is that particular stories can have universal themes underlying them, and it is this universality that allows them to have meaning beyond the immediate story told. Here PBT is functioning as Art.

ii. Playback Theatre endows the stories that are told with aesthetic form in that the stories told are responded to in an artistic way. This dimension of the proposition describes how PBT is aesthetic, that is, displays some qualities that link it to art. Louise, attending for the first time, said:

It's more like a piece of poetry or something which is fluid. Here's a picture, here's a representation of your story that you can play around with and do what you want but it's still leaves the storyteller or the audience owning the story. It's

abstract enough to leave the storyteller with another insight into their story, but still owning their story because it doesn't attempt to replicate it.

This comment by Louise describes experience of qualities in PBT that link it to art—"like a piece of poetry".

What is interesting is that while seven out of 47 co-investigators explicitly talk about the aesthetic in relation to PBT, many more do this by inference. For example, Tracey, a regular attendee, linked PBT with the arts more generally, and specifically arts processes:

Well, the performers from memory, in a lateral and creative way, not a literal way, because Playback would be terribly boring if it was exactly literal and it wouldn't build on what is offered... like painting or writing is an externalising, giving form and making tangible your own experience whereas Playback is doing that with someone else's experience which is quite a remarkable skill, a special combination of skills.

Tracey highlighted that not only does PBT take the stories told and work with them in an artistic way, but also by this process gives shape and form to experience. This is a feature of the Arts more generally⁴³.

Tara, a first time attendee and student of drama, talked specifically about fluid sculptures⁴⁴:

[T]hey were doing things similar to the way they did their body moulding [fluid] sculpture. (pause) They're not expressing it all in words, for example, where the mother sat down with her hands on her head and with her back to everybody, that was not putting in words but showing that she was closing herself out from everyone else.

This illustrates how the telling was done with aesthetic form: "body moulding sculptures" and has also been responded to in artistic way: "the mother sat down ... showing that she closing herself out ...". Nancy also highlighted this notion:

... So his story is sort of expanded by the artist ... you know by the way they do it, now they might also have some words but that's, that fits in with the movement or the creating of the picture.

What Nancy and Tara both describe is how PBT, through the use of aesthetic form "body moulding sculpture" and "creating of the picture", not only gives shape to experience, but also takes the specific and makes it universal.

⁴³ It is also important to understand that the fact that I have used this quote earlier in relation to another proposition reveals that people tend to talk about ideas in relation to each other.

⁴⁴ A sub-form of PBT.

iii. The aesthetic form, which links the theatrical process and art, is in itself capable of eliciting feelings. Curtis, a regular attendee, had this to say:

The fascinating thing is both [stories] were very ordinary and when they were told, you think “oh yeah, OK”, but the moment that I remember with [the actor] last year was when the violinist was talking with the teacher. And he was trying to say, I can’t remember what it was, but something happened and then [the actor] played this guy’s love of music and it started to come to him. And there was someone behind me who started crying in an uncontrollable way. And then I could see [someone] was there, the musician was there, quite close too, and it was like ... they were just ... I mean it was like a dance that was happening between them. And this enormously subtle thing that’s just touching something. For it went down to the bedrock of something about our hopes for ourselves and what it is to be human, and to imagine and dream about our lives. And it was probably quite short, maybe just a couple of minutes. There was something about that that just for me touched something in my own life too, my own longings for what I want to do, where I want to be, and my own truth experience of myself. There was something ... I don’t know, almost universal, just kind of crystallised out in that moment. It was extraordinary.

The evocation of emotion is clearly shown in this comment: “someone started to cry in an uncontrollable way”; “[it] touched my own longings...”. Interestingly, what Curtis also reinforced is how the aesthetic leads from the particular to the universal: “there was something ... almost universal ... crystallised out of that moment”. In other words, Art has the capacity both to speak to us and to take us beyond ourselves. More specifically, the aesthetic form draws on, and uses, metaphor and symbolism. Ewan, a first time attendee, described his own experience thus:

There was actually one bit. One of the feelings, I think it was, one of the words was “satisfaction”. And one of the performers put two boxes one on top of each other and stood back and looked at it, and the sort of the hands on the hips and said ‘I’m pretty impressed with that, good job’. And I thought yes! What an interesting way to express that. You know it could be anything she’d done. All she done was put one box on top of another. But to actually get that whole, ‘oh wow isn’t that fantastic’ across. I thought it came across really well. I felt myself laughing at that, thinking that’s really creative, that’s a really good thing to do. Minimal resources and actually get a whole message across was really profound.

Inga, with a background in drama, also understood this notion, linking it with the capacity of participants to identify with the stories that are told:

And I think the other thing that struck me was the use of symbolism by the actors to— I was really interested in their use of symbolic form. In fact when I’d been told about Playback Theatre I had this image of it as being very realistic, almost like someone tells a story and people act it out in a kind of realistic way. In fact, it isn’t realistic. OK, it has elements of realism, but it really used symbolism a lot. That’s something I’m particularly interested in. These are representations in theatre and not just naturalism and sort of emotional identification techniques. So I found that really interesting.

Inga went on to describe one specific example of this:

There was one bit, for example, where the mother was keeping the anger in, one of the actresses or actors got hold of a red piece of material and she was meant to be sick so this material made you feel there was a sickness inside her but it was also representative of the red of the anger. I thought that was really powerful. And then another, the actors put on black to represent the dying friend in that last session that was used. That was powerful. And the same actor used a blue piece of material to— when she was playing the father of the person who said his father always went to the shed to be angry but never showed anger in front of the family. And I don't know why the blue was significant, but it was somehow. I don't know whether it was— I think it was because the story teller had said 'remember my father used to be very calm in front of us but then used to go to the shed and all hell would break loose', all kind of blue words.

(b) Playback Theatre is linked explicitly with healing.

i. Healing because the atmosphere of trust and respect—where the act of honouring the teller and their story endows the individual with a sense of status—provides recognition and affirmation. This proposition describes how the atmosphere of PBT has certain characteristics that enable healing to occur. Mitchell, described some of these characteristics:

Playback ... honours grief, and that honours humans in a way that I don't see happen much in this society.

Curtis, a psychotherapist, also drew a parallel between what he sees happen in his own practice and what happens in PBT:

So my understanding of what happens, certainly here, and I think that there is a parallel with Playback, is that they're actually coming to me to find a place which is safe, contained and which can often take a long time. And where they can feel that it's going to be OK to talk about other stuff, and to allow this other stuff out. And that still, I'm not going to abandon them. The connection is still going to be there.

Curtis highlights that participants have to feel safe in order to tell a story, and that when they have done this, they will not be abandoned. This reflects the notions of trust and respect that are integral to PBT, and also parallels what exists in a counselling session. Furthermore, when participants experience the qualities of trust and respect, they can feel endowed with status and affirmed—all important in the healing process. Brad, a teller, described his experience of feeling affirmed, and how this gave him hope:

They're issues because we think we're the only ones suffering from them, it intensifies the suffering. But at least knowing other people around you in the community are going through exactly the same things as you. It says, 'oh OK this is sad, this is hard but John down the street has had that happen to him too'. So you know, he survived, I can go on.

And Ugo, a teller, also felt “respected”:

And that it’s good to share experiences and other things, I think, it means that because they’re kind of not taking the piss, if you like. They’re not abusing your material. I think there is that potential. That’s not what happened. I felt kind of respected and appreciated if you like, rather than anything else.

Likewise Evan, who attends occasionally, was not only able to articulate how he experienced feeling affirmed, but also how affirmation leads to connections being developed with others:

That's rare and I think that it's important for us to all feel that we are being heard, that we are being understood. And I think also that thing of being part of the universal or at least a wider experience in us and what your feeling is, is not just you, you know, you are not the only one, that there is other people as well. So if you can see somebody else's experience as being similar to yours, oh yes, I know what that feels like you know, then I think is an equal part of feeling connection with other people. And I think that's a very important thing that we feel connected to other people who in one way or another we live with. I mean we live with millions of other people in Sydney and when you come a little bit closer to them like in that situation in the Theatre, then I feel it's good to be able to feel some closeness with them.

Evan, in this short space of time managed to mention “feeling” or “feel” seven times!

Simone, with a background as a psychiatrist, drew attention to another dimension of this proposition; that is, the status and attention that specifically goes with telling:

You are important ... the most important person of the moment in this room whilst telling and the audience listens. It's an interesting number of audience. It makes it relatively intimate but also quite public. But there is something very rewarding of getting, about getting all this attention.

Interestingly, Simone also raised the idea that audience size is a factor in considering the healing potential of PBT, and also that people might tell stories for a variety of purposes. These aspects of PBT are not mentioned in the aphorisms described here, and I will turn attention to these, and others, in a subsequent section.

ii. Playback Theatre is safe, nurturing, accepting and provides a non-judgemental forum where stories can be told. Kate, an experienced playbacker, said in interview:

I mean I have been at shows where people actually share things incredibly personal, and I think that they surprise themselves with what comes out. Then it somehow, yeah it’s a passport to be able to tell. It feels like a safe place, very non-judgemental place to tell a story. There is no-one going to try and fix you up or try and tell you should be different.

Kate is describing PBT as “it feels like a safe place ... no one is going to try and fix you”.

Shane, who attends PBT regularly, in observing this characteristic of safety and acceptance, provided an insight into how this feeling is engendered:

In a way that was quite good because he [the conductor] would introduce an element of honesty. I think the whole thing was aiming to be very honest and it broke down the traditional role of performer versus audience, it broke down the traditional role of watcher or voyeur versus protagonist, and I think in the way the conductor led people through their own fear and knowledge that they would be frightened to speak up and that, it actually made it a much more real event. So I think, honesty, reality and a degree of creativity and really realism and relevance to individuals was what was going to come through.

Importantly, Shane highlighted that with the conductor and the company modelling important qualities such as “aiming to be very honest”; the “tone” is set for what is to follow. In other words, a licence is provided where participants know they can tell their story—no matter what it is—and that participants and their story, will be treated with integrity.

Finally, John, a regular attendee, highlighted that in PBT judgement is suspended and that e personally “put[s] aside the judgement”:

I feel that there is no judgement when a story’s presented. I put aside the judgement, and watch what the story is. I was just hoping that other people did that. I get the feeling that generally that’s what happens with Playback; that judgement is suspended, and that’s the beauty of the story that’s brought out.

iii. Playback Theatre has a capacity to move each person toward his or her fullest humanity—this humanity being reflected in the individual’s spontaneity and creativity. Shane described how in his experience PBT engages each person in a creative way, and this was both implicit and explicit within it—implicit in the process that is used, and explicit in what was modelled by the actors. Shane described both of these facets thus:

At the end of the evening [the conductor] says talk to someone beside you if you had a story, what would it have been? Or what touched you tonight? Or use the notion that he actually said to the audience, ‘what is something that you would have like to have seen or happen tonight?’ And someone came up with the idea of a magic grab-bag or something you know and then he ran with that, and said, ‘Well, okay, if you had your magic grab-bag, what would you extract from that, from the evening?’ And one of the actual performers said that what they would grab out of it would be a story of hope or something like that you know, which was great that it was voiced and great that it was voiced by someone who perhaps has a position of the greater authority, both from a personal and structural sense. So that sort of sense that everyone is a creative being comes out time and time again both inside the drama and within Playback.

Mitchell, an occasional attendee, also described how this nexus between humanity and creativity seemed to be a natural “fit”:

‘Cos I actually find [Playback Theatre] seems to be something comes together in a very natural way. That it’s, actually a very natural human behaviour to want to be

together to be open and to change, to go through change whatever's happening there, whatever it is, you know. Experience of it is about change— Whatever it is for whoever, it seemed to be a really natural, human thing to do. Which has been just a saving grace for me, to realise that.

Mitchell's words reveal that, for him, being “open” and “open to change”, a process in his experience facilitated through PBT, was a “saving grace”. For Shane, a regular attendee, the process of PBT facilitated his own creativity in an active way, and this gave him a greater awareness of “who” he was, and his “place” in the world:

But to have your story related back in a creative way, it's not just a creative way; it's the fact that you've participated in a creative process. So in other words, you are a creator and the ordinary becomes divine (pause). It leads to all sorts of possibilities as well, if that is possible, which it is because you're actually participating in it, so you're having an actual experience that is both subjective and objective, and it can't be denied that that's what's going on and it sort of, in a sense, realigns your appreciation of who you are, and how you are, and what you've done in the world.

These quotes reveal that PBT does engage participants in a way that facilitates their own sense of creativity and spontaneity. In addition, this process can have therapeutic implications—“[it] realigns your appreciation of who you are ...”.

iv. Meaning, when presented as integrity of form, that is, with aesthetic properties, is in itself a fundamental and profoundly affirming agent of healing.

Liselle had this to say which supports the above proposition:

Well because in the Playback Theatre the performances [were] reflecting [the participants] own experiences and their feelings and they might be able to see it clearer, so it was better to look at the other person [the actor] rather than looking inside. Inside them might be a lot of confusion, but when you see it acted outside out of you, you look at it differently.

Liselle, in saying how in PBT participants “might be able to see it clearer” and “you might look at it differently” shows that meaning is given shape and form, which provides clarity and awareness. Ned, who told a story of his father dying that very day, described his experience as both “freeing” and “healing”:

But the coinciding of the ... death and the playback experience ... was a blessing for me. I was actually moving from the grief and in a sense there is some anger with all of that ... the playing out of that, my relationship with my Dad was a gift to me also by those people in that place and that time and so it was somehow, there is some freeing in that, some healing in that.

Suzanna, with experience as a Playback actor, also highlighted this aspect and suggested how it may work:

They used a lot of metaphor in it, and I think that that worked very well ... for the teller, to be at a point where she actually had moved further along in her analysing the whole situation. In the beginning, it was she wasn't sure of how her stance was, whether it was all worth it or, or whatever. By the end of that story she was saying, 'It was worth it, because that's what that woman wanted'. So, there was real movement [in her understanding].

What Suzanna draws attention to is the way that metaphor is part of the artistic process, with experience of this aesthetic dimension facilitating a change of understanding.

A5. The structure of Playback Theatre is ritualistic.

This proposition describes how PBT uses ritual structurally, and for a variety of purposes. Ulwin, a regular attendee, described how it is ritualistic:

It's a ritual form of mirroring to an individual something that is very personal and to an audience something that is collective, that's part of the human experience. It's taking a fragment of that human experience and as it says 'playing it back'. Mirroring it. Reflecting it back to the different audiences that are there.

Tracey, a first time attendee, described how ritual was used in the "warm-up" as an icebreaker, and as a way of gently involving the audience:

I liked the way it was introduced. I really liked the way [the conductor] started with asking the actors how they would describe themselves. I thought that that was very intimate, helped to build a connection between the audience and the actors. And I particularly liked a couple of the words that the actors used in describing [themselves]. I think that that was what [helped] in getting the audience involved because then people volunteered words and it's also a very gentle way to break the ice and to get people involved because most people could at least think of a word to describe what they felt. And then things are quite generally worked on, on that to draw more information from the audience to describe how they were feeling.

i. These rituals serve to both contain (create frames) and transform the teller's (and audience's) experience. Ritual in PBT is a sophisticated notion. Usually, it is only those co-investigators who are very knowledgeable about PBT, or have a strong background in theatre or drama, who have some understanding of it. However, ritual is an important aspect of PBT as it provides a constant structure around the maelstrom of creativity. It does this in a variety of ways.

First, ritual helps to establish a feeling of safety. Ulwin described this clearly:

Not necessarily comfortable but safe. So I am allowed to be uncomfortable and know that I will be safe. That is done [in Playback Theatre] in the warm up sessions, the fragments, the moment stuff. That shows that these people are going to treat the moment with respect. Nothing is done that in any way is like abusive or put-down. So even new people coming in get that sense, and someone like myself who's been around it for long enough to know that this form doesn't change, that safety is brought in.

Second, ritual helps to induce a liminal space where the transformation of experience can occur. Ulwin went on to describe this ritual aspect in relation to tellers:

But then in ritual form invite someone to move into a different space, step over the threshold. The first moment is the opportunity to indicate a fragment of it from the audience, or the invitation to step across the line, to walk across the stage. That's crossing a threshold. Then there's a series of questions that are designed to be non-confrontational, open-ended. 'Where does this story begin', 'Where' has two meanings: it has time, it has space, geography, it has emotional space, any way you want to take it. So it's a series of questions that are designed to extract the key elements in the way the storyteller wishes to tell them. But also has a secondary purpose to enable the actors to hear, to get their bit and the intensity with which the actors will listen.

Umberto, a young person attending for the first time and also a teller, described his experience of this threshold—that is, the induction into the liminal space—as: “almost like an out of body experience, watching what was going on through my head at that time”. Dianna, while not a teller, also experienced this sense of liminality which was different to the here and now:

It [the action] was happening very close, only a few feet away from where I was. There was a juxtaposition of the real person and the people she had chosen to represent herself and other people in her life. It was really the essence of her story in a really concentrated droplet. I suppose that had in it its potency. There was an irresistible force about it. I forgot where I was. I forgot surroundings. When I look back on it I don't just think of a bare floor and those four blue boxes. It was much more of a whole picture of her life and of her experiences. I feel like I have these pictures in my mind that they created somehow of her whole existence and of the whole story.

Uma, with the benefit of postgraduate qualifications in Sociology, was able to clearly articulate how she saw ritual used in PBT:

Well, they always do that ritual of talking people before you start, talking to people you don't know in the audience and I think that's a very important ritual. It's sort, that's the first telling of the story to someone you don't know and it gets easier from there. It's a sense of everyone's in there together. Oh, and there's a sense that people go there knowing that that's what they're going to do, so usually a good part of the audience are there because they value the telling of stories and ... listening to [them] and the creation of magic.

Importantly, Uma identified the way that there is a ritual beginning to PBT that deals with the needs of the group. This also helps to develop the feelings of mutual trust and respect that are so important to PBT. In addition, her experience of the “creation of magic” also links the development of liminality with the aesthetic—and it is in the creation of this space that change and transformation can occur.

Third, the rituals that exist in PBT also serve to contain the spontaneity and creativity that lie at the heart of the process. Ursula described an example where the ending to a story was found, and how this ritual “ending” acted to not only debrief those present but also “contain” the story that was told:

And the summing up I thought was terrific because it helped put it in perspective and finish. I was very glad that [the conductor] made a real emphasis of finding endings to the stories. And especially for the woman in the body cast because I felt, she couldn't find the ending when he asked her because it was still a current issue. But he was making it come to an end for her. I felt 'wow', that's a real gift to her. If she can let that sit for a while. What he is saying to her is 'it has an ending'. It was just great. Him putting it in perspective for me. And a bit like a debrief before we moved on to the next story. So that it was contained. That was really good. So you actually began it, you processed it, you finished it and then you could move onto the next story.

Ulwin, with his deep understanding of ritual, was also able to further contextualise the role that ritual plays in PBT:

If you ask someone to tell their story without that kind of structure it goes in any direction, all over the place. By putting it fit into this box, this container, this much, what it does is actually to allow it to move out of just what I would be able to conceal myself, in terms of telling that story. It's that paradox that only comes from within the constraint, the discipline of a particular form. That's the role that I find ritual plays.

ii. It is the structure of Playback Theatre, comprised of storytelling, a focus on the storyteller, and an artistic transformation of the teller's story, that provides for the healing to emerge. Sharon, a teller with a background as an educator, was particularly aware of the structure of the performance:

I think what stood out for me over the evening was the structure, the way they were conducting the evening. I'm very used to having a structure in the way I conduct meetings, or the way I conduct a lesson, or, doing some sort of an art form, or have a conversation. And that structure is basically moving from the known to the unknown. Or, in the jargon that I've become familiar with over the years, through a process of facilitation, and of conducting a reflection on something, which is basically what I saw the whole evening as. A reflection is moving from that objective level of questioning and thinking, you know, the 'how are you today'? type of thing, what word came to your mind? And the first question they asked of course, was, well, when you say the word reconciliation, what word comes to your mind? It's that objective level, the reflective, the interpretive, and the decisional. Well, I saw them moving through that, all the way through, going backwards and forwards a bit between those levels of thinking and questioning, but I saw that structure behind what they were doing. But for me, all of those levels of thinking were present in the performance that they did.

Sharon particularly alluded to the way that the structure of PBT has educational overtones—“from the known to the unknown”; “levels of thinking and questioning”; “the reflective ...”—and for her, this notion of reflection characterised the whole evening.

Ulwin, who was also a teller, described his own experience of this shaping and framing:

I think once I get into that seat, and this is when in my experience, it's a case of letting go. That I'm in the hands of the conductor in terms of what he, usually he, needs to unpack from the story in order to be able to frame it for the actors. And I have seen enough Playback work in that Company and also in terms of work within the Men's Movement where the same form is used to know what the conductor's job is, is to tease out the key elements. Like the standard phrase is 'where does it begin' for all the major characters. What are a few words that describe those characters, what is the nature of the story. So that conductor is going to unpack in a way that he thinks is relevant for the actors.

Ulwin went on to note the links between the order of events and the physical placement of the teller, conductor and audience:

The conductor acts as the bridge between the storyteller and the audience. So it's like I've been moved from one world and physically placed in another, and that physical position reflects the emotional position that I'm taking in relation to the whole thing. It's very cleverly constructed in that way. The whole thing about place and position in any gathering is something that I've become much more aware of, the importance of that stuff.

Ulwin sees that "place and position" is part of the ritualistic structure of PBT⁴⁵. Finally, Ulwin articulated how rituals, and the liminal space that they induce, can lead to transformation and integration:

The rituals that work ... actors seated until the moment they are called into play. At which point there is movement again to standing. Again a ritual form. I am called to play my part- I will now stand. So each of those little elements that is used consistently is adding a component of the structure, a ritual structure that enables something very dynamic to move because it's been contained. That's where the threshold is a transformative experience and then there's a return for the integration. What the Company has done with its form is to create that liminal space with its own rituals.

Thus, in PBT as experienced, ritual is seen to play an important role in PBT not only for the way it serves to structure and contain experience and the creativity that is induced, but also for the atmosphere of safety that is created. For Kirsten, a teacher of PBT, ritual, in and of itself, can be affirming:

This type of ceremonial framework that Playback always takes place in. People respond to that without necessarily recognising it or knowing why. It is almost like it is so absent from most other contexts of modern life that people welcome it and need it.

Surprisingly, this ritual does not necessarily need to be complex:

⁴⁵ Ulwin has previous experience of PBT, and is aware of the concept of liminality.

Just very simple things like where you sit down, how you begin, how you end. It is almost like there is a routine that people know and it is more than a routine in the sense that you know what a routine is if you go to the library and check out a book. It is a sort of raising of ordinary experience into this place that is deeply affirming to people.

A6. Playback Theatre is action-orientated and multi-modal.

Ned, a first-time attendee of PBT, and someone who told a profound story, described how the dramatic action of the playback helped him to see his family with more understanding:

What it did to Mum and what it did to the others and so I think that that's actually the major thing that they if you like, fed back to me. Not so much the particular incidences or the way they actually did it, or if you like the dialogue even. But it was just framing that rigidity in another, other than just a talking way, but in a dramatic way.

Ned experienced PBT as offering “other than just a taking way” of depicting his story. Ned also says that the action helped him “see what it did to ‘mum ... and the others’”. When asked about the difference between telling his story and seeing it “played back”, he replied:

The telling is an intellectual exercise although it has emotional content but in a way I could move in and out of that emotionally fairly easily. I could touch the feelings and then move back and shut them out again. But when it actually is being played out, well, I have no desire to. [The task was then] for me to feel it.

Ned has explained how the PBT action resulted in a shift for him from it being an “intellectual exercise” to one “for me to feel it”.

Tracey described the action in PBT as “externalising” the story:

So they are doing it in action which is a way of externalising. Playback is fascinating because it is not only the externalising of your own, like painting or writing is an externalising, giving form and making tangible your own experience whereas Playback is doing that with someone else's experience which is quite a remarkable skill, a special combination of skills.

And what is important about this externalising is that it has a strong visual component. Tara, a first time attendee, helped to explain how important this was to her:

They're not expressing it all in words, for example, where the mother sat down with her hands on her head and with her back to everybody, that was not putting in words but showing that she was closing herself out from everyone else. Um, you can say more like a picture is worth a thousand words, the same more with action than with words, yeah they did that a lot.

Furthermore, the combination of movement and engagement of a variety of senses takes participants into the moment as it is created. Brad, a teller, described this notion in these words:

And so the actual physical context is generating the emotion. And because it's non-verbally represented and it's sending you information on so many different levels, that emotion actually hits you before the rational reason does.

Brad highlighted how the multi-modal nature of PBT engages a variety of senses “so many different levels”, and how this has the potential to move participants into another space and time. Dianna, a first-time attendee, clearly draws the distinction between traditional forms of Western entertainment and PBT:

It is a different form of theatre. It is different than passively sitting in front of the movie screen or even going to a theatre where a straight play is delivered to you and there is no request for audience participation or response. You might sit there blubbering in the back row but no one is going to ask you why. I enjoy the two way process of it.

The other interesting adjunct to this proposition is that because PBT relies on words far less than most other theatre forms, this also helps to make it more universal. The following dimension of this proposition illuminates this.

i. Playback Theatre depends on a variety of forms of language for communication of its meaning. Nancy, while not a teller on this occasion, underscored how using a variety of forms of language can move the audience beyond the specificity of words:

... because the spoken word is actually very limited, so his story is sort of expanded by the artist. You know by the way they do it, now they might also have some words but that's, that fits in with the movement or the creating of the picture.

Evan also described how the process of multi-modal action made the stories, and the meanings inherent in them, more accessible:

I thought it was really powerful how they manage to both universalise and personalise that story so that I had a sense of, a different sort of a sense of where this guy was at, by what the Playback actors did with his story.

Furthermore, Nina also described how having the stories “moved” or acted out in the context of the theatrical event not only made them more accessible, but also endowed them with greater significance:

In one sense they were able to turn stories, which, if you heard them in any context, they wouldn't necessarily be memorable ... but, yet, seeing these all acted out, they did become memorable and significant stories that, you know, I probably won't ever forget.

PBT, then, can be seen to be a distinctly theatrical form where action is paramount and engagement of the senses occurs through multi-modal forms of representation.

A7. Playback Theatre is educative.

Louise, with a background as a teacher, foregrounded the educative potential of the form in terms of “personal relevance”:

And formal, education sometimes fails because it (pause) mainly reflects values that are Anglo middle class. And it doesn't respond to different fashions and trends that come and go. There are people who are disadvantaged with that type of education. At least with the methodology of the playback (pause), you can't really fail people if they have control, if they have ownership of the process, you know, if they're running, if they're picking up the ball and running with it.

Uma, who also had experience as an educator, agreed:

I mean, it's educational just in that you're sitting down and hearing other people's experiences. It's education for the self, seeing how other people, how you appear in other people's eyes, which is what really happens with the performers. They use all their senses really. And feedback, it's educational for the self; it's educational for the audience in terms of expanding their understanding of other people.

Brad, who told a story about a relationship that he was in, described his learning as a result of the experience:

As a thing that happened just from observing from the outside, it was really, really useful. Like previous to that night I'd been considering basically backing off totally again because I don't want to go back into the previous type of relationship. But after seeing it on the dramatisation, I saw how much effort she took just to come back and it's like 'hey'! That does mean there's something there. She might be unsure but I just shouldn't walk away because I've been hurt. So it has changed my perspective of the night and given me more information.

Importantly, Brad also went on to describe how this learning was facilitated by the emotion he felt as a result of the Playback:

Is this woman interested in me at all? And from looking at the dramatisation, Playback, she might be because no one would put up with this much shit unless she were. No one can be hurt this badly. Like I could see how much it was hurting her and that was something I appreciated. And that was only represented to me because I had emotion. I couldn't feel that emotion talking about it with friends. Talking and discussing, I never saw her side of it. I couldn't feel her intensity of what she was after.

Here, PBT is experienced as linking the head and the heart. Mitchell, who wasn't a teller, but who had attended on four previous occasions, described a different sort of learning where the experience allowed him to engage with, and challenge, his own particular prejudices:

I felt quite nervous for myself and for everyone else there [upward inflection] I guess because it was [a theme about] reconciliation, and um, that's a big conception of myself. I wasn't sure [slows down his delivery] what I was in for that night, and it felt a bit risky, as though my own prejudices I guess [upward inflection] and my own ideas were being challenged. Or I felt they were going to be, and they were, definitely, um [sigh]. Some of the stuff was really interesting

for me, hearing other people speak. I felt on that particular night there was a lot more quality of feedback from the audience than what I'd witnessed before, and the participation was a lot more centred and maybe even more intelligent than what I'd heard there before [upward inflection]. I quite often hear really good stuff in Playback but there seemed to be a bigger majority of it there, it was a very focussed sort of awareness, or it seemed to be to me. I think what was challenging about it for me was I had to look at what my idea of reconciliation was, and the fact that for me to be there and get anything out of that night, it was not a passive experience. It wasn't like watching TV, which is what I've been brought up with, and my idea of going to the theatre or my experience of going to theatre and going to movies and things is often quite a passive experience. I know that intellectually, but last Sunday night I found that to be really active. So it was a really confronting night that way, and I realise that I was shocked at how confronting it was for me. I like to think of myself as able to participate in that sort of stuff easily, but it was, uh, a difficult night for me, yeah.

Furthermore, he also talked about what the learning was for him:

I got to get in touch with my stuff, people get to get in touch with their stuff and that's what it's about. Ah, I think a lot of people— I experienced that I wasn't the only one feeling a lot that night, and it was a safe place for me to feel and go into those feelings. It seemed very important, very important to me. What Playback is for me came into focus, it's a it's a society that I feel like I've stumbled across, that I've been looking for maybe for a long time, that honours grief, and that honours human experience in a way that I don't see happen much in this society.

Finally, Kate, a member of the original Playback company, described the essence of this proposition in this way: “I connect more deeply with myself and my community through the spontaneous enactment of people's stories”.

A8. Playback Theatre is a highly context-sensitive, co-operative creation.

The public performances of PBT occur in a context that has both physical and social dimensions. Uma noticed the importance of context generally: “I mean, the story's set within a context and that's the audience, the venue, the person who's telling it. It, it, I guess it can be very strong”, and Tain, who is studying drama at University, commented specifically on the dimension of the physical space:

Just the audience was really close to the stage although there wasn't actually a stage and then the lights weren't turned off or anything so it was, yeah, it made us feel that we were part of it, or it made me feel part of the whole thing, the whole performance.

It is also important to understand that the physical context that Tain is referring to did not change over the course of this research, with each performance being located in the Edge Theatre, Newtown—an inner city suburb of Sydney. Kate, an experienced Playbacker, described how the company used lighting and simple props within the space in order to help create a “warm” atmosphere:

Well I thought the actual place where it happened, The Edge Theatre, can be pretty drafty and cold, but they had some nice warm lighting and drapes and everything and the way they have set it with up the musical instruments and slightly closer to the audience than sometimes, and the seating, yeah.

Over the course of the research each performance was a public performance, and therefore open to anyone who would chose to attend. However, while performances are open in this sense it is reasonable to expect that not everyone would choose to go out on a Sunday evening to this form of theatre in inner-city Sydney. In this sense, it can be said that the social context did not vary significantly.

One example of how PBT can be context-sensitive was described by Tain:

For example, the man who got up as third story teller on Sunday night kind of was implying that, he's going, 'Look, I've had this issue sitting with me for the last three weeks and I just kind of don't know what else to do with it and so I think I might get up and tell it'.

It seems that the context of PBT, with its social dimension, enabled this “teller” to “get up and tell it” when for three weeks he had been burdened with it. In talking about the context, Shane, with a background in training, described it this way:

It is pretty obvious that people being asked to participate are going to be frightened and reticent. So I mean when [the conductor] uses universals and truisms to bring people along then you gain their respect and you also gain their cooperation. So when you do ask them to break through and do something some of them will and others will see that others are and so it moves on. I think the audience participated well in that sense because they played a part and they enjoyed it. I thought the humanness was a key.

Shane's experience is of how the conductor can “bring people along” (context) and “gain their co-operation” (co-operation creation).

The fact that PBT takes as its text the stories that are volunteered each performance, with no one knowing beforehand what these might entail results in co-operative creation. In this sense, there is not only co-operation between the teller and the actors—for without the teller's stories there would be no performance—but also between the actors, musician and the audience themselves, who are often asked to respond to the stories that they have seen.

Kirsten, for example, provided an exemplar that highlights this facet:

There is a community purpose for what is going on and people in the audience are just as important as the teller and even the actors are just as important. They are all co-creators in some kind of community transformative event.

A9. Playback Theatre has an improvised and spontaneous nature.

Kate described her experience of its spontaneous and improvised nature of the genre thus:

It's a ghastly state to be in often, but it's the nature of Playback. I can't say more that's just what happens there is just uncertainty there when you are not sure what will happen next. And out of that comes something, always. You don't know what is going to happen in Playback, you don't know what the story will be, who is going to tell next.

Louise, who was seeing PBT for the first time, saw a parallel between the written and spoken word and the spontaneous nature of the PBT event:

Part of what's nice about [Playback] theatre is what is nice about a conversation and that is the dynamic, it's alive, it's not staged, it's not rehearsed. It's like the difference between a written and a spoken form, it's interactive and it's just really nice to have that kind of interaction where you give something out and you get some of that bounces back, you see it reflecting through the dramatisation.

Louise went on to describe the distinction between traditional theatre and PBT, and how the latter's spontaneous and interactive nature helped to develop a feeling of community:

When you go to a traditional theatre you have certain expectations and the audience is much more passive and you can come away from it and talk about it, 'Well, what does that mean to you?' and 'What did you think of that bit of acting?' and you know, do all this in retrospect. Which is what we do and it's probably what I'm doing about the playback theatre but at the time when you're involved with the playback theatre you can feel that interaction that much more and it's also closer to the audience. If you go to the normal theatre, the only people that you interact with in the audience are the people who you go out with on the evening. In this there was conversation happening, you know, when [the conductor] organised for us to turn around and talk to someone, say hello to someone. The woman behind me started telling me a very personal story (laughs) and there was the spontaneous humour and interaction that was going on, you know, there was a conversation that started up between one side of the audience and the other.

Finally, Liselle, also attending for the first time, described her experience thus:

I saw people being willing to come together and share and that is I think the most important first step and people are willing to talk and to listen, to take it for what it was because there is a certain structure in it. But on the other hand it's quite lucid, so it's spontaneous and this is something I want to learn you know, to be fluid in the structure and that's great. Usually you see performances that are planned, they are this, this, this, this. Timing is right, everything and this one is more spontaneous and free for me and it has to do with the moment rather than a concept.

Liselle's mention of "more spontaneous and free" as her experience of PBT supports this proposition (A9) perfectly.

A10. Playback Theatre is a site for Inquiry.

Suzanna, for example, described how she had been able to engage emotionally with issues surrounding the Stolen Generation, experience that she did not directly have:

I feel that, by that process, I'd been able to tap into it at an emotional level, which I think does give me greater understanding of the loss, that that Stolen Generation have, you know, as opposed to just thinking about it. I actually feel that I can empathise more because I would have a sense of what it would feel like not to have that, that cultural background, whatever my cultural background might be.

For Suzanna, the emotional experience was at least as illuminating as any previous intellectual understanding she may have had. This is a case of decentering, as through her experience of PBT she'd "been able to tap into it at an emotional level" and thereby "have a sense of what it would feel like"⁴⁶. It involves a head and heart engagement in the depiction

Sharon, attending for the first time, also gave a clear description of this process, that is, the engagement of both the heart and the head that occurs through the PBT process, and also the possibility of projecting this understanding into the future:

Putting people in touch with an objective situation, and their personal response to it, and connecting those two, and therefore the process, that is, the process of reflection, which we don't do enough. So very much a reflective tool. And people will take away I think some new dimension of understanding of the particular issue, or of their particular participation in the issue, or how they might respond.

Furthermore, Inga, who was beginning to undertake some of her own research in the educative potential of drama, was also able to provide some understanding of how this occurs:

And also I think it has the power and I'll use the technical term here because I suppose it links to my research, I think it has the power of metaxis. That thing of being involved but detached. That ability to feel and yet have some understanding of that experience. And that's what the symbols do, I think. They allow you to emote but not get completely lost in it. They allow you that sense of feeling and detachment which I think is very powerful, dramatic convention.

It is this paradox of both *distance*, to gain perspective "an objective situation" (Sharon), and *engagement* "their personal response" (Sharon), where the feelings are used as a source of information that occurs through the PBT experience, that underlies the educative potential of PBT.

A11. Playback Theatre is both theatre and an interactive social process.

i. "Good" Playback Theatre is dependent on both artistic and social criteria.

Shane, who attends PBT regularly and works in the training field, commented:

⁴⁶ This is usually referred to as metaxis. In Boal's (1995:43) words: "the state of belonging completely to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image".

Well I think the first thing that struck me in the opening was that there was an expectation that the audience would play a pretty major role and it wasn't just a walk on, or a titillation role, but one that was fundamental to the whole evening. The whole matter of the issues one has when one is suddenly in the limelight got dealt with pretty well by the convenor or whatever he was called. In a way, that was quite good, because he would introduce an element of honesty. I think the whole thing was aiming to be very honest and it broke down the traditional role of performer versus audience ... watcher or voyeur versus protagonist, and I think in the way the conductor led people through their own fear and knowledge that they would be frightened to speak up and that, it actually made it a much more real event.

This shows Shane's recognition of the dependence of PBT on the audience contributing: "there was an expectation that the audience would play a pretty major role". Also he points to the link between this and the breaking down of traditional barriers: "it broke down the traditional role of watcher ... versus protagonist". Thus Shane's experience was that PBT involved the artistic in "the convenor" playing a special part, and also "social interaction through expected audience involvement.

ii. It is also important to recognise that this "holistic" form of communication occurs in a social setting, so that Playback Theatre has both individual and group benefits. Kate an experienced playback actor and conductor, described how PBT can reduce individuals' feelings of isolation:

Well it gives you a sense that the work of Playback is about building community and sharing and sort of not being isolated, and you see so much of that in today's society that it feels like a very positive move.

Umberto described how this happened for him:

The conductor was open and joked with that audience and the audience was at first a bit uneasy but at the end of it you were quite at ease with talking to, out aloud, to everyone in the room apart from just the person sitting next to you. Even at the coffee afterwards everyone would just talk. It really broke down barriers that society, or social norms whatever.

For, Liselle, also attending PBT for the first time, showed how she experienced both individual and group benefits:

Because you can identify yourself, because you, you might find a solution to your own questions, hearing somebody else's story is connecting you to the other person, makes you not feel you're alone. Maybe though it brings in something new when you share when you actually bring out your own stories, letting go, rather than holding on to it, and making it more of a collective experience rather than your own experience. I think it's making you realise you're not alone, that everybody is with everybody, and we all experiencing the same stories in different ways, most people the same and maybe there will be an idea of creating stories together rather than having your own.

This experience shows that PBT can have an individually subjective perspective and a collectively subjective perspective, which is a feeling response by the individual *and* the group.

Finally, Sarah foregrounded how there is a possibility to learn from each other:

This sort of performance, these performances are about everybody's lives every day to day life experiences and in that we were a community that came together from all different backgrounds, all different age groups, but we're still experiencing the same day to day life experiences and as a result of that, no matter what, how educational, what educational background people come from, and socio-economic background, they still have the opportunity to learn from each other from these experiences which is pretty amazing when you think about it.

PBT, then, can be a form of interactive theatre that explicitly exists in a social setting. Furthermore, the success of this form of theatre depends not only on the artistic evocation of emotion, but also on attending to both group and individuals' needs. This proposition suggests that if these elements are successfully addressed, then benefits will flow to both the group and individuals present, and the co-investigators' experiences support this contention.

A12. Playback Theatre unequivocally embodies humanity and community as well as art.

i. Indeed, it is the function of art both to integrate and comprehend individual and communal experience and to reveal meaning. After being a teller on a particular night, Evan said:

It's not just entertainment. It's a thing where people are sharing very openly deeper aspects of their personality or their humanity, their experience. I mean you generally wouldn't go into with a bunch of strangers and started talking about 'Well the first time I came to Sydney, blah, blah, blah. I felt this, I felt that', and I mean everybody accepts what's happening. I mean I thought it was quite amazing. There were so many people there last night who hadn't had any experience of Playback and everybody was just very open to what was coming out. And I think everybody was prepared to listen to other people opening up and sharing aspects of themselves.

Evan explicitly illustrates the embodiment in PBT of humanity and community: "It's a thing where people are sharing very openly ... their humanity". Curtis saw that this experience leads to the creation of meaning:

And I suppose the other word that comes to mind is that it gives meaning, people's experience because it's in a community and it also gives coherence to their experience too. That they can actually start to understand what it is that's going on.

Louise uses these words to describe her own experience of this dimension:

I think to an extent you're thinking, 'Is this true? Can I relate to this? Is this my, is, is this my experience? What is the same about my experience?' But it's the whole, just the sensory thing about it being such a visual representation of your experience and being abstract. But it's also just an enjoyable piece of entertainment. And it's an art form.

These co-investigators show that they see PBT as interweaving these distinct threads into a gestalt, a feature that helps to reveal this genre. Finally, this notion of a whole leads on to the concluding proposition that describes PBT's attributes.

A13. Playback Theatre sits at the intersection of social, ritualistic and content dimensions.

Uma described how she experienced the interweaving of art and the social in PBT in this way:

I think it's sort of on multiple levels once again. Like, there's the appreciation of the artistic part of it, that's a part of it. There's the relating it I guess to my own experience. Does it match, does it not? Do I relate to something in the sculpture? There's the matching of it with how I understood the person's story. There's the watching the person who tells the story, and seeing how they're responding. And watching them watch the performers, and the expressions on their face.

Letitia, who was attending for the first time, also articulated how, in her experience, PBT is multi-valent in nature:

The other thing that I really liked was the deeper meaning behind some of the things, like people were telling their stories, and I could see myself in some of those situations, and just recognise some things that I may not have thought of before. So it was a thing that was personal as well.

Summary of the Attributes of Playback Theatre

In this chapter we looked at the empirical data from interviews in light of what the co-investigators say about the *Attributes* of PBT. Thirteen propositions were analysed through the NUD*IST program (see Appendix E) and were illustrated by material from relevant transcripts taken from the co-investigators' talk about PBT.

This served to provide empirical evidence that the *Attributes* dimension of PBT as experienced has some of the key characteristics of:

1. *Theatre*, which in this case is:
 - Multi-modal, action-orientated, improvised and spontaneous, ritualistic, and a highly context-sensitive and co-operative creation thereby highlighting PBT as an interactive social process.
2. *Story*, in that it is:

- Based on personal story, and
 - Uses these stories as “text” for performance.
3. *Education*, in that it involves:
- Personal learning
 - Social learning
 - Instrumental learning, and is also a site for
 - Inquiry.
4. *Healing*, in that it:
- Endows participants with status providing recognition and affirmation
 - Has an atmosphere of trust and respect whilst also being non-judgemental
 - Facilitates spontaneity and creativity
 - Aesthetically creates meaning.
5. *Art*, in that it:
- Conveys meaning beyond the individual and specific
 - Endows stories with aesthetic form
 - Elicits affect
6. *Gestalt*, in that it contains elements of:
- Health/healing, education/learning, theatre, ritual, community building, story, and art.

Tracey drew all of these threads together in this way:

I think that it is something about making the experience external but also something that says “yes” to it. It validates it. It makes it. You might go around a million experiences or a million moments everyday and then there are so many days in your life and you have a lot of things that you think are not very significant and yet you can take something that you might not have not necessarily thought as significant and present it to the Playback performers and they can take it and make something special of it. By then presenting it and externalising it, and of course by the way that they do it. It isn’t only that fact that they are externalising it but how they do it. It is a gift which is like presenting or enlarging on what you offered and presenting it back to you, and so it is a way of saying this is “okay”, this is what you have experienced, this is how to the best of my ability I am capturing what I believe you have experienced and presenting it back, making something of it kind of thing. That can be wonderfully affirming. We don’t get enough affirmation in our lives and here is a way, a form which is set up just purely to do that. Not just only because it is set up for many reasons but it is what we need.

CHAPTER TEN

Playback Theatre: Processes

As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word* ... Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world ... Once named, the word in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*.

The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1972)

Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical evidence bearing upon the *process* of PBT—in other words, “how do participants make meaning of this thing”. The following chapter (Chapter 11), then presents the evidence in relation to the *outcomes* of PBT—what meanings participants make and what impacts these new meanings have, or potentially have, on the social and emotional lives of the participants. These two chapters particularly address the empirical research questions that I proposed at the beginning of the project; however, in line with grounded theory methods, these are slightly reordered and expanded in light of what the data reveal. These two chapters present and illuminate the lived experience of PBT for the co-investigators, including the way that it works, and the outcomes of this experience.

This chapter considers twenty propositions that were drawn from my conceptual work on the literature on PBT. The co-investigators’ descriptions of their PBT experiences were analysed in light of these propositions to ascertain whether the propositions can be supported empirically.

The Playback Theatre Process

This section of the thesis reports on the propositions of PBT that are descriptive of the processes inherent in this genre—the “how” of PBT in a sense. While some of these propositions are similar to the attributes described in the previous chapter, they particularly relate to the processes of PBT itself, and describe how certain outcomes are achieved.

P1. Playback Theatre employs a variety of forms of language.

Brian, for the first time, related how it was different seeing the story “played back” as opposed to just hearing it:

[When] the story [was] just told, the audience member who’s telling the story is only telling it in words, so there’s only one sense instead of two senses involved [as in Playback].

Simone, a regular attendee, described the process this way:

... [They] get to the essence of the person’s experience and then put it into movement, words, action, presentation. They give a picture, it looks like they create this image, they create images and play them back.

Nancy, a regular attendee, also described how when the story is portrayed in a multimodal way, it is expanded and becomes “more”:

the spoken word is actually very limited, so his story is sort of expanded by the artist. You know by the way they do it, now they might also have some words but that fits in with the movement or the creating of the picture.

This “expansion” described by Nancy occurs through “movement or ... picture”, thereby adding a visual as well as an auditory component; in addition, this process emphasises the emotional components latent in the story. This process underlies the artistic transformation of the story, and Nina, a first-time attendee, described how this process made the playback more significant for her:

It’s the providing of visuals ... yet the visual stimulus, and the way the actors interpreted the story added something to it. It made it significant.

This engagement of a number of senses makes the story more accessible to the audience, thereby allowing the audience members to either identify with the story, or project themselves into it. Wilma, as someone who goes regularly to the theatre but was attending PBT for the first time, described how she could relate more to the story when it was played back, as opposed to merely hearing it:

I thought, we've all experienced that, but when they played it out, I could actually sit back and have a laugh, and you know, sort of see how I—ah, yes, I remember doing that!

Interestingly, Wilma highlights the way that participants can project themselves into the story, and thus get some understanding of their own actions: “ah, yes, I remember doing that!”

Finally, Bettina described this notion simply:

And I think probably it makes it more real, acting it out. It adds clarity.

This is not surprising when we consider that the actors are acting *as if* it was real, and often a measure of actors' success is how “realistic” their portrayal is.

P2. Playback Theatre uses the transactions and the expression of emotion, and the social interactions between the actors to allow the problem and issues of the story to be seen.

This proposition describes how the work of the actors allows the layers of a teller's story to be revealed. This revelation is dependent on the individual skill level of the actors, the quality of their listening, their ability to intuit what is behind the story, and the quality of their ensemble work. This notion is a simple but powerful one because it relates to one of the core processes in PBT, that is, the way that the actors work with the stories that are told, and what is evident as a result of that process. Isaac, for example, a teller and a first time attendee, described how this happened in the playback of his own story:

It was spooky. That young fellow that played the part of me he put so much of the emotions that I feel in to that story. The emotions that I feel, you know, the anger and the laughing, and sometimes it is hopeless and sometimes it is absolutely divine what happens. It was spooky.

Not surprisingly, many of the co-investigators mention this aspect of making the implicit become explicit specifically. 32 of the 47 respondents talking explicitly about this, and many more by inference. Uma, for example, with a background as a sociologist, described how the actors can reveal multiple voices within a story, reflecting issues or perspectives that may not have first been clear:

But one of the ways it does that is by there being multiple voices in the performance which make numerous paradoxes or numerous parts. So something about capturing the complexity of the performance, or part of the complexity ... They're different conflicting voices and realities all existing at once in this story. It somehow captures the essence, because it's intangible.

Uma went on to give a specific example of this:

And that was really clear in that lovely story somebody gave about meditation and that experience of sitting there to find peace and calm. And your voice going ‘chatter, chatter, chatter’ and the knees ‘ache, ache, ache’ and the path in the future, someone sort of coming in and tempting you away. And that for me captured very well the experience of meditation and all the numerous things that happen as soon as you stop to listen and they're not at all what you expect.

In PBT the actors take different aspects of a story as Tracey describes here:

Each person represented a different aspect of it. I have a strong memory of [one actor] and I have a strong memory of [another] with a purple cloth around her and saying something about comfort which I hadn't consciously thought through in the story. I thought, yes, of course, I was hiding in it and it was comfort and it was like I loved and I hated this purple dressing gown.

Cal also saw deeper issues revealed when the story was worked with dramatically:

I guess you hear a story, and then it is dramatised. So you are listening on one level and then you see four or five other people and musicians' interpretation of it and you think, Oh yes. It gives you a deeper or a different perspective on it. It draws things out of the story that you mightn't of thought of, or hit on yourself.

A consideration of this proposition reveals that it is the actors' work in “showing” the story that allows the layers of the story to be revealed.

P3. Playback Theatre facilitates self-disclosure through storytelling.

This proposition draws attention to the way storytelling can be therapeutic for the teller.

Liselle saw this process as one of “letting go”:

Well, first the [participants] are encouraged to share and then when they did, they let go of holding it inside ... so they didn't feel so alone with it, and everybody was sharing in it. I mean, look at the audience, there was crying, the audience was involved and it became alright.

Tain, with a background in mental health, has this to say about storytelling in PBT:

When people really share past the intellectual and small talk level and you get to that inner core and ... you're really asking people to go straight to that inner core level ... I think most people get some kind of, oh joy's not the word I'm looking for. I don't know. It's that some level of satisfaction out of connecting with people in that way.

Tain draws attention to how “when you share [storytell] ... you get to the inner core” and thereby experience ‘satisfaction out of connecting with people’.

Mary, who works in the communication industry, also highlighted that part of the process where there are shared experiences, felt emotions, and connections being formed with those present:

because they encourage you as the audience to kind of talk to other people and to share stories, to share personal stories. And you've all sat there and you've all kind of cried together, and you've had people's lives exposed, and so you really do feel some kind of connection.

Evan, a teller, described his experience of this process:

people are sharing very openly deeper aspects of their personality or their humanity, their experience ... everybody was just very open to what was coming out. And I think everybody was prepared to listen to other people opening up and sharing aspects of themselves.

Self-disclosure is clearly indicated by Evan, who uses the term "open" or "openly", or "opening up" three times in as many phrases.

Wilma, attending for the first time, stated this explicitly:

Virtually, to be able to tell your side of things, your story. Always makes one feel better [to be heard].

For Wilma, PBT is where one "is able to tell your side of things".

Another aspect of this proposition is that the process is modelled initially by the actors and the conductor, and then by audience members themselves. Simone, a psychiatrist, talked about this process:

I have observed in my work is that when you're staying open yourself and you acknowledge the other person and invite them and they can feel that they are allowed to come out and do, they are even encouraged. They respond to that. And often they have a great urge to do that. And often they find it far easier to tell it to a crowd than to a secret person.

Kate, an experienced playbacker, talked about her own experience in a PBT performance where, because others were talking about pain, she could speak about her own:

Well someone talked about being in pain, that their pain was about separation from people, and I have been in a lot of physical pain lately, so it reminded me of (well I didn't have to be reminded), but I just thought I would speak about that.

An important component of this concept is the way that audience members, whether offering words, phrases or complete stories, do have control over the amount that they tell or self-disclose. Shane, a regular attendee, described how this realisation helped with his own comfort level:

I felt less uncomfortable as it got going, but it was still pretty uncomfortable until about a quarter or halfway through when I realised that although there was a degree of revelation and exposure going on, there was only going to be as much as each person wanted.

Clearly tellers not only choose whether to tell or not, but also the level at which they disclose.

P4. Playback Theatre involves the community of those present “witnessing” a storyteller’s narrative.

This proposition describes how the PBT process involves elements of witness as does all theatre. However, what is highlighted here is that in PBT the audience watches or witnesses the actors work creatively with some form of contributed text—work that can be conceptualised as a type of “telling” in itself—and in the case of PBT, there are different forms of telling.

First, there is the telling of the story by the teller—ostensibly to the conductor—which the audience witnesses. Umberto, a teller, talked about the process in terms of the way that the conductor helped him to tell:

It felt really weird that it was like me and [the conductor]. That was it. I was telling James, and every now and then like, I realised that the audience was there and I would talk to them a bit. I was really mainly talking to James; I wasn’t really talking to the whole group. I felt at ease and comfortable.

Second, there is the telling that occurs *through* the playback. In each of these cases there is a public “telling”, and the audience who act as witnesses to the telling. Therefore witnessing can occur on a number of different levels—the teller who “witnesses” his/her own story in playback, and the audience who witnesses the telling *and* the playback. Mary, attending for the first time, described this process:

I think it really shows that when people are honest, it encourages other people to be honest and people can rip away those barriers and it can actually be really really cathartic for a lot of those people. I mean, probably for all, for everyone who was there. And somehow for them seeing their experiences re-enacted, even though the actors didn’t really show any kind of resolution to any of these people’s sort of dilemmas, it was still, it somehow was a relief. I mean, there’s something really fascinating about how it can actually be quite healing-like.

Simone, with a background in psychiatry, talked about PBT filling a role that related to “witness” in contemporary society:

It’s like a mirror you know, a richness. People do need witnesses to what they have experienced, what they have to tell and often the art of story telling has gone a little bit under with all the radio and the newspapers and the television.

As someone who had seen Playback over a period of time, Simone was also able to describe the process of witnessing as one where audience members can identify with the teller. She described it this way:

People often see themselves. They can find themselves in aspects of some characters, you know, they can identify. It's about identification and often about problem solving and most stories have a content of someone getting a bad deal, getting into sticky situations in transforming themselves and more often than not you have a happy end and you paid your money and you go home and feel good. It is obviously a response to a very deeply held need in people otherwise you wouldn't be there.

Interestingly, Simone identified the way people need to tell and also to find resolution in their stories: “people do need witnesses to ... what they *have to tell*” and “[when] you have a happy ending ... you go home and feel good”.

The next dimension of the proposition concerns the modelling that happens when people watch someone else do something first. In the case of PBT, this occurs first through the actors modelling, sharing a word or a phrase, which then sets the tone for what follows. In short, modelling and witnessing involve all present and provide “licence”. Shane, a management trainer, saw it this way:

So when you do ask them to break through and do something some of them will, and others will see that others are, and so it moves on. A lot of it was on modelling; a lot of people like, in the same way that the performers were the first to offer a word then the audience offered a word. Pretty well, there was a lot of watching what the others do, accepting that this is normal behaviour, so I can do that too in my way. A lot of it is setting the principles, setting a model, and people following.

Kate, an experienced Playback performer and director, also described how witnessing can be freeing and links with learning:

It is very freeing, and insightful, and sometimes things you haven't thought of yourself you see, and it's not always that they get it right, but it often is still quite enlightening.

Ned, attending for the first time, and also a teller, talked about his experience of being a witness to his own story:

As the playing out of that, my relationship with my Dad was a gift to me also by those people in that place, and that time, and so it was somehow, there is some freeing in that, some healing in that.

Ned's witnessing resulted in “some freeing” and “some healing” for him.

Finally, Shane underscored that we play different roles in our lives, and that the notion of witness is at least as important as the role of teller:

Maybe it is that we are at one time a performer and an audience in our life, continually switching between the two. I suppose some people are stuck in one or the other but ideally we are both, otherwise it is a difficult life.

These co-investigators show that from their experience, witnessing by those present can be seen to be one of the fundamental processes of PBT.

P5. Playback Theatre involves audience members telling personal story.

This proposition is so fundamental and essential to PBT that the co-investigators usually don't mention it specifically. Liselle, with a background in storytelling, described the process in these words:

one is sharing their story and the audience is invited to bring in what they felt afterwards, so it's a bit of a feedback from the audience and everybody is interacting with everybody on an unconscious level I'm sure.

John, a participant who had done some drama training, described some of the choices that the storytelling process engender:

With Playback, it's the focus on the energy and essence, and you know, one word for a situation is picked up and, and it's played with, and presented in context with all the other phrases and words and situations of that particular story. And then presented, and that allows the storyteller to accept it, and/or dismiss some aspects that may not have been accurate for how that person saw that story. But that's the beauty of the story. There's no right or wrong way for a story, there's no wrong way for a story. The story's just told.

John also highlighted that the process is non-judgemental and accepting: "there's no right or wrong for a story".

Inga, a first-time attendee, in response to a question about what stood out for her from the PBT experience, also highlighted the focus in PBT on telling personal story:

But I mean basically people were prepared to share within that strange group of more or less strangers, if not all strangers. Amazingly personal stories. I found that really interesting.

Interestingly, Tracey described what the actors did with her story:

Well the performers from memory in a lateral and creative way, not a literal way because Playback would be terribly boring if it was exactly literal, and it wouldn't build on what is offered. The performers listened very attentively to what I said, and what I didn't say and what I implied maybe, and filtered that through their own knowledge of the world with the intent of trying to capture what I had said and what I had not said, and present that back to me and to other people in the room. They managed to do that successfully. So they are doing it in action which is a way of externalising.

Tracey highlights that the actors listen intently to: (i) what is said, (ii) what is implied, and (iii) what is not said. Then, what is "heard" is reflected back in action that is mediated through the actors' own experience and knowledge of the world. This "builds" on the story, revealing the playback as more than a literal mirror image of the story that was told.

P6. Playback Theatre entails the actors enacting the stories that are told in an artistic way that transforms story into art.

This proposition describes what the actors do with the stories that are told. Tracey described what this process involves:

It is something to do with seeing it in action, seeing people externalising things which are inside me. Something to do with that, which is what a lot of art and creativity is about. It is about giving external form to inner processes.

Importantly, Simone described the particular improvised and spontaneous way that the stories she experienced were enacted:

And this is the whole thing, I mean, the immediacy of the acting process, you know, the fact that they can't just go along with a line that they have learned and they just have to remember. They have to reach into their own experience and come up with something that is true, that resonates with the audience and that resonates with the person who is giving the story. And when they manage it, it is just wonderful. It's like, you know, it's just, it's hard to find a good word for it. It's terrific. It's an equipped, exquisite moment of theatre, which cannot be matched by anything else.

Perhaps a “good word for it” might be artistic.

Simone identifies the story-enacting process as non-scripted, spontaneous and improvised, which introduces a powerful and exciting element. Ursula, who attends occasionally, talked about another important dimension of this proposition, that is, the quality of the acting:

The acting I was blown away by because— I mean I think some of them are better than others, especially that woman in black, I thought she was amazing. Very perceptive. Yes, just fantastic, just fantastic. The acting was quite exciting to watch because they picked up all the moods you felt and translated them or repeated them. And things that I didn't feel, extra things. They opened it up for me too, the story in a new way. They opened up the story in ways I wasn't quite conscious of as I listened and that was really interesting. So they enriched it for me as well. So that they added layers to my hearing.

Importantly, Ursula also highlights that when the acting is good, the aesthetic element is foregrounded and “they opened it up for me ... they enriched it as well”. Simone went on to describe another important dimension of this proposition, that is, the ensemble nature of this enactment and then explicitly states “Um, that's art”:

The humour, the movement, the way they work together. They work together beautifully, like a team as well you know. I mean you have to look at the Conductor, five actors, two musicians, eight people and they just bang. They have to work together and produce something on the spot without being able to tell you: ‘I tell you this and you do that’. Um, that's art. Admirable. And they can't just do their thing, you know, it's not actor such and such doing that.

And finally, Evan described his own experience of the process:

It is the way that they acted it out. I thought that, for instance the way the voices that called you know to come back and also [the actor's] dance you know. He wasn't pretending to play the Violin which would have been a bit, you know, corny. And he did something that obviously worked for him so he was able to take an aspect of my activity which was making music and he actualised that by through some sort of movement. And I was quite moved by what he did, especially at the time when he decided he was going to stay, his movement became that much stronger.

This clearly talks of artistic transformation of story in Evan's experience of PBT.

P7. Playback Theatre shapes and structures experience.

This proposition describes in a global way the playback process where the conductor, and then the actors, take a story and help shape and frame it into a performance that is a (re)presentation of the experience. Sarah described her experience of the order of happenings in PBT thus:

The conductor asked the teller to tell his story. But he started off by just asking him to talk about two words, two feeling words, and then the person mentioned those feelings. Then the conductor took the person further than that, and asked him more detail about the story and one step at a time bringing in the person, the key person into the story. Each time the key person was established in the relationship then the teller chose the person, one of the performers, one of the four performers to choose the role as that person. Once the story was completed, and the conductor did ask it, at the end of the story how the teller wanted the story to finish. Then the group of four performers then performed this story for the audience and the teller and the conductor.

This explains *what* is done to shape the experience. Inga, who has a strong background in drama, described in detail how this is done:

I mean I was very interested in the way he got people to start to share. How difficult that is, and how you get people first of all on through the warm up exercises too, which I thought were excellent. And then how you draw the story. And you know, it all seemed to do about the beginning of the story, one or two things about actors, one of two things about specific details of the incident so he was always confining it. Drawing out, confining; drawing out, confining. And then he'd talk about the middle and then the end. So it was very carefully structured I noticed. And structured through questioning all the time. So he was questioning, repeating.

Inga notes "it was very carefully structured" but also involved active listening by the conductor "questioning, repeating" thereby shaping what is to be played back. The next step of the process involves the actors playing back the story that they have heard. Ulwin described what this playing back entailed for him:

It's a ritual form of mirroring to an individual something that is very personal and to an audience something that is collective, that's part of the human experience. It's taking a fragment of that human experience and as it says 'playing it back'. Mirroring it. Reflecting it back to the different audiences that are there.

Interestingly, Tracey drew a parallel between PBT and other art forms where there is a process that shapes and structures experience:

Playback is fascinating because it is not only the externalising of your own, like painting or writing is an externalising, giving form and making tangible your own experience whereas Playback is doing that with someone else's experience which is quite a remarkable skill, a special combination of skills.

P8. Playback Theatre represents meaning in an aesthetic form.

Ivan, who was seeing PBT for the first time for many years, highlighted that it was not the specific content of the stories that was important:

It wasn't so much the content of the stories that were enacted, it wasn't that at all. But it was more the highlighting of tensions within. You know, like having to give up and not wanting to. Or something ending or something beginning or whatever.

Evan, who had seen PBT before and knew what to expect, told a story in a search for understanding. This is what he said:

It is the way that they acted it out. I thought that was, for instance, the voices that called you know to come back and also [the actor's] dance. He wasn't pretending to play the Violin which would have been a bit you know, corny. And he did something that obviously worked for him so he was able to take an aspect of my activity which was making music, and he actualised that by through some sort of movement, and I was quite moved by what he did.

He notes, "[my story] was actualised through some sort of movement", that is for him the playback was an aesthetic representation of the meaning of his story. Ulwin also described how it was particularly the movement and sound that worked for him:

What I got from it was the importance of sound and movement in terms of ways of unlocking stuff. Which had it been offered in terms of advice would have been taken as being wrong. I know that. So those kinds of things, the unexpected, I find fascinating in Playback.

Significantly, this has a number of effects. Tamara, an occasional attendee, spoke about the effects of having a story artistically represented:

It seemed more powerful to me having it played back. It did bring out something. I don't know why or how, but it brought another level.

And Uma described the process of transformation as something akin to "magic":

It's like somebody tells a story, it's pretty ordinary, and two minutes later you've got the finished product, and you've got an art, a piece of work, art. Or a representation or something that's been created and it's sort of, of like the alchemy of the transformation. Yeah. The magic of that. Yeah.

The co-investigators certainly experienced PBT as an event that takes what lies deep within a story and reveals this through a process of artistic representation.

P9. Playback Theatre honours the teller and his/her story.

This particular proposition describes a process is employed whereby the teller, no matter who they are, or what is told, is supported, accepted and respected. Ewan described how having seen this process in action allowed him to tell:

So that's what led me to— At that stage I think I'd developed trust with the characters on the floor or the people on the floor, the actors. And what justice they'd done to the other stories that I felt, gee I can— I would like to see somebody play me. And would like to see somebody play these people in my life in this situation. I feel safe handing these people over and saying these are people that are precious to me. The situation is precious to me. It's yours to do with what you want.

Ursula, with a background in counselling, described this honouring of the teller as being “held”:

I felt a great deal of respect in the room. I felt that there was a sort of respectful listening amongst the audience as well. I felt people were being held a bit, and that was good.

Ursula went on to illustrate how this respect was manifest in relation to a teller:

But they didn't make fun of him. They didn't put him down. And it was part of the respect, I think, to keep your own judgements out of it and still honour that person's experience even if that's where he's at. You know. You still accept where he is. And that was good.

Finally, Evan, a teller, described how this process seemed to be very caring, and particularly moving for him:

I mean I was often sort of on the verge of tears, not necessarily because there was anything particularly sad going on. Sometimes the tears were from laughter, but also because something was being done with the moment. The actors were being very caring of the things that they were being given.

Another important dimension of this honouring process is the way that the actors and the conductor model this care, respect and non-judgemental attitude, “what justice they'd done to the other stories” (Evan). It is this process that reveals in part the learning potential inherent in the form.

P10. Playback Theatre focuses on the teller, self-knowledge and his or her place in the world.

This proposition describes how PBT takes as its focus the personal story of those who choose to tell. Nancy described how this occurred for her:

I guess it [PBT] creates a space where we can explore, we can take ourselves beyond—I don't know how to explain what I'm going beyond, but I think maybe it's the mundane, the sort of the black and white.

Nancy describes the way that PBT focuses on the teller and provides him or her with opportunity and “space” to explore “so we can take ourselves beyond”.

Uma described a process where, for her, fluid sculptures provided this focus:

What I love about is sculptures is that one person comes in and they're doing something else. The next person comes in, and they do something which is about the part of the person. And then there's an interaction between the first two to some extent. Not always. But to some extent. And so it's circular rather than linear, it breaks down the idea of 'We are logical, reasonable, rational people who always act, a causes b causes c causes d'. And it's sort of like, well, person one comes, part two of the person comes in and soon as part two's there, part one's different. And then when part three comes in everyone's different. So, it's sort of the power of the systems and the change and the sense of, yes, we have systems outside. And I guess the story brings that in. But we also have inside we're complicated. And I like that in playback, that it's visual, it's representative and it says more in a couple of sculptures in a couple of minutes than if, than if you tried to write it down it would be pages and pages and pages and pages.

This indicates that what this sub-form does is to reveal metaphorically the teller—the protagonist in the story—in relation to others and interestingly, how this can be conceptualised as a system. What is important about this notion is that an effect on one part of the system can affect the system as a whole. Uma went on to describe her reaction to this:

I think it's sort of on multiple levels once again. Like, there's the appreciation of the artistic part of it, that's a part of it. There's the relating it I guess to my own experience. Does it match, does it not? Do I relate to something in the sculpture? There's the matching of it with how I understood the person's story. There's the watching the person who tells the story, and seeing how they're responding. And watching them watch the performers, and the expressions on their face.

Uma describes how, as an audience member, she focuses on the teller and his/her story. Therefore, PBT provides a focus on the teller that comes from telling, watching and projection into what is artistically represented. In this way, PBT focuses on “the teller, self-knowledge and his or her place in the world”.

P11. Playback Theatre uses rituals to create frames for the teller and audience that facilitate transformation of the audience's experience of Playback Theatre itself.

Uma described her observation of the use of ritual:

Well, they always do that ritual of talking to people before you start, talking to people you don't know in the audience and I think that's a very important ritual. It's that the first telling of the story to someone you don't know and it gets easier from there. It's a sense of everyone's in there together.

Uma shows how she has experienced: "a sense of everyone's in there together" largely because of the beginning ritual. As Liselle foregrounded, it was the structure of PBT that allowed people to share their stories:

I saw people being willing to come together and share, and that is I think the most important first step. And people are willing to talk and to listen, to take it for what it was because there is a certain structure to it.

This ritualistic structure progressively builds up levels of interaction and self-disclosure from words, to phrases, to whole stories. John described how he experienced this:

The facilitator will ease the audience into participation. You know, the first contact is: 'What's a word for you?' And then it works into phrases, and then reminders. And then you move on to a story. And it's 'OK, does anyone have a story they want to bring out?' So, it just draws you into that participatory space, both from a subconscious level of 'Ohh, OK, I'm in here now!' and then also physically, into the performance space of the stage. I think that's how the trust is built up in that form. And just being able to see how other people react to your one word: What's your word for the day? You know. Then when it's brought out, and 'Oh, OK, fine!' The other person over there had the same sort of thought I did. So they get some interaction going between the audience members and also the actors. So then it becomes a melting pot in the middle there, on the stage, and [indrawn breath] I think it's shown by how the actors, present those moments. There's no judgement, there's just, 'Here it is!' It's played back at you. 'Oh, OK, that's fine'. And, so it eases you into the [adopts 'stage' voice] 'Oh, well I'm not—even though I might've thought it was a silly thing to say, it's not that silly! It's OK! People played it back, and found that people liked it. Oh, that's all right then! I feel better about that now!

In talking about the warm-up, an important ritual in PBT, Shane said:

The nature of alienation [by being a teller] is dispelled in the unifying effect of a shared common experience. The person actually telling the story, well, they are very much putting themselves on the line in a sense, because they're exposing a heck of a lot of themselves. Upon reflection on the night that that happened so fast, or so speedily, kind of says something about the nature of the warm-up given by the whole atmosphere that people could dive into a very, very deep revealing [of] themselves.

Shane highlights that, for many, it can be risky to tell, and yet “the nature of the warm-up [was such] ... that people could dive in very, very deep”.

P12. Playback Theatre facilitates identification with the teller, and his or her story.

The process of identification begins with the audience members beginning to watch the person telling his/her story. Nina described, in the first instance, how there needs to be something to watch:

So I suppose it is that relating to it, seeing these people as human and seeing their emotions. Like, 'cos that's something you don't often see, you don't get to watch people in intimate moments like that [laughs]. So, I suppose it's that ability to be able to spy on other peoples' lives, but it's quite open, you know.

Beth tells how she came to identify with the teller:

Well there is a safe environment and maybe it is also because I'm quite an empathetic person, you know, feel for the person. For a person to get up and tell their story, you know I really admire that. It takes a lot to be get up and be open and honest and say your story. So I think I really sort of admire that in a person, so that would be the beginning of the connection.

The fact “there is a safe environment” and that “I admire [getting up and telling] in a person” facilitated Beth's identification with the teller.

Louise drew attention to a different aspect of this proposition. Here, she explained how having the story presented in visual and abstract way facilitated her process of identification:

I think to an extent you're thinking, 'is this true? Can I relate to this? Is this my experience? What is the same about my experience?' But, it's the whole, just the sensory thing about it being such a visual representation of your experience and being abstract.

Louise foregrounds that audience members will often project themselves into the portrayal. Tain described how she listened carefully to the teller and then interpreted how the actors portrayed the story. This action-based representation, so characteristic of PBT, allowed her to access her own feelings:

I think sometimes I'm also connecting with the emotional experience of the storyteller. Like if they tell something really sad or embarrassing, you can kind of go, 'Oh, yeah, I can dig that' or, you know, step in their shoes for a minute and go, 'Oh, yeah, that would've been funny' or 'that would have been really sad'.

Liselle gave an example of this notion, and also talked about how seeing the emotion in a teller's story affected her:

I felt very moved and I felt very sympathetic to his feelings and what he was going through. And, because I have a bad relationship with my father and I always think this could happen, my father could die and then it's too late. So it makes you think about your own, and it made me feel also.

Kate then alluded to the potential of education though PBT when she described the next step in the process as reflection: “Well, I suppose, I relate it to myself”. However, as she indicates, this isn't always an enlightening experience:

Well it is sort of like a recognition, of something in themselves, they have seen something that means something to them personally, and it can happen the other way too. You can say ‘Oh God, that was bloody awful, you know, how dreadful, how embarrassing, I don't dare look’, you know there are moments like that too, It's not always great.

P13. Playback Theatre co-operatively creates story.

Wilma compares PBT to other theatre to illustrate how PBT co-operatively creates story:

If you go to conventional theatre, and the title may be something like, you know, ‘The Forgotten Love’ or something, and you might relate to that time, but then it's their sort of story, in this particular one on one [PBT], you basically give your opinion or your side of things, and they take that on board, and put it out—I mean, we all got asked the same, any themes for the story. We sort of get to choose the characters. Like, in the people that went up to talk, to tell them their story, they could actually even choose the actors that they wanted to play their particular roles. So it's just like expressing yourself, in a way, and then see it, see it back to you.

Co-operation is indicated by “you give your opinion ... and they take it on board and act it out ... [The teller] could actually even choose the actors ... to play ... their roles”.

Mary, with a background in performance, revealed a different dimension when she talked about how co-operative storymaking relies on the skill of the actors:

I mean, they're just obviously very sensitive and tuned in. I mean, they've obviously been doing it for a long time. I suppose the actors have got huge trust in each other and can literally kind of go with something straight away and they can have faith that somehow something will emerge that will tell the story.

This reflects the improvised and spontaneous way that the actors work, in not knowing what stories will be told before they occur.

Suzanna was able to describe a specific example where this co-operation occurred:

And, I think the second story, not necessarily the telling of the second story, but the performance of the second story, I saw really true improvisational work done. They were really working off one another, there was really good dynamic balance, I mean, as a piece of theatre, there was good use of the stage area, good relationship between the conductors, the musicians, and the actors. It seemed to meld in really well and at times led the performance, and at times blended in. So I found that very good, and that's hard with two musicians, but that worked really well.

PBT, then, in these co-investigators' experience co-operatively create stories on a number of levels, and in a number of different ways.

P14. In Playback Theatre, participants actively construct knowledge and transform experience.

This proposition relates specifically to one of my original research questions: "How do people make meaning in a PBT performance?" Sharon makes explicit her belief that PBT can result in active construction of knowledge:

An in-depth reflection on an issue facing the nation [upward inflection] or the issue, you know, was there some other issue, an experience of the evening, and putting people in touch with an objective situation, and their personal response to it. And connecting those two, and therefore the process, and that is the process of reflection, which we don't do enough. So very much the reflective tool, and people will take away I think some new dimension of understanding of the particular issue, or of their particular participation in the issue, or how they might respond.

Sharon mentions that because of reflection "people will take away ... some new dimension of understanding after PBT. This aspect was also clear to Nina, who was not an educator and also a first-time attendee. She described how audience members are actively involved in constructing knowledge, or making-meaning, by projecting themselves into the playback because it is structured as a story:

I suppose you could, in one sense put yourself in the situation more, relate more to the emotions of the story, because, you know, you were seeing it. I could relate to things you'd been through yourself or things that you've seen other people go through because it was just that more physical, which is how we experience life rather than necessarily as a narrative.

Curtis described the process whereby he engaged with the Playback in a metaphorical way:

So I guess the image, it's sort of like this mirror, that it's a mirror for something else. Like you're not just hearing your own words. You're actually, it's almost like your words are out there. It's like your own words kind of take on form and take on other clothes. And it's like you say this thing and it's almost as if you say to yourself "oh yeah, right". And then you see this thing that's you, but it's like you're watching it objectively. It's like you're watching yourself unfold. It's like you're standing as an observer which someone can't do when they're kind of in turmoil or all this stuff's churning around in their mind.

Curtis explains very well his having his experience transformed by “watching yourself unfold”.

P15. Playback Theatre takes the rendering of the particular and makes it universal.

This proposition extends the previous proposition, and describes the way that PBT takes the specifics of an individual’s story and works in an artistic way to make it broader. This process is described in an analogy by Simone, a regular attendee:

The important thing about that is what the actors also do in Playback, how the story comes over to them. So [they] need to reflect it but they are like mirrors in the sun. They can actually make it shine brighter and give it more heat. And sometimes you have spontaneous combustion like you know in the butcher story, so there is something amplifying about the Playback.

Wilma described her experience where the process made the story “everyone’s”, rather than merely the individual teller’s:

What [the] process does actually— I guess it’s because when he was saying it, it’s his story— Whereas when they acted it out, it became all our story. That would be the best way that I could describe that: while he was saying it, sure I could relate to it, but that was his story, whereas when the actors started to really act it, it was basically became, like all ours.

Here, Wilma also draws attention to the way the process helps build community, that is the PBT story “basically became, like all of ours”.

Inga, with a background in drama, understood how the symbolic can “speak” beyond the specific towards the universal. In this example, she describes an experience of her own where the symbolic portrayal of violence was poignant:

So for me it was a kind of emotional thing but I was still able to relate to that theme of violence which isn’t physical but is spoken and it’s the violence of verbal. I think violence and emotional violence touching someone. I think the moment in that drama where in fact a hand was put out, and although it wasn’t striking it was showing the, you know. It didn’t strike the mother figure, the wife figure, he was there within a small distance. Again a symbolic movement almost to say that she was being crushed by this type of verbal abuse, emotional kind of slugging off. Manipulation. And I can identify with that kind of thing happening in my experience. I suppose it’s kind of identifying with that.

Elaine, an occasional attendee at PBT, also described how the rendering of the particular into the universal is almost essential for good PBT:

That they all had universal things, they did. The duck story, I mean it's incredible that such simple stories actually tap into these huge things. Because that duck story was such a simple story but when Playback really works the actors relate that story to the universe and make it a bigger story and that's when it's really powerful.

This proposition is clearly exemplified in the examples given by the preceding co-investigators and “that's when it's really powerful”.

P16. Playback Theatre activates the inner experiences of the audience.

Suzanna described how “hearing” the story can tap you into your own experience, and “showing” leads to a point of *feeling* what it was actually like:

I think Playback combines the real venture of storytelling, so, just hearing other people's experiences taps you into those experiences yourself, but not only that, it then shows the levels of emotion and the conflict. The inner conflict it can play up that inner conflict, so it can take you not just to the story, but to the feelings. So, what it feels like to be in that position, as opposed to just hearing the story and, you know, only seeing this one level.

Suzanna went on to describe her own experience of this “activation” when watching a story about the Stolen Generation which brought up experiences in her own life:

I don't know that I had feelings about me being white. I don't suppose I've thought about it [slight laugh] in that sense, but through the evening, I actually started, through the stories, and seeing what it was like, started to think about what it was like to be—yeah. To be white, in this situation. So I guess things came up for me that transcended the thinking about it, to the feeling of it.

Importantly, she highlights how PBT can engage the feelings, and when the feelings are engaged, understandings can change. Ned described his experience this way:

Well first of all it was reasonably intellectual, and I was watching what was going on, and then I couldn't watch any more cause of my feelings. I suppose I was sobbing really and it didn't matter what they did visually any more, but I could hear the words and I was already in like I was a part of it and I didn't watch. It wasn't that I was avoiding that. It was I was just focussing on feeling that. I couldn't have had my eyes opened and watched it and been that upset. It sort of took me over and I was, well, I don't know whether conscious is the right word but I wasn't consciously trying to repress that or control that or stop that. I was just letting it happen rather than saying well I must get controlled here and watch. It was giving me permission in a sense to actually feel the depth of that without even having to watch. I just felt these deep sort of sobs coming up from inside and I thought I am not, I wasn't pushing them down, I didn't want to push them down. I just let it happen.

These co-investigators describe how hearing and seeing Playback resonated with them, “on the feeling of it”. This points to the possibility that PBT has potential for learning and healing. This proposition also highlights the power of the aesthetic to universalise the particular and

build community through the provision of shared experiences, and the development of emotional response.

P17. Playback Theatre voices and embodies aspects of one's collective experience.

Tamara described how hearing one story about a child precipitated a number of “child” stories, including one that she told:

Because someone had just told a child story I think it is easier to speak from that child's perspective. It might make you vulnerable but it not as much as if I was actually telling a story in the now. Maybe that is just kind of my first step toward getting out of that comfort zone thing. I think I did. Someone else told a child thing behind me and I just instantly thought of the story about temptation. I remember that temptation to have that thing. I suppose it was that child, having the distance with the child. You know. Another time. Me in another form.

Suzanna also described how PBT works to reveal the community experience that is present at a performance. What this means is that when individuals hear that their experience is not unique, they do not feel so alone.

I don't necessarily think that Playback is unique in its ability to touch, you know. I think there are other forms that do it as well, I think Playback does it very effectively and quickly. It doesn't tell its story, it tells the story of the community—the community that comes along. So this is very much about people connecting with other people, this audience member connecting with this audience member, via this channel of Playback. And people do realise that even though they might seem very different, there are often shared experiences.

Suzanna's comments show she feels PBT involves collective experience in that “there are often shared experiences”, and “connecting ... via the channel of Playback”. Importantly, this process is facilitated through live theatre, where there is an *embodied space* in close proximity to the audience, and the action is occurring in real time. Suzanna went on to describe her own experience of this:

Playback is about it being immediate and you sitting there, really being able to interact with it. Mm. I think live theatre is much more powerful than other forms [upward inflection]. You can bring in all your special effects and all that sort of thing, but nothing I think is as powerful as live theatre.

In this way, PBT can also be seen to be responsive and sensitive to those present.

P18. Playback Theatre emphasises the affective rather than the cognitive elements of the story by focussing more on movement than words.

This proposition describes the process whereby participants are moved from the oral telling of a story—a story that is often intellectually based—to the affective mode. Brad, a regular

attendee and a teller on this occasion, talked about how the physical context took him straight back to the original experience he had told in story:

Well, that night it was happening really for the moment again the thing that had happened previously. But again it was being replayed in the moment you're presently in. So as it was being represented to you in the moment of present time, you're emotionally charged to respond to what those things are again. You don't have to remember. You're there. And so the actual physical context is generating the emotion. And because it's non-verbally represented and it's sending you information on so many different levels, that emotion actually hits you before the rational reason does.

Dianna, attending for the first time, explained the way that she saw the affective emphasis being used:

When the actors actually started playing I was impressed by the way they had listened so carefully to her story. They seemed to isolate key events and key phrases that she had used that they were able to playback and enlarge on. I found myself starting to be tugged emotionally and as it went on it was like a relentless process of being drawn more and more into the story. In the end I started to feel that I was going to cry and I felt really awkward about it. I didn't want to but it was a relentless process. It just kept carrying on, the unfolding of someone else's tragedy.

Finally, Louise used the powerful metaphor of an "unravelling ball of silk" as she tried to explain the capture of the affective rather the cognitive in what she saw in PBT:

I think of it as sort of almost visual, you know, so much of it was music and movement, that in fact something like the web image I think would probably just about sums it up because a whole lot of words and a whole lot of rationalisation and thought about it just doesn't capture it. It's not essentially a wordy art form. It really changes it into something else in a way, talking about it. I think if there was an image that just about captures I suppose it's something like an unravelling ball of silk, you know. There's moving, moving. And sort of like sometimes, you know, you see a photograph of people that have been moving quickly and it's just like all you can see is bands of colour where people have been moving and I think of that, you know (laughs). And I just, I just like the whole movement and, and feel, mmm. The unravelling of it.

Each of these co-investigators reports on the way that, in using movement more than words, PBT works to reveal the feelings in a story.

P19. Playback Theatre draws on the interaction of the social, ritualistic and content dimensions.

While the co-investigators don't talk about this directly, it is possible to see this relationship described in their transcripts by inference. Uma, for example, described the interaction this way:

It's that first telling of the story to someone you don't know and it gets easier from there. It's a sense of everyone's in there together. Oh, and there's a sense that people go there knowing that that's what they're going to do so you, oh, so usually a good part of the audience are there because they value the telling of stories, and they listening to, and the creation of magic.

Here, the structure is revealed through “the first telling of the story”; the presence of the audience, in that “everyone is in there together”, and that theatre is created: “so usually a good part of the audience are there because they value the telling of stories, and they listening to, and the creation of magic”.

John also revealed for the first time an important dimension of the social context; that is, what the audience bring with them to a performance. This dimension is a social one and has the capacity to influence powerfully how a performance is received. In these words, John speaks of the expectations that he arrived with:

I went there with the idea of, I mean with the idea of entertainment. There was also an expectation, having been before, I know how it was working, or will work. It's a nice air of expectation to know that, Mm! There's going to be a story told, there's going to be a few stories told, I may have one of them, I don't know, it depends on what comes up. Um, so there's also that air of expectation, then you move from that expectation, into what you're going to expect, into the actual happening of it and you're caught in this story! Uh! And so, the expectation moves onto involvement. I was happy with, how I was, then, quite receptive, and open, you know. An open acceptance of what was being told. Ah, enjoyment of what was being told, and enjoying the stories.

P20. Playback Theatre uses music to evoke a mood, shape a scene, reflect and induce the emotional development of a story, embody a role, render the full emotional content of a story and reveal a subtext that otherwise may remain hidden to the teller and audience.

Kate described how this element really stood out for her:

The things that stood out for me were the music, it was fantastic. Sometimes music has a way of making a direct connection that no acting or words can do, and I thought that happened last night in that story about Chopin, brilliant.

Nick, who has worked as a musician in PBT, described the process that he uses, and it is worthwhile quoting him at length:

As to what I'm aware of, the dynamics of story telling. And how to really augment that as a musician. Not just to augment it but have an active or proactive sort of hand in crafting the story. That's one of the main things that I've been trying to work on in myself is that ability to not just react and respond to what I'm seeing, what's going on but also to get right in there and, and constructively help to shape the stories that are, as they're played back so they become really satisfying. So that moments of change are clearly delineated. I can help the actors a lot by triggering moments and leading into to changes that need to occur. You know, when a change needs to occur in a story sometimes everyone can get caught on a sort of a wash of uncertainty as to where things are, and where to go next, you know. And as a musician you're really often ideally placed to bring in a theme that's going to trigger the next scene. You know, with words perhaps or a sound and feeling that will suggest to the actors where it needs to shift to.

Nick talks of the way he tries to use music “when a change needs to occur” ... [or] “to bring in a theme” clearly indicating the evocation from music that occurs in PBT.

Summary of the Process of Playback Theatre

In this chapter we looked at the empirical data from interviews in light of what they say about the *Process* of PBT. Twenty propositions were analysed through the NUD*IST program (see Appendix E) were illustrated by material from relevant transcripts taken from the co-investigators' talk about PBT.

This served to provide empirical evidence the *Process* of PBT as experienced has the key characteristics of:

1. *Storytelling* which:

- Involves the audiences' own stories
- Facilitates self-disclosure/openness
- Transforms into art
- Involves group/community witnessing
- Honours, focuses on and validates, tellers and their stories
- Co-operatively makes “seen” the problem/issues in the story.

2. Use of *multi-language* and *multi-modalities*, which:

- Facilitates audience identification with the story
- Evokes mood
- Reveals the subtext and emotional content of the story
- Enables embodiment of collective experience
- Promotes catharsis and multi-perspectives.

3. Use of *ritual* which:

- Creates a frame of “safety”
- Creates an atmosphere of respect
- Enables meaning to be represented in an aesthetic form
- Facilitates transformation of participants’ experience
- Activates the inner experiences of the audience
- Enables interaction of the social, aesthetic with the content, which leads to the:

4. Shaping of experience(s)

- Involves all participants actively
- Makes the particular be experienced as universal
- Allows emergence of the affective as well as the cognitive.

This *Process* domain of PBT has certain *Outcomes*, and the following Chapter (11) considers the empirical evidence regarding them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Playback Theatre: Outcomes

In a time of drastic change,
It is the learners who inherit the future.
The learned find themselves equipped
To live in a world that no longer exists.

Eric Hoffer (1973:32)

Introduction

Chapter Eleven presents empirical evidence revealing the *outcomes* of PBT, or the meanings that people make as a result of experiencing it. In this chapter, I focus on what the co-investigators report in the light of fourteen propositions conceptualised from the literature through using the program NUD*IST, as described at the beginning of Act IV. Before discussing the outcomes it is appropriate to remind the reader that a central focus of this research has been on *meaning-making* in PBT. I used the lived experience of the participants, who by virtue of their involvement during the empirical component of the research became co-investigators with me, as a way to reveal the meaning-making potential inherent in this form. This lived-experience was then used to illuminate *how* participants made meaning, and furthermore *what* meanings they might make. These meanings became the learning-healing continuum described in the emergent theory.

It is important to understand that there is nothing in the data that shows that these co-investigators did **not** make any meaning in any of the nine PBT performances attended. This is not surprising as they were all volunteers, and the question of meaning-making was directly or indirectly asked of them. Whereas two co-investigators did describe how the actors either did not “get” the essence of their story, or the aesthetic representation of their story did not seem to work theatrically, these statements are qualitatively different, though related, from the meaning-making process itself. It could be the case, for example, that some people in the

audience made no meaning out of a performance at all, and this could be a focus for future research.

It might also be remembered that the propositions developed (Appendix E) were derived from the PBT literature itself and a characteristic of this literature is that it is grounded in the PBT practitioner movement. As a result of the situatedness of this literature, there is very little, if any, critique of PBT, hence this research, drawing as it does on this literature could be viewed as having an advocacy function. However, this research was not concerned with what PBT purports to be, or how it works, or indeed, its benefits, but rather if there was empirical support for the claims that have been made.

Playback Theatre Outcomes

O1. Playback Theatre has a therapeutic/healing effect.

Brad, a teller on this occasion, had this to say about the effect PBT had upon him:

Emotionally at the time I felt sad and happy, and a release of laughter and tension when some of those sexual scenes were going on. The conflict, but also a sadness when the conflict did occur. And to feel that, to see that represented, and to see it actualised I suppose made it even more real. I mean that was my story there and they were capturing something, confirming something for me that I was feeling which they just picked up and took off, took a bit further, as in expressing what they understood of my story.

Engagement of feelings is indicated here: “emotionally I felt sad ... happy ... laughter”. The fact that Brad felt a therapeutic effect is suggested when he says, “they were ... confirming for me”; and “[I felt] a release ... of tension”.

Ned extended this notion of the healing effect of PBT, when he said:

I feel differently somehow inside, but I can't quite explain that or articulate that because I haven't had it long enough really. But the coinciding of the two [the playback and the event], I think moved me along very quickly and maybe helped me look at the—I think I said to one of the players, it was a blessing for me. I was actually moving from the grief and in a sense there is some anger with all of that, but to move fairly quickly to look at a gift that death is actually, now that my Dad died is a gift to me. As the playing out of that, my relationship with my Dad was a gift to me also by those people in that place and that time and so it was somehow, there is some freeing in that, some healing in that.

Finally, Kirsten, an enormously experienced playbaker, used the powerful metaphor of a ‘light shining on experience’ to describe both how a sense of healing worked for her and the change that occurred as a result:

Another way is thinking of light being shed on one's own personal experience in some way. That doesn't relate particularly to connectedness or creativity but it is

kind of a— I'm not quite sure how to characterise it but I am thinking of an experience many times as a teller telling something which I have perhaps thought of many, many times, maybe a painful memory that I have gone back to a number of times. When I tell it and I see it I see new things in it that change it permanently for me so that it is not painful any more, or painful in the same way. It is both because I am seeing it externalised, outside me instead of inside my mind's eye. Also it is because of the creativity of the actors that they are bringing something to it, which is from them, and it is not just myself animating all those characters as I do in my memory. It is being open to how they heard my story and how they bring it to life. From that moment that story changes its meaning for me and becomes less hurtful.

For Kirsten, the change that she reports is “that it is not painful anymore ... or in the same way ... its meaning for me becomes less hurtful”. For the co-investigators, then, PBT generates a healing effect through feelings being engaged, expressed, affirmed, and creatively externalised resulting in “freeing” and “healing”.

02. Playback Theatre results in bonds being constructed between members of the group, the audience and the storyteller him or herself.

Louise expressed this proposition this way:

Being a type of performance that brings people's stories out and makes connections between the people who are participating. I mean there were connections happening between the audience and the actors, [and] between different members of the audience.

Shane described those relationships he saw being constructed between participants thus:

Then the idea that I had was while I was watching the face of the people presenting, you know offering their story, I was watching their reaction to the performers and seeing where there were connections and where there weren't. And I think to some extent in all of the deliveries there was a degree of probably understanding and experience which went beyond what was there before. Also just the sharing, the openness, it is terribly comforting to be able to share something with people who you didn't know five minutes ago even if that something can be deep and serious experience in your own life. That is a break through.

For Shane the “connections” he mentions and the “sharing” as being “terribly comforting”.

Tain further helped to describe how bonds are constructed in highlighting the sharing that occurred, the empathy that developed, and the understanding that flowed as a consequence of that sharing:

I just think it helps to understand fellow human beings better I think. You're just able to, I don't know; share their humour and their joy. Or you're able to kind of feel for them if that's, you know, been a painful thing.

Interestingly, this notion of connection is not only apparent to those who have attended previously. Liselle, attending for the first time, also described how the playback experience is connecting to others, affirming, and makes you feel that you are not “alone”:

Because you can identify yourself, because you might find a solution to your own questions, hearing somebody else's story is connecting you to the other person, makes you feel you're not alone. Maybe those it brings in something new when you share, when you actually bring out your own stories, letting go, rather than holding on to it, and making it more of a collective experience rather than your own experience. I think it's making you realise you're not alone, that everybody is with everybody, and we're all experiencing the same stories in different ways, most people the same and maybe there will be an idea of creating stories together rather than having your own.

Liselle speaks of it becoming “more of a collective experience”.

PBT, for these co-investigators thus, builds community through the experience of feeling “connected” with others, “comforted”, and that “everybody is with everybody”.

03. Playback Theatre creates meaning through the shaping and constructing of experience.

Tain said about the experience of the storyteller in PBT:

I think it's a different experience for the people telling it to seeing it. Just because, saying it's one thing, but having it right in your face and seeing it I think is really different.

When Tain says this she is making a distinction between “telling it” and “seeing it”. She suggests that the “seeing” creates meaning.

Suzanna, whose perspective was informed through her own experience as a playback actor, described how she saw a change in meaning happen for a teller:

There appeared to me, for the teller, to be a point where she actually had moved further along in her analysing the whole situation. In the beginning, it was she wasn't sure of how her stance was—whether it was all worth it or, or whatever. By the end of that story she was saying, ‘it was worth it’.

Suzanna remarks on how the teller “moved further along in her analysing the whole situation”.

This construction was also clear to Liselle, as reflected in these words:

It brings me so many different levels of understanding because they reflect on my experience. I reflect on their experience about my story and then I say, ‘oh this is how you can see this well’, so I'm gaining so many different levels of assumptions [and] consciousness about it.

Liselle is experiencing meaning: “they reflect on my experience” and “I’m gaining so many levels of consciousness about it”.

Evan, a teller on this occasion, helped illuminate this proposition further when he described his experience of the playback as giving him a stronger sense of his own story, that is, something was revealed to him that he had not seen before:

I mean I was glad that I did that [tell], and I was glad that they did the way that they did it, and I think there was some very powerful moments there for me that sort of gave me a stronger sense of my own story than I had before I told it. It is the way that they acted it out.

For Evan, the shaping of experience in the playback gave him “a stronger sense of my own story”. Shane also revealed an extension to this dimension when he highlighted that the actors have a role—both literally and metaphorically—in creating meaning. For example, the actors add meaning to the story that was told. Shane described it this way:

A person told the story and that has meaning in many ways, just to reveal so publicly and to tell a story that has some sort of value is important. To watch the performers portray it was interesting because they were adding their human meaning onto that story. So they had their element.

And Curtis, someone who had done some playback training, described how PBT in his experience provides a reflection back to the teller that is more than a mirror image—this reflection revealing something that might be “profoundly true” for themselves:

And this is my own experience when I’ve told a story, is that when they see enacted that the mirror will be— that they will get a mirror back to themselves that what they— this chaotic, frightening need, funny, whatever it might be stuff that’s happened to them, is that it’s actually being understood. And understood in a way that they themselves may not even know but that someone really has seen their story. And the mirror that they get back is not just that they might see it themselves, their own words, but they are actually getting a reflection back of something that is profoundly true about themselves.

To experience “something that is profoundly true about themselves” through Playback is an example of the creation of meaning.

Suzanna also went on to make clear an extremely important facet of PBT, that is, that participants are “active” meaning-makers. She described her own experience, where the theme of the performance was on the issue of reconciliation:

But I guess what it does is, it from an intellectual point of view it taps me into, it helps me connect with those experiences that I’ve had, both with Aboriginal communities and with my own family links. But it also takes me deeper as well. I also feel a deepening of maybe a political commitment to both sides having to take the matter in hand, not just one side, and—mm. And, that change is, has

occurred [for me], you know, just not just on a head level I suppose but on a heart and, for want of a better word, a spiritual level.

What this reveals is that meaning-making is an integral part of PBT, and particularly profound in the way that heart and the head are linked to allow meaning making to occur. Suzanne provided a clear example:

I wouldn't have been able to really say what I was feeling, but now that I see it, and you've given me those words, you've actually given me a tunnel to view it in, or a connection. You know, a couple of weeks back, I was the teller, and I was just telling a story which I knew had some emotional component, but I didn't really know what that emotional component was. But I knew for me, it was emotional; otherwise I wouldn't have been telling the story. But I had a need to tell this story. And what they showed me was why I was telling this story, what I really felt about it. It meant that I could deal with that issue much easier. So it's a working through the issue by seeing it there.

For these co-investigators PBT had the outcome of meaning-making largely because of “working through the issue by seeing it there”. Importantly, this occurs on a number of different levels and happens in relation to both stories that individuals tell, and the stories of others.

O4. Playback Theatre endows the teller with a sense of status, and provides recognition and affirmation.

This proposition foregrounds that there are a number of outcomes for tellers. One outcome is affirmation. Tain described the affirmation that people feel through PBT:

I think those [painful and embarrassing] experiences everybody has got in some form or another and I feel warmed by people when I hear what their experiences are, and I think that that's why a lot of other people go to playback too.

Evan, who had experience as a teller, described his experience as both “validating” and “enriching”:

I felt that I sort of came out the other side of that experience and having seen it acted out, I felt like, "Yes! That's what it's all about". And I noted the kids who also had similar stories acted out also would have come out the other side feeling like their lives had been validated and enriched by that experience.

Interestingly, Curtis described an experience where he felt differently in the end about a teller as a result of seeing him revealed more fully “through” the playback experience:

So I found myself thinking I didn't want to hear what he had to say, and I wished he hadn't been the one to put up his hand and speak. But then I had an experience when the story was being played back to him that it actually changed how I felt about him. And what it did for me was to, it was a strange experience, it actually—I ended up having quite a lot of feeling for him. And also I respected him as well.

Recognition and affirmation of the teller thus seems to occur in PBT despite initial participant rejections: I didn't want to hear what he had to say ... but when the story was being played back ... it changed how I felt about him".

Curtis then went on to describe this not just as a change in understanding, but also as development of empathy for what this person was feeling:

A different understanding, I think it was— I guess the word, particularly with the kind of work I do, the word I'd use would be that there was an empathy for what he was really experiencing in himself. So it actually played back, it actually let me see what was going on inside him.

Finally, Hayley described her own experience of having status, recognition and affirmation as a teller:

And the best bit was when he said "what would the name on the birth certificate" and I said Toby and everyone clapped. I mean I get tingles talking about it. And I told [my partner] which was really nice for him to hear. Like that was a really healing thing. That was really good, to get that sort of validation, validation en masse. Fantastic. I thought, "oh that's really great" and that was quite healing and unexpected. I got really validated and it's given me certain strength. It was good.

The provision of the teller with status, recognition and affirmation as described by co-investigators is an outcome with both personal elements "I get tingles ... about it" (Hayley), and general elements "there was an empathy for what he was really experiencing" (Curtis).

O5. Playback Theatre is educational.

In order to consider the proposition that PBT is a potential site for learning, it is helpful to consider that it has a number of different dimensions, namely a) self-knowledge; b) social knowledge, and; c) instrumental learning. The comments of the co-investigators will now be reported. First, PBT is educational in that it focuses on:

(a) Self-knowledge.

Kate, an experienced playback, said about her experience of PBT:

Well it is sort of like a recognition, of something in themselves, they have seen something that means something to them personally, and it can happen the other way too.

This highlights Kate's belief that, in PBT, participants experience *personal* meaning. Evan described his experience of personal learning:

I learnt about myself. Um, in the story that was told, no I am sorry, that I told, it was acted out. There were a couple of moments there where I looked at these people and thought "Yeah! That's me, or an aspect of me" and as I said with the violin dance, I felt I learnt something about feeling strong with my own sort of

creative journey if you like. Because he showed that when I actually decided to stay that I then became stronger for it.

Interestingly, this personal learning is not just confined to tellers. Uma made this clear:

I mean, it's educational just in that you're sitting down and hearing other people's experiences. It's education for the self, seeing how other people, how you appear in other people's eyes ... it's educational for the audience in terms of expanding their understanding of other people. I guess it's educational for the performers in terms of watching what they do with it.

What Uma's words reveal is that learning comes from hearing other people's stories, and "how you appear in other people's minds". She says it is "educational ... in terms of expanding ... understanding of other people".

Suzanna, experienced as she was at Playback, described how she observed someone's understanding develop as a result of the playback experience, how the teller "moved further along in analysing the whole situation":

I just think some very clever work, some very on the ball work, in that little story, and because of that there appeared to me, for the teller, to be a point where she actually had moved further along in her analysing the whole situation. In the beginning, it was she wasn't sure of how her stance was—whether it was all worth it or, or whatever. By the end of that story she was saying, 'it was worth it, because that's what that woman wanted'. And the effort was worth it, and even if she couldn't quite understand why this woman would want to put herself through that course, to her now the importance became that it was important to that student, and therefore, the effort had been worth it. And I don't think that's what she came—started with. So, there was real movement. And I think that that's in layers, it wasn't just superficially what the woman was saying, but they went down to some of the feelings, well, some of the frustrations as well, um, yeah,

Interestingly, Suzanna also described how her own understanding of the situation had shifted:

"Um, I could feel a shift in how I thought about it as well."

Finally, John talked about his own experience of learning something about himself that was not previously visible:

Firstly, on the level of just what was played back, that was great, totally accurate of how I felt about it, and they picked the emotions, and I laughed. I laughed at myself, I laughed at the whole thing. It wasn't a serious situation, well on the face of it, for me it wasn't a serious situation, but then I saw elements there that I—'Oh, yeah! OK! That's how I might operate!' And—yeah, there was some learning.

(b) Social knowledge.

Shane described how he saw social learning happening in a performance:

Then the idea that I had was while I was watching the face of the people presenting, you know offering their story. I was watching their reaction to the

performers and seeing where there were connections and where there weren't, and I think to some extent in all of the deliveries there was a degree of probably understanding and experience which went beyond what was there before. Also just the sharing, the openness, it is terribly comforting to be able to share something with people who you didn't know five minutes ago even if that something can be deep and serious experience in your own life. That is a break through.

Evan drew attention to the way that PBT reveals “something [about] ... who we are ... what we do”:

What I find with the Playback is that they are touching something that is more of the essence of who we are, or what we do. Or what we feel or we express, or what happens to us or whatever in the same way as a dream in a way can be more real than the experience of real life. So when you go in there and you find that their acting out scenes or moments or stories or feelings that are thrown to them by members of the audience, and you see it being brought to life. You can see, I feel anyway, that there something very strong creatively happening at that moment and you think "Yes, yes, that's what it's all about and that's what it feels like" or "now I know what that person was feeling", or something like that. That makes you, well it makes me feel that, more of a zing to that moment.

Evan is describing how he is developing his social learning in his PBT experience: “yes ... that's what it feels like [for that person]”. Evan also highlights that in PBT, feelings are engaged in learning. Tain extended this idea, describing how she was able to learn about others through the Playback experience, and, importantly, how this learning occurred through the development of empathy:

I just think it helps to understand fellow human beings better I think. You're just able to, I don't know, share their humour and their joy or you're able to kind of feel for them, you know.

Uma also helped reveal this dimension when she talked about “shared” experiences, and what it means to be human:

It's just a sense of commonality of experience. I think that there are things that are common to all of us, and I guess that brings a closeness or an understanding of each other.

Finally, Sharon, who was attending for the first time, described her own experience of social learning in a profound way as a result of the playback of a reconciliation story:

Yes, right at the end, where the actor acted out the Aboriginal woman speaking to the Assembly at the end. And the agony, and the silence that she went through there, and [the playback] was an obvious exaggeration, but it to me highlighted exactly what the woman, over many, many years, has gone through. Not on the spot there, obviously, but over many many years has gone through, so that deepened my understanding and reflection upon what she might have gone through you know, throughout her lifetime. So I think that was very very powerful, to add that dimension into it, it was really capturing a lifetime of struggle in a moment of silent agony. And that was very powerful.

(c) Has the potential for instrumental learning (where specific skills such as listening and communication can be taught).

Cal talked about the listening involved:

I guess because you hear a story and then it is dramatised. Okay you hear a story, so you are listening on one level, and then you see four or five other people and musicians' interpretation of it and you think, O yes. It gives you a deeper or a different perspective on it. It draws things out of the story that you mightn't 've thought of or hit on yourself. So I guess that is the value of it and why I went a second time.

Tracey also mentioned the *quality* of the listening involved, and this indirectly points to what is modelled to participants as part of the PBT process:

The performers listen very attentively to what I said, and what I didn't say, and what I implied maybe, and filtered that through their own knowledge of the world with the intent of trying to capture what I had said and what I had not said, and present that back to me and to other people in the room.

In a different example, Evan highlighted the spontaneity of the actors, "being in the moment", and how the performers were teaching him something about life skills through what they modelled:

I really enjoy that thing of doing something right at that moment and really being able to go with it. So I certainly have learnt about that. I learnt also about the way in which those people work together. They work as a unit of very different personalities but they work in with each other. Then the offers that they give each other that they take up, you know work in obviously a particular physical sort of a way. The fact that virtually no time last night was anybody talking over the top of anybody else because they were trying to do something at the same time. I mean simply as performers they were teaching me something. Also I was learning that you know there is so much more to life than just getting through day to day.

The co-investigators statements about their experience of PBT indicates that it is a site for learning in a broad sense of the word. There is evidence of personal learning, social learning and instrumental learning. Importantly, the above comments show that this learning is achieved through a variety of means, and is made powerful and cogent by the way it is mediated through the arts, the dynamic of those present, and by the models that are provided through the PBT process itself.

O6. Playback Theatre builds community.

Co-investigators reported that they identify with, and relate to, some of the characters who are embodied in the playback. Dianna described her experience this way:

Yes there is. I suppose because there are 3 or 4 people playing it over, playing the story that there are multiple levels on which you can be engaged. You could be

engaged with the younger brother. That hilarious story about that girl who ate that plastic lion the other night. If you were the goody goody two shoes in the family you could relate to the brother, or her, or the slow driver of the father. There are a lot of ways that you can actually relate to the characters.

Interestingly, this experience wasn't particular to those who had attended before. Shane described how he could relate to the story that was told, thereby establishing a connection with someone else in the audience:

I thought the humanness was a key thing that came through, that we are all human. The story about that man is not dissimilar to the story about me. That woman and what is happening to her could happen to anybody, and hey, I didn't even realise that woman was going through that while she was just sitting there two seats away from me. It is an opening up of awareness.

Shane's words, therefore, revealed the importance of story as a way of connecting with others. Finally, Uma highlighted that stories at some level are universal, and this brings a degree of closeness and understanding to the performance that may not have been present before:

Well, the meditation story was the story that could've been my story. It could've been anyone's story probably. Apart from that, and that was the one that was totally parallel to my experience. But apart from that it was more moments that resonated with me than whole stories. It's just a sense of commonality of experience. I think that there are things that are common to all of us, and I guess that brings a closeness or an understanding of each other. Yeah, I guess that comes back to the archetypal stuff, the universal stuff, that (pause) we're all infinitely different but we're infinitely similar also. Here's this, like a common base to talk from.

PBT, then, is clearly a potent way to build "understanding of each other" (community) through "experiencing a common base to talk from".

07. Playback Theatre builds understanding from multiple levels of representation.

(a) One is "really understood".

Curtis described both how this happened to him as a result of the playback:

When it was played back to me, I can't quite remember how it went round, but as each person in the Playback played it out, it became more and more intense. And so what happened in the end was that the last person who, I can't quite remember exactly how it went, but the last person who said something, this intensity had been building up, just screamed. And I'll never forget that moment. Because it showed to me was actually how I did feel. Like it was a true reflection of the pain that I experienced that even I couldn't admit to myself. Because it was just something that was like, you know, it seemed such a little thing. But in fact it was this huge thing. I'd actually been quite rocked by it. So I guess there's that, and I guess that experience for me was that it had been really understood.

Curtis notes how the representation had a number of different levels, “it became more and more intense”, and he learns and feels from this how “such a little thing ... was this huge thing”.

(b) Emotion is interpreted and given perspective.

Louise, a first-time attendee and a teller on this occasion, described her experience of telling and how she obtained perspective largely because of the multiple renditions of her story:

Because it's really important to have that outlet, and I think in some ways that Playback Theatre offers some of that, but it's also an entertainment. And it was delightful to see people's stories, not necessarily in trying to be resolved but to see them dramatised. And what the actors did that I really enjoyed was like when I told my story, I had three pairs of people giving their own spontaneous and different interpretations to it. So, I got to free it, I got to see it represented three different ways. And I could see some of my story in each of those representations.

(c) Emotion is reflected in language, movement and sound.

This dimension of the proposition describes how emotions are represented in PBT in a number of different ways. Ivan described how the actors do this:

I felt in a sense each of the actors acted, you know took a feeling or a dimension of what had been presented and sort of stuck with that. So one would portray anger or frustration, another one would portray some other emotion.

The effect of this diverse representation is that the playback of the story is different from just hearing it. Brian described it this way:

Obviously one aspect is that in the story just told, the audience member who's telling the story is only telling it in words ... and if you count the kinaesthetic there's three senses [in the playback] anyway. So that's obviously part of it.

Bruce described what happened when emotion was represented to him in a variety of ways:

And so the actual physical context is generating the emotion. And because it's non-verbally represented and it's sending you information on so many different levels, then the emotion actually hits you before the rational reason does.

For Bruce the use of “different levels” for him meant “emotion actually hits you ... before the rational”. Finally, as Rebecca described it:

I feel that by that process [the use of words, music and action], I've been able to tap into it at an emotional level, which I think does give me greater understanding.

These co-investigators found that, for them, PBT builds understanding from presenting multiple points of view using multi-modal ways.

O8. Playback Theatre reframes experience.

Tamara talked about the difference between telling the story and seeing it played back: “It seemed more powerful to me having it played back. It did bring out something. I don’t know why or how but it brought another level”. Uma helped reveal what this other level was:

And the working out of those problems, so I think it can be used educationally in so many ways, and also that it's sort of out there. Like it's really different from nutting things through with somebody. I guess it gives you a meta-perspective or an external perspective, getting a sense of what it's like or what you're like when you talk about something or the perceptions in the community or whatever, political situation and actually having your interactions on the situation or whatever it is, fed back to you. It's kind of like, 'Oh, so, is that what it's like? Is that's what happening?

Evan described how he gained a different understanding from having the story that he told played back:

But when it was actually acted out it gives it a completely different aspect, a completely different perspective because it's like standing back from yourself and seeing yourself doing something and that you need to see it in a different way. It's like if you see yourself on it in a different way. It's like if you see yourself on video, you are going to see yourself in a different way from what you think you are going to be. Well this was like having somebody act out my life and I felt, yeah, that's that's certainly you know, showing me something about myself.

This outcome of PBT was not just visible to those who were familiar with the form. Beth, as someone attending PBT for the first time, also saw how it worked:

First of all the person tells their story and then the actors act it out, so you are getting a different perspective and then you are sitting back and you get your own perspective on the story. A person will tell a story and the actors will act it out and actually it can be funnier or, they take a different perspective on it. So yes, I think it just gives you something to think about.

Suzanna gave a specific example of how she felt differently as a result of the playback performance—importantly a feeling and understanding that helped her cross a cultural boundary:

I feel that, by that process, I’d been able to tap into it at an emotional level, which I think does give me greater understanding of the loss, that that Stolen Generation have. As opposed to just thinking about it. I actually feel that I can empathise more because I—um, yeah, because I—would have a sense of what it would feel like not to have that, that cultural background.

The description these interviewees gave shows that PBT reframes experience in a way that allows learning and healing to occur which can develop from a change of perspective.

O9. Playback Theatre develops in individuals an enhanced sense of self and an awareness of the inter-connectedness of self and others that transcends the

immediacy of the performance—that is, individual and collective experience are connected

Sarah talked about her learning that came about as a result of hearing what other people said in reaction to the playback of a story:

It will help, because I discovered tonight that other people also have rifts or separations from close hereditary ties. And that it doesn't always come back together before someone dies and that sometimes someone, a person in the audience said that sometimes it just doesn't come back. And that it's really helpful to know that. That's how it is for other people too, and they've learnt to live with that, and that's been ok. It mightn't be the way they really want it, but it's ok.

Hayley described this in more detail:

When I sat down [after telling] and a woman who was sitting next to me who I don't know very well, who hadn't known about that, she cried through the whole story apparently. And she was still teary and at the end she was still really teary so I thought, wow, it really triggered something in her as well. And I felt wow, again that's validating too, you know. And obviously nice for her even though she's sad, she's obviously seen that other people go through exactly what you just said. That we're not alone. I had that with that duck story with that woman. You know about the ducks dying and I thought, oh really, because I often feel like that. A bit separate sometimes and a bit deep and a bit overwhelmed at the world and city and the harshness. And just to see she had— that like I'm not a bit weird, and I'm not crazy. Like she actually had those feelings too. Yeah it's very validating. I keep saying validating but I found it validating last night.

Hayley's feeling of connectedness is described where she says how her experience of PBT made her realise "other people go through [it] ... we're not alone". Ursula, with a background in counselling, extended this idea linking awareness of our own lives in respect to awareness of others:

I think that true of any enduring story telling no matter what format it takes. Whether it's theatre or novels or fairy stories, whatever. We were talking earlier about the privilege of speaking to someone. It's because it connects with your own experience. And if something is to have any value— I think all stories open up human experience which we can share. And which we become, which we recognise. I'm not sure it's always enriching, but somehow it adds to our consciousness, our own consciousness about our own lives and our own humanity.

Finally, Liselle talks about PBT being an experience where you can both see yourself as yourself, and see yourself as part of a larger group to which you belong:

Because you can identify yourself, because you, you might find a solution to your own questions, hearing somebody else's story is connecting you to the other person, makes you not feel you're alone. Maybe those it brings in something new when you share when you actually bring out your own stories, letting go, rather than holding on to it, and making it more of a collective experience rather than your own experience. I think it's making you realise you're not alone, that everybody is with everybody, and we all experiencing the same stories in different

ways, most people the same and maybe there will be an idea of creating stories together rather than having your own.

For these co-investigators PBT connects individuals to a group and the group to individuals, thereby enhancing their sense of humanity that transcends the immediacy of the performance.

O10. Playback Theatre transforms experience.

This proposition describes how an experience can be changed as a result of a PBT performance. For some co-investigators, this is akin to “magic”. Uma put it like this:

It's like somebody tells a story, it's pretty ordinary, and two minutes later you've got the finished product, and you've got an art, a piece of work, art. Or a representation or something that's been created and it's sort of like the alchemy of the transformation. Yeah. The magic of that.

Hayley put it like this:

When the actors playback more than [what] the person's said, they take it a step further. Which is a bit what my interpretation is, when they say, 'you've got wisdom'. That's what I mean too. They're really hearing, they hearing more than what you said on the surface. And that's where I thought they can give the person more insight into what's going on, when they take it a bit further. And yeah, I think that's good.

Here Hayley is describing transformation of experience when she says: “they take it a step further ... [and thereby] give the person more insight into what's going on”. Brad explained in detail both how this happened, and what the result was for him:

You saw the whole picture and you see things you never saw before. In your own story you only ever see your story, your life from your point of view because you're in it. And there's no way you can literally get outside your point of view. You can try and understand the other person's point of view, understand the situation from a different perspective but when you have the luxury of sitting outside watching actors portray things— But when I saw [the actor] do it from my position, outside it, I saw a whole different view of misunderstanding, perception, the way this person, the other person is seeing it, in the story.

Finally, Nancy foregrounded how transformation is intrinsically interesting, and educational:

Well, for me it makes it more interesting and it also, well for me it takes me on to other ideas, I mean him telling the story already, I, you know there are triggers going and I think about things, and then when they do [playback] then, you know it sort of expands my horizons about how I might look at something.

The transformation of experience and more importantly, the understanding of experience that can occur in PBT is clearly depicted in the interview responses of the co-investigators.

O11. Playback Theatre acknowledges the universality of feelings that underlie being human.

Letitia commented specifically on this proposition:

I guess the acceptance that all people are alike in some basic things. Like those feelings, like you have a thousand people, they might feel a little bit different, but basically they're feeling the same thing, it's just a difference of how you show it on the outside.

And for Shane, this was one of the distinguishing features of PBT itself:

I thought the humanness was a key thing that came through, that we are all human. And there is an openness and an honesty and a revelation of what is human and the humanness of us all. The whole subject matter was humanity.

Mary also found that this sense of “oneness” stood out for her: “I suppose what really struck was just the kind of, how we all have this overriding sense of kind of oneness, you know, like in terms of all humanity”, and for Mary, how this was “heartening”:

And I suppose because it does, I mean, I kind of find it quite heartening to realise that we all do share a kind of common humanity. And you know, that what's really important about our lives, are things like sort of our desire to be loved and to, to love and everything. And so, you know, like last night sort of confirmed that really.

Interestingly, Nina conceptualised this aspect of PBT as something analogous to worship—broadly speaking:

Well, for me, I go to a church and stuff, but I'm really dissatisfied with churches, because I think they lack stuff that I saw at Playback. 'Cos I see worship as something that not necessarily involves you with God, but involves you interacting with God's creatures, God's, you know, people, and you're here with God and those people enjoying life! And I think a lot of that aspect was there at Playback, that we were here, being people, celebrating humanity, celebrating mercy, celebrating all those aspects that, you know, I see as Godly aspects. And so, in one sense even though, to me, you know, all those people weren't there praising God there was that essence, there was that searching, there was that 'We can see good out of this bad', which a lot of humanity is, you know. We can seek through this [through playback] and go on to Mercy, go on to Grace.

The above comments about PBT show that it can reflect our humanity through drawing out what we have in common and in the search for understanding that is so often revealed in this genre.

O12. Playback Theatre promotes a feeling (affect) response by the individual and the group.

Suzanna described how, in a performance which had as its theme “Reconciliation” and a story that focussed on the Stolen Generation, she accessed feelings about her own family:

And [the actor] just said, ‘I was taken away, and my mother was taken away, and my grandmother, and now—and me, and, and treated like we were just—animals’. I could feel very, yeah, you know, I can just feel it now, um ... I could f--, yeah, you felt that you could feel that. I don’t know that I can say, well, I’ve felt that, but I know what it feels like as in to be taken away. But I know what it feels like to have a strong family background, which I have. I have a very extended family, and that family means a lot to me—my mother and my grandmother, and to not have those connections, that’s what it then felt like there, when I, when I heard that, and saw it.

In a like manner, Dianna, attending for the first time, described her engagement in the playback of the same story, and the effect that this had on her:

I found myself starting to be tugged emotionally and as it went on it was like a relentless process of being drawn more and more into the story. In the end I started to feel that I was going to cry and I felt really awkward about it. I didn’t want to but it was a relentless process. It just kept carrying on, the unfolding of someone else’s tragedy.

And while Dianna felt “that I was going to cry”, Tain by way of contrast, linked her own feeling response with the expression of feeling by others, and noted how this can be comforting:

I think there’s just something about sharing and identifying with one another that I think people, makes people a lot more, it makes people feel very human I think. Oh, that’s okay. That person had that happen to them and that’s similar to my experience and oh, God, it’s comforting to hear that they felt really embarrassed or they felt really depressed too.

Interestingly, Mary, revealed another important dimension of PBT’s affective influence when she highlighted how the expression of feelings can build community:

You know, because they encourage you as the audience to kind of talk to other people and to share stories, to share personal stories. And you’ve all sat there and you’ve all kind of cried together and you’ve had people’s lives exposed and so you really do feel some kind of connection. So that was quite amazing I thought, to sort of, to feel that at the end of two hours.

Importantly, the telling and portraying of one story can also affect all of those present. Hayley drew attention to a different dimension of this proposition when she described how the meaning-making that occurred left her feeling “enriched”:

Well there’s a few things. One is I think there’s a beauty in hearing other people’s real stuff and I find that an honour to be a part of that. If someone shares with me

what's happening for them, I'm deeply— or what has happened I feel kind of honoured that they're being real with me. And I feel enriched just by that. Whether I relate particularly or not, that in itself for me is like a gift and doesn't happen enough in our society. So just that, and if it's something that I relate to particularly then it would touch me even closer.

Hayley also remarks here “there's a beauty in hearing other people's real stuff” and how she feels “deeply honoured”. Both are expressions of the affective dimension.

Finally, Evan explicitly linked the expression of feeling by both the individual and those present:

And I think also that thing of being part of the universal, or at least a wider experience in us and what your feeling is, is not just you, you know, you are not the only one. That there is other people as well, so if you can see somebody else's experience as being similar to yours, oh yes, I know what feels like you know, then I think is an equal part of feeling connection with other people. And I think that's a very important thing.

In other words these PBT participants found that PBT creates a feeling response both by the individuals and the group present at a performance—a response that affirms and builds community.

O13. Playback Theatre provides opportunities for reflection

Brad, who has also done some psychodrama training, reflected on his own experience of telling a story. He described how the playback provided him with some distance on this story, and consequently some new perspective:

So while the first time it happened [the experience] all you could go by was emotion, often emotion just controls you. The second time you watch it in Playback you've got the emotion again, but you also can reasonably see all the other information aspects that your emotion actually blocked you seeing the first time.

He continued:

These are sorts of things dramatically you can look in the in-between area, between actually being in it and talking about. So I should be able to think about it.

Here, Brad highlights that PBT creates a liminal space, and this is where reflection can occur. Cal, who had attended on two previous occasions, described how on both occasions he had learnt something through the opportunity PBT provided for reflection:

I have only had the two experiences of Playback but it seems that people can't help but tell the truth just from their emotional reactions. It certainly makes them look at themselves and in my experience in going to it both times it's been that. It has certainly made me look at myself and made me reflect on what is going on

with my mind and my feelings. So its been, particularly the first time that I went, quite a valuable experience. There was a bit lesson for me. It really brought home to me the business about how judgemental I can be.

Letitia conceptualised this opportunity for reflection as resulting in “opening myself up”:

And I think if I get somebody putting up a mirror in front of me, with a thing [playback] like that, I can look at myself. In day-to-day life I don't look that much at myself, at my feelings, but suddenly I'm confronted with something, in this sort of medium. And it reminds me, you know— I guess that that's what it is, that, it's also an acceptance of the fact that, basically, all people have the basic feelings, it's just a matter of how everybody displays them, or not, or doesn't display them. And, if I confront myself with those, and allow myself to be confronted with them, it's also a way of, of opening myself up.

Importantly, this process of reflection can extend past the theatre itself. Ugo described his experience of this phenomenon this way:

It [the playback] becomes quite a bit thing in your mind and in your experience. And so it stays with you after the show as well. And for the next few days, I'm still thinking about it. So for all those reasons it definitely brings clarity. It certainly brings, promotes reflection. Yeah if you like, integration of the experience. Or understanding of it.

And Tracey also came to some important understandings through her post-performance reflection:

One of the things that came to me afterwards was the thing of how the same thing like a house for example, or a dressing gown can represent comfort and safety, and at the same time it can be a trap. It can be a prison or a trap. That really came home to me in reflecting on it afterwards. Yes, that was what the dressing gown that I sort of hid away in because I was too afraid to face the world and I was very unsure of myself and I was very shy at the time. So it was comforting, but it also was a trap, hiding behind that persona. So I got quite a bit out of seeing that very brief moment played back.

Finally, Ulwin highlighted an important dimension of the encouragement to reflect when he revealed that PBT is not dogmatic:

But it leaves questions; it doesn't try and come up with answers. I think that would be the other bit that I would add to what I said earlier, the importance of not only the question that draws out but the questions that are left unresolved. There is no inherent need within the form to come to an answer.

It is clear then that these PBT participants found it educational in that it provides both physical and psychological space for reflection.

O14. Playback Theatre heightens awareness of the senses

Kate described how the improvised nature of PBT could be exciting:

A lot of people will say after they have watched a story where they have got it right they will say, ‘My God, how come you know how to say that? How did you know that is what is exactly what I said? Or my husband said this or that, how did you know?’ Because [the actors] just sort of intuit things and very often it is exactly what’s happened without even realising it. So it’s pretty exciting, very exciting!

And Beth described how this feeling of excitement can facilitate an audience to be “really attentive” and “connecting”:

You can feel that everyone is really attentive. You probably noticed. Everyone was leaning forward and really connecting. But is it, yes it is sort of different than when you go to a play, I think.

Furthermore, PBT happens in real time, in an embodied space that is physically close to the audience. Tain, for example, highlighted that because PBT is completely improvised and spontaneous, you don’t know what is coming next:

I always feel a bit on edge actually (laughs). The sense of excitement about, you have no idea what’s about to happen. Unlike going to say a film that you’ve read a review of, that you know is a suspense thriller or a comedy, there’s a sense of excitement with playback because you just, you just need no idea because it all depends on what comes out of the audience at a particular moment in time. So there’s that, and a sense of wondering also goes with that.

Finally, Suzanna described how PBT, when it works well, “you are drawn into it”—an experience that I can strongly relate to:

Well, you know, I think part of it is just the sheer exhilaration of seeing people’s thought process so quickly. And you’re thinking, ‘My God, how did they think of that!’ or you know, ‘these people are just playing off each other so well,’ A part of it is sheer appreciation for the skill of it, part of it is just being in the moment, and just absolutely enjoying it. I mean, I tend to find it really hard to— I try to be quite objective in my analysis of what’s working, what’s not working. Where are the problems here? Where are the dead spots? you know. How is the stage being used? Um, whether people are in the moment or not, whether there’s a relationship that’s been established, you know. I tend to try to be objective in that, to learn, so to sit back and learn, but I find it so hard! Because I’m just drawn into it. Just the sheer, I mean, entertainment value, it is that! It has the ability to reach good sorts of levels, psychological levels, to bind a community. It has all those things as well, you know, the ‘Power of Drama’, but it does, it’s entertaining, you know. It really is just fun.

PBT, then, engages an audience through a process that heightens the senses as illustrated by what participants say they feel: “excited”, “attentive”, “on edge”, “sheer exhilaration”, “drawn in”, “sheer appreciation”, “absolutely enjoying it”, “fun”.

Summary of the Outcomes of Playback Theatre

In this Chapter we looked at the empirical data from interviews in the light of what they say about the *Outcomes* of PBT. Fourteen propositions identified through analysis of the known literature on PBT were analysed using the NUD*IST Program (see Appendix E) were illustrated by material from transcripts of the co-investigators' talk about PBT. This provided empirical evidence that the *Outcomes* of PBT as experienced consist of the following:

1. Potential for *Education/learning*, through:
 - Promoting self-understanding/awareness (personal learning)
 - Focusing on the self's place in the world (social learning)
 - Modelling effective interactive/life skills (instrumental learning).
2. Potential for *Health/healing*, by:
 - Endowing participants with sense of status, affirmation/being heard
 - Creating sense of community
 - Enhancing recognition that the particular (individual) is universal (communal)
 - Providing catharsis opportunities
 - Giving perspective(s) to emotion
 - Engaging emotional response and sensory awareness
 - Providing for reflection
 - Using multiple levels of presentation.
3. Experience *reconstruction*, by:
 - Promoting the affective response
 - Giving opportunity for reflection
 - Reframing and transforming presented experience (story)
 - Creating meaning through shaping experience (Playback).
4. *Community building*, by:
 - Constructing bonds between all participants
 - Enhancing awareness of the interconnection between self and others and their experience(s)
 - Acknowledging and illustrating the universality of experience and feeling.

Act IV (Chapters 9, 10 & 11) has been presented. The players here (the empirical data) clearly show support for the propositions extrapolated through analysis using NUD*IST. However, there remains the possibility to synthesise these findings into an emergent theory of PBT by moving beyond the original research questions (outlined in Chapter 1) to attempt the

formulation of a phenomenologically based and “grounded theories” of PBT. This theory could be then be used as an explanatory device, and as a guide to further research. This synthesis and emergent theory is undertaken and developed in the next Chapter (12).

Finally, there was evidence that could be used to construct additional propositions. This is not surprising, considering the brief literature on PBT itself. A fuller set of these potential propositions is given in Appendix F. However, it is important to note that those propositions not dealt with here, in no way contradict the analytical heuristic presented in Chapter Nine. Further, and interestingly each of these propositions can be treated as *Attributes*, *Processes*, or *Outcomes* and therefore fit within the framework already described.

ACT V

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning
The end is where we start from.

T.S. Eliot (1974) *Four Quartets*