**Introduction**

In this particular study, the focus illuminates the creative process of two teachers devising and performing a piece of theatre that was filmed and witnessed by theatre based students, looking at the impact of this on student learning. Both authors of this paper are teachers in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) as well as researchers and theatre practitioners. The premise of this paper is to illustrate how to encounter and potentially deepen one's understanding of teaching practice through the research methodology known as a/r/tography. A/r/tography is an arts based methodology used to explore teaching practice (Siegesmund, 2012) by engaging in the researcher's art form to generate new perspectives on teaching practice.

The rationale for the research was to explore a new way of communicating with students to help with their learning and development for their final year project, a solo performance informed by autobiographic material. As teachers, researchers and theatre practitioners we wanted to experiment with our teaching practice using theatre arts. We wondered whether a solo performance by one of their teachers might communicate in new ways to help students develop their skills as performers. Presented here through an a/r/tographic lens are our reflections and findings from this process which we have arranged in terms of two relationships; that of the performer/director and also the student/teacher.

A solo performance was developed, utilising the teachers' interests and skills as performer and director. Initially the performance took place in front of a fee paying public audience that was also filmed. The film was shown to students on the theatre based course to inform research and teacher development eight weeks later. Students were able to access and watch the recording individually before the focus group that was facilitated by both researchers. Following the focus group students completed a questionnaire that was anonymised. After the collection of the data from the focus group, questionnaire and researchers' written reflections, thematic analysis was carried out that fell into two categories, performer/director dynamics and student/teacher dynamics.

**Performance Overview**

The performance was a one man show with a running time of around seventy minutes. In terms of stagecraft, a 'poor theatre' (Grotowski, 1991) approach was used as there was very little on stage except the performer. No props were used and the stage itself was left completely bare. The rationale for adopting this minimalist style is that leaving things blank, visually, helps the audience to engage their imagination and project their own ideas into the space about what each scene 'looks like'. The style of theatre perhaps also mirrors the authors' teaching approach as audience members, like students, are invited to construct and develop their own meaning and understanding.

The costume was formal with a loose, plain looking suit with a black t-shirt underneath and smart black shoes. The main character, a game show host, attempts to control and stage manage the other characters, insisting they keep up their appearance. Other characters depicted are a bride groom waiting for a bride, a cheerleader repeating a dance routine, a man in a chair who is interrogated, a door that will not open and a hard chair. The first two thirds of the performance introduce the characters and their stage positions, whilst in the last part of the show chaos ensues as the characters' staging begins to break down, challenging the developing story. The performance shifts

from rigidity and structure to a more chaotic orientation where emotion starts to make itself more known. The researchers identified themes in the performance such as love, intimate relationships, order, structure breaking down, control, keeping up appearances and the power of the imagination.

**Research Methodology**

A/r/tography explores the complexities of the relationships as a teacher, artist and researcher to deepen one's understanding of teaching practice and knowing through the senses (Siegesmund, 2012). Leblanc et al. explore how theses multiple identities are woven together through "practice and poesis, allowing deeper understandings to emerge" (2015: 356). By artistically engaging in research one questions one's comprehension and perception (Lea et al., 2011). By immersing oneself in the art form one is able to question ones multi- identities and how the tensions between the different roles have the potential to deepen one's awareness. De Cosson argues that the conflicts between the identities are a place of learning because "an artist knows the point of disjuncture is a point of learning" (2004: xiv). Kind explores how A/r/tography is about making "time for the unexpected" to emerge and being open to new possibilities by cultivating the imagination that challenges understandings about pre-existing positions, beliefs and identities (2008: 3). Brinkmann's notion of abductive research permits the unexpected by courting and valuing "astonishment, mystery, and breakdowns in one's understanding" (2014: 720) furthers the unfolding and receptive process that characterises A/r/tography. Irwin considers A/r/tography as an unfolding of the researcher's experience that generates questions to deepen their understanding to "theorize what they are learning" (Irwin, 2010: 42).

A/r/tography as defined by Springgay et al. (2008) offers three stages. Firstly, it involves self-study, secondly it is contextualised in an a/r/tographic community and thirdly there is the ongoing and resulting ethical activism.

*Self-Study*

As self-study, the personal is drawn out and is intrinsically linked to the professional. A/r/tography explores the intuitive, emotional, spiritual, embodied and tacit forms of knowledge. All aspects and experiences of the 'self' form part of the research as ways of knowing; experiences of the personal, professional and public selves are all given equal value (Springgay and Irwin, 2004).

As a living inquiry, the a/r/tographer is required to constantly open themselves up to impulses, absurdities, the ridiculous, contradictions, confusion and to go blindly with intuition, however uncertain this may feel. The purpose of the artist is not to apply logic but to "serve the work, to hear where it is going and respect that it has a life of its own" (Kalin et al., 2009: 15).

*Community*

The second integral part of a/r/tography is being with the self in the context of community. Irwin articulates that "a/r/tographer's recognise that no researcher, or artist or educator exists on their own, nor do they only exist within a community for, in fact, both occur" (Irwin, 2008: 72).

A/r/tographers create knowledge through the interplay of inter-relational dynamics of self and other. A/r/tography, is a living inquiry and is "fundamentally concerned with creating situations where knowledge and understanding are produced through the process of inquiry" (Carson and Sumara, 1997: xvii-xviii). The production of knowledge through relationship occurs through the community in which one is practising (Carson and Sumara, 1997). It is through the community of being with self and others that we make sense and find meaning in our experience. A/r/tography involves meaning- making as a form of self-study - yet this relies on the existence of and connection to the other in order for meaning to emerge. To study the self is to study others. To study teaching practice is to study student learning. The role of teacher and learner is intrinsically linked.

*Ethical Activism*

Thirdly then, ethical positioning is thus a relationship of otherness, because otherness helps to forge becoming, bringing into being that which was not known before,and thus a shift towards a living inquiry (Springgay, 2008). The creation of a dynamic knowledge that is constantly becoming, evolving, shifting and being re-born and thus counter the belief that knowledge is fixed and static. Knowledge is created in the space between self and other where roles might be ambiguous or confused, characterised by "vulnerability" and "openness", "where meanings and understanding are interrogated and ruptured" (Springgay, 2008: 6).

**Method and Research Ethics**

A range of methods were used to capture the experience of both performer, director and participants/students. Written reflections from the performer and director offered reflexivity, whilst a focus group discussion and a written questionnaire elicited participant/student experience. A range of methods to capture experience helped to address issues of validity and reliability. Using different approaches from independent sources allows for triangulation and thus draws upon "more than one standpoint" which helps to strengthen any claims of knowledge (Patton, 2002; Cohen, et al., 2007: 141).

*Reflexivity*

The performer and director met up five times during the devising and rehearsal period. Each would make written reflections to explore their experience of working together as artists that were then verbally shared and discussed.

*Participant/student focus group and questionnaire*

A film of the performance was made available to participants/students of a post graduate theatre course. The whole student cohort were invited to be part of the research, six agreeing to be research participants. All participants/students watched the film privately before attending the thirty minute focus group that was also filmed. The involvement and filming of the students/participants in a focus

group and the completion of a questionnaire was approved by the University ethics committee. The focus group was facilitated by both researchers, who were also tutors on the course that participants/students attend. The questionnaire offered participants/students to share their experience anonymously, aware that some may have felt hindered expressing themselves more fully. The questionnaire asked the five following questions:

'How did the performance impact on your understanding?'

'How did the performance impact on your thinking with respect to your own assessed performance?'

'What was the impact of witnessing your tutors developing their research and performance interests?'

'What impact did the performance have on your imagination?'

'What was the impact on you of being part of your tutor's research?'

To protect confidentiality, no names or identifying information will be used in this study. Instead, participants/students will be referred to numerically, for example, 'participant/student one'.

**Part one: Director/Performer Relationship**

Early on in the research process the performer appeared less connected with the director, seemingly struggling to communicate their ideas or vision for the performance. In the performer's written reflections they commented that 'the performer is very animated whilst the director is quiet, static and passive.' The director did not seem to be mirroring the same energy or enthusiasm for the performance as the performer. The performer was energetic and engaged their physicality, whilst the director sat still and moved very little physically.

However, as the rehearsal process progressed, there seemed to be a marked difference in the dynamics between performer and director. The performer's written reflections suggest: 'they seem more reflective giving space for one another to listen and learn....the director seems more animated, more present and notably smiling'.  Then later on in the written reflections the performer commented 'they both have a shared purpose - both intent on building a show together - perhaps their vision is more shared.'

It seemed as though the relationship had gone through a transformation with the passage of time. Creativity theories highlight the importance of time to incubate ideas, issues, or puzzlement that activate the unconscious without deliberate "conscious mental steps" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996: 98). Incubation offers space to the unconscious processing of ideas that is one of the most mysterious

parts of the creative process, yet one arrives at some new discovery or insight without conscious understanding of how one arrived there (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

In a similar vein, theatre director Katie Mitchell (2009) comments on the individualistic quality of the performer/director relationship and stresses the importance for directors to hold in mind that each performer will digest and absorb comment in their own way. A link can be forged here with ideas around student learning and the necessity to remember that each student responds to learning and tutor feedback in a style that is personal to them. Bird (2012) suggests that learning is personalised, not standardised and that meaning is discovered.

Mitchell (2009) notes that the actors she works with respond differently to her director feedback and warns against making assumptions about how this is being received.  She argues that resistances from actors against her comments may be a form of processing and as such should not be seen as fixed oppositional stances; more as transitional states as one moves from one way of thinking to another. Perhaps it is important to recognise the transitory nature of learning and appreciate the time it can take to accommodate a new idea. Patience is needed for processing and reconfiguration, something that is important to remember in a learning environment.

Throughout our verbal discussions we identified a notion that we were going through a process of 'settling in' to our roles as performer and director, sensing what we needed from each other for these roles to become complementary. Interestingly, the director further reflected that, for them, it was 'what we are not saying that is more important'. This hints at the non-verbal communication that was taking place as these roles became assimilated. As the director reflected, this may have been to do with 'finding a common language and shared understanding'. It is perhaps worth noting that these 'gaps' in verbal communication are reminiscent of the 'in-between' spaces that feature so prominently within a/r/tography (La Jevic and Springgay, 2008).

In the last rehearsal which was just a few days before the live public performance, the director gave some notes to the performer of small tweaks to make. Interestingly, this appeared to be accepted by the performer in a relaxed and open way – as if this was of no consequence even though the performance loomed imminently. Written reflections from the director highlighted that 'the attunement between the performer and director seems increased as there is more eye contact and evidence of really understanding each other'. They go on to notice that 'the distance between them seems to have lessened'. Perhaps this dynamic mirrors the student/teacher relationship where trust, rapport and familiarity must be developed in order to take risks and realise potential (Vygotsky, 1925/1971).

Devising a performance together offered an opportunity to play, experiment and celebrate making mistakes that, perhaps unlike other aspects of our professional roles, would have no consequences or recriminations. Bird and Tozer explore how they were able to question teaching practice through dramatic improvisation, enabling them "to explore tension in an uncensored way" and not bound up with their usual teaching roles (2016: 6). In this respect we were free to open up to a wider

experience and following intuitive impulses that in usual circumstances we might guard against. However, this liberating approach was not without struggles, as the director's reflections highlight:

> I now see that my initial reticence in engaging more fully in the process was largely to do with vulnerability, a theme also echoed in this study by both the performer and participants/ students. Being frank about my ideas for the performance meant that I had to trust the performer would be able to respect these and respond openly to them. I needed a dialogue that met my needs as a director in the same way that the performer required a director that met their needs as a performer. I wanted mutual understanding and willingness and perhaps wanted to 'test the water' before opening myself up to this more fully. Through the process, I have come to appreciate that readiness to engage in such openness and vulnerability may take some longer than others; perhaps for me getting to this stage of trusting the other took a bit more time.

Creative ideas involve letting go of certainty and embracing uncertainty which is fraught with tensions and conflicts, but "creativity requires a certain amount of tension" and giving up of fixed views and identities (McNiff, 2003: 130). A new view involves letting go, giving up and ending that could be considered a 'mini-death'; consequently this consents to newness (Gersie, 1992). In this sense, the creative process itself is built on both constructive and destructive processes. Holding on to a comfortable idea or identity could be considered a defence against fear because newness often evokes uncertainty and anxiety as one cannot be sure what they will experience or be confronted with. Here, the director may have needed to encounter a level of trust in the relationship before being able to trust the creative process more fully. Irwin and Springgay ascertain that a creative process in a/r/tography is social in nature emphasising the importance of "invention rather than interpretation, where concepts are marked by social engagements and encounters" (2008: xxi). However, perhaps it is necessary to further explore the concept of 'invention' when in relation to an-other; what might this be like for the individual? Further reflections reveal some of the tensions inherent in the social milieu, as felt by the director:

We were perhaps unsure of how our new roles as co-artists, rather than co-teachers, worked together yet. Where did the boundary of one role meet another? Did such boundaries exist at all? I recall, in these initial stages, trying to stave off fears and anxieties about conflicts emerging in our creative vision. I wondered if we shared the same ideas about theatre. I feared that perhaps I had assumed this was the case in the past but I had made an error of judgement. I questioned whether or not I had gotten involved in something that actually did not inspire or nourish me creatively but by that stage I felt too committed to back out.

Were these genuine concerns or were they attempts to intellectualise my un-comfortability at being in unfamiliar territory? Did I actually hold these views or were they more of a distraction used to avoid addressing deeper concerns about moving into a new role? Although not performing, I too felt like I was on show. I had to come to terms with trusting not only the artistic process, but also the performer in being able to understand and integrate my vision. I constantly found myself asking myself the questions: is this going to work? Do they understand me?

A/r/tography encourages one to focus on ruptures, conflicts and tensions as these can be rich seams of knowledge to mine (Irwin et al. 2016). Here, we can see that the 'in-between' space of the different roles of teacher and artist generates anxiety for the director as they are uncertain of how to cross the boundary from one role to another. Perhaps a deeper source of their anxiety here is not the move from one role into another, but the fact that they felt witnessed by an-other in doing so. It may be that a fear of 'getting it wrong' and the associated shame that so often accompanies this was being activated. Burke (2017) comments on this notion and argues that academic settings can feel particularly shaming as one may feel under pressure to prove one's' worthiness of being there. This undercurrent may have been strengthened by other aspects of the relationship between the performer and director, such as gender dynamics. The male performer, who is also older than the director, may have been experienced as more powerful and authoritative, due to the patriarchal dominance of the academic setting (David, 2015). Furthermore, aspects of their past relationship as student and teacher were perhaps also unconsciously affecting the creative process, as the director's written reflections show:

Was some of the old student/teacher dynamic in the room still as we rehearsed together? Was some of my un-comfortability related to sharing a new level of artistic and thus

personal intimacy with someone that used to mark my performance work? Perhaps unconsciously these historic roles will always be a part of our relationship. However, the potency that these past roles may hold over our present interactions seems to wane when they are brought into conscious awareness and spoken or thought about together.

One can see then, that it is perhaps important to look not only at the roles of artist, researcher and teacher, but also other, past roles and indeed the academic setting that may be unconsciously impacting on how these roles may be assimilated. Here, the relationship the director had with both the performer and the institution is seen to have an impact on how she navigated moving from teacher to artist. This perhaps serves as a reminder that students may also be working with complexities in terms of their relationships with teachers supervising and marking their work, as well as the impact of being in an academic setting.

The activity of developing a performance offered the performer and director a context for cooperation that nurtured learning. It became an active dynamic for the performer to develop their ideas. As confidence in the relationship grew the performer seemed more prepared to take risks and consequently their potential as a performer developed. The director actively increased the performer's expressive range through taking risks and thus new aspects of the characters emerged, such as developing the woman tied to the tree's physical embodiment, thus intensifying their struggle. The performer's potential was maximised through the nurturing dynamic within the director/performer relationship, helping them go beyond what they would have done in isolation.

However, interestingly, our relationship developed over time and our comfortability with our roles seemed to increase. Conversations became a lot more flowing and connected, we seemed to be attuned with one another to a greater degree, at times saying the same thing at the same time. It felt as though we had moved to a place where we trusted each other. Curiously, this increased level of trust generated not only more creative energy but also helped us to expand the boundaries of our roles as performer and director. We felt supported by the other to test the limits of these roles, perhaps going further in this than we would have done in isolation.

 It may have been that the director's presence allowed the performer to push the boundaries of what they felt incapable of doing on their own. Risk is a prerequisite of theatre that brings a performance to life.  A safe performance might resemble aspects of Brook's dead theatre; one that is lifeless and devoid of energy and tension (2008), struggling to incite the audiences' engagement or curiosity. Here, notions of the social, relational and community aspects of a/r/tography are again becoming prominent as the performer felt equally challenged and supported by the director to take more risks. Having a personal and embodied understanding of the artistic process helps one to be more sensitive as a teacher. By engaging in and reflecting upon the process of art-making, one becomes more attuned to challenges that students may be experiencing in their own creative

process. What this can mean in practice is that the distance between student and teacher is lessened, giving way instead to compassion and a heightened sense of universality. As discussed, such an atmosphere can be helpful in creating a trusting environment where one feels safe enough to take risks.

**Part two: Student/ Teacher Relationship**

It became apparent that there was a meaningful response for participants/students in witnessing their tutors in a different role. There seems to be the distinct theme of the participants/students being able to relate more to the teacher having seen them perform. The focus group discussion illuminated that initially participants/students found it strange to see their tutors in another light. One participant/student commented to the performer that 'it was you but it wasn't you' whilst another noted to the director that 'your voice sounded completely different'. There was the sense that this felt somewhat odd and surprising at first, that there was something almost disconcerting about seeing tutors outside of their familiar roles at the University. Participant/student four reflected that seeing tutors in different roles 'made me feel I could relate to them and they are still human – not robots at a University'. There seemed to be something emboldening for students in witnessing tutors in a more vulnerable, and indeed exposed role on stage.

A/r/tography is about becoming, bringing something into being that was previously not known. In this respect the students were also bringing something into being, by seeing their teachers in a new way, seeing them as 'evolving' and becoming and not as something fixed or set.  LeBlanc et al. consider a/r/tography as engaging in "becoming while being in communities of enquiry where stories are perpetually in motion, weaving through one another to enlarge, disrupt and enrich our understanding." (2015: 356). The participant/student's comments about seeing us as human thus amplified our becoming, whilst challenging pre-existing teacher roles that had the potential to habituate our behaviours. Participant/student observation enabled us to let go of over identifying exclusively with the teacher role.  A/r/tography recognises that one does not position oneself exclusively or "align" to one particular role at the expense of another (Irwin 2004: 27). Utilising performance as a means of inquiry helped us come out of the usual structures and systems that constrain us (Grosz, 2001) and reveal over investment in the teacher role. Immersion in the performance process of "playing, devising and improvising can activate dormant experiences" (Bird, 2016: 172), and in this respect helped raise awareness, questions and new understanding of ones relationship with the teacher role. By coming out of our teacher's roles, participants/students seemed to have been able to identify more with us as fellow learners.

Participant/student comments in both the focus group and the questionnaire conveyed a sense that there was something useful for them in witnessing tutors in this unfamiliar way. They noticed that the teacher by performing had positioned themselves nearer to the student experience because the participants/students also had to offer a performance. It emerged that witnessing the tutors performance helped with participant/student confidence levels for their own research studies as there was a growing realisation that 'if they can do it, so can I'. Students/participants seemed to appreciate seeing tutors going through a similar process as they are asked to do. It seemed to endow

them with a feeling of 'universality', the potential for a shared experience (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005), whilst also encouraging them to take risks, having seen tutors doing this themselves. By positioning ourselves differently in relation to the students there was increased intimacy that along with this accompanies increased risk taking, vulnerability and "provocation that opens discussions" (Siegesmund, 2012: 101). There was also an increased sense of togetherness which seems to level some of the (both real and perceived) power dynamics inherent in the student-teacher relationship. Positioning ourselves closer to the student experience rather than in a positon of power that could lead to 'belittlement and harsh criticism' (Kornetsky, 2017: 242) offered participants/students the chance to embrace more risk as the potential of student shame was lessened. Participant/student two noted that there was an impact in 'feeling like they have been through a similar process to us'. Similarly, participant/student five wrote 'they perform and take the risks that they are always pushing/advising us to take!'

> Performing and rehearsing in front of the director and colleague had its risks, offering increased vulnerability. This dynamic had the potential to mirror some of the student/participants experience of receiving feedback on their assessed performance from a teacher. As the dynamic between director and performer developed there was an increased need and dependency on the director to shape and guide the performance that accompanied trust and mistrust. Sometimes I wanted more director input as a performer, sometimes less. When I felt clear about my focus as a performer I did not need so much director input, then at other times when confidence was waning I looked more to the director for support. Overall it felt like the director and performer were constantly trying to negotiate and read how much input or involvement the other wanted. This raises questions about how the dynamic between director and performer might mirror the student/teacher relationship and whether the teacher is sensitive enough to be able to read the signs with regards to their involvement.

The teachers by changing their usual roles create different conditions where new social relationships might emerge. The teachers by repositioning themselves as artists challenged some of the inherited positions of both teacher and student as all attempted to meet under different conditions and circumstances where usual roles were cast aside.  The teacher becomes a performer, the students become members of an audience. They both meet in a theatrical context that is different to a classroom condition. Art forms that socially engage others have the potential to find "collective

elaboration of meaning and aims to produce new social relationships and thus new social realities" (Springgay, 2008: 7). By being in relationship and entertaining the complexities of the different roles, we were challenging our fixed positions of teacher and student, moving into unchartered territories. As Meyers elucidates, "inquiring is relational because it involves being in relationship with others in many different ways" (Meyers, 1998: 148).

Lobman (2010) explores how the student/teacher dynamic has been conditioned, scripted and fixed; their behaviours can be reactive, which leads to a limited repertoire of expression that can impact on learning. By exploring our roles as artists, performer and director, we were able to expand our range of expression in communicating to the students and draw on a wider range of resources available to us that previously may have been out of reach. If we as teachers invest in expanding our expression and ability to communicate, what might the impact of this be on students? Silvia Kind explores in her work in school how creativity in children is dependent on the teacher's ability to be open and creative (2008: 3).

By immersing in a performance viewed by students I was able to question my identity as a teacher and explore some of the emerging tensions and conflicts that made themselves known. Some of these tensions were on the periphery of awareness, but a performance and focus group intensified questions about my relationship with the teacher's role. By stepping outside of the usual boundaries of the teacher's role deeper understandings of my values and beliefs became clearer. Further to this by moving beyond the normal roles we inhabit we also open to new meaning and deeper understanding. Bird explores how our identities are in constant flux and how it's important to loosen up the attachment to our roles and "move beyond habitual patterns of thinking that narrate our lives" so we can increase awareness (2017: 8).

As a consequence of the performance I seemed to appear more honest and open as a teacher- being more at ease to share my experiences within the teacher/student dynamic. Whilst there was an emerging theme of sharing more, there was also an accompanying sense of shame.  It was as if I had broken a boundary between teacher and student, one that had kept us safe and in the familiar territory of our respective roles as teacher and student. At times I felt embarrassed, like I had done something inappropriate- done something my teaching colleagues would not have approved of. I felt like I had touched on some taboo and the performance role had teased this out. At times I wanted to distance myself from the performance and retreat to the safer territory of the teacher role, reinforce my impeached boundaries and confine myself back in the familiar role and reassert myself as a teacher.  In retrospect I realised I felt some shame about being more open and less hidden. The accompanying unfolding of uncomfortable feelings generated new questions about how I

perceived the teacher's role, perhaps as someone who should be distant, removed and unemotional. I was positioning myself further away from the usual accustomed teacher role and aligning myself potentially more with student experience and their vulnerabilities. I realise how the teacher role in some ways protected me from more personal interactions with the students. The performance seemed to open me up to the kind of personal interactions and feelings I had tried to dissociate myself from. There was a growing intimacy between myself and students, more banter and playfulness and in some ways more disclosure.

By stepping outside of the confines of the teacher role utilising a performance, I was positioning myself closer to student experience because they too would be completing a solo performance. On reflection I realised I was managing my sense of vulnerability and risk by offering a recording that had the potential to distance myself from the participant/student intimacy that a live performance would have offered. A recording still offered some control and a place of safety.  One of the themes in the performance was playing with fears of losing control and order. The role of the teacher for me was a well ordered and structured position, I knew what I was doing and this created its own sense of security. The teacher's role was clearly defined to me. It was different to more everyday relationships that were messy, harder to define and negotiate. At the heart of my experience was a fear of getting too close to students, and the teacher's role helped to shield me from this. I had ascribed to the teacher's role certain rules, such as don't get too close or be too friendly, attempts to protect me from the challenges I might encounter in the teacher/student dynamic. Prior to the current study I had noticed how I struggled to come into relationship with students if it was not directly linked to teaching or learning. It was a challenge to find conversations that might be more personal and not related to the usual teacher role. More often than not in these situations with students I would resort to the secure and familiar position of a teacher and conduct my interactions from there, discussing aspects of the curriculum.

The desire to create a community of learning might have been minimized by not offering a live theatre performance, yet despite the somewhat muted experience of a recording there seemed to have been a growing confidence and exchange of ideas that was notable, in particular the theatre based module where students have to complete a final solo performance themselves. There seemed to be to be more mutual understanding of the challenges they have to face. As a performer I have not distanced myself from the performance process, I am actively engaged in this too and subject to a similar kind of vulnerability. In this respect I have positioned myself as being more sensitive to the demands of a solo performance the students have to go through and more attuned to their journey as I am also a living enquiry. I have been inspired by their living inquiry because it has helped me inform my own. My understanding of solo performance process is informed by student learning, much like their search in theatre informs my search. There is more willingness to

share the challenges I face putting on a performance, sharing my unfolding learning experience that unfolds alongside theirs.

In this respect the boundaries between teacher and student have the potential to be woven together as we are both artists exploring the medium of theatre. What has been noticeable is an increasing sensitivity to the demands of a solo performance so when offering critical feedback to students we are more considered in what we say and how we say it. Our communication with students is in a manner that is more aligned with how we might communicate within more everyday interactions. We realise how our communication in the past with students within the confines of the teacher role has been clumsy and distanced. Since the new emerging dynamic with students and increased vulnerability there is also more emotion on display and more care how we communicate feedback to students in a supportive way. The study has helped us position ourselves with a range of other roles such as artist, researcher and fellow learner. This has widened our emotional range of expression and helped to inform more intimate relationships with the students that we believe has helped with their learning because more of us is present in the classroom. The boundaries between the teacher and student role are still there, but less rigid and more permeable. In this way we have been able to come into more relationship with the students so we can both benefit from learning together.

**Limitations of the study**

The limitations of the research were threefold. Firstly the small number of participants had the potential to distort the results as fewer than 50% of participants/students were represented in the overall cohort. Therefore the data needs to be received with this in mind. Secondly, whilst some attempts have been made to consider the potential difficulties and power imbalance dynamic between students and teachers, this may have impacted on the participants/students withholding aspects of their experience in the focus group that was facilitated by the researchers and tutors. Thirdly, participants/students were responding to a recording of a performance that was not live. Some participants/students commented on this aspect of the study and how this might have influenced them had they been party to a live performance.

**Summary**

A/r/tography has enabled the researchers to explore their roles as a performer and director and discover key tenets in their experience to aid their development as teachers. Participants/students in their roles as audience members and witnesses have been able to develop their perspective by using the performance as an intermediary for negotiating a new dynamic in the teacher/student relationship. The study seemed to suggest that participants/students responded positively to witnessing their tutors in roles distinct from the ones they usually inhabit within the University

environment. The data leant towards indicating that seeing tutors going through an artistic process, one that required them to take risks and expose vulnerabilities, assisted participants/students in engaging and approaching their own assessed performance. There was a sense that taking part in this research project softened the 'us and them' dichotomy inherent in the student/tutor relationship, fostering an atmosphere where learning takes place together. Witnessing tutors on stage – not as a lecturer regurgitating knowledge, but instead engaged in artistic roles, potentially helped students imagine themselves in a similar exploratory process, which appeared to have a positive impact.

The performance set up a creative activity and context that seemed to build and foster a different teacher/student dynamic. The structure of the performance offered the potential to generate unconscious learning for the participants/students that might not have been possible in the direct context of a classroom setting.  The notion of learning when applied to classroom context is perhaps somewhat challenging because of its direct intention for knowledge transfer. Yet, in a performance context participants/students seemed more receptive to learning or discovery when having a more indirect experience. King (1993) coined the phrase 'from sage on the stage to guide on the side' in her argument advocating for indirect teaching and learning processes that facilitate the student in discovering their own relationship with learning which seems to chime with the nature of our findings and discoveries.

What has emerged is a more natural curiosity and willingness to understand students as part of the learning community that is personal, for learning is always personal. We are a community of learners because learning needs a social context. To be part of a community of learners requires one to be vulnerable, to risk sharing of oneself, not knowing how others are going to respond. We did not know how the students would respond to the artist role, but what seemed to draw out of both student and teacher alike was an honesty, understanding and a generosity to attend to one another's experience. The new dynamic helped to transcend the usual patterns and entrenched behaviours our respective roles of student and teacher we can slip into and experiment with a new dynamic of community that opened us up to new experiences where we were more able to listen to and, consequently, learn from each other.

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