

Empathy Machines

Introduction

"Movies are the most powerful empathy machine in all the arts." (Roger Ebert - *Life Itself*)

Since 2010, I've been creating film and theatre that has been used to train health professionals, helping them to empathise with the realistic depictions of mental health, trauma, neurodiversity and many other themes explored by each piece.

My work addresses key questions regarding the potential for creative arts to impact public consciousness about mental health, and the creative turn is also reflected in my research methods.

Research

I am now undertaking a PhD by Portfolio:

'Empathy Machines: Using theatre and film in the training of compassionate and reflective health professionals.'

The objectives are:

- Deeper understanding of the effectiveness of this approach.
- Deeper understanding of how and why this approach works differently to more traditional ones.
- Co-develop a best practice model for the use of film and theatre as a pedagogical tool for future training.

I am using Dialogical Narrative Analysis as my primary research methodology. I will evaluate the effect my stories (three short films and my new play, *The Possibility of Colour*) have had on the stories of the research participants, and in turn, how this then affects my own story as a researcher.

The main element of my synopsis will be in the form of a new theatrical play, which will do most of the 'heavy lifting' in terms of communicating my research findings to as wide an audience as possible.

'It made me feel the emotions that the patient would feel.'

'I no longer feel so alone in who I am.'

'Real life experience - delivered in a safe environment.'

Audience feedback on 'The Possibility of Colour'

The Possibility of Colour

My first full length play, *The Possibility of Colour*, has been created over several years with input from mental health professionals, academics and people with lived experience of the themes explored.

Alongside its first full production and Northwest tour in November last year, 1,350 student nurses were given the opportunity to watch the play as part of their training.

Thanks to recent funding from PACT, I am now developing and refining the play, whilst also working with NHS England to plan a national tour, where, as well as reaching a far wider public audience, thousands more student nurses will watch the play as part of their training.

The Possibility of Colour
'1984 meets *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* meets *I Daniel Blake*'

'So funny'
'Terrifying'
'Urgent'
'Just a wonderful play'

Average audience rating:
4.8/5 stars
★★★★★

'A fantastic piece of drama which draws out the joy of everything it is to be human and the value of experiencing the world in your own unique way'
★★★★★
North West End

References:

James, S. (2014). *Life Itself*, S. James, G. Basch, & Z. Piper; Magnolia Pictures.



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