The 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre Practitioners

in post-war Sri Lanka:

Naivety, Altruism, Reciprocal Caring, and Psychological Growth.

Lynne McCormack PhD[1],

Evelyn Henry MClinPsych[1]

[1] University of Newcastle, Australia

Address for Correspondence:

1. Lynne McCormack PhD

   Senior Lecturer

   School of Psychology

   Faculty of Science & IT

   University of Newcastle

   NSW 2308 Australia

   E-mail: lynne.mccormack@newcastle.edu.au;

   Ph: +61 413406050

Abstract: 150

Total number of words: 6252

Abstract

Background: Playback Theatre is applied theatre that draws on real life stories from its audience to reflect the psychosocial needs of individuals and communities. Contemporarily it is being used to support those exposed to war/disaster; however, the impact of such work on its practitioners, is under researched.

Methods: Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis positive and negative subjective interpretations were sought from five Western Playback Theatre practitioners who taught in post-civil war Sri Lanka.

Results: One superordinate theme, *Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble*, encompassed five subordinate themes. These reveal an integral struggle experienced by Western practitioners unprepared for a culturally different lens.

Conclusion: Teaching Playback Theatre in post-war Sri Lanka for these practitioners exposed the gap between the desire to help cross-culturally and their experienced reality. Over time, the collision of Western naivety with good intent facilitated an integral and humble search to be wiser humanitarians cross-culturally in these participants.

Keywords: Playback Theatre, Sri Lanka, war and conflict, posttraumatic growth, interpretative phenomenological analysis

Introduction

Playback Theatre is an applied, audience participatory theatre form in line with oral traditions of storytelling that responds to personal stories (Fox, 2015). Contemporarily it is increasingly being used as a psychosocial support with individuals and communities that are in environments of war, conflict, oppression and disaster (Buhler, 2012; Rivers, 2015). For humanitarian aid workers deployed to such environments, physical and psychological threat to wellbeing is now well documented (Lopez Cardozo, et al, 2012; McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack, Orenstein, & Joseph, 2016) however, there is a paucity of research investigating the Playback Theatre practitioner experience in similar at risk environments. This phenomenological interpretative study explores the 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre practitioners teaching in post-civil war Sri Lanka. It seeks both positive and negative interpretations of their experiences.

Playback Theatre was founded by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in 1975 (Fox, 2015), a form of community theatre used to replay real life stories drawn directly from its audience. Developed from the tradition of oral storytelling, incorporating improvisation, dance, music and voice with the theoretical underpinnings of psychodrama and sociometry (Fox, 2015), it is positioned outside traditional theatre, influenced by the realms of art, education and psychology. The functions of telling, modelling, bearing witness (Wright, 2013), reflection and empathic listening, delivered with a person-centred philosophy, all contribute to creating the Playback Theatre milieu and aesthetic.

However, debate is alive about Playback Theatre's application in a trauma context (Freeman, 2013) and its positioning as art or therapy (Fox, 2013; Nash & Rowe, 2000). A small range of qualitative studies seeking the audience perspective have been conducted in Western settings in the fields of education (Wright, 2013), and drama and psychosocial applications (Glover, Mitchell, Stedman, Fairlove & Brown, 2016; Rousseau, Gauthier,

Lacroix, Alain et al., 2005; Salas, 2005). There is also an abundance of grey literature that informs on Playback Theatre in contexts of war, conflict, oppression and disaster including in the wake of genocide atrocities against Sri Lankan Tamils in Southern India (Alexander, 2013); the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York city (McIsaac, 2013); the 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan (Munakata, 2013); and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Freeman, 2013; Juge Fox, 2013). All represent examples of Playback practitioners doing Playback Theatre for their own communities, within their own cultures.

In contrast, Joffre-Eichhorn (2013), working outside his own culture, has conducted a Playback Theatre project spanning five years with over 60 performances in Afghanistan narrating the telling of stories of trauma, war and loss, utilizing case study material, and emphasizing the psychosocial benefits for tellers and listeners. Through this project he offers lessons learned including questioning how to ensure the emotional and psychological integrity of the performers, and bringing consciousness to the impact of hearing and performing stories of war and trauma.

Exploring his experience with Playback Theatre as part of The Freedom Theatre's Freedom Bus initiative in Palestine, Rivers (2015) conducted over 30 interviews with Palestinian audience members to investigate the 'limits and potentials' of Playback Theatre. However, despite the numbers of practitioners working in this challenging environment, no practitioner perspective was offered apart from the author's own, an intersubjective account as a Playback Theatre practitioner.

Though little is known of the psychological impact on Playback practitioners working in international high risk environments, humanitarian aid personnel, working in similar environments have reported primary and secondary/vicarious posttraumatic stress responses from exposure to and witnessing traumatic events. These include witnessing stories, images, and experiences of survivors in the course of their work in conflict and disaster regions

(Doná, 2014; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Lopez Cardozo, Gotway Crawford, Eriksson, Zhu et al., 2012; Connorton, Perry, Hemenway & Miller, 2012; Eriksson, Vander Kemp, Gorsuch, Hoke & Foy, 2001: Lopez Cardozo et al., 2012; McCormack & Joseph, 2013).

Similarly, it has been recognized that distress from potentially difficult situations in high risk environments may disrupt altruistic intent (McCormack & Joseph, 2012) thought to be the motivating drive of humanitarians (Faigin, Owens & Goodyear-Smith, 2014). Such disruption, Altruistic Identity Disruption (McCormack & Joseph, 2012), is a complex emotional response to lack of validation on return from humanitarian work. It is defined by inter-related feelings of isolation, doubt, and self-blame and impacts healthy reintegration with family, career and society post-mission. In an attempt to lessen distress, the individual may seek to return prematurely to the field for understanding and validation amongst fellow aid workers (McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack et al., 2016). These findings have relevance for future research into the psychological wellbeing of Playback Theatre practitioners working in high risk environments.

Importantly, research now recognises the potential for posttraumatic growth following a wide range of traumatic and adverse events experienced by humanitarian returnees (McCormack, Hagger & Joseph, 2009; McCormack & Joseph, 2011). Positive changes have been reported across the three broad life domains of self-worth, interpersonal relationships, and changed life values and beliefs (see Helgeson, Reynolds & Tomich, 2006; Joseph & Linley, 2005; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2007) with aid personnel reporting a redefining of their altruistic identity through self-reparation and re-engaging with empathy (McCormack & Joseph, 2013). Theories of posttraumatic growth posit that conscious rumination between subjective appraisals and cognitive intrusions are the process by which individuals bring meaning to their traumatic experience (see Joseph, 2011).

As such, distress and growth are curvilinear with distress an active and integral part of posttraumatic growth (see Joseph, 2011).

Relevant to Playback Theatre practitioners there are likely to be cross cultural differences in perception of traumatic distress. Collective cultures, often geographically at the centre of natural and man-made disasters, may respond to traumatic events differently to those from Western individualistic societies (Bracken, 2001). This is not to say they are not experiencing distress but that other, more ecological and shared experiential pathways of meaning making may be at play that absorbs events within the group. As a consequence, teaching Playback by Western practitioners in a collective culture requires preparation prior to deployment to avoid the risk of replicating something akin to a colonization model (Thompson, 2005). Furthermore there is a likelihood of inherent power imbalances that can lead to a mismatch of philosophies impacting the work of all parties. Currently, the monitoring and reporting of practice in these contexts is voluntary with no formal governance structure or screening. This is a notable concern in light of the vulnerability of many communities in which Playback Theatre is currently practicing.

The Sri Lankan Theatre of Friendship Network (Benny, 2012; Buhler, 2012) represents a group of Playback companies with a vision to bring reconciliation across cultures in post-war Sri Lanka. Playback was initially taught in Sri Lanka following the 2006 tsunami (Benny, 2012), initiating a base of interest amongst coastal and tea plantation communities, setting the stage for ongoing training and development.

Given the paucity of research in understanding the 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre practitioners working cross-culturally in communities exposed to war and disaster, this phenomenological study sought both positive and negative subjective interpretations from Playback Theatre practitioners who had worked in Sri Lanka post-civil war.

Method

Participants

Following University Human Ethics approval participants were recruited via purposive sampling from within the Theatre of Friendship Project, a Playback Theatre project responsible for setting up, training and offering ongoing support to Playback Theatre companies throughout Sri Lanka. Participants comprised five adults who were non-nationals and had travelled to Sri Lanka to work on this project. They each met the inclusion criteria of speaking fluent English, being greater than18 years or older, and having taught Playback Theatre in Sri Lanka post-civil war 1983-2009.

- Insert Table 1 here -

Procedure

Potential participants were provided with the study information letter and consent forms. Interviews were arranged at a location of the individual participant's choice. In-line with IPA protocols, the participants were provided with the interview schedule one day prior to the interview, allowing for a period of pre-interview reflection (IPA: Smith, 1996). Signed consent forms and a completed brief questionnaire to supply demographic information were collected prior to the face to face interview. Consistent with IPA, participants were a small, homogenous group who had experienced the same phenomenon, i.e. teaching and using Playback Theatre with individuals and communities impacted by the Sri Lankan Civil War. The semi-structured interviews were conducted, digitally recorded, and transcribed by the second author (see Appendix 1). All were given pseudonyms and password protected. The interviews varied in length, between 35 and 70 minutes. By using a semi-structured interview the interviewer can ask clarifying questions, working from general to specific with a 'funnelling' technique (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this way the participant is encouraged to engage with the phenomenon more generally and then narrow down to interpretative reflections that are more specific to their experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

At all times the interviewer recognises that personal biases may impact their enquiry and works to remain neutral for credible collection of data that is representative of the participant's interpretation. See Table 1 for participant list of roles, years of Playback Theatre experience, and number of visits to Sri Lanka.

 Philosophical underpinnings

IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008) is underpinned by a phenomenological and interpretative stance which aims to capture the richness and diversity of the individual participant's interpreted experience, particularly poorly explored phenomenon. IPA also engages the social view of symbolic interactionism: i.e. 1) that people act toward things based on the meaning they bring to those things; 2) that meaning is derived from social interaction; and, 3) that interpretation modifies meaning (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1995). IPA therefore seeks meaning making through the dynamic interpretative activity that occurs between the researcher and the participant. In this way IPA is described as having a double hermeneutic as the researcher strives to make sense of the participant striving to make sense of their experience (See Table 2: Smith, 1996).

Validity and reliability

By rigorously following the steps of IPA this study aimed to ensure trustworthiness, verification, credibility, and dependability. Although Guba and Lincoln's (1981; 1982; 1989) early and seminal work recommended post hoc evaluation by qualitative researchers to support trustworthiness, the contemporary view stresses "checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain" (Morse, 2011, p. 17) throughout the analysis. Therefore, in defining rigor in an IPA qualitative research, reliability and validity is assured through strict adherence to the analytical steps mindful of its philosophical stance (Smith, 1996). Therefore, IPA is concerned with subjectivity rather than external reality, a primary concern of validity in positivist research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and as such seeks thematic richness in the data

for both convergent (across all transcripts) and divergent (within one transcript) themes rather than providing saturation of each theme (see Smith, 2011).

Furthermore, purposive sampling of a small homogenous group; funnelling down to the phenomenon being explored; and the double hermeneutic investigative focus of interviewing all sanction rigour in IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The argument for inter-rater reliability remains divisive in qualitative research (Armstrong, Gosling, Weissman, Marteau, 1997) whereas strict adherence to independent audit trails by the researchers, prior to collaborative consensus of themes substantiated by the data, remains a critical step in IPA (see Smith et al., 2009). This necessitates that each individual researcher engages in an 'interpretative relationship' with the transcribed interviews prior to joint collation of themes with the other researchers (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The step-by-step analytic process is outlined in Table 2.

- Insert Table 2 here -

Both authors recognise the potential for personal biases to impact interpretation. The first author has worked as a trauma therapist for over 25 years inclusive of psychosocial support in international humanitarian settings. The second author is a psychologist and Playback Theatre practitioner whose own experience in Sri Lanka as part of the Theatre of Friendship Playback Theatre project brought enormous insight to this research project. Therefore bias was potentially positive and negative. A great deal of debate ensued around interpretation that may have been influenced by experience and former knowledge of this research project so that final analysis and findings remained true to the data. Strict adherence to the IPA protocols and critical discussion of each other's perspective continued throughout for final emergent themes. The audit trail inclusive of a reflexive journal continued throughout the analysis and write-up.

Results

One superordinate theme: *Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble*;
encapsulates five subordinate themes: 1) *Western naivety, the reality stick*; 2) t*he big itch*; 3)
e*xpert rejected, a colonial overhang*; 4) h*umble reciprocity*; and 5*) eyes opened/self-
reparation*. Participants actively sought to make sense of the collision between their
expectations in Sri Lanka and reality. Even within the interviews, their reflections recognise
conflicting responses to a complex environment forcing their good intent to oscillate between
many pairs of polar positions: war and excitement, good will and naivety, expert and fool,
trust and suspicion, giving and receiving, grief and joy. Western naivety and a desire to
empathically contribute in the '*rubble of post war*' is juxtaposed by a confrontation with self.
Reparation with self and an integral and humble search to be wiser humanitarians cross
culturally remains an integral struggle. As they reject their misplaced confidence as the
expert, this wiser self engages a humble reciprocity where aspects of joy, hope, and happiness
despite psychological distress, can emerge.

Insert Table 3 here -

Western naivety, the 'reality stick'

This subordinate theme describes the participants' Western naivety that inhibited pre-
deployment preparedness at the project's conceptual level in these Playback Theatre
practitioners. Similarly, it highlights the lack of contextual preparedness for doing Playback
Theatre in countries impacted by war who have a vastly different cultural history and
identity. Reality is confronting and goodwill is not enough. As one practitioner reported "*I
was very excited",* despite the risk. This masked the reality of the project:

> Playback in a different country … seemed like a fun idea … and it's not like I
>
> hadn't taken on board that it's a post war context … but the reality of what that
>
> actually means wasn't true for me until I was actually in the country. (Amanda)

As artistic professionals working in a post war zone, in many ways they are independent wandering minstrels, unlike aid personnel who have a contractual remit of responsibility for the psychological and physical care of vulnerable people. Teaching Playback Theatre for one participant was *"having fun"*:

We were playing. We were having fun ... we weren't there stitching up shrapnel wounds or even listening in a sort of psychotherapeutic kind of way … to people's stories. We were there as artists and that's a different thing. (Brett)

However, other participants remember the creeping discomfort of this naivety which underestimated the impact of teaching an 'art' form:

I couldn't anticipate how difficult it was going to be … working with trauma was one level of difficulty, working with … interpreters was another and then working with people from different cultures with different agendas or purposes. So there were layers and layers of complexity. (Gillian)

Realising she has underestimated the complexity, shameful internalising occurs:

I started to doubt myself and I thought this is too stupid for words that we've come here with our Western ideas into this you know this traumatised place where people are genuinely day to day worried for their life; are we being stupid?

(Gillian)

Exploring this sense of personal failure her confident professional self unravels, unlocking empathy and a shift in positioning:

I had no idea of what I was going into, no idea of … how hard it was for them.

(Gillian)

The big itch, an altruistic calling

Reflecting on what propelled them to take such risk, participants become aware of something operating deeper in them, an altruistic calling to 'pay back', to make a difference, to be a global citizen. Altruistic and heroic overtones emerge hopeful that as volunteers they

can contribute to peace, and give back to humanity. One participant however, identifies the

drive to give as motivated by more selfish needs:

> There is this idea oh we can go to these places where there is great need … I'm
>
> making a contribution, Playback Theatre is valuable, I have the skills and I'm
>
> going to give the skills and it's very one sided … but actually what's going on is
>
> … people go there because they want something. (Isobel)

Driven by a childhood dream of joining the Peace Corp or volunteering abroad, of

becoming a global citizen, one participant describes it as *"the big itch"*:

> I was feeling stagnant and dissatisfied with the role of being the single parent
>
> paying the mortgage in the suburbs … it didn't give me anything of what I needed.
>
> It was always this calling to 'isn't there something else happening in the world?'
>
> … that's what I found with working on this project … the itch was scratched.
>
> (Amanda)

Responding to the itch inadvertently sets up a confrontation between what was

anticipated and what is experienced.

The expert rejected, a colonial over-hang

With great discomfort, the participants' unravel the 'expert' position, recognising the

underlying historical overtones of colonisation in Sri Lanka:

> When I went to Sri Lanka maybe I went as the dominant culture and I wasn't … I
>
> positioned myself as that and I wasn't, so I had a lot of adjusting to do. (Gillian)

Brett spoke of enjoying the accolades "*I just sat there and lapped it up really*

laughing". However, an unease and counter vulnerability; *"um I mean like there is a thing*

always going, "are you just doing this cos I'm white" you know?" left him suspicious of the

positive attention, and questioning the validity of his experience:

> Do (they) just think that I have better skills than (they) do cos I'm white or from a
>
> developed country? (Brett)

Unprepared for the counterintuitive expectations of their hosts limited the building of relationships, trust and safety for one participant:

> I felt a little bit, not exploited but ah I felt a little bit annoyed … I understand …
>
> they are poor people but nevertheless it wasn't the intention to, to arouse that sort
>
> of interest in me as being a giver. (Richard)

For another participant a personal crisis of competence unravelled in this environment:

> I have a strong idea of who I am historically you know in Playback Theatre … but
>
> when I went to Sri Lanka that was all stripped away because no one knew
>
> anything of my history, it meant nothing to them. What mattered to them was what
>
> I did in that moment, by my standards what I did in that moment wasn't enough so
>
> I had that … existential crisis of I thought I was this person but in this environment
>
> I'm not. I'm no one … who am I? (Gillian)

Going to the '*pit of herself*' this participant critically confronts her prior valuing of self.

Finding humble reciprocity

In the unravelling, a conduit for redefining the link between these culturally disparate groups began to emerge. An honest appraisal of the power imbalances, misunderstandings and resources needed to commit or continue this work occurs. Confronting her position in relation to the Sri Lankans, Amanda speaks of being humbled and ready to abandon her 'expert' hat, recognising that autonomy and independence for all parties brings reciprocal caring:

> For some of them they can recognise me in a different way now, I'm more on a not
>
> a level playing field but … I just started adding more of my stories … that's what
>
> happens as relationships develop and deepen. (Amanda)

Reflecting on the coming together of Westerners and Sri Lankans, one participant describes the true value of the project bringing mutual learning and understanding:

That is the actual basis of the whole project is we share who we are, we get to see

each other's differences. (Isobel)

These participants acknowledge that for successful outcomes, both sides needed to

experience the '*reality stick'*. Felt distress is described as entering a '*cultural cauldron'*.

There is a painful awakening that could only be healed through reciprocal humility:

It was probably a culture clash for [them] too, [they] had no idea what we were

doing so in a very short time it was like, it was a cauldron, we had so much to

exchange. We all got a bit burnt. (Gillian)

Moving beyond the differences there is a reawakening of purposeful

connection:

All the other stuff is peripheral really … the main thing was the strong heart

connection between me and the core group and that remains (big breath in).

(Richard)

Eyes opened/self-reparation

Humbly abandoning the naivety of 'expert' allows new world views in these

participants that facilitate grateful reciprocity in relationship and unexpected psychological

growth. Psychological growth as a product of adversity unfolds for one participant in rich

within-the-moment self-reflection:

I don't think I made sense of much until I came home … at first I was in shock and

then I think I was in panic (laughing) and then I think I was in decline … I

survived the experience but the juice or the nectar of it has come in the months

after, literally after I recovered … it took a long time for me to even look at myself

honestly and I probably still haven't fully. (Gillian)

Psychological distress is evident as she struggles with her own sense of failure, the

catalyst for reparation with self:

It's really like rising out of the ashes because I had to do so much soul searching

and I did reconnect with what I love about Playback Theatre. (Gillian)

Personal and professional growth is evident for all the participants in the realms of new

learning, strengthened practices as international Playback Theatre practitioners, and personal

insights. However, culturally there remains a void where the impact of trauma lurks. One

participant interprets community response to war-related trauma as resilience with a capacity

to love despite the pain. While this may be a naïve interpretation unworthy of the Sri Lankan

experience, the perspective provides an opportunity for this participant to reflect on aspects of

Community missing in her own personal life:

I want that kind of love in my personal life not just in my professional life (laughs)

… it sort of showed me though that it's not what my personal life is. (Isobel)

Inspired by their exposure to the Sri Lankans, these participants value the co-existence

of traumatic grief, hope, and joy in others they sought to serve:

You know the holding of intense grief … at its best or at peoples' best. There's

this capacity to - -to still hold joy and still hold hope … at the same time. (Brett)

Discussion

This study provides a window into the 'lived' world of Playback Theatre practitioners

working within communities that have been impacted by war or disaster. Motivated by good

intent the harsh reality of working in prior war zones and cultural diverse communities,

leaves them psychologically vulnerable and questioning their 'expert' positioning. Their

attempts at meaning making are complicated by deep colonial and historically embedded

patterns on both sides of which they were acutely naive. While authentically pursuing

understanding, personal triggers are unearthed within the complex cultural and contextual

interpersonal space of Playback Theatre. Unprepared for taking Playback Theatre into a post

war zone and the different cultural responses to traumatic distress some are confronted by

self-doubt, embarrassment and shame. Questioning their own good intent, prior unresolved

life issues emerge from the juxtaposed positions of war and excitement, good will and naivety, expert and fool, trust and suspicion, giving and receiving, grief and joy. Most needed to leave Sri Lanka to process their experience, redefining Playback Theatre within their lives, and how they would position their commitment to Playback Theatre in the future.

Without psychosocial and cultural preparedness for working within culturally diverse and high risk environments, coping and resilience strategies for psychological and professional self-care were absent for some of these participants as they struggled to align good intent with reality. One participant watched her professional Playback Theatre identity dissolve in front of an unknown community. Another accepted the accolades as a professional theatre practitioner and teacher, only to wonder at the validity of the praise, all too aware of the powerful imbalances operating. The three women described pre-existing cognitive and affective states as unexpectedly being challenged in the post war environment. On returning home, one experienced a crisis of purpose and meaning in life.

Interpretations at times were gender specific. In this study, the female participants described experiencing psychological growth as being derived from traumatic distress. The male participants on the other hand expressed a paucity of psychological disparity working in a post war context, and were more pragmatic about their experiences, neither expressing high levels of distress or growth. This is in line with current theories of posttraumatic growth which consider posttraumatic growth and distress to have a curvilinear relationship, such that the greater the distress the greater the potential for growth (see Joseph, 2011). Similar to recent studies defining domains of growth in humanitarian workers (McCormack et al., 2009, McCormack & Joseph, 2013), the female participants expressed their growth as a new way of relational engagement through humility, gratitude, self-reparation and redefined altruistic self. This brought a renewed commitment to giving through a more person-centred, relational equality.

In his work on the Freedom Bus, Rivers (2013) critiques the use of a medicalised trauma narrative for working with Palestinians, and supports a psychosocial approach, which incorporates Playback Theatre. Rivers reports the factors inherent in Playback Theatre that mitigate the development of psychological trauma include gaining perspective and distance, experiencing solidarity, breaking down barriers, taking action, emotional release, empathic joining and 'strengthening fortitude'. His findings appear to mirror the experiences of participants in this study, as one participant gained perspective and distance, another experienced solidarity and another experienced emotional release and empathic joining, particularly as they recognized the inappropriateness of the 'expert' within a culturally different environment. Adding to Rivers (2013) findings, these results highlight the two-way relational process that underpins Playback Theatre as important, as it was not immediately grasped by these participants in the early stages of their arrival in Sri Lanka leaving them psychologically vulnerable. As such, it was their own experiential mismatch of expectations, their crisis of identity, and underlying personal issues colliding with post war cultural diversity that was crux to traumatic distress for the participants of this study.

Motivation to work within the humanitarian field has been identified as having a healthy *altruistic identity* (McCormack et al., 2009; McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack et al., 2016). However, without validation from organisations and family, such individuals can develop *altruistic identity disruption* (AI/AID: McCormack et al., 2009) with subsequent feelings of isolation and shame interfering with healthy reintegration back home. Altruistic identity disruption can trigger a desire to return prematurely to the field while still psychologically vulnerable hoping to receive support from former co-workers. Complicating any traumatic distress, the participants of this study were left questioning their response to 'the big itch'. One of the participants of this study describes realising that her family and friends on return home were more interested in her 'holiday' anecdotes than the more serious

side of her experience. Feeling isolated and with a loss of belonging she sensed that 'debriefing' was only possible with other participants. As a consequence this participant has returned several times to work with the Sri Lanka Playback Theatre community attempting to bring a sense of validation to her altruistic drive.

However, vicarious growth, defined as a process of positively redefining self and world views as a result of being exposed vicariously to another's traumatic distress (McCormack & Joseph, 2011) and in line with Cohen and Collens' (2012) position on vicarious growth between aid workers and their client population, became evident in this study's participants. Participants came to re-position their worth and view of self in the world from their cross-cultural struggle experienced working with the post-war distress of Sri Lankan colleagues. Importantly, participants recognised that through being part of the Sri Lanka Playback Theatre project they had redefined their relational engagement with the Sri Lankans as a more *humble reciprocal* exchange that included relational equality and mutual support.

Limitations

As a qualitative study the results are not generalizable to other settings, and do not suggest causation. Interpretative analysis is open to the subjective bias of researchers. As stated, each of the authors has extensive practitioner experience that could influence interpretation. This can be both positive and negative; however, the analysis of data, identifying of themes and interpretation of narrative experience was conducted with a conscious and thorough awareness of potential bias influence. Independent auditing of the data, critical discussion, and audit trails were used to identify disparity and differences in interpretation. No theme was accepted without consensus.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Longitudinal research that explores participants' experience across time, could add valuable insight into the psychological risks for Western Playback Theatre practitioners working in culturally diverse environments. Furthermore, as this research strives to understand the participant experience, it leaves unknown any understanding of the experience of the Sri Lankans who were taught Playback Theatre.

This study highlights the experiential challenges of these Playback Theatre practitioners teaching people exposed to war, conflict, oppression and disaster in a culture outside their own. Specifically it identifies a response to 'an itch' or altruistic calling and the challenges of a naïve understanding of the inherent complexities of working within other cultures when individuals position self as 'expert' in an environment that has a colonial past. More importantly, contributing to culturally diverse environments for healing without an educated knowledge of possible responses to trauma narratives left these participants vulnerable to loss of self, apart from unknown harm to others. For some participants, that distress became cumulative on return home highlighting the need for preparedness before engaging in humanitarian work and for psychosocial support by an organisation. Training and responsibility for the physical and psychological care of participants travelling to post war zones, for the welfare of vulnerable people rebuilding after war, is part of humanitarian aid ethos. However, unaffiliated with any aid organisation, travelling under the wide umbrella of the International Playback Theatre community, Playback practitioners are vulnerable to ongoing and unresolved psychological distress.

The value of this research lies in what can be learnt and taken to inform ongoing work in places like Sri Lanka worldwide. While training has been set up for Playback practitioners (Fox, 2015), access to this is voluntary and there is no requirement of qualification impeding the work. While the International Playback Theatre network provides an on-line community and the IPTN Journal, and organisations offer training internationally, there is no registration

organisation limiting or monitoring its use. This lack of regulation is in part the philosophy of community theatre and specifically Playback Theatre (Fox, 2015), and Broekman (2014) warns against losing this and becoming too closely associated with transnational organisations with their own complex agendas. Nevertheless, accountability is an issue that needs addressing, as good intent is not enough and checks and balances are necessary to care for practitioners and the vulnerable communities they work in worldwide. Importantly, the safety of vulnerable groups following war or disaster is a significant aspect of aid work and therefore police screening, monitoring, support and training of Western Playback Theatre practitioners, as with all those working with vulnerable communities, is needed for the wellbeing of both recipient and provider. Therefore this research supports the need for conversations about how to ensure accountability within an unregulated International Playback Theatre community.

References

Alexander, S. C. (2013). Playback theatre and cultural genocide. *Interplay,18*, 2, 12-14.

Benny, S. J. (2012). Theatre in a troubled world: The story of the Sri Lankan theatre of friendship network. *Interplay, 1,* 2, 1-6.

Braken, P. J. (2001). Post-modernity and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Social Science & Medicine, 53,* 733-743.

Broekman, K. (2014). *The meaning of aesthetics within the field of applied theatre in development settings* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.

Buhler, C. (2012). The story of the Sri Lankan theatre of friendship network. *Interplay, 17,* 2, 7-9.

Cohen, K., & Collens, P. (2013). The impact of trauma workers: A metasynthesis on vicarious trauma and vicarious posttraumatic growth. *Psychological Trauma, Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 5*, 6, 570-580.

Connorton, E., Perry, M. J., Hemenway, D., & Miller, M. (2012). Humanitarian relief workers and trauma-related mental illness. *Epidemiologic Reviews, 34,* 145-155.

Doná, G. (2014). The psychological impact of working in post conflict environments: A personal account of intersectional traumatization. *Intervention, 12,* 1, 91-94.

Eriksson, C. B., Vande Kemp, H., Gorsuch, R., Hoke, S., & Foy, D. W. (2001). Trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms in international relief and development personnel. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 14,* 1, 205-212.

Fox, J. (2013). The therapy question. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 29-30.

Fox, J. (2015). *Beyond theatre, a playback theatre memoir*. NY: Tusitala Publishing.

Freeman, P. (2013). Enacting traumatic experience. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 6-8.

Glover, K., Mitchell, A., Stedman, J., Fairlove, A., & Brown, A. (2016). Women's narratives of attending Playback Theatre for refuges and asylum seekers: Towards new ways of seeing, feeling and being with others [featured article]. *Interplay.* Retrieved from: www.playbacknet.org/

Jenkins, S. R., & Baird, S. (2002). Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma: A validational study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 15,* 5, 423-432.

Joffre-Eichhorn, J. J. (2013). No healing without justice: Playback theatre with war victims in Afghanistan. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 24-26.

Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2005). Positive adjustment to threatening events: An organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity. *Review of General Psychology, 9,* 1, 262-280

Joseph, S., Murphy, D., & Regel, S. (2012). An affective-cognitive processing model of posttraumatic growth. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, *19,* 316-325.

Juge Fox, A. (2013). NOLA playback theatre & unperforming disaster in New Orleans. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 22-23.

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2006). The positive and negative effects of disaster work: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on stress & Coping, 11,* 3, 229-245.

Lopez Cardozo, B., Gotway Crawford, C., Eriksson, C., Zhu, J., Sabin, M., Ager, A., … Simon, W. (2012). Psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and burnout among international humanitarian aid workers: A longitudinal study. *PLoS ONE, 7,* 9, 1-13.

McCormack, L. & Joseph, S. (2012). Post-mission Altruistic Identity Disruption Questionnaire (PostAID/Q):   Preliminary development of a measure of responses to aid work. *Traumatology 18,* 3, 41-48.

McCormack, L., & Joseph, S. (2013). Psychological growth in humanitarian aid personnel: Reintegrating with family and community following exposure to war and genocide. *Community, Work& Family, 16,* 2, 147-163.

McCormack, L., Joseph, S., & Hagger, M. S. (2009). Sustaining a positive altruistic identity in humanitarian aid work: A qualitative case study. *Traumatology, 15,* 2, 109-118.

McCormack, L., Orenstein, A., & Joseph, S. (2016). Postmission Altruistic Identity Disruption Questionnaire (PostAID/Q): Reliability and Validity in measuring distress during reintegration following International Humanitarian Aid Work. *Traumatology. 22,* 3, 1-8.

McIsaac, P. (2013). Playback theatre and trauma*. Interplay, 18,* 2, 27-28.

Moreno, J. L. (1987). *The essential Moreno: Writings on psychodrama, group method and spontaneity by J. L. Moreno MD*. J. Fox (Ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Munakata, K. (2013). Before you saw a hill here; now you see the ocean: How playback theatre serves communities in crisis. *Interplay 18,* 2, 19-21.

Nash, S., & Rowe, N. (2000). Safety, danger and playback theatre. *Dramatherapy 22*, 3, 19-20.

Rivers, B. (2013). Playback theatre, cultural resistance and the limits of trauma discourse. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 15-18.

Rivers, B. (2015). Narrative power: Playback theatre as cultural resistance in occupied Palestine. *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 20,* 2, 155-172.

Rousseau, C., Gauthier, M-F., Lacroix, L., Alain, N., Benoit, M., Moran, A., Viger Rojas, M., & Bourassa, D. (2005). Playing with identities and transforming shared realities: Drama therapy workshops for adolescent immigrants and refugees. *The Arts in Psychotherapy, 32,* 13-17.

Salas, J. (2005). Using theater to address bullying. *Educational Leadership, 63,* 1, 78-82.

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology, *Psychology and Health*, *11,* 261-271.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: a practical guide to research methods (53-80) (2nd Ed.).* London, UK: Sage Publications.

Tedeschi, R. G., Calhoun, L. G., & Cann, A. (2007). Evaluating resource gain: Understanding and misunderstanding posttraumatic growth. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 56,* 3, 396-406.

Thompson, J. (2005). *Digging up stories: Applied theatre, performance and war.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Wright, P. (2013). Playback theatre: Learning and enquiry through applied theatre. *Journal of Arts & Communities, 5,* 1, 7-23.

Transcript Extract Notations:

- - A pause in speech;
- … Removal of nonessential material.

Table 1

Participant Gender, Project role, Playback Theatre (PT) Experience (years), Number of trips to Sri Lanka (SL)

Participant	Gender	Role	Years in PT	Trips to SL
1	F	trainer	28	1
2	F	trainer/project officer	16	5
3	M	trainer	12	4
4	M	trainer	20	2
5	F	trainer/producer	22	8

Table 2

Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Stage	Process
1	Participant interviews were transcribed verbatim.
2	Transcribed interviews were read and re-read to engage the researcher in the lived experience of the participants
3	Notations are made in the left hand margin identifying interesting or significant material, this can be in use of language, of content, or a sense of the participant
4	Another reading is used to notate emerging themes in the right hand margin. These themes represent the essence of what is being communicated.
5	These steps were then repeated for each interview, in the order they were conducted, completing each one fully before commencing on the next
6	Researchers meet to discuss independent audits, robustly discussing emerging themes to identify and agree on themes within each transcript
7	Creation of an agreed list of convergent and divergent themes across transcribed interviews, identifying clusters to inform subordinate themes
8	Using the data as the basis, content of themes are interpreted, creating a narrative that of the subjective lived experience of participants, threading together a coherent 'story'

Table 3

Superordinate theme and subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes
Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble:	Western naivety, the reality stick; The big itch: an altruistic calling; Expert rejected, a colonial overhang; Humble reciprocity; Eyes opened/self-reparation.

Appendix 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction:

We are interested in both positive and negative aspects of teaching Playback Theatre with traumatised communities from your perspective. Secondly, we are interested in how doing this work has impacted on you, your relationships, and you values. Thirdly, we are interested in both positive and negative interpretations of working with communities that have experienced war, specifically the Sri Lankan civil war.

1. In general, could you talk a little bit about your experiences as a Playback Theatre practitioner in Sri Lanka following the civil war?

2. More specifically, how has your experience of doing Playback Theatre in Sri Lanka impacted on you?
Prompt: Positively as well as negatively?

3. How do you feel that you as a person may have changed positively or negatively because of this experience?

4. Can you talk about any psychological, philosophical, or existential thoughts that have altered or become part of your thinking since this experience?

5. How has this experience influenced your feelings, thoughts, relationships and goals?

6. How would you describe your future being influenced by this experience?

Prompts: How do you make sense of that? What does that mean for you? Can you tell me more about that particular part of the experience? What has changed? So you're saying…? Is there something that you would like to talk about that has not been included?

The 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre Practitioners

in post-war Sri Lanka:

Naivety, Altruism, Reciprocal Caring, and Psychological Growth.

Lynne McCormack PhD[1],

Evelyn Henry MClinPsych[1]

[1] University of Newcastle, Australia

Address for Correspondence:

1. Lynne McCormack PhD

   Senior Lecturer

   School of Psychology

   Faculty of Science & IT

   University of Newcastle

   NSW 2308 Australia

   E-mail: lynne.mccormack@newcastle.edu.au;

   Ph: +61 413406050

Abstract: 150

Total number of words: 6252

Abstract

Background: Playback Theatre is applied theatre that draws on real life stories from its audience to reflect the psychosocial needs of individuals and communities. Contemporarily it is being used to support those exposed to war/disaster; however, the impact of such work on its practitioners, is under researched.

Methods: Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis positive and negative subjective interpretations were sought from five Western Playback Theatre practitioners who taught in post-civil war Sri Lanka.

Results: One superordinate theme, *Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble*, encompassed five subordinate themes. These reveal an integral struggle experienced by Western practitioners unprepared for a culturally different lens.

Conclusion: Teaching Playback Theatre in post-war Sri Lanka for these practitioners exposed the gap between the desire to help cross-culturally and their experienced reality. Over time, the collision of Western naivety with good intent facilitated an integral and humble search to be wiser humanitarians cross-culturally in these participants.

Keywords: Playback Theatre, Sri Lanka, war and conflict, posttraumatic growth, interpretative phenomenological analysis

Introduction

Playback Theatre is an applied, audience participatory theatre form in line with oral traditions of storytelling that responds to personal stories (Fox, 2015). Contemporarily it is increasingly being used as a psychosocial support with individuals and communities that are in environments of war, conflict, oppression and disaster (Buhler, 2012; Rivers, 2015). For humanitarian aid workers deployed to such environments, physical and psychological threat to wellbeing is now well documented (Lopez Cardozo, et al, 2012; McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack, Orenstein, & Joseph, 2016) however, there is a paucity of research investigating the Playback Theatre practitioner experience in similar at risk environments. This phenomenological interpretative study explores the 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre practitioners teaching in post-civil war Sri Lanka. It seeks both positive and negative interpretations of their experiences.

Playback Theatre was founded by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in 1975 (Fox, 2015), a form of community theatre used to replay real life stories drawn directly from its audience. Developed from the tradition of oral storytelling, incorporating improvisation, dance, music and voice with the theoretical underpinnings of psychodrama and sociometry (Fox, 2015), it is positioned outside traditional theatre, influenced by the realms of art, education and psychology. The functions of telling, modelling, bearing witness (Wright, 2013), reflection and empathic listening, delivered with a person-centred philosophy, all contribute to creating the Playback Theatre milieu and aesthetic.

However, debate is alive about Playback Theatre's application in a trauma context (Freeman, 2013) and its positioning as art or therapy (Fox, 2013; Nash & Rowe, 2000). A small range of qualitative studies seeking the audience perspective have been conducted in Western settings in the fields of education (Wright, 2013), and drama and psychosocial applications (Glover, Mitchell, Stedman, Fairlove & Brown, 2016; Rousseau, Gauthier,

Lacroix, Alain et al., 2005; Salas, 2005). There is also an abundance of grey literature that informs on Playback Theatre in contexts of war, conflict, oppression and disaster including in the wake of genocide atrocities against Sri Lankan Tamils in Southern India (Alexander, 2013); the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York city (McIsaac, 2013); the 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan (Munakata, 2013); and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Freeman, 2013; Juge Fox, 2013). All represent examples of Playback practitioners doing Playback Theatre for their own communities, within their own cultures.

In contrast, Joffre-Eichhorn (2013), working outside his own culture, has conducted a Playback Theatre project spanning five years with over 60 performances in Afghanistan narrating the telling of stories of trauma, war and loss, utilizing case study material, and emphasizing the psychosocial benefits for tellers and listeners. Through this project he offers lessons learned including questioning how to ensure the emotional and psychological integrity of the performers, and bringing consciousness to the impact of hearing and performing stories of war and trauma.

Exploring his experience with Playback Theatre as part of The Freedom Theatre's Freedom Bus initiative in Palestine, Rivers (2015) conducted over 30 interviews with Palestinian audience members to investigate the 'limits and potentials' of Playback Theatre. However, despite the numbers of practitioners working in this challenging environment, no practitioner perspective was offered apart from the author's own, an intersubjective account as a Playback Theatre practitioner.

Though little is known of the psychological impact on Playback practitioners working in international high risk environments, humanitarian aid personnel, working in similar environments have reported primary and secondary/vicarious posttraumatic stress responses from exposure to and witnessing traumatic events. These include witnessing stories, images, and experiences of survivors in the course of their work in conflict and disaster regions

(Doná, 2014; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Lopez Cardozo, Gotway Crawford, Eriksson, Zhu et al., 2012; Connorton, Perry, Hemenway & Miller, 2012; Eriksson, Vander Kemp, Gorsuch, Hoke & Foy, 2001: Lopez Cardozo et al., 2012; McCormack & Joseph, 2013).

Similarly, it has been recognized that distress from potentially difficult situations in high risk environments may disrupt altruistic intent (McCormack & Joseph, 2012) thought to be the motivating drive of humanitarians (Faigin, Owens & Goodyear-Smith, 2014). Such disruption, Altruistic Identity Disruption (McCormack & Joseph, 2012), is a complex emotional response to lack of validation on return from humanitarian work. It is defined by inter-related feelings of isolation, doubt, and self-blame and impacts healthy reintegration with family, career and society post-mission. In an attempt to lessen distress, the individual may seek to return prematurely to the field for understanding and validation amongst fellow aid workers (McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack et al., 2016). These findings have relevance for future research into the psychological wellbeing of Playback Theatre practitioners working in high risk environments.

Importantly, research now recognises the potential for posttraumatic growth following a wide range of traumatic and adverse events experienced by humanitarian returnees (McCormack, Hagger & Joseph, 2009; McCormack & Joseph, 2011). Positive changes have been reported across the three broad life domains of self-worth, interpersonal relationships, and changed life values and beliefs (see Helgeson, Reynolds & Tomich, 2006; Joseph & Linley, 2005; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2007) with aid personnel reporting a redefining of their altruistic identity through self-reparation and re-engaging with empathy (McCormack & Joseph, 2013). Theories of posttraumatic growth posit that conscious rumination between subjective appraisals and cognitive intrusions are the process by which individuals bring meaning to their traumatic experience (see Joseph, 2011).

As such, distress and growth are curvilinear with distress an active and integral part of posttraumatic growth (see Joseph, 2011).

Relevant to Playback Theatre practitioners there are likely to be cross cultural differences in perception of traumatic distress. Collective cultures, often geographically at the centre of natural and man-made disasters, may respond to traumatic events differently to those from Western individualistic societies (Bracken, 2001). This is not to say they are not experiencing distress but that other, more ecological and shared experiential pathways of meaning making may be at play that absorbs events within the group. As a consequence, teaching Playback by Western practitioners in a collective culture requires preparation prior to deployment to avoid the risk of replicating something akin to a colonization model (Thompson, 2005). Furthermore there is a likelihood of inherent power imbalances that can lead to a mismatch of philosophies impacting the work of all parties. Currently, the monitoring and reporting of practice in these contexts is voluntary with no formal governance structure or screening. This is a notable concern in light of the vulnerability of many communities in which Playback Theatre is currently practicing.

The Sri Lankan Theatre of Friendship Network (Benny, 2012; Buhler, 2012) represents a group of Playback companies with a vision to bring reconciliation across cultures in post-war Sri Lanka. Playback was initially taught in Sri Lanka following the 2006 tsunami (Benny, 2012), initiating a base of interest amongst coastal and tea plantation communities, setting the stage for ongoing training and development.

Given the paucity of research in understanding the 'lived' experience of Playback Theatre practitioners working cross-culturally in communities exposed to war and disaster, this phenomenological study sought both positive and negative subjective interpretations from Playback Theatre practitioners who had worked in Sri Lanka post-civil war.

Method

Participants

Following University Human Ethics approval participants were recruited via purposive sampling from within the Theatre of Friendship Project, a Playback Theatre project responsible for setting up, training and offering ongoing support to Playback Theatre companies throughout Sri Lanka. Participants comprised five adults who were non-nationals and had travelled to Sri Lanka to work on this project. They each met the inclusion criteria of speaking fluent English, being greater than18 years or older, and having taught Playback Theatre in Sri Lanka post-civil war 1983-2009.

- Insert Table 1 here -

Procedure

Potential participants were provided with the study information letter and consent forms. Interviews were arranged at a location of the individual participant's choice. In-line with IPA protocols, the participants were provided with the interview schedule one day prior to the interview, allowing for a period of pre-interview reflection (IPA: Smith, 1996). Signed consent forms and a completed brief questionnaire to supply demographic information were collected prior to the face to face interview. Consistent with IPA, participants were a small, homogenous group who had experienced the same phenomenon, i.e. teaching and using Playback Theatre with individuals and communities impacted by the Sri Lankan Civil War. The semi-structured interviews were conducted, digitally recorded, and transcribed by the second author (see Appendix 1). All were given pseudonyms and password protected. The interviews varied in length, between 35 and 70 minutes. By using a semi-structured interview the interviewer can ask clarifying questions, working from general to specific with a 'funnelling' technique (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this way the participant is encouraged to engage with the phenomenon more generally and then narrow down to interpretative reflections that are more specific to their experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

At all times the interviewer recognises that personal biases may impact their enquiry and works to remain neutral for credible collection of data that is representative of the participant's interpretation. See Table 1 for participant list of roles, years of Playback Theatre experience, and number of visits to Sri Lanka.

Philosophical underpinnings

IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008) is underpinned by a phenomenological and interpretative stance which aims to capture the richness and diversity of the individual participant's interpreted experience, particularly poorly explored phenomenon. IPA also engages the social view of symbolic interactionism: i.e. 1) that people act toward things based on the meaning they bring to those things; 2) that meaning is derived from social interaction; and, 3) that interpretation modifies meaning (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1995). IPA therefore seeks meaning making through the dynamic interpretative activity that occurs between the researcher and the participant. In this way IPA is described as having a double hermeneutic as the researcher strives to make sense of the participant striving to make sense of their experience (See Table 2: Smith, 1996).

Validity and reliability

By rigorously following the steps of IPA this study aimed to ensure trustworthiness, verification, credibility, and dependability. Although Guba and Lincoln's (1981; 1982; 1989) early and seminal work recommended post hoc evaluation by qualitative researchers to support trustworthiness, the contemporary view stresses "checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain" (Morse, 2011, p. 17) throughout the analysis. Therefore, in defining rigor in an IPA qualitative research, reliability and validity is assured through strict adherence to the analytical steps mindful of its philosophical stance (Smith, 1996). Therefore, IPA is concerned with subjectivity rather than external reality, a primary concern of validity in positivist research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and as such seeks thematic richness in the data

for both convergent (across all transcripts) and divergent (within one transcript) themes rather than providing saturation of each theme (see Smith, 2011).

Furthermore, purposive sampling of a small homogenous group; funnelling down to the phenomenon being explored; and the double hermeneutic investigative focus of interviewing all sanction rigour in IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The argument for inter-rater reliability remains divisive in qualitative research (Armstrong, Gosling, Weissman, Marteau, 1997) whereas strict adherence to independent audit trails by the researchers, prior to collaborative consensus of themes substantiated by the data, remains a critical step in IPA (see Smith et al., 2009). This necessitates that each individual researcher engages in an 'interpretative relationship' with the transcribed interviews prior to joint collation of themes with the other researchers (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The step-by-step analytic process is outlined in Table 2.

-        Insert Table 2 here -

Both authors recognise the potential for personal biases to impact interpretation. The first author has worked as a trauma therapist for over 25 years inclusive of psychosocial support in international humanitarian settings. The second author is a psychologist and Playback Theatre practitioner whose own experience in Sri Lanka as part of the Theatre of Friendship Playback Theatre project brought enormous insight to this research project. Therefore bias was potentially positive and negative. A great deal of debate ensued around interpretation that may have been influenced by experience and former knowledge of this research project so that final analysis and findings remained true to the data. Strict adherence to the IPA protocols and critical discussion of each other's perspective continued throughout for final emergent themes. The audit trail inclusive of a reflexive journal continued throughout the analysis and write-up.

Results

One superordinate theme: *Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble*; encapsulates five subordinate themes: 1) *Western naivety, the reality stick*; 2) t*he big itch*; 3) e*xpert rejected, a colonial overhang*; 4) h*umble reciprocity*; and 5*) eyes opened/self-reparation*. Participants actively sought to make sense of the collision between their expectations in Sri Lanka and reality. Even within the interviews, their reflections recognise conflicting responses to a complex environment forcing their good intent to oscillate between many pairs of polar positions: war and excitement, good will and naivety, expert and fool, trust and suspicion, giving and receiving, grief and joy. Western naivety and a desire to empathically contribute in the '*rubble of post war*' is juxtaposed by a confrontation with self. Reparation with self and an integral and humble search to be wiser humanitarians cross culturally remains an integral struggle. As they reject their misplaced confidence as the expert, this wiser self engages a humble reciprocity where aspects of joy, hope, and happiness despite psychological distress, can emerge.

Insert Table 3 here -

Western naivety, the 'reality stick'

This subordinate theme describes the participants' Western naivety that inhibited pre-deployment preparedness at the project's conceptual level in these Playback Theatre practitioners. Similarly, it highlights the lack of contextual preparedness for doing Playback Theatre in countries impacted by war who have a vastly different cultural history and identity. Reality is confronting and goodwill is not enough. As one practitioner reported "*I was very excited",* despite the risk. This masked the reality of the project:

> Playback in a different country … seemed like a fun idea … and it's not like I
> hadn't taken on board that it's a post war context … but the reality of what that
> actually means wasn't true for me until I was actually in the country. (Amanda)

As artistic professionals working in a post war zone, in many ways they are independent wandering minstrels, unlike aid personnel who have a contractual remit of responsibility for the psychological and physical care of vulnerable people. Teaching Playback Theatre for one participant was *"having fun"*:

We were playing. We were having fun ... we weren't there stitching up shrapnel wounds or even listening in a sort of psychotherapeutic kind of way … to people's stories. We were there as artists and that's a different thing. (Brett)

However, other participants remember the creeping discomfort of this naivety which underestimated the impact of teaching an 'art' form:

I couldn't anticipate how difficult it was going to be … working with trauma was one level of difficulty, working with … interpreters was another and then working with people from different cultures with different agendas or purposes. So there were layers and layers of complexity. (Gillian)

Realising she has underestimated the complexity, shameful internalising occurs:

I started to doubt myself and I thought this is too stupid for words that we've come here with our Western ideas into this you know this traumatised place where people are genuinely day to day worried for their life; are we being stupid? (Gillian)

Exploring this sense of personal failure her confident professional self unravels, unlocking empathy and a shift in positioning:

I had no idea of what I was going into, no idea of … how hard it was for them. (Gillian)

The big itch, an altruistic calling

Reflecting on what propelled them to take such risk, participants become aware of something operating deeper in them, an altruistic calling to 'pay back', to make a difference, to be a global citizen. Altruistic and heroic overtones emerge hopeful that as volunteers they

can contribute to peace, and give back to humanity. One participant however, identifies the drive to give as motivated by more selfish needs:

> There is this idea oh we can go to these places where there is great need … I'm
>
> making a contribution, Playback Theatre is valuable, I have the skills and I'm
>
> going to give the skills and it's very one sided … but actually what's going on is
>
> … people go there because they want something. (Isobel)

Driven by a childhood dream of joining the Peace Corp or volunteering abroad, of becoming a global citizen, one participant describes it as *"the big itch"*:

> I was feeling stagnant and dissatisfied with the role of being the single parent
>
> paying the mortgage in the suburbs … it didn't give me anything of what I needed.
>
> It was always this calling to 'isn't there something else happening in the world?'
>
> … that's what I found with working on this project … the itch was scratched.
>
> (Amanda)

Responding to the itch inadvertently sets up a confrontation between what was anticipated and what is experienced.

The expert rejected, a colonial over-hang

With great discomfort, the participants' unravel the 'expert' position, recognising the underlying historical overtones of colonisation in Sri Lanka:

> When I went to Sri Lanka maybe I went as the dominant culture and I wasn't … I
>
> positioned myself as that and I wasn't, so I had a lot of adjusting to do. (Gillian)

Brett spoke of enjoying the accolades "*I just sat there and lapped it up really laughing*". However, an unease and counter vulnerability; *"um I mean like there is a thing always going, "are you just doing this cos I'm white" you know?"* left him suspicious of the positive attention, and questioning the validity of his experience:

> Do (they) just think that I have better skills than (they) do cos I'm white or from a
>
> developed country? (Brett)

Unprepared for the counterintuitive expectations of their hosts limited the building of relationships, trust and safety for one participant:

> I felt a little bit, not exploited but ah I felt a little bit annoyed … I understand …
>
> they are poor people but nevertheless it wasn't the intention to, to arouse that sort
>
> of interest in me as being a giver. (Richard)

For another participant a personal crisis of competence unravelled in this environment:

> I have a strong idea of who I am historically you know in Playback Theatre … but
>
> when I went to Sri Lanka that was all stripped away because no one knew
>
> anything of my history, it meant nothing to them. What mattered to them was what
>
> I did in that moment, by my standards what I did in that moment wasn't enough so
>
> I had that … existential crisis of I thought I was this person but in this environment
>
> I'm not. I'm no one … who am I? (Gillian)

Going to the '*pit of herself*' this participant critically confronts her prior valuing of self.

Finding humble reciprocity

In the unravelling, a conduit for redefining the link between these culturally disparate groups began to emerge. An honest appraisal of the power imbalances, misunderstandings and resources needed to commit or continue this work occurs. Confronting her position in relation to the Sri Lankans, Amanda speaks of being humbled and ready to abandon her 'expert' hat, recognising that autonomy and independence for all parties brings reciprocal caring:

> For some of them they can recognise me in a different way now, I'm more on a not
>
> a level playing field but … I just started adding more of my stories … that's what
>
> happens as relationships develop and deepen. (Amanda)

Reflecting on the coming together of Westerners and Sri Lankans, one participant describes the true value of the project bringing mutual learning and understanding:

That is the actual basis of the whole project is we share who we are, we get to see

each other's differences. (Isobel)

These participants acknowledge that for successful outcomes, both sides needed to experience the '*reality stick'*. Felt distress is described as entering a '*cultural cauldron'*. There is a painful awakening that could only be healed through reciprocal humility:

It was probably a culture clash for [them] too, [they] had no idea what we were

doing so in a very short time it was like, it was a cauldron, we had so much to

exchange. We all got a bit burnt. (Gillian)

Moving beyond the differences there is a reawakening of purposeful

connection:

All the other stuff is peripheral really … the main thing was the strong heart

connection between me and the core group and that remains (big breath in).

(Richard)

Eyes opened/self-reparation

Humbly abandoning the naivety of 'expert' allows new world views in these participants that facilitate grateful reciprocity in relationship and unexpected psychological growth. Psychological growth as a product of adversity unfolds for one participant in rich within-the-moment self-reflection:

I don't think I made sense of much until I came home … at first I was in shock and

then I think I was in panic (laughing) and then I think I was in decline … I

survived the experience but the juice or the nectar of it has come in the months

after, literally after I recovered … it took a long time for me to even look at myself

honestly and I probably still haven't fully. (Gillian)

Psychological distress is evident as she struggles with her own sense of failure, the

catalyst for reparation with self:

> It's really like rising out of the ashes because I had to do so much soul searching
>
> and I did reconnect with what I love about Playback Theatre. (Gillian)

Personal and professional growth is evident for all the participants in the realms of new learning, strengthened practices as international Playback Theatre practitioners, and personal insights. However, culturally there remains a void where the impact of trauma lurks. One participant interprets community response to war-related trauma as resilience with a capacity to love despite the pain. While this may be a naïve interpretation unworthy of the Sri Lankan experience, the perspective provides an opportunity for this participant to reflect on aspects of *Community* missing in her own personal life:

> I want that kind of love in my personal life not just in my professional life (laughs)
>
> … it sort of showed me though that it's not what my personal life is. (Isobel)

Inspired by their exposure to the Sri Lankans, these participants value the co-existence of traumatic grief, hope, and joy in others they sought to serve:

> You know the holding of intense grief … at its best or at peoples' best. There's
>
> this capacity to - -to still hold joy and still hold hope … at the same time. (Brett)

Discussion

This study provides a window into the 'lived' world of Playback Theatre practitioners working within communities that have been impacted by war or disaster. Motivated by good intent the harsh reality of working in prior war zones and cultural diverse communities, leaves them psychologically vulnerable and questioning their 'expert' positioning. Their attempts at meaning making are complicated by deep colonial and historically embedded patterns on both sides of which they were acutely naive. While authentically pursuing understanding, personal triggers are unearthed within the complex cultural and contextual interpersonal space of Playback Theatre. Unprepared for taking Playback Theatre into a post war zone and the different cultural responses to traumatic distress some are confronted by self-doubt, embarrassment and shame. Questioning their own good intent, prior unresolved

life issues emerge from the juxtaposed positions of war and excitement, good will and naivety, expert and fool, trust and suspicion, giving and receiving, grief and joy. Most needed to leave Sri Lanka to process their experience, redefining Playback Theatre within their lives, and how they would position their commitment to Playback Theatre in the future.

Without psychosocial and cultural preparedness for working within culturally diverse and high risk environments, coping and resilience strategies for psychological and professional self-care were absent for some of these participants as they struggled to align good intent with reality. One participant watched her professional Playback Theatre identity dissolve in front of an unknown community. Another accepted the accolades as a professional theatre practitioner and teacher, only to wonder at the validity of the praise, all too aware of the powerful imbalances operating. The three women described pre-existing cognitive and affective states as unexpectedly being challenged in the post war environment. On returning home, one experienced a crisis of purpose and meaning in life.

Interpretations at times were gender specific. In this study, the female participants described experiencing psychological growth as being derived from traumatic distress. The male participants on the other hand expressed a paucity of psychological disparity working in a post war context, and were more pragmatic about their experiences, neither expressing high levels of distress or growth. This is in line with current theories of posttraumatic growth which consider posttraumatic growth and distress to have a curvilinear relationship, such that the greater the distress the greater the potential for growth (see Joseph, 2011). Similar to recent studies defining domains of growth in humanitarian workers (McCormack et al., 2009, McCormack & Joseph, 2013), the female participants expressed their growth as a new way of relational engagement through humility, gratitude, self-reparation and redefined altruistic self. This brought a renewed commitment to giving through a more person-centred, relational equality.

In his work on the Freedom Bus, Rivers (2013) critiques the use of a medicalised trauma narrative for working with Palestinians, and supports a psychosocial approach, which incorporates Playback Theatre. Rivers reports the factors inherent in Playback Theatre that mitigate the development of psychological trauma include gaining perspective and distance, experiencing solidarity, breaking down barriers, taking action, emotional release, empathic joining and 'strengthening fortitude'. His findings appear to mirror the experiences of participants in this study, as one participant gained perspective and distance, another experienced solidarity and another experienced emotional release and empathic joining, particularly as they recognized the inappropriateness of the 'expert' within a culturally different environment. Adding to Rivers (2013) findings, these results highlight the two-way relational process that underpins Playback Theatre as important, as it was not immediately grasped by these participants in the early stages of their arrival in Sri Lanka leaving them psychologically vulnerable. As such, it was their own experiential mismatch of expectations, their crisis of identity, and underlying personal issues colliding with post war cultural diversity that was crux to traumatic distress for the participants of this study.

Motivation to work within the humanitarian field has been identified as having a healthy *altruistic identity* (McCormack et al., 2009; McCormack & Joseph, 2012; McCormack et al., 2016). However, without validation from organisations and family, such individuals can develop *altruistic identity disruption* (AI/AID: McCormack et al., 2009) with subsequent feelings of isolation and shame interfering with healthy reintegration back home. Altruistic identity disruption can trigger a desire to return prematurely to the field while still psychologically vulnerable hoping to receive support from former co-workers. Complicating any traumatic distress, the participants of this study were left questioning their response to 'the big itch'. One of the participants of this study describes realising that her family and friends on return home were more interested in her 'holiday' anecdotes than the more serious

side of her experience. Feeling isolated and with a loss of belonging she sensed that 'debriefing' was only possible with other participants. As a consequence this participant has returned several times to work with the Sri Lanka Playback Theatre community attempting to bring a sense of validation to her altruistic drive.

However, vicarious growth, defined as a process of positively redefining self and world views as a result of being exposed vicariously to another's traumatic distress (McCormack & Joseph, 2011) and in line with Cohen and Collens' (2012) position on vicarious growth between aid workers and their client population, became evident in this study's participants. Participants came to re-position their worth and view of self in the world from their cross-cultural struggle experienced working with the post-war distress of Sri Lankan colleagues. Importantly, participants recognised that through being part of the Sri Lanka Playback Theatre project they had redefined their relational engagement with the Sri Lankans as a more *humble reciprocal* exchange that included relational equality and mutual support.

Limitations

As a qualitative study the results are not generalizable to other settings, and do not suggest causation. Interpretative analysis is open to the subjective bias of researchers. As stated, each of the authors has extensive practitioner experience that could influence interpretation. This can be both positive and negative; however, the analysis of data, identifying of themes and interpretation of narrative experience was conducted with a conscious and thorough awareness of potential bias influence. Independent auditing of the data, critical discussion, and audit trails were used to identify disparity and differences in interpretation. No theme was accepted without consensus.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Longitudinal research that explores participants' experience across time, could add valuable insight into the psychological risks for Western Playback Theatre practitioners working in culturally diverse environments. Furthermore, as this research strives to understand the participant experience, it leaves unknown any understanding of the experience of the Sri Lankans who were taught Playback Theatre.

This study highlights the experiential challenges of these Playback Theatre practitioners teaching people exposed to war, conflict, oppression and disaster in a culture outside their own. Specifically it identifies a response to 'an itch' or altruistic calling and the challenges of a naïve understanding of the inherent complexities of working within other cultures when individuals position self as 'expert' in an environment that has a colonial past. More importantly, contributing to culturally diverse environments for healing without an educated knowledge of possible responses to trauma narratives left these participants vulnerable to loss of self, apart from unknown harm to others. For some participants, that distress became cumulative on return home highlighting the need for preparedness before engaging in humanitarian work and for psychosocial support by an organisation. Training and responsibility for the physical and psychological care of participants travelling to post war zones, for the welfare of vulnerable people rebuilding after war, is part of humanitarian aid ethos. However, unaffiliated with any aid organisation, travelling under the wide umbrella of the International Playback Theatre community, Playback practitioners are vulnerable to ongoing and unresolved psychological distress.

The value of this research lies in what can be learnt and taken to inform ongoing work in places like Sri Lanka worldwide. While training has been set up for Playback practitioners (Fox, 2015), access to this is voluntary and there is no requirement of qualification impeding the work. While the International Playback Theatre network provides an on-line community and the IPTN Journal, and organisations offer training internationally, there is no registration

organisation limiting or monitoring its use. This lack of regulation is in part the philosophy of community theatre and specifically Playback Theatre (Fox, 2015), and Broekman (2014) warns against losing this and becoming too closely associated with transnational organisations with their own complex agendas. Nevertheless, accountability is an issue that needs addressing, as good intent is not enough and checks and balances are necessary to care for practitioners and the vulnerable communities they work in worldwide. Importantly, the safety of vulnerable groups following war or disaster is a significant aspect of aid work and therefore police screening, monitoring, support and training of Western Playback Theatre practitioners, as with all those working with vulnerable communities, is needed for the wellbeing of both recipient and provider. Therefore this research supports the need for conversations about how to ensure accountability within an unregulated International Playback Theatre community.

References

Alexander, S. C. (2013). Playback theatre and cultural genocide. *Interplay,18*, 2, 12-14.

Benny, S. J. (2012). Theatre in a troubled world: The story of the Sri Lankan theatre of friendship network. *Interplay, 1,* 2, 1-6.

Braken, P. J. (2001). Post-modernity and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Social Science & Medicine, 53,* 733-743.

Broekman, K. (2014). *The meaning of aesthetics within the field of applied theatre in development settings* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.

Buhler, C. (2012). The story of the Sri Lankan theatre of friendship network. *Interplay, 17,* 2, 7-9.

Cohen, K., & Collens, P. (2013). The impact of trauma workers: A metasynthesis on vicarious trauma and vicarious posttraumatic growth. *Psychological Trauma, Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 5*, 6, 570-580.

Connorton, E., Perry, M. J., Hemenway, D., & Miller, M. (2012). Humanitarian relief workers and trauma-related mental illness. *Epidemiologic Reviews, 34,* 145-155.

Doná, G. (2014). The psychological impact of working in post conflict environments: A personal account of intersectional traumatization. *Intervention, 12,* 1, 91-94.

Eriksson, C. B., Vande Kemp, H., Gorsuch, R., Hoke, S., & Foy, D. W. (2001). Trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms in international relief and development personnel. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 14,* 1, 205-212.

Fox, J. (2013). The therapy question. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 29-30.

Fox, J. (2015). *Beyond theatre, a playback theatre memoir*. NY: Tusitala Publishing.

Freeman, P. (2013). Enacting traumatic experience. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 6-8.

Glover, K., Mitchell, A., Stedman, J., Fairlove, A., & Brown, A. (2016). Women's narratives of attending Playback Theatre for refuges and asylum seekers: Towards new ways of seeing, feeling and being with others [featured article]. *Interplay.* Retrieved from: www.playbacknet.org/

Jenkins, S. R., & Baird, S. (2002). Secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma: A validational study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 15,* 5, 423-432.

Joffre-Eichhorn, J. J. (2013). No healing without justice: Playback theatre with war victims in Afghanistan. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 24-26.

Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2005). Positive adjustment to threatening events: An organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity. *Review of General Psychology, 9,* 1, 262-280

Joseph, S., Murphy, D., & Regel, S. (2012). An affective-cognitive processing model of posttraumatic growth. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, *19,* 316-325.

Juge Fox, A. (2013). NOLA playback theatre & unperforming disaster in New Orleans. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 22-23.

Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2006). The positive and negative effects of disaster work: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on stress & Coping, 11,* 3, 229-245.

Lopez Cardozo, B., Gotway Crawford, C., Eriksson, C., Zhu, J., Sabin, M., Ager, A., … Simon, W. (2012). Psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and burnout among international humanitarian aid workers: A longitudinal study. *PLoS ONE, 7,* 9, 1-13.

McCormack, L. & Joseph, S. (2012). Post-mission Altruistic Identity Disruption Questionnaire (PostAID/Q):   Preliminary development of a measure of responses to aid work. *Traumatology 18,* 3, 41-48.

McCormack, L., & Joseph, S. (2013). Psychological growth in humanitarian aid personnel: Reintegrating with family and community following exposure to war and genocide. *Community, Work& Family, 16,* 2, 147-163.

McCormack, L., Joseph, S., & Hagger, M. S. (2009). Sustaining a positive altruistic identity in humanitarian aid work: A qualitative case study. *Traumatology, 15,* 2, 109-118.

McCormack, L., Orenstein, A., & Joseph, S. (2016). Postmission Altruistic Identity Disruption Questionnaire (PostAID/Q): Reliability and Validity in measuring distress during reintegration following International Humanitarian Aid Work. *Traumatology. 22,* 3, 1-8.

McIsaac, P. (2013). Playback theatre and trauma. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 27-28.

Moreno, J. L. (1987). *The essential Moreno: Writings on psychodrama, group method and spontaneity by J. L. Moreno MD*. J. Fox (Ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Munakata, K. (2013). Before you saw a hill here; now you see the ocean: How playback theatre serves communities in crisis. *Interplay 18,* 2, 19-21.

Nash, S., & Rowe, N. (2000). Safety, danger and playback theatre. *Dramatherapy 22*, 3, 19-20.

Rivers, B. (2013). Playback theatre, cultural resistance and the limits of trauma discourse. *Interplay, 18,* 2, 15-18.

Rivers, B. (2015). Narrative power: Playback theatre as cultural resistance in occupied Palestine. *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 20,* 2, 155-172.

Rousseau, C., Gauthier, M-F., Lacroix, L., Alain, N., Benoit, M., Moran, A., Viger Rojas, M., & Bourassa, D. (2005). Playing with identities and transforming shared realities: Drama therapy workshops for adolescent immigrants and refugees. *The Arts in Psychotherapy, 32,* 13-17.

Salas, J. (2005). Using theater to address bullying. *Educational Leadership, 63,* 1, 78-82.

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology, *Psychology and Health*, *11,* 261-271.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: a practical guide to research methods (53-80) (2nd Ed.).* London, UK: Sage Publications.

Tedeschi, R. G., Calhoun, L. G., & Cann, A. (2007). Evaluating resource gain: Understanding and misunderstanding posttraumatic growth. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 56,* 3, 396-406.

Thompson, J. (2005). *Digging up stories: Applied theatre, performance and war.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Wright, P. (2013). Playback theatre: Learning and enquiry through applied theatre. *Journal of Arts & Communities, 5,* 1, 7-23.

Transcript Extract Notations:

-   A pause in speech;
…   Removal of nonessential material.

Table 1

Participant Gender, Project role, Playback Theatre (PT) Experience (years), Number of trips to Sri Lanka (SL)

Participant	Gender	Role	Years in PT	Trips to SL
1	F	trainer	28	1
2	F	trainer/project officer	16	5
3	M	trainer	12	4
4	M	trainer	20	2
5	F	trainer/producer	22	8

Table 2

Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Stage	Process
1	Participant interviews were transcribed verbatim.
2	Transcribed interviews were read and re-read to engage the researcher in the lived experience of the participants
3	Notations are made in the left hand margin identifying interesting or significant material, this can be in use of language, of content, or a sense of the participant
4	Another reading is used to notate emerging themes in the right hand margin. These themes represent the essence of what is being communicated.
5	These steps were then repeated for each interview, in the order they were conducted, completing each one fully before commencing on the next
6	Researchers meet to discuss independent audits, robustly discussing emerging themes to identify and agree on themes within each transcript
7	Creation of an agreed list of convergent and divergent themes across transcribed interviews, identifying clusters to inform subordinate themes
8	Using the data as the basis, content of themes are interpreted, creating a narrative that of the subjective lived experience of participants, threading together a coherent 'story'

Table 3

Superordinate theme and subordinate themes

Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes
Naivety, Humility and Hope amongst the Rubble:	Western naivety, the reality stick; The big itch: an altruistic calling; Expert rejected, a colonial overhang; Humble reciprocity; Eyes opened/self-reparation.

Appendix 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction:

We are interested in both positive and negative aspects of teaching Playback Theatre with traumatised communities from your perspective. Secondly, we are interested in how doing this work has impacted on you, your relationships, and you values. Thirdly, we are interested in both positive and negative interpretations of working with communities that have experienced war, specifically the Sri Lankan civil war.

1. In general, could you talk a little bit about your experiences as a Playback Theatre practitioner in Sri Lanka following the civil war?

2. More specifically, how has your experience of doing Playback Theatre in Sri Lanka impacted on you?
Prompt: Positively as well as negatively?

3. How do you feel that you as a person may have changed positively or negatively because of this experience?

4. Can you talk about any psychological, philosophical, or existential thoughts that have altered or become part of your thinking since this experience?

5. How has this experience influenced your feelings, thoughts, relationships and goals?

6. How would you describe your future being influenced by this experience?

Prompts: How do you make sense of that? What does that mean for you? Can you tell me more about that particular part of the experience? What has changed? So you're saying…? Is there something that you would like to talk about that has not been included?