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Putting the Self in the Hot Seat: Enacting Reflexivity through Dramatic Strategies

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Abstract

In this paper we, as self-study researchers whose background is in drama and theatre, examine the connection between strategies borrowed from drama, self-study practices, and the reflexive imperative. In doing so, we are enacting the notion of reflexivity in our research practice as well as offering a methodological tool to add to the self-study repertoire. Building on the notion of the self-interview, the concept of the critical friend, and techniques used in both acting and drama-in-education, this article discusses the development of what we term the *reciprocal self-interview (RSI)*. Methodologically, we will both explore the genesis of the RSI idea and enact it in order to test its efficacy as a reflexive interrogatory method through our own experience. In this way, we seek to draw on our own discipline-specific knowledge in order to expand the potential of both reflexive research in general and the self-study project in particular. We draw on Gillie Bolton's (2010) construction of reflexivity to shape our offering of our own reflexivity as a lens through which to articulate reflexive practice in action.

Keywords: theatre and reflexivity, self-study, self-interview, hot-seating, reciprocal self-interview

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Introduction

This article examines the use of strategies borrowed from the field of drama to interrogate how we as drama practitioners and researchers¹ can address the notion of self in self-study. Self-study is reflexive because it asks researchers to examine critically their own self(ves) in action; this parallels the inward–outward dynamic of the dramatic process, where the inward-looking practice of the actors leads to the outward-looking performance for an audience. We experiment with methods rooted in the dramatic process for engaging in reflexive practice—enacting the notion of reflexivity in our research practice as well as adding a methodological tool to the self-study repertoire.

We have mined our experience and knowledge in theatre and drama to find innovative ways in which to reflect on our practice. Building on the notion of the self-interview, and appropriating techniques used in both acting and in drama-in-education, this article discusses the development of what we have termed the *reciprocal self-interview (RSI)*. Thus, we seek to answer two core research questions:

- 1) How do we use and translate elements derived from our own discipline-specific knowledge in order to interrogate our selves as practitioners and researchers?
- 2) How do we formalise such practice as a methodological and interrogative tool?

To answer these questions we draw the connections between what we do ourselves and what may be gleaned from that experience. Gillie Bolton (2010, p. 43) suggested that “a closely observed event . . . written about, reflected upon, discussed critically and re-explored through further writings stands metonymically for the whole of that professional’s practice.” Thus, we offer our own reflexivity as a lens through which to articulate an approach to reflexive practice in action.

We as authors are engaged in both self-study research and artistic practice, and are seeking ways to negotiate the complex relationship between these experiences. Arts-based methods offer, and are, one such possibility. Anastasia Samaras (2010, p. 722) suggested:

Arts-based self-study encourages connections of the self to practice, individualizes meaning-making, provides critical analysis and interpretation, and encourages dialogue about improving one’s practice through the arts.

We believe the RSI, which draws heavily on our dramatic and theatrical practice, to be a method that can promote such activities. Thus, in this article we will

- explore the genesis of the RSI and its antecedents in drama and self-study;
- interrogate its employment as a research tool through a discussion of our own experience of the RSI; and
- examine the implications of the RSI as a tool for generating reflexivity in research practice.

¹ Tamar and Tanya are currently engaged in doctoral research; both are undertaking self-study projects that focus on their own practice. Lorraine is their supervisor for these projects. All three work in higher education in the field of Drama and/or Drama Education.

In her study of reflective practice Bolton (2010, p. 14) observed that “reflexivity is making aspects of the self strange: focusing close attention upon *one’s own* actions, thoughts, feelings, values, identity, and their effect upon others, situations, and professional and social structures.” This is the starting point for our research journey: placing our practice under the microscope through a re-orienting of ourselves towards that practice, making it “strange” so that it can be stripped of the complacent and the familiar and emerge in a more sharply defined and critically engaged light.

Theatre, Self-Study and Reflexivity

We believe that the field of drama, by its very nature, constitutes training in reflexivity. In performance we are constantly trained to reflect on our actions, and to use this process of reflection as a springboard for improving the performance in an iterative manner. Actors are required to examine their action/s onstage through fine observation of themselves, and through the daily routine of notes given by the director. Thus, performance can be seen as training for reflexive research practices, with the director acting as a critical friend, the “other” against whom the actor can test her or his insights and understandings. Through the ongoing processes of rehearsal and performance, theatre provides training in iterative thinking, which is the basis of reflexivity. Performance requires the asking of questions—of the text, of the actors, of the audience—in the same way that self-study demands a questioning of the self: in action.

Drama as a form is fundamentally dialogic: in the relationships between actor and character, between director and performer, between performer and audience, and between characters onstage. The complexity of the multiple dialogues at work in theatre may parallel the complex nature of reality and of the self within that reality. Self-study, too, is dialogic in that it creates a relationship between the self as researcher and the self as practitioner, and between the researcher and the critical friend who acts as the metaphorical mirror, reflecting back the researcher’s inward-looking gaze. It is, like theatre, both inward- and outward-looking and it also asks that researchers interrogate their own practice in relation to the others on whom the practice impacts.

Our approach is driven by Jonothan Neelands’ (2006, pp. 18–19) notion of the reflective practitioner, as

both a professional practitioner, in our case an arts educator, and also a practitioner of reflective practice. . . . They reflect on and consequently, or simultaneously, modify their professional practice and their professional practice is itself reflexive in terms of the transparency of the processes of selection, reflection and modification that underpins it.

Thus, we are attempting here to engage with how we can use dramatic strategies both to reflect on practice and to enact reflexivity in practice (Neelands, 2006). In so doing, we are seeking to elucidate an arts-based methodology driven by performance techniques.

Methodology

Our approach, described in this article, is to experiment with using dramatic strategies on ourselves as participants, as part of our own reflexive self-study interrogating our own practice. We have sought to find ways that will allow us to “edge in” (Heathcote, cited in Wagner, 1980, p. 34) to the examination of the self that is so necessary to the task of self-study. Launching directly into autobiographical narrative did not work for us; we found ourselves self-editing and self-censoring. Instead, we have looked to our training in theatre and drama to provide ways in which we could examine ourselves in action “in order to look at it as if from the outside” (Bolton, 2010, p. 14). This imperative has led us to the reciprocal self-interview. In developing this methodology we are drawing on three main aspects of our practice: from theatre, the tool

of hot-seating; from self-study, the critical friend; and from qualitative narrative research, the interview form.

We were intrigued by the technique of the self-interview, with which Lorraine has experimented previously. While the self-interview is itself a useful technique, we have chosen to extend this notion, drawing upon theatrical techniques to develop the RSI. The reciprocal aspect is a direct consequence of our collaborative work as directors and as theatre professionals, constantly supporting, reinforcing, and extending each other's contribution. We transcribe and transpose the idea of hot-seating, taking it out of the realm of developing a character, and using it to put the self into the hot seat. We ask each other self-generated questions to create the data in a self-reflexive manner. In doing so, we are seeking to intertwine the theatrical technique with the qualitative research initiative in order to develop an arts-based approach to reflexive knowledge generation.

Tamar and Tanya will thus enact the practice of the RSI, generating the data to interrogate its efficacy as a reflexive and research tool. We will record the exchanges, witnessed by Lorraine as the external eye and additional critical friend. Each of us then comments on our experience of the process. We then examine how to translate the data from our own lived experience into a methodological approach for reflexive practice.

Hot-seating

One of the most widely used techniques for building an actor's sense of engagement with character is called hot-seating. In this technique, the actor is asked to sit in a chair before an audience—the metaphoric hot seat—and is asked to answer questions and respond to prompts in the persona of the character she or he is portraying. The technique is intended to enable the actor to identify fully with the character and to develop a complex understanding of the character's history and biography. When executed effectively, this exercise propels the actor into the lived experience of the character and generates a three-dimensional, authentic, and convincing representation of the figure in the play.

To participate in the hot-seating exercise the actor must first work on discovering the character's autobiography and subjectivity in the world of the play; this is much the same as self-study researchers having to develop and articulate their personal narrative in the process of interrogating their personal practice. The director—or the hot-seater—will then ask questions that elicit the actor's understanding of the character's subjectivity but also probe it and take it into new directions that the actor may or may not have considered. The point is for the actor to go beyond the play text itself and into an examination of feelings, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses in an effort to give flesh and texture to the playwright's written, imagined figure. The key for the questioner is often to surprise the actor out of a sense of complacency and challenge her or him to go beyond the safety and security of that which is familiar. In a similar way, we envisage using the RSI to challenge ourselves to step outside of our comfort zones into spaces of new understandings and moments of reflection hitherto unconsidered.

A slightly different version of the hot-seating method is also used in drama-in-education practice to learn more about participants in a drama class or group. Chosen people are asked about themselves by the group. The type of questions depends on the age group and on how familiar the group members are with each other (Moore, 1998, p. 108). Apart from the "getting to know you" aspect, teachers use this technique to encourage oral communication and confidence building. The person in the hot seat is not usually in role but answers as her- or himself because the aim is for the class to get to know more about the person. Hot-seating is also used as a means of building belief in a role when developing role-plays and for play-making where the character is interrogated to reinforce what has been created and to determine what extra research may be needed for developing the character (Moore, 1998, p. 110). During these sessions, the

teacher often assumes a role and is able to ask relevant and probing questions in this guise. The teacher-in-role persona can be compared to the critical friend who asks questions to elicit information that will assist in the shaping of the final product.

Hot-seating thus belongs in the constructivist model of learning, where the process of responding to prompts generates new knowledge for the performer or participant. When we expand this hot-seating practice into the self-study arena we can generate new knowledge/s of self and thus engage reflexively with the self.

Critical friends

As self-study researchers we need to ask questions of our practices in ways that do not allow for camouflage. This necessitates an engagement with reflexive practice—moving beyond simple observation and description and into honest and probing interrogation. One of the ways in which this reflexivity is engendered is through the use of critical friends.

On the surface the idea of the critical friend¹ may seem contradictory. However, as Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p. 103) showed, the term is a perfect description:

The responsibility of a critical friend is to be both a friend and a critic. As a friend, you are supportive and available to listen to the practitioner's account of their research. As a critic, your work is to offer thoughtful responses to the account, raising points that perhaps the practitioner has not thought about.

The frank and open exchange of ideas is essential to the efficacy of the critical friend relationship. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2010) pointed to the fact that they considered the important dialogic role of critical friends in self-study research to be one of the defining characteristics of this type of methodological approach. The critical friend method allows researchers to make use of a colleague or friend to operate as an external yet interested eye through which their practice and their research can be reflected.

The critical friend therefore operates as a collaborator, working with the researcher, helping to refine insights and understanding through an ongoing feedback process. In order to do this appropriately and effectively, Samaras (2011) pointed out that the critical friend needs to be a “trusted colleague” (p. 5) who has knowledge of, and insight into, the researcher's practice. Thus, the critical friend is not a disinterested outsider but rather an interested, invested partner in the research endeavour. This is certainly true for Tamar and Tanya, who have worked together collaboratively for many years.

The role of the critical friend is also one of the key ways in which researchers who work in the self-reflexive mode can ensure the validity of their insights. Through ongoing dialogue with the critical friend, the researchers engage in a rigorous, iterative process of continual testing of their insights. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2010) suggested that a key aspect of the critical friend's responsibility is to assist researchers in developing trustworthiness through challenging the ways in which they process and develop their ideas and knowledge.

¹ While we are using a singular term here, it should be understood that critical friends can also operate as a group, where the researcher presents her or his ideas and insights to more than one interested colleague.

The use of this kind of “dialogical validity” (Samaras, 2010, p. 219) can take a number of different forms. These approaches can also be reflected in the final research paper in different ways such as through a process of editing by the critical friend, or by verbatim use of critical friend feedback as a data source. It is our contention that the RSI imagines a new kind of formalisation of the critical friend role. The critical friend here acts as the voice prompt and mirror for the researcher, reflecting back the self so that one’s practice can be revealed and dynamically engaged in a living, interactive dialogue.

The self-interview.

Interviewing is an established method within qualitative research generally, as well as in the self-study model. Many different kinds of interviews exist, and they are used to elicit information from participants with regard to the phenomenon under investigation.

The self-interview is a method that resonates well with Bolton’s (2010, p. 14) description of reflexivity as “making aspects of the self strange”. Bolton (2010, p. 14) went on to suggest that this can only “be done by somehow becoming separate in order to look at it as if from the outside.” When working in self-study the focus is on the “I”. We ask: Who is the self (that teaches, researches, writes)? We wonder how we as researchers might get a clear understanding of the self that practices or performs—without that same self acting as censor and editor.

The self-interview is a technique that has come from the business world, where it has been used for purposes of self-assessment and preparation for job interviews. Artists have found a way of subverting this technique to promote their work. For example, a painter or musician might develop a series of interview questions to show how she or he has developed a new direction or a new work (Everybody’s Toolbox, 2007).¹ Interview questions may also be used to show how they have been influenced by another artist or movement. These questions may be based on “nodal moments” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16) or “critical events” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 17).

Our first experience of the self-interview was through Lorraine’s doctoral research (Singh, 2007), a narrative inquiry in which Lorraine was cast as both the external narrator and a character narrator (Bal, 1997). The key question in the thesis related to the development of the arts curriculum, a process in which she had participated. The critical issue was how to include her experience of this phenomenon in an authentic way—methodologically and paradigmatically. Her character voice was as important as her narrator voice in this story. So the solution arose: interview yourself! Including her experiences in the narrative added another point of view that enriched the curriculum story.

Methodologically, she relied on the questions prepared for the email interviews with other participants, and responded to those questions in writing as if answering a questionnaire. She worked systematically from the first question to the last without going back to alter any responses, in an effort to resist the temptation to edit and interpret the responses later. When she moved on to the discussion and deeper analysis she realised that had she written about these issues as a researcher (outsider); she would not have said what she did as the interviewee (insider). So the self-interview helped her maintain her dual roles in the narrative, becoming a bridge between the insider–outsider views of the research.

The self-interview can be used for many purposes and at different stages of a practitioner’s work. As a strategy in the case described above, it served to document the researcher’s experiences and knowledge of a specific area, making these public and presenting the self-interview as a methodological tool for

¹Everybody’s Toolbox is a collective effort to develop the discourses that exist within the performing arts and to create a platform where this information can be accessed by a wider audience than the practitioners it involves.

development, documentation, and reflection (Everybody's Toolbox, 2007). In the self-reflexive genre, the purpose of a self-interview may shift in focus to encompass more of the values, contexts, and world-view of the self. As with all interviews, it must revolve around a set of questions that are carefully selected and crafted to achieve the desired goals. In the case described above, the questions were designed to be asked of others in the study as well.

In her later self-study research, Lorraine has used a different approach in the self-interview, where the questions are intended only for the self to answer. In this instance Lorraine reflected, through memory work, on her own development and practice as a Drama Education lecturer, interrogating her personal pedagogic philosophy through the impact of influential teachers, events, and processes. Thus, the self-interview was a tool used to frame her memories and capture significant influences in her early life (Singh, 2012). This was an organisational method that assisted in maintaining the validity of her study because it provided "the security of academic structure and the opportunity for reflection" (Singh, 2012, p. 87). It was an "intentional reflective process" (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002, p. 3) in getting to know more about who she was and how she came to do what she did. The interview "highlighted the 'then' (experience) and the 'now' (reflection) aspects" (Singh, 2012, p. 87). This stepping in and out of roles as interviewee and researcher mirrors the constant duality of self-study.

Questions in self-interviews are not vague but are drawn from the purpose of the study and its theoretical leanings. For this self-interview, Lorraine presented the ideas as a mock interview for a group of critical friends who observed and offered critique. Following on their input the interview was then refined, reshaped, and reduced for clarity and coherence. This process is very similar to the RSI but, significantly, it did not contain a reciprocal element, which we believe heightens the investment of the participants.

The RSI

Drawing these threads together, we sought to develop further the method of the self-interview in order to refine the technique and extend its application. In the RSI, while the researcher should set the questions or choose the prompts to be used, the questions and prompts must be posed by an other, a critical friend who can serve as a sounding board and who can also probe further, thus preventing the researcher from evading the self. Thus the RSI engages the idea of a dialogic reflexivity as the researcher interrogates the self through the person of the other. The RSI therefore can function as an enactment of reflexivity—as a way of seeing reflexivity in action.

Interviewing the Self(ves)

Generating the method

The RSI process included the following stages:

1. Tamar and Tanya separately created sets of questions related to their own self-study projects. These were drawn from the critical questions in their research studies and from a reflexive investigation of what they wanted to know about themselves and their practice. Tamar's questions focused on the role of director in the theatre and the relationship between directing and teaching, for example: Who are the directors that have influenced you, how, and why? What kinds of skills are taught through the theatre-making process? These questions form the backbone of her personal narrative self-study. Tanya, whose study focuses very specifically on a single production and the collaborative process engaged in its making, asked questions such as: Why do you choose to work collaboratively? What do you think you bring to the collaborative theatre-making process? The key aspect here is how to select and construct the questions. As in the self-interview, the questions need to be generated by the focus of the study. The researcher needs to consider what she or he wants to discover from the exercise, just as in hot-seating, there is a clear purpose to the exercise. Here the self-reflexive element must be brought to the fore.

2. The second step involved sharing the questions with a critical friend who operates as an external eye to gauge how well the questions flow and whether or not they will generate the necessary reflexive interrogation. This step in the process is not essential to the exercise because it can still proceed without such input; however, the dialogue with the critical friend can produce deeper understandings. In this instance, Tamar and Tanya showed their questions to Lorraine who offered feedback in terms of both the order of the questions and the way in which the questions were framed. For example, she suggested that Tamar combine some of her questions into one because the topics covered were interrelated, and that Tanya change the order of her questions. However, she was very careful not to change the content and focus of the questions because these are self-generated. In any use of the method, the critical friend needs to gauge the degree to which the questions can be changed without interfering with the reflexive focus of the exercise; it needs to be primarily about what the researcher wants and needs to be asked, rather than what someone else thinks is significant. In addition, the critical friend needs to pay attention to stylistic issues, in particular that the questions posed are open-ended, offering opportunity for discussion. It is also quite important that the researchers do not see each other's questions before the interviews happen because this may limit the spontaneous responses that we are seeking.
3. Both interviews were conducted on the same day, face to face, in the presence of a critical friend, and were recorded. Tanya interviewed Tamar first, and then Tamar interviewed Tanya.¹ Lorraine acted as the critical friend observer and also was able to ask questions. In this way we have both an inward-looking and outward-looking eye on the experience, which allows for a more textured reflexivity to emerge. The observer can note not only the spoken words, but also the behavioural clues that may not be immediately evident to the participants. This adds an invaluable layer to the process; however, if it is not possible to have an observer, a similar function may be served by filming the interviews.
4. The next step was to reflect on the interviews. Here each of us conducted our own reflections separately and then met to discuss our observations with each other. Tamar and Tanya reflected on both the experience of being interviewed and of playing the role of the interviewer, and Lorraine was able to comment both on what was said in the interviews and on the non-verbal behaviours that were revealed. The group discussion allowed us to trace similarities and differences between our respective experiences, as well as throwing up new insights through the discursive process. We chose not to discuss the interviews immediately after they happened and instead took some time to mull over the experience. While the reflection could happen immediately, we believe that the thinking space afforded by a short time gap allows for more considered reflection to occur.
5. While this will not be included in this article, the next step involves analysing the data generated from the RSIs, and potentially repeating these interviews at other stages in the research journey. This would allow us to cover some of the gaps that became evident in our responses and allow us each to give further consideration to the ideas thrown up by the RSI process.
6. The final aspect to consider would be how this data is included in any finished research paper. We believe that this method offers a way to formalise the contribution of the critical friend in the reflexive dynamic of the research.

¹ We think that there may be some impact on the interviews based on who is first to be interviewed, and who is first to play the part of interviewer. However, that is outside the scope of this paper and may be a subject for further exploration.

Reflecting on the RSI

In this section we want to discuss our own observations and reflections from the RSI process. In this way we are seeking to “stand back”, as Bolton (2010, p. 14) suggested, from our experience and “look at it as if from the outside”. We describe and analyse our reflections from the viewpoint of both the insiders as well as the observer.

Reflecting from the inside

In discussing Tamar and Tanya’s observations, a number of key themes emerged, around which our reflections can be grouped. These are outlined below.

- i) Being on the spot: This forces one to think on one’s feet and is a direct parallel with the drama hot-seating when the actor must come up with an answer even if she or he doesn’t know it offhand. Even though the fact that the questions are self-generated presupposes that the person knows the answers, the very experience of being in the hot seat makes it feel as if it is happening for the first time. Having to talk spontaneously forces one to think more quickly and instinctively, so that answers are intuitive, offered without artifice and the luxury of crafting the answers to sound good. There is an aliveness and presence that compels one towards being fully in the moment and silences the inner critic.
- ii) Our analysis of this phenomenon made us realise that the act of making sense of information in process—in live, present-tense action, while you think and speak, and without the potential censorship that can happen with the possibilities of deletions in writing—takes one into unexpected, and often uncharted, territories and spaces. This allows for a far more penetrative reflexivity that goes beyond that which is easily and safely negotiated; as such, it becomes a powerful mechanism for challenging one’s self-perceptions, one’s sense of self, one’s sense of one’s own practice and personal knowledge. Tamar said, for example:

I hadn’t really unpacked technically the relationship between teaching and directing—other than in vague and generalised references to life skills learning—but when forced to probe more deeply, I discovered within myself an understanding of the process of knowledge-making, the practice of teaching and learning, that surprised me . . . in terms of how I saw quite clearly the path through the theatre-making process as one that paralleled what happens when one really learns.

The above observation seems to point to reflexivity in action. Being in the hot seat worked, as it does in theatre practice, to reveal surprises and discoveries that allow us to improve our practice in the same way that the exercise assists, in theatre-making, to improve the actor’s performance. In so doing, we came to understand Graeme Sullivan’s (2006, p. 28) observation that “the researcher and the researched are both changed by the process because creative and critical inquiry is a reflexive process.”

- iii) Questions become strange: Both participants noted that when spoken aloud by someone else. It has the effect of making it sound as if the questions are new and not ones that you have devised. Tanya said, “I couldn’t anticipate what to say because I didn’t know what was going to come next.” We realised that when you listen and have to answer verbally, it leads to different places than had been imagined. Tamar noted, “When I wrote the questions down, I had in my head different answers than what actually emerged in the interview situation—the very verbalisation releases something different from what is in one’s mind in writing.” So it seems that the act of listening actively to the questions

reframes them, makes them strange, because listening becomes an act of “reflection on practice” (Neelands, 2006, p. 18).

- iv) Speaking aloud: This shifts the brain into a different mode, creating an aliveness and newness in the thinking that is different from the writing process. We reveal more, and that knowledge comes from a deeper level where it is harder to self-censor and hide. Tamar said, “Speaking the answers aloud leads into new places and new discoveries—shifting insights—the actual speaking facilitates the reflexive act”. Thus what is revealed in the RSI is different from a written self-narrative; in the former, the information emerges almost in spite of itself. Tanya observed, “Being in the hot seat makes you vulnerable as you are taken out of your comfort zone and when you are not comfortable, more interesting things begin to happen.” The process of speaking parallels the self-study imperative of making public one’s thinking and practice, with all the vulnerability that accompanies that process. In addition, by participating in the interview we experience reflexivity as happening in real-time; as we speak, we are considering the impact of our words, the ramifications of our answers, making discoveries about our knowledge and the gaps in that knowledge. As Tamar observed: “The act of verbalising thoughts, speaking them, really makes the experience of having thoughts different—more scary, but also more revelatory.”
- v) Gaps in knowledge: These emerge through this process. Both participants observed that the RSI revealed very clearly to each of them what they knew, what they did not know and, more importantly, what they did not know that they knew (Heathcote, in Wagner, 1980). They were both surprised by their responses in the act of articulating them. Tamar said that the process “revealed that I knew both more AND less than I thought—and sometimes it was where I thought I might know more that I knew less, and vice versa.”
- vi) For both participants, who are engaged in doctoral studies of their own practice, the RSI process made very clear where the gaps in their narratives are, where they are not clear in their thinking and where they still need to flesh out their understandings of self in practice, and where deeper reflections on particular aspects of practice are needed. Since this process revealed the areas to reflect and take further action on, the RSI can become an iterative arts-based research method that may be introduced into different stages of the research process to generate new ways of knowing and understanding our own practice that can then be tested further in action and in research.
- vii) The RSI becomes dialogic: Tanya points out that:

The interview, rather than being a question and answer session, moves easily into conversational mode with give and take between interviewer and interviewee. The questions serve as a starting point which give the interview a structure so that it does not become diffuse.

While this is also true of most face-to-face interviews in qualitative research, the RSI is interactive and dialogic in ways that a regular interview or written interview is not. This may be especially true for Tamar and Tanya owing to their personal familiarity and the amount of time they have worked together. In addition, since both participants share theatrical and dramatic training, they are able to move in and out of the reflexive mode quite freely. The dialogue also flows in the RSI because while answering the question, the person being interviewed is also reflecting on what prompts the interviewer’s interest, wondering why they want to probe more deeply where they do.

The dialogue also emerges from the interplay of the interviewer’s reactions to the questions posed. Tanya thought, “How would I answer the question that I ask of you?” This is unique to this form of self-interview

technique because of its reciprocal nature. While the questions are generated by the person being interviewed, because it is a two-way process, the interviewer will also be interviewed and there may be overlaps, especially where a focus is shared. A regular interviewer in a situation of unfamiliarity with a participant's experiences cannot ask Tanya's question or move into this dialogic mode because the information being sought is most often unfamiliar and unknown. They can only respond to what is given.

In Lorraine's experience of the written self-interview, she discussed an advantage as being that without the interviewer she could not tailor her responses to the listener, noting, "I have no need to create a self for how I want to be known by the interviewer" (Singh, 2007, p. 120). This is an interesting point, and one that most qualitative researchers try to provide for by use of probing questions and multiple methods. The external eye of the critical friend conducting the interview can serve a similar function to prevent the researcher from simply tailoring responses.

viii) The interviewer role: This is very important because what they ask and how they ask it leads to different insights. This promotes the idea of the mirror reflecting back; an ordinary interviewer responds just to what you say, but a critical friend operates from a different level of knowing about your work. This interviewer can probe, stimulate, push, uncover because she or he works from an invested perspective. In the RSI, the entire agenda is to assist researchers to look inward at their own practice and it thus offers a different space for discovery. The process is deepened when there is a degree of familiarity between interviewer and interviewee, as Tanya noted: "It does make a difference that the interviewer knows you and knows what is not being said—they can recognise habits of hiding." We found that the "other eye" sees a thread in the answers that the person being interviewed may not see—so the other person can narrow the focus of the reflections when they act as a prism, reflecting back what they are hearing, in a clear way (Samaras, 2011, p. 214). In this way, the subjectivity of the interviewee can be more fully explored and understood in order to generate knowledge and improvement of practice.

In summing up their experiences, the participants both felt that it was like looking into the mirror. In such a process we are not always comfortable with what we see, but the more we explore our inward gaze and receive feedback from the critical friend, the more our image can shift, evolve and acquire depth, complexity and texture, in ways that the two-dimensional initial image cannot. Maybe this is at the core of reflexivity—a prismatic experience where the image of the self becomes multifaceted, complex and mysterious, and yet penetrable by the inward gaze of the reflexive practitioner. The voicing, the making public, makes that inward gaze infinitely more attainable—and honest—because it is of necessity exposed to the light of others' insights, observations, and critiques, which is the result of the trust between the critical friends and the power of the hot seat. This process fosters the development of new ideas and new ways of thinking, which can drive transformation of practice.

Reflecting from the outside

The reflections of the critical friend, Lorraine, who observed both interviews, are also grouped around recurring themes, as outlined below.

i) The reciprocal nature of the interview: This is key to the reflexive nature of this process. Both Tanya and Tamar brought in their own experiences to reflect what the other was saying, and thus enriched and extended the dialogic nature of the process. The knowledge that Tanya had of Tamar's work, allowed her to ask questions that were not on Tamar's list and thus the discussion deepened. For example, Tamar asked the question "What techniques do you use when directing?" Tanya expanded

on this, asking, “How do the design and the space impact on what you do as a director?” Tamar also posed a question, “What kind of teaching and learning practice do you embrace?” In the interview, she commented when asked the question: “Why did I ask that?” Tanya was able to offer prompts that drew a response; for example, she reframed the question saying, “What kind of a teacher do you think you are and how does that influence your directing practice?”

When Tamar was the interviewer, she offered her own opinions of Tanya’s work, as well as responses, and so helped build a conversation. For example, when Tanya said she did not really have a philosophy of directing, Tamar said: “Of course you do. When you direct, you observe closely and work in that way to shape the performance.” This created the space for more probing to occur.

It is clear from the above that the choice of interviewer for the RSI is of vital importance. This critical friend should extend the discursive reciprocal relationship. Can this method work if participants do not have a close relationship or have not previously collaborated? We believe that it can if there is a common understanding of the discipline as well as familiarity with the work of the person being interviewed. This method thus extends the function and role of the critical friend in self-study and highlights the need to formalise ways in which the role assists in areas of validity and trustworthiness.

- ii) Interviewing styles differ: This affects the way in which the self-generated questions are handled. Although committed to the common goals of the process, each interviewer conducted the interview based on her own personal style. Lorraine described Tanya’s style as external; in response, Tanya said she was very aware of trying not to add commentary, but to ask questions and not lead Tamar. Thus she allowed for pauses and silences, but knew also when to come in with a helpful comment or question. She appeared to be reflecting on what Tamar was saying, allowing an organic development of thought and conversation. Tamar’s style was different, yet similar. Lorraine commented that Tamar’s way of building the conversation and developing thought was “to be empathetic.” She helped the discussion to flow with probing and was not averse to changing the question—in style not content—when she felt it would help. For example, one of Tanya’s original questions asked, “Do you think that you are a good collaborator?” Tamar added to the question, asking, “What have you learned from your work in other aspects of theatre that influence your collaborative methods?” This could happen because Tamar is familiar with Tanya’s work and her history.
- iii) This poses the question of how much leeway the interviewer can be allowed. It also reinforces the importance of the choice of interviewer. Trust is a vital element in this potentially vulnerable relationship, and the integrity of both interviewer and interviewee should be respected.
- iv) Behavioural clues are significant: These emerged during the interview, which reinforced and validated what was being spoken about. Lorraine was able to tell from Tamar’s tone and body language what was important to her about her values and practice. She observed that: “Her tone became charged with seriousness and I felt her compassion and urgency. When she spoke about her directing work—about which she is very knowledgeable—she spoke easily and with passion.” Tanya, on the other hand, became quiet and pensive when talking about things that really concerned and interested her. Lorraine made this observation: “By mid-interview Tanya had become much quieter, and there was a visible drawing into self and looking inward. For me, this pointed to an examination of thinking and deep reflection.” Tanya added that the process made her really think about what she does, why she does it, and how. This “thinking intensely” was evident to Lorraine at various times in the process.

The content is therefore expressed in body language and vocal tone. In the RSI the visual clues are immediate and obvious. These observations make for deeper reflections during the post-interview discussion and allow the participants another view of their inner selves and their practice for analysis. Thus, although not absolutely vital to the RSI process, the outsider critical friend does offer an additional dimension.

The efficacy of the RSI thus relies largely on the act of speaking aloud—both the questions and the answers—and how this moves the speaker into a deep reflective state. The critical observer can see the stages of the thought processes through observing the body language and tone of the participants.

Playing out Our Reflexivity

Self-study encompasses a plethora of methodological tools; we wanted to contribute a method derived from the discourse of theatre. We believe there to be strong synergies between self-study, reflexive practice, and theatre and this article has suggested one possible intersection point.

Critical to our understanding of methodology is the need to provide replicable and utilitarian methods that can be appropriated and applied across many disciplines and in multiple contexts. The dialogic, iterative nature of drama lends itself to this kind of strategy. In this part of the article, we have attempted to formalise the RSI method in such a way as to make the strategy accessible for anyone, including those with no theatrical background. To assist in this we have summarised the method visually through the use of the flowchart shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the Reciprocal Self-Interview Method

This can be used as a step-by-step guide for those wishing to experiment with the RSI. The real joy of the method, however, is to use it as a starting point and then see where the adventure can take one. Samaras (2010, p. 720) suggested that

In self-study research, researchers initiate personal inquiries situated in their practice with attention to the play role [sic] as researcher inside that process. They openly, reflectively, and systematically examine their practice with critique from others to gain alternative points of view. . . . As self-study scholars question the status quo of their practice, they attempt to make that practice explicit to themselves and to others.

We used the RSI as a playful tool to explore and make explicit our own practice as artists through the lens of self-study; Tamar and Tanya will utilise the rich data derived from the initial RSIs and subsequent experiences as key information for self-study doctoral projects, as well as for improvement of their practice as artists. We believe the method has the potential, as Sullivan (2006, p. 24) suggested, to “lend itself to interdisciplinary approaches where the emphasis is to offer new perspectives on educational issues”. In this construction, the RSI becomes not only arts-based research but also a research method for artists and practitioners.

This article has elucidated the background to our thinking in the process of developing the RSI, as well as our own experience of the RSI and the insights that arose from the experience of putting this form of reflexivity into action. Reflexive engagement offers the potential to generate transformation of practice, a key aspect within the social change agenda. As Bolton (2010, p. xix) stated:

To be reflexive is to find a way of standing outside the self to examine, for example, how seemingly unwittingly we are involved in creating social or professional structures counter to our espoused values. It enables becoming aware of the limits of our knowledge, or how our own behaviour is complicit in forming organisational practices which, for example, marginalise groups or exclude individuals. . . . It requires being able to stay with personal uncertainty, critically informed curiosity, and flexibility to find ways of changing deeply held ways of being: a complex, highly responsible social and political activity.

In standing outside of one’s self and thinking about what one does in the moment of action, we are able to recognise the potential for new understandings, new knowledges, and new practices to emerge. In transforming our own practice at the level of individual artists, we create space for transformation at the macro level, where societies and institutions function.

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