

Pedagogies applied to develop student self-awareness and written self-evaluations: A costume case study

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Abstract

In 2013–14 a change in assessment criteria percentage weightings on the BA Stage Management and Technical Theatre course at East 15 Acting School was implemented – a course taught mainly through authentic learning processes. This change, coupled with the increase in emphasis on reflective processes in higher education in general, highlighted that students not only on this course but also more widely need to be able to articulate their learning more rigorously than before through more comprehensively written self-evaluations. Through a discussion of critical thinking and reflection and instinctively applying Art and Design pedagogies to teaching on what is traditionally considered to be a vocational course, this article charts an experimental case study following students on the Costume Pathway, hoping to improve their ability in this area. The aim was to develop the self-awareness and analytical and reflective thinking involved in evaluating personal working practices to a high standard in order to improve the written communication thereof. Therefore, this article is also a reflection on how a thorough understanding from educators of what self-evaluation demands of students can enrich student learning experiences and develop transferable skills to produce industry-ready and life-ready graduates.

Keywords

technical theatre

authentic learning

self-evaluation

critical thinking

reflection

costume

Introduction

The BA Stage Management and Technical Theatre course at East 15 Acting School (changed in 2014–15 to BA Stage and Production Management) is similar in nature to other courses such as the Theatre Practice BA at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the Technical Theatre Arts BA at Guildhall School.

Technical theatre courses such as these focus on the application of practical skills and the collaboration across, and organization within, each discipline necessary to produce and manage performance – namely, set construction, lighting, sound, costume, stage management and prop-making. The East 15 course in comparison to the majority of Technical Theatre courses tends to take in fewer numbers of students.

Learning a specialist subject within technical theatre essentially necessitates ‘doing’ rather than ‘theorizing’, and such course structures can be held up as good examples of ‘authentic learning’, which refers to connecting what students are taught to real-world applications. Learning by doing theoretically maintains student interest and motivation, thereby subliminally improving the necessary skills for the job at hand. On technical theatre courses this is done by requiring students to produce public performances on-site and off-site, collaborate with external and internal theatre practitioners, and manage overlapping deadlines with complex logistics in real situations. Students are constantly put into a myriad of situations in which diverse, ambiguous and open-ended issues that could be described as ‘messy’ consistently arise. Authentic learning therefore, while there is room for error alongside support from course staff, does tend to press the issue of emotional and behavioural maturity. It is specifically intended to ‘encourage students to think more deeply, raise hard questions, consider multiple forms of evidence, recognize nuances, weigh competing ideas, investigate contradictions, or navigate difficult problems and situations’ (Great Schools Partnership 2013). As in a large number of life or work circumstances there are usually no right or wrong answers, and these ‘messy’ situations in theatre are therefore closely aligned with the need for the critical thinking and emotional intelligence inherent in reflection.

Critical thinking and reflection

The ‘cognitive’ and ‘motivational’ skills inherent in critical thinking (Facione, Facione and Giancarlo, 1997) echoed what was lacking in the written self-evaluations of the East 15 students as described here by a STEM subject lecturer:

Getting beyond description by developing and using insight, an objective ability to dissect an issue and interpret...the 'whole picture' rather than just adopting a subjective or naïve viewpoint. (Participant C1 in Hilsdon 2013)

This could also be summarized as being able to appropriately gather, comprehend and express the meaning of information, situations or judgements, reason logically and responsibly from them, and draw reliable conclusions in order to decide what should be done or believed (Schafersman 1991). Reflection can be summarized as a term for the affective activities through which we explore and evaluate personal experiences, leading to new understandings, appreciations or generalizations in order to be more effective than previously (Boud et al. 1985; Cowan 1998). Models of reflective behaviour (Schön 1983; Gibbs 1988; Kolb 1984) suggest that the development of emotional insight or emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996) is central to the process of reflective learning and its representation in writing as the circular process consciously engages the learner in mentally processing knowledge, understanding and emotions (Moon 2004).

The use of interrogative words fundamentally underpins the two areas of critical thinking (Rimiene 2002) and reflection (Race 2014). Although ensuring that students think critically in an effective way is an important part of a holistic education (Rimiene 2002), this does not explicitly take into account self-contemplation or the consideration of personal conduct as a part of its focus. It is possible to think critically without reflecting. Reflection adds the personal, interactive element into the process, implying that critical thinking has concerns that are mainly external from the self and reflection pays more attention to putting oneself and one's emotions into a given scenario. Hence, critical thinking must be applied within the process of reflection in order to write effective self-evaluations.

Aims

In 2013–14, the East 15 course was a real example of Race's later assertion that higher education systems 'are beginning to not only encourage, but also require our students to evidence their reflection' (2014).

Previously, written self-evaluations were an unspecified percentage of each termly course module encompassing all practical and written work together. Written self-evaluations became 20 per cent of each termly course module, leaving 80 per cent weighted on practical work. It had been noted that students in general showed some or all of the capabilities needed to practically think through and navigate situations while working on shows, and did improve various elements of their working processes over time. However, they were less able to successfully analyse and articulate a deeply thought-through process of reflection and evaluation in writing to aid that improvement. One of the criticisms of authentic learning is that the level of academic rigour involved is called into question. The percentage weighting change, while introducing a regular distinct ‘academic’ element to the course, also introduced an emphasis on the general writing skill gap leading to the potential of expected marks being affected. With this, the need was identified for students to be able to think critically and reflect deeply on their experiences in writing more clearly. This was the aim of the experiment described in this article for two reasons: one, to fulfil the newly highlighted weighting without any detriment to marks and, two, to allow students the time, while supported in a learning environment, to develop this skill to a high standard for use in their professional career and in the ‘messiness’ of life.

Technical Theatre pedagogies and Costume Pathway specifics

The ‘Creative Team’ refers to Designers (Costume, Lighting, Sound, Set, etc.) and Directors in both theatre programmes and in performance industry parlance. However, Brennan (2011) points out that the heading of ‘Cast’ undersells the creative contribution of actors to the process of performance making, and in the same way I would argue that ‘Production Team’ or ‘Crew’ greatly undersells the creative contribution to the same process of Technical Theatre graduates, the headings under which they most often find themselves. The hidden assumptions suggested in such titles are misleading of the creative input into performance making that everyone working on a production has. They also undermine the way in which Technical Theatre students learn, particularly on a Costume Pathway, which is something more akin to the ‘signature pedagogies’ in Art and Design described by Shreeve et al. (2010), each italicized and discussed below.

Learning involves living with uncertainty and unknown outcomes. The Technical Theatre authentic learning environment creates a ‘culture of ambiguity’ that students must learn to negotiate through live project work, problem-based learning and replicating the experience of being a practitioner. Experiential learning in this way ‘extends to the professional realm’ (Shreeve et al. 2010) and I would argue that Technical Theatre courses go one step further than this by being *based on* producing public performance, not internal projects. For students following a Costume Pathway, ambiguity and uncertainty is not only a daily occurrence as part of working in theatre generally, but also in the way in which changes, developments and contradictions are constantly made as a necessary part of a rehearsal process.

Learning has a material and physical dimension. While other specialisms in Technical Theatre could be described as having these dimensions, it is undeniable that some aspects of costume are learnt literally through the ‘material’ and the non-verbal, which also extends to ‘space and the body itself’ (Shreeve et al. 2010). The Technical Theatre costume student is in constant close physical proximity with others, facilitating an individual bespoke service for each performer: measuring the body, making/sourcing/adjusting clothes for the body, fitting the body and continuously dressing /undressing the body.

Learning has a visible dimension. Even if the ephemera of other Technical Theatre disciplines were removed, costume artefacts from performance would still exist (apart from extreme cases where the body is naked, a costuming choice in itself), which are ‘open to debate and public scrutiny’ (Shreeve et al. 2010). Producing costume for performance therefore opens up the Technical Theatre costume student also to *aspects of learning [which] take into account the audience.* While Shreeve et al.’s audience consists of other practitioners and students, the Technical Theatre student uses this audience to consider communication to a *further* audience, the performance watcher. On a Costume Pathway this is through a contribution to materials choice, sourcing, garment cut, styling and collaborating with others in character building through costume.

Learning is fundamentally social. The nature of working in Technical Theatre fosters an atmosphere of open-ness, knowledge sharing and constant, clear communication. Teams of people with specific specialisms rely heavily and closely on inter-departmental collaboration to be able to flexibly facilitate the requirements of each performance successfully as it develops and runs. For costume, the act of being in the close environment of a working costume department intensifies personal and professional working relationships, discussion being a ‘key part of often informal learning situations’ (Shreeve et al. 2010). In addition, the complex social skills necessary to negotiate intimate situations with performers who may be adrenalin filled, nervous, shy, physically intimidating, self-conscious or in any other state of heightened self-awareness with consequent mental and physical effects need to be highly developed.

Process is important and developmental. Discussion with students/student work (physical or social aspects) present via formative feedback is essential in the time-sensitive nature of producing theatre, whether that is advising students throughout the preparation period or working alongside students during a technical rehearsal or a performance run. Technical Theatre assessment arguably focuses more on process than on final outcomes, through an emphasis on behavioural and developmental observations by tutors of professional/key/transferable skills as well as practical skills. In addition, the assertion that tutors ‘appear to see themselves as co-learners with their students’ (Shreeve et al. 2010) is brought into focus for Technical Theatre when student roles are allocated equally alongside staff practitioner–teachers; indeed, in some cases students take lead roles over staff. For example, a student Costume Supervisor might be teamed with a staff Costume Maker or Costume Assistant and be able to share new processes or knowledge learnt on a previous show that that staff member was not involved in. Thus, *the intention is to develop independent creative practitioners* where ‘tutors engage their students in activities and discussions, which are the same as those in their practice’ (Shreeve 2010).

Methods

Although based on resolving the identified gap in student written self-evaluation skills, the teaching methods applied to the year-long case study of the East 15 Costume Pathway students described below were not all pre-planned. Methods used were incremental and intuitive in response to student responses and

circumstances. It was guided by tutor experience and a cumulative theoretical understanding of critical thinking and reflection as the year progressed, itself a reflection of what was concurrently being asked of the students and part of a concurrent personal effort to become a more critically reflective teacher (Brookfield 1995). However, hindsight shows a correlation between the Art and Design pedagogies described above, and the instinctive methods used to approach improving written student self-evaluations, italicized below.

In 2013–14, there were three students from the total course cohort of approximately 40 students who had chosen to specialize in costume at East 15: two in the final year (students A and B) and one in the second year (student C). The sample size was therefore dictated by the number of students available.

Autumn term

Having already established a way to widen and contextualize student subject knowledge alongside their authentic learning (through e-mails containing URL links with costume-related interviews, images, articles, videos, tips, exhibitions, current debates, etc.), students were invited to start their own parallel e-mails. Staff and students were then common recipients and dispensers of information, allowing students to practise knowledge sharing and peer learning and encouraging them to take/share responsibility for their own engagement with subject research. Enabling students to choose their own specific subject interests also created a personal affiliation with the exercise for them.

Recognizing that this platform could be used to introduce the idea of critical thinking and reflection more formally, one question per week was added, based on the e-mail content, which required some analysis or research, and a Friday morning reply was requested. When asked to analyse and extrapolate their own thoughts – i.e. think critically from a specific given starting point – student writing (e-mail replies) was perceptive, well dissected and intelligently articulated. This was an effective way to indirectly stimulate regular practice in critical thinking and writing while simultaneously engaging students in their subject and its context.

Friday afternoon discussion sessions were introduced based on all e-mail exchanges from that week, making a concrete link between virtual isolated research/online interaction and physical face-to-face tutor/student/peer interaction. Students had the opportunity to explain their written thoughts and dynamically react in group conversation, provoking further critical thinking, analysis and debate.

It was openly stated that the gradual development of the original 'informational' e-mails was an instinctive way of helping them with their critical thinking and reflective skills for their written self-evaluations.

Students came to discussions with prepared points to present and discuss. Each student was able to contribute to dialogue in a more thoughtful way than had been evidenced in previous written self-evaluations, analysing their own research in order to form opinions, using comparison to examine things in more detail and debating current issues.

The weekly e-mail question became explicitly about relating a given thing/situation/issue to the students' own working processes, eliciting a more reflective approach in response. Students were able to explain the specific ways their knowledge was expanding; however, they did not make the leap from thinking critically and analytically about the external to thinking reflectively about the self.

Spring term

A formal session on reflection used various pieces of supporting academic literature. Alan Mortiboys' 'common questions' about reflection (2009: 7) prompted a discussion about the use of 'I' in formal writing. Definitions of reflection (from Moon 2006; Cowan 1998; Boud et al. 1985; Brockbank and McGill 1998; Biggs and Tang 2011) helped to introduce, break down and discuss some of the academic language used about reflection, such as 'affective', 'transformative' and 'processing'. Students filled out Mortiboys' 'Am I an effective learner from experience?' chart (2009: 6) in order to understand where they sit within some actions and attitudes that could lead to a deeper process of reflection. The Open University (2007: 15–21), Gibbs (1988) and Brookfield (1995) also provided exercises on 'ways to get started', such as free writing, mind mapping, open-ended questions, journals/diaries, audio recordings, and drawing. Blogs and tweets were also suggested in order to identify a suitable strategy for each student to develop an ongoing individual

reflective process, easing the pressure of writing self-evaluations from scratch at the end of term. Student A tried free writing with prompt words three times, student B took on free writing six times, and student C doodled once.

Despite the continuous critical thinking practice through e-mail exchange, following this first formal session it was unfeasible to continue with the Friday discussions because of complicated and incompatible spring term timetables. Even accounting for a predictable wane in initial enthusiasm, student workloads and increasing fatigue over the term, coupled with the lack of regular face-to-face group meetings, were perhaps the main factors in the minimal amount of attention students paid to their reflection process strategies over the term. The issue of ‘thinking time’ (both with and without tutor contact) versus ‘doing time’ was one of contention on the course. Indeed it was a regular occurrence for students in all departments to be still working on shows past the submission dates for self-evaluation on those shows. Arguably the number of shows that the course facilitated at the time far outweighed the number of shows needed for the students to achieve excellent learning, experience and results, and the consequences of this were clear. Despite student willingness to engage with the process of working on their reflective skills and therefore their learning in general, they gradually became less motivated to spend time ‘thinking’ as the pressure of ‘doing’ increased. The timing of the low level of motivation, however, seems to also correspond with what might be expected in the middle of an academic year, and did pick up towards the end of the spring term.

Students were asked to analyse and discuss possible improvements in one another’s autumn term self-evaluations during the one group session possible in the last week of the spring term. Student recent writing was used as opposed to some neutral writing because it was thought that a direct feedback system – that is, learning from their own previous representation of learning – would have more of an immediate effect on the self-evaluations they were about to write. Students found strengths and weaknesses in each other’s evaluations, productively challenged one another and suggested useful methods for deepening their own reflection through comparison.

Summer term

Friday discussion sessions were reinstated as a priority, and a more structured approach to written self-evaluations ensued. Students were directed through Moon's exercise 'The Park' (2006) in which four versions of the same event are read, each one increasingly more reflective. Criteria were elicited for each of the four levels within Moon's 'Framework for reflective writing' in the students' own words, resulting in a clearer understanding of the progression through each level and the depth and quality of thinking, reflection and articulation required to reach level 4. Here a metacognitive stance is taken: i.e. 'a critical awareness of one's own processes of mental functioning – including reflection' (Moon 2006). Put simply, a review of one's own reflective processes within the reflective writing itself is expected.

Students were asked to apply these criteria to one another's spring term self-evaluations to identify and agree upon which level each student was currently at. The new comprehension of the reflection process in general and where they sat individually within it shocked students and motivated a desire to have moved up by at least one level by the end of the term.

A visual reminder, four large sheets of paper each containing progressive levels of reflective criteria, was placed on the wall of the Costume Department. Students appreciated having clear levels to refer back to, rather than simply being asked to 'improve' open-endedly.

Each student was asked to produce a new plan to follow over the summer term. Student A chose to write a weekly diary in order to reflect on the reflections in the final written submission. Student B chose to keep a dedicated detailed notebook and time plan of working processes, highlighting sections that could be helpful to talk about in the self-evaluation. Student C chose to write daily notes and a mid-term self-evaluation in order to have something to reflect on again at the end of term.

An open discussion was had with students to align Moon's levels with the course-marking structure. Within the 2013–14 East 15 marking system one could reasonably align level 1 with 'Pass' (40–49=3rd), level 2 with 'Good' (50–59=2:2), level 3 with 'Very Good' (60–69=2:1) and level 4 with 'Outstanding' (70–100=1st). Using this alignment, the autumn and spring terms' written self-evaluation marks were accurate

relative to each other but too high in general. Retrospective marks for each student would have been one or two points below their given mark. On sharing this analysis students agreed with the alignment rationale and independently gave themselves retrospective marks matching my analysis. A discussion then ensued concerning the fairest way to assess summer term self-evaluations, either relative to the spring term or according to the agreed alignment, which could potentially skew student perception of personal progression, but would be more objectively accurate. On seeing that using the more objective system would have only reduced overall module marks by one or two points, students agreed to be assessed using the new alignment for several reasons. First, they had understood the personal value to the work we had been doing and wanted to see a unity between their aims within Moon's levels and their marks. Second, the two third-year students (students A and B) were already over ten marks above the '1st' threshold, and so the difference would be negligible in terms of their class of degree should they continue at the same level of output. This second point was not true of the second-year student (student C) who was sitting one point under the first-class threshold; however, reasoning that only final-year marks counted towards the final degree award, this student was happy to use the new method as she had time to improve further in her final year. Third, students raised the point that it would be difficult for me as an assessor to ignore or discount the work we had been doing as a team all year for the sake of a minimal potential shift in marks. All three students stuck to their chosen strategies throughout the term, and this dedication produced a more sophisticated and refined quality and depth of reflection in the written self-evaluations than previously seen.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the results and findings draw from figure 1: actual marks attained over the year set against retrospective marks for the autumn and spring terms aligned with Moon's framework as described. There are no retrospective marks for the summer term as Moon's framework was used to determine the actual marks.

Autumn term

For written self-evaluations, student A was entirely at Moon's level 1 'Descriptive Writing', student B was mainly at level 2, 'Descriptive Account With Some Reflection' with some obvious elements of level 3

‘Reflective Writing (1)’, and student C was at level 2 with some minor hints towards reaching level 3 in parts.

The revised percentage division focusing 20 per cent of overall module marks on written self-evaluations did indeed, as suspected, lead to a reduced increase in overall module marks than there otherwise would have been for students A and B. Both students showed great improvement in their practical work, but poor analysis meant that module marks went up by only one or two points. Furthering the student understanding of how to improve their expression of critical thinking and reflection *in writing* was unsuccessful, even though students were regularly thinking more critically in both e-mails and discussions. The psychological distance of the e-mail exchanges/discussions, both as activities that are not formally assessed and as activities that students see as ‘fun’, could have been a factor in this. Students did not make the leap between the ‘fun’ and ‘academic’ aspects of the methods themselves, which with hindsight was too ambitious an expectation. The results from the speculative methods used showed that a more strategic, structured approach to this aspect of teaching, with a theoretical grounding, could potentially help students to improve written self-evaluations more effectively.

Spring term

For written self-evaluations, student A improved to have some elements of level 2, student B improved to sit fully half-way between levels 2 and 3, and student C remained the same at level 2, with some minor hints towards reaching level 3 in parts.

The improvement in overall module marks for the spring term aligned with the motivation and engagement students put into their chosen reflective processes through the term. This correlation could be ascribed firstly to coincidence as the majority of students tend to naturally learn and improve. Secondly, the timing of the direct autumn term writing comparisons (directly before spring term submission) could have had some influence, especially considering that the chosen reflection processes were abandoned by all three students half-way or earlier through the term. Thirdly, the case for changing approaches to teaching should be made. It could be said that the increasingly conscious effort to support students by mixing intuitive with more

theoretically informed pedagogical methods went some way towards a general improvement in both writing and awareness of writing in students. In other words, they were more conscious of the difference the percentage change and focus on written self-evaluations could make to their marks.

Summer term

For written self-evaluations, student A improved to sit fully within level 2, student B improved to sit at the low end of level 4, 'Reflective Writing (2)', and student C improved to sit comfortably within the low-mid end of level 3.

The improvements in the summer overall module marks clearly correlated with the level of renewed effort each student made in his or her written self-evaluations, even accounting for the 80 per cent weighting on practical and documentation work. This is possibly to do with students having chosen individual strategies more suited to their individual learning styles from an already improved knowledge of their learning behaviours during the spring term exercises. In addition, the clearer theoretical grounding and real application of such through the summer term inspired a conscious dedication to adding reflective habits into working processes. This is also linked to a greater understanding of both the defined four levels of reflection to aim for and the value of having thinking time. Students understood how the work we had been doing on reflection could advance them personally and professionally by developing the skills to be able to make sense of the unstructured situations and diverse ideas they work through as part of their authentic learning. Students learnt to think more deeply and articulate that thinking to a higher degree than would otherwise have been the case, through the promotion of self-awareness and reflective writing leading to 'behavioural change or commitment to action' (Higher Education Academy 2014).

Conclusion

Art and design pedagogies applied to Technical Theatre

The overall purpose of this experiment was to mitigate a potential loss in student marks due to a percentage weighting change that focused a distinct portion of marks towards written self-evaluations, previously noted as being of low quality. Teaching methods were not pre-planned but flexibly developed and organically

deployed as a trial and error process, and hence had the ‘open-ended and often ambiguous and unknown outcomes’ that support the development of critically aware practitioners (Shreeve et al. 2010). Technical Theatre has traditionally been considered ‘vocational’, not ‘creative’, suggesting an emphasis on learning specific specialized tasks that do not require knowledge of a wider context. However, if the learning needs of these students require teaching methods instinctively taken from Art and Design pedagogies when trying to improve critical thinking, reflection and writing, these pedagogies could perhaps be applied more widely or openly to Technical Theatre teaching, or further recognized when already in use. I would argue that such courses do indeed establish an underlying practice-based arts education on the basis of knowledge being produced through amorphous situations, which change constantly, are situated in practice and are led by tutors who are also themselves practitioners (Shreeve and Smith 2012). As shown, this is particularly relevant for those students on Costume Pathways who learn through student-centred material, physical, visual, experiential, audience-based, social processes and approaches. For example, it was clearly the social interaction of horizontal and vertical group learning with a specific relevant goal being openly shared and discussed (Entwhistle and Ramsden 1983) that mainly inspired and persuaded students to continue to improve, even though *what* they were being asked to improve were their ‘academic’ abilities.

Support through changes

Any change in percentages highlighting previously weak areas of student achievement should be carefully considered to ensure that students are not put at a disadvantage in terms of expectations or results, even though such changes may be well intentioned and justifiable as part of wider changes in higher education. Direct, explicit teaching in the area of critical reflection underpinned with academic literature is something that sits generally on the margins of teaching on courses based on authentic learning. Therefore, choosing and implementing support strategies for tutors and guidance strategies for students through module content should also be suitably and carefully adjusted to cover any shortfall in ability. The increasing need to evidence written reflection in higher education may motivate these changes on such courses in the future.

Time to think

The provision of ‘intellectual space’ (Barnett 1997) and a sensitivity to the time required for students to produce high-quality written self-evaluations is essential. There is a value to prioritizing dedicated ongoing thinking, reflecting and writing time as an essential part of developing personal and professional skills and practices in the midst of pressing practical work. It produces more self-assured and self-aware graduates with the ‘intellectual abilities, practical skills, work habits, and character traits required for success in adult life’ (Great Schools Partnership 2013). This seems particularly relevant for Technical Theatre graduates as the competitive performance industry is largely navigated through short freelance contracts and word-of-mouth recommendations, necessitating a high level of skill in adaptable appropriate conduct and considered self-scrutiny. Offering a more openly recognizable academic element to students on courses taught mainly through authentic learning, and offering the time to fulfil this requirement, could then be said to give them the tools with which to become more rounded individuals who can not only ‘demonstrate subject knowledge and skills, but can develop and grow as circumstances around them continue to change and evolve’ (Race 2014).

Costume learning

Gaining the skills discussed through this article is particularly relevant for costume graduates not only in Technical Theatre but also in design and research. The broad subject of ‘costume’ is a burgeoning research area for which there is currently very little academic scholarship in existence. Indeed, there is a ‘vacuum in discourse on costume’ (Barbieri 2012) that leaves costume education unvalidated in an academic sense. This article borrows from Art and Design signature pedagogies (Shreeve et al. 2010) to show that the need for costume graduates to be able to critically reflect on and write about practices and context supports a wider growing recognition of costume and costume practices as a distinct creative form in the academy.

End notes

The collaborative nature of authentic learning in Technical Theatre and the small number of costume students in this case study suggest a predisposition not to ‘let the team down’ in any situation. As the size of the study was dictated by available student numbers, the question of whether a similar improvement in written self-evaluation assessment results could have been achieved with a larger group of participants

remains unanswered. However, the case study does show that in ‘encouraging forward student’s criticality’ (Barnett 2007) using and/or recognizing art and design pedagogies within a vocational course, learning standards are raised and a more rounded education could be said to have taken place. ‘Our task is to educate their whole being’ (Robinson 2006) so that students enter into a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998) where an understanding of context and meaning are essential. Recognizing the use of art and design pedagogies to improve academic competencies may be applicable not only to Technical Theatre courses but also to other tutorial-based and process-based art and design disciplines where teaching structures are organized more socially in general than the traditional lecture format.

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Nadia Malik is a lecturer and researcher in costume at the University of Huddersfield. Since 2002 her costume work has encompassed new writing, original and adapted classics, opera, traditional folk and contemporary dance, musicals, site-specific and experimental devised work and live art. Recent credits include design for shows at the Greenwich and Docklands Festival, the Imperial War Museum, the V&A and for the award-winning company Elastic Theatre. Nadia is interested in how costume design practice can engage an audience and communicate meaning within performance through costume-led processes and a collaborative approach to performance devising using the human body, movement and visual experimentation to develop character and narrative. She has taught at various universities including the University of the Arts London and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. She has worked nationally and internationally as a performance practitioner and has exhibited costume work (physically and digitally) in group exhibitions such as World Stage Design and for the Society of British Theatre Designers.

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