**Informing Prison Theatre Improvement through World Café Conversations with Prisoners**

**Sarah Page and Nicola Gratton**

Sarah Page is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Criminology in the School of Law, Policing and Forensics and Nicola Gratton is Lead for Civic Engagement and Evaluation at Staffordshire University

*With recognition to research assistants Brinkle-Wilkinson, R., Campbell, N., Chamberlain, V.& Smith, K. for their involvement in the data collection and Prof. James Treadwell for training and supervision.*

**Introduction**:

This paper aims to acquaint readers with the participatory consultation and research method of ‘World Café’ in the context of evaluating a theatre project delivered in a prison with adult male sex offenders in the UK. World Café as a consultation tool with staff and prisoners, for service improvement, is being encouraged within the prison service[[1]](#footnote-1). There is some evidence for this methodology being used by prison service practitioners and being highlighted as best practice for prison consultation[[2]](#footnote-2). However, very little is documented about using this approach in criminology within academic research[[3]](#footnote-3). This paper aims to discuss our experience of using World Cafe within a prison setting, providing an academic external evaluation of a prison theatre arts project. As such, the focus of this paper is on the strengths and limitations of utilising this methodology, in the context of this project, drawing upon wider experience of using similar methods in other settings3 [[4]](#footnote-4). Our prison-based study involved 12 inmates who took part in a World Café with a follow up questionnaire, following participation in a 2-week theatre arts project. The conversational approach to World Café[[5]](#footnote-5) enabled us to collect qualitative data and build consensus, whilst allowing individual perspective to be shared and valued in a group context. Our prison participants reported the World Café method was an enjoyable mechanism to enable reflection upon their experiences.

Our research within a prison setting aimed to explore what impact a theatre project had on a) the health and well-being of the prisoners, b) the self-esteem and confidence of the prisoners and c) the ability to develop healthy relationships. We also wanted to explore what prisons and theatre arts companies could do to improve theatre project experiences in prisons to maximise impact. Researching the prison population is a positive thing if assisting the improvement of prisoner "*health and well-being*"[[6]](#footnote-6). Our wider research aims to improve arts project practice to enhance prisoner health and well-being and prison culture, by conducting a series of data collection sessions. However, this paper focuses purely on the evaluation of the theatre project.

Arts projects in prisons have been identified as positively contributing to offender rehabilitation and learning. Stephenson & Watson demonstrate that theatre work in prisons with inmates can lead to 'behavioural-cognitive change', reducing 'depression' and increasing 'self-esteem'[[7]](#footnote-7). Theatre also has helped in bringing 'healing' from past abused experienced by perpetrators[[8]](#footnote-8) as well as contributing to enhancing family connections [[9]](#footnote-9) [[10]](#footnote-10) [[11]](#footnote-11). Jewkes[[12]](#footnote-12) links art-based projects to enhancing a therapeutic community in prison for rehabilitation and Liebling *et al[[13]](#footnote-13)* acknowledges the contribution of arts and creativity to positive prison experience and successful rehabilitation. Yardley & Rusu [[14]](#footnote-14) point out that arts projects can be a gateway for prisoners to start engagement in other prison educational programmes and can reduce re-offending. SPS[[15]](#footnote-15) document the positive impact of arts on Scottish prisons and highlight that arts are particularly aligned to “*sustained or improved physical and mental well-being”, “improved literacy skills*”, increased employability prospects and *“improvements in the attitudes or behaviour which lead to offending and greater acceptance in managing their own behaviour and understanding of the impact of their offending on victims and their own families”* (p7). Theatre work can have a powerful impact upon prisoner outcomes. Drama work being conducted with sex offenders has been successful for theatre companies such as Geece, where confrontational theatre training approaches have helped engagement with male perpetrators[[16]](#footnote-16). Prendergast[[17]](#footnote-17) comments that inmates “*express over and over again… how the experience has been invaluable to their rehabilitation, self-confidence, and the ability to face the public with pride rather than shame or fear*.”(p348). This is particularly important when theatre is being conducted in a “*penal system that is set up to isolate and shame”* offenders[[18]](#footnote-18) (p348). It is argued that theatre can help to humanise individuals and the prison setting, which our findings corroborate. Keehan[[19]](#footnote-19) surmises that *“… the purpose of applied theatre and drama in prisons can be to facilitate change on an institutional as well as individual level”*(p391), which poses challenges for capturing data*.*

The theatre project we evaluated was conducted in November 2018 with convicted sex offenders. Some of the participants would have experienced isolation due to non-diagnosed learning disabilities such as Autism and Asperger’s, or from symptoms of early dementia. A proportion of abusers have been abused themselves as a child, although other factors make the abused-abuser connection complex [[20]](#footnote-20) [[21]](#footnote-21) [[22]](#footnote-22). A BBC media report[[23]](#footnote-23) infer having a learning disability makes a person more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Monsell *et al[[24]](#footnote-24)* found a person with learning challenges was twice more likely to experience sexual abuse. This group of offenders are likely to have experiences of victimisation, as well as exploiting victims. According to West[[25]](#footnote-25) there is some evidence of links between mental health and relational building capacity issues for some sex offenders. Relational building issues may be symptomatic of autism[[26]](#footnote-26), which may be undiagnosed. Research suggests that younger sex offenders have higher likelihood of autism related disorders, than other offending groups[[27]](#footnote-27). The 12 prisoners on the theatre project were pre-selected for the theatre arts project by the prison, to ensure minimal risks. This practice is used in other prison arts projects to select participants7. All participants on the theatre arts project were informed about the research evaluation whilst on the project and the voluntary nature of participation in the evaluation element. Participation in this research did not impact upon whether they could take part in the theatre project.

One feature of the theatre project was the use of refreshments and exploring the topic of food and health in prisons from a historical perspective which inmates enjoyed. Groupwork was used to facilitate theatre work, resulting in two final performances; one to prisoner family and friends and a second to other prisoners. As with other prison-based theatre projects, the performance included interaction and engagement with those viewing the production16. There is recognition that those viewing a prison theatre performance may have little ‘*theatre-going experience’* (p481) and as such, may be more vocal and interactive16. However, there is also recognition from prison theatre experts such as Thompson16 that the new experience of theatre may evoke “*hostility, suspicion, anxiety and occasionally ridicule*”(p481). Inexperienced theatre-going prisoner audiences tend to “*signal if they are getting restless or bored*”(p347), which makes it challenging for performers17. Theatre in prisons developed and performed by offenders can help to *“break down the audience’s preconceptions about who an “offender” is and what he is capable of achieving.”*(p345), *w*hich means that theatre can be rehabilitative for both offender and also audience members17.

The end of the theatre performance included ‘*talk-backs’(p348)*, where performers are encouraged to share what taking part in the project meant for them17. There was also opportunity to gain feedback from the audience. Some talk-back comments were used as discussion prompts within our formal evaluation via World Café methodology. The evaluation took place on the 5th day after the theatre production had been performed to an audience. So, our evaluation from the World Café data reflects short term impacts and further research is required to explore long term change.

**Using World Café within Prisons**

Participatory approaches in evaluation can help to co-construct new knowledge, if a safe space is created for stakeholders to speak openly about the project, or service, being evaluated[[28]](#footnote-28). We were unable to underpin our research in all principles of participatory evaluation due to timescales and incarceration limitations. Cartland *et al*28 argue that good participatory evaluation is underpinned by three principles: *Inclusion*, by which stakeholders are involved in the whole process of evaluation, from design to dissemination of findings; *Dialogue* through which community partners are consulted on the evaluation; and *Deliberation* in which a consensus about the evaluation process is established with stakeholders. However, participatory evaluation, like participatory action research, can still prove effective in some more challenging settings with considered pragmatic adaptations4. We adopted the creative and participatory consultation technique of World Café, which stipulated voluntary participation, encouraged all participants to be involved regardless of literacy levels, or the presence of a learning disability and provided a space for prisoners to speak freely about their experiences, while working within the restraints of being in a prison setting. World Café as a research tool also reflected the refreshments and group element of the theatre-based arts project that participants had been engaged in.

World Café is group discussion based, involving refreshments to provide an informal atmosphere for data collection as developed by Brown & Issacs5. Whilst it is ideal to use World Café with over 15 participants, it is possible to utilise the approach with smaller groups (above 8) and get rich data, however, the format requires adjustment3. The World Café session opened with a short presentation whereby Nicola shared her experience of being an audience member at one of the theatre productions and highlighted some ‘talk-back’ comments. Prison security prohibited us taking a USB stick into the prison, altering our approach to presenting from powerpoint to flip chart. The flip chart presentation worked with a smaller group of participants, however, this might be less effective with a larger cohort, or if working with visually impaired participants. I (Sarah), then talked through the research aims and the process of World Café using flip chart prompts, so that everyone knew what would happen in the session. I then talked through participants rights and the research assistants (our table-hosts) went through the information sheet and consent forms in small groups. There was some debate over signing consent forms, with genuine concern from some inmates about anonymity and how the data would be presented in reports or publication(s). The environment of a prison is low trust[[29]](#footnote-29), which can have implications for research.

Our World Café event lasted for approx. 2 hours and was conducted in the visitors meeting space, where the theatre production had been delivered. We arranged a section of the visitors’ space like a café, with paper table clothes on coffee tables. We used 3 tables for data collection, allowing for 4 participants and 1 table-host per table. Felt-tip pens and information sheets about the study were put on the tables, however, we did not include a ‘menu’ of the event order, or the consent forms which is recommend[[30]](#footnote-30) [[31]](#footnote-31) [[32]](#footnote-32). We had a forth table set up without pens, so participants wanting to withdraw at any point, could opt to sit there and a prison officer would join them, or escort them back to their cell (depending on the appropriateness of the moment) after a researcher debrief. Usual practice is for refreshments to be set up on tables in advance, so that participants can enjoy food and drink as part of the research process5. The prison agreed to provide refreshments but there was an issue with getting refreshments to us by the beginning of the session. So, refreshments were set up part way through the session and participants went to a refreshment trolley to get drinks. Sadly, no snacks were offered on this occasion. However, having a mid-point refreshment break worked well, but added time onto the event to allow people to go and get drinks. Fortunately, our participants were able to re-focus on return to tables, and we started with a new research question to stimulate conversation.

In World Café it is advisable to keep the main questions to a minimal5. We had 3 main questions and used a new table cloth to capture data for each one. We utilised table hosts to a) scribe the answers to accommodate any literacy issues and b) ask further prompt questions to gather more data. Literacy issues can be a barrier to participation in research that requires reading and writing7. Table-hosts read out any written documentation, such as the information sheet, as well as writing on behalf of the group. Group members are also invited to write or draw responses. World Café was designed to be participatory in nature by engaging participants as table hosts5 30. We have adapted the World Café approach in other studies to utilise research assistants as table-hosts to scribe on behalf of participants, which is particularly useful when working with vulnerable groups with low literacy levels3. The prison community in the UK is known for lower literacy levels[[33]](#footnote-33). Our research assistants for this project were undergraduate students who received additional training to undertake the role. Myself (Sarah) and Nicola facilitated the session in the ‘presenter’ role3, introducing the main questions and allowed approximately 15 minutes for the group to respond to each question, before we invited the participant to rotate.

Rotations are where some of the group move to join another table 5 [[34]](#footnote-34). The table-host welcomes new members and facilitates existing members in sharing what they have been discussing. New members were invited to comment and add additional insights from their previous groups’ discussions31. We asked our table-hosts to write ‘agree’ next to anything already written down that new members concurred with. We used one rotation per question, however, on the last question it was apparent that a few of the participants were getting tired and indicated a further rotation would not be appreciated. We accommodated this request. From working with vulnerable groups in the past, it was clear that a flexible approach to the numbers of rotations was important in order to keep participants engaged3. As a presenter and facilitator of the World Café event you need to be able to observe participant responses to rotations and make a judgement call on whether to continue using them. Chang & Chen[[35]](#footnote-35) infer the use of up to 3 rotations per question, at the discretion of the World Café facilitator. Part of the principle behind rotations is that they enable participants to gain a ‘world view’ from what others have discussed and a cross pollination of ideas5. However, this is also achieved by the table-host offering a summary to the whole group at the end of each question discussion. We referred to ‘rotations’ as playing musical chairs (without the music), to help the prisoners to understand what we were doing and we directed movement, rather than a free-for-all on what table to go to. That meant at further rotations, we were able to invite one previous ‘mover’, and one previous ‘stayer’ to move on. This assisted with mixing the groups up. When we felt that participants had discussed a question sufficiently (before and after rotation), we invited the table hosts to provide a brief summary of the conversations at the table.

The presenter(s) were able to oversee the table-hosts and give support where required. For example, when one participant needed a more detailed explanation of how we would guarantee anonymity at the beginning of the session and later when a participant shared something quite powerful that stopped the table-host from being able to scribe, while she processed her emotions. We were able to encourage table-hosts to capture certain bits of the conversation that we noted as important, which gave valuable insight into prison life. We had two prison officers present which facilitated a learning opportunity for them regarding the application of World Café and also provided safeguarding. So, whilst World Café is perceived as a cost-effective measure due to it being participatory in nature and a session being able to accommodate larger numbers of participants than traditional qualitative data collection approaches, having table-hosts is an additional resource consideration when using this method with vulnerable groups. If you then consider prison safety standards and including prison officers, it can add to the on costs of the project. However, it is still a cheaper mechanism than the security measures required for one-to-one or small group interview.

We used a questionnaire at the end of a World Café to capture any data that participants did not want to express in group discussion and to elevate issues of what Garner & Sercomb[[36]](#footnote-36) describe as ‘*social relations’*(p81). Follow up questionnaires are not part of the original World Café format, but have been a useful additional tool for data collection in previous research3. Questionnaires have been used as a sole tool to evaluate arts projects in other studies to gain useful data7. We offered scribing support for questionnaire completion to accommodate literacy issues. We observed that participants also offered each other support in completing the questionnaires. Interestingly, many omitted answers for demographic details such as age and ethnicity. This may be due to the concerns raised at the beginning of the session pertaining to anonymity.

Social relations in the context of a group of prisoners who have learnt over a two-week period to work well together, enhanced the collection of rich data. A lot of collaboration work had clearly occurred whereby prisoners had made positive relationships with one another during the theatre-based arts project. So much so, that they felt comfortable opening up in front of group members in their table discussions about personal impacts from the project concerning reduced stress, improved self-esteem and confidence and how the theatre project had provided a welcomed distraction from personal issues. We observed vulnerability within the sharing of their thoughts, feelings and experiences. They also talked about how relationships generally in prison are more for “*survival*” and involve less depth. Liebling & Arnold29 discuss low trust and poor relations between inmates, as well as the ‘*prisoner hierarchy’*, so selection of participants for a World Café requires some consideration, aiming to reduce ‘*gang-bullying’* behaviour described by Wood, Moir & James[[37]](#footnote-37) (2009) and effects caused by ‘*prison subcultures’* and ‘*power relations’[[38]](#footnote-38)*(p59). Facilitating a World Café with a group of inmates who are less well known to each other, may not produce the level of data we achieved in this session if trust levels between inmates is poor. Having an experienced facilitator being table host, could be imperative in this situation to reduce bullying. Rotations may leave some prisoners vulnerable, if their ‘survival’ peer moves to another table, and a more hostile prisoner joins them. So there needs to be risk management to who is invited to take part in World Café data collection events, based on the prison service observations of social relations, prisoner hierarchy and social clashes between prisoners and staff who might be present.

Two prison officers joined our World Café event and we wondered whether this would create a power dynamic that hindered data collection. However, the rapport between the officers and prisoners was apparent and data collection didn’t seem to be obstructed. Mann’s[[39]](#footnote-39) interview findings evidenced that sex offenders with cultural capital are more likely to put on an act in front of staff and lie, in order to ensure better treatment in prison. So, there is potential that accounts shared were not completely truthful, due to prison staff being present. Consideration is also required in the selection of prison officers involved in observing World Cafes whether as a security measure, or in them facilitating World Café events. The prisoners in our research talked about officers who were less supportive and were not approachable. Mann38 also reports that prison staff working with sex offenders, particularly child sex offenders, can be harsher with prisoners, than other offender groups due to the nature of the offences. Therefore, some prison officers may not be suitable to the role of World Café observer, presenter or table-host, particularly if prisoners are asked to share personal thoughts and feelings about a topic.

World Café does not lend itself to sensitive topics due to sharing thoughts and experiences in a group setting. Alternative data collection methods would be more suitable to gain personal information. However, it is particularly useful for topics where a brief education input at the beginning of the session to stimulate discussion would benefit participants, for example drugs education3. Prisoners are then able to make suggestions to inform better support provision for prisoners. However, questions need consideration as to whether a prisoner sharing ‘inside’ knowledge in a group setting could cause repercussions from inmates that may be benefitting from prisoner and prison issues.

At the end of the World Café, following table-host summaries, we started to close the session. We handed out follow-up questionnaires, once these were completed and returned, we verbally corporately debriefed the group. The ‘presenter’ role led the debrief and talked through the accompanying ‘debrief sheet’, which was then disseminated. We gave further assurances of anonymity and reiterated what would happen with the data and discussed how participants could request a copy of the report, or publications and also how they could withdraw or make a complaint. Our aim is to publish the entirety of the findings from the wider arts evaluation project that we are leading, which is an 18-month process. So, we wanted to manage expectations on when a final report is likely to be published. However, we will share some elements of the findings in this article to assist understanding on the quality of the data and to highlight some initial thoughts on improving theatre arts projects being delivered in prison settings.

**Prisoner Views of World Café**

A section on the follow-up questionnaire asked participants what they liked and disliked about the World Café session. The comments clearly indicate that participants liked World Café and found the opportunity to reflect useful and cathartic:

* *“I enjoyed the session”*
* *“It was enjoyable & fun”*
* *“I enjoyed the café as it was informal which helps you open up”*
* *“It was not as “intense” as I thought it would be”…“The feedback theme was useful, clear and positive – thank you”*
* *“This was great , it was like getting thinks off your chest”*
* *“Great to reflect on what we done and achieved in two weeks”*
* *“It was good to reflect on the project, and think about how impacted on me”*
* *“It was good to reflect about what we had done in the past 2 weeks”*
* *“It’ good to share positives and negatives about the Rideout project and be able to share our opinions” x 2 people*
* *“A general debrief and the opportunity to decompress and express my thoughts and feelings about the project has been useful and appreciated”*

The informal approach to World Café was cited as an enabler to participants sharing information which reinforces practitioner expert views1 2.

**Quality of the Findings**

There is recognition that the quality of data from a World Café lacks the richness of interviews or focus groups but provides more information than questionnaires3. To some extent the quality of data is determined by the quality of scribing taking place, which is why utilising research assistants as table-hosts can be beneficial3. However, it is not a panacea, as Scribes can fall into the pitfall of only capturing responses to the actual research questions, rather than capturing additional information. This means that the research becomes researcher-led, due to the limited capturing of off-agenda topics that participants share because it is important to them in the moment. Whereas, when audio-recording focus groups and interviews, the unstructured conversation amidst direct responses to questions, get captured, and can be utilised in analysis.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail of the impact of the theatre project upon inmates, staff and the wider prison setting. However, we wanted to include a sample of the findings from the World Café session to facilitate the appreciation of the quality of the data and enable those interested in developing arts projects and/or participatory research methods in prison some shared learning insights.

Theatre Impact upon Relationships and Prison Culture:

It was evident that inmates had cultivated supportive peer relationships in the group through undertaking the theatre project. Participants talked about how their judgements about others were positively challenged by working with people that they wouldn’t have normally connected with. Empathy was established as they learnt about others. One person reported having *“… a better understanding of other people’s situations”* and another said *“when doing the project different ages wasn’t a problem, it was better working with different ages*” and another said that it helped them to “*Chat to different people, opens your eyes to different opinions.”.* There was a strong sense from the data that participating on the theatre project had helped to address personal prejudice e.g. “*after getting to know people pre-conceptions and judgements were changed.”* Furthermore, communication skills and confidence increased: *“The one thing I learned was how to interact with other people”* which had assisted them in “*confidence building”,* another commented that *“Doing the project has made me more interactive with people”.* Taking part in the project reduced isolation and helped people who were new to the prison to settle. Prisoners commented that in workshop settings the opportunity to connect with others was limited e.g. *“In workshop never had a proper chance to talk to people.”* Overall, inmates reported that taking part had made them *“more open to new relationships, professional and personal because less judgemental. Not ‘judging a book by its cover’ really understanding a person.”* However, several inmates talked about how it *“Would be nice to maintain friendships and connections****”*** and they were concerned that in prison *“relationships get cut off and healthy relationships need nurturing to be long term. So, makes you feel there’s no point.”* They talked about how most relationships in prison are for “*survival*” purposes and that undertaking the theatre project had given them a “*support network*” that they could not utilise when the project ended, if they were on separate wings. If on a separate wing to others from the theatre project participants talked about the emotional impact and how they “*feel emptiness”.* The relationships that were made were cited as being of benefit through giving “*More concentration – we helped each other and created a bond.”*The inmates were also keen for us to understand that “*The benefit of the project is worth the cost of making new friends and then losing them on the outside.”*

Inmates went on to talk about how there was improved “closeness…with staff and residents” and how taking part had “Broke down barriers between officers and residents” because it had given inmates a “Different impression of what they want from their job”. They talked about how the project helped them to feel “On a level par, no staff/residents, equal.”. They also talked about how “the right staff were picked to oversee” the project because some staff were not enthusiastic about the benefits of the arts on inmates. One participant commented that it had given him “More confidence to speak to officers”.

Relationships with family also were impacted with one inmate talking about how this was the first time that his *“Family (were) proud of me”* and another talked about how it had given*“Peace of mind for family, showed them they are okay and happy – having a good time*.” One participant talked about how he noticed in the performance that there was *“...increased confidence seeing family*” and another talked about how they *“Got emotional because I had no one there*” and that “*Having strangers talk to us helped*”. Having other peoples’ family members congratulate them after the performance benefited those who didn’t have family in the audience.

Prison culture was commented upon in that “*Prison takes a shot gun to self-esteem*” and this was reiterated in another comment that *“Confidence is knocked in this environment”.* Thepositive feedback from the audience(s) had given them a *“massive boost*”. Others talked about how it had given them a “*Sense of pride – “not the label you have been given”.”* There was appreciation for not feeling ‘*judged’* for the two weeks of the project. The feedback is suggestive of a prison culture that is judgemental, negatively labels people and knocks esteem and confidence.

Sadly, one inmate described how health and well-being improves during the project and then after the project there is a ‘*crash’* as they go back into the daily prison routine: *“Health and wellbeing are covered until the projects are over, until you get back to reality – there needs to be something else or another programme to support “the crash*”.” This statement was supported by a drawing of a car hitting a wall to symbolise the “*crash*”.They talked about how going back to a wing that didn’t have an understanding staff member, or any of the men from the project on it, was hard in getting support for processing post-performance emotion. Prison culture is such that there was concern that re-entry into daily prison life from a project may undo some of the health and well-being benefits of taking part in a theatre arts project whilst in prison.

Positive Approach of the Theatre Project Practitioners:

The prisoners talked about how they felt “*more human*” during the 2 weeks on the project due to being treated as an “*equal*”. They said they “*Got treated like a person*”, “*Treated like a human, not a convict”*. The facilitators had successfully created a “*Protected, safe space that helped me to open up*” and gave people “*the opportunity to speak*”, which was valued. Participants appreciated the “*structure*” of the sessions and how they were given choices when improvising and developing the script. Participants welcomed “*Working together collaborating and creating*”. They liked how they were given “*different options*” and encouraged to “*try more things*” and having “*shared responsibilities*”. They wanted “*more time*” to work on the scenes and to conduct “*research*”. Comments included “*Had to do a lot of research as a big group, would have been nice to do individual work as well to focus a bit more*” and “*Access to more research would have been good, more resources”.*

The prison governor was perceived to be supportive of arts projects and participants felt greater involvement of senior leadership would have been beneficial. This related to their concerns about staff who did not regard prison arts project and were more distant relationally with prisoners. The theatre project enabled supportive staff to the arts, to build productive relationships with prisoners. Crewe[[40]](#footnote-40) [[41]](#footnote-41) points out that UK prisons acknowledge the value of relationship building between staff and prisoners in order to support prison “*decency, safety and security*”(p3). Furthermore, Hulley *et al[[42]](#footnote-42)* exhorts the value of staff demonstrating respect to prisoners. Evidently, the practice of the theatre team created an environment for relationship building and respect that facilitated prisoners in feeling human and of worth. The prisons talked generally about a prison system, that negatively impacted on them. It would seem our findings concur with classical research about the impact of negative judgements and labelling[[43]](#footnote-43), institutionalisation[[44]](#footnote-44) and impersonal power[[45]](#footnote-45) and more recent debate from Morris *et al[[46]](#footnote-46)* providing further support to the notion that negative strained institutionalised prisoner experience leading to negative prisoner attitude and behaviour and this is particularly interesting due to the links between strain theory and sex offenders identified by Ackerman & Sacks[[47]](#footnote-47) to the context of this study. Mann’s38 findings also point to the harsher treatment that sex offenders are likely to experience from staff and the stricter prison regime. The theatre project helped to elevate these tensions and could provide role modelling to some prison staff about different ways of working that has positive impact and can contribute to enhanced prison security. However, there is also evidence from Mann38 that inmates with cultural capital manipulate relationships with staff through acting. As such, theatre projects may not be suitable for certain inmates, if the skills learnt through theatre enhance manipulative performances with staff during sentences and the community thereafter, however, they may benefit from other arts disciplines.

**Conclusion**

Theatre arts projects in prison have the capacity to positively impact upon a) the health and well-being of the prisoners, b) the self-esteem and confidence of the prisoners and c) the ability to develop healthy relationships with both inmates and prison staff. However, there needs to be consideration about the transition from taking part in a theatre project to going back into the usual daily prison pattern of activity to ensure that mental well-being does not take a significant dip post performance. Having supportive prison staff that appreciate the arts, peers from the performance on the same wing and an on-going drama based weekly activity to engage in post-performance can assist prisoners with the transition to regular prison routines. We found that inmates appreciated taking part if they were new to the prison and found it a way to settle, we were also told by inmates (via questionnaire) that they would welcome doing a theatre project nearer to their release date. Prisoners talked about how the project made them feel ‘*human’* and helped family members who watched the performance to feel proud of them, which positively impacted upon the prisoners. Theatre has the potential to help to rebuild families. This needs further research.

Our experience of utilising the participatory consultation and research method of ‘World Café’ in the context of evaluating a theatre-based arts project being delivered in a prison setting with adult male sex offenders in the UK was positive. Prisoners articulated that they found the data collection approach enjoyable. They also stated that the informal and fun environment helped to facilitate them sharing their personal experiences and thoughts on the strengths and areas for improvement upon the project. The conversational approach to World Café as described by Brown and Issacs5 enabled us to collect rich data and build consensus, whilst allowing individual perspective to be shared and valued in a group context. Formal evaluation at the end of a theatre arts project helped our participants to ‘*debrief’* and ‘*get things off their chests’*.

We needed to adapt the World Café approach by reducing rotations and to accommodate the prison in terms of our presentation delivery and refreshments at the event. Using table-hosts, reduces an element of the participatory nature of the World Café approach, but assists in capturing data where literacy levels might be a barrier for some to engage fully in the process3. However, one limitation from recording data through writing is that responses that directly answer the question tend to be recorded in less detail and valuable participant-led anecdotal information is less likely to be captured. It would be interesting to explore in the future enhancing the participatory nature of evaluation by engaging prisoners in shaping the research questions and becoming table-hosts to see what impact that has upon views of the research method and the quality of data. In a community setting, participatory approaches where there is engagement in design and delivery of evaluation is empowering to those engaged in the process and offers them the opportunity to develop new skills, self-esteem and confidence4. With research skills being part of developing the script for the theatre arts project, training inmates in research prior to participating in the theatre arts project could enhance the theatre project work. This is an area for further research. Our participants talked about how they enjoyed researching and developing the script and wanted more time to conduct research. Engaging offenders in the research process of evaluation work, could facilitate this and be enriching to those involved.

1. Revolving Doors (2016) Improving Your Prisoner Involvement Systems: A ToolKit for Staff. http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1863/download?token=1cQMWr1W (accessed 27/10/2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Clinks (2011) BEST PRACTICE in service user involvement in prisons and probation trusts https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/Service%20User%20Best%20Practice%20Sept%2011.pdf (accessed 27/10/2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E (2018) World Café: a participatory research tool for the criminologist engaged in seeking world views for transformation. In the British Society of Criminology Conference Papers Vol 18 PP5-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gratton, N. & Beddows, R. (2018) "Get Talking: Managing to Achieve More through Creative Consultation" In From Austerity to Abundance? pg141-160. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2045-794420180000006007> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5 Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005) World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Williston USA [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bachmann, R.D., & Schutt, R.K. (2017) The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice. 6th Ed. Sage Publications, LA. P80. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Stephenson, Z. & Watson, A. (2018) Scratching the Surface: A service evaluation of an applied theatre intervention for female offenders. IN Prison Service Journal. Vol239, PP16-31 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ibid;p17 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fair, H. & Jacobson, J. (2016) Family Connections: a review of learning from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Prison Reform Fellowship Part II. The Prison Reform Trust. Accessed online via wwwprisonreformtrust.org.uk on 14/01/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Thorpe, J. (2014) A Little Patch of Sky: The Use of the Arts to connect families affected by incarceration. A Winston Churchill Fellowship Report (2014). PP1-31. Accessed via [www.wcmt.org.uk](http://www.wcmt.org.uk) on 14/01/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Barton, A. & Russel, A. (2018) Research Report: HMP/YOI Winchester Applied Theatre pilot 2018. Accessed online via [www.artsevidence.org.uk](http://www.artsevidence.org.uk) on 14/01/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jewkes, Y. (2018) In Place of Hate. IN Prison Service Journal. Vol239, PP48-49 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Leibling, A., Laws, B., Lieber, E,, Auty, K,, Schmidt, B.E., Crewe, B., Gardom, J., Kant, D. & Morey, M. (2019) Are hope and possibility achievable in prison? The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice Vol 00(0) PP1-23. Accessed online [www.prc.crim.cam.ac.uk/pdf/hopeandpossibility](http://www.prc.crim.cam.ac.uk/pdf/hopeandpossibility) 14/01/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Yardley, E. & Rusu, D. (2018) Edmund Clark's Artistic Residency at HMP Grendon. In Prison Service Journal. Vol239, PP50-57 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. SPS (2015) Scottish Prison Service Arts Review April 2015. PP1-34. Accessed online via [www.sps.gov.uk](http://www.sps.gov.uk) on 14/01/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bottoms, S. (2010) Silent partners: actor and audience in Geece Theatre’s Journey Woman. IN Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance. Vol 15(4), PP477-496 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Prendergast, M. (2016) Tracing the journey to here: reflections on a prison theatre devised project. Theatre Topics. Vol 26(3), PP343-349 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, p348 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Keehan, B. (2015). Theatre, prison & rehabilitation: new narratives of purpose? RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance. Vol20(3), PP391–394 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Crow, I. (2003) The Treatment and Rehabilitation of Offenders. 2nd edition. Sage Publications, London. PP123 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Glasser, M., Kolvin, I., Campbell, D., Glasser, A., Leitch, I. & Farrelly, S. (2001) Cycle of child sexual abuse: links between being a victim and becoming a perpetrator. The British Journal of Psychiatry. Vol 197(6) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Jespersen, A.F., Lalmumiere, M.L. & Seto, M.C. (2009) Sexual abuse history among adult sex offenders and non-sex offenders: A meta-analysis. IN Child Abuse & Neglect. Vol 33(3), PP179-192 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. BBC News (2015) Children with learning disabilities 'more vulnerable to abuse' https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34204824 (accessed 27/10/2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Monsell *et al* (1998) cited IN Edelson, M.G. (2010) Sexual abuse of children with autism: factors that increase risk and interfere with recognition of abuse. IN Disability Studies Quarterly Vol 30(1) accessed online 12/01/2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. West (1996) cited IN Crow, I. (2003) The Treatment and Rehabilitation of Offenders. 2nd edition. Sage Publications, London P122 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Melvin, C.L., Langdon, P.E. & Murphy, G.H. (2017) Treatment effectiveness for offenders with autism spectrum conditions: a systematic review. IN Psychology, Crime & Law. Vol 23(8), PP748-776 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Baarsma, M.E., Boonmann, C., ’t Hart-Kerkhoffs, L.A., de Graaf, H., Doreleijers, T.A.H., Vermeiren, R.R.J.M. & Jansen, L.M.C. (2016) Sexuality and Autistic-Like Symptoms in Juvenile Sex Offenders: A Follow-Up After 8 Years. IN Journal of Autism Development Disorders. Vol 46(8), PP2679–2691 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cartland, J. Rush-Ross, H.S. & Mason, M. (2012) Engaging community researchers in evaluation: looking at the experiences of community partners in school-based projects in the US. In Goodson, L. & Phillimore, J. (eds) Community Research for Participation. Bristol. Policy Press [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Liebling, A. & Arnold, H. (2012) Social relationships between prisoners in a maximum security prison: Violence, faith, and the declining nature of trust. IN Journal of Criminal Justice. Vol 40, PP413–424 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. MacFarlane, A., Galvin, R., O’Sullivan, M., McInerney, C., Meagher, E., Burke, D., & Lemaster, J.W., (2017) ‘Participatory methods for research prioritisation in primary care: an analysis of the world café approach in Ireland and USA’, *Family Practice*. Vol 34(3), PP278 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ritch, E.L., & Brennan, C., (2010). ‘Using World Café and Drama to explore older people’s experience of financial products and services’. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. Vol 34, PP405-411. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Burke, C., & Sheldon, K., (2010). Encouraging workplace innovation using the ‘world café’ model. *Nursing Management*. Vol 17(7), PP14-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Creese, B. (2016) An assessment of the English and maths skills levels of prisoners in England. IN London Review of Education Vol 14(3), PP13-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Aldred, R., (2009). ‘From Community Participation to organisational therapy? World café and appreciative inquiry as research methods’. *Community Development Journal*. Vol 46(1), PP57-71 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Chang, W., & Chen, S., (2015). ‘The Impact of world café on entrepreneurial strategic planning capability’*. Journal of Business Research*. Vol68, PP1283-1290 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Garner, M. & Sercomb, P. (2009) Research as Social Relations: Implications for Teaching Research Methods. IN Garner M, Wagner C & Kawulich B (Eds) Teaching Research Methods in Social Sciences, Ashgate Publishing Group, Surrey: PP81-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Wood, J., Moir, A. & James, M. (2009) Prisoners’ gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement. Journal of [Psychology, Crime & Law.](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.staffs.ac.uk/toc/gpcl20/current)Vol15(6), PP569-581 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Matthews, R. (1999) Doing Time: An Introduction to the Sociology of Imprisonment. Palgrave, Basingstoke. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Mann, N. (2012) Ageing Child Sex Offenders in Prison: Denial, Manipulation and Community. IN The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice. Vol 51(4), PP345-358 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Crewe, B. (2009) The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison. Oxford University Press, Oxford. P3. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Crewe, B. (2011) Soft power in prison: implications for staff-prisoner relationships, liberty and legitimacy. European Journal of Criminology. Vol 8(6), PP455-468 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Hulley, S., Liebling, A. & Crewe, B. (2012) Respect in prisons: Prisoners’ experiences of respect in public and private sector prisons. IN Criminology & Criminal Justice. Vol12(1), PP3-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Becker, H. (1973) Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. The Free Press, New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Goffman, E. (1968) Asylums, Essays of the Social Situations of Mental Patients. Pelican, Harmondsworth. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Weber, M. (1948) From Marx Weber: Essays in Sociology. Ed Gerth H & Mills CW. Routledge & Kegan-Paul, London. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Morris, R.G., Carriga, M.L., Diamond, B., Piquero, N.L.& Piquero, A. (2012) Does prison strain lead to prison misbehaviour? An application of general strain theory to inmate misconduct. IN Journal of Criminal Justice Vol40(3), PP194-201 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ackerman, A.R. & Sacks, M. (2012) Can general strain theory be used to explain recidivism among registered sex offenders? In Journal of Criminal Justice. Vol40(3), PP187–193 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)