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Learning Together

Informing Prison Theatre Improvement through World Café Conversations with Prisoners

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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 UK prison with adult male sex offenders. World Café is encouraged within the prison service as a consultation tool with staff and prisoners for service improvement³. There is some evidence for this methodology being used by prison service practitioners and highlighted as best practice for prison consultation⁴. However, very little is documented about using this approach in criminology within academic research⁵. This paper discusses our experience of using World Café within a prison setting, providing an academic external evaluation of a prison theatre 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 settings⁶. 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 Café⁷ 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 the 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'⁸. Our wider research aims to improve theatre project practice to enhance prisoner well-being and rehabilitation 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 and Watson demonstrate that theatre work in prisons with inmates can lead to 'behavioural-cognitive change', reducing 'depression'

1. With recognition to Scarlett Hunt and Kate Smith for research assistance at one event on this project and to Professor James Treadwell for research supervision and training.
2. The research funding for this project derived from Rideout from The Staging Time University of Warwick project, via the Wellcome Trust as part of *Prisoners, Medical Care and Entitlement to Health in England and Ireland 1850-2000* combined with additional Arts Council England funding, the W.E.D Trust, the Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust and Thomas Deane Trust.
3. 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)
4. 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%202011.pdf> (accessed 27/10/2018)
5. 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. Vol18, PP5-19.
6. 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/S2045-79442018000006007>
7. Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005) *World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Williston USA
8. Bachmann, R.D., & Schutt, R.K. (2017) *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 6th Ed. Sage Publications, LA. P80.

and increasing 'self-esteem'⁹. Theatre also has helped in bringing 'healing' from past abused experienced by perpetrators¹⁰ as well as contributing to enhancing family connections^{11 12 13}. Jewkes¹⁴ links art-based projects to enhancing a therapeutic community in prison for rehabilitation and Liebling *et al*¹⁵ acknowledges the contribution of arts and creativity to positive prison experience and successful rehabilitation. Yardley and Rusu¹⁶ point out that arts projects can be a gateway for prisoners to start engagement in other prison educational programmes and can reduce re-offending. SPS¹⁷ 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

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.

approaches have helped engagement with male perpetrators¹⁸. Prendergast¹⁹ 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*' offenders²⁰ (p348). It is argued that theatre can help to humanise individuals and the prison setting. Keehan²¹ 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 in November 2018 with 12 convicted sex offenders included those who 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^{22 23 24}. A BBC media report²⁵ infers having a learning

disability makes a person more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Monsell *et al*²⁶ found those with learning

9. Stephenson, Z. & Watson, A. (2018) Scratching the Surface: A service evaluation of an applied theatre intervention for female offenders. *Prison Service Journal*. Vol239, PP16-31
10. *ibid*;P17
11. 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. www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk (Accessed on 14/01/2019).
12. 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. www.wcmt.org.uk (accessed 14/01/2019)
13. Barton, A. & Russel, A. (2018) Research Report: HMP/YOI Winchester Applied Theatre pilot 2018. www.artsevidence.org.uk (accessed 14/01/2019).
14. Jewkes, Y. (2018) In Place of Hate. *Prison Service Journal*. Vol239, PP48-49.
15. Liebling, 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. www.prc.crim.cam.ac.uk/pdf/hopeandpossibility (accessed 14/01/2019)
16. Yardley, E. & Rusu, D. (2018) Edmund Clark's Artistic Residency at HMP Grendon. *Prison Service Journal*. Vol239, PP50-57.
17. SPS (2015) Scottish Prison Service Arts Review April 2015. PP1-34. www.sps.gov.uk (accessed 14/01/2019).
18. Bottoms, S. (2010) Silent partners: actor and audience in Geece Theatre's Journey Woman. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*. Vol 15(4), PP477-496.
19. Prendergast, M. (2016) Tracing the journey to here: reflections on a prison theatre devised project. *Theatre Topics*. Vol 26(3), PP343-349.
20. *Ibid*, P348.
21. Keehan, B. (2015). Theatre, prison & rehabilitation: new narratives of purpose? *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*. Vol20(3), PP391-394.
22. Crow, I. (2003) *The Treatment and Rehabilitation of Offenders*. 2nd edition. Sage Publications, London. PP123.
23. 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)
24. Jespersen, A.F., Lalmumiere, M.L. & Seto, M.C. (2009) Sexual abuse history among adult sex offenders and non-sex offenders: A meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Vol 33(3), PP179-192.
25. BBC News (2015) Children with learning disabilities 'more vulnerable to abuse' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34204824> (accessed 27/10/2018)
26. 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. *Disability Studies Quarterly*. Vol 30(1) (accessed 12/01/2019).

challenges are twice as likely to experience sexual abuse. This group of offenders are likely to have experiences of victimisation, as well as exploiting victims. According to West²⁷ there is some evidence of links between mental health and relational building capacity issues within the sex offending population. Relational building issues may be symptomatic of autism²⁸, which could be undiagnosed. Research suggests that younger sex offenders have higher likelihood of autism related disorders than other offending groups²⁹. The prisoners on this theatre project were pre-selected by the prison. This practice is used in other prison arts projects to select participants³⁰. All participants on the theatre arts project were informed about the research evaluation whilst on the project and the voluntary nature of participation in our evaluation. 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. Groupwork was used to facilitate theatre work, resulting in two final performances: one to prisoner family and friends and a second to prisoners. As with other prison-based theatre projects, the performance included interaction and engagement with those viewing the production³¹. 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 interactive³². There is recognition from prison theatre experts such as Thompson³³ 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 performers³⁴. 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), which means theatre can be rehabilitative for the offender and audience members³⁵.

The end of the theatre performance included 'talk-backs'(p348)³⁶, where performers were encouraged to share what taking part in the project meant for them. There was also opportunity to gain feedback from the audience. Some talk-back comments were used as discussion prompts within our formal evaluation which took place on the 5th day after the theatre production had been performed. So, our evaluation from the World Café data reflects short term impacts. Further research is required to explore long term change.

Participatory action research, can still prove effective in some more challenging settings with considered pragmatic adaptations.

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 evaluated³⁷. We were unable to adopt all participatory principles

in our research due to timescales and incarceration limitations. Cartland *et al*³⁸ 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

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27. West (1996) cited IN Crow, I. (2003) *The Treatment and Rehabilitation of Offenders*. 2nd edition. Sage Publications, London. PP122.
28. Melvin, C.L., Langdon, P.E. & Murphy, G.H. (2017) Treatment effectiveness for offenders with autism spectrum conditions: a systematic review. *Psychology, Crime & Law*. Vol 23(8), PP748-776.
29. Baarsma, M.E., Boonmann, C., 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. *Journal of Autism Development Disorders*. Vol 46(8), PP2679-2691.
30. Stephenson, Z. & Watson, A. (2018) see n.9
31. Bottoms, S. (2010) see n.18
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Prendergast, M. (2016) see n.19
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. 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
38. *Ibid.*

action research, can still prove effective in some more challenging settings with considered pragmatic adaptations³⁹. 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 a prison setting.

World Café is group discussion based, involving refreshments to provide an informal atmosphere for data collection as developed by Brown and Issacs⁴⁰. 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 adjustment⁴¹. The World Café session opened with a short presentation including 'talk-back' comments and audience feedback from the performance. Prison security prohibited us taking a USB stick into the prison, so we presented via 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. The research aims and World Café process was also explained using flip chart prompts, so that everyone knew what would happen in the session. Participant rights were articulated 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 trust⁴², which can have implications for research.

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Our World Café event lasted for approx. 2 hours and was conducted in the visitors meeting space, where the first theatre performance was delivered. We arranged a section of the visitors' space like a café, with paper tablecloths on coffee tables. We used three tables, 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 the recommended 'menu' of the event order on the tables^{43 44 45}. We had a fourth table set up for participants who might want to withdraw at any point. Usual practice is for refreshments to be set up on tables in advance and accessible throughout the research process. The prison agreed to provide refreshments but there was an issue with getting refreshments to us for the beginning of the session. So, part way through the session participants had a refreshment break from a drinks trolley. Sadly, no snacks were offered on this occasion. Having a mid-point break worked well but added time onto the event. Fortunately, our participants were able to re-focus on return to tables, and we started with a new research question to stimulate conversation.

It is advisable to keep the main questions to a minimum within World Café⁴⁶. We had 3 main questions and used a new tablecloth for each one to capture the data. We utilised table-hosts to scribe responses to accommodate literacy issues and to ask further prompt questions to gather more data. Literacy issues can be a barrier to participation in research that requires reading and writing⁴⁷. Table-hosts read out written documentation and wrote on behalf of the group. Group members were also invited to write or draw responses. World Café was designed to be participatory in nature by engaging participants as table-hosts. We have adapted the World Café approach

39. Gratton, N. & Beddows, R. (2018) see n.6

40. Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005) see n.7

41. Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E. (2018) see n.5

42. Liebling, A. & Arnold, H. (2012) Social relationships between prisoners in a maximum security prison: Violence, faith, and the declining nature of trust. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. Vol 40, PP413–424.

43. 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.

44. 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.

45. Burke, C., & Sheldon, K., (2010). Encouraging workplace innovation using the 'world café' model. *Nursing Management*. Vol 17(7), PP14-19.

46. Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005) see n.7

47. Stephenson, Z., & Watson, A. (2018) see n.9

in other studies of utilising research assistants as table-hosts for scribing support purposes. This is particularly useful when working with vulnerable groups with low literacy levels⁴⁸. The prison community in the UK is known for lower literacy levels⁴⁹. Our research assistants for this project were undergraduate students who had received additional training to undertake the table-host role.

Academic leads facilitated the session in the 'presenter' role, introducing the main questions and allowing for approximately 15 minutes for groups to respond to each question before inviting participants to rotate. Rotations are where some group members move to other tables⁵⁰. The table-host welcomes new members and facilitates existing members in sharing what they have been discussing. New members comment and add additional insights from their previous groups' discussions. 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 some participants were getting tired and indicated a further rotation would not be appreciated. We accommodated this request. A flexible approach to the number of rotations is important in order to keep participants engaged. 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 and Chen⁵¹ infer discretionary use of up to 3 rotations per question, however, we feel reduced rotations work better. The principle behind rotations is that they enable participants to gain a 'world view' from discussions and a cross pollination of ideas⁵². However, this is also achieved by the table-host offering a summary to the whole group at the end of each main question. We referred to 'rotations' as

playing musical chairs (without the music), to help the prisoners understand the process. We directed movement, rather than a free-for-all on what table to go to. We typically invited one previous 'mover', and one previous 'stayer' to move to assist with mixing the groups up. When we felt sufficient discussion had occurred (before and after rotation), we invited the table-hosts to provide a brief summary of the conversations at the table.

The presenters were able to oversee the table-hosts and give support where required. For example, one participant needed a more detailed explanation of

how we would guarantee anonymity and later a participant shared something emotionally powerful that temporarily stopped the table-host scribing while she paused to process her emotions. We were able to help table-hosts capture conversation that they might have missed because it was contextual to prison life, rather than specific to our research questions. In this way the 'presenter(s)' become additional scribes.

We had two prison officers present as a learning opportunity regarding the application of World Café and this also provided safeguarding. World Café is perceived as cost-effective due to accommodating larger numbers of participants than traditional group/individual qualitative data collection approaches. However, utilising

research assistants as table-hosts is an additional resource consideration, along with ensuring adequate security. Although, 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 the World Café to capture data that participants did not want to express in group discussion and to elevate issues of what Garner and Sercomb⁵³ describe as '*social relations*'(p81). Follow up questionnaires are not part

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.

48. Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E. (2018) see n.5

49. Creese, B. (2016) An assessment of the English and maths skills levels of prisoners in England. London Review of Education Vol 14(3), PP13-30.

50. 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.

51. Chang, W., & Chen, S., (2015). 'The Impact of world café on entrepreneurial strategic planning capability'. Journal of Business Research. Vol68, PP1283-1290.

52. Brown, J., & Issacs, D. (2005) see n.7

53. 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.

of the original World Café format but have been a useful additional tool for data collection in previous research⁵⁴. Questionnaires have been used as a sole tool to evaluate arts projects in other studies⁵⁵. We offered scribing support for questionnaire completion to accommodate literacy issues. We observed that participants also offered each other support in completing 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 connected well over a two-week period, enhanced the collection of rich data. Effective collaboration work had clearly occurred whereby prisoners made positive relationships with one another during the theatre project. So much so, that they felt comfortable sharing 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 and Arnold⁵⁶ 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 when aiming to reduce '*gang-bullying*' behaviour described by Wood, Moir and James⁵⁷ (2009) and effects caused by '*prison subcultures*' and '*power relations*'⁵⁸(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 because of poor trust levels between inmates. Having an experienced presenter and table-hosts 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. There needs to be risk management regarding invitations to a World Café event based on the prison service observations of social relations, prisoner hierarchy and social clashes between prisoners and staff who might be present.

We wondered whether the prison officers observing our World Cafe would create a power dynamic hindering data collection. However, the rapport between the officers and prisoners was apparent and data collection didn't seem to be obstructed. Mann's⁵⁹ interview findings evidenced that sex offenders with cultural capital are more likely to put on an act in front of staff and lie to ensure better treatment in prison. 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 or facilitating World Cafes. The prisoners in our research talked about officers who were less supportive and were not approachable. Mann⁶⁰ reports that prison staff working with sex offenders (particularly child sex offenders), can be harsher with them than other offender groups. Therefore, some prison staff may not be suitable to the role of World Café observer, presenter or table-host, particularly if prisoners are asked to share personal thoughts

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.

and feelings.

World Café does not lend itself to sensitive topics due to the group setting; alternative data collection methods are more suitable. However, it is particularly useful for topics where brief education input from the presentation at the beginning of the session to stimulate discussions would benefit participants. For example, drugs education⁶¹ where participants learn about substances and associated health risks. Prisoners are then able to make suggestions to inform better service provision for prisoners. However, questions need consideration as to whether a prisoner sharing 'inside' knowledge in a group setting could cause repercussions

54. Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E. (2018) see n.5

55. Stephenson, Z. & Watson, A. (2018) see n.9

56. Liebling, A. & Arnold, H. (2012) see n.42

57. Wood, J., Moir, A. & James, M. (2009) Prisoners' gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement. *Journal of Psychology, Crime & Law*. Vol15(6), PP569-581.

58. Matthews, R. (1999) *Doing Time: An Introduction to the Sociology of Imprisonment*. Palgrave, Basingstoke.

59. Mann, N. (2012) Ageing Child Sex Offenders in Prison: Denial, Manipulation and Community. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. Vol 51(4), PP345-358.

60. Ibid

61. Page, S. & Temple-Malt, E. (2018) see n.5

from those benefitting from drug dealing or similar prison issues.

At the end of the World Café, following table-host summaries, we handed out follow-up questionnaires and upon their completion the presenter debriefed the group by talking through the 'debrief sheet'. We gave further assurances of anonymity and reiterated what would happen with the data and discussed how participants could request report and publication copies and how they could withdraw or make a complaint. Our aim is to publish the entirety of the findings from the wider 18-month arts evaluation project, so we wanted to manage expectations relating to timescales.

Prisoner Views of World Café:

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

- ❑ *'I enjoyed the session'*
- ❑ *'It was enjoyable and 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 things (things) 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 (it) 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 (name omitted) 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.

Quality of the Findings:

There is recognition that data quality from a World Café lacks the richness of interviews or focus groups yet provides more information than questionnaires⁶². To some extent the quality of data is determined by the quality of scribing, which is why utilising research assistants as table-hosts can be beneficial⁶³. However, it is not a panacea. Scribes can fall into the pitfall of only writing responses to the actual research questions and not capturing off-agenda topics that participants raise, causing the research to become researcher-led. Whereas, when audio-recording focus groups and interviews, unstructured conversation gets captured

amidst direct responses to questions and can be utilised in analysis. Having presenters supporting the table-hosts helped with recording additional participant-led information.

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:

Inmates had cultivated supportive peer relationships in the group through undertaking the theatre project. Participants talked about how their judgements about others got positively challenged by working with people they wouldn't normally connect 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 that participating on the theatre project had helped to address personal

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.

62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.

prejudice for example *'after getting to know people pre-conceptions and judgements were changed.'*

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 prison to settle. They would welcome opportunity to do a similar project just prior to release. Prisoners commented that in workshop settings the opportunity to connect with others was limited for example *'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' (and) 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 on separate wings which made them *'feel emptiness'*. However, 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 talked about how there was improved *'closeness...with staff and residents'* and how taking part had *'broke(n) 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, who were enthusiastic about the benefits of the arts on inmates. Whereas, some officers were perceived less supportive to arts interventions. One

participant commented that it had given him *'more confidence to speak to officers'*.

Relationships with family also were impacted. One inmate talked 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'*. Yet another talked about how they *'got emotional because I had no one there'* but 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. The positive 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 suggested the negative side to prison culture where some staff can be judgemental and negatively label prisoners which knocks esteem and confidence. 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'*.

Inmates described how health and well-being improved during the project but afterwards there was a *'crash'* from going back to 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 with unsupportive staff and none of the men from the project was hard in getting support for processing post-performance emotion. However, those with supportive prison officers on their wings and others from the project, felt the *'crash'* less explicitly. Furthermore, some participants were part of an on-going once a week theatre group and reported feeling less of a dip in emotion after the project due to

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'.

knowing they had a creative outlet where they could meet up with like-minded others.

Positive Approach of the Theatre Project Practitioners:

Prisoners talked about feeling *'more human'* during the 2-week project due to being treated as an *'equal'*. They said they got *'treated like a human, not a convict'*. The theatre facilitators successfully created a *'protected, safe space that helped me to open up'* and gave people *'the opportunity to speak'*, which was valued. Prisoners appreciated the *'structure'* of the sessions and how they were given choices when improvising and developing the script. They welcomed *'working together collaborating and creating'* and 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 positively and supportive of arts projects. Greater involvement of the wider prison senior leadership and prison officers would have been welcomed by the prisoners. The theatre project enabled supportive prisoner officers to build productive relationships with prisoners. Crewe^{64 65} 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). Hulley *et al*⁶⁶ 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 self-worth. Prisoners talked generally about a prison system that negatively impacted them. Our findings concur with classical research about the impact of negative judgements and labelling⁶⁷, institutionalisation⁶⁸ and impersonal power⁶⁹ and more recent debate from Morris *et al*⁷⁰ that negative strained institutionalised prisoner experience leads to negative prisoner attitude and behaviour. This is particularly interesting due to the links between strain theory and sex offenders identified by Ackerman and Sacks⁷¹ to the context of this study. Mann's⁷² findings point to the harsher treatment that sex offenders experience from staff and the stricter prison regime. The theatre project helped to alleviate these tensions and could provide role modelling to some prison staff to ways of working that has positive impact and can contribute to enhanced prison security. However, there is also evidence from Mann⁷³ that inmates with cultural capital manipulate relationships with staff through acting. As such, theatre projects may not be suitable for certain inmates who may use theatre skills to enhance manipulative performances with staff and the wider community. Such inmates may benefit from other forms of art disciplines.

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.

Conclusion:

Theatre arts projects in prison have 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. Theatre project staff facilitated

64. Crewe, B. (2009) *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. P3.

65. Crewe, B. (2011) Soft power in prison: implications for staff-prisoner relationships, liberty and legitimacy. *European Journal of Criminology*. Vol 8(6), PP455-468.

66. Hulley, S., Liebling, A. & Crewe, B. (2012) Respect in prisons: Prisoners' experiences of respect in public and private sector prisons. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*. Vol12(1), PP3-23

67. Becker, H. (1973) *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. The Free Press, New York.

68. Goffman, E. (1968) *Asylums, Essays of the Social Situations of Mental Patients*. Pelican, Harmondsworth.

69. Weber, M. (1948) *From Marx Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Ed Gerth H & Mills CW. Routledge & Kegan-Paul, London.

70. 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. *Journal of Criminal Justice* Vol40(3), PP194-201.

71. 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.

72. Mann, N. (2012) see n.59

73. *Ibid*.

in a respectful style that contrasted with some prison officers. Unsupportive prison officers undermine the rehabilitative culture of prisons. There needs to be consideration to prisoner transition from taking part in a theatre project to going back to usual daily prison routines to ensure mental well-being does not take a significant dip. Having supportive prison staff that appreciate the arts and peers from the project on the same wing, with opportunity to engage in weekly ongoing drama-based activity after the performance, can assist prisoners transitioning from a concentrated arts project back into regular prison routine. We found inmates particularly appreciated taking part in the theatre project if they were new to the prison because it helped them to settle in. We were 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 had positive impacts upon the prisoners. Theatre has the potential to help to rebuild families. A recommendation is for prisons to ensure that there are audience members to provide positive affirmation after an arts performance. This happened within this theatre project which helped to alleviate disappointment for those without family and friends in the audience.

Our experience of utilising the participatory consultation and research method of 'World Café' in the context of evaluating a theatre-based arts project in a UK prison setting, with adult male sex offenders, was positive. Prisoners regarded this data collection approach as enjoyable. The *'informal'* and *'fun'* environment helped facilitate the sharing of personal experiences and reflections on the project. The conversational approach to World Café as described by Brown and Issacs⁷⁴ enabled us to collect insightful 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 participants to *'debrief'* and *'get things off their chests'*. Some sensitive topics for investigation would not work for World Café in prisons and careful consideration is needed regarding which prisoners and prison staff to include at World Café events to maximise effectiveness of data collection and to reduce negative repercussions.

We adapted the World Café approach by reducing rotations, having a refreshment break (rather than ongoing refreshment supply on tables) and we accommodated prison requirements for our presentation format. Using table-hosts reduces elements of the participatory nature of the World Café but assists in capturing data where literacy levels might be a barrier to engagement. However, one limitation from recording data through writing is that responses tend to be captured in less detail than what was articulated in the discussion groups. Valuable participant-led anecdotal information is less likely to be captured. It would be interesting to explore enhancing the participatory nature of evaluation by engaging prisoners in shaping the research questions and becoming table-hosts. In a community setting, participatory approaches with engagement in design and delivery is empowering to those involved in the process and offers opportunity for skill development, self-esteem and confidence⁷⁵. With research skills being necessary for theatre-project scriptwriting, training inmates in research prior to the project could have enhanced scriptwriting research skills. This is an area for further research. Our participants talked about enjoying researching and developing the script and wanted more time to conduct research. Engaging offenders in the research process of evaluation could facilitate this and be enriching to those involved.

74. Brown, J. & Issacs, D. (2005) see n.7

75. Gratton, N. & Beddows, R. (2018) see n.6