



Ageing, Drama and Creativity: Inter-professional Training Course

Workshop Details and Resources

August 2013



Ageing, Drama and Creativity: Workshop Details and Resources

Introduction

'Ageing, Drama and Creativity' was a pilot six session inter-professional training course that took place February-April 2013. It focused on the use of intergenerational drama in professional practice and was delivered collaboratively by Keele University and the New Vic Theatre as part of the AHRC funded *Ages and Stages* follow-on project. The course developed practice capabilities and age awareness amongst professionals working in arts organisations, the voluntary sector, local government, health and social services and housing.

The six three-hour sessions took place at the New Vic Theatre and were facilitated by Head of Education, Jill Rezzano with support from Dr Miriam Bernard, Prof of Social Gerontology at Keele University, and Dr Michelle Rickett, Research Associate on *Ages and Stages*.

Themes included; ageing, drama and creativity; stereotyping; intergenerational relationships; and intergenerational drama in practice. Three sessions involved invited speakers/performers, including members of the intergenerational *Ages and Stages Theatre Company*, based at the New Vic. Course participants also attended a performance by the Company, entitled *Happy Returns*, at one of a number of regional venues.

This document gives detailed aims and objectives of the course. It provides an overview of each of the sessions; summarises the exercises that were used, and provides web links for further information.



The Ages and Stages Company

Aims of the Course

The overall aims of the course were:

- To bring together professionals from a range of settings to learn and share expertise and experiences in relation to intergenerational drama.
- To increase the practice capabilities of learners by providing them with tools and techniques from drama, education and Social Gerontology.
- To increase the age awareness of learners through practical exercises, discussion and reflection on their own experiences and professional settings.
- To create a network of learners who would be able to continue to support each other and share their experiences after the training ends.

Specific learning objectives included:

- Introduce participants to thinking critically about ageing and about how we socially construct older - and younger – people (ie. what we as a society do/don't do: restrict; constrain; facilitate etc; what we do/don't value).
- Explore how an understanding of the life course can inform experiences of ageing and intergenerational relations.
- Explore some key principles underpinning thinking about ageing and the relations between the generations.
- Examine myths and assumptions about ageing; old people and young people.
- Examine the value of chronological age as a basis for understanding ageing.
- Look at the meaning of ageism and examples of ageism.
- Look at how ageism manifests itself in, for example, our workplaces and at how it can be challenged.
- Look at how we can use this material and these experiences in creative ways to help challenge ageism and inform other people's understandings of what ageing is like – for both older and younger people.
- Draw – and reflect on - your own experiences in the workshop debates and discussions.

Session 1

Ageing, Drama and Creativity: Introduction – an introduction to the key course themes with practical exercises and examples to get participants thinking about ageing and social relationships across the life course.

Summary

This session introduced participants to a range of informal activities designed to set ground rules for the course, to contribute to the evaluation design, and to act as ice-breakers. The activities were closely focused on the issue of age and ageism, and encouraged people to reflect on their own experiences of ageing. In discussion, there were many suggestions about how the ideas could be adapted by participants to use in their own work, especially when developing intergenerational programmes. The session concluded with an activity that demonstrated how a dramatic scene could emerge from these informal activities.

Activities

- ‘Ground rules’/‘Hopes and Fears’ exercises. For example, it is important to note that sharing stories should always be voluntary when working with groups – the stories may not always be positive and people may not be willing to share them.
- Ice-breakers – e.g. meanings of names, ‘people bingo’, ‘If I was Queen’
- ‘Value line exercise’: Quotes taken from *Ages and Stages* workshops and interviews were read out. Participants were asked to stand close to Jill if they agreed with the statement, further back if they agreed less/weren’t sure, and towards the back if they disagreed. Statements included:
 - ‘If something is interesting, I’ll take a risk, I’ll get involved’.
 - ‘There comes a time when you have to step aside’.
 - ‘I don’t even think about ageing’.
 - ‘There are young people who’ve given up already’.
 - ‘The media has done a lot to damage relations between young and old people’.
 - ‘I don’t mind stopping, I just don’t want to be told to stop’.

Participants were then asked to share their reasons with the group for choosing to stand where they had.

- ‘Lifeline exercise’: in advance of the start of the course, participants had been sent two lifeline templates: one showing events over the life course and the other mapping ups and downs (like a temperature chart) and asked to produce, and bring along, their own versions. Prompts for discussion included:
 - What has stayed the same over time / changed?
 - What triggered the peaks and troughs?
 - How would you describe personal development in terms of your own life course?

They discussed these lifelines in pairs, thinking about similarities and differences between people and changes over time. The exercise emphasises that ageing happens over a life course.

- ‘Decisions exercise’: Participants were divided into pairs and asked to sit opposite each other and describe either 1) ‘A decision that they had made for someone else’ 2) ‘A decision someone made for them’. The listener was asked to remember three words from the speaker’s story. The point of the exercise was that the words that came from people’s own experiences were more powerful than if they had simply identified a range of words linked to decision making in general.
- ‘Decisions exercise’ – frozen image: the session concluded with groups of participants choosing a situation where an older person made a decision for a younger person or a younger person made a decision for an older person. This could be a personal experience or an imagined experience. They then had to create a frozen image to represent their chosen situation. This demonstrated how a dramatic scene could begin to emerge from informal activities.

Session 2

Ageing and Stereotyping – a thematic workshop with practical exercises and examples focussing on images of ageing, ageism and stereotypes.

Summary

This session focused primarily on stereotypes and assumptions, and how these might be challenged. It concluded with a piece of Forum Theatre, involving actors from the *Ages and Stages* theatre group, which was about a 55 year old employee experiencing oppression in the workplace. The audience collectively identified strategies to address this ageism and volunteers then acted out these new strategies with the performers. At every stage, course participants were encouraged to reflect upon how they could use the activities and approaches that were demonstrated, in their own professional practice.

Activities

- Ice-breaker: Participants divided into pairs and, with their partners, found 5 things that they have physically in common. No preparation is needed for this exercise and it is particularly good for varied groups (ages, ethnicity, ability) who may think, initially, that they have nothing in common.
- Drama activity: revisiting and further development of the final activity of the previous session: two of the words that had been identified from people's experiences of decisions were included in short (20 second) pieces of dialogue that served to bring the frozen images to life.
- 'Assumptions' exercise (part 1): sheets were given out with a number of partially completed sentences on:
 - I thought.....but I was wrong
 - He thought.....
 - She thought.....

Participants were asked to fill in the gaps/complete the sentences, and this becomes the start of a conversation. The conversation includes discussion of the extent to which assumptions are based on personal experiences or on learned perceptions.

The exercise brings out people's concerns and can address people's invisibility. They may be based on primitive instincts but they (stereotypes) can have adverse consequences.

- 'Assumptions' exercise (part 2): groups created short drama sequences based on the sentences used. The focus was on what 'wrong' looks like – what it does to you, and what changes. The exercise encourages reflection on the impact of stereotypes and assumptions.
- Stereotypes/images exercise: facilitators and participants had brought in a range of articles, leaflets, adverts and cartoons that they considered to demonstrate stereotypical assumptions about age. These were used as the basis for group discussions.
- 'Forum Theatre' exercise: members of the *Ages and Stages* theatre group came in to perform a Forum Theatre piece about a 55 year old employee experiencing oppression in the workplace. In Forum Theatre, the audience can stop a performance in which a character is being oppressed and can suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in order to try to change the outcome of what they are seeing. Furthermore, if an audience member is confident enough to do so (as was the case in this workshop), then they can actually take the place of the oppressed person in order to demonstrate their suggestion.

Session 3

Understanding Intergenerational relationships - a thematic workshop with practical exercises and examples exploring attitudes between the generations.

Summary

This session used a variety of prompts (from simple questions to photographs from New Vic Theatre performances and quotes from *Ages and Stages* research participants) to further develop discussions about ageing and attitudes to ageing and to reflect on participants' own experiences of intergenerational relationships, their social networks and how these had changed over time.

Activities

- Warm-up exercise - 'name torpedoes': to practice remembering people's names. Participants stood in a circle and approached someone at the opposite side, saying their name. Before they reached them, the person they were approaching then had to approach someone else, again saying their name. This builds up to 'name torpedoes', when two or more people do this at the same time.
- 'How old are you?/how old do you feel? These two simple questions formed the basis of a group discussion about ageing and attitudes to ageing.
- New Vic photographs exercise: a number of photographs taken at New Vic Theatre productions were used to prompt discussions. Each photograph features people from different generations in some kind of relationship/interaction with each other. Participants were asked to consider:
 - Who are the people in the photo?
 - What is the relationship between them?
 - What is happening?

After small group discussions, each person in the group stood up and began with 'I wonder....' then said something that they were curious about in the photograph/ in the relationship depicted. This activity is an 'exercise in curiosity'. The photographs act as a stimulus for reading relationships between people, and draw attention to some of the stereotypes that we might have about people of different ages and about the nature of intergenerational relationships.

- Social network diagrams: participants had been given and asked to complete social network diagrams as part of their 'homework' from the previous session. These were used as the basis of a discussion about people's relationships, and how life course changes might impact on these. One person volunteered to have their diagram visualised, which involved participants representing particular people in that person's life. The people who are closest to the person form an 'inner circle' and the participant who has volunteered explains the significance and role of each person/relationship.
- *Ages and Stages* quotes: a selection of quotes from the *Ages and Stages* interviews were used as the basis for a discussion about who might have said the words; what

age they might be, and what kind of situation they might be referring to. Groups of participants were then asked to create short scenes that featured one of the quotes.

- Guest speaker (Louise Middleton, Beth Johnson Foundation). The talk included a demonstration of the 'gingerbread figure exercise', which focuses on cross-generational age stereotypes. The exercise involves drawing two gingerbread figures on a piece of flipchart paper; one representing a young person and one an older person. Inside the older figure participants write words representing younger people's perceptions of older people; inside the younger figure they write words representing older people's perceptions of younger people. It can be a good preparation exercise for groups of younger and older people, before bringing them together. It provides an opportunity to discuss stereotypes and where they come from. This exercise led to further discussion about the challenges of intergenerational practice, with participants reflecting on their own experiences.

Session 4

By individual arrangement, all participants attended one of the *Happy Returns* tour performances by the intergenerational *Ages and Stages Theatre Company*, and were asked to write a reflective piece about the experience.

Session 5

Intergenerational Practice, Drama and Creativity I – a task-oriented workshop giving participants the opportunity to focus on their own intergenerational practice or professional context.

Summary

In this session, the focus was on places and their meanings to participants. It began with global perspectives on place (with activities relating to a building or monument of world importance); then it moved to a local perspective, with participants having been asked to bring along photographs of important local buildings. Finally, the perspective became personal, with people's own stories about places that had been significant in their own personal histories. At every stage, participants were shown how to introduce prompts for

discussion amongst the groups that they work with, which could then be developed into both still and animated images. As throughout the course, the activities are intended to be adaptable to different contexts and groups.

Activities

- Warm-up exercise: letters and objects. Participants split into groups and were given a letter of the alphabet. They had ten seconds to devise a visual image representing something beginning with that letter. To further develop this exercise, participants produce an image that can be animated.
- Global building/monument exercise: participants produced a visual image of a building or monument of world importance – something that people of any age group would be able to identify. When the image has been produced, other participants pretend to be tourists visiting the building/monument. They guess what the building is, and then talk about it to each other, (improvising, as tourists) without actually naming the building. To further develop this exercise, the groups then physically arrange themselves and the buildings/monuments that they have chosen on an imaginary world map.
- Significant local buildings: in this exercise the focus moves from the global to the local, as participants bring along and discuss photographs of local buildings or places. When working with groups from the same area, these buildings/places can also be physically mapped in relation to each other.
- Significant local buildings: still images. This further develops the previous exercise: groups chose one of the significant buildings and then created a visual image of something that happens/has happened there. A spotlight can move around each of the images, and the idea is again to stimulate curiosity in participants about their own communities. To develop the activity still further, sounds and words can be added to the images. The exercise can be expanded so that different people's perspectives on particular places can be visually represented. This can be interesting as the images can reveal things that have happened; are happening; or could happen, in particular places. The exercise reveals different stories relating to different parts of people's lives.

- ‘The key’ exercise: this exercise develops the personal perspective on places. The group were given an unidentified key. The key was passed round the group - each person had to say ‘this key’ then something about it (e.g. where it was found, who it belonged to).
- First key stories: the group were then asked to think about the first key they were given. How old were they? What was the key for? In small groups, people shared stories about their first keys.
- First key walkthrough: a volunteer from the group agreed to give the rest of the participants a ‘guided tour’ of the place that their first key related to, describing it in detail.

Session 6

Intergenerational Practice, Drama and Creativity II – continuation of session five: participants have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt.

Summary

At the end of the previous session, participants were allocated to small groups and asked to devise and prepare a 10 minute practical exercise to show to the whole group in week 6. The brief was to develop an exercise that could be used in one of their work settings. It could be an exercise covered in the course; a development/adaptation of an exercise covered in the course, or an original exercise.

Activities

- Warm-up ‘name game’ exercises.
- Participants then led a variety of practical exercises based on the learning from the course. These included:
 - An exercise focused on place, which used photographs as the main stimulus.
 - An exercise that explored and challenged generational perceptions and stereotypes, using photographs initially and, later, toys and literature.
 - An exercise focused on holidays and sensory memories, using postcards as the initial stimulus.

- An exercise using drama that explored stereotypical assumptions between people of different generations.

AGEING, DRAMA AND CREATIVITY – ONLINE RESOURCES

Course participants were provided with a Resource Pack which included biographies of Course Leaders and course participants; selected articles about ageing, ageism and intergenerational relations, and a list of online resources as detailed below:

Theatre and Ageing – UK

- Video reports about 'Juliet and her Romeo', a reworking of Romeo and Juliet, based in a care unit, at Bristol Old Vic Theatre
 - 1) http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_8848000/8848774.stm
 - 2) http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/bristol/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_8490000/8490658.stm
- 'On Ageing', a production by the 'Fevered Sleep' theatre company -
 - 1) <http://feveredsleep.co.uk/archive/onageing/>
 - 2) <http://www.youngvic.org/archive/on-ageing>
- Reviews of 'On Ageing' –
 - 1) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/sep/07/on-ageing-fevered-sleep>
 - 2) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/8009428/On-Ageing-at-the-Young-Vic-what-age-do-you-still-wish-you-were.html>
- Video clip about the Vintage Theatre Coop, actors all over 70. The aim of the group is 'to break down the myths of how the older person should behave and act' - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-WGakwbl8>:
- The making of 'George', Brian Clark's play about ageing - <http://vimeo.com/3814700>
- Manchester City Council's Valuing Older People's Cultural Offer Working Group - <http://www.allaboutaudiences.com/projects/valuingolderpeople>

Intergenerational Relationships and Practice – UK

- The Centre for Intergenerational Practice (Beth Johnson Foundation) – includes a resources tab with links to other UK intergenerational projects and strategies, and downloadable publications by the Centre - <http://www.centreforip.org.uk/>
- Scottish Centre for Intergenerational Practice - <http://www.scotcip.org.uk/>
- Age UK's 'intergenerational volunteer' programme - <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-in-your-community/integrational-volunteer/>
- 'Intergenerational Practice: a review of the literature' – research report free download -

http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LIG01/LIG01_home.cfm?publicationID=71&title=Intergenerational%20practice:%20a%20review%20of%20the%20literature

Theatre, Ageing and Intergenerational Practice – International

- Information about the intergenerational 'GeriActors' theatre group in Edmonton, Canada (we are linked with them through the University of Alberta project, 'Health and Creative Aging: Theatre as a Pathway to Healthy Aging'):
<http://geriactors.ualberta.ca/>
- More about the 'Health and Creative Aging' project:
<http://www.rapp.ualberta.ca/en/Research/TheatreAndHealthyAging.aspx>
- David Barnet (Director of GeriActors) talking on Edmonton TV about the 2011 Creative Age Festival:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzI4nJD-yxw>
- The Big Telly Theatre Company 'Spring Chickens' project – a creative arts project for older people in Northern Ireland:
<http://www.big-telly.com/springchickens.html>
Spring Chickens video - <http://www.big-telly.com/springchickens/Belfast.htm>
- 'Wicked Widows', a play based on Susan Feldman's PhD research on widowhood. Susan is a member of the Ages and Stages Advisory Group and is based at Monash University, Australia.
<http://www.med.monash.edu.au/sphc/haru/conference09/wicked-widows.html>
Clip from 'Wicked Widows' - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUO6D5yVeLY>
- Video clip about 'Stagebridge', USA's oldest Senior Theatre Company based in Oakland, California.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0c8HaMjnDI>

Ageing and Creativity

- Magic Me – an intergenerational arts organisation based in Tower Hamlets, East London - <http://www.magicme.co.uk/>
- Age Exchange, an organisation focused on reminiscence work with older people, using the creative arts- <http://www.age-exchange.org.uk/>
- The 'Penelope Project' by Anne Basting at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee – a creative project in a long term care community. Anne is a member of the Ages and Stages Advisory Group:
<http://penelopeproject.wordpress.com/about/>
- 'Penelope Project' podcast - <http://thirdcoastdigest.com/2011/01/podcastthe-penelope-project-redefining-age-and-memory-loss/>

- Timeslips storytelling project, by Anne Basting - <http://www.timeslips.org/>
- Video about the Bealtaine Ireland Festival, which is about celebrating creativity in older age
<http://bealtaine.com/videos-and-comments>

Ageing – General Interest <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA>

- YouTube timeline of Jeanne Calment, the oldest human ever -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5XDuyE8SD8&feature=related>
- ‘Lost Generation’ video – 20 somethings imagining their life beyond the age of 50 -
www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA
- DAVOS Forum on the ageing society -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vzo7lit2AU>
- New Dynamics of Ageing programme - <http://www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/>
- Desmond O’Neill blog about ageing/gerontology on the BMJ website -
<http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/category/desmond-oneill/>

Ages and Stages project

- Ages and Stages website - <http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages/>
- Ages and Stages blog - <http://www.agesandstagesproject.blogspot.com/>