

Hi I am Umut Erel I am a sociologist at the Open University. Hi I am Erene Kaptani a research fellow performance maker and drama therapist working for this project at the Open University.

In this online teaching video we will be giving an introduction to how participatory theatre methods can be used in social research. This is based on the Participatory Arts and Social Action Research project which I led. It looked at how we can use participatory theatre and walking methods to engage marginalized groups in research. Maggie O'Neill from the University of York and Tracy Reynolds from the University of Greenwich were the co-investigators and Erene Kaptani was the research fellow. Maggie O'Neill and Tracy Reynolds are presenting another video online resource which looks specifically at participatory walking methods you might like to also watch that. Now let me begin with a brief overview of this project. The project researched the opportunities and challenges of participatory theatre and walking methods for social research and how these methods can create a space for exploring, sharing and documenting processes of belonging and place making among migrant families. The project develops methods and methodological knowledge of participatory theatre and walking methods by looking at how these methods can generate research data, how they can help engage participants in dialogue with other social groups and thirdly how these methods can generate a model for engaging research participants, policymakers and practitioners in an integrated way from research to engagement and dissemination. This has involved working with social scientists and arts practitioners as well as collaborating with other partner organizations such as Counterpoint Arts, RENA ISI and The Runnymede Trust. You can find more information on the project and further resources from the methods such as a toolkit and a series of short videos on the project website.

The participatory theatre research practice in this project is based on the participatory performance I have been developing through my collaborations in different social research and public engagement projects. I used different techniques of playback theatre drawing on Jonathan Fox and forum theatre drawing on Augusto Boal as well as psychosocial methods of physical theatre exercises on everyday movements and interactions visualization of everyday routes an emotional mapping of localities. As well I used an exercise called talking to the panel where participants present their concerns to a panel of policy experts played by actors. But why are these in social research? Through research conducted with Yuval-Davis between 2005 and 2008 under the ESRC Identities Program we found that theatre methods emphasize dialogic performative and embodied ways of knowing. This speaks to epistemological and methodological concerns of feminist post-colonial or decolonial and participatory action research.

Yes participatory theatre offers social researchers a performative way beyond language of engaging with the experiences, views and knowledge of research participants. This is really helpful when working with research participants whose English language skills might be limited or those who do not have the cultural capital to be confident to engage discursively with researchers.

Yes absolutely research using participatory theatre methods can draw out responses that are relational, tacit experiential or effective rather than simply cognitive. Another useful aspect of participatory theatre is that it constitutes a liminal space. An in between space where social reality is suspended. When participants play out scenes from their everyday life in this liminal space these experiences can be de-familiarized and this de-familiarization allows participants and researchers to observe, analyze and theorize these experiences together. As a

form of action research this further allows researchers and participants to reflect together on the power relations and social structures as well as behaviors involved in making the social world. In this online teaching video we focus on one particular technique of participatory theatre that is forum theatre. Augusto Boal developed forum theatre as part of the Theatre of the Oppressed. It is based on the principles of collective empowerment and emancipation by Paulo Freire who is a theorist and practitioner of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. As Freire explains and I'm citing 'our conceptualization of participatory ethics is motivated by a vision of what could be and the possibilities of addressing asymmetries of power privilege and knowledge production' - unquote - Boal used this ethics to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed this broke down the boundaries between actors and spectators to allow participants to become what he called spectator's who can do both acting and reflecting. In a in a series of workshops a theatre practitioner trains participants in basic theatre skills through games and exercises to learn to use the body as a tool for expression. Then participants are invited to show a scene of their choice on a personal experience of a social problem conflict or dilemma. Other participants watch the scene and step into the role of the protagonist to suggest an alternative course of action try out different solutions to a problem.

In this next scene we can see an issue which many of the mothers experienced. That is they feel caught up between caring for their families in the UK and their parents and family members transnationally. This tension was part of all participants' lives and here they show a scene of asking the head teacher for special leave to take their child out of school to be able to visit a sick relative abroad.

Headteacher: Good morning.

Mother1: Morning. Can you help me please? I want to go on holiday. It's not holiday because like my dad is not feeling well he's in the hospital however.

Headteacher: Sorry it's not allowed I'm afraid it's not allowed.

Mother1: But I have to go it is my dad.

Headteacher: No I have to it's out of the rule.

Mother1: Only five days.

Headteacher I've said it twice and I'm saying it for the last time I cannot authorize this is that clear?

Mother1: You have to listen to me I have to go! It is my dad not just anyone I have to go there I don't anyone to look after my children.

Headteacher: Sorry you need to leave now because I cannot do it.

Researcher: What was she doing?

Participant1: She was ignoring her.

Participant2: Looking somewhere else.

Participant3: She is not really looking at her. She is not bothering.

Participant 4: She is doing yeah she didn't even listen till the end of the yes sentence no listen just no.

Researcher: Can you see her body she is there you know she's not like know but still that it's so powerful how your body is even this little things like the writing and not looking. Is there something that the mother could do? How come she got refused then?

Participant 5: Because she didn't event want to listen properly. Even if just I want to appeal.

Researcher: Come in we want to see that. Can you take her position?

Participant5/Mother2: I have to go.

Headteacher: Yes but I just can't let you. You need to leave now madam.

Mother2: I'm sorry but I have a genuine reason that have come here. I got a relative that's seriously ill I've come here for your permission but if you're not gonna give it to me I will seek other means, even if that that means even if that means appealing it. Because you haven't even asked me the reason for my journey.

Headteacher: All right then let me think it over see me in two days' time.

Mother2: Thank you very much.

Researcher: What changed what was different?

Participant: Because she said she's gonna appeal. It helped to change behavior she's normally last yeah yeah she's a not relax and say okay how think about it.

Researcher: She actually looked at her. That was a big change. What made you look at her?

Headteacher: Because she's quoting rules.

Augusto Boal argued but forum theatre allows participants to rehearse for social change in real life through their interventions in the scenes. We just saw in this scene that this can involve challenging institutional rules which assume normative family lives and do not take account of transnational families. Participants' interventions are about trying out different solutions and experiencing the steps necessary for change. Such interventions may not be successful in fully achieving the spec actors aims but they can nonetheless lead to a changed situation and for social research such scenes are very productive as we can see the social constructiveness and the multiple possibilities of social life.

So forum theatre is useful as it allows researchers and participants to reflect together on the social construction of reality, identifying social structures which lead to oppressions. It also allows participants to try out social action validating participants' local subjugated knowledge. As this is a collective process each individual interventions brings a new aspect of knowledge into the scene and participants learn from each other. There are of course challenges of using participatory theatre for social research as it requires collaborations

between artists and academics. Working across the academia and participatory arts are challenging as they employ different practices. Both researchers and arts practitioners need to allocate time for meetings to design and negotiate each step of the process. Forum theatre is oriented towards exploring participants' agency in negotiating coping with and also challenging social power structures most of the time this is represented by an individual actor or individual actors. However it's important not to foreshorten the analysis of power or oppression simply to interpersonal relationships or to individualize responsibility for social problems and their solution. To address this challenge enough time needs to be spent to reflect with participants about structural power relations institutional and organizational aspects and also possibilities for collective action. Another challenge is to ensure that participants are invited to give shape to the themes and issues they want to explore in order to avoid a hegemonic gaze which casts them only as having problems. This challenge can be counterbalanced by allowing participants to express all aspects of their experiences. We did this also by using other methods such as playback theatre, physical theatre, psychosocial mapping and of course walking methods. To conclude participatory theatre methods can contribute embodied dialogic and affective knowledge to social research. The methods help to create a convivial space for participants to exchange experiences and build shared knowledge and address social isolation. The methods hold the potential to articulate subjugated knowledge collectively and through research dissemination can reach wider audiences. These methods can make an important contribution to research on issues which are difficult to address verbally. For example in our research with migrant families we were able to explore embodied knowledge of racism, care and relationship building which can be difficult to articulate verbally. As we're experiencing the widening of inequalities in the UK and globally it becomes more important for researchers to ensure that participants can co-produce knowledge about themselves and contribute to developing policy and practices about the issues affecting them.