

## **International Conference Presentation**

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**Title** 'The man in the mac': an acting/ teaching analogy.

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#### **Abstract**

The notion that lecturing has similarities to acting is not an unfamiliar one to teachers (Quinn and Hughes 2007). This is because, standing in front of a large number of people communicating a narrative, creating a presence, whilst using captivating devices to hold the an audiences attention could potentially result in either teaching or acting (Street 2007). This analogy is particularly pertinent because the emphasis on managerial performativity places the lecturer in a vulnerable position for scrutiny and evaluation (Avis 2005; Muijs 2006) as delivering a lecture is one of the most public elements of a lecturer's role (Race 2001). Hence considering how acting may have influenced the development of a teachers could add another perspective to the development of teachers.

A purposeful sample of 10 teachers, who were also trained actors, participated in the study. The aim was to explore whether they perceived if there were any similarities between acting and teaching. Data was gathered via unstructured in-depth audio taped interviews and analysed thematically.

Within the findings six key themes emerged, these represented the main similarities between acting and teaching from the perceptive of these participants. Although these themes were clearly delineated, there was a degree of interrelatedness between them. Furthermore, each of these themes was underpinned by the element of performance in terms of both being able to physically perform each element but also creating a performance in its own right.

The theme of 'communicating and sustaining an impact' was based on verbal and non-verbal communication techniques, but also included issues like timing, improvisation, humour pace and energy. These allowed the actor and teacher to initially create, but then maintain, an impact with the audience through the performance or session, an issue that they clearly felt was important both to acting and teaching.

While the first theme dealt with how you created an impact the 'presenting confidence' theme represented the type of impact you created eg confident, enthusiastic or nervous. It was considered that presenting confidence was important both to actors and teachers as the participants felt that an audience or students may be able to tell if the performer was confident or not. However, they did identify that their acting training had given them the ability to control their verbal and non-verbal cues to maximise a confident persona on stage or in front of a class.

The 'narrative and creating meaning' theme dealt with the communication of the subject knowledge or narrative whether that was concerned with the physiology of the heart or portraying love in Romeo and Juliet. This theme not only included subject knowledge, but dramaturgical and pedagogical knowledge in terms of knowing how to portray a convincing character or being able to communicate a dry theoretical subject in an interesting way. Hence creating meaning was an integral part of communicating the narrative in both education and acting.

The theme 'sensing and responding to the audience' was important. It was clear that these participants felt that an actor or teacher can evidently sense the audience and that this in turn can influence the way the teacher/actor then performs. This was based on the actor/teachers ability to build relationships and 'work off' other people either actors or the students, but this was reliant on the level of confidence.

Within the theme 'finding your place' it was evident that as a teacher you need to find your own style or persona, by using elements of yourself. Similarly in acting the actor would use elements of themselves to find the character they are portraying. But it was evident that experience for both teachers or actors would enhance a their ability to find their place.

'Commitment and motivation' was the final theme and dealt with the performers commitment to acting or teaching and their motivation to do it well. This also dealt with issues of value for money as audiences and students would have paid for the theatre ticket or education.

In conclusion, it appears there were six key similarities between acting and teaching identified within this study. These teachers all felt that their acting training had made a significant impact on their development as teachers. This was not to say that all teachers should be actors, more an acknowledgement that learning from the performing arts could make a positive contribution to teacher development.

In the words of one respondent:-

*'I was an actor for a long time before I was teaching. When I started teaching. I thought I would have to readdress all of that. But, as I began to teach I quickly realised that everything I learnt at drama school and everything I learnt acting, writing and directing was exactly what I needed to be a good teacher.'*

## **References**

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