

Negotiating Narrative Identity in Intercultural Contexts - the Role of Applied Theatre

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how applied theatre can facilitate arenas and methods to support identity development particularly favorable to an intercultural context, explored through the concept of *narrative identity*. Identity and identity processes may be extra challenging to people with intercultural backgrounds. Research shows that how you master your identity affects how you master your life. A case study of two intercultural applied theatre projects was used to address the research question. The article builds on the experiences of two drama teachers and one teaching artist / artistic leader. The interpretation and analysis of the theory related to practice makes visible how aesthetic processes of negotiating and staging life stories (narratives), through applied theatre methods, facilitate participant's exploring, constructing, re-constructing and meta-reflecting own identity.

Keywords: *Narrative identity; intercultural identity; applied theatre; aesthetic educational practice; intercultural education*

Sammendrag

Denne studien tar utgangspunkt i konseptet *narrativ identitet* og undersøker hvordan anvendt drama kan tilby en arena og metoder som støtter en identitetsutvikling som er spesielt gunstig i interkulturell kontekst. Forskning understreker at hvordan et individ mestrer identiteten sin påvirker hvordan livet mestres. Identitetsprosesser kan være ekstra utfordrende for mennesker med interkulturell bakgrunn. Artikkelen baserer seg på erfaringene til to dramalærere fra et anvendt teaterprosjekt og en teaching artist / kunstnerisk leder fra et annet, begge prosjektene opererer i interkulturell kontekst. Tolkning og analyse av teori relatert til praksis synliggjør hvordan estetiske forhandlingsprosesser og iscenesettelse av livshistorier (narrativ) tilrettelegger for at deltakere får utforske, konstruere og rekonstruere, samt meta-reflektere over egen identitet.

Søkeord: *Narrativ identitet; interkulturell identitet; anvendt teater; estetisk utdanningspraksis; interkulturell utdanning*

Received: September 2016; Accepted: December 2016; Published: January 2017

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Citation: H. M. Haraldsen and S. Ingul. "Negotiating Narrative Identity in Intercultural Contexts - the Role of Applied Theatre." *Journal for Research in Arts and Sports Education*, Vol. 1, 2017, pp. 69–82.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.23865/jased.v1.536> 69

Introduction

Most areas of our society need intercultural cooperation and dialogue in order to maintain a sound and inclusive democracy. This is particularly important in the field of education in order to ensure a safe and productive daily life for all students. Identity is an important aspect of the development of personality and creates conditions for learning, development and participation in society (Castells, 2011; Giddens, 1991). Sociology and social psychology view identity as reflexively negotiated in a reciprocal relationship between self and society often expressed in narratives (Castells, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2012). Narrative identity as understood in psychology and sociology is the core theoretical concept of this study. It describes how and why people tell their constructed, autobiographical story with an inner storyline of characters, plots, turning points and possible outcomes (McAdams, 2012; McAdams, 2013; McAdams & Guo, 2015).

Building identity in the context of our complex modern time may be a lifelong self-realization project (Giddens, 1991). People with intercultural background may experience this process as especially challenging because their individual development of identity as well as their individual aspirations and goals may be out of line with collective identity markers linked to ethnicity, gender and culturally defined collective interests (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2012). International research underpins that there are different ways of handling these challenges, and that some ways are more beneficial related to psychological well-being, access to opportunities in life and degree of participation in society (Huynh et al., 2012; Umana-Taylor, 2012; Unger, 2012). Mastering one's identity is therefore an important part of mastering life. There is sparse research on these matters within Norwegian educational context in the scope of applied theatre, even though international research points out the importance of addressing the topic. The point of departure for this study is that applied theatre might address this issue also in an intercultural context.

In the following, we will raise and discuss some theoretical and applied perspectives that have become apparent through our research process. The aim of the study is to investigate how the teaching artist / drama teachers of two applied theatre projects in intercultural settings perceive that they facilitate the development of narrative identity in their participants. Our research question is: *What experiences do the teaching artist / drama teachers of two chosen applied theatre projects in intercultural contexts acknowledge when it comes to their participants' exploring, constructing, re-constructing and meta-reflecting their narrative identity?*

Before we proceed to the study, we will start by contextualizing construction and negotiation of narrative identity in late modernity and outline the main aspects of the theory of narrative identity.

Identity in the context of our time

The word identity derives from the Greek word *idem*, meaning 'the same', 'likeness' (Caprona, 2013), something static that is constituted in fixed concepts like

personality, gender, ethnicity, nationality, education, class and profession (Vignoles et al., 2012). This way of perceiving identity has changed alongside the world becoming socially more complex. Today most people perceive identity as something under constant construction and the many channels of social media open up a myriad of possibilities for exploring different expressions of identity in interaction with the environment (Gran, 2004).

The problem of identity has evolved regarding the level of abstraction and reflection from traditional societies that did not theorize identity at all to the staged and self-reflexive identities in our theatrical times. There is no innocence left in the self-reflexive production of identity; identity is forever mediated, staged and planned (Gran, 2004, p. 55, our translation).

This understanding and handling of identity that unfolds in our society today is connected to the features of late modernity according to Anthony Giddens (1991). Giddens identifies the Western world as complex, dynamic and fragmented with challenges that unsettle the foundations of individuals' being. He claims that the ability to construct a *self-identity* is one of the most important skills in late modernity, and that doubt connected to the dislodging of authority is a trait of our time. Authority has, according to Giddens been moved from families and local communities to experts and organizations that often contradict each other, and thus, nourish the doubt. This change from a time and place specific collective authority to a nonspecific time and place with individual responsibility involves a reorganizing, even a 'dissolving' of time and space (Giddens, 1991). This changes the premises and conditions for the construction of self-identity, amplifying the fundamental need of feeling safe, of *ontological security*, the opposite of existential anxiety. When this security exists, it may open the door to self-identity construction, self-realization and individual freedom. Giddens describes modern human beings as responsible, flexible, self-reflexive and morally anchored in a positive spiral of eternal self-realization. One could say he describes 'the successful few' with the freedom, resources and security to make 'the correct choices'. One could also say that this is overly optimistic and that not everyone fits the bill, not everyone copes with the constant demands of self-realization and -presentation. The sociologist Manuel Castells (Castells, 2005, 2011) has labeled a possibly antisocial kind of identity that does not cope so well with the demanding life in late modernity, namely *resistance identity*. Resistance identity may occur among people that are marginalized by dominating groups in society. In their social exclusion, they construct their identity in opposition to the establishment, often nourished by conspiracy theories. Castells calls it "the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded" (Castells, 2011, p. 9) and points at the dangers of someone falling on the outside of society lacking a successful self-realization and -identity. With this study in mind we suggest, that this highlights the importance of acknowledging and facilitating support for narrative identity development for students in the educational system.

We have now argued that a traditional understanding of identity is no longer valid in the modern society. If someone does experience a sense of unity, it is not because it

actually ‘exists’, but because of an explored, constructed, re-constructed and meta-reflected autobiographical story; a *narrative identity story* told in order to establish a meaningful whole (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 2012).

Narrative identity – developing identity through roles of actor, agent and author

Identity (McAdams, 2012, 2013, 2015) as a psychological term, rooted in the work of Erik Erikson (Erikson, 1959, 1993), describes how young adults begin to organize their life in time. McAdams uses terminology from drama and theatre to describe identity as an inner storyline, identifying three psychological layers of self that human beings navigate their identity through; ‘actor’, ‘agent’ and ‘author’ (McAdams, 2013). The psychological layers ‘phase in’ one by one and become more sophisticated as one grows older. The ‘actor’ (from about age 2) lives in the present testing and playing out different roles in interaction with the surroundings. The ability to act with authenticity turns vital, as role-playing becomes an essential tool in social negotiating of own identity. The richer the repertoire, the more flexible the negotiation. The self as ‘agent’ (from age 4–5) is more calculated than the actor, operating in the present and the future. The agent has plans, dreams, desires and long-term goals that mirror the given expectations of the surroundings: ‘the script’. Mastering the role of the agent is depending on a sense of *empowerment*. This freedom to take part in own life facilitates the planning and shaping of ‘possible selves’, the production of one’s own ‘script’, counteracting resistant identity (Castells, 2011; McAdams, 2013, 2015). The self as ‘author’ (occurs in late adolescence) operates in mutual exchange with the actor and the agent and creates stories that explain what the social actor does, what the motivated agent wants and what it all means in the greater context of the narrative self. The author operates in the past, the present and the future, interprets autobiographical stories within the frame of the culture (McAdams, 2013). Finding self-continuity is essential. The lack of continuity might provoke psychological dissonance, ill-being and potentially an identity crisis (Holmgren & Hansen, 2010; McAdams, 2012).

McAdams and colleagues reveal that different cultures will emphasize and promote different cultural framings that nurture the three layers of the narrative self (McAdams, 2012, 2013). Research shows that the culture sets norms and conditions for the ‘actor’, provides scripts and priorities for the ‘agent’, and provides a menu to choose from for the ‘author’s’ use of images, characters and metaphors (McAdams, 2013). McAdams’ findings are based on research among different ethnic communities in America, and the research makes visible that Asian cultures tend to focus more on collective and social roles (for example expressed in keeping up a facade and respecting authorities), while Western cultures tend to focus on individual skills and self-realization (McAdams, 2013). American research shows that having several and different cultural foundations, with contrary individual and collective priorities may complicate the identity development and -construction. International research reveals that there are different strategies of handling living under such conditions

(Huynh et al., 2012; Umana- Taylor, 2012; Unger, 2012). For instance, having an identity that is culturally divided and conflicted, is associated with lower tolerance for other cultures, resistance towards new experiences, greater language barriers and cultural isolation (Huynh et al., 2012). While an embedded and harmonic intercultural identity is associated with higher self-esteem, less depression, less anxiety and loneliness (Huynh et al., 2012). In other words, how an individual handles identity affects how life is handled.

Research design

This qualitative case study is positioned within the philosophical stance of critical theory and pragmatism (Bredo, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Through investigating the projects' ability to facilitate development of narrative identity in their participants, we also want to test the theory's usefulness (Carr, 2007; Carr & Kemmis, 2003) as well as pay attention to the value of aesthetic education in general and applied theatre in particular.

The study is part of UTSNIDT (UTvikling av Språk og Narrativ Identitet i Drama og Teater / Development of language and narrative identity through drama and applied theatre). UTSNIDT is an inter-institutional collaborative action research group (since October 2014) funded through the Norwegian national governmental strategy 'Kompetanse for mangfold' (Competence for Diversity) (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2016). UTSNIDT consists of five teacher educators, teaching artists and applied researchers in the field of drama, theatre and dance. Two are the authors of this article, and the other three run the two applied theatre projects (units of this study), and have conducted their own action research under the umbrella of UTSNIDT. This means that the investigation of narrative identity and production of meaning has emerged -, and been negotiated through many layers and perspectives. As researchers, we are situated within, closely related to and actively negotiating with the studied units. This may both be a methodological strength as well as a weakness, emphasizing the importance of transparency, reflexivity and trustworthiness (Finlay, 2002; Morse, 2015; Shaw, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Figure 1 gives a visual account of the many layers that have been interactive.

SolidaritetsForumTeater/Solidarity Forum Theatre (SFT) and TekstLab Ung/TextLab Young are our purposefully selected subjects of inquiry to investigate if and how the theoretical concept of narrative identity actually works at play in the real world (Creswell, 2013). They provide two different and relevant examples of applied theatre in intercultural setting. SFT is an applied theatre method further developed from Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 1995). Two drama teachers and members of UTSNIDT use the method as part of the teacher training programs in two institutions in Norway. They move students out of their classrooms and into learning centers for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers where the students and the immigrants take part in a common process that deal with experiences of oppression through ethically guided theatrical staging. The aim of SFT is to investigate diversity, otherness, disagreements, conflicts and oppression experienced by the immigrants in

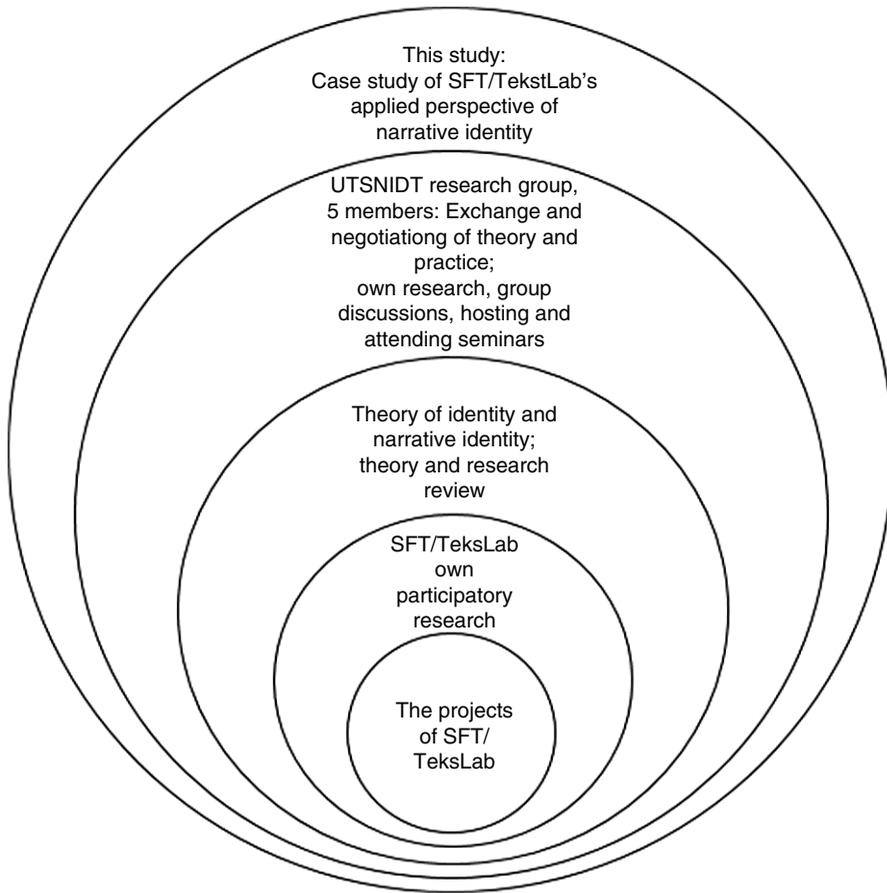


Figure 1. The layers of project UTSNIDT and the position of current study.

Norway (Songe-Møller & Bjerkestrand, 2016). TekstLab is a theatre company supported by the Arts Council of Norway. It has a department for children and young people called TekstLab Ung with an extensive outreach program operating on many arenas in and out of schools. TekstLab Ung aims to create free and open arenas to develop new voices, new writing, and new forms of expressions within theatre and performance art (Brahmachari, 2016), and has been successful in recruiting participants with diverse cultural backgrounds. The different branches of TekstLab are all based on the same writing -, and creative devising method in non-hierarchical, collaborative learning cultures. The participants receive professional guidance through experimental artistic processes, but always stay in charge, exploring own ideas. This article focuses on the work TekstLab Ung does in schools with young people who have recently arrived in Norway.

In this case study, we address the methods of SFT and TekstLab Ung as examples of exploring and developing narrative identity. We have mainly focused on how the teachers perceive that their participants explore and develop their narrative identity

in their projects as they, in our view have an interesting meta-perspective based on own practice-based action research (Aure, Songe-Møller, & Bjerkestrand, 2013; Brahmachari, 2016a; Brahmachari, 2016b; Songe-Møller & Bjerkestrand, 2012, 2016).

Data collection and analysis

An exploratory case study was conducted to investigate how applied theatre can facilitate arenas and methods to support narrative identity development. The main data has been collected over a long period, and consists of eight group-discussions (within UTSNIDT research group) and three individual interviews with the artistic and pedagogical leaders. In addition, we draw on observations from TekstLab's working process and performances (staged narratives) as well as supplementary materials like posters, programs and documentary pictures from both projects. The discussions within UTSNIDT have been ongoing negotiations, reflections and meta-reflections on relevant aspects of narrative identity. These discussions have not been 'friendly' conversations amongst like-minded peers, but have been more 'crossing of swords', a negotiating of opinions and perspectives of our understanding of the theory at play in practice (Tanggaard, 2007).

The analysis strategy has not been a straight forward procedure, but a dialectical and circular process. The procedure was a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted intertwined with the group discussions, which enabled a constant member checking of the data-interpretation and -analysis. All the citations below (with one exception) are extracts from the interviews while the analysis is structured through themes that emerged inductively through the group discussions. They freely draw on both main and supplementary data in the discussions within the analysis.

Trustworthiness, reflexivity and limitations

We have applied several approaches to quality, rigor and validation (Creswell, 2013) in this study. In order to strengthen the trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Shenton, 2004) we have used theory and research review, triangulation of different types of data, use of systematically procedures of data collection and analysis, debriefing sessions among the researchers, continuous member checking, rich contextualization descriptions and extensive use of *reflexivity*. We have used reflexivity as a tool to sharpen our consciousness to our roles as active 'players' situated in and related to the studied phenomena (Finlay, 2002; Shaw, 2016). Reflexivity has been a central tool due to our interacting and negotiating with the research participants and their projects. We do not claim objectivity in our arguments, but acknowledge that they are subjective and marked by who we are and our interwoven position. The underlying 'call for action' that is a part of critical theory and pragmatism is another aspect of the study that may be a limitation. Where do we draw the line between researching usefulness and promoting projects? How does this underlying 'call for action' affect our

lens of analysis and also our arguments and claims? UTSNIDT had a constant attention to our situated position and roles as acting subjects and making this transparent here is one way of addressing this limitation.

Negotiating Narrative Identity through Two Intercultural Theatre Projects

Grounded in the theory of narrative identity the aim of this study has been to investigate and explore how two drama teachers and one teaching artist in two applied theatre projects in intercultural settings perceive that they facilitate the development of narrative identity in their participants. The findings reveal that they have a facilitating role when it comes to assisting their participants in exploring, constructing, re-constructing and meta-reflecting their narrative identity and, thus, applied theatre provides favorable arenas and methods to explore and develop the participant's identity. We present the analysis through five themes that emerged inductively through the group discussions: 1) symbolic staging, 2) developing the 'actors' skills and expanding their repertoire, 3) creating ontological security as a base for empowering the 'agent', 4) assisting the 'author' when striving for narrative continuity and 5) challenging the culture's influence on the narratives. All the quotes are translated from Norwegian by the authors.

Symbolic staging

The three research participants report that through role-playing the participants step out of their own life, gain distance, view themselves from the outside and are confronted with a meta-perspective. They gain access to other people's interpretations, perspectives and experiences, which add new dimensions to own understanding. Role-play, theatre and applied theatre share the common drive to explore symbolic actions (Sæbø, 2003). This 'as-if' dimension, this 'mirror of life' has other rules and regulations than life itself. It has the potential to transform the personal and threatening into something general and non-threatening and at the same time awake a sense of individual responsibility rather than relying on the collective (figure 2).

	Symbolic staging	
Personal and potentially threatening	→	General and non-threatening
Collective responsibility	→	Individual responsibility

Figure 2. The process of symbolic staging.

We argue that gaining more individual responsibility in a way that is favored and even expected in Western cultures, may be helpful for someone raised in a culture with stronger collective authorities. Daring to break boundaries, speak a new language, express things that otherwise might be embarrassing, awkward or even taboo is easier when it's 'all play'.

When the oppression is powerful on stage, it concerns them. They take action because they've experienced it themselves. The inner drive and motivation becomes so strong that they enter stage and speak Norwegian. Even though they don't speak Norwegian very well they enter stage because it concerns them and they have so much guts (Drama teacher 1).

TekstLab's broad approach to language starts by acknowledging the recourses ready available to the participants which strengthens personal growth, language development and identity construction.

/. . / they find their own language and they use physical language, and we use several different ways to communicate with each other and they grow through their own language and they grow through learning Norwegian (Teaching artist).

The word 'lab' in the name TekstLab points to this laboratory activity; experimenting with own language and material as well as others', exploring, constructing and re-constructing through symbolic staging, opening a room for reflection and meta-reflection, a room for growth.

They grow, they develop, they develop texts, they have a space that's non-hierarchical, and there's room for investigation, artistic experimentation and interaction (Teaching artist).

We suggest that these arenas and theatrical methods offer a unique 'as-if' dimension that create a filter to deal with potential challenges related to own life story, the collective, and the development of identity. We argue that the combination of nearness and distance that lies in staging, where the participants view themselves from inside and outside and shift between action and reflection may stimulate learning and development.

Developing the 'actor's' skills and expanding their repertoire

In order to be able to take on the main part in own life the participants need skills to master the different roles that are expected (McAdams, 2013). The leaders report that by rehearsing alternative roles the participants expand the repertoire for their actor-selves and thus possibly build more conscious, efficient and rewarding strategies for their agent-selves. This may be a dress rehearsal for taking on the main part in own life according to the leaders of SFT. The process makes the participants aware that rehearsing helps them with their individual life skills:

They say that they didn't know that they could stop the oppression in this way, with respect. 'I didn't know that, but I realize now that I must rehearse more', they say (Drama teacher 1).

In other words, the work contributes to making the participants aware that their identity is flexible and that they can be in charge when constructing and re-constructing it.

Some of the participants have expressed through the process that they gain a kind of 'a-ha-experience' of that identity is flexible by nature. That does something to how they experience their role and how they want things to be in their life (Drama teacher 2).

When the repertoire extends, the participants need to gestalt their roles with credibility. The participants are supported in building and delivering convincing characters through the SFT stagings. "Through verbal discussions and dialogue, through physical theatre activities and theatrical expressions, they get more diverse in their intercultural communication" (Drama teacher 2). We argue that this might be transferable to real life and potentially can have an impact on the individual's capacity to negotiate socially in society. In a democracy, communication skills are crucial in creating dialog, understanding and cooperation. Through applied theatre the participants practice oral communication as well as universal, rich languages beyond words.

Creating ontological security as a base for empowering the 'agent'

SFT has a particularly strong emphasis on establishing a safe environment. Many of the participants are asylum seekers waiting for their applications to be processed, and may carry scars and traumas that affect their sense of ontological security. The leaders are aware of the importance of making the immigrants feel welcome and establishing relational trust contributing towards their basic need for ontological security (Giddens, 1991). They use simple means like personal welcoming, hand shaking, sitting in circles, game playing and music to create a warm atmosphere. In contrast to other areas in society where their stories and intentions are questioned, even interrogated, there is an emphasis on seeing the participants and believing in their experiences.

We trust them one hundred percent. No matter what they play out we trust them and that makes something happen. Something happens when they are met and their life-stories are believed (Drama teacher 1).

SFT belongs to the critical tradition of the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 2000) and empowering the participants is a core aim of their project. Staging oppression, discrimination and difficult episodes from their past reminds the immigrants of why they pulled up their roots and left their homes in the first place. In this process, the leaders express that the participants re-discover and evoke latent inner power to handle present challenges.

We stage situations where people are victims, and revise the situation to find ways of taking charge of the situation without becoming oppressors. We see power and strength and willingness to change oppressive situations /.../ We often see their inner power and that power does not belong to victims, quite the contrary (Drama teacher 2).

While SFT has an outspoken policy and visible game plan to create trust and a sense of security, empowering their participants, TekstLab use a different strategy.

They acknowledge the importance of trust in theatre work too, but focus on promoting non-hierarchical relations that the participants often otherwise experience as hierarchical; teacher–pupil, director–actor and majority–minority. In the UT-SNIDT discussions, the teaching artist from TekstLab repeatedly pointed out that distribution of power within a group is a tool to create a more respectful and free space. TekstLab creates ontological security through form, and releases the participant’s creativity in doing so. The leader has found this essential to whether or not TekstLab succeeds in bringing forward new voices. When the participants express themselves on stage, it may thus be read as a sign of empowerment. Both projects may, we suggest, end up improving the ontological security of the individual, something we argue is essential to develop and negotiate narrative identity.

Assisting the ‘author’ when striving for narrative continuity

In the light of McAdams theory and research, it is not only important to learn to play your cards strategically in relation to others, it is equally important to promote mental health and quality of life (McAdams, 2012; Unger, 2012). “Many of the stories carry a lot of shame and guilt. It can be like a poison that must be drained out” (Drama teacher 1). Moving between two or more very different cultures and living in ‘transit’ for years, may distort a person’s narrative identity as a chronologic, harmonic story (Huynh et al., 2012; Unger, 2012).

We have had many stories of young Asian boys who walked away from home when they were 13. Several of them saw their mum and dad shot before their eyes before heading towards Europe. They have been victims of violence and abuse, travelling through many countries, maybe arriving in Norway at the age of 19 (Drama teacher 1).

We believe that the work of SFT may contribute to the healing process of these boys by visualizing the standstill, the torture or the lack of continuity. The leaders have witnessed participants that have patched up their narrative and rediscovered their path with a reconciled and progressive attitude.

We had a forum play about a young woman who was expelled from university in her native country because her curls jumped out of her hijab and she was caught by the religious police and taken to the administration who denied her further studies. We staged this episode and she became more reflected and said ‘until now I have thought no more school, but now I am going to start school again’. She is almost a pre-school teacher now (Drama teacher 2).

This may be an example of what narrative psychology calls ‘thickening’ of one’s identity (Holmgren & Hansen, 2010). This concept concerns getting more and alternative parts to play out in own story. Someone’s identity becomes ‘thin’ when connections between the parts and the whole of their story lack (Holmgren & Hansen, 2010). Through finding alternative narratives, the participants may ‘thicken’ their identity and SFT offers an arena to test this out. In light of this analysis we argue that

SFT represents an aesthetic educational practice that is very relevant in order to develop continuity and possibly thicken own narrative identity.

TekstLab as a theatre company with all its branches of work addresses blanks in *collective narrative*, creating room for voices that otherwise might not be staged, ‘thickening’ the understanding of ourselves as a culture. The performance ‘The politics of identity: Det usagte, de uørte’ (‘The politics of identity; The untold, the unheard’, our translation) from their professional repertoire (not part of their outreach program) may be an expression of this.

There are many stories about being an artist that we whisper to our closest but don’t say out loud, not in public. Powerful stories remain untold. ‘The untold, the unheard’ uses documentary material and personal experiences of power and powerlessness. We lift the veil and show stories of the untold on stage. But what do we dare to say on a public stage? And how do we tell the untold, the things that are too dangerous to be told? (Extract from promotion for ‘TekstLab Scratch Festival’, October 2016).

The above exemplifies how TekstLab operates as an agent of power distribution not only in the rehearsal room. In our opinion, TekstLab is an organization that plays on a larger scale: On top of developing skills and broadening the horizon of their individual participants, TekstLab challenges existing politics and existing hierarchies in our society.

Challenging the culture’s influence on the narratives

Negotiation between individual and collective identity is a recurring theme in the work of SFT, confirming McAdam’s research on culture’s influence on narratives. The narratives as described by the two drama teachers in SFT reveal the authority that the collective may hold over the individual.

Girls express how they live in Norway with mom and dad; mom can be helpful and allow them to go out and meet Norwegian girlfriends, go shopping for Western clothes or meet a Norwegian boy. Then there may be a father who is trying to prevent all the same things, who gets furious or tries to stop it because the collective community won’t allow her to blend in with Norwegian culture (Drama teacher 1).

As pointed out under the first theme ‘symbolic staging’; there is a unique, disarming potential that lies in the methods of applied theatre offering grounds for negotiation between the individual and the collective. This may offer significant experiences for the individual. Different cultures will also add different content to the same categories of identity. The roles of ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ for instance, do not necessarily have the same content, expectations and goals across different cultures.

././ when they head out into the community, to school or hang out with other youngsters they find that they’re not allowed to wear make-up for instance. If they do, they’re called whores. But they do go out with girl-friends and some want to

dress in Norwegian clothes and wear make-up, take off their hijab and all sorts (Drama teacher 1).

This may cause confusion and challenges for the ‘actor’, ‘agent’ and ‘author’ who have to play out and negotiate the roles and identity markers in different settings at home and in the Norwegian community.

Finally we believe that a by-product of the SFT work may be that the participants have their preconceived ideas (Norwegians and immigrants) put to the test, possibly gaining a more nuanced picture of each other as well as each other’s identity categories.

It can be heartbreaking experiences, but it feels important to dare because sometimes it’s like sticking your hand into a wasp’s nest, things you shouldn’t talk about, I think it’s so important that we dare to confront them with peaceful means (Drama teacher 2).

We emphasize the importance of daring to face stereotypical and preconceived ideas in order to contribute to a sound and polyphonic democracy, even though it might be distressing.

Conclusion

In this study we have raised and discussed some theoretical and applied perspectives of narrative identity. We have investigated how the two chosen case-units; SFT and TekstLab Ung, facilitate their participant’s narrative identity. Through the experiences of the drama teachers and artistic leaders of the applied theatre projects we have shown that they nurture the participants in exploring, constructing, re-constructing and meta-reflecting their narrative identities through facilitating; a) symbolic staging, b) development of the ‘actor’s’ skills, c) creating ontological security d) development of narrative continuity and e) challenging the culture’s influence on the narratives. Future research is needed and could do well addressing the actual narratives and explore experiences from the participants’ point of view to expand the body of theory and research.

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