

The Paper Birds present

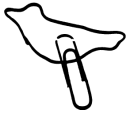
FLYING HIGHER



**A BRAND NEW
DEVISING
THEATRE CPD**

A practical full day workshop designed for teachers of Drama and Performing Arts

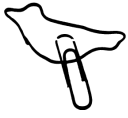
Resource Pack



The Paper Birds

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Introduction

Who are The Paper Birds?

The Paper Birds is a devising theatre company, with a social and political focus. We are recognised as UK leaders in verbatim theatre. We are artists, investigators, entrepreneurs, educators. We pride ourselves on taking complex, multi-faceted subjects and making them accessible.

Our **vision** is to provoke change, one encounter at a time. Our **mission** is to be quiet rebels, amplifying the voices of everyday people. We inspire change through the theatre we create.

We are story collectors. We spend time in communities, listening to personal experiences. The words of the people we meet form the backbone of our shows, giving voice to the voiceless, painting powerful and very human alternative social commentaries. Our desire to listen, to understand and then 'give voice' means not only making space for the under-represented and the misunderstood, but also that our shows explore voices from all walks of life. We aim to do this in breathtaking theatrical fashion.

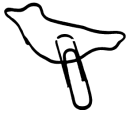
The company was formed in 2003 by Co-Directors Kylie and Jemma; and is now led by a team of 6 women who work collaboratively alongside a wide range of freelance artists, designers and facilitators to deliver thought-provoking, urgent, and accessible theatre shows and workshops to a wide range of audiences.

The Ingredients

We have designed this CPD course to give participants a sample of the 5 key ingredients that make up our work. Although each of our shows explores different topics and often feature different performers; the essence of each show can always be traced back to these 5 components. The course will explore ways of introducing these ingredients to your students, as well as enabling you to develop a clear understanding of the process in which we work and how we develop a professional production.

The 5 key ingredients are:

1. Verbatim
2. Movement
3. Character and Narrative
4. Exposing the Method
5. Motif



1. Using Verbatim

How and why do we use Verbatim?

We first began to utilise verbatim techniques in our production *In a Thousand Pieces* (2008), when we felt there was a layer missing; the opinions of real people. So we set out with a Dictaphone and recorded some real peoples' opinions of the topic of the show. Having placed these soundbites into the script, the impact the show had on audiences was one of honesty, integrity, shock, and deep emotional connection. When it came to make our next production, we were hooked—as a technique, collecting and using other people's words verbatim in our productions was of deep interest.

With each production we make, we adapt and change the way we structure the collection methods; sometimes we conduct one to one interviews, often we host workshops or seminars and speak to people in a group, we distribute questionnaires, or ask people to respond to a task such as writing a letter or leaving a voicemail. Depending on what the topic of the show is, we try to find a creative way to collate material for us to work with. Although it is important to us to do this sensitively, and to adopt a process that is suitable for the participants and audiences we are trying to reach.

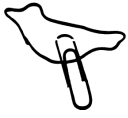
We constantly strive to find new and interesting ways of staging verbatim material. With each new show we produce there are different techniques or conventions that we explore and often they are derived directly from the theatrical ideas within the show; eg in *Thirsty* (2011) verbatim material is scribbled onto the toilet walls as graffiti, and in *Ask Me Anything* (2020) it scrolls on an autocue screen as in a TV studio.

In this clip, the cast set up the premise of the show, that they received letters from young people—and begin to read from them verbatim.

Ask Me Anything (2020) 2 mins

<https://youtu.be/Yz05MJzqgts>

In the following exercises we share 4 different performative approaches to staging verbatim. Depending on the time that you have available, you could run a lesson on each of the four approaches, or if you are short for time, you could look at all four approaches in one lesson by asking students to work in groups of four, with each member of the group looking at a different performative approach. Either way, students will need a piece of verbatim transcript to work with. This can be something they have sourced themselves, or a piece of found text. Please refer to the accompanying verbatim stimulus on our theme of 'Fashion'.



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Exercise 1: Presenting Verbatim

a) Perform the text as the original character.

Use all the info you can find to inform your performance. If the text comes from someone you have met, make sure to emulate their mannerisms and vocal traits. If it is sourced online, what research can you do to collate a physical picture of the subject, are there videos and interviews that you can study to learn their physical attributes? Create a naturalistic representation of the text as best you can.

b) Perform the text with headphones on.

If you have access to the original audio of the excerpt from an interview or YouTube video etc, then use the original. If your text only exists as a transcript, ask someone else to read and record the text into a phone or recorder. Play the audio track through your headphones and deliver naturalistically whilst listening to the text.

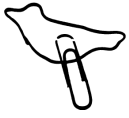
c) Performer/Non-performer.

Read text as the performer (yourself) into a microphone. Off-mic, you prepare 'asides' to tell the audience. What are your thoughts about the text? You can comment on it. You can explain how you chose your section, what you edited, how you might have trouble with pronunciation etc. Spend some time preparing what these 'asides' are and annotate the text accordingly. Concentrate on differentiating the delivery between what text is verbatim and what is original. Make it clear to the audience when it is yourself.

**If use of a microphone is not available, then the performer must work extra hard to differentiate voice and physicality between verbatim and themselves.*

d) Dramatise the text in a non-naturalistic way.

Use juxtaposing or contrasting ideas to the original text in how you stage it. So if you think the text would originally have been said quickly, try performing it slowly. If it was set in an public place, try placing it in a domestic setting, so on.



2. Choreographing Movement

How and why do we use Movement?

We want to tell stories in breathtaking theatricality. That's why for us, we try to use movement as a mode of conveying parts of the story to heighten or accentuate the spoken word. We have always used physicality in this way, for example in *Thirsty*, repetitious movement depicts the characters becoming more drunk; or in *Broke* (2014), the performers fast forward and rewind through scenes to depict the verbatim editing process.

Here we have listed 3 very simple introductions to developing choreography. Each task is designed to work generously for students with a broad range of skill and ability in dance and movement.

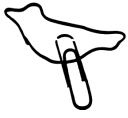
Exercise 2: Choreography

a) Cut and paste

Ask participants to each source and bring in 3 images of people in interesting physical shapes/ positions. The images can have one person or two people in the picture. Participants will work in pairs so they have in total, 6 images from which they must create a movement sequence. The 6 images must each be seen within their sequence, becoming the skeleton for the choreography. On top of this, the participants must create ways to travel between their 6 moves as well as considering speed, quality of movement, pace, and energy etc.

Music suggestion: Caribou https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yq_tD0FU5tY





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b) Gestures

In pairs, create 6 clear physical gestures. Use only these 6 gestures to create a sequence that you can perform together. You can repeat the gestures in whatever order you like to create a story, but you cannot add anything else in, you can only use the 6 gestures chosen. Sometimes you may move in sync with each other, sometimes you may move separately. Consider pace, dynamic and stillness as well. It can be just as interesting that one of you moves slowly or not at all in contrast to the other. The only rule is: 'no acting'. Let the physicality tell the narrative, don't tell us a story through facial expressions.

Examples of gestures you could use:

A shrug; Hair tuck; A look to side/up/down; Shuffle on to toes; Sit / stand etc...

Music suggestion:

Mr Scruff <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhyHnp1JaWg&app=desktop>

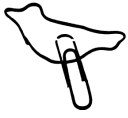
c) In groups you are going to choose a character that could be in your show or linked to your theme. You are now going to come up with an external physical action to communicate something that character is feeling. In our show '*On the One Hand*' we came up with an action to demonstrate each time one of our characters felt confused and unsure.

In this extract, the character of Eighty, played by Illona Linthwaite, suffers with dementia and struggles to remember moments of her story. The cast represent her feeling in that moment through their use of gestural movement.

On the One Hand (2013) 2 mins

<https://youtu.be/FNAr3mf94Vo>

When you have a physical action that you feel is powerful and communicates this emotion well, look to sprinkle this in to the show each time that character is feeling this emotion. This can then become a physical motif within the show that recurs.



3. Character and Narrative

How do we develop Character and Narrative?

Sometimes both the characters and narratives that feature in our productions are real—they might be people we have met throughout the research phase, or they might be stories that we've collected. In this instance, we try to play them verbatim and use a convention so that the audience know they are real. But often we need to fill in the gaps, or use our artistic licence to create interesting, relevant characters that will feature in the story. This sees us play a lot at the start of a process and use improvisation.

Often when we work in schools, we recognise competition between students for the 'main part' - students often can't see past the protagonist in a story. Here is a simple improvisation game to enable students to see further opportunities and begin to measure the possibility of creating the supporting characters within a narrative.

Exercise 3: Multi-role Improvisation

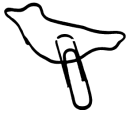
a) Come up with a basic storyline related to your theme

- Make a list of all the possible characters featured in that narrative; start with the central characters (protagonist), and then then all the other supporting roles they might encounter.

Eg, girl who vlogs about fashion tips; her best friend; her brother who she has to share her laptop with; her idols; her aunty she admires, etc

- Multi-role Impro – set up 3 zones: central character, director, supporting role. In a loop, each performer moves through each of the roles. The director calls out new characters for the supporting actor to improvise from the list. Keep swapping roles and each performer try playing the central character.

- Let participants play until they have tried all the characters on their lists, they can repeat characters and pick up conversations where they left off etc. Encourage them to swap often and if the people in the 'hot-seat' are waning, then the director and audience can shout out things to help.



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Exercise 4: Consequences

This exercise for us hinges on the notion that every scene within our production is there for a reason—and it may be that if two scenes mean the same thing, then we might layer them together. This is a good exercise to run early on in a process to encourage totally opposing styles and approaches to getting scenes up on their feet.

Using the narrative you came up with for the previous exercise, now break this storyline down into 6 clear and concise bullet points.

For example:

1. *A girl is bullied at school.*
2. *She decides she is going to transform herself*
3. *She changes her fashion, hair and attitude.*
- 4 *Everybody starts to try to be her friend*
5. *She realizes she was happier before.*
6. *She goes back to the way she was.*

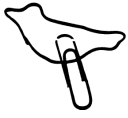
- Using each of these 6 bullet points, come up with 1 scene idea that serves the function of that bullet point. Try to focus on the theatricality and stylistic choices of the scene—not just the naturalistic content. Could this scene be a poem, is it a silent scene to a specific piece of music. What does the atmosphere feel like and how can you create it with conventions?

Eg: 1 – Girl bullied at school: she's walking down corridor and every time someone walks by they sidestep to avoid her. Over the speakers we hear their pre-recorded voices of what they think of her—but we don't hear their voices live.

- You have 1 minute to decide a scene idea for that bullet point and write it down. When time is up, fold over and pass on to the next person.

- When all of the 6 bullet points have been explored, read out the ideas for each scene in your groups.

- Discuss – what are the common ideas? Is it a good or bad thing if ideas are repeated by more than one person? When does it mean that the idea for a scene is working, and when does it mean that we need to push further and past the obvious? Which ideas can work together and layer up to make a scene?



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4. Exposing the Method

What do we mean by 'Exposing the Method'?

There is always an element or layer to our productions that we call 'exposing the method.' This means that we try to incorporate ways of heightening the action on stage with some insight into the background of how we made the show, or the choices or editing we've conducted throughout the process. Many of these techniques hark back to Brechtian traits such as alienation effects; reminding the audience that they are here in the theatre and that the issues they see on stage are real issues currently happening in our society.

Examples of some of these techniques we might include are: performer interruptions or disagreements; breaking the action, breaking the fourth wall, commenting on the scene staging or costume, non-acting, multi-rolling/ swapping character, asides...

Using techniques such as these are by no means original to the work of The Paper Birds—in fact they are present in many contemporary theatre artists' work, but nonetheless, they are always present in some essence in our work.

Exercise 5: Breaking Naturalism

a) Choose a video clip from YouTube of something that relates to your theme.

Work with 1 other person and use a device to watch the video with no sound. Improvise the text of what the person on the screen is saying. Watch each other's and help shape what works. You can try to do this really effectively and concisely, or you can play around being ironic and funny.

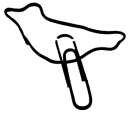
Urge participants to emulate the physicality and gesture of what they see on screen at the same time as the video. The fun and beauty of this technique will come in the timing of the delivery and how it matches the video.

When showing these scenes back to an audience, show the videos on a screen and have performers stand downstage of it.

*In this extract, the cast try to 'speak' for celebrity Heather Mills.
After inviting her to correspond with them in the process of making the show
with little success, they seek footage on YouTube of her appearance on
breakfast TV show GMTV to use as source material.*

'Others' (2011) 2 mins 30

<https://youtu.be/YvypalOYLAo>



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b) Swapping Parts

Participants can work in groups of 2 or 3 for this task. They begin by writing a simple script of a conversation between two characters in their show. Once they have this script they each print out a copy. Participants will begin by performing the scene naturalistically. They will then decide points within their script where they could swap characters or play a character at the same time. Make sure participants mark these cues on their scripts. Finally ask that they focus on creating strong and clear physicality and vocal traits for each character so that the audience can keep up on knowing who is playing whom.

The emphasis here is on speed and keeping it tight—knowing where you are going next and joining in sync at the right moments.

See example here of using the technique of ‘swapping parts’.

In this extract, the cast re-enact an extract from GMTV where Heather Mills is interviewed. They swap roles between interviewer and interviewee.

Others (2011) 3 mins

https://youtu.be/CW76b4Q2_p8

c) Write a Pitch

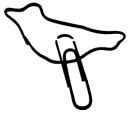
Consider what a show based on your theme would look and feel like if you had unlimited time and resources. What special effects or famous actors would you include? The sky is the limit—it’s time to think big! Write the pitch that details what the audience would see and experience if you had unlimited budget. Describe the opening sequence for us and don’t hold back!

For example:

The show begins in darkness, with just the distant murmur of a rumble. The rumble begins to grow until we can hear a river. The river becomes louder and we start to see dripping centre stage, it is lit from above and gradually begins to fill a pool. We see Leonardo Di Caprio enter. He smashes the glass side of the pool and water spills into the audience...

Once these are written, ask participants to share them with a bit of an intro such as:

“We wanted to make a show that you’d never forget. But we didn’t have enough time, so instead imagine this...”



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5. Motif

Examples of Motifs we use

Motif is commonplace throughout all of art, and within The Paper Birds' productions, it features heavily. The motifs we incorporate can take the form of textual or language references, physical or movement, sound or musical, or symbolic or visual recurring motifs.

In each production we choose a selection of motifs that suit the content and the style of the piece. In our production *Broke*, we incorporated several styles of motif;

Textual—found text from Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* which depicted a fairytale take on poverty.

Visual—imagery of 'golden tickets'.

Movement—fast forwarding and rewinding through scenes.

Sound and music—childlike music created on toy xylophone and rubber piano.

So for us, motif can be one of many different conventions.

We thought it would be really useful for you to have some examples of different styles of motifs to hand, to demonstrate to students the different routes they could go down, and try to get them thinking creatively about how and why they would incorporate into their pieces.

Use of Motif Montage (4 mins)

<https://youtu.be/rFqbaGTu0o8>

Examples used:

1. Goldfish Bowl: found text (Frankenstein), sound, light
2. In a Thousand Pieces: image (ice-cream)
3. Thirsty: prop (red shoes)
4. Blind: image (shadow)
5. Broke: movement (fast-forwarding), found text (*Charlie & the Chocolate Factory*), prop (golden tickets)