

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST  
2012 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

A Foolish Adventure  
The Use of Clowning in Applied Settings  
and it's Potential Benefit for Teachers and Teacher Training

“We are all used to being ‘proper’ but through laughter we can go back to who we really are.  
We’re not proper, we all just pretend we are.”

Alina Sirbu, Care Home Manager

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## 1. Precis and Acknowledgments

This 2012 Churchill Fellowship report provides details of:

- Visits to organisations and individuals who use clowning in applied settings
- Community engagement through the use of humour e.g., Clown Festival of New York and Laughter Yoga
- Attendance at the Sacred Clown Pueblo Indians in Toas, New Mexico

The inspiring, challenging and thought provoking six week adventure allowed me to meet some of the world's leading practitioners and innovators in their field. I am indebted to Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fund for their openness, interest and boldness in supporting a clown to travel to the other side of the world to explore playfulness and a little bit of mischief.

The experience was also made possible by the generosity of extremely busy professionals who willingly gave up their time and shared their expertise freely: Sandy Radvanyi and the team at Fools for Health, Professor Bernie Warren, Audrey Crabtree, Michael Christen, Matt Mitler, Olivia Harris, Dr Timothy Sharpe, Tricia Cooney, the entire staff at Arts and Health especially John-Paul Bell, Steph Kheo and everyone at the Women's Circus and David Symons and Dr Quack and Dr Nick Nack at the Humour Foundation.

## 2. Executive Summary

### Fellowship Objective

Examine the use of clowning in a variety of applied settings and explore how this could be adapted to support teachers and teacher training in the UK.

### Findings

- Clowning in applied setting is recognised as being extremely demanding and professional on-going training is essential.
- Research into the benefits of applied clowning is becoming an area of priority for some organisations including Arts and Health and the Humour Foundation in Australia. This is seen as essential for the development of the work.
- Many of the practitioners and leaders working through clowning feel it is misunderstood or misrepresented in the wider public.
- There is a burgeoning clown scene in New York that allows artists and practitioners to network, innovate and experiment.
- The Positive Psychology Movement and its focus on wellbeing supports the principles behind Clown Doctoring/Clowning with Elders and could provide a framework through which to understand the principles of clowning as a tool for teachers.
- The most successful organisations recognise advocacy, campaigning and lobbying are essential to develop long-term change relating to clowning and its benefits in community settings.

### Fellowship Highlights

- Being exposed to the wealth of experience and talent of artists, practitioners and thinkers who use the principles of clowning or playfulness to develop creative work within communities.
- Learning about in-depth research that has been completed by the University of New South Wales into the impact of Humour Therapy with Elders.
- Having the opportunity to witness the thriving 'clown scene' created through the New York Clown Festival and the important sense of community this creates.
- Exposure to a variety of clown practices – spiritual/sacred clowning, circus clown, theatrical clown, vaudeville and buffoon - and their appropriate uses in different settings.

## Conclusions

- It is possible for whole organisations working in applied clowning to grow and thrive despite meeting with resistance based on misunderstandings regarding the nature of clowning.
- Understanding how to implement change management techniques when working with in the face of resistance has also been invaluable to the success of many of the organisations working with applied clowning.
- There is an ever-growing body of scientific evidence around the benefits of clowning including laughter. This gives further credibility to anybody working in applied clowning and will only benefit the growth and develop of work in this field.
- There are many techniques, activities and games that are used to train clown doctors that could be adapted to inspire and nourish teachers in a workshop setting.
- There is much potential to build a stronger community and grow the art form of clowning through the creation of a UK Clown Festival.
- The spirit of the clown is alive and well.

### 3. Itinerary

Windsor, Canada 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> September

- 👉 Observations of clowning with elders by Fools for Health
- 👉 Interview with Sandy Radvanyi, Director of Fools for Health
- 👉 Observations and interview with Dr Bernie Warren, Ph.D at University of Windsor

Brantford, Canada 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> September

- 👉 Participation of workshop delivered by Dr Bernie Warren on best practice when developing volunteer clown doctor programmes for hospitals

New York, USA 17<sup>th</sup>- 27<sup>th</sup> September

- 👉 Interview with Michael Christensen, The Founder and Creative Director of Big Apple Circus
- 👉 New York Clown Festival
- 👉 Bouffon Workshop taken by Audrey Crabtree, Artistic Director of New York Clown Festival
- 👉 Observations of rehearsal process for Dzieci Theatre Group lead by Artistic Director, Matt Mittler and performances of Makbet and Ragnarok
- 👉 Interview with Olivia Harris, Bond Street Theatre
- 👉 Attended clown performances at the New York Clown Festival; Unbearable Lightness, In the Boudoir, Moving Stationary, Lauffiti, Members of our Limbs, Dante: Magical Man in Plaid

Toas, New Mexico, USA 28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> September

- 👉 Observation of Sacred Clowns and St Geronimo Day Festival

Sydney, Australia 18<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March

- 👉 Observing laughter yoga workshop by Kylie Willows, Founder of Yoga Laughter Sydney
- 👉 Observing clown rounds with 'Dr Quack' and 'Dr Nick-Nack' at Sydney Children's Hospital for the Humour Foundation
- 👉 Interview and meeting with John Paul Bell and his team, Arts and Health
- 👉 Interview with Dr Timothy Sharpe at Happiness Institute
- 👉 Interview with Tricia Cooney at Circus Solarus

Melbourne, Australia: 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March

- 👉 Women's Circus
- 👉 Interview with David Symons, Artistic Manager, Programs, Humour Foundation

#### 4. Introduction

I am a trained theatre clown, theatre maker and co-director of Nimble Fish, a leading community arts company that specialises in creating high quality, arts-led happenings that foster social change. I have spent much of my career working creatively in schools throughout London and Essex. In particular, I specialise in creating and delivering projects with and for young people who have been permanently excluded from school as well as supporting the work of teachers at Pupil Referral Units. During this time, I have witnessed first hand the pressures and high levels of day-to-day stress many teachers face. This is supported by a recent survey by England's Health and Safety Executive that found teaching to be one of the most high-pressure careers in the country, with 41.5% of teachers reporting themselves to be "highly stressed".

*“Teaching is one of the most high-pressure careers in the country, with 41.5% of teachers reporting themselves highly stressed.”*

The aim of my fellowship was exploring how the principles of clowning could combat high levels of stress whilst also offering teachers support in developing key areas of expertise - resilience and responsiveness, confidence, creativity and risk taking. My long term objective is not to encourage teachers to put on a red nose – although they could if they wanted to - but to find and share practical tools that bring a sense of fun and discovery back into lesson plans and the day-to-day life of schools. Part of this process is discovering activities that can help nurture and support teachers in their own personal/professional development.

I think it is important to also clarify the term clowning. When talking about clowns most people think of the American circus clown with white painted faces, brightly coloured costumes, wigs and oversized props. This however, forms only a very small part of clowning history. Clowns date back to ancient Egypt and throughout the ages from the Roman Empire, to the Jester in courts of the Middle Age and the acrobatic clowns of the Renaissance. Much has been written about Shakespeare's use of the fool, and the clowning traditions in Italy (Commedia Dell'Arte) and France (the Pierrot) continue to be used as rich source material for comedy. Across the continents of the world, the clown still serves a vital function in spiritual and sacred contexts and has done for hundreds of years. Today professional clowns work in all areas of life including hospitals, in care homes and with international refugee charities providing emotional support through comic relief.

The Fellowship gave me the opportunity to:

- meet with the worlds most successful founders and practitioners of applied clowning
- explore how clowning is used in a variety of institutional settings
- explore how applied clowning is assessed and evaluated
- discover best practice in terms of training methodologies and exercises

## 5. Review of Activities

### Fools for Health, Windsor www.foolsforhealth.ca

#### Overview

Fools for Health is a charity dedicated to using the arts to promote health and well being in healthcare facilities. They work with patients, residents, their families and healthcare teams to increase quality of life through the therapeutic use of music, improvisational play, reminiscence and humour.

I spent a day shadowing a “Laughter Boss” visit to a Care Home in Windsor with Tilly Tom Tom (Charmaine Miron) and Merry Kay (Sandy Radvanyi).

“Staff need to be silly, it’s good for them. The clowns take the edge of a tough week. We are all used to being ‘proper’ but through laughter we can go back to who we really are. We’re not proper, we all just pretend we are.”

“Laughter Boss” is a training program that has been devised by Fools for Health to work in tandem with staff and elders at long-term care facilities. Merry Kay and Tilly Tom Tom work along side staff at the Care Homes to encourage them to include fun and laughter in their daily activities with the residents, their visiting families and the staff.

#### Activity

The care facility we visited clearly enjoyed the arrival of the clowns and staff immediately began to joke with Tilly Tom Tom and Meryy Kay. Their presence animated the main hall space where elders were listening to music. The clowns gently persuaded staff to dance with them, this in turn encouraged two elders to come and dance. The effect on the group was much interest and laughter from both staff and elders alike. Previously the elders had been still and some disengaged and now the room was busy with activity. Even after the clowns had left, some of the elders continued to dance and clap.

When I spoke to one staff member about this she said:

*“The clowns give us permission to do things we wouldn’t normally do. I just don’t think of the kind of things they come up with but I like copying their ideas...sometimes when the clowns come it feels like some of our clients wake up, they are more alive”*

I also interviewed Alina Sirbu, Manager of the Care Home. We discussed how the clowns have been working with staff to use humour as a tool to ease anger or confusion. In the past staff had been frightened to ‘mess around’ or joke feeling it might be inappropriate. Working with the clowns had inspired the staff to see playfulness as vital in encouraging and supporting clients at the Care Home.

Alina also explained how easy it is for “*staff to be emotionally shaved with the job*” through losing elders and dealing with the complexities and illnesses associated with ageing. She emphasised the immense challenges of working with up to thirty residents a day. Alina also believed the pressures of the job were compounded by the fact the role has little status or value in the wider community.

For Alina the clowns played an essential role in the life of the Care Home:

*“The staff need to be silly, it’s good for them. The clowns take the edge of a tough week. We are all used to being ‘proper’ but through laughter we can go back to who we really are. We’re not proper, we just pretend we are.”*

Alina also spoke of the seriousness of her own job and how focused she is required to be especially after a round of cuts but insisted the clown visits would remain. She believes the clowns provided a vital change in

perspective for staff, elders and families. Their visits are “*just common sense*”.

In my interview with Charmaine and Sandy we spoke about the practice and training they undertook as clown doctors and Laughter Bosses. This is a combination of both practical training e.g. medical terminology as well as creative engagement techniques. Both discussed the importance of staying open to what was actually happening in a room and ‘listening’ for ideas.

Charmaine and Sandy recognise a large part of their role is breaking down barriers with staff members who may previously have had bad experiences with clowns or believe they are not appropriate in a hospital or Care Home: “*there is a misconception that clowns will do anything, but they don’t, they are allowed to have boundaries too*”. The use of music can be very powerful in these instances as well as working slowly and respectfully. In one case it took Charmain two years for a nurse to engage with her but gradually through gentle offers and a game called “Staff Appreciation Day” the nurse became one of their biggest allies and advocates in the hospital.



Annie enjoying interaction with Tilly Tom

Dr Bernie Warren  
Drama in Education and Community  
University of Windsor, Canada  
[www1.uwindsor.ca/drama/biography-bernie-warren](http://www1.uwindsor.ca/drama/biography-bernie-warren)

### **Overview**

Dr. Bernie Warren has carried out prolific research on clown therapy and is a researcher, writer and teacher on the role of the arts for persons in healthcare and therapy. He is also the Founder of Fools for Health and Lecturer at the University of Windsor, Canada.

### **Activity**

I spent three days with Bernie and was able to participate in his several BA Undergraduate workshops and a one day training workshop for volunteer clown doctors working in Brentford.

Bernie's approach to teaching and learning is human-centered and he believes the most powerful practitioners spend most of their time listening; *"we all just want to be heard"*. Bernie also uses stories and storytelling to inform his approach to lessons and workshops. This is because he believes *"it is the first form of teaching, our stories locate us and help us understand who we are where we have come from, we want to share our story"*.

The principle of bringing your 'whole self' to work is also important to Bernie. He believes this allows practitioners to engage all of their expertise and experience into the facilitation and teaching process, for example, Bernie uses elements of clowning and his practice in Qigong and T'ai chi in a variety of workshops to strengthen and develop understanding of a subject area for these students.

'The Five E's of Exceptional Teaching' were also themes we discussed at length; Engaging, Empowering, Enlightening, Entertaining, Educating. Bernie strongly believes it is possible to create meaningful learning challenging in some scenarios and often requires practice and dedication.

Humour plays a large role in Bernie's facilitation style. This was particularly effective when I took part in the inaugural workshops for BA Undergraduates in the Drama Department. Bernie consciously used gentle humour as an 'inclusion tool' to put the group at ease, for example, he made self-deprecating jokes to lower his status and this enabled students to be more playful in their approach to tasks. As you might expect from a clown, Bernie is not afraid to "play the fool" at times. He sees this as a useful strategy to relieve tension and anxiety rather than a tool to impress or entertain. Bernie also believes his playfulness is a signal to students that he expects something different from them in his class.

### **Clown Doctor Workshop for Volunteers In Brentford led by Bernie Warren**

The four major areas covered in the workshop were:

- Considering the value of a smile.
- Clown doctors creating 'sparkle and shine'.
  - Exploring how clown doctors can "work towards small", e.g., creating intimate and immediate moments with children in hospitals enable them to feel less vulnerable or less scared. Bernie also highlighted the difference between a clown doctor and a circus clown, e.g., the circus clown make-up can be intimidating and not appropriate in hospitals.
- Clowns Doctors as 'creative detectives'.
  - Clown doctors have to be aware of what is happening in a room and how they can change the atmosphere. They have to train to ensure they have a complete awareness of everything around them. Bernie used a particularly poignant quote from Dr Shelia Horen, *"Clown Doctors can learn lots about patients that the rest of us are too busy to see"*.
- Clown Doctors and 'distraction therapy'.
  - Understanding how clown doctors 'rest the clock', e.g., make a two and a half hour wait pass effortlessly.

Michael Christensen  
Founder and Creative Director  
Big Apple Circus, Clown Care Unit, New York  
[www.bigapplecircus.org/clown-care](http://www.bigapplecircus.org/clown-care)

**Overview**

The Clown Care programme at the Big Apple Circus was co-founded in 1986 by professional clown and co-creator of Big Apple Circus, Michael Christensen. In partnership with hospitals chief medical and administrative staff, members of the Clown Care team conduct 'clown rounds,' where clowns work with young people undergoing treatment in pediatric facilities.

Currently, 80 professional artists conduct clown rounds one to five days a week, year-round, making nearly 225,000 visits to young patients every year to 6 pediatric facilities across the United States.

*"The definition of a clown is someone who makes a 100% unconditional commitment to being authentically present. ...it has nothing to do with being funny, it's about opening up everything. That is the key."*

**Interview**

For Michael, clown doctors have to 'be in touch' with who they are before they can consider joining the profession,

*"When I give workshops to clowns I say, "I don't care about your clown character or your internal journey to find your inner clown...What I do care about is you, I care a lot about you and I want to celebrate and discover what makes you wonderful, special and fantastic, because you are"...This workshop is called Human First, Red Nose Second. Unless we connect with ourselves we can't have a feeling of authenticity, it'll always be phony and even if people don't say it, they'll feel it."*

The training for clown doctors, as hinted above, is an intensive process and integral to the organisation's success. A strong emphasis is placed on developing the artistry of the clown and the processes and techniques through which a performer can arrive at a state of mind that enables them to be completely present,

*"Basically, anyone can put on a Macdonald costume but it's the antithesis of clown doctoring. It's not strapping on a character and marching through a hospital all day."*

For Michael, in order to be a successful clown doctor a performer has to have the ability to respond to people and situations in the moment. The only way to achieve this is by developing genuine listening skills. Michael believes listening is the essence of a good clown but is also an essential tool for anyone who would like to be effective in their job, including teachers,

*"It's the same skills needed for really good performers, or really good... 'anybody'. They are skills that can be applied everywhere, it's simply that the outcomes of the job description are different but the communication skills we use can be applied."*

The training to become a clown doctor is intensive because the clowns are required to absorb and interpret tremendous amounts of information very quickly. A clown doctor may only have 10 to 15 seconds in a hospital room doorway to assess the circumstances before making an appropriate proposal or offer to the people in the room.

Throughout the 'clown rounds', the clowns are required to make decisions and actions based on ever changing information. On top of this the clown doctors are required to:

- create fun and make it look easy and effortless
- be aware of hygiene, procedure and protocol
- manage the emotional aspect of the work

Michael explains,

*"We create the illusion of chaos that anything could happen in a very rigid structure. That's pretty neat. We have someone who can juggle five balls in an intensive care unit next to an IV or heart monitor and gives a comic patter at the same time and it's totally secure."*

For Michael the purpose of clown doctors is to successfully fill a room with the "shimmering feeling of play and lightness". This doesn't necessarily mean interaction with patients has to be high energy, it might be small, lyrical or quiet but the point is to leave the space different to the way it was encountered. Pedestrian behaviour is to be avoided at all costs.

The demands of the clown doctor role are clear and the nurturing and supporting the clowns is recognised as being an essential duty of care for the organisation. It includes:

- Providing support circles every month where clown doctors can share their experience facilitated by professional therapists.
- Making it compulsory for the clowns to work in teams of two thus enabling the duos to be sources of emotional support for each other.
- Having an identified a member of clinical staff who can emotionally support the clowns on site if necessary (this has only happened twice in twenty six years of work).
- Working with the clowns to enable them to develop their own rituals that can help process the emotional aspects of this job.



Michael Christensen as Mr Stubs and Michael Christensen in his office!

## New York Clown Festival

[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_York\\_Clown\\_Theater\\_Festival](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Clown_Theater_Festival)

### Overview

The New York Clown Theatre Festival is an annual celebration of the art of clowning held at The Brick Theatre in Brooklyn, New York. Festival performers come from across the USA and around the world. The festival was established in 2005 and runs for three weeks every year in September.

*"These are not birthday party pranksters, but fools, buffoons and harlequins who are serious, trained performers".*  
New York Times

### Activities

Performances I saw: Unbearable Lightness, In the Boudoir, Moving Stationary, Lauffiti, Members of our Limbs, Dante: Magical Man in Plaid

The New York Clown Festival is deliberately curated to showcase many different styles of theatrical clowning and I had the opportunity to watch several clown performances in one day. This is not something I have been able to do previously and the benefit was to see a vast array of styles, concepts and performance techniques back to back. This helped me understand my own craft more fully and made me feel more ambitious about the potential for this kind of work. Often in the UK, it can be challenging to connect with other artists working in this genre and the New York Clown festival was a powerful reminder of the potential benefits of being exposed to global networks of artists and directors working in similar fields.

It was inspiring to see the Festival challenging people's negative perceptions around clowning by supporting performances with workshops, lectures, cabarets and film projects. Having spoken to several audience members during the festival this approach is obviously effective. One group of people had only attended the "Moving Stationary" performance because they were curious about the promotion of 'theatre clown' and wanted to know why it was different to the circus. The high profile promenade events also drew large crowds and provided the public with an opportunity to engage with the work outside of a theatre.

For Audrey, the Creative Director, the aim of the festival is to make audiences,

*...laugh-hard. I want them to be moved, and inspired by the work. I want to erase the narrow stereotype of the circus clown from their minds and remind them of the tradition of clown and physical comedy performance here in the US from theater and film."*

Audrey believes the festival is a success:

*"because of the type people who personally are drawn to perform and create clown. Motivated, intelligent and sensitive people who truly believe this is an important art form".*

**Buffon Emersion Workshop**  
by Audrey Crabtree as part of New York Clown Festival  
[www.nakedempirebuffon.org/2013/05/05/audrey-crabtree](http://www.nakedempirebuffon.org/2013/05/05/audrey-crabtree)

**Overview**

Audrey Crabtree is the Creative Director of the New York Clown Festival. She is also a theatre instructor, performer and producer. Since 1992 she has been teaching professional theatre practitioners in universities, theatres and studios. She specialises in creating Buffon performances for theatre and has numerous awards and accolades for this.

**Activity**

I was invited to take part in a two day workshop exploring buffon. Buffon is anti-clown and many of the same theatrical techniques used in clowning are employed in buffon e.g., the removal of the fourth wall and responding to audiences in the moment. Both characters are ridiculous and operate in extremes, however, the simple clown approaches the audience in naivety but the buffon is intelligent and manipulative. The buffon is extremely aware of the hypocrisy and double standards in society. Audrey explains they are:

*“cursed with the misfortune of a grotesque appearance, and compulsion to push the limits of decency and morality you is deemed less than human... the buffon is obsessed with the society from which s/he were unjustly cast, and spends time observing the villagers, their hypocrisy, and personal private vices”*



Exploring Buffon (I'm the one in white!)

Audrey believes that when buffoon is done well *“they show us who we are”*.

Audrey is an excellent facilitator with many years of experience and during the workshop she focused on creating a strong group dynamic through observational games and exercises. She also helped the group understand the course material by relating it directly to our own life experiences thus giving it more impact and meaning. In many ways the workshop was extremely liberating, Audrey gave us permission to be as “Un-PC” as we liked and explained that by pushing at the boundaries of what is acceptable we are able to develop creative insights that otherwise wouldn't be possible.

The rationale for each exercise was clearly explained so at no point did I feel unsafe or uncomfortable about developing what could be considered as potentially provocative or shocking work. This was supported by a light-hearted and playful approach to all of the exercises. Emphasis was placed on building camaraderie as well as finding ideas ‘through the body’ rather than ‘in our heads’.

Audrey's approach to facilitation was to keep the workshop moving at a fast pace and allow time to create work in small groups. This enabled the group to work at different speeds and to try out ideas that participants might not feel comfortable sharing with the whole group.

Like all of the innovative practitioners and facilitators I met on this Fellowship, Audrey was very comfortable working spontaneously and like the clown, making the most of every opportunity that arose. On our last day, Audrey invited us to wear our costumes to go and get lunch, she explained this was the best way for us to understand how the buffon operates in society. This was not a compulsory part of the workshop but Audrey articulated the benefits of doing this in such a way that most of the group took up the invitation, as a result I found myself buying my sandwiches in costume. This is not something I would normally have felt brave enough to do and is testament to Audrey's strong facilitation skills and her ability to inspire the group to go beyond their comfort zones in a way that was supported and relevant.

Matt Mitler  
Artistic Director, Theatre Dzieci  
[www.dziecitheatre.org](http://www.dziecitheatre.org)

**Overview**

Dzieci (djyeh-chee) is an international experimental theatre ensemble dedicated to a search for the “sacred” through the medium of theatre. One of the key features of their work is the Fool’s Mass. They describe this work as,

*“A group of medieval village idiots forced to enact their own Mass, due to the untimely death of their beloved pastor. Bursting with buffoonery and comic audience participation.”*

Like many of the activities I have experienced on my Fellowship, it is hard to describe the work of Theatre Dzieci because as Matt Mittler, the Company’s Artistic Director, explains “*we don’t really fit in with the conventional theatre framework*”. Theatre Dzieci places significance on developing personal transformation through their work and their interventions in hospitals, monasteries and institutional settings is considered to as important to the development of the company as performing work in front of a tradition audience. Rooted in ritual theatre, Dzieci also believe that it is possible to generate a profound healing effect through creating and sharing their work.

**Activities**

I saw performances of their shows Makbet and Ragnarok as well as attend rehearsals for the latter.

The performance of Mabket was held on a boat moored off Pier 44 in Brooklyn as part of the Water Front Museum. The performance began before we entered the space and we were met by a traveling family of Gypsies, singing and offering us a swig of wine from bottles hidden in brown paper bags.

The production itself is unlike any version of Macbeth I have seen. The ensemble of four had each learned every word of the text and would swap characters at will, or even play multiple versions of the same character at once. The ‘set’ was delineated by a carpet and the lighting effects were created by three carriage lamps that were moved by the actors at will. The character changes were signified through the removing or wearing of single pieces of clothing added to their Gypsy wear.

The result was a deeply physical, chaotic and dramatic piece of theatre. As an audience member I was both exhausted and energised by the relentless pace (it was delivered as one act) and the intimacy of the performance (we were so close at some points it was possible to touch the actors).

The most remarkable aspect of the evening was the combination of pleasure and ceremony created by the event. Although the subject matter was dark (it is Macbeth after all), we were also aware the performers were incredibly playful in their seriousness. The ensemble created a combination of spontaneous interruptions, diversions, patterns and games that could never be recreated. In essence the performance was an embodied understanding of the power and potential of the ‘liveness’ of theatre and it’s capacity to temporarily alter the state of those making and watching it....much like clowning.

I was interested to note audience members offered donations for each performance rather than pay a set ticket price. The emphasis here is on creating work that can be shared within a community rather than focusing on the commercial viability of a performance. In the current political climate, this is very radical indeed. This must limit the company’s choices in terms of which venues they can perform and rehearse in, however, this is an organisation that works with what it is given and whose genuine focus is of ‘being of service’. This is completely antithetical to how commercial theatre is run. Given the company is 15 years old clearly something is working.

Olivia Harris  
Communications Director, Bond Street Theatre  
www.bondst.org

**Overview**

The Bond Street Theatre (BST) was founded in 1976 and develops international theatre based work in refugee camps, post-conflict zones, areas of poverty and with populations that have been victims of natural disaster. They use theatre to promote healing, empowerment, and social development through the arts. I was particularly interested in their work because their roots in clowning and street theatre.

*‘Through our work we show that we are just humans coming together. So Americans and Afghanistan have commonalities; we are just humans trying to connect’*

**Activities**

I was lucky enough to find out about the extraordinary work of Bond Street Theatre through the New York Clown Festival and they were generous enough to invite me to discuss their work. My main point of contact was Olivia Harris, Communications Director.

During our conversation Olivia discussed the powerful effects of their current work in Afghanistan. They have had some form of project running there for ten years and over this time they have witnessed the potential of working through the arts with different communities including the Military Police, women prisons and students. Olivia believes their work is important because,

*“Many people there have never seen live theatre being presented right in front of them. Our work creates hope. The more you do it and open up possibilities, the better.”*

The Company’s focus is always on developing *“engagement and empowerment at a level that couldn’t really happen unless you are on the ground.”* In 2011, BTS worked in Kabul to help create the first resident professional theatre company at the University and its first all-female theatre company.

I found BST’s focus on ensuring their processes of work have a humanising effect on all participants particularly inspiring. Using the principles of Friere’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and adaptations of Augusto Boal exercises, their workshops and performances focus on promoting conversation and discussion about what is happening in the day-to-day lives of the participants. Olivia pointed out this is much more than simply *‘lets get together and discuss our problems’*; it’s about enabling participants to have ‘a voice’ and to take control of a process and lead it. They spend a long time working with participants to develop a ‘safe space’ in order to achieve this. This is important for BTS because it means *“our ideas, workshops and performance come from the people we work with”*.

Working so closely with participants in the field BTS knows their work makes a difference because they see it first hand. Olivia recognised, however, it can be hard to develop systems that can accurately quantify and assess these benefits, especially if they are not immediate,

*“We do something in the room and maybe (participants) think about it in six months time... connecting different people together has a ripple effect and if the work has an effect on one person you don’t know where that might lead or what effect that might have six months from now”*.

Developing long term evaluation systems is also difficult because BTS is run by a small team, however, Olivia recognises the company creates impressive international projects in challenging circumstances despite there only being five core member of staff. Like many companies in the UK, BST knows they can generate more funding if they had a full time development team, however, in order to do this they required more funding. It’s a ‘catch 22’ situation. It is also important for the ethos of BST that there is an interconnectedness regarding ‘the field and the office’ so all members of staff know what life in the field is like, rather than staff being

segregated into 'the people in the office' and the 'project workers'. This enables the team to engage with the work of BST more fully and to be able to effectively problem solve together.

## Sacred Clowns or Koshares Feast of San Geronimo at Taos Pueblo

### Overview

There is much secrecy around The Sacred Clowns or Koshares of Pueblo people in Taos New Mexico and their ritual purpose. Photography and recording equipment of the event is strictly forbidden. It is also forbidden to write in detail about the events and although some people have ignored this, out of respect to the Taos Pueblo, I will only share essential facts.

Unlike the status of clowns in the UK, the Koshares are a highly valued clan among the Pueblos people. They hold a semi-religious position and are honoured as powerful members of the community. Koshares are inspired by divine spirits and teach traditional customs and ways. It is believed they form a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds and enforce social discipline by providing a deterrent for naughty children as well as highlight the vanities and hypocrisies within society.

### Activities

The clowns arrived in the village around 2pm and created for around four hours. Their presence was genuinely terrifying and exhilarating; at once the clowns were shocking and ridiculous. It was clear to see by the clowns' lawless behaviour this was not a show put on for the tourists. It was an authentic community event that had potentially serious consequences for any audience member.

The style of the 'performance' was improvisational and inspired by the interactions and reactions of the audience. Their parodying and goading of the community was funny and at times cruel. Similar to the concepts behind buffon, their actions served to highlight societal anomalies and our own ridiculousness.

Dr Timothy Sharpe  
Founder and Director, The Happiness Institute  
[www.thehappinessinstitute.com](http://www.thehappinessinstitute.com)

### **Overview**

Dr Sharpe is founder of The Happiness Institute, Australia's first organisation devoted solely to enhancing happiness in individuals, families and organisations.

His primary area of interest is enhancing happiness at work but he is also actively involved in consulting and research projects in the areas of leadership, resilience, recruitment and positive education, as well as applications of positive psychology to health and wellbeing.

### **Activities**

Dr Sharpe kindly agreed to meet me for an interview and we discussed how Positive Psychologists have developed multiple ways of measuring happiness, wellbeing and satisfaction. We also considered how an academic and rigorous structure could be developed to assess the impact of a programme exploring how the principles of clowning might benefit teachers or teacher training.

In order to achieve this it would be necessary to consider what specifically needs to be measured and why? Tim explained this is harder to answer than it might seem because there are so many different measures for different constructs. Areas to consider might be:

- Positive emotions in teachers
- Purpose and meaning within the teaching role
- Increased sense of self worth or value for the role of teaching

Tim explained the ultimate goal of Positive Psychology is not actually happiness. Positive Psychology is understanding how to live a good life. This is generally agreed to be 'thriving and flourishing' and goes beyond the pleasure of positive emotion. There are four main themes associate with this,

- 1) Pleasure: having fun, play and happiness
- 2) Character: virtue, value, doing the right thing at the right time
- 3) Building positive relationships: connecting and belonging to a community or neighbourhood
- 4) Being 'of service': giving back or contributing in some way whether this is financially, with time or expertise

When all of these elements combine we are able to "Thrive and Flourish" by living a life that is rich and meaningful.

Tim also discussed a movement called "Positive Education" which is a "*hot topic in Australia at the moment*". The premise is based on the idea that educational institutions require much clearer relationships and lines of communication between children, teachers and parents and how they relate to each other through education. Positive Education applies the principles of Positive Psychology (values, optimism, building positive relationships, living a life of purpose) to education but also encourages teachers and parents to engage in this philosophy too. This results in the creation of a system that allows these three groups to work together to develop and promote awareness and understanding of well-being. Tim suggested this might be challenging for some schools to attain because of time pressures and cost, however, with effective planning and training he believes it could be possible.

Clown Round with Dr Quack and Dr Nick Nack  
At Sydney Children's Hospital  
Humour Foundation  
[www.humourfoundation.com.au](http://www.humourfoundation.com.au)

**Overview**

I followed Dr Quack and Dr Nick Nack around one of their tours through the wards of Sydney Children's Hospital.

In consultation with staff members, the clowns identified different departments and wards to visit. The total experience lasted about four hours.

**Observations**

The clowns worked with a broad age range of children from very young toddlers to teenagers. Particularly impressive were the clowns' abilities to use the apathy of the teenagers to create humorous material that engaged them.

The parents were always included in the games and jokes set up by the clowns.

Staff often joined in or responded to the proposals made by the clowns.

The clowns shifted the tone, length and energy of each interaction depending on circumstances, parental responses and age. Dr Quack and Dr Nick Nack did not repeat any material they had used elsewhere.

One parent was so touched by the clowns interactions with his child he could not believe this service was offered for free. He wanted to make a financial contribution to the work.

Children were visibly engaged and excited by the arrival of the clowns and it was possible to hear many of them talking or laughing after the clowns had left.

The clowns provided a distraction for one boy who was distressed about electrodes being placed on his head and the nurse had not been able to attach them. The clowns transformed the stressful experience into a game and the situation immediately changed into something light and playful, eventually the child completely forgot about what the nurse was doing.



Dr Quack in action

John Paul Bell and Dr Maggie Haertsch  
The Arts Health Institute (AHI)  
<http://www.artshealthinstitute.org.au>

### **Overview**

The Arts Health Institute (AHI) was co-founded two years ago by John-Paul Bell and Maggie Haertsch in order to bring creativity and humour to care. AHI has developed national programmes, education and facilitates research to bring the arts into health and aged care environments. One of their major schemes of work is Play Up. Play Up is a humour therapy program that involves regular visits by a Play Up performer who is a professional actor with special skills working in aged care. The Play Up performer works with clients with dementia and mentors staff in the techniques of creative engagement.

### **Activities**

I spent the afternoon with the AHI Institute and had the chance to interview the whole team and I also spent the afternoon with co-founder John-Paul Bell.

Part of my time at AHI was spent talking about the importance and impact of the Smile Study. The Smile Study is a world-first research study of humour therapy conducted from 2009 to 2011 by the University of New South Wales and was a randomised controlled trial involving 36 residential aged care facilities and 400 clients with dementia.

The study found that individually tailored, regular visits with a specially trained humour practitioner who worked together with a staff member,

- a) reduced agitation
- b) increased happiness
- c) increased positive behaviours

The SMILE Study Humour Therapy Intervention resulted in 20% on average reduction in agitation level in the treatment group. Amazingly, this is the same effect size as is achieved by antipsychotic medications used to treat agitation without the adverse side effect.

The Play Up scheme is the manifestation of this study and it was John-Paul who facilitated 88% of the interventions. Essentially, it is John-Paul's forty years of experience as a comedy performer and his ability to transfer and apply this knowledge to work with Elders that has been so successful. John Paul acknowledges:

*What we are doing is trail blazing to a point. We decided to investigate the therapeutic benefits to humour. It gave credibility to the words "Humour Therapy", that's a big break through for us and the industry is accepting it.*

I was deeply inspired by AHI's ambition and they are very open about their goals to influence policy: "we live in hope of creating a culture change" and they continue to work with the Department of Health and Aging to achieve this. Maggie believes that policy-makers can sometimes be unfairly judged, however, it has been her experience that they want to engage and support programmes or systems of work that have proven benefits to participants.

The organisation recognises there is a need to do a systematic global review that collects evidence, published or not, regarding the therapeutic gains from the arts. This is not just within the healthcare arena for elders but across all fields of medicine. The focus would not necessarily be on well-being but all the health benefits that can be derived and measured as a result of intervention from the arts. This would be an enormous task but ultimately, AHI believes the results would revolutionise how arts and health is recognised and funded.

AHI is focused on creating a self-sustaining business model and, through the help of a benefactor, is working towards creating a fee for service organisation rather than a charity. It is beneficial Maggie comes from a medical background and has a PhD in psychology. This gives her an understanding of the hierarchy in

institutions and the systematic way they work. The combined effect of this is the ability to articulate the Play Up structure to organisations in ways that make them feel safe and included.

The organisation experiences challenges and resistance from individuals and organisations that are not familiar with the benefits of playfulness. John-Paul noted,

*“With Humour Therapy, especially with the Play Up partner, there can be an attitude from other members of staff within the facility that you are bugging around, yet the work they are doing is reported to be the most fulfilling part of that residents week.”*

Interestingly, the Play Up performers do not use red noses when they work with clients. They still apply the principles of clowning but believe the red nose “gets in the way” as there are too many negative associations with it, instead the Play Up partners wear a 1950’s valet or ‘bell-boy’ costume. AHI believes this is more appropriate for the age range of people they work with whilst also signifying the performers are different from other members of staff; they have come to be known as “Humour Valets”.

Kylie Willow  
Founder of Sydney Laughter  
[www.sydneylaughter.com.au](http://www.sydneylaughter.com.au)

**Overview**

Kylie is the founder of Sydney Laughter Yoga and is one of only two Master Trainers in Laughter Yoga in Australia. Laughter yoga works without humour, jokes or comedy and one of its objectives is to cultivate childlike playfulness, which helps participants to laugh without reason. It is always practiced in a group setting. There are hundreds of laughter exercises but no set workshop format. This can be tailored to the needs, attitude or age of any group. Kylie has worked with all age ranges and settings, including co-operate environments.

**Activities**

Kylie invited me to attend one of her workshops and it is clearly something that should be experienced rather than read about, however, I attended a session with a group of elders. Kylie began the workshop by briefly explaining the rationale behind the laughter-based activities and then took us through a series of breathing, laughing and clapping exercises for over an hour. I was surprised at how physically demanding the laughter yoga session was and how engaged the elders were. Once the group had overcome initial shyness and self-consciousness, participants became playful and confidently interacted with each other.

I had felt the workshop was particularly boisterous but Kyle explained it was relatively sedate because of the age of the participants and that it's quiet normal for participants to be rolling on the floor with laughter.

Kylie believes that laughter yoga is about getting in touch with your natural and healthy desire to laugh freely, express joy and live in the moment. She feels this is becoming more and more relevant given the pressures and demands of 21<sup>st</sup> Century living.

Encountering participants who are resistant is a normal part of Kylie's work and is something she is confident in managing. She would never force participants to be involved but often when they see how much fun other group members are having they start to join in. Kylie believes it is helpful that laughter is contagious!

A skilled practitioner and facilitator, Kylie is able to 'read a room' but ultimately she is confident and passionate about Laughter Yoga and she believes this helps to motivate and inspire her participants.

Tricia Cooney  
Co- Artistic Director, Circus Solarus  
www.circussolarus.com.au

**Overview**

Circus Solarus is a not-for-profit social enterprise formed in 1987. The focus of their work is exploring all aspects of the Theatre of Celebration. They do this by transforming every-day public space through street theatre, contemporary carnival, lively comic performances and large visual imagery. Their commitment to engagement through the arts is done largely through playful and humorous parades that include moments of interaction with the public.

**Activities**

I met with Artistic Director, Tricia Cooney who showed me around the studio and we discussed her work and the running of the organisation.

Tricia feels the Company embraces the anarchic nature of the fool in and through their work. Humour plays an essential part in both their devising process and final product. The playfulness of their work is non-threatening and allows people, who might never consider taking part in an event, to experience the work; it provides “a way in”.

Often Circus Solarus will create carnival characters on a theme for public events but they like to keep an open mind about how these characters will respond to each other and the public. The main focus is to ‘invite’ interaction, “*we don’t want to process through a space and not connect with audience*”. This requires the Company to understand participants needs and being flexible in both artistic process and product allows Circus Solarus to “*find ways that speaks to each demographic*”. Tricia believes this creates more visually interesting work and develops greater community ownership of the work.

The skills and aptitude of performers who create work for Circus Solarus are important. Tricia believes there can be a misconception that “*anyone can put on a costume and say hello to the public*”, however, the Company’s aesthetic and commitment to finding meaningful moments of engagement and connection with the public means performers and practitioners have to be interested and excited in creating “person-to-person” contact. They must be able to achieve this quickly and often in chaotic circumstances. She explains,

*“Our work is not just about ‘pretty-pretty’, it’s about engagement, otherwise the work is something you just watch and not necessarily interact with. It’s about creating something to say, however brief, in a moment of unexpected contact with another person”.*

During our time together, I also discovered Tricia is an Australian Winston Churchill Fellow. Her central line of research was considering “*Why in our 21st century technological society, that our ‘hand-crafted’ performance and the carnival tradition is still so much in demand?*” Tricia felt that the quote from Marilyn Stewart’s book, “The Carnival and Don Quixote: The Folk Tradition of Comedy” summed up her experience most fully:

*“When the reality of modern existence seems to have degenerated into another Iron Age, the comedy of Carnival can teach the imagination how to fight despair...the world of carnival is a peculiar construction which loosens the boundary between fantasy and reality and mocks ordinary ways of perceiving time and space. ”*

As a result of this conversation I am keen to do further research into the cultural impact of contemporary carnival and understand how this might influence and impact my understanding of clowning,

Circus Solarus is an impressive 26 years, however, the current funding climate is extremely challenging. Local sources of funding for performances have diminished, festival budgets are being used in different ways and there is greater competition between other live events. Tricia believes the organisation has survived because of

a high degree of flexibility and strong entrepreneurial skills. Alongside tendering and developing new work, the Company is able to generate other income by working for local governments to support community education campaigns. Through these project Circus Solarus develops ways in which they can continue to bring their unique brand of performance to the streets.

Similar to many of the organisations I have visited, Circus Solarus finds evaluating their work difficult because gathering data related to any long term impact of the work is extremely challenging and potentially very expensive.

Plans for the future include an exploration into establishing the Circus Solarus School for Fools. This could provide a vocational education certificate for young people wanting to work in carnival and performance.

# Women's Circus

www.womenscircus.org.au

## Overview

Women's Circus is a community arts organisation established in Melbourne in 1991 and was the first all women circus in the world. Its initial rationale was to provide a platform to build self-esteem for women who had been the victims of domestic violence, however, the circus has a wider remit now and aims to "inspire and empower" women from all walks of life.

They deliver:

- i) Training
- ii) Outreach activities to communities around Melbourne
- iii) Circus Performance

*I don't like art disconnected from life, that's why I like the Circus, It's about women's lives and not about some sacred other fictional space of art or theatre. This is art in life. Steph Kheo, Artist in Residence*

## Activities

I was interested in how the practice at the Women's Circus had been applied to support and nurture women. After spending three days there I could see it clearly provided a powerful vehicle through which women could express themselves and find a physical identify completely different to one they might previously perceived they had. When I spoke with participants about this they discussed the benefits of circus practice and how it required them to take part in activities they had previously considered out of their reach. This enabled them to accomplished amazing feats such as 'flying on the trapeze', standing on their heads, bending over backwards or defying gravity. They felt the process had helped them to work with fear and resistance,

*"Circus asks unique things of the body and mind; strength, courage, risk taking, the confidence to try the impossible. To do anything in circus requires training on an athletic level and this obviously has an impact on you on a psycho physical level, how you imagine and understand yourself, your body and what you are capable of".*  
(Participant wanted to remain anonymous)

One of the most enjoyable aspects of being with the Women's Circus was being part of its strong sense of community. I spoke to the Steph Kheo, the Artist-in-Residence, and she explained this is of paramount importance for the organisation. Both the staff and the participants at the Circus work hard to achieve this,

*"This is not just a gym or acting class. We are creating something much deeper – we are explicit about why we are doing this - because we share certain values. You can't just ring up and say I want to do "Intermediate ariel". All new participants take part in a programme called "New Women", this is an intro to all circus skills but most importantly it brings women into the culture and the values. We empahsise this is a safe and supportive place, it's a non hierarchical, non competitive space."*

I have attended workshops at circus spaces in the UK before and often there is a particular body aesthetic amongst participants as well as a typical age range. At the two workshops I attended at the Women's Cirucs, women of all ages and abilities worked together to explore movement and playfulness. The focus was on ensuring all participants were able to achieve some part of the workshop and this was a very liberating and positive experience for me. Aside from the inclusive teaching style, Steph highlighted the importance of using play as a tool for self-discovery,

*"The thing about circus is that it's very physical and it's very fun. It's purely physical so the head is out of the picture. You might have to jump up a hundred times just to get a simple lift right. It's liberating. The women say the classes are fun because circus is playing and it's what everyone did as kids: climb tree, jump down, tumble and roll, jump from trees just with a form. Basically, circus is how children play and roll so for the body we are*

*going back to the movement we probably did much more naturally as kids. As we grow older we lose the physical inclination to do”.*

As an organisation the Women’s Circus is going through a period of transition, one of the reasons is the recent governmental change in Victoria. This has resulted in the funding criteria for community arts organisations changing and this has made it more challenging for companies like the Women’s Circus to receive previous levels of funding. Ten years ago the organisation had a small core team of full time staff but now staff only work part-time.

Despite this potential risk, the staff at the circus remain motivated and their positivity and enthusiasm was inspiring. Over the last four months staff have developed a strategy to encourage new practitioners to engage with the circus as well as focusing on connecting with even more women, particularly those who are ‘hard to reach’. For Steph the future of the circus rests...

*“With our strong focus on creating a safe, supportive and stimulating environment in which participants can extend their skills, build confidence and have fun, and in presenting engaging, high quality public performances of social relevance”.*

David Symons,  
Artistic Manager of Programs, Humour Foundation  
[www.humourfoundation.com.au](http://www.humourfoundation.com.au)

**Overview**

The Humour Foundation was established as a charity in 1996 and has two principal areas of work, the Clown Doctors program and the recently developed Elder Clowns program. While Clown Doctors work with children in hospital, Elder Clowns work with elderly people living with dementia or depression in aged care facilities.

The Humour Foundation works in all major children's hospitals in Australia and works with 100,000 people a year.

*"The hardest part of my job is convincing people we are serious in our stupidity"*

**Activities**

I met with David to discuss his role as Artistic Manager and the significance of the clown in the work of the Human Foundation. For David, it is the underlying state of clown - open, imaginative and honest – that makes it so effective in hospitals and with elders. The clown affirms everyone else and is unthreatening and signals it's time to have fun and to be playful; they have an open presence and a strong sense of wonder. They are allowed to be anarchic and naughty and that can be a useful change in atmosphere in a hospital.

For David, one of the hardest parts of his job is convincing people they are '*serious in their stupidity*'. All the performers at the Humour Foundation have a genuine interest in changing how a child feels. The methodology is playfulness, stupidity, anarchy and naughtiness but the intent is serious - to change the world for the child they are working with and to make it better for them. David notes,

*"There's a genuine attempt, no matter how challenging the situation or environment, to make a connection with that kid, to help empower them".*

There is a high level of artistry in clown doctoring that is sometimes misunderstood. Performance can be an art form that people think they can "do", unlike painters or musicians, however, working as a clown doctor without training is unsustainable. In order for clown doctors to consistently deliver work of a high standard they need to understand the subtleties of:

- play, improvisation
- rhythm and timing
- artistic form / dramatic tensions
- working with intuition
- tone and intention

The best clown doctors look like they are simply 'messaging about' however, the confidence and the understanding of performance form allows 'audiences' to feel safe; the children understand they are interacting with professionals who know what they are doing. David said,

*"The clown has a willingness to meet you exactly where you are, wherever that. The clown will work with this and use all of their artistic skills to develop something with you in the moment".*

Clown Doctors and Elder Clowns require very different skills and performers don't necessarily work across the two sectors. Working with a child it is possible to be immediately anarchic with elders there is a more focused and gentler approach. David explains,

*“It’s a different tone, working with elders you have to be interested in the significance and the gravitas of the life they have lived and you have to be ready to engage in this world and be open to how amazing this is.”*

The first principle of Elder Clown is getting to know a person, not to make them laugh and the performer will visit the elders every week. This allows a relationship to be built up based on respect and trust and, eventually, the clowns become more playful. Working with children in hospitals does not always allow the clowns to build long term relationships and focus is placed on creating much shorter bursts of activity where the priority is to make the children laugh.

One of the strengths of working with children is the relationship between clown and child is accepted and convention supports this, however, the clown relationship with elders is new. Currently, the Humour Foundation is managing the misconception that clowns infantilise older people. David believes a well-trained clown will provide opportunities for the elder to enjoy being in high status and enable them to instruct or take charge of a situation. This might be the only time in the week they are able to do this.

The Elder clown work is more complex than the clown doctor process. Elder clowns work at multi-levels – i) with the elders ii) with the carer workers iii) with the whole facility. David states,

*“The stories of the residents are really important and we are asking care workers to be more engaged with these stories but part of our role is to listen to the care workers. These are people who are asked to care and care and care but who’s listening to or caring for them? We have one clown, Freddy, who even goes into the kitchen and causes trouble there and everyone loves him. Just because you are kitchen staff doesn’t mean you don’t matter. We’re looking at infiltrating everywhere to create more freely humane places.”*

Research and understanding *exactly* what clown doctors do has become a major focus for the organisation and they are currently setting up a PhD study to analyse the impact and benefits of their work on patients. This will enable the Humour Foundation to further develop their training and focus activities where they will have maximum benefit in hospitals. It will also enable deeper discussions with medical institutions and staff and potentially allow the organisation access to hospitals or units that are currently wary or unsure of their work.

Another area of development is ensuring the clowns have access to a strong professional development programme so that the performers can expand their work, develop cohesive principles of performance practices and continue to bring the highest level of artistry into their work.

## 6. Conclusion

There are many organisations which use clowning in applied settings, however, similar to circumstances in the UK there is not much respect for the art form of clowning as it is often misunderstood. As a result, all of the organisations working in applied clowning have met with resistance. It is likely that discussing the benefits of clowning practice as a tool for teacher development might meet with similar resistance in the UK. My Fellowship, however, has proved it is possible for whole organisations working in applied clowning to grow and thrive.

Understanding how to implement change management techniques when working in the face of resistance has been invaluable to the success of many of the organisations I met. This includes,

- Sharing knowledge about why there is a need for change either within the organisation, policy or society
- Sharing knowledge about the principles of clowning
- Sharing knowledge about the benefits of play, humour and laughter
- “Speaking the language” of the organisation they are working with
- Being able to articulate clearly the benefits of ways of working supported by evidence
- Creating change at a slow and consistent pace
- Creating human-centered processes so the individuals involved are included and supported throughout the activities/processes

All of the points mentioned above will be crucial in order to develop a programme that uses the principles of clowning to support and enrich teacher training and practice. Articulating how any programme of work directly links to the curriculum or professional development, such as leadership, is essential. It may also be politic to avoid using the term clowning altogether.

There is an ever-growing body of scientific evidence around the benefits of clowning as well as laughter. This gives further credibility to anybody working in applied clowning. Making this information accessible and relevant to teachers and Senior Leadership Teams will benefit the growth and develop of the work I hope to carry out. This is important because it helps counteract the trivialisation of play and playfulness. All of the organisations I met had an innate understanding of how clowning connects us to moments of play which, in turn, helps us cope with the stresses of everyday life. For them, play is not an indulgence but a necessity and a fundamental expression of humanity. Experience has shown, however, when dealing with “grown-up” institutions such as hospitals, it is sometimes helpful to have scientific evidence in order to prove playfulness is useful and that it has a place within traditional organisations and institutions.

There are many techniques, activities and games that are used to train clown doctors that could be adapted to engage, inspire and nourish teachers in a workshop setting. There was, however, one essential theme that reoccurred throughout my trip that practitioners and leaders alike felt was essential in order to develop meaningful human centered experiences: the power of effective listening. It is the most important component of any successful clowning intervention and *all* of the individuals and organisations created opportunities for listening in one form or another. This means listening to what other people are saying but also developing techniques to ‘listen’ to body language, dynamics or tensions in a room as well as shifts in energy and attitude. Remaining genuinely and authentically available for another person for long periods of time is challenging and this is why clown doctors require training as well as group support. It is my belief that teachers are not listened to enough and yet gifted teachers spend much of their day listening to other people. I am confident that exploring the power of listening and how to nurture and support listening will be beneficial and worthwhile areas of exploration in any programme I develop.

There were two reoccurring motifs from my Fellowship that I would also like to discuss here. I asked everybody I engaged with why they believed they were successful and five of the practitioners used the same expression, “*I followed my bliss*”. I heard this phrase in both Australia and America and its repetition had a powerful effect on me. The individuals discussing this genuinely believed in the power and potential of understanding what makes

them happy and the importance of investing time and energy in this and then acting upon it. As a result, it seems to have given these particular leaders enormous focus. They discussed how it enabled them to take big risks within their careers and motivated them during periods of adversity. It might just be coincidence but these individuals were also extremely charismatic. I wonder if living a life that focuses on generating fulfillment (not hedonism) enables us to be more open, generous and present in the company of other people? I would like to explore this idea further and it is, perhaps, a useful point of reflection for teachers (or anyone) to explore; what were the impulses that lead to specific career choices, how can we reconnect with these and how can they inspire and motivate us now?

The second recurring motif was the significance individuals placed on “being of service”. This was the consistent response I received when asking about the most important element of an individual’s or organisation’s role. The necessary humility required to give this answer emphasises there is not much room for ego in the world of Applied Arts. This is a realm that attracts individuals who are deeply concerned with creating change to better reflect the values of inclusion and fairness. The reality of effecting change through clowning is tough, yet all of the individuals or organisations I met had achieved this. Remembering the ultimate purpose of their work was to “be of service” had enabled these groups to stay motivated despite managing the day-to-day minutiae of busy offices, facing the challenges of funding cuts and the pressures of an economic downturn. Connecting with a purpose larger than oneself is a powerful concept, and being able to articulate this effectively to others is an important step towards creating change. Inspired by this, I revisited and revised my own personal and private rationale for working with teachers and this is now much clearer and purposeful for me.

#### Appendix

Energised by my Fellowship, I approached organisations that might be interested in my work and I am proud to say I have completed a pilot workshop at Goldsmith’s University with students studying for a Masters in Applied Theatre. Using clown practice and techniques inspired and developed by the Fellowship, the workshop explored Playfulness and Resilience. Ironically, given my conclusion above, the course director was interested in the workshop *because* of the clowning aspects. Although, my target group is teachers, the workshop represents a valuable milestone in trying out content as well as generating anecdotal evidence about the benefits of the workshop and creating credibility for the work.

I have been invited back in January to run the same workshop and continue to approach other organisations who could benefit from this work.

An unexpected outcome from my Fellowship has been a longing to recreate the same kind of energy, sharing and community generated by the New York International Clown Festival. I feel there is a real opportunity to develop something similar in London and I am currently putting together a feasibility study regarding this.

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