

Institution: University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 27		
Title of case study: Using participatory theatre and media production to empower and transform marginalised communities in Jinja, Uganda		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004-2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Jane Plastow Dr Katie McQuaid	Professor of African Theatre Senior Research Fellow (School of Geography)	1994–present 2014–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-ongoing		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Professor Jane Plastow's sustained record of participatory scholarship in East African countries, particularly Uganda, has shown how multifaceted arts-based community work in slum quarters of second cities in the Global South can support the development of better informed, more cohesive communities that are able to claim better agency over their life conditions. Her practice-as-research model has enabled a participant-led challenge to systemic inequality with an emphasis on improving both intergenerational and gender relationships. The multiple impacts generated by Plastow's research fall into two principal categories: (1) community cohesion, empowerment and environmental improvement; and (2) improvements in sexual health education and the advancement of gender equality. Participant skills development in media production has led to disseminating project outcomes across the country via radio and film broadcasts.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Over the past two decades, Plastow has become internationally renowned for her participatory scholarship on East African community theatre, which is grounded in fieldwork in Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia. She is at the forefront of research into how arts-based practices can be successfully used to empower marginalised communities and develop evidence-based solutions to key issues identified by them [1, 4]. A key insight of her work has been her critique of the neo-colonial ideologies of contemporary Theatre for Development (TfD) in Africa. Her analysis of TfD's socio-political contexts has challenged the use of poorly trained practitioners, who often work on a short-term basis to produce single-issue, didactic, or even propagandist theatre designed to promulgate the agenda of western corporations or NGOs. Plastow reveals how this kind of approach tends to domesticate and disempower communities [5]. By contrast, her practice-as-research has advanced a participatory arts-based model rooted in exploratory performance practices that promote critical reflection and concrete action from participants, leading to its adoption in a range of interdisciplinary research contexts, notably with medics and educationalists [3]. Her work demonstrates how having trained practitioners working on a long-term basis with individuals and communities empowers them to debate and address issues that are important to them. Working in collaborative and non-hierarchical ways, Plastow's model has empowered marginalised communities to speak to power and has promoted equality. She has particular expertise in addressing gender inequality, having pioneered the Uganda Women's Intergenerational Theatre Project (UWITP: 2015–2017) to investigate the issues facing women in communicating across age and class boundaries [2].</p>		

This model underpins **Plastow's** work in the Walukuba-Masese district, one of the most deprived districts in the Jinja municipality of Eastern Uganda. She began working in Walukuba in 2015 as co-investigator on a multidisciplinary arts and social research partnership between the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield. **Plastow** led the intergenerational community theatre strand of this project, assisted in Uganda by Dr Katie McQuaid, whom she trained in community arts activity, and Ugandan TfD practitioner Baron Oron. **Plastow's** expertise in African participatory theatre and gender inequity, combined with McQuaid's background in anthropology, led them to pioneer an approach that merges ethnographic and social science methods with Freirian-inspired applied theatre and Stiwanism, an intersectional African feminism. **Plastow** and McQuaid's blending of these methodologies led them to propose new ways of strengthening and promoting unity within a divided community, empowering members to recognise and challenge systemic injustices and inequalities [4].

Applying the community arts training provided by **Plastow**, McQuaid and Oron ran 50 theatre workshops over five months with over 60 Walukuba residents, aged 14 to 60. **Plastow** then worked intensively with intergenerational groups for two months to identify and achieve consensus on their primary concerns and to devise performances to address these. These included an eight-section promenade performance on issues including sexual health, institutional corruption and environmental concerns, which was performed to a community audience of 400; and three short plays on the oppression of women, land insecurity and intergenerational environmental knowledge exchange. A central feature of this work has been the use of theatre and audience debate to generate interventions. **Plastow** returned to Uganda in 2016 to produce a further performance on waste management and lead a biofuel-briquette-making project [3].

Building on these successes, in 2017 **Plastow** secured grants to extend her work within the Jinja district and apply her methods in other areas. Funded by the GCRF and again assisted by McQuaid, **Plastow** led a project based in Walukuba and Domasi Village in Malawi to test the length of time and training needed to enable communities to become self-sufficient in making arts-based interventions. This project showed that much longer-term engagement with communities was needed than had previously been anticipated, and that communities require ongoing support in order to put training into practice [3]. Follow-on grants from the British Academy and GCRF in 2018 enabled **Plastow** to foster arts-based interventions for adolescents in Walukuba-Masese district. Here she directed a team of local researchers to develop a participatory arts-based approach that empowers adolescents to lead in the development and dissemination of effective sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education in partnership with public health practitioners [4]. Of particular importance in this project was the attempt to re-balance gender hierarchies, with an unusual focus on the male role, thereby working towards a re-valuing of relationships and a promotion of attitudes of kindness and care.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Boon, R., & Plastow, J. (2004). *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama and The World Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Kiguli, S., & Plastow, J. (2015). 'Exploring Poetic Voice in the Uganda Women's Intergenerational Theatre Project'. In M. Banham, J. Gibbs & F. Osofisan (eds.), *African Theatre 14: Contemporary Women* (pp. 30-40). Oxford: James Currey.
3. McQuaid, K & Plastow, JE. (2017). 'From Research to Activism: Theatre and Anthropology in Walukuba'. *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques: The IATC journal/Revue de l'AICT*, 15.
4. McQuaid, K., & Plastow, J. (2017). 'Ethnography, Applied Theatre and Stiwanism: Creative Methods in Search of Praxis Amongst Men and Women in Jinja, Uganda'. *Journal of International Development*, 29: 961–980.
5. Plastow, J. (2014) 'Domestication or Transformation: The Ideology of Theatre for Development in Africa', *Applied Theatre Research*, 2 (2) pp.107-118.

Selected Research Grants

RG1: Plastow, J. 'Capacity building, knowledge exchange and upscaling film making for Schools in Kenya and Uganda, HEFCE, 2017–2018, GBP76,391.

RG2: Plastow J. (Co-I) & Willcox, M. (PI). 'Family Planning: Fact or Fiction', AHRC-MRC. March 2018–November 2019. GBP50,132.

RG3: Plastow, J. 'Engendering equality: working holistically in a Ugandan slum to challenge gendered inequalities, sexual ignorance and abusive sexual behaviours'. British Academy, January 2018–January 2019, GBP49,999.

RG4: Plastow, J. 'Performing Living Knowledge: Developing a replicable model for arts-based empowerment of marginalised urban communities in Uganda and Malawi'. AHRC, February 2017–January 2018, GBP80,626.

RG5: Plastow, J. 'Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda'. AHRC, December 2017–November 2019, GBP174,590.

RG6: Valentine, G. (PI) & Plastow, J. (Co-I) 'Intergenerational Justice, Consumption and Sustainability in Comparative Perspective', AHRC, April 2014–March 2017, GBP867,356.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

(1) Community cohesion, empowerment and environmental improvement

Working with an original cohort of over 60 women and men aged 14–60 years, the success of **Plastow's** theatrical interventions in Jinja led participants to form the community group *We are Walukuba* (WAW), registering it as a Community Based Organisation on 30.10.15, eight months after she first began working with them **[RG6]**. Prior to its establishment, members had expressed the view that there was no place for intergenerational, cross-gender and cross-religious meetings, which left many of them feeling isolated and undervalued. Involvement with WAW has since given them a community profile; empowerment as educators on matters of environment, housing and domestic violence; skills in creative arts and income through commissioned arts activities; and mutual advice and support on a range of issues, from health to food and accommodation **[A]**. The group now abides by a written constitution that applies the principles of intergenerational and gender inclusivity promoted by **Plastow**, operating through a revolving management committee which elects an older man and woman and a younger man and woman to lead the group each month **[B]**.

Since fieldwork ended, WAW has continued to advocate for intergenerational dialogue and empowerment of community voices as a means for local sustainable development, deploying the creative arts skills they have gained through the project to facilitate this **[A]**. By creating and performing short plays, initially led by **Plastow** but increasingly by members themselves, where participants use the anonymity of theatrical role to express their own concerns, the group has debated issues they identified as key to their lives, using the dramatic medium to rehearse possible real-life solutions. Examples range from sensitising marketplace vendors to sanitation and waste disposal issues, to challenging instances of casual domestic violence **[RG4]**. Through the work begun by **Plastow** and McQuaid's interventions, the group claim that there is now 'a reduction in domestic violence' **[A]**. The work has also resulted in improved, mutually respectful relations between young people and their parents and elders. For example, one participant noted that the project had 'helped the different age groups of the community to come and work together. Such a thing had not happened [before] in our community, [and] to find the young and the old discussing an important issue such as environmental conservation was really a big breakthrough'. Another stated that being 'uneducated, old and poor' had previously made her 'despise' herself. However, through her involvement in the UWITP project, which put 'us together with the youth ... I feel like I am now important to the community' **[4]**.

In 2015, **Plastow** created three plays with WAW exploring corruption in land sales, female oppression, and intergenerational environmental knowledge exchange **[RG6]**. The plays enabled previously disempowered participants to speak to power and provoked a shift in attitudes amongst senior community leaders. One of these, *This land is ours, but not ours*, used comedy to highlight injustices in the process for local people trying to claim leasehold of land where they were sitting tenants. First performed on 18.8.15 to 80 stakeholders including local government, NGOs, CBOs and the police, WAW members and the audience debated the issues raised immediately after the performance. This led to invitations to perform to 35 senior members of Jinja Municipal Council's Management Committee, and to 50 people including the

Minister of Lands, raising awareness at the highest level of the social problems facing local people. For example, the Town Clerk noted the efficacy of the theatrical medium to generate social and political change, telling the cast: 'When you act we were really touched, we are all pledging to work for you. We watch without bad blood. We cannot look away' [B].

In 2016, audience debates, which followed 14 separate performances of a play about local waste disposal co-devised by **Plastow** and WAW, included council representatives. Subsequent discussions led to community clean-ups, rubbish collections in markets and districts, and pressure being placed on the municipal council to collect refuse more frequently [RG6]. WAW's focus on responsible waste disposal also led to considerations of sustainable energy use, and **Plastow** and WAW worked together on a biofuel-briquette-making project using recycled household waste. Six women from the group formed an intergenerational briquette-making cooperative using a manual press, for sale to local residents and businesses. A core environmental benefit of this initiative was a reduction in the number of trees being cut for charcoal burning [A, C]. As a direct consequence of their work and in recognition of the important role WAW played in raising community awareness of environmental concerns, WAW became an integral part of the Council's 'Clean Up Jinja' campaign, and the group was invited to take part in 10 local events (<http://theatre-studies.co.uk/2016/04/06/a-rubbish-play-and-a-good-day/>). The Environment Department supported these events by providing materials to facilitate community clean-ups, and the Waste Department undertook to ensure that rubbish skips at local markets were collected more frequently.

(2) Improvements in sexual health education and engendering equality

Plastow's more recent research exploring ways of tackling exploitation in male-female relationships and improving awareness of sexual health and contraception has also produced noteworthy effects. **Plastow** and McQuaid [RG3] identified that everyday relationships between boys and girls were often antagonistic and built on exploitative notions governed by the sexual and social dominance of boys and the subservience of girls. A follow-on project [RG5] investigated how a participatory arts approach could develop an effective model for youth-led sexual and reproductive health education, empowering pupils to make safe choices and challenge harmful gender roles and stereotypes. Six hundred pupils from six schools in the Jinja District participated in pilot workshops, which were later successfully repeated with over 1,500 pupils from the same schools, as well as a further 400 pupils across two related projects in Malawi and India. Post-project interviews with Jinja participants [D] revealed profound and life-enhancing changes for them, including increased confidence and self-respect, raised life aspirations, and improved knowledge and understanding of the importance of sexual health. Their comments included: 'Before this project I was a girl who fear [sic] everything and every person, but after the project I think I will not be fearing anybody. I think I will be a very important person in this world. I think after this project I will not be fearing a talk with mature people and talking in public' (15-year-old girl); 'After the project I have learnt how to associate with boys freely. I have got knowledge and skills of how I can protect myself from human change. I have got confidence. I have got knowledge about menstruation. I have got knowledge about pregnancy and family planning. I think that nothing about changes in human especially in girls can defeat me to handle' (15-year-old girl); 'I learnt that playing sex is bad because it causes STDs and unwanted pregnancies, and this affects the girls negatively leading to school dropouts, early marriage' (16-year-old girl) [D].

The Head Teacher of one of the schools noted that a further benefit was the fact that girls were now more likely to remain in education as ridicule from boys over menstruation diminished: '[The project] has opened up a way that people take it now as a normal thing, now boys no longer laugh at the girls. Those days girls would even drop out of school because of some change in the body, you're ashamed, they laugh at you. But now it is very normal, a boy can even get his sweater and say please can you wrap yourself with this sweater, they now know that they have to protect their sisters to see that they remain in school' [E]. Boys themselves also supported this view. For example, one 15-year-old boy described his changed attitude to girls: 'I was one of them stubborn boys who laugh at the girls ... But one lesson took just 30 minutes for me to understand my mistakes from there [and] I became a changed person' [E]. Teachers and health professionals also reported witnessing transformed attitudes and behaviours in gender relations, as well as changing their own practices to become more

proactive in seeking to help the adolescents in their care. For example, one health practitioner reported that involvement with the project had led him independently to approach a local school and establish a sexual health programme there. As he observed: 'The impacts have been amazing. The school administration has reported no pregnancy for the whole year of 2018. A number of boys and girls have been seeking more SRH information and being able to seek more support for various issues in their lives, many of them have been much better able to commit to their education through positive behaviour change practices' [F]. A head teacher summed up the project's impact: 'They have learned the difference between friendship and a love relationship ... respecting one another is paramount which was not initially there ... I think these people's lives are transformed. This kind of education that they got from this kind of project is peculiar; they will not find it anywhere, so I believe they will carry this along wherever they will go' [E]. Such testimonies highlight the radical nature of **Plastow's** work and its crucial importance to local communities: it has successfully challenged the whole school culture, which in sub-Saharan Africa is often particularly hierarchical.

Plastow's continuing work in Jinja has pioneered the use of community video, using this medium to share more broadly the health and social messages that arise from the theatrical work. Members of WAW were trained in filmmaking techniques [A] and established the Jinja Film Unit, which has generated funds for the wider group by making videos for local NGOs [RG1]. Training was provided to teachers in the six partner schools, and in 2018–19 three of these were supported in setting up film clubs for pupils, which made films profiled at the Kenya National Schools Film Festival in 2019. In February 2020, short films made through the project *Family Planning: Fact or Fiction* [RG2] <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7049578?page=2>, highlighting the importance of contraception in avoiding unwanted pregnancies, were given approval by Uganda's Ministry of Health to be screened in health centres across the country [G]. The project also led to the creation of a six-part series of short radio plays, *I Just Wanted to Ask*, exploring how parents and children can talk to each other to foster more supportive relationships. Recorded in the native language, Lusoga, the plays were broadcast in February–March 2020, with each episode followed by a live listener phone-in. Notably, callers demonstrated improved understanding that parents should share the task of child-rearing, should better support and educate their daughters about menstruation, and that girls should be able to continue with their education if they became pregnant [H].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

A: 'We Are Walukuba' signed group testimonial (1.3.19).

B: McQuaid, K. and Plastow, J. (2017) *From Research to Activism: Theatre and Anthropology in Walukuba*. Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques: The IATC journal/Revue de l'AICT, 15. ISSN 2409-7411.

C: Film 'We are Walukuba Green Briquette Project' housed on WAW Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1225426094225906>

D: Responses from 18 project participants aged 14–16 years, Masese Girls School (6.12.18)

E: Independent project evaluations via 71 interviews with children, teachers and public health facilitators (June–July 2019).

F: Testimonial from Senior Health Practitioner, Jinja District, February 2020.

G: Letter from the Assistant Commissioner Health Services, Ministry of Health, Uganda, (5.2.20).

H: Transcript 'I Just Wanted to Ask' radio call-ins (translated into English from Lusoga) February–March 2020.