

Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 33. Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Enhancing lives through new approaches to participatory arts		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2020		
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:
Helen Nicholson Rachel Beckles Willson	Professor of Theatre Professor of Music	2000 onwards 2004-September 2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Research undertaken at Royal Holloway has strengthened arts practices with disadvantaged populations, shaped new participatory arts practices, and informed understanding of the arts by, with, and for communities. By analysing how ideologies and belief systems inform community programmes involving music and theatre-making, research by Professors Helen Nicholson and Rachel Beckles Willson has underpinned new and equitable approaches to participatory arts. Their research has informed the work of cultural organisations, artists, and teachers; supported charities and NGOs; inspired humanitarian workers and carers; and enhanced the lives of community participants, including refugees, migrant children, and people living with dementia.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Nicholson (Drama) and Beckles Willson (Music) share research interests in participatory and socially engaged arts. Their research investigated commonly held perceptions that the arts have 'humanising' or 'civilising' powers, demonstrating that this assumption is indebted to nineteenth-century cultural imperialism, and popularised by Christian reformists who believed that the arts would benefit the poor, transform behaviour, treat social ills, and promote community cohesion. Their research showed how this legacy has endured into the twenty-first century, surfacing internationally in musical programmes Beckles Willson described as 'missionary projects' and in participatory arts programmes Nicholson identified as 'redemption narratives'. Collaborations with cultural geography opened new lines of inquiry about how participatory arts might become more attuned to twenty-first century sensibilities towards place and embodiment, fostered by Beckles Willson as Director of Royal Holloway's Humanities and Arts Research Institute, where Nicholson served as Fellow with Professor Phil Crang (Geography) in 2013 to 2014. The impact evidenced in this case study is underpinned by three areas of research: 1) applied theatre as an inclusive and relational practice; 2) practice-based research on music with displaced people; 3) interdisciplinary research on the arts in dementia care. By recognising the relationship between place, cultural practices and the body, this research has achieved new understandings of participatory arts, and developed artistically innovative practices that attend to different homes, spaces, life histories, and everyday experiences.</p> <p>Nicholson's research contributed to defining the emergent field of applied theatre in the early twenty-first century. When her research was first published in 2005 it broke new ground by analysing the values that applied theatre sought to promote. Using theories of the gift, her research revealed that theatre-makers' well-meaning intentions to 'empower' or 'help' participants are not always equitable or well-received. Despite calls to the contrary, she found that some drama practices with disadvantaged communities were neither co-created nor responsive to the contexts in which they lived. Claims that individuals had been 'transformed' by participating in theatre risked an uneven balance of power; stories of 'empowerment', widely told</p>		

by white middle-class practitioners, often emphasised change that conformed to their own liberal values (R1). Her research on **theatre education** analysed creative pedagogies, asking how the political radicalism associated with the twentieth-century theatre in education movement might be re-imagined with young people today (R2). By 2016, Nicholson's research posited an alternative to one of the familiar tenets of twentieth-century participatory theatre (that theatre creates the conditions for social change when participants distance themselves from their worlds). Influenced by cultural geography, she argued that inclusive practices in applied theatre might attend to the embodied, relational, and sensory experiences of everyday life as well as cognitive forms of meaning-making (R3). Nicholson's body of work has provided a rationale for long-term, creative, and equitable partnerships, sustained by mutual exchange of learning between artists, participants, arts organisations, institutions, and communities.

Two examples of projects with different populations (music with displaced people in Sicily, and the arts in dementia care) illustrate how Nicholson's and Beckles Willson's research has underpinned the development of participatory arts practices. Beckles Willson's research on **music-making with displaced people** in Sicily was conceived as an alternative to the cultural imperialism she had uncovered in peace-building initiatives in refugee communities, where musical works from the European canon were imposed on children of multiple faiths (R4). After listening to the voices and life histories of unaccompanied migrant minors (Africans and Bangladeshis), she designed new ways of facilitating their singing and rapping, investigating how ubiquitous technologies (mobile phones and WhatsApp) enable music-making (R5). Her research showed how displaced minors can use musical creativity to communicate their ideas, tell their stories and develop their sense of identity. Her findings demonstrated that song-writing and public performance enable young migrants to integrate with their host communities and build adult lives in unfamiliar environments.

Nicholson's interdisciplinary research on **the arts in dementia care** illustrates the importance of attending to the network of relationships in care homes. Building on her long-term partnership with the sector-leading charity Age Exchange Theatre Trust and in collaboration with Professor Frank Keating (RHUL Social Work), the research project *Reminiscence Arts and Dementia Care: Impact on Quality of Life* (RADIQL) brought together researchers in the arts, social work and clinical psychology. Nicholson and PhD student Jayne Lloyd defined the principles of Reminiscence Arts, working with Age Exchange to develop an innovative relationship-centred approach to creative engagement. Designed as an alternative to arts practices that use cognitive recall to 'recover' the person who is 'lost', this research showed that people with advanced dementia, many of whom are post-verbal, can continue to learn new creative skills when artists and carers are attuned to their cultural heritages, tastes, physicality, sensory memories and their everyday lives (R6).

3. References to the research

- R1:** Nicholson, Helen. 2005. *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. 197pp (2nd edition 2014). Can be supplied by the HEI on request. QI: Double peer-reviewed monograph with academic press. Translated into Japanese, funded by AHRB.
- R2:** Nicholson, Helen. 2009. *Theatre & Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan. 91pp. Can be supplied by the HEI on request. QI: Peer-reviewed academic press. Translated into Slovak, Hungarian and Arabic.
- R3:** Nicholson, Helen. 2016. 'A Good Day Out: applied theatre, relationality and participation' in Hughes, Jenny and Nicholson, Helen (eds.) *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre*. pp. 248-278. CUP. Can be supplied by the HEI on request. QI: Double peer-reviewed collection with academic press. Translated into Korean.
- R4:** Beckles Willson, Rachel. 2011. 'Music teachers as missionaries: Understanding Europe's recent dispatches to Ramallah', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, 301-325. DOI: [10.1080/17411912.2011.641370](https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2011.641370). QI: Double peer reviewed in leading academic journal.
- R5:** Beckles Willson, Rachel. 2019. 'Listening through the warzone of Europe', *Ethnomusicology* 63, 289-295. DOI: [10.5406/ethnomusicology.63.2.0279](https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.63.2.0279). QI: Double peer-reviewed in leading academic journal.

R6: Lloyd, Jayne and Nicholson, Helen. 2017. 'The Care Home as a Creative Space' in McCormack, S. (ed). *Applied Theatre: Creative Ageing*. London, Bloomsbury, pp. 125-146. QI: Double peer-reviewed book with academic press. Draws on research findings and Grey Literature report: Nicholson, H., Keating, F., Lloyd, J. & Cole, L. 2015. *Reminiscence, Arts and Dementia Care: Impact on Quality of Life (RADIQL)*. Funded by Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.

4. Details of the impact

Context and Pathways to Impact. As participatory arts have become increasingly mainstream in the twenty-first century, artists and cultural organisations have reported a need to reassess their work in the light of concerns about social and cultural privilege. Perceived pressure from funders to evidence how participatory arts transform people's lives, often in short time-periods, is frequently cited as inhibiting deeper articulation of the work's benefits, complexity and challenges. Royal Holloway's research has responded by supporting new, long-term, and inclusive forms of creative practice, and by articulating the value of work that is artistically inventive, context-sensitive, and sustainable.

The primary beneficiaries are the partners and communities where the research is embedded. Findings are widely shared (via written publications, websites, MOOCs, workshops, training programmes, grey literature reports, public talks and performances) to extend the research nationally and internationally, reaching arts organisations and artists; charities and NGOs; humanitarian workers, students, and carers.

Influencing the training of students and practitioners. When Nicholson's book *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* was published in 2005, the sub discipline was in its infancy. As one of the first studies to define the field, it influenced new university curricula in applied theatre and has had substantial impact on teaching throughout the period of assessment. *Theatre & Education* was developed as a pedagogical resource for students and self-directed learners, and articulated her original research in accessible ways. Translated into five languages, her books have been widely adopted as core texts in over 38 countries. Statements from leading universities in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Norway, Taiwan, Sweden, Canada, USA, and South Africa illustrate the impact of her research on university curricula and student learning (E1). Distinguished Professor Kathleen Gallagher comments, '*Helen's texts have been, and will continue to be, core texts in my courses at the University of Toronto. Arts education students from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, theatre students from the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, along with graduate students from various health disciplines have particularly valued Helen's comprehensive, accessible and theoretically rich texts. Her work has made young scholars feel a part of something important; she has championed a discipline and has given voice to its diverse practices that vary dynamically across cultural contexts.*' (E1).

Nicholson's research has informed theatre companies and practitioners. In India, the director of leading company Applied Theatre India Foundation, Kaustubh Bankapure, notes: '*Informed by Nicholson's research, we always propose theatre-based training programmes that are designed as long-term interventions with local people not one-off events*'. In Canada, her research has been widely used by Tarragon, one of Canada's major theatres, to strengthen youth engagement with their local environments. [text removed for publication] (2016 to 2019), commented: '*[text removed for publication]*'. In Japan, her translated book is widely used by university students and practitioners. Leading arts [text removed for publication] comments that it provided '*[text removed for publication]*' (E2).

Informing new participatory programmes in theatre: Public Acts at The National Theatre. '*[text removed for publication]*.' [text removed for publication], of the National Theatre (E3). Nicholson's research on inclusive forms of participatory theatre led to a partnership with the National Theatre (NT), illustrating the impact of her research in this area. She was commissioned to lead research for the inaugural programme of Public Acts, their first major community initiative in partnership with charities and Queen's Theatre Hornchurch (2017 to

2020). Public Acts is part of the NT's vision and annual repertoire, and has already reached over 400 participants across London, eight charities and 5,000 audience members from 2017 to 2019. *'Her research findings have informed and framed the next phase of Public Acts, currently developing in Doncaster; research findings have enabled a deeper commitment to the role theatre can play in long-term partnership with communities, and an understanding of how Public Acts can support wider change in theatre – for example, in developing more inclusive ways of working and a more representative workforce.'* Alice King Farlow, Director of Learning, NT (E3).

Increasing cultural participation and quality of life among displaced peoples. Before Beckles Willson's project in the province of Siracusa, there was no cultural provision for underage migrants in Sicily. Her project *Today is Good!* enabled young asylum-seekers to tell their stories through song-writing and use of sound recording and digital technologies. The refugee [text removed for publication] at Casa Freedom credited Beckles Willson's intervention as *'[text removed for publication]'* (E4); the [text removed for publication] of the CIAO community school, Siracusa, wrote that music *'[text removed for publication]'* (E5). Beckles Willson's trauma-informed approaches to music-making have been disseminated globally by the MOOC 'Caring for Children Moving Alone' led by the Centre for Excellence for Looked-After Children in Scotland. In 2019 the first edition of this course reached 12,400 students from more than 120 countries, including humanitarian workers, lawyers, teachers and childcare providers working with refugee and migrant children; four further editions of the course are scheduled from 2019 to 2020 (E7).

Integrating refugees into host communities through music. By enabling unaccompanied migrant minors to perform to the local community, Beckles Willson's research has *'[text removed for publication]'* ([text removed for publication], CIAO community school, Siracusa, E5). Their performances in concerts in four cities across Sicily, attended by over 700 members of the host community, allowed them to *'[text removed for publication]'* (E5). In 2018, six asylum-seekers published their songs on CD and online, which were broadcast on Italian and London radio, and discussed as indicators of integration: Italy's leading independent radio station, Radio Popolare, observed *'how much we are enriched by other cultures and realities'* (E6). Three young composers (Gambian, Malian and Nigerian) registered with the royalty collection agency in Italy (SIAE) to protect their interests, and others started their own YouTube channel (E6). Their music was cited to support successful legal cases in Italy, including asylum applications (E4).

New art forms enhance the quality of life for people living with dementia. There are currently around 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK, and arts organisations are responding by working creatively in care homes. Age Exchange, a long-established charity in this field, adapted storytelling methods widely used with neuro-normative elders. Royal Holloway's research (2013 to 2017) changed Age Exchange's creative practice by defining the principles of Reminiscence Arts, a new multi-sensory methodology inspired by the creativity of people living with dementia and the positive contribution they continue to make to others. The research is cited as a case study in the report of the *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing* in 2017 (E8). The Artistic Director of Age Exchange directly credits Royal Holloway's research with (i) enabling them to become a national charity via a new partnership with Community Integrated Care (CIC), one of the UK's largest providers of health and social care. This has enabled Age Exchange to develop 3 new hubs across the UK, securing the charity's sustainability; (ii) extending their provision in care homes in London, directly reaching approximately 200 people living with dementia per annum and many more via online toolkits; (iii) increasing funding, securing over GBP1 million from 2016 to July 2020; and (iv) strengthening their training and consultancy in Reminiscence Arts, including an average of 65 artists and over 200 carers each year nationally and internationally from 2015. *'Royal Holloway's research has revitalised our charity. It helped us learn a language we didn't know, and it helped us practise in a different way. We can now articulate a vision of dementia care, we can now say confidently what Reminiscence Arts is about and that it has measurable benefits'* (Artistic Director, Age Exchange) (E8).

Nicholson's expertise on the arts in dementia care led in 2017 to an invitation to Taiwan, where she contributed to training programmes for artists and curators in three cities and National Museums, reaching over 300 professionals. '[text removed for publication]' (E9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1: Testimonials on Nicholson's impact on students from Universities of Toronto, Sydney, Stockholm, Western Norway, Auckland, Texas Austin, National University of Tainan Taiwan, Griffith University. Data from survey of 58 universities in 38 countries, evidencing her impact on pedagogy in applied theatre.

E2: Testimonials from theatre companies and practitioners in India, Japan, Canada, evidencing Nicholson's impact on their practices.

E3: Testimonials from Alice King Farlow and [text removed for publication], on impact of Nicholson's research on Royal National Theatre, London.

E4: Child-migrants: Recorded interview (mp4) with [text removed for publication], Social Cooperative "Freedom" (Emergency Hostel for unaccompanied foreign minors), 15, San Foca Street - Priolo Gargallo, Italy, interview conducted 27.03.2018.

E5: Collections of testimonials from officials in Sicily evidencing impact of Beckles Willson's research, including: Accoglierete, the leading legal body in the region for the protection of unaccompanied minors ([text removed for publication]); CIAO, community school, Siracusa ([text removed for publication]).

E6: *Today is Good! Music for Asylum-Seekers in Sicily*: website with recordings, testimonials from participants and audiences, and media coverage. www.todayisgood.org

E7: MOOC 'Children on the Move' (<http://www.childrenonthemovemooc.com/index.php/en/>) available at Future Learn (<https://www.futurelearn.com/>).

E8: Reports on impact of RADIQL: Reminiscence Arts: All Party Parliamentary Group on Health Report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, 2017. Case study cited p.2; *Age Exchange Impact Report 2019*, indicator of annual reach of RADIQL. Testimonial on impact on Age Exchange: David Savill (artistic director), citing www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1xc9JGTVpk

E9: Testimonial from the British Council Taiwan to evidence Nicholson's impact on the museums and arts practices in dementia care.