

Institution: Brunel University London		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Using Creative Writing To Support Social Justice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 to 2018		
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:
Sarah Penny	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	02/2003 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 to 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Dr Penny's research focus is on using Creative Writing to support social justice. In 2015, she worked on '*Seeds Of The Future*'. She ran workshops with men, women and girls from the Somali diaspora in London, gathering testimony about how they had accepted a transition away from FGM, in order to support a wider community refusal to cut girls. Between 2016 and 2019, she ran *The Xenophobia Project*. This project, in collaboration with the Scalabrini Centre in Cape Town South Africa, worked with migrants to harness testimony about their experiences of xenophobic violence in South Africa. This testimony was then used as the basis of an expressive arts workshops with local teens, and finally Scalabrini staff were trained to use the expressive arts approach in their own workshops.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Dr Penny's research focuses on using expressive arts for social justice. At the core of her research is the investigation of how creative writing and dramatherapy can form a synthesis to offer practical solutions to social justice issues in Africa and deliver social change.

In 2014, Dr Penny (then, Lecturer) was awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Grant (Grant 1) to conduct research on whether the synthesis of creative writing and dramatherapy can be used as a tool to empower mothers in their refusal of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) for their daughters. The research findings showed that the integration of the 2 disciplines is an effective methodology to achieve social change (Ref. 2).

In 2015, Dr Penny employed dramatherapy and creative writing to gain insight into the commitment of Somali men, women, and adolescent girls in London to move away from FGC (Ref.1). The research methodology used was vested in the creative arts and therapy with the aim of having a process that takes into account the sensitive nature of the topic but also offers an effective way to gather testimonials from the parties involved. The distinct use of dramatherapy and creative practice as research synthesis allowed for these testimonials to emerge and worked as a tool for social change, activism, and healing.

Dr Penny's scholarship is defined by this research synthesis, and she has used it to collect research findings to which she would have otherwise been denied access due to language barriers, illiteracy, or cultural differences. Her research methodology provides practical solutions

Impact case study (REF3)

to the challenging communication of narratives that centre on moving away from FGC and other issues of social justice.

Dr Penny's most recent research project investigated in more detail whether expressive arts can also be used to change xenophobic attitudes among young people in South Africa. The research built on her existing body of work on how the synthesis of creative writing and dramatherapy can provide effective and concrete solutions to issues of social justice (Ref.1; Ref.2; Ref.3.; Ref. 4).

Xenophobia in South Africa is rife. Because many migrants are undocumented it is difficult to get exact data on the prevalence of the attacks, but in 1 small town alone, Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, during 2015, over 500 people were displaced and over 300 shops and homes looted or destroyed through xenophobic violence. The South Africa government is widely perceived as taking very little initiative to combat xenophobic violence, and is often accused of fuelling violence through the public statements of ministers and public figures.

Since the first democratic elections in 1994, there has been a steady flow of migrants into South Africa, fleeing war, drought and poverty and attracted by South Africa's relative stability and wealth. A 2011 census calculated that there are approximately 2,200,000 migrants in the country (4.2% of the population). The unemployment rate in South Africa currently stands at 25.5%. The combination of poverty, unemployment and competition for resources with people perceived as strangers, has a deeply negative effect on integration in South Africa, and in urban centres in particular.

The research objectives were:

- To gather stories from migrants about their experiences.
- To run workshops with teenagers, based on the migrant testimony, and assess how impactful this approach was.
- To train staff in this approach.

Dr Penny's research found that adolescents reported that when they were introduced to a story-based approach they felt they developed a real understanding of the issues faced by migrants whereas when they were 'taught' about migrant issues using a formal approach, they disengaged and felt little empathy for the migrants. The migrants themselves reported that being able to talk about their experiences using the expressive arts approach was therapeutic and beneficial.

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

Outputs

Ref. 1. Penny, S. & Kingwill, P. 2018. 'Seeds of The Future/Somali Programme: a shared autoethnography on using creative arts therapies to work with Somali voices in Female Genital Mutilation refusal in the UK,' *New Writing* 15, 55-64

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2017.1362442>

Ref. 2. Penny, S. 2014. 'Can Creative Writing and Dramatherapy be used as tools to empower mothers to refuse Female Genital Cutting (FGC) for their daughters? A study based in Talek, Narok and Maralal, Kenya. *Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Grant Report*.

<https://www.wcmt.org.uk/sites/default/files/report-documents/Penny%20S%20Report%202013.pdf>

Ref. 3. Penny, S. 2014. 'Respect for Girls to Make Great Ladies! Sarah Penny puts forward the role of Creative Writing in ending FGM,' *Writing in Education* 64

Ref. 4. Penny, S. 2016. '[I just want to go see my camels!](#) Sarah Penny recounts her creative use of drama and narratives to involve FGM-affected women in research design,' *Writing in Education* 69, 64-70.

Ref. 5. Dixon S., Agha K., Ali F., El-Hindi, B., Locock, L., Otoo-Oyortey N., **Penny, S.** & Hinton, L. 2018. 'Female genital mutilation in the UK- where are we, where do we go next? Involving communities in setting the research agenda. *Research Involvement and Engagement* 4 [10.1186/s40900-018-0103-5](#)

Grants

Grant 1. Sarah Penny (Principal Investigator), Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, 1 January 2014 to 30 December 2014, *Using African example to enable UK girls to refuse FGM*, GBP5,000

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

The Xenophobia Project:

There is a deep divide between (undocumented) migrants and the other inhabitants in South Africa which often leaves migrants excluded. Migrants are denied access to the same level of protection from the government as others. The Government does very little to combat xenophobia, and ministers and public figures tend to fuel violence with xenophobic and derogatory statements.

The Scalabrini Centre is a human rights organisation in Cape Town. The organisation is committed to alleviating poverty and promoting development in the Western Cape area of South Africa while fostering integration between migrants, refugees and South Africans. This integration is very difficult in the face of a government rhetoric that often seeks to deflect from failure to deliver and corruption by promoting an anti-migrant agenda.

One of their programmes is Unite!, a youth programme which is attended by 281 young people and unites students from 6 different local high schools to build social cohesion and transformation in South African society (E2).

Scalabrini needed Dr Penny's research because they wanted a testimony they could use for Unite! but they also wanted to be able to engage with this testimony with young people in a more inclusive and effective way. Dr Penny worked with Scalabrini to gather the testimony, and then trained them in how to work with the testimony using an expressive arts approach. The workshops used both creative therapeutic writing and dramatherapy to allow the participants to explore their memories in a way that was not exploitative, and that allowed them to revisit sometimes very traumatic life events in a contained and safe space. The Centre confirms that because of Dr Penny's distinct use of expressive arts, the participants were able "to express themselves in ways they would not have been able to otherwise. In this way, [Scalabrini] were able to map what they have gone through" (E1).

In the migrant phase, in April 2017, Dr Penny worked with 12 migrants from the DRC, Rwanda, Somalia, and Zimbabwe to create a set of testimonials about their experiences that could be used for Unite!. She delivered 5 workshops for men only and 5 workshops for women only, and worked on an individual basis with each participant to help them to write their story. The Scalabrini Centre notes that this phase "was very psychologically beneficial for the participants

in the workshop to be able to share a space with others who had walked a similar journey. They were able to find their communalities and share the hardships they had endured” (E1).

After that, Dr Penny ran pilot workshops with Unite! in order to explore how most effectively to share the material, using creative writing and dramatherapy. She worked for 5 days with 15 young people. She conducted staff training programmes in using the material, working with 10 staff members over a 2-day period, and collated a resource to be referenced when using the materials in Scalabrini programmes. The Centre says, “The techniques we were taught allowed us to be much more creative and imaginative [and] Dr Penny left us with a detailed manual about the activities which we continue to use to date” (E1).

The migrants described the experience of taking part in the workshops as positive and cathartic. 1 of the participants fed back regarding one of the group activities: “It was really good for me to write the letter. It sorted out some things that confused me that I needed to say even though it brought pain. It has made me feel more peaceful.”

There has been a ripple effect in the organisation following Dr Penny’s work. The adult staff are using her ideas across the organisation in their different programmes. Meanwhile, the young people who attended the workshops have gone out into 6 different local high schools in order to peer-facilitate the same activities with which Dr Penny has provided them (E1).

Dr Penny has impacted on Scalabrini’s strategy by giving them an arsenal of tools that they can use both to strengthen their existing programmes and to have wider outreach.

Seeds of the Future:

Midaye Somali Development Network is a user-led charity that is focused on supporting ethnic minority communities. The grassroots community organisation is deeply embedded in the ethnic minority communities in West London. Midaye is committed to the well-being, empowerment and making a tangible difference in the lives of individuals, families and communities and to building bridges that strengthen integration to the wider society.

Midaye needed Dr Penny’s research for FGM prevention. They needed a way to reach non-English speaking Somali migrants with the message that it was becoming acceptable in the community to transition away from FGM. These workshops also combined creative therapeutic writing and dramatherapy. It was particularly important to have a safely held space in opening up a discussion of FGM because there is so much secrecy around the topic within the community. It was also important to be extremely sensitive in how the workshops were run, as a non-Somali, because the community has had the previous experience, when attempting to engage with safeguarding authorities about FGM, of being told for many years that FGM was a ‘cultural practice’ and could be dealt with by the Somali community internally. This attitude then transitioned into a very heavy-handed approach (from around 2014) in which a much more serious commitment was made by the UK government to mobilise domestic and international efforts to end FGM. But the intrusive nature of this more vigorous approach (such as questioning at airports and mandatory reporting by GPs) have sometimes made Somalis feel as if their whole culture is under attack.

Dr Penny worked with Midaye for approximately 2 years in total, between 2015 and 2016. She ran workshops with women, then men, then girls who had not been cut. Each set of workshops ran for 1 working week (5 workshop in each week). Dr Penny also met individually with participants to write their stories after which she podcasted them and uploaded them to Sound Cloud, using actor’s voices for anonymity.

Impact case study (REF3)

Covid-19 has brought to light once again the various inequalities vulnerable communities face when hit by health, economic, and social disasters. While all BAME communities have been disproportionately affected, the social issues facing Somalis in London have made it very difficult to cope. 80% of British Somalis live in social housing with multi-generational families and without gardens or balconies, and many families with school-aged children have low access to computers and tablets that are needed for home-learning (E3).

Dr Penny had aimed to go back to the Midaye Somali Development Network in 2020 to investigate how the impact had matured in the last 4 to 5 years. However, due to the disparity in risk faced by the Somali community, Dr Penny is unable to press for access. If anything, these high levels of inequality make Dr Penny's work all the more important, as it demonstrates how practical measures can be taken to set in motion important mitigation measures.

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

E1 Corroborating Letter from Scalabrini

E2 Scalabrini Centre, Annual Report 2018-2019

E3 Covid-19 in the Somali Community: Urgent Briefing for Policy-makers in the UK, *The Anti-Tribalism Movement*, 23 April 2020, <https://theatm.org/info/27545/>